

Can a Hindu be Black?: A Study of Black Americans and Hinduism

by

Krishni L. Metivier

Graduate Program in Religion
Duke University

Date: _____

Approved:

Richard Jaffe, Advisor

Joseph Winters

Leela Prasad

Jason Bivins

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Graduate Program
in Religion in the Graduate School
of Duke University

2021

ABSTRACT

Can a Hindu be Black?: A Study of Black Americans and Hinduism

by

Krishni L. Metivier

Graduate Program in Religion
Duke University

Date: _____

Approved:

Richard Jaffe, Advisor

Joseph Winters

Leela Prasad

Jason Bivins

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
Religion in the Graduate School
of Duke University

2021

Copyright by
Krishni L. Metivier
2021

Abstract

Nearly half a century ago, acclaimed jazz musician Alice Coltrane (1937-2007), marital partner of saxophonist John Coltrane, began disseminating Hindu (Vedanta) teachings and jazz-inflected *bhajans* (songs of praise) in her predominately Black, though multiracial, spiritual community in Southern California. Despite all her accomplishments—becoming the first African American guru, authoring two revelatory sacred texts, composing fifteen devotional albums (many on major record labels), and founding and directing a Vedantic center and quasi-monastic community for over thirty years—the highly acclaimed Alice Coltrane is overlooked by scholars of religion, especially of Asian religions. Similarly, Cleveland-born, Princeton graduate Bhakti Tirtha Swami (1950-2005)—who initiated hundreds of disciples across North America, Africa and Eastern Europe into a Hindu religious tradition (Gaudiya Vaishnavism), authored nineteen books, and acted as a consultant to several world leaders—has also passed away hardly noticed. Since at least the 1960s, Black Americans have made lifelong religious commitments to Vedantic teachings and South Asian religious practices such as performing *kirtans* and *bhajans*. Despite this, their presence and contributions remain virtually invisible to scholars. My dissertation seeks to disclose Black Americans’ presence and influence in Hinduism since the 1960s as well as raise an urgent ethical and theoretical question for the study of religion: *Can a Hindu be Black?*

Through intellectual and aesthetic artifacts, literary publications, and twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with Black Americans across several U.S. Hindu communities, my doctoral research illustrates Black Americans' participation in Hinduism since the 1960s through the charismatic leaders Alice "Swamini Turiyasangitananda" Coltrane, John "Bhakti Tirtha Swami" Favors, Clarissa "Krsnanandini Devi Dasi" Jones, and a successive generation of Black practitioners. Thus, my study answers the above question affirmatively; yet, building on recent scholarship on the racialization of religion and genealogies of religion, my study also provokes an indispensable examination of race, ethnicity, and geography in academic constructions of 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism,' assessing how theory and discourse have, at times, foreclosed the possibility of a Black Hindu.

Dedication

To my mother and father,
To the Sun, Moon, Ocean and Earth
and
the three acharyas.

Contents

Abstract	iv
List of Figures	x
Acknowledgements	xi
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Dissertation Arguments and Structure	13
1.2 Theoretical Frameworks and Methods	19
2. The Invisibility of Black Hindus	30
2.1 Race, Racialization and Racial Formation	34
2.2 Trouble Defining 'Hinduism'	37
2.3 'Hindu' as "People of India"	44
2.4 'Hinduism' as Religious "India"	50
2.5 'Hinduism' in "World Religions" Discourse.....	54
2.6 'Hinduism' as "India" and the "East" in Indology and Orientalism	62
2.7 Racializing Hindu in Early Twentieth Century America.....	68
2.8 Lingering Observations.....	75
3. Between Swamini and Swami: Three Black Acharyas (Teachers) of Hinduism	80
3.1 On Becoming 'Guru': Gender Stratification	82
4. Swamini Turiyasangitananda (Alice Coltrane), August 27, 1937 – January 12, 2007..	100
4.1 Biographical Overview.....	101
4.2 Commercial and Non-Commercial Musical Recordings of Alice Coltrane.....	120

4.3 Crafting an Academic Foray into Swamini	135
5. Krsnanandini Devi Dasi (Clarissa Jones), January 5, 1952 - November 13, 2020	141
5.1 Biographical Overview	141
5.2 Perceiving Krsnanandini Devi Dasi’s Authority	147
5.2.1 An Ethnographic Vignette of Black-Female-Hindu Authority	150
5.2.2 Krsnanandini’s Theological Methods and Message	167
5.2.3 Krsnanandini as ‘Mata’ or ‘Mother’ and Feminine Religious Authority	171
6. Bhakti Tirtha Swami (John Favors), February 25, 1950 – June 27, 2005.....	177
6.1 Biographical Overview.....	182
6.2 Black Utopia: Futuring with Bhakti Tirtha Swami.....	202
7. Roots: Black Matriarchies and Kinship.....	211
7.1 Introduction	211
7.2 Constructing Images of the Black Matriarch.....	216
7.3 “I’m a minority in a minority, in a minority”	220
7.4 The Coltrane Matriarch	229
7.5 A Black Vaishnavi Matriarchy	243
7.6 Conclusion.....	263
8. Conclusion	266
Appendix A: The Works of Alice Coltrane	273
Appendix B: The Works of Krsnanandini Devi Dasi	275
Appendix C: The Works of Bhakti Tirtha Swami	277
Appendix D: Structured Interview Questions.....	279

Appendix E: Bhakti Tirtha Swami in GBC Resolutions	286
Bibliography	300
Biography.....	334

List of Figures

Figure 1: Graph of Cumulative Sum of B. T. Swami Initiations Per Year	180
Figure 2: Map of B. T. Swami Initiations by Country	181

Acknowledgements

A composition of this magnitude does not come to fruition without a community endowing it with love and support. At Duke University, I benefitted greatly from the guidance, long-standing support, and constructive feedback of faculty advisors Leela Prasad, Richard Jaffe, and Joseph Winters. Prasad's strength of character is empowering, Jaffe's sensibility and pragmatism grounds me, and Winters's kindness and thoughtful brilliance gives me hope. The trust they have placed in me over the years has endowed me with the courage to pursue this dissertation through its many twists and turns and, finally, to completion. I am also grateful for their tremendous letters of recommendations over the years that have facilitated this wonderful research and many enriching opportunities, grants, and fellowships at home and in India.

A number of other notable scholars have also encouraged and supported this work in significant ways. I am grateful to Jason Bivins of North Carolina State University as a much-welcomed member of the dissertation committee who early on connected me with an invaluable contact—saxophonist and professor Rudresh K. Mahanthappa at Princeton University. Generously, Mahanthappa met with me and assisted me in contacting the gracious and generous Sai Anantam Ashram musical director Surya Botofasina. My colleagues at Elon University, such as Lynn Huber, Brian K. Pennington, and Geoffrey Claussen, deserve mention as well for creating a

supportive and delightful second-academic home in which the spark for this project started and was fanned with enthusiasm and professional opportunities to grow it. I also cannot overlook Graham M. Schweig of Christopher Newport University who is a tremendous mentor, always brimming with positivity and encouragement, and has uplifted me countless times. He has also graciously supported my research with invitations to present at Harvard University and contribute a chapter to an edited volume.

The religious and spiritual communities of this research were enormously supportive of this project and availed their resources and networks to be of great assistance all along the way. This research was also supported by several grants and fellowships from the Graduate School and the Graduate Program in Religion of Duke University, including a Dean's Graduate Fellowship and summer assistantship at Rubenstein Library, and a generous AAUW American Dissertation Fellowship in 2020.

My abundance of friends, family and communities are all deserving of my sincere gratitude as well for their ongoing support, encouragement, and care, though I will just name a few here. From my peers, especially Sungjin "Jin" Im, Rebecca Mendelson, Jeffrey Nicolaisen, Mani Rao, Seth Ligo, Torang Asadi, Yael Lazar, Yasmine Singh, and Carter Higgins, I have received an abundance of support, idea sounding sessions, and advice throughout the years and am grateful for having spent my time in the company of these brilliant classmates. Much thanks must be given to the benevolent

and marvelous Jessica Covil, who is not only an inspiring intellectual, writer, and poet, but a like-minded scholar-activist; any endeavor is enhanced by her mere presence. I offer my deep gratitude to my mother who instilled in me a dissenting mind, perseverance, and a praxis of care and activism for an equitable world. I am also deeply grateful to Krsna Kumari and Dhira Krishna, who have shown me immense care and support. I also could not have accomplished this feat without the inspiring love and care of my dear partner Dr. Marek Vanzura.

1. Introduction

*When we talk about a religion, are we, in fact, talking about certain races?*¹

Nearly half a century ago, acclaimed African American jazz musician Alice Coltrane (1937-2007) acquired her Sanskrit name Swamini Turiyasangitananda (“The Transcendental Lord’s Highest Song of Bliss”), marking her entry into *saṁnyāsa*, the fourth and final Hindu theological life stage (or *āśrama*) defined by renunciation and celibacy.² Simultaneously, her initiation into the renounced order of life between 1975 and 1976 inscribed her as “Swamini,” a designation recognizing her as a renounced female spiritual master.³ During her lifetime, she authored three capacious revelatory sacred texts, composed fifteen devotionally-oriented albums (many on major record labels), and founded and directed a predominantly Black, though multiracial, Vedantic center and quasi-monastic community for over thirty years in Southern California.

Indeed, there is also Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, a Black American Vaishnava teacher,

¹ This is a question that is posed to the academic community studying religion by Dr. Malory Nye. See Malory Nye, “Race and Religion: Postcolonial Formations of Power and Whiteness,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, c, 31, no. 3 (June 25, 2019): 210–37, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341444>.

² Shankari C. Adams, *Portrait of Devotion: Spiritual Life of Alice Coltrane Swamini Turiyasangitananda* (self-pub., 2016), Kindle; Franya J. Berkman, *Monument Eternal: The Music of Alice Coltrane* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2010).

³ In 1975, Alice “Turiya Aparna” Coltrane had a mystical experience wherein she was anointed; see Turiyasangitananda, *Divine Revelations*, 34-5. In 1976, for the first time, she publicly donned the traditional saffron robes of a renunciate (*saṁnyāsa*); see Adams, *Portrait of Devotion*, chap. “Re-awakening Through Tapasya,” sec. “Holy Anointing.”

orator, author, and pioneer in a Hindu lineage originating in Bengal, India known as Gaudiya Vaishnavism.⁴ She, too, maintained a Hindu religious community for over twenty-five years in Cleveland, Ohio. In forging new and expanded routes for accessing Hinduism for Black Americans and families, she addressed ongoing barriers to the transmissibility of the Hindu religious discourses and practices.

Formidable is the prominent African American Princeton University graduate John Favors (1950-2005) turned Vaishnava guru Bhakti Tirtha Swami who initiated hundreds of disciples across North America, Africa and Eastern Europe into Gaudiya Vaishnavism (specifically, the Hare Krishna Movement).⁵ He has nineteen books published under his name and has appeared on dozens of TV and radio programs, including regularly on the Cathy Hughes WOL radio talk show in the '90s.⁶ He also acted as a consultant to several prominent leaders and celebrities during his lifetime including the first President of Zambia Kenneth Kaunda, the then-President of South Africa Nelson Mandela, boxer Muhammad Ali and Ben-Amin, Leader of African Hebrew Israelites.⁷ His commitment to and prominence in several West African countries earned him a coronation as High Chief of Warri, Nigeria in 1990.⁸

⁴ Gaudiya (or Bengali) Vaishnavism is a religious theology and lineage originating from 11th century Bengal, India that emphasizes a devotional relationship (bhakti yoga) with God, primarily in a primordial feminine and masculine forms of Srimati Radharani (Radha) and Sri Krishna.

⁵ Steven J. Rosen, *Black Lotus: The Spiritual Journey of an Urban Mystic* (Washington, D.C.: Hari-Nama Press, 2007).

⁶ Rosen. *Black Lotus*, 250-9. For a list of Bhakti Tirtha Swami's work, please see Appendix E.

⁷ Rosen. *Black Lotus*, 388.

⁸ Ibid.

Posthumously, his life's accomplishments were honored and entered into official government records in a ceremonial resolution by Washington District of Columbia's Mayor.⁹ Despite these public luminaries having established and sustained religious communities for decades, scholars write very little, if anything, of their (or their communities') religious commitments to what is commonly known as Hinduism; for that reason, they are conspicuously hidden figures.

Though from the body of scholarship on Hinduism and African American religions, these connections are hardly detectable. As fields of academic inquiry, Hindu studies and African American religion have largely developed remotely from one another, suggesting a similar lived remoteness between their respective subjects. Scholarship on Hinduism outside of India, particularly in the United States, has provided thorough analyses of the South Asian diaspora (e.g., Narayanan 2006; Kurien 2007), eminent Indian gurus (e.g., Forsthoefel and Humes 2005; Lucia 2014; Neumann 2019), and exchanges between Indians and a predominantly white America (e.g., Rochford 1985; Jackson 1994; Bryant and Ekstrand 2004; Altman 2016). When encountering the "East comes West" histories of Asian religions' arrival to the United States, the historical figures representing the "West" are almost uniformly white (e.g., Edwin Arnold, Joseph Campbell, Allen Ginsberg, Aldous Huxley, Henry David

⁹ Ibid., 178.

Thoreau, Ram Dass).¹⁰ Even as one edited volume on American-born Hindu gurus attempts to cross the orientalist East-West divide to name “American Hinduism,” it did not name any Black American teachers, such as Bhakti Tirtha Swami, Swamini Turiyasangitananda, Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, or Devamrita Swami.¹¹

The best example of academic preoccupation with White American history in the study of Hinduism is the historic speech by Swami Vivekananda, founder of the Ramakrishna Mission, at the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religion, a space dominated by White elite Christian male apprehensions and evaluations, which becomes the quintessential, imagined introduction of Hinduism to the United States for American religious history. Vivekananda’s speech is vividly recalled not for the sake of Vivekananda nor for mere historical accuracy, but for its audience who is addressed deliberately and successfully through a series of rebuttals to (and strategic

¹⁰ This trend in historiography is palpable in: E. Allen Richardson, *East Comes West: Asian Religions and Cultures in North America* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1985); Carl Jackson’s *Vedanta for the West*; Carl T. Jackson, *Vedanta for the West: The Ramakrishna Movement in the United States*, Religion in North America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Philip Goldberg, *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation: How Indian Spirituality Changed the West*, 1st ed (New York: Harmony Books, 2010); Michael J. Altman, *Heathens, Hindoo, Hindu: American Representations of India, 1721-1893* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). Altman’s study both examines and exemplifies the problem. Its sources invariably represent American representations through white Americans, yet the study also offers astute interrogations of those representations for constructing a normative image of America as white and Protestant Christian. In a rare case, Stephen R. Prothero and Thomas A. Tweed include a few African Americans in their history of Asian religions in the United States; see Stephen R. Prothero and Thomas A. Tweed, *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). In *American Veda* (cited in this footnote), John and Alice Coltrane are at least briefly acknowledged (on page 264-5) in Goldberg’s fascinating whirlwind tour of Vedanta’s influence on American literature, culture, arts, music, science, and more.

¹¹ Ann Gleig and Lola Williamson, eds., *Homegrown Gurus: From Hinduism in America to American Hinduism* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2013).

reinforcements of) White American Christian imaginings of Hindus, ranging from the seemingly benign spiritual, apolitical foreigner to violent, superstitious idolater.¹²

Quietly forgotten is that Swami Vivekananda expressed interest in the plight of Black Americans as well, criticizing Jim Crow laws and choosing to embody solidarity with African Americans by sitting in the colored-only train cars. "Rise at the expense of another? I did not come for that," answered Vivekananda on why he chose to sit in the segregated seating area where Black Americans were once confined to by U.S. law.¹³

The predominant formations of religion and race in constructions of African American religion have also suggested that Black people are not constructing religious identities from within South Asian religious discourses and practices. In the study of African American religions, Black Religion is too often made to be synonymous with Black Christianity contributing to an essentialized Black religious subject.¹⁴ A number of scholars, such as Anthony Pinn (2017 [1998]), Victor Anderson (2008), William D. Hart (2008, 2011), and Judith Weisenfeld (2013), contest the equating of Black religion with

¹² Altman, "Putting the 'Religions' in the World's Parliament of Religions," in *Heathen, Hindoo, Hindu*. Altman's analysis of the interests and perspectives represented at the first World's Parliament of Religions demonstrates that Vivekananda presented a model of Hinduism which defended against racist stereotypes and "fit the Protestant model of religion."

¹³ Murali Balaji, "Review Gerald Horne, *The End of Empires: African Americans and India*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008. Pp. 266. Cloth \$54.50. Paper \$26.50," *The Journal of African American History* 95, no. 1 (2010): 112–14, <https://doi.org/10.5323/jafriamerhist.95.1.0112>, 113.

¹⁴ Curtis J. Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

“the Black Church,” calling for new theoretical maps that acknowledge and accommodate religious diversity among African Americans.¹⁵

Hart (2011) calls the Black church narrative a “terministic screen,” wherein forms of Black religiosity that exceed Christianity are screened out of conversation and theory.¹⁶ In an exceptional, but limited study, Hart (2008) analyzes three African American figures within Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism.¹⁷ Hart’s study acknowledges and disrupts the misrepresentation of Black people as essentialized subjects conceived as producing narrow political, aesthetic, and religious experiences. Studies demonstrating the variety of African American religions are not new (e.g., Fauset 1971), but few when considering Hinduism.¹⁸ Judith Weisenfeld (2013) identifies a need for research on African American participation in Hinduism alongside several other similarly understudied religions; unlike other religions she names, however, she does not name a single study that has broached the subject of Hinduism in the discipline.¹⁹ The latest

¹⁵ Anthony B. Pinn, *Varieties of African American Religious Experience: Toward a Comparative Black Theology*, Twentieth anniversary edition (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2017); Victor Anderson, *Creative Exchange: A Constructive Theology of African American Religious Experience*, Innovations (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008); William D. Hart, *Afro-Eccentricity: Beyond the Standard Narrative of Black Religion*, 1st ed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); William D. Hart, *Black Religion: Malcolm X, Julius Lester, and Jan Willis*, 1st ed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Judith Weisenfeld, “Invisible Women: On Women and Gender in the Study of African American Religious History,” *Journal of Africana Religions* 1, no. 1 (January 3, 2013): 133–49.

¹⁶ Hart, *Afro-Eccentricity*.

¹⁷ Hart, *Black Religion*.

¹⁸ Arthur Huff Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).

¹⁹ Weisenfeld, “Invisible Women.” A parallel example can be found also in Juan Williams and Quinton Hosford Dixie, “Fishin’ for Religion,” in *This Far by Faith: Stories from the African-American Religious Experience*, 1st ed (New York: William Morrow, 2003).

theories that attempt to redefine African American religion, such as those by Pinn (2003, 2017), open doors to study religiosity beyond Christianity.²⁰ Herein lies the emergent reconstructionist precedent my study follows, adding Black Americans' engagements with Hinduism to the corpus of scholarship that rightly seeks the "complex subjectivity" of Black Religions (Pinn 2003).

One ethnomusicologist Franya Berkman (2007, 2010) pioneers in her positioning of Alice Coltrane's Hindu religious influences as central to her post-1960s musical compositions.²¹ The study, however, aims to examine her musical virtuosity rather than seeking to position her racial and religious identities as contiguous with other Black Americans or even a history of Afro-Asian formations, encounters and political alliances.²² Thus, Coltrane becomes an exception that reinforces what is understood to be normatively true—that is, Hinduism is not a Black religion. Alice "Swamini Turiyasangitananda" Coltrane is certainly an extraordinary and noteworthy person—but, importantly, not a historical anomaly.

Unfortunately, any history of Afro-Asian encounters and formations fall into obscurity in comparison to the vast, accumulated knowledge said of "the Hindu"

²⁰ Anthony B. Pinn, *Terror and Triumph: The Nature of Black Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003); Pinn, *Varieties of African American Religious Experience*.

²¹ Franya J. Berkman, "Appropriating Universality: The Coltranes and 1960s Spirituality," *American Studies* 48, no. 1 (2007): 41–62, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40644001>; Berkman, *Monument Eternal*.

²² Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001); Vijay Prashad, "Black Gandhi," *Social Scientist* 37, no. 1/2 (2009): 3–20; Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*.

confined to its “place” (Appadurai 1988), produced in large part by the scholarship of Indology, British colonialism, and Orientalism.²³ From this vantage point, the erasure of Black, particularly African American, forays into Hinduism appears to be neither coincidental nor accidental—if secondary, it is symptomatic of a rather systematic racializing process. The dividing and tethering of certain “Hindu” practices and beliefs to a particular race, nation, and ethnic group—and not others—can be traced back to 17th century western European constructions of religions (see Masuzawa 2005) and even to 11th century Persian constructions (e.g., al-Bīrūnī 1910 [1030]). A fuller investigation of this genealogy is taken up in chapter two.

The racial and ethnic boundary-making of Hindus endures into the United States racialized society as well.²⁴ The racialization of Hindus as a non-white race became part

²³ Arjun Appadurai, “Putting Hierarchy in Its Place,” *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (February 1, 1988): 36–49; Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and “the Mystic East”* (London : New York: Routledge, 1999); Ronald B. Inden, *Imagining India* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2000); Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2001). By “place,” I refer to Appadurai’s article that wittingly turns on two meanings of “place”: 1) place as essentialisms in theory and 2) place as geographic confinement. There is a third meaning which could think of “place” as “setting the record straight” or providing a correction (or a critique). Some of the “places” in which Hindus and Hinduism are confined to includes primitivism, spirituality, femininity, mysticism, emotionalism, and India (or “the East”). These are imagined in opposition to modernity, materialism, masculinity, rational religion, logical intelligence, and Europe (or America or “the West”).

²⁴ Khyati Y. Joshi, “The Racialization of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism in the United States,” *Equity & Excellence in Education* 39, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 211–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680600790327>; Alexander Rocklin, “‘A Hindu Is White Although He Is Black’: Hindu Alterity and the Performativity of Religion and Race between the United States and the Caribbean,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no. 1 (2016): 181–210, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417515000614>; *United States v. Thind*, 261 U.S. 204 (1922), <https://www.loc.gov/item/usrep261204/>.

of U.S. immigration law at the turn of the twentieth century.²⁵ In the Supreme Court case *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923), the presiding Chief Justice George Sutherland ruled that Bhagat Singh Thind, an Indian Sikh man seeking naturalization, could not be considered to be a white person under the law, and therefore was ineligible to be a naturalized U.S. citizen.²⁶ The final judgement reads as follows:

No. 202. Argued January 11, 12, 1923.-Decided February 19, 1923.

1. A high caste Hindu, of full Indian blood, born at Amrit Sar, Punjab, India, is not a "white person", within the meaning of Rev. Stats., § 2169, relating to the naturalization of aliens. - P. 207.

2. "Free white persons," as used in that section, are words of common speech, to be interpreted in accordance with the understanding of the common man, synonymous with the word "Caucasian" only as that word is popularly understood. P. 214. *Ozawa v. United States*, 260 U. S. 178.

3. The action of Congress in excluding from admission to this country all natives of Asia within designated limits including all of India, is evidence of a like attitude toward naturalization of Asians within those limits. P. 215.²⁷

Afghan, Arab, Burmese, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, and Korean applicants were also determined to be ineligible non-white races for naturalization in various court decisions and legislation.²⁸

²⁵ Another example from the time period includes the Immigration Act of 1917 which instituted an English literacy test and barred the immigration of "Natives of specified Asiatic, etc., districts." See Immigration Act of 1917, Pub. L. No. 301, § Chap. 29, 10384 H. R. 874 (1917), <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/64th-congress/session-2/c64s2ch29.pdf>.

²⁶ *United States v. Thind*, 261 U.S. 204 (1922), <https://www.loc.gov/item/usrep261204/>.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, at 204.

²⁸ Marian Schibbsy, "Naturalization in the United States Part IV: Racial and Cultural Conflicts and Education: Chapter XXVI," in *One America: The History, Contributions, and Present Problems of Our Racial and National Minorities*, by Francis J. Brown, vol. 1, 1945, 524–38, <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.immigration/oahcpp0001&i=538,529>.

Becoming non-white and perpetually not-American, however, did not mean Hindus were racially Black nor did it entail that Black people could possibly be Hindu. This boundary is exposed also in U.S. courtrooms when in 1929 Trinidadian Sheik Ghulam “Hazrat” Ismet Ali was accused of being a fraudulent yogi “master” on the basis of Ali possibly not being “East Indian” (here: South Asian), but instead “West Indian” (here: African-descended Caribbean).²⁹ In the United States in the mid-1920s, Ali became a yogic “oriental” teacher of breathing exercises (similar to *prāṇāyāma*) and physical posture (possibly, *āsana*), as well as popular Hindu discourses and American esotericisms, and had a notable following of white and a few Black Americans.³⁰ Ali’s controversy in the U.S. press and courtrooms is recovered by Historian of Religions Alexander Rocklin who untangles the racial dimensions of accusations of imposter in Black Hindu performativity:

The accusation of inauthenticity leveled against Ali appears to have included not only questions of his national identity and whether he was “really” Hindu, but also insinuations that he was “[B]lack” and passing as Hindu. [...] [T]he implication was that if he was not himself “Hindoo” by race and “East” Indian by nationality, and particularly if he was a “[B]lack” West Indian, *this assumed racial/religious incompatibility would invalidate his claims to being a teacher of “philosophy of the inner life” of an Eastern variety.*³¹

Drawn from U.S. courtrooms and newspapers, these examples exemplify, as Rocklin said, an “assumed racial/religious incompatibility” between Black racial identity and

²⁹ “Question of ‘Prophets’ Identity,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, August 3, 1929, sec. 1; Rocklin, “‘A Hindu Is White Although He Is Black.’”

³⁰ Rocklin, “‘A Hindu Is White Although He Is Black,’ 185-6 and 189-94.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 194; my italics.

Hindu religiosity pervading the hegemonic apparatuses structuring and reflecting U.S. thought and practices.³²

Kyle Garton-Gundling and Franya Berkman have recognized that in their academic fields—literature and musicology respectively—Black Americans since the civil rights era have engaged with Asian religions, yet they also note that these intersections, contributions and histories are mostly ignored.³³ These Afro-Asian intersections and formations often live as open secrets, or rather foreclosed exoduses from the privileged white and Christian discourses on American life. In Kyle Garton-Gundling’s studies (2015, 2019) of Alice Walker and Charles Johnson’s literary formations of Hindu and Buddhist thought, Garton-Gundling remarks that white histories of Hinduism and Buddhism in the U.S. not only understudy Black Americans’ presence, influence, and interests in Asian religions (think Alice Walker, Jan Willis, and Alice Coltrane), but do not account for the difference in social positions and challenges that African Americans encounter when entering into Asian religions.³⁴ Although literature on and by Black Buddhists has emerged powerfully in the last couple of decades, the same cannot be said

³² Ibid.

³³ Kyle Garton-Gundling, *Enlightened Individualism: Buddhism and Hinduism in American Literature from the Beats to the Present*, Literature, Religion, and Postsecular Studies (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2019), 118-53; Berkman, *Monument Eternal*.

³⁴ Kyle Garton-Gundling, “Ancestors We Didn’t Even Know We Had’: Alice Walker, Asian Religion, and Ethnic Authenticity,” *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 6 (March 1, 2015); Garton-Gundling, *Enlightened Individualism*, 118-153.

of Black perspectives on and engagements with Hinduism.³⁵ This is despite Black people having a similar demographic share of American Buddhism as they do American Hinduism in the 2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study conducted by the Pew Research Center.³⁶

Through intellectual and aesthetic artifacts, literary publications, and about eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with Black Americans across several U.S. Hindu communities, my doctoral research illustrates Black Americans' participation in Hindu religious discourses and practices through the charismatic leaders Alice "Swamini Turiyasangitananda" Coltrane, John "Bhakti Tirtha Swami" Favors, Clarissa "Krsnanandini Devi Dasi" Jones, and a successive generation of Black

³⁵ Recent Black Buddhist literature is blooming and rich: Angel Kyodo Williams, *Being Black: Zen and the Art of Living with Fearlessness and Grace* (New York: Viking Compass, 2000); Jan Willis, *Dreaming Me: An African American Woman's Spiritual Journey* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2001); Calvin Malone, *Razor-Wire Dharma: A Buddhist Life in Prison* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2008); Charles R. Johnson, *Taming the Ox: Buddhist Stories and Reflections on Politics, Race, Culture, and Spiritual Practice* (Boston: Shambhala, 2014); Rima Vesely-Flad, "Black Buddhists and the Body: New Approaches to Socially Engaged Buddhism," *Religions*, Basel 8, no. 11 (2017): 239, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/rel8110239>; Adeana McNicholl, "Being Buddha, Staying Woke: Racial Formation in Black Buddhist Writing," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 86, no. 4 (November 29, 2018): 883–911, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfy019>; Pamela Ayo Yetunde, "From StrongBlackWoman to Remarkably Relationally Resilient Woman: Black Christian Women and Black Buddhist Lesbians in Dialogue," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 37 (2017): 239+; Tina Turner, *Happiness Becomes You: A Guide to Changing Your Life for Good* (New York: Atria Books, 2020); Janice Dean Willis, *Dharma Matters: Women, Race, and Tantra: Collected Essays* (Somerville, MA, USA: Wisdom Publications, 2020); Tina Turner, *Happiness Becomes You: A Guide to Changing Your Life for Good* (New York: Atria Books, 2020).

The notable exception to my analytical insight on the field is ethnomusicologist Franya Berkman's research (2010) on Hindu religious influences on Alice Coltrane's music and life. Another contribution are Kyle Garton-Gundling's works (2015 and 2019) on Alice Walker's literary adaptations of Hinduism and Buddhism.

³⁶ Alan Cooperman et al., "America's Changing Religious Landscape: Christian Decline Sharply as Share of Population; Unaffiliated and Other Faiths Continue to Grow" (USA: Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015), <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>, 21.

practitioners. Since at least the 1960s, Black Americans have made lifelong religious commitments to Vedantic teachings and South Asian religious practices such as performing *kirtans* and *bhajans*. My dissertation seeks to disclose Black Americans' presence and influence in Hinduism as well as raise an urgent ethical and theoretical question for the study of religion: *Can a Hindu be Black?*

1.1 Dissertation Arguments and Structure

My study answers the dissertation's core question above affirmatively; yet, interrelating scholarship on the racialization of religion, postcolonialism, and genealogies of religion, this dissertation also provokes a requisite re-examination of race, ethnicity, and geography in constructions of 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism,' assessing how theory and discourse have at times foreclosed the possibility of a Black Hindu, much like we saw in U.S. public discourses above. Thus, in the second chapter of this work, "The Invisibility of Black Hindus," I examine the non-emergence of Black Hindus by considering the accumulated and sedimented discourses in the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism.' I re-examine debates on the meaning of 'Hinduism' and historical constructions of 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' as sites of racial formation. In the study of religion, religion is not consistently understood as a racialized category.³⁷ As Theodore Vial points out in *Modern Religion, Modern Race* (2016), "We [scholars of religious studies]

³⁷ Nye, "Race and Religion," 222.

tend not to think of religion as a racialized category, but in our comparative work the same hierarchies of Kant, Herder, Schleiermacher, and Müller continue to reappear. The category of religion is racialized in ways that are not obvious.”³⁸ Thus, I find that a substantial reconsideration of the nexus of racial, ethnic, and geographic subtexts in familiar discourses on ‘Hindu’ and ‘Hinduism’—including in the writings of Persian Muslim scholar al-Bīrūnī (973-1048 C.E.), early Christian Europeans’ ‘world religions’ discourses (Masuzawa 2005), and Philologist and Orientalist F. Max Müller (1910)—is a crucial step in establishing what are the authoritative, disciplining boundaries at play.³⁹ Here, I theorize that ‘Hindu’ and ‘Hinduism’ acquire persistent legibility and *boundary* as metonyms for a particular ethnic-cultural identity and geographic place (India) that over time acquires additional religious and racial meanings. Punctuated and partially constrained by this nexus, contemporary academic research on ‘Hinduism’ screens out its Black participants as Black experiences are not imagined to be part of the ethnic and racial constructions of ‘Hindu’.

The next four chapters are presented as the dissertation’s second and largely historical division, “Between Swamini and Swami: Three Black Acharyas (Teachers) of Hinduism.” This set of chapters (chapters three through six) considers the lives of three African American teachers who were each deeply revered and commanded pronounced

³⁸ Theodore M. Vial, *Modern Religion, Modern Race* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 13.

³⁹ I want to acknowledge that I do not draw much attention to Indian nationalist constructions of Hindu and Hinduism here nor delve into its full examination.

authority across multiple domains, such as the aesthetic, familial, and political. They—whom I refer to by the anglicized Sanskrit word *acharyas* (*ācārya*, teachers)—not only participated in South Asian-American religious networks and devoted themselves to Indian gurus, but also expanded those very networks, largely in Black communities, and transformed the American religious landscape. Each of them established their own spiritual-religious communities in the United States in the mid to late-twentieth century. Their names are Swamini Turiyasangitananda (also known as Alice Coltrane), Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, and Bhakti Tirtha Swami.

Prior to considering each teacher in separate chapters (chapters four to six), I offer an introductory essay (chapter three) considering gender as one intersecting social identity differentiating religious authority among the acharyas. Here, I raise a number of questions to consider: 1) How is authority in religion a gendered domain? 2) How might our nomenclature around Hindu religious authority replicate persistent gender marginalities in the religions we study? 3) How might research better support Black women at the margins of religious authority rather than re-enact asymmetrical distributions of social power (including notoriety in academia)? For the scope of this project, I cannot hope to answer these important questions in full, yet I raise them to acknowledge the role scholarship could play in 1) making visible inequitable gender difference in holding institutional power and religious authority and 2) strategically setting up frameworks that do not position marginalized women at the margins of their

text.⁴⁰ I raise them also because considering Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, an African American woman barred by her gender from even being considered a guru in her religious institution, necessitates reflection on how the highest forms of religious authority are gendered positions.

Chapters four, five, and six are devoted to Alice “Swamini Turiyasangitananda” Coltrane, Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, and Bhakti Tirtha Swami respectively. Each chapter offers a biographical overview of their life, discusses their primary contributions and works, and illuminates new avenues and directions for further research. In chapter four, I synthesize and build upon two vital biographical works on Alice—one by ethnomusicologist Franya Berkman and the other by her disciple Shankari C. Adams.⁴¹ My research and analysis of progressive theological threads in Coltrane’s musical and literary compositions (especially her revelatory writings) extends Berkman’s ethnomusicological biography that has only accomplished this theological work in limited ways due to her expertise being in musicology rather than my academic positionality in the field of religious studies. This chapter also reorients readers to thinking of Swamini and her ashrama within a global economy of overlapping Black American and South Asian religious and artistic flows and networks.

⁴⁰ Here, I am implicitly acknowledging the immense labor it takes to be seen and heard as women which was illustrated to me in my previous research on U.S. Hindu women’s negotiations of gender roles. See Krishna Metivier, “Her Voice: Negotiating Gender in ISKCON,” in *The Worldwide Krishna Movement: Collected Essays on Half a Century of Growth, Impact, and Challenge*, ed. Graham Schweig (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

⁴¹ Berkman, *Monument Eternal*; Adams, *Portrait of Devotion*.

In chapter five, dedicated to Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, I leverage a detailed ethnographic account of religious performativity to illustrate Krsnanandini's lived religious authority within her community. Through her positionality as lecturer and her audience's embodiment of reverence and devotion for her, I illustrate that she occupies a legitimized position of relational, rather than directly institutional, authority which is supported by a number of embodied discourses in the Hare Krishna movement. The conveyance of Krsnanandini's authority through written ethnography, I argue, is crucial to upending her marginality, especially as she does not fit easily or simply within the framework of 'guru,' a framework which scholars regularly use in historicizing South Asian religious authorities.

In chapter six, I consider the cosmopolitan life and accomplishments of Bhakti Tirtha Swami, who quickly acquired public recognition as a charismatic Hindu religious teacher (guru) by the late 1980s and acquired a wide audience in the United States and Africa. Reifying Bhakti Tirtha Swami as a quintessentially itinerant Hindu guru and renunciate would be easy and familiar. Instead, I argue that his Afro-Asian futurism—envisioning and making of the future—and modern projects merit consideration beyond just the religious or theological frames to make him legible also within identified developments and practices in Black American cultural frames. Utilizing Alexander Zamalin's theory and history of Black intellectuals' utopian thought, I recover Swami as

a Black American utopian visionary alongside his recognized identity as a Vaishnava guru.⁴²

The seventh chapter, “Roots: Black Matriarchies and Kinship,” presents multi-generational Black families who have passed down teachings drawn from sacred texts, like the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Mahabharata*, and *Ramayana*, and practices like home worship (*pujas*), vegetarianism, mantra chanting, and singing, composing, and playing devotional hymns (*bhajans*). Several families I encountered in my ethnography had religious lineages of kinship linking them to two distinct, and, by now, familiar, matriarchs: Krsnanandini Devi Dasi and Swamini Turiyasangitananda. These matrilineal “roots,” as narrated to me by my Black interlocutors, spoke of the indispensable resiliency of their intimate kinship bonds to South Asian religious thought and practices—in spite of having their Afro-Asian religious upbringings routinely dismissed. Drawing heavily from my formal interviews and ethnographic research, I dive into their oral histories to offer an intimate, emic portrayal of the joys and challenges around growing up at the intersection of a Black racial identity and Hindu religious identity. This chapter discusses how the questioning of a Black Hindu identity is lived and experienced from within lived experiences. This chapter also offers a novel

⁴² Alex Zamalin, *Black Utopia: The History of an Idea from Black Nationalism to Afrofuturism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

insight for contemporary research: familial inheritances of Hinduism are Black religious experiences too.⁴³

1.2 Theoretical Frameworks and Methods

My interdisciplinary approach can be subdivided into three interpretive domains, namely the theoretical, historical, and anthropological, and draws from religious studies, Black studies, gender studies, history, ethnomusicology, sociology, and anthropology.

In my analysis of theory, my methods are allied with scholars of religion who have sought to show that the construction and meaning of ‘religion’ cannot be separated from the political and historical fields in which they arise. Genealogists of religions, such as Talal Asad and Tomoko Masuzawa, have argued and demonstrated time and again that the category of religion is not *sui generis*, and is instead a “historical product of discursive processes”.⁴⁴ This work, like my own, undoubtedly shares in French

⁴³ The language of “adoption” has been utilized to distinguish non-South Asian or Indian religious experiences from “inheritors” (i.e., South Asians or Indians) by Amanda J. Lucia, *Reflections of Amma: Devotees in a Global Embrace* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014). A notable academic predecessor to my chapter’s vision is *Hare Krishna Transformed* which is a compelling sociological study of the Hare Krishna movement and includes study of second-generation American Hare Krishna devotees; E. Burke Rochford, *Hare Krishna Transformed* (New York, US: New York University Press, 2007).

⁴⁴ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 15. For other critical theories of religion and genealogies, see Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and “the Mystic East”* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999); Tomoko Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press,

philosopher Michel Foucault's methods of a "history of the present" and genealogy.⁴⁵ The particular direction I take builds on Foucault's notion of emergence (*Entstehung*) as delineated in his essay *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*. In the essay, Foucault defines emergence as the episodic, depersonalized struggle of forces that marks a site of confrontation: "Emergence is thus the entry of forces; it is their eruption, [...] emergence designates a place of confrontation."⁴⁶ Genealogy is the methodological praxis for recording the fragmented, polyvocal history of emergence.⁴⁷ Though, my methods are not intent on emergence (of say Hindu as world religion), but rather a non-emergence: a disciplining of the subject and its discursive purviews, a silence, an implausibility. What is unauthorized contestation and the defining features of non-debate? It is a site of non-confrontation that motivates my discussion, rather than confrontation, but I approach sites of confrontation to demonstrate what goes unchallenged. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity assists me here in considering how what is natural and uncontested is born of accumulated, repetitive social practices.⁴⁸

1997); Smith, Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, edited by M. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269–84; Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York: New American Library, 1964).

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139–64; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 2012).

⁴⁶ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 149–50.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁴⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

The genealogy presented here represents authoritative and legitimizing discourses that structure what can be said of Hinduism today. Going to well-known sites of struggle, like academic debates on defining Hinduism, offers insights into what aspects of Hinduism are debatable and which are not. I work with Julius Lipner's banyan tree model and Wilfred Cantwell Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1964) as one site since they offer opposing solutions to the agreed upon "problem" of diversity and non-theological unity of Hinduism. I also re-examine evidence and arguments from another popular site of scholarly debate: the origins of Hinduism as a category of religion (e.g., Hawley 1991; Talbot 1995; Lorenzen 1999; Pennington 2005). Utilizing Tomoko Masuzawa's *Invention of World Religions* (2005), I re-visit the tensions of ethnic and universalist European constructions of Hindu and religion, considering their emergence in nineteenth century discourses of orientalist Indologist Max Mueller and Bengali monk Swami Vivekananda. To comprehend the racial disciplining of 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' in the U.S. context, I review two legal sites, the Supreme Court case *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* and the controversy around Trinidadian Hazrat Ismet Ali; I was thankfully led to these cases by scholarship by Khyati Y. Joshi and Alexander Rocklin.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Khyati Y. Joshi, "The Racialization of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism in the United States," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 39, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 211–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680600790327>; Alexander Rocklin, "'A Hindu Is White Although He Is Black': Hindu Alterity and the Performativity of Religion and Race between the United States and the Caribbean," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no. 1 (2016): 181–210, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417515000614>.

In order to recover a history of Black American engagement with the post-1965 influx of ideas, texts, practices, and teachers from India, some of which belonged to Hinduism, I focused on the lives of three influential Black religious authorities, as already mentioned above. These individuals were selected for both the religious authority they command and their communities which indicate the further involvement of Black peoples. For Swamini and Swami, I acquired authorized biographies on Swamini and B.T. Swami, Shankari C. Adams's *Portrait of Devotion* (2016) and Steven Rosen's *Black Lotus* (2007) respectively, which provided not only maps of their lives, but perspectives from within their respective spiritual/religious communities. To understand Swamini's religious development and theology, I also reviewed all of her albums, including their album liner notes, and two of her sacred texts, *Divine Revelations* (1995) and *Endless Wisdom Vol. 2* (1998). In general, Swamini's written works are a body of rare and obscure literatures that offer excellent insight into her religious teachings and an autobiographical perspective on key events and practices in her life. Published and recorded interviews, newspaper articles, and film and website documentaries offered further context, corroboration, and perspectives on Swamini's life and the ashram.

Bhakti Tirtha Swami has a sizeable digital archive (BTSwami.com) organized and maintained by a handful of volunteers, a mix of working professionals and monks who are his admirers and Hare Krishna devotees. On multiple occasions, I reached out to them to understand the archive operations and ask for help with a source. They were

very amicable to my requests for which I am grateful. They also manage a separate video collection of B. T. Swami on YouTube. I utilized the archive primarily to access the large collection of Bhakti Tirtha Swami's over 600 hours of recorded lectures, classes, radio interviews, and speeches, thirty-five tour reports and newsletters written by his secretaries, scanned newspaper clippings, and an incomplete list of his disciples and their place and dates of initiation. Based on that database of disciples, I was able to analyze the data and create visual charts and maps of the data using the software Tableau (see Figure 1 and 2). The volume and mode of preservation of his opus does not surprise me in the least. It is not uncommon for popular and prolific Hare Krishna gurus to have numerous disciples serving their spiritual masters by creating and maintaining their historical legacy and memory in archive. It parallels with the devotional archiving practices of B. T. Swami's guru, the founder of the Hare Krishna movement. This is very strong evidence that B. T. Swami was indeed a very prominent and beloved guru.

I also reviewed institutional records, from ISKCON, B. T. Swami's institutional religious home, which gave immense clarity on B. T. Swami's fluctuating relationship with the highest administrative body (the GBC) of the religious organization. I am quite lucky to have had a friend at Princeton University who gifted me a digital copy of B. T. Swami's Princeton undergraduate thesis which provided insight into very early themes and trajectories of his intellectual thought. I also had access to B. T. Swami's published books of which the *Spiritual Warrior* series seems to be the most popular and written for

the widest audience; I must note though that it was not within the scope of this project to conduct a thorough close-reading and textual analysis of all of his writings.

For Krsnanandini's life, there are currently no published biographies, though a film documentary is currently underway, and her descendants are completing the autobiography she started. I graciously was granted a one-on-one oral history interview with Krsnanandini, despite the fact that she was in hospice care at the time. This was facilitated by her lovely adult sons and daughters who supported my work and permitted access to her. Beyond this interview, I limited my in-person contact with Krsnanandini to respectfully honor her family's primacy to care, love, and grieve with her privately at that time. I, instead, remotely watched her give numerous online lectures in the summer and fall of 2020 to observe her relationships with her community and understand her teachings. I also reviewed her personal and professional websites, her published books, articles, and blog posts. As I did for Swamini and B. T. Swami, I searched for and read newspaper articles that mentioned her name through online databases like LexisNexis and ProQuest.

The core anthropological method, ethnography, has centered around the immersion of the anthropologist among a group in order to illuminate and represent (often in textual form) to "others" its cultural processes, features, or structures therein. It is a participatory and observational "inquiry into the conditions and possibilities of

human life” conducted with people in shared lived experiences.⁵⁰ It has been long critiqued from within the field of anthropology that ethnography has also a problematic power relationship between the researcher and the researched, of which the former has final authorial control over the latter’s voice; this requires methodological sensitivity to mitigate.⁵¹ One method is to share in a collaborative vision for how the research might also serve a goal of the individuals and communities at the center of the study.

Acknowledging this inherent tension and leaning into restorative justice strategies, feminist ethnographers have shown that ethnography has the potential to recover and “raise the volume of subjugated voices”.⁵² Ethnographies of lived religious praxis have also levied critiques on disenchanting historical narratives (e.g., Orsi 2016) and prevailing text-focused hermeneutics of religion (e.g., Prasad 2007).⁵³ Therefore, I employ an ethnographic praxis in this work to attune to and turn up the volume on Black Americans’ voices negotiating and navigating Hinduism (both its practices and normative discourses about it).

⁵⁰ Tim Ingold, “Anthropology Contra Ethnography,” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7, no. 1 (March 2017): 21–26, <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau7.1.005>, 21.

⁵¹ Two well-known critiques of this kind are: Judith Stacey and the essays of *Writing Culture*

⁵² Christa Craven et al., *Feminist Activist Ethnography: Counterpoints to Neoliberalism in North America* (Blue Ridge Summit, USA.: Lexington Books, 2013), 19. It must be acknowledged that ethnography has been reflexively critiqued also for the asymmetrical power relationship between the researcher and the researched which is a form of exploitation.

⁵³ Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016); Leela Prasad, *Poetics of Conduct: Oral Narrative and Moral Being in a South Indian Town* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

From Fall 2019 to Spring 2021, I conducted a part-multi-sited and then, during the pandemic, continued with remote ethnography and historical research. The ethnographic research consisted of participation, observation, structured and unstructured interviews, and informal conversations and meetups. As an undergraduate student at Northwestern University, I, both Black American and Latinx, participated in the ritual life of Hare Krishna temples in North and South America and I completed a multi-sited ethnographic study of women and gender in ISKCON. Since moving to North Carolina in 2014, I have built enduring friendships with many Hare Krishna devotees and formerly played bass in an interfaith *kirtan* band (called Samadhi) for which I helped record an album (*Awakening*, 2015). These networks and relationships provided the initial starting point for my ethnographic research and assured me that the racial-religious intersection I sought to study existed vibrantly. As a starting point for research, the transnational religious organization ISKCON (the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, colloquially known as the Hare Krishna movement) had a number of advantages like it offered both practitioners and me a well-connected transnational network of temple communities and thus greater access to a larger population. ISKCON devotees—although dispersed across large distances—had often participated and traveled to temples and centers outside of their local communities.

Knowing several Black Americans in this network, I conducted a preliminary survey with two Black American Hare Krishna devotees that generated a list of over

fifty Black, mostly African American, persons practicing or who have practiced Hinduism. The disadvantage, however, was that nearly all persons mentioned were connected to the Hare Krishna movement. On the other hand, ISKCON is justifiably a significant institution worthy of central study because they, indeed, did directly appeal to African and African diaspora communities—namely, through Bhakti Tirtha Swami’s innovative contributions and Krsnanandini’s community building efforts. The result in the end was that most interviewees (n=11) were affiliated with ISKCON in some way (e.g., initiated by an ISKCON guru or born into a family with ISKCON devotees). The remaining interviewees, however, were affiliated with either Sri Chinmoy Centers (n=3), Swamini Turiyasangitananda’s ashram (n=2), or unaffiliated/independent (n=1).⁵⁴

Since Black Americans participating in various forms of Hinduism are geographically dispersed and not immediately locatable at a singular site (i.e., decentralized), I utilized referrals, as indicated above, and conducted multi-sited ethnographic research initially to locate potential sites and people of relevance to the research. I located and conducted in-depth interviews with Black Americans across four communities: the Hare Krishna Movement, Sai Anantam Ashram, Sri Chinmoy Centers, and Swami Satchidananda’s Integral Yoga.⁵⁵ All communities were located along the East Coast of the U.S. except the Sai Anantam Ashram. Over forty hours of recorded

⁵⁴ No identifiable affiliation to a particular school’s authority, belief, or rules.

⁵⁵ It should be noted that each of these communities express a universalism that seeks to overcome the limitations of the terms ‘Hindu’ and ‘Hinduism’.

interviews with nineteen Black Americans were arranged and completed by the summer of 2020. A structured set of interview questions was utilized in the first interview to gather demographic information and learn about the central people and practices to their religious lives (see Appendix D).⁵⁶ Subsequent interviews often were dialogues exploring relationships to important religiously or spiritually influential figures and life histories. The primary interviews explored in chapter seven were selected to highlight a little-known aspect of American Hinduism: multigenerational Black families practicing Hinduism. To investigate multi-generational Hindu families, I interviewed two grandmothers, and six adult children (mostly mothers and fathers) about their family histories, religious beliefs, and practices, and held regular, open-ended conversations with one mother for one and half years.

Prior to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, I sought to contextualize my interviews by visiting temples and yoga studios, participating in festivals (e.g. Festival of the Holy Name in Alachua, Florida), lectures, and community meetings, and regularly meeting with local participants in their homes, restaurants, shops, and places of recreation. From April 2020 onwards, the research was carried out remotely as required by Duke University in order to ensure safe research practices.

⁵⁶ The demographics questions were anything but benign and often generated rich conversations revealing the complexity around naming their religion; in short, there was no standard or simple answers to the question “what is your present religion”.

Therefore, I turned to analyze many digital primary resources and conducted all interviews and conversations remotely.

2. The Invisibility of Black Hindus

Invisibility is not an inherent condition of an individual.

Invisibility results from a collective collapse in vision.

Invisibility is not an inherent condition of minority groups.

For the minority populations of billionaires and world leaders are highly seen.

Invisibility is a contingent occurrence, as is being seen, as is being marveled.

Invisibility, like immobility, can be both an involuntary condition, as much as, a voluntary position.

Since encountering Alice Coltrane's spiritual metamorphosis into Swamini Turiyasangitananda through the late-ethnomusicologist Franya Berkman's work, I have been struck not by Swamini's presence, but her *absence* in the discipline of religious studies. Neither she nor any other Black person is studied in collections of academic essays on gurus in Hinduism—such as *The Graceful Guru* (2004), *Gurus in America* (2005), or *Homegrown Gurus* (2013). She does not figure into Anthony Pinn's broad survey of the *Varieties of African American Religious Experience* (1995) nor his later work, *Introducing African American Religion* (2013). Surveying available literatures and querying librarian

specialists, my search for Black people's emergence and presence in Hinduism has revealed that the racial-religious (and gender) intersection that Swamini stands at, is one which appears to be hollow and vacant from the vantage point of episteme, but is, in reality, not. In her (and many others') absence, a question haunts me: why are Black participants non-emergent in the study of Hinduism, or equally troubling, why is Hinduism not present in the study of Black Religion?

My framing of the question as one concerned with invisibility is purposeful. By framing my apprehension as a matter of discursive non-emergence, I problematize evolving racial dialectics, not Black people. As scholars begin to "see" or "reveal" intersections between Black religiosity and Hinduism (and all its associated subjects) and engage in interpretative work, the rationalizing and justifying of their—that is, Black humans'—prior absence in Hinduism will seem like a reasonable and sound academic inquiry. I take issue with this approach since central disciplines in academia, namely religious studies, have not made to date a substantial investigation into a possible presence—perhaps, inhibited by essentialisms. As the familiar adage goes, the absence of evidence is *not* the evidence of absence. Therefore, prior to assuming that the presence acknowledged in this research is new, recent, late, obscure, unusual, exceptional, limited, exotic, or rare, research agendas should be made to investigate whether it *could* be old, common, ordinary, widespread, or suppressed. In order to do that, one needs to accept such a possibility.

At present, imagining such a possibility is challenging—*why though?* Many curious observers of myself and this research project express preoccupations with the very existence of a Hindu that is racialized as Black (by sociohistorical contexts), skeptically wondering if there were any Black people even interested in Hinduism—if so, where could they possibly be hiding? Initially, I thought the issue could be resolved easily by pointing to a number of well-known individuals like Alice Coltrane, Carl Lewis (an Olympic athlete), and Michael Narada Walden (singer, musician and music producer), thus proving they/we exist and were not completely obscure. I quickly realized, however, that such figures were easily accommodated in the grammar of exceptionalism; that is admiring them for how they have stepped outside the boundaries of what is normative. Thus, it is a dialect that reinforces rather than challenges common knowledge. Even when physically present and explaining my ancestral history (as I am often asked to do), I surprise many individuals—sometimes, to their disbelief—that I am both not ethnically Indian, as fate would have it, and have a substantial interest (whether interpreted as academic, personal, or both) in Hinduism. In time, I began to turn the quandary around and concern myself with another curiosity entirely: why does the idea of a Black Hindu strike you (possibly a fellow American, a European, an Indian) as eccentric, unusual and, perhaps, even unfathomable?

In light of these concerns, I elect to examine the non-emergence of Black Hindus—that is, the belief, assumption, feeling, intuition, or other ways of “knowing” that Black

people do not engage with the thing(s) called Hinduism(s). My investigation is situated within and on discursive formations that, through strategic positions and instruments, have the ability to make truth-claims about Hinduism with authority; thus, dramatically altering perceptions of the real. In my own examination, I use a method that is most associated with French philosopher Michel Foucault's: namely, genealogy. I make no claims to being "faithful" to the late-philosopher's analytical methods, nor Nietzsche who stood before him. I simply acknowledge our shared intent in investigating the "history of the present" through discursive formations, and that such formations are, indeed, the iterations and artifacts of power (as Foucault described it)—intended or not.¹ I also take cues from Judith Butler's performative theory of gender: gender, like other social markers of identity, undergoes naturalization and gain pseudo-permanency, a historical contingency that is veiled in repetitive enactments of renewal.² As for the significance of this chapter, Kimberlé Crenshaw's legal analysis of Black-female intersectionality reminds us all that the unsuspecting consequence of addressing race and gender separately is an ignored intersection marred with marginalization, discrimination, and invisibility.³ I find that to be an apt theoretical framework for

¹ "In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault clarifies that 'power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society' (1990a: 93)." Qtd. in Dianna Taylor, *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2014).

² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

³ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>.

understanding the present condition of being Black and Hindu in religious studies and the need to “map the margins.”⁴

2.1 Race, Racialization and Racial Formation

In this chapter, I am particularly concerned with what might be called the “racialization” of Hinduism. To see the formations of race or the (il)logics of racial identities in the category of religion, which is already presupposed as a *sui generis*, transcendent domain, is very challenging in a post-1970s America that favors both color-blind and cultural/ethnic flavors of racial ideology, and in scientific inquiry of religion that sometimes regards religion as separate from the social, economic, and political.⁵ This is further compounded by the fact that large segments of the academic field of religion do not interrogate race in a sustained and self-critical manner.⁶ Therefore, I will begin by introducing readers to a condensed summary of race and its (il)logics, followed

⁴ “Map the margins” plays on the title of the famous article by Crenshaw that I have refer to in the previous note.

⁵ By transcendent, I refer not only to the metaphysical content of religions, but also, and more importantly, to the common supposition that religion exists outside of history. For a discussion on this, see Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). For works on color-blind and cultural/ethnic racial ideologies, see Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, 3rd ed (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010); Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015); William Ryan, *Blaming the Victim* (Pantheon Books, 1971). For an astute poststructuralist argument in favor of studying religion and power jointly, see Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

⁶ See Malory Nye, “Race and Religion: Postcolonial Formations of Power and Whiteness,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 31, no. 3 (June 25, 2019): 210–37, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341444>.

by two prominent sociologists expanded tripartite breakdown of race into race, racialization, and racial formation.

Race is a social construct—as most scholarly fields recognize—used to organize humans into racial groups and signify human differences via assigning immutable characteristics to each group.⁷ Race’s (il)logic rests upon a “chain of equivalences”—a borrowed phrase from Stuart Hall—that it creates between the biological and genetic and the social and cultural.⁸ Contrary to the (il)logics of race, the racial groups are not actually fixed, nor permanent; races are socially and historically contingent, predicated on non-stable sets of bodily criteria—like skin color, eye shape, hair texture, and genes.⁹ The scientific, biological basis for defining/fixing racial groups has long been discredited and disproven, although not an entirely abandoned racial project.¹⁰ The myths that race creates, however, have profound socio-historical consequences.

The emergence, process, and work (consequences) of race in a society is effectively captured through American sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s tripart terminology of *race*, *racial formation*, and *racialization*.¹¹ In their widely cited book

⁷ Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, and Angela Harris, *Critical Race Theory*, 3rd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.18574/9781479851393>, 9; Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 105-6; and Stuart Hall, *The Fateful Triangle Race, Ethnicity, Nation*, ed. Kobena Mercer, 2017, 31-79.

⁸ Hall, *The Fateful Triangle Race, Ethnicity, Nation*, 69.

⁹ See Michael Yudell and J. Craig Venter, *Race Unmasked: Biology and Race in the Twentieth Century* (New York, United States: Columbia University Press, 2014), 2. Also consider Rocklin 2016 and Slate for readings on the instability/ambiguity of the category of Hindu in U.S.

¹⁰ See Yudell and Craig 2014; and also Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 115-20.

¹¹ See Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, sec. Part II “Racial Formations”.

Racial Formation in the United States, race receives numerous definitions, but is summarized in the following way:

Race is a concept, a representation or signification of identity that refers to different types of human bodies, to the perceived corporeal and phenotypic markers of difference and the meanings and social practices that are ascribed to these differences.¹²

Such a definition, when decontextualized, is rather banal lending itself to ignoring the historical atrocities organized through the (il)logic of race and claims that race is merely an illusion (as in colorblind ideology). Aware of this, Omi and Winant recall that race has been and continues to be intimately involved in social stratification, hierarchy, marginalization and power relations—as grossly evident in transatlantic enslavement and genocidal acts against indigenous peoples, but also at intersections with constructions of gender as exposed in Frances M. Beal’s “Double Jeopardy” or legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw’s analysis of race and gender in applications of U.S. antidiscrimination law. Omi and Winant emphasize, however, that race can become a template for resistance to forms of subordination as well (e.g. African Americans and South Asians’ “colored cosmopolitanism” in the twentieth century).¹³ Thus, they also assert that:

We understand race as an unstable and “decentered” complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle. With this in mind, we

¹² Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 111.

¹³ Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012).

advance the following definition: *Race is a concept that signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies.*¹⁴

Having acknowledged race's relationship to the political (i.e. power), the processes embedded in race are underscored through a breakdown of two related terms: *racial formation* and *racialization*. Racial formation is the "sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed." Racialization is "how the phenomic, corporeal dimensions of human bodies, acquires meaning in social life"; Omi and Winant delineate it as "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group".¹⁵ Although these terms may feel new, they each refer to processes gleaned in race well over a century ago—like in the nineteenth century scholarship of Anna Julia Cooper, and W. E. B. Du Bois and Isabel Eaton.¹⁶

2.2 Trouble Defining 'Hinduism'

One of the influential institutions invested in and (self-)tasked with conveying authoritative knowledge about Hinduism is the academic one (although certainly not the only one). Within this institution there are a number of disciplines that engage with the substrate covered by the term 'Hinduism,' including anthropology, sociology, philosophy, visual, performing, and literary arts, and history; but religious studies rank

¹⁴ Ibid., 110. (emphasis in original)

¹⁵ Ibid., 109 and 111.

¹⁶ See Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice From the South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2000 [1892]), <https://docsouth.unc.edu/church/cooper/cooper.html>; and W. E. B. Du Bois and Isabel. Eaton, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: Published for the University, 1899).

at the top as Hinduism is most often subsumed under the category of religion (as opposed to philosophy, for instance) today. As modern scholars—particularly those who have inherited the eighteenth and nineteenth century western European academic field of religion—have approached the phenomena of Hinduism, they have faced methodological and theoretical challenges, including struggling to define ‘Hinduism.’ Scholars of religion face difficulties finding what defines (or “binds together”) ‘Hinduism’ in a way that *feels* systematic and comparable enough when they reflect on the “diversity” it is meant to hold.¹⁷ These “challenges” have been commonly the consequence of deriving “universal” definitions of religion from an implicit (or explicit) framework for defining religion, Protestant Christianity, and then applying it to Hinduism.¹⁸ Although the critique of ‘religion’ as a constructed category is an interrelated and intriguing debate that is worthy of study, this section seeks to highlight what has facilitated scholars to continuously talk about Hinduism, argue whether it is religion or not and, despite known quandaries, define it. It is what *incidentally* arranges the boundaries of Hinduism, seen in this and co-related academic debates, to which I seek to show.

¹⁷ For a review of this and related issues in the academic study of Hinduism, see Arvind Sharma, ed., *The Study of Hinduism*, Studies in Comparative Religion (Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

¹⁸ For more on this, see Will Sweetman, “‘Hinduism’ and the History of ‘Religion’: Protestant Presuppositions in the Critique of the Concept of Hinduism,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 15, no. 4 (January 1, 2003): 329–53. See also Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*, particularly chapters two, four and five, for a historical discussion of eighteenth and nineteenth century western European authors who engaged in comparative religions, theorizing religion using Christianity as the assumed model. See also chapter two “‘Religion’ in the West” in Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*.

Chief among academic debates is how to define 'Hinduism.' At various times, academics have pointed to the difficulty (or impossibility) of defining Hinduism because of its perceived heterogeneity and internal pluralism.¹⁹ Notably, some recent scholars, such as Elaine M. Fisher and Julius Lipner, have made these same characteristics into central to their theories of Hinduism.²⁰ Whether scholars see in Hinduism a heterogeneity that is emblematic or problematic to defining 'Hinduism,' a preliminary definition of Hinduism seems to be already assumed or known. I illustrate this commonly taken-for-granted pattern through two opposing scholars in the debate, Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Julius Lipner.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000) was a twentieth century Canadian scholar of comparative religions who taught and directed research centers in a number of universities including Harvard University and McGill University. In his immensely influential book *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962), W. C. Smith levies a substantial critique against the term 'religion,' arguing that its reification as a universal category with immutable essences is beyond historical veracity. After revealing a mostly Christian and European genealogy of the term "'religion' in the West" in the previous

¹⁹ For more excerpts and examples of this, one can review Arvind Sharma, "What Is Hinduism?," in *The Study of Hinduism*, ed. Arvind Sharma, Studies in Comparative Religion (Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 1–19.

²⁰ See Elaine M. Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism: Religion and the Public Sphere in Early Modern South India*, South Asia across the Disciplines (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017), 136; Julius Lipner, "On Hinduism and Hinduisms: The Way of the Banyan," in *The Hindu World*, ed. Sushil Mittal and Gene R. Thursby (New York: Routledge, 2004).

chapter, W. C. Smith discusses the modern development of the concept of 'religion' in "other cultures" (also called "the religions").²¹ In discussing 'Hinduism,' W. C. Smith regards the -ism as misleading and anachronistic for at least two reasons: (1) the term misrepresents heterogeneous practices and beliefs as a discrete systematic unity and (2) the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' were not indigenous to "classical Hindus."²² I turn to W.C. Smith's discussion on heterogeneity in 'Hinduism' for the ways in which it reveals an implicit connotation in 'Hinduism':

My objection to the term 'Hinduism', of course, is not on the grounds that nothing exists. Obviously[,] an enormous quantity of phenomena is to be found that this term covers. My point, and I think that this is the first step that one must take towards understanding something of the vision of Hindus, is that the mass of religious phenomena that we shelter under the umbrella of that term, is not a unity and does not aspire to be. It is not an entity in any theoretical sense, let alone any practical one.

'Islam' and 'Christianity', as we shall subsequently consider, are also in fact, in actual practice, internally diverse, and have been historically fluid. They, however, have included a tendency to wish not to be so; this is not how they conceptualize themselves. Many Christians and many Muslims have come to believe that there is one true Christianity and one true Islam. Hindus, on the other hand, have gloried in diversity. One of their basic and persistent affirmations has been that there are as many aspects of the truth as there are persons to perceive it.²³

W. C. Smith's reasoning for the abandonment of the term 'Hinduism' (but not necessarily 'Hindu') hinges on the enormous "diversity" that the term is made to cover, which, he admits, is not dissimilar to the diversity in 'Islam' or 'Christianity.' His main

²¹ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York: New American Library, 1964).

²² *Ibid.*, 61-3.

²³ *Ibid.*, 63.

animating point is that the beings, practices, ideas, and materiality to which Hinduism refers do not cross into a self-fashioned theological unity (called 'religion') prior to historical encounters with Muslims and British/Christians. This animating point should be seriously reevaluated, but a more subtle point, easily overlooked, is more relevant to my analysis at this moment.²⁴ In W. C. Smith's argument, the term 'Hinduism' is already made to cover a diverse set of phenomena. This is acknowledged in the phrase "the mass of religious phenomena that we shelter under the umbrella of that term." If, as W. C. Smith argues, an apparent theology does not unify or define the content covered by the term 'Hinduism,' then what does?

Scholar of Religion Julius Lipner addresses the same question of heterogeneity—albeit championing a solution that directly opposes Smith's.²⁵ Since as early as 1996, Lipner has proposed considering Hinduism's perceived heterogeneity as its central

²⁴ Smith's argument that Hindus (and thus, Hinduism) do not historically aspire for a single unified totality, unlike the two aforementioned religions, should be re-evaluated. The "indigenous" aspiration for systematizing religion is vague and arbitrary criteria for "unity" and "religion" only made clear in Smith's book via the history of Christianity's self-fashioning (see Chapter Two). Smith, notably unconsciously so, attributes an immense innovative agency to Christianity that quite remarkably is not to be found in any other "religion" earlier. A more charitable reading of Smith, however, would conclude that Smith historicized (and provincialized) the term 'religion', thereby making visible laden interests from Christianity (which are evident in any discussions about what counts as religion). Nevertheless, Smith's conclusions here are worth reassessing in light of more recent scholarship on not only South Asian history, but also exemplary postcolonial and subaltern scholarship that seeks to apprehend the agency and subtlety of non-Christian and non-West "others" in hegemonic History. Talal Asad, for instance, offers a noteworthy critique of Smith's characterization of Muslim-Hindu relationships as unilaterally violent and foreign (see Asad, "Reading a Modern Classic").

²⁵ See Julius Lipner, "On Hinduism and Hinduisms: The Way of the Banyan," in *The Hindu World*, ed. Sushil Mittal and Gene R. Thursby (New York: Routledge, 2004).

defining characteristic.²⁶ Lipner calls this approach the “Banyan Model,” named after Lipner’s central simile: like the banyan tree, Hinduism is “an interconnected polycentric phenomenon in the flux of growth, change, and decay [...]”²⁷ As might be evident, Lipner’s definition is not yet tied to anything tangible, nor is it clear from what empirical data does this definition arise from; the data is only implied so far. In Lipner’s writing, this model is both descriptive (defining/interpretative) of what Hinduism is and instructive of a methodological approach to Hinduism.²⁸ Lipner acknowledges, however, a key limitation in this model: “[I]n terms of social scientific discourse, there

²⁶ Ibid., 24

²⁷ Ibid.; From the cited work in this note, Lipner’s summary of the model is as follows:

‘In recent work (Lipner 1996, 1998a), I have likened Hinduism to the massive banyan tree that is a chief attraction of the botanical gardens on the outskirts of Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), capital of the Indian state of West Bengal. This is not meant to be an exact comparison but only a basis for constructing a model of Hinduism that bears functional resemblances to this particular tree. The Kolkata banyan is very old—it has a history of well over two hundred years—and in the way of ancient banyans has put out aerial roots from its branches which have reached the ground and resemble trunks themselves. For some reason there appears to be no central axis, so that the Kolkata banyan looks like a grove of interconnected trees. In fact, there are more than a thousand trunks with a canopy of about four acres (Hawkins 1986: 39). The effect is that of a three-dimensional lattice that is multicentered; each of the thicker “trunks” seems to sustain a microsystem of lesser trunks with their branches, and the whole comes across as an arboreal grid that is one, yet many. This is a promising model for the view of Hinduism that I propose: an interconnected, polycentric phenomenon in the flux of growth, change, and decay—but there is a difference. As a single organic system, the banyan can display only a limited diversity of its botanic structure (fruits, foliage, and so on); furthermore, dubious (perhaps parasitic) growths can be identified for what they are by accredited scientific means. There are ways of telling botanically whether something is “banyan” (*ficus benghalensis*) or not. This is where the resemblance with the model of Hinduism I am proposing breaks down. On the one hand, I wish to retain the rhetoric of an organic unity in the Hindu banyan, on the other, I wish to allow for a wider range of diversity of its constituent features than in its botanic counterpart (with regard to rites, rituals, doctrines, and so on). Further, in terms of social scientific discourse, there seem to be no clear ways of discerning on occasion where the Hindu banyan ends and non-Hindu characteristics take over, that is, whether something can with confidence be described as “Hindu” or not.’

It should also be noted that the banyan tree has served as a metaphor for Hinduism previously by Sir Monier Monier-Williams. See Hawley, “Naming Hinduism,” 22,

²⁸ Lipner, “On Hinduism and Hinduisms,” 1, 12-13, 21, and 24-25.

seem to be no clear ways of discerning on occasion where the Hindu banyan ends and non-Hindu characteristics take over, that is, whether something can with confidence be described as 'Hindu' or not."²⁹ Despite making this admission, no less than two sentences later, Lipner declares that many things are, in fact, "Hindu," and "clearly" so.³⁰ Lipner proceeds to then discuss the early emergences of a civilization near the Indus river (*Sindhu* in Sanskrit)—who later become known as "Hindu(s)" by 6th century B.C.E. by Persians.³¹

In the scope of my study, this small paradox is already quite indicative of implied structure and characteristics laden in 'Hinduism'. The contradiction is problematic because while the beginning and end of 'Hinduism' are not clearly definable, Lipner simultaneously claims that we know what (or who) is "Hindu". Hindus, or how one defines 'Hindu', then becomes, by default, the gauge for tangibly defining the abstraction called 'Hinduism'. W. C. Smith makes this connection unabashedly clear stating that "Hinduism [...] is the name that we give as a totality to whatever it might be that they [Hindus] thought, or did, or thought worth doing"; he also remarks that "the religious life of the people of India" is what is perhaps most closely meant by the modern academic use of 'Hinduism'.³² Although Smith and Lipner came to starkly opposite conclusions (i.e. Smith's abandoning vs. Lipner's keeping the

²⁹ Ibid., 24.

³⁰ Ibid., 24-25.

³¹ Lipner, *Hindus*, 8-12.

³² Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 61.

term 'Hinduism'), both of their discussions on Hinduism's heterogeneity (its "diversity") are made possible by a definition of 'Hinduism' that is predefined by "knowing" Hindus as non-Muslim, non-Christian "people of India."

2.3 'Hindu' as "People of India"

The historical dictionary *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases*, first published in 1886 by Scottish Orientalist Henry Yule and English civil servant and scholar Author C. Burnell, offers etymologies and chronologically ordered illustrative quotations (in various languages) for mostly foreign words of Asian origin that have entered into the English lexicon. I recall Yule and Burnell's entry for "Hindoo" (Hindu) for it echoes and summarizes the layered connotations embed in 'Hindu' and the etymology of the term traced in this chapter: "HINDOO, n.p. P. Hindū. A person of Indian religion and race. This is a term derived from the use of the Mahomedan [Muslim] conquerors (see under INDIA)."³³

The ethno-geographic implications embedded in the term 'Hindu' have existed for at least two-and-a-half millennia, with later cultural, racial and religious connotations added—albeit with some slippage and variation between historical usages and regions. There is more or less a consensus among scholars on this historical fact, and the history that I trace in part here is an often-recounted history for the field of Hindu

³³ H. Yule and A. C. Burnell, "Hindoo," in *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases*.

studies. The word 'Hindu' is an ancient Persian word derived from the Sanskrit word 'Sindhu' (meaning 'river').³⁴ The oldest known usage is an inscription on the tomb of Persian King Darius I in 486 B.C.E, wherein it reads that the King had ruled over "Hidush" (India).³⁵ The large Sindhu river (also known as Indus via its Greek transliteration) flows through a region located in the former northwest region of India (now Pakistan). As outsiders to the region, the Persians and Greeks called the geographic region near the Sindhu river "Hidush" and 'India,' respectively.³⁶ Other names for the geographic region are similarly derived (e.g. 'Hind' in Arabic and 'Hindustan' in later Persian).³⁷ Thus, the inhabitants and the civilization encountered at the banks of the Sindhu river became known to Persians and Greeks as 'Hindu(s)' and 'Indian(s)'. Notable, neither 'Hindu' nor 'Hindu dharma' can be found in premodern Sanskrit texts.³⁸

Going beyond mere geography, 'Hindu' acquired additional ethnic, cultural, and religious meanings during the Ghaznavid dynasty (Persian Muslim rulers of Turkish

³⁴ H. Yule and A. C. Burnell, "India, Indies," in *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*, New ed. edited by William Crooke, B.A. (London: J. Murray, 1903); Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 249; Carl W. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center*, SUNY Series in Muslim Spirituality in South Asia (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 22.

³⁵ See Yule and Burnell, "India, Indies."

³⁶ Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 249; Yule and Burnell, "India, Indies."

³⁷ Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, 22; Yule and Burnell, "India, Indies." 435.

³⁸ David N. Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 4 (October 1999): 647.

origin) in northern India.³⁹ According to Professor of Islamic Studies Carl W. Ernst, Persian scholar al-Bīrūnī (973-1048 C.E.) was the first to present Hindus as a “distinct religious group” in addition to older cultural and ethnic meanings.⁴⁰ Of al-Bīrūnī, Ernst describes how al-Bīrūnī distinguished Hindus as religious opposite to Muslims:

[A]l-Biruni* was sympathetic but critical; he presented Indian doctrines as he found them in the Sanskrit texts, and compared them to the teachings of Greek philosophers and scientists. His book was designed "as a help to those who want to discuss religious questions with them [the Indians], and as a repertory of information to those who want to associate with them." Despite his appreciation of Indian civilization, al-Biruni* could not help seeing it in opposition to the Islamic: "The Hindus entirely differ from us in every respect." He described the differences between the two cultures in terms of language, Indian xenophobia, custom (especially exclusionary purity rules), and the bitter legacy of Arab and Turkish invasions. In his final analysis, from a Muslim point of view Hindus were "our religious antagonists." Al-Biruni's* concentrated study of the Brahmanical learning of northern India had accustomed him to applying the Islamic concept of religion (din*) to India. [...] he was probably unaware of the novelty of his synthetic creation of the concept of Hindu religion. With al-Biruni*, Hindus become identified for the first time as a distinct religious group, precisely insofar as they are distinct from Muslims.⁴¹

In al-Bīrūnī's study, 'Hindus' signifies a group of people in India that had distinct language, dress, customs, manners, and religious beliefs and practices to Muslims.⁴² Much like later European scholars would, al-Bīrūnī favored a monotheistic, Brahminical and Sanskrit rendition of Hindu religion, noting pessimistically of the deviations into anthropomorphism he found outside of the “educated” classes of

³⁹ See Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, 22-9.

⁴⁰ Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, 24.

⁴¹ Ibid; asterisks in original.

⁴² Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Bīrūnī, *Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A.D. 1030.*, trans. Eduard Sachau (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1910), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015008727623>.

Indians.⁴³ It is interesting to note that renewed interest in al-Bīrūnī in the form of the translation of his work was accomplished in nineteenth century European scholarship on India that was, at the time, voraciously developing its own notions of Hindu religion; the English translation of al-Bīrūnī's study used by Ernst was published originally in London in 1888 by German Orientalist Eduard Sachua.⁴⁴ Despite this later interest in al-Bīrūnī, he was not widely read during his lifetime according to Ernst; nevertheless, the adverse religious othering of Hindus by Muslims became commonplace by the 13th century.⁴⁵ Ernst argues that the Islamic concept of Hindu emerges as medieval Muslims witness Mongols (conceived as pagans) conquest over Islamic sovereignty across Central Asia; consequently, an Islamic imperialism intensified to defend the last epicenter of Islamic civilization (India) against other potential outsiders.⁴⁶

According to Ernst, the intensive *religious* (as opposed to caste or ethnic) othering of Hindus by Muslims is somewhat one-sided in the medieval period, developing more among medieval Muslims, but not yet Hindus.⁴⁷ Scholar David N. Lorenzen, however, opposes this reading of medieval Hindus (Indians) citing as counter-evidence the use of

⁴³ Ibid., 31-32.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 282, note 81.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 24-8.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 24-6.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 28. It seems, however, that medieval Hindus (Indians) did accept 'Hindu' as a self-designation, but it is not clear whether it was a separate religious identity. Certainly, the self-referential use has ethnic-geographic connotation. See Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?," for an opposing point of view to Ernst in this issue.

'Hindu' in 14th-16th century poetry of Kabir, Anantadas, Ekanath, and Vidyapati.⁴⁸

Although, the ethnic-geographic layer of 'Hindu' is never contested by Lorenzen. In fact, nearly all of his examples show medieval Hindu poets using 'Hindu' against the term 'Turk' (*turka*). Lorenzen, instead, aims to make the more subtle point that the religious meaning is foremost over the ethno-geographic meaning.⁴⁹ Lorenzen's discussion on a poetic dialogue written by the Marathi mystic Ekanath (1544-1599) demonstrates this most clearly:

Among them [Ekanath's compositions] is a humorous poetic dialogue between a Hindu Brahmin and a Muslim, the *Hindu-turka-samvada*. The term "Turk" (*turka*), like "Hindu," can be used in a[n] ethno-geographical sense, but here-as in the texts of Anantadas, Kabir, and Vidyapati cited below, as well as in those of many other medieval poets—its *primary* [emphasis added] meaning is clearly "Muslim."⁵⁰

Lorenzen's disagreement arises when scholars read Hindus as not having developed any self-conscious religious identity in the medieval period. His contestation is part of a larger debate in academia on the construction of 'Hinduism' which is discussed below. Despite this orientation to his argument, he accepts (as illustrated above) that ethnic and geographic meanings continue throughout this period.

⁴⁸ David N. Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 4 (October 1999): 630–59, 648-53.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 648-9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Although al-Bīrūnī marks the beginnings of distinct religious implications in the word ‘Hindu,’ ethno-geographic meanings clearly prevailed (even in al-Bīrūnī’s study).⁵¹ One of the earliest uses of ‘Hindu’ in Indian languages (also discussed by Lorenzen) are the titles of several kings of the Vijayanagara empire found in 14th century Andhra inscriptions: “Sultan among Hindu kings” (*Hindu-raya-suratrana*).⁵² Historian Cynthia Talbot writes that this assumed designation by South Indian kings should be primarily interpreted as ethnic (with some religious meaning included):

“Hindu meant Indic as opposed to Turkish, not ‘of the Hindu religion’ as opposed to ‘of the Islamic religion.’ In this interpretation, the definition of the self as Hindu can be seen as a sign of an incipient Indic ethnicity—incorporating territorial associations, language, a common past and customs, as well as religious affiliation.”⁵³

Talbot’s interpretation of ‘Hindu’ here as primarily ethnic is further supported by Ernst and Lorenzen who both acknowledge that Indian-language literatures rarely mention the words ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim’ before the 1800s; Muslims are nearly unanimously

⁵¹ This is particularly clear from the table of contents (see Ch. XVIII, for instance) and the very first chapter of al-Bīrūnī’s book. See, for example, his comparison of Hindus to Greeks on page 24 of Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Bīrūnī, *Alberuni’s India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A.D. 1030.*, trans. Eduard Sachau (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1910 [1888]), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015008727623>, especially 19-26.

⁵² Cynthia Talbot, “Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 4 (1995): 700. See also Lorenzen, “Who Invented Hinduism?,” 652.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 700. Please note that I do not agree with Talbot’s understanding of the category of religion. She employs a definition of religion that seems flattened and unsophisticated. On the same page, she writes, “for ethnicity is composed of numerous elements, unlike linguistic or religious identity.” Religious identity is certainly intersectional.

It should also be noted that David N. Lorenzen (1999) claims to disagree with Talbot’s interpretation, but under closer inspection, he misinterprets Talbot as claiming ‘Hindu’ should be read as “merely geographical.” Talbot, however, does not claim that ‘Hindu’ was only geographical in these inscriptions as evidenced by her use of “Indic ethnicity” to suggest geography as well as customs, language, and religion.

referred to by terms like *tajika* (Arab) *turuska* (Turk), *yavana* (foreigner), *mleccha* (barbarians), and *saka* (Scythian).⁵⁴

2.4 ‘Hinduism’ as Religious “India”

A full historical examination of the various meanings and uses of ‘Hindu’ (and co-related terms like ‘Gentoo’) would require broad and wide study of literary and material artifacts spanning at least the last two millennia and a multitude of languages; such a comprehensive study has not been undertaken to date, as far as I am aware. Over the last three decades, however, many scholars have sought to historicize the term ‘Hinduism’ in attempts to locate when and how it emerged as a religious category and identity. The research agenda has been driven by a particular set of questions involving the recent coinage of the term ‘Hinduism’ (or ‘Hindooism’) in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century: is ‘Hinduism’ (the religious category) an invention/construction of modernity; if so, under what historical circumstances and by whom?⁵⁵

I have already discussed one precursor to this trend in scholarship, Wilfred C. Smith’s *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1962). On one side of the debate are those scholars who argue that in the nineteenth century a construction, invention, or colonial project birthed ‘Hinduism’ into a reified single, united, and ancient religion; this is

⁵⁴ Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, 30; Lorenzen, “Who Invented Hinduism?,” 647.

⁵⁵ The earliest date for the use of “Hindooism” mentioned in scholarship is 1787 in a correspondence written by Charles Grant, Director of the East Indian Company. This is cited in Geoffrey A. Oddie, “Constructing ‘Hinduism’: The Impact of the Protestant Missionary Movement on Hindu Self-Understanding,” in *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication Since 1500*, ed. Robert Eric Frykenberg (Independence, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), 155–82.

argued with varying degrees of strength and variable conclusions on who the primary actors in this construction are (whether by British colonialists, European Indologists, Indian bourgeois or all three). Among the constructionists are scholars Vasudha Dalmia, Robert E. Frykenberg, John Hawley, Ronald Inden, Richard King, Brian K. Pennington (with some contentions), Brian K. Smith, and Heinrich von Stietencron.⁵⁶ Of those who bring this claim into question in various ways are Wendy Doniger, Carl W. Ernst (to a limited degree), Alf Hildebeitel, Cynthia Talbot, and David N. Lorenzen.⁵⁷ To be honest, the “sides” of this debate could be represented as two poles with scholars falling on a spectrum.

At stake in this polemic debate is the meaning and definition of ‘religion,’ who or what defines or defined ‘Hindu’ and ‘Hinduism,’ and who are the gatekeepers to

⁵⁶ John Stratton Hawley, “Naming Hinduism,” *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 15, no. 3 (1991): 20–34; Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron, eds., *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity* (New Delhi ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 1995); Robert Eric Frykenberg, “Constructions of Hinduism at the Nexus of History and Religion,” in *Defining Hinduism : A Reader*, ed. J. E. Llewellyn and Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Routledge, 2017 [2005]), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315475653>; Ronald B. Inden, *Imagining India* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2000); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and “the Mystic East”* (London : New York: Routledge, 1999); Brian Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Brian K. Smith, “Questioning Authority: Constructions and Deconstructions of Hinduism,” in *Defining Hinduism : A Reader*, ed. J. E. Llewellyn and Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Routledge, 2017 [2005]), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315475653>.

⁵⁷ Wendy Doniger, “Hinduism by Any Other Name,” *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 15, no. 3 (1991): 35–41; Talbot, “Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self”; Carl W. Ernst, “Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconsideration of Arabic and Persian Translations from Indian Languages,” *Iranian Studies* 36, no. 2 (2003): 173–95; Ernst, *Eternal Garden*; Lorenzen, “Who Invented Hinduism?.” Lorenzen also names Lawrence Babb, Gabriella Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi, Thomas Trautmann, and Peter van der Veer as also standing on this side (Lorenzen, “Who Invented Hinduism?,” 630).

answer these questions.⁵⁸ It is not my prerogative to enter into contestation over the dates and parties involved in the emergence of 'Hinduism' as religion *sui generis* par excellence, but the nineteenth century is a watershed moment for the reification of 'Hinduism' involving both Europeans and Indians.⁵⁹ Of greater interest, however, is what the debate's evidence and commentary happens to readily reveal: namely, 'Hinduism' as coterminous with a religious people of India.

Above, I have presented evidence and interpretations from Ernst, Lorenzen, and Talbot who represent one side of the debate. I will now briefly sketch some drawn from the opposing side. Situating the emergence of the 'Hinduism' squarely in the nineteenth century, Historian Robert Frykenberg describes 'Hinduism' as a construct equivalent to India—"As a concept, it is India's twin".⁶⁰ He delineates five preeminent structures of the concept of 'Hinduism' produced by Indian and European intellectuals in the context of British India:

The "official" (or establishment) structure, in summary, consisted of at least five elements: (1) Hinduism as a nativistic synonym for all things Indian (or pertaining to India); (2) Hinduism as an ancient civilization, something clearly identifiable before 1800 and going back five thousand years; (3) Hinduism as a loosely defined label describing all socioreligious phenomena found or

⁵⁸ Expectedly, more than just academicians enter the debate and academic answers to such questions become part of a broader public contestation over such questions (and authority over such inquiries).

⁵⁹ I tend to agree with Brian K. Pennington's characterization of the period:

It would be a severe historical misrepresentation (albeit a faddish one, to be sure) to suggest, as many have, that Hinduism was the invention of the British. Adapting to the colonial milieu, Hindus themselves entered a dialectic space in which they endorsed and promoted the British publication of ancient texts and translations, resisted missionary polemic, and experimented with modifications, alterations, and innovations in Hindu religious forms. (Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*, 4)

⁶⁰ Frykenberg, "Constructions of Hinduism at the Nexus of History and Religion," 125.

originating in India (comparable to, but less pejorative than, paganism as a label for nonmonotheistic religions in the ancient Greco-Roman world); (4) Hinduism as an institutional/ideological instrument for the socio-cultural and sociopolitical integration of an all-India (imperial or national) sway; and (5) Hinduism as a single religion which, with the coming of Swami Narendranath Datta Vivekananda to the First World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893, was gradually recognized and then elevated by liberally minded and eclectic western clerics into the rank of a world religion. A pragmatic and sometimes romantic blending of these five representations, as Hawley has argued, helped to reify Hinduism in popular imaginations. With western impetus, this blending was then projected onto the world.⁶¹

By Frykenberg's assessment, the 'Hinduism' we have imbibed today is a projection on India that consolidates a heterogeneous geographical population (i.e. Hindus) and their myriad ideological and material productions into a single ancient world religion called 'Hinduism.'

Brian Smith, like Frykenberg, emphasizes the employment of a singular 'Hinduism' to facilitate British colonialism:

Just who invented "Hinduism" first is a matter of scholarly debate. Almost everyone agrees that it was not the Hindus. As a discrete Indic religion among others, however, "Hinduism" was probably first imagined by the British in the early part of the nineteenth century to describe (and create and control) an enormously complex configuration of people and their traditions found in the South Asian subcontinent. "Hinduism" made it possible for the British, and for us all (including Hindus), to speak of a religion when before there was none or, at best, many.⁶²

Remarking on the Irish Indologist Vincent Smith (1843-1920), Ronald Inden similarly concludes that Indologists subsumed and consolidated the diversity of India into a single religion called 'Hinduism':

⁶¹ Ibid., 135.

⁶² Lorenzen, *Who Invented Hinduism?*, 633.

Vincent Smith spoke for many when he told the would-be reformers of the Indian government: 'If all reference to Islam, Christianity, and other foreign religions be put aside for a moment, it may be said *that India, excepting uncultured tribes, is essentially [!] Hindu*, the land of the Brahmans. The unity underlying the obvious diversity of India may be summed up in the word Hinduism' (Smith, 1919: 26). Simply put, the proposition is this: the essence of the religions of India is the religion of the Brahmans. To understand their religion is, therefore, *to grasp the mind of the entire civilization*. Hinduism, then, is another pillar in the construct of India.⁶³ (emphasis added)

Without entering into any of these authors' specific claims, it is clear that among scholars who emphasize the nineteenth century as crucial to a modern understanding of 'Hinduism', India (its practices and people) is also discursively essential in its making and meaning. The impetus to define Hinduism in British colonialism, according to these authors, was to know, subordinate, and rule India. Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) famously addressed the mythic center of modernity, Europe, as "hyperreal" to indicate an idealized vision of Europe as dominant in modernity's definition.⁶⁴ In defining 'Hinduism,' India is another hyperreal. The implications of which will be discussed in the next three subsections.

2.5 'Hinduism' in "World Religions" Discourse

A significant historical development in the genealogy of religion emerges in the nineteenth century in the birth of the science of religion (*Religionswissenschaft*) and the concept of world religions. In discussing the logic behind the world religions

⁶³ Inden, *Imaging India*, 86.

⁶⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Reissue, with a new preface by the author, Princeton Studies in Culture, Power, History (Princeton, NJ: Univ. Press, 2008).

classificatory system, I hope to illustrate how this system often organizes religion around ethnicity, nationality, and geography. In this discourse, 'Hinduism' is an ethnic religion, bound to a race of people and place, much like earlier constructions of Hindu.

In *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (2005), historian of religion Tomoko Masuzawa offers a close historical examination of the ideological foundations of the rather passively accepted logic and underexamined ideology of the concept of world religions.⁶⁵ Presently, world religions, or major religions of the world, is the classificatory system that recognizes a set of more or less twelve religions, including Hinduism. Masuzawa's book is mostly concerned with what has led up to the establishment of this supposedly neutral and inclusive, pluralistic system in the Euro-American study of religion and thus the scope of her book is limited to European authors and intellectuals from the late nineteenth century to early twentieth century where this conceptual framework developed. Two theses run parallel throughout the book: the genealogy of 'world religions' reveals how it preserves and reproduces (1) Eurocentrism (and by extension Americacentrism) and (2) Christian hegemony as *the* supreme universal religion for all other races. What perhaps makes her work most fascinating is the fact that the present Euro-American academic study of religion is all but too keenly aware of these potential slippages in

⁶⁵ Tomoko Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

discourse on 'religion'; often, scholars of religion are candidly and unequivocally distancing and deconstructing European and Christian supremacy embedded in the ideology of the study of 'religion.'⁶⁶

Refraining from reasserting all of Professor Masuzawa's sub theses and evidence here, I will, instead, contain myself to how her analysis reveals world religions as often coterminous with race (as in bounded lineage), ethnicity, and place. In her discussion on comparative theology's relationship to the secularist science of religion, she reveals one ideological formulation of world religion that seems at first at odds with the later secularist ("neutral" and "historical") approach:

The earliest known manifestation of the term "world religion," albeit in German, was in this sense of the "uniquely universal" religion of Christ—in other words, the religion of the world—as distinct from all other homegrown, indigenous religions particular to the land: Landesreligionen, or "national religions," as the latter term was commonly translated. This Christian-monopolistic use of the term "world religion" persisted concurrently with the development of the scientific/taxonomic sense, as we see, for example, in the title *Christianity the World-Religion* (1897), a book by John Henry Barrows, the president of the World's Parliament of Religions and the Haskell Lecturer on Comparative Religion at the University of Chicago.⁶⁷

In this early theological formulation of *a* world religion, the distinction between *a* world religion is distinctly transhistorical, transnational, and transethnic—"uniquely universal"—which is compared against those religions—summarily considered the "rest"—that are distinctly local, "national," bound to place, and ethnic. Here begins Masuzawa's

⁶⁶ Some of the most prominent and well-read scholars of this epoch of poststructuralism and deconstructionism are Talal Asad, Jonathan Z. Smith, Richard King, Russell McCutcheon, and Timothy Fitzgerald. Edward Said is undoubtedly an important precursor.

⁶⁷ Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*, 23.

tracing of one political implication of being bound to a place as a religion: inferiority to a universal religion.⁶⁸ Although the secular science of religion purports to be above this “prescientific” intellectualism, Masuzawa warns against summarily dismissing the list of “national religions” (plus Christianity) in the comparative theologians’ work—for it is in likeness to the list of world religions of scientific writings, like in Max Weber’s unfinished work *Economic Ethic of the World Religions*.⁶⁹

A question lingers in her writing: has the Eurocentrism (here seen in the form of Christian supremacy) of nineteenth century theories been overcome by in the pluralistic ethos of world religions today?⁷⁰ The final chapter of Masuzawa’s analysis suggests otherwise:

This last chapter, then, entertains the possibility that the discourse of world religions, whose rhizomatic growth in the nineteenth century I trace, when it finally erupted in the early twentieth century, facilitated the conversion of the Eurohegemonic claim from one context to another—that is, from the older discourse of Christian supremacy (now considered bankrupt by many liberal Christians) to the new discourse of world religions, couched in the language of pluralism and diversity.⁷¹

⁶⁸ I will not argue here that this is unique to Christianity, as such exclusivist claims can be found in other religions. Other religions, however, have not held the same sway as Christianity, which has received far more favor in the academic enterprise on religion. Even in critiques against religion (the entire category), Christianity’s claims to universalistic doctrine has either been the sub-text definition of what is religion. See W. C. Smith.

⁶⁹ Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*, 28.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 28-9.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

On the whole, her work calls for a re-examination of the logics of 'world religions', the term's genealogy, and assessment of what may have passed into our present discourse on religion.

Could aspects of the initial Christocentric discourses in world religions live on in present conceptual arrangements of 'Hinduism' today? Let's examine the key strands in the ideological foundations of world religions that Masuzawa uncovers. The first finding is that early American and European taxonomic system for various religions in publications from the seventeenth to early nineteenth century classify and identify other (non-Christian) religions not as belief systems (with internal doctrinal unity); "instead, it recognizes and categorizes different 'nations,' or in our terms, different 'peoples.'" ⁷² A second conclusion is that the religious classification systems in nineteenth century comparative theology extols Christianity as the supreme universal religion above "ethnic" religions, of which Hinduism, or generically classified under "paganism/heathenism/idolatry", would fall into.⁷³ Two pioneers of immense influence on this discourse are discussed: Frederick Denison Maurice (1805-72), Christian Socialist and professor at Kings College, London and later Cambridge University, and James Freeman Clarke, a prominent Unitarian minister and Bostonian—whose immensely

⁷² Ibid., 61.

⁷³ Ibid., 122, 145.

popular volume *Ten Great Religions: An Essay in Comparative Theology* (1871) passed through thirty editions between 1871 and 1893.

In Clarke's particular formulation of ten religions in his volume, a racial logic—namely, that essential and fixed characteristics are constrained to a people and each group through their 'religion'—is patently clear. As per Clarke's introduction (quoted in Masuzawa's chapter), the purpose of his comparative theology is as follows:

For if we can make it appear, by a fair survey of the principal religions of the world, that, while they are ethnic or local, Christianity is catholic or universal; that, while they are defective, possessing some truths and wanting others, Christianity possesses all; and that, while they are stationary, Christianity is progressive; [...] If Christianity appears, after a full comparison with other religions, to be the one and the only religion which is perfectly adapted to man, it will be impossible to doubt that it was designed by God to be the religion of our race; that it is the providential religion sent by God to man, its truth God's truth, its way the way to God and to heaven.⁷⁴

Religions, here, are originally bound to a race, with only one transcending its local and ethnic boundaries to be *the* world religion. Clarke's section headings, reiterate this:

§6. It [comparative theology] will show that, while most of the Religions of the World are Ethnic, or the Religions of Races, Christianity is Catholic, or adapted to become the Religion of all Races.

§7. Comparative Theology will probably show that the Ethnic Religions are one-sided, each containing a Truth of its own, but being defective, wanting some corresponding Truth. Christianity, or the Catholic Religion, is complete on every Side.

§8. Comparative Theology will probably show that Ethnic Religions are arrested, or degenerate, and will come to an End, while the Catholic Religion is capable of a progressive Development.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Ibid., 78.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 78-9.

While Masuzawa holds mostly silent here on the racial formation I detect, she does note the consequences of Clarke's (and Maurice's) framing: the advocating and legitimizing of the supremacy and hegemony of Christianity and its (European) people over all others. The others in this case are religions who represent (or are a proxy for) distinct, localized ethnic groups. In fact, to establish a hegemony, whether Christian, European or both, depends on these religions remaining resolutely limited to a group, a lineage, a race. From the point of view of nineteenth century comparative theology, then, Hinduism is resolutely and profoundly ethnic.

In the beginnings of the science of religion, Masuzawa detects another similar racial formation underway at the intersection of comparative philology and religion. Some of the examined progenitors of which are no less than Prussian scholar, diplomat, and founder of Humboldt University in Berlin Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), Indologist Friedrich von Schlegel (1772-1829), and Indo-European philologist Ernst Renan (1823-92).⁷⁶ Their scholarship theorizes the superiority of non-Semitic Europe on the basis of philological research that "discovered" European languages ancient link to Sanskrit. These theorists proclaim this by arguing that an opposing family of languages—called Semitic—are inferior to Indo-European language family on the basis of a difference in linguistic inflection (inflexion) between the two language groups. By their own discursive extensions, their "scientific" discoveries made fixed qualities of languages

⁷⁶ Ibid., 159-62, 163-5, 167, 171-8.

into the fixed qualities of peoples, cultures, and religions generated by the original speakers of the languages.⁷⁷ Thus, Masuzawa concludes the following:

To be sure, comparative philology itself might never reveal the biological beginning of the species, but insofar as this science suggested that several distinct types of languages emerged more or less independent of one another, and that the "spirit" of a people was coterminous with the type of language they *generated*, it seemed reasonable to infer that the division of the races [...] was *fundamental* and, in effect, *original*, since the differences went back all the way to the earliest traceable moment of (pre)history.

This deep division of the "races" implied, conversely, commensurability and commutability of peoples, languages, "geniuses," and "spirits" belonging to the same "family," even if they were separated by a great distance in space or in time.⁷⁸

Masuzawa adds that the concept of language *families*, with its fixed lineages, does not, in fact, allow other speakers of Indo-European languages outside of the *original* family to move into the circumscribed (European) space of linguistic, moral, cultural, and, ultimately, racial superiority:

By this reckoning, learning another's language, or being born into a language of another, would not alter one's inherent identity. An American of African descent growing up speaking English, or even more ironically, generations of Jews speaking Yiddish, the language of their own and of no one else for centuries, would not be considered Indo-European even though their birth languages undoubtedly were. These languages, in fact, would be forever a borrowed tongue for them. In contrast, Germans speaking English or Russians speaking French were merely circulating among their own family, so to speak, and by the same token, the modern European might rightfully claim classical Greek or Sanskrit as his own, as his birthright.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Ibid., 159-78, especially 176-7.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 168; my emphasis.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 169.

It is therefore evident that religion becomes fixed to an original people through language. The inability to move out of one's essentialized language group and its associated characteristics is a sort of reified permanency that is a cardinal feature of race.⁸⁰ One is bound to their origins, their lineage, their place, their people in racial identities. One might also note that those of African descent were not part of the Indo-European family.⁸¹ The implications of both comparative theology and philology, then, is that Hinduism is an ethnically, geographically bounded religion, held to and characterizing of a race of people.

2.6 Hinduism' as "India" and the "East" in Indology and Orientalism

In the scholarship of comparative philology, one might wonder if Hinduism enjoyed a newfound preeminence by way of its illustrious Sanskrit origins; and if so, did it transcend the limitations of "ethnic" or "national" religion? In some respects, one could answer in the affirmative, especially if reading the German Romantics of Indology, British Orientalists, and Indian intellectuals of the Bengali Renaissance. In his volume *India: What Can It Teach Us?*, a compilation of seven lectures delivered at University of Cambridge, renowned German Sanskritist and father of religious studies

⁸⁰ Hall, *The Fateful Triangle Race, Ethnicity, Nation*, 45-6.

⁸¹ See Vasudha Dalmia, *Hindu Pasts: Women, Religion, Histories* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2018), 31 and 38;

Friedrich Max Muller (1823-1900) finds in the ancient Vedic literature of India a universal value:

Here lies the general, the truly human interest which the ancient literature of India possesses, and which gives it a claim on the attention, not only of Oriental scholars or of students of ancient history, but of every educated man and woman. [...]⁸²

For Mueller, the religion of Hindus is the compendium of ancient Sanskrit literatures, and it holds broad import for all the “educated” classes of society.⁸³ Hindus are not necessarily equal representatives of this timeless, textual ‘Hinduism’—modern Hindus are particularly subject to a variant interpretation by Mueller. Although Mueller expressed general apprehension towards any generalizations, especially contemptuous ones, about India and Hindus, his counterarguments against the general condemnation of Hindus by Europeans still attributes essential qualities to India and Hindus via their presumed religion.

Hindus and India are epitomized and naturalized as “meditative and transcendent.”⁸⁴ They are “pervaded” by the “ancient spirit of Vedantism” (Mueller’s conception of true ‘Hinduism’) and “breathe” it from birth:

⁸² F. Max Mueller, *India, What Can It Teach Us?: A Course of Lectures Delivered Before The University of Cambridge* (London; New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910), 119-22.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 128-9 and 249-50. I cannot assume this includes every person at this time, though the language may be dictated by his Cambridge audience and not an affront on non-elite classes.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 117-8. Mueller here writes:

I tried to explain to you the difference, and the natural and inevitable difference, between the development of the human character in such different climates as those of India and Europe. And while admitting that the Hindus were deficient in many of those manly virtues and practical achievements which we value most, I wished to point out that there was another sphere of intellectual activity in which the Hindus excelled—the

To the present day India acknowledges no higher authority in matters of religion, ceremonial, customs, and law than the Veda, and so long as India is India, nothing will extinguish that ancient spirit of Vedantism which is breathed by every Hindu from his earliest youth, and pervades in various forms the prayers even of the idolater, the speculations of the philosopher, and the proverbs of the beggar.

For purely practical reasons therefore—I mean for the very practical object of knowing something of *the secret springs which determine the character, the thoughts and deeds of the lowest as well as of the highest among the people in India*—an acquaintance with their religion, which is founded on the Veda, and with their philosophy, which is founded on the Vedanta, is highly desirable.⁸⁵

Here, a chain of equivalences is made: ethnicity (“Hindu”), geography (“India”), and religion (“Vedantism”) become metonyms, all indicative of one another, interchangeably so. Historian Romila Thapar notes this as well in her study of Mueller’s theory on Aryan race; Thapar writes, “As was common in the nineteenth century, he [Mueller] used a number of words interchangeably such as Hindu and Indian, or race / nation / people / blood /—words whose meanings would today be carefully differentiated.”⁸⁶ Indian religion (here, the Sanskrit Vedas), in so far as Mueller sees it, is the eternal “mind of India,” to borrow the words of Ronald Inden, and “her” people.⁸⁷

Orientalism, the reifying of the “East”—in this case, India, Hindus, and Hinduism—against the “West,” abounds in this period. Inden delivers a condemning

meditative and transcendent—and that here we might learn from them some lessons of life which we ourselves are but too apt to ignore or to despise.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 250; my emphasis.

⁸⁶ Romila Thapar, “The Theory of Aryan Race and India: History and Politics,” *Social Scientist* 24, no. 1/3 (1996): 3–29, 6.

⁸⁷ Inden, *Imagining India*. (See chapter three, “Hinduism: The Mind of India;” See also Ibid., 107. ‘Her’ is in quotations to indicate India as essentialized as feminine by orientalists.

critique of nineteenth century Indology for establishing an essentialized Hinduism and India. His analysis illustrates the following: Hinduism is conceived as quintessentially imaginative, feminine, irrational, and the spiritual mind of India, directly in opposition to the rational, logical, scientific, masculine, and materially superior West.⁸⁸ Within Inden's postcolonialist analysis and conclusions, Edward Said's theory of orientalism can be easily read as Inden argues that Indology's construction of Hinduism depended on an "ontological and epistemological distinction" between "East" and "West."⁸⁹ In the classic text *Orientalism* (1978), Said interpreted Orientalists (those who produce discourse and knowledge *about* the Orient) as cultural imperialists, creating a "system of knowledge... an accepted grid for filtering the Orient into Western consciousness," that depends on the West having a "flexible positional superiority" over the Orient.⁹⁰ Likewise, Inden calls attention to how such constructions of Hinduism lent themselves to legitimize British colonialism in India: India needed the scientific, masculine, rationality of Europe.⁹¹ Postcolonialist scholars, such as Nicholas Dirks and Bernard Cohn, delineate the role of British knowledge production on India as a means of sustaining and authorizing the British colonial project in India.⁹² Richard King similarly

⁸⁸ Ibid., 128.

⁸⁹ King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 82.

⁹⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 14-5 and 78-9. Ironically, Said only gave Orientalist scholars of the Asiatic Society a mere glance in *Orientalism*.

⁹¹ Inden, *Imagining India*, 128.

⁹² Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996); Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

concurr with Inden's critical denunciation of constructed essentialisms of India for their implications in colonial projects, but reminds that the eternal mystical, Vedantic, and spiritual images of India of romantic Orientalism were also the ideological makings of nineteenth century Bengali intelligentsia (mostly upper-caste, "*bhadralok*"), such as founder of the Brahma Samaj Ram Mohan Roy and acclaimed Hindu monk Swami Vivekananda, to resist European domination.⁹³

During the same long nineteenth-century period, the major proponents of the Bengal Renaissance—such as Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883, founder of Arya Samaj), and Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833)—publicly debated and presented Hinduism as monotheistic and egalitarian to oppose Protestant Christian missionaries' most virulent and disparaging depictions of Hindus (here, non-Christian, non-Muslim religious people of India) as inferior idolators and "heathens" without rational religion.⁹⁴ Swami Vivekananda's famous speech on Hinduism at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 goes so far as to render all religions as provincial and thus, undermining Christians' self-ascribed exclusive position as beholders of universal truth:

To the Hindu, then, the whole world of religions is only a travelling, a coming up, of different men and women, through various conditions and circumstances, to the same goal. Every religion is only evolving a God out of the material man,

⁹³ King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 92-3; Christophe Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 6-10.

⁹⁴ Michael J. Altman, *Heathens, Hindoo, Hindu: American Representations of India, 1721-1893* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 38-42 and 129-135.

and the same God is the inspirer of all of them. Why, then, are there so many contradictions? They are only apparent, says the Hindu. The contradictions come from the same truth adapting itself to the varying circumstances of different natures.⁹⁵

In between the tension of the universality (and dematerialization) of the Vedas and the progression of historical manifestations of varying religiosities in India, Hinduism becomes an ethnic religion of a group with its own claim on universal religion within it.⁹⁶ In overall effect, his speech renders Hinduism as much “world religion” as Christianity utilizing indigenous, soon to be nationalized resources, creating a formidable challenge to the rationale for maintaining a political and ideological superiority of Europe over India.

In *Modern India*, originally a Bengali essay published in 1899, Vivekananda states that the liberation of India from Western colonization and imperialism depends on India “awakening” to “her” “unsurpassed valour, suprahuman genius, and supreme spirituality” as inherited from the Brahminical Vedic canon of sacred texts and oral

⁹⁵ Stephen R. Prothero and Thomas A. Tweed, *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 132-3. For many scholars, the Vivekananda’s speech at the Parliament represents the mythic beginnings of Hinduism in America, although many European and American representations of religion in India circulated in the United States in the century prior. See Altman, *Heathen, Hindoo, Hindu* for a study of American representations of Indian religion that existed prior to the World’s Parliament of Religions in 1893.

⁹⁶ In order to successfully raise Hinduism to an equal position to Christianity in this predominantly white Protestant space, Vivekananda made a Protestant-evaluation of Hinduism and relegated worship of *murtis* (images and forms of divinity)—along with churches, mosques, books, and crosses—to “spiritual childhood” and “the lowest stage.” See Swami Vivekananda, “Hinduism,” in *The World’s Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World’s First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection with the Colombian Exposition of 1893*, ed. Rev. John Henry Barrows, vol. 2 (Chicago, IL: Parliament Publishing Company, 1893), 968–78, 976.

narratives.⁹⁷ In the rise of India's independence movement against British colonialism at the turn of the twentieth century, such a reading of religion in India proved a political avenue for the creation of an Indian nation-state.⁹⁸ Indian Hindus religious inheritance and predisposition becomes both internal and external testimony to the inherent sovereignty and value of India and Indians in the past, present, and future. Centralizing constructions of Hindu religiosity in the body politic (i.e., Hindu nationalism), however, has, equally, dismissed, marginalized, and even sought to eliminate the plurality of religious identities in India—like Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Sikhism and Christianity—in favor of Hinduism.⁹⁹

2.7 Racializing Hindu in Early Twentieth Century America

In 1923, Chief Justice Sutherland delivered the opinion of the U. S. Supreme court on whether Bhagat Singh Thind, “a high-caste Hindu, of full Indian blood, born at Amritsar, Punjab, India” was a white person under the law and thus, legally eligible for citizenship under the 1790 Naturalization Act.¹⁰⁰ Indian Sikh immigrant Dr. Thind, a U.S. Army veteran, argued for his citizenship on the basis of distinguishing himself as an upper-caste Hindu from the lower caste, in his words, “the aboriginal Indian

⁹⁷ Swami Vivekananda, *Modern India*, electronic resource, 3rd ed (Almora: Advaita Ashrama, 1939), 51-3 and 57.

⁹⁸ Ibid.; Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru attests to this further in his booklet of speeches on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. See Jawaharlal Nehru, *Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda*, electronic resource, 2nd ed. (Almora: Advaita Ashrama, 1953), especially 7-8 and 16-19.

⁹⁹ Christophe Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁰ United States v. Thind, 261 U. S. 204 (1923).

Mongoloid.” His attempt to claim legal whiteness using this distinction and he was denied citizenship. The results of *The United States v. Thind* case, however, stood in contrast to U.S. courts’ decisions between 1908 and 1922 that granted U.S. citizenship to at least sixty-nine middle-class, high-caste Indians.¹⁰¹

Utilizing contemporary race science (of which was based on linguistic families), many of these Indians were granted legal whiteness and some of its privileges (i.e., citizenship) by arguing that they belonged to a racially pure “Aryan” identity, as opposed to “Dravidian.”¹⁰² Reiterating nineteenth-century race theory, the United States Immigration Commission in its *Dictionary of Races or Peoples* (1911) distinguished between “Aryan” and indigenous “Dravidian” races in India; the former was to be considered Caucasian and the latter, which was considered all of South India, was associated with the “Negro race.”¹⁰³ The white privileges of a few high-caste Indians were short-lived. In 1923, Sutherland ruled that “free white persons” would no longer be interpreted on the basis of the “science” of ethnology, but on a commonsense white American understanding of race.¹⁰⁴ The ruling is also a part of the racial formation of Indians in America. The Chief Justice reinscribed Indians as racially “brown Hindu[s]” in the United States, located outside of the white race, despite what ancestry in antiquity

¹⁰¹ Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, 28.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 29-20.

¹⁰⁴ *United States v. Thind*, 261 U. S. 204 (1923). See especially arguments 7 and 11.

the two races may share.¹⁰⁵ The following year, the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act further deprived Indian immigrants, and most Asians, the right to even immigrate to the U.S..¹⁰⁶

This was not the first, nor would it be the last time, that Hindus was racialized as distinct race of Asia and distinguishable from white Americans in the U.S. national culture. Scholar of religion In *Heathen, Hindoo, Hindu: American Representations of India, 1721-1893* (2017), Michael J. Altman documents that American textbooks and popular magazines from the early nineteenth century (about a century prior to U.S. v. Thind) educated U.S. children and adults to identify themselves as white, Protestant Americans distinct in race, religion, and nation from Hindus (spelled “Hindoos” in these texts).¹⁰⁷ Inhabitants of India (or “Hindoostan”) were located in the Asiatic or Yellow race in the four and five-fold racial taxonomies.¹⁰⁸ This race, as represented by “Brahmins” or “Hindoos” of India, becomes characterized as “half-civilized”, violent, dangerous, and inferior by way of describing Hindu religious beliefs and practices.¹⁰⁹ Predicated on racial taxonomies outlined in widely circulated contemporary geography books, schoolbooks, such as Samuel Goodrich’s *The Tales of Peter Parley about Asia* (1845) collapsed geography, race, and religion into a reified, inferior depiction of a Hindu

¹⁰⁵ *United States v. Thind*, 261 U. S. 204 (1923) at 209.

¹⁰⁶ Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, 31.

¹⁰⁷ Michael J. Altman, *Heathen, Hindoo, Hindu: American Representations of India, 1721-1893* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); see chapter three.

¹⁰⁸ Samuel A. Mitchell, *A System of Modern Geography, Comprising a Description of the Present State of the World and Its Five Great Divisions: America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Oceanica: With Their Several Empires* (Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait, 1844), 43.

¹⁰⁹ For examples, see Samuel Goodrich, *The Tales of Peter Parley about Asia* (Thomas, Cowperthwait, 1845), 108-125; and Mitchell, *A System of Modern Geography*, 42-51.

Other.¹¹⁰ In summation, Altman finds that these depictions served to buttress a self-fashioning of America as white and Protestant—imagined to be superior in both of these respects:

As producers of American national culture, writers and editors constructed representations of Hindoo religion to entertain and educate American citizens of various ages. These representations of Hindoos reinforced notions of America as white, Protestant, civilized, and democratic by imaging India as dark, heathen, uncivilized, and hierarchical. According to these representations, Hindoo religions led to despotism, and American Protestantism led to freedom. These representations took the earlier missionary representations of Hindoo heathenism and added an explicitly nationalist rhetoric of racial and civilizational supremacy.¹¹¹

Nevertheless, these degrading images of Hindus and Hindu religion were not the only representations in circulation in the nation. Indeed, at the very same time, the New England Transcendentalists—such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau—were imagining for their audiences a mystical and contemplative Indian religion that offered desirable metaphysical content to “balance [...] Western materialism and Protestant practicality.”¹¹² Moreover, Swami Vivekananda’s famed speech at the World’s Parliament of Religions further revitalized the image of Hindus and Hindu religion in the late nineteenth century.

At the onset of the twentieth century, “Brown Hindu” was a liminal racial identity in the U.S., someplace in-between the Black-white race binary construct with

¹¹⁰ Altman, *Heathens, Hindoo, Hindu*, 55-6; Goodrich, *The Tales of Peter Parley about Asia*, 108-125. An example of a very widely circulated geography textbook would be Samuel Augustus Mitchell’s 1884 *A System of Modern Geography*; Mitchell, *A System of Modern Geography*; see pages 42-51.

¹¹¹ Altman, *Heathens, Hindoo, Hindu*, 49.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 81.

some limited privileges. Scholars Nico Slate and Alexander Rocklin both recall harrowing accounts of whites' discrimination against both Indians and Hinduism while still identifying the ways in which being read as "Hindu" garnered certain privileges.¹¹³ West Coast immigrant workers, for instance, from India faced housing and employment discrimination, and segregation similar to African Americans in the 1920s. While just a few years earlier, a small elite group of Indians had managed to gain citizenship (even if only briefly), which was reserved for "free white people".¹¹⁴ On account of others recognizing them as Asian—sometimes through performances of legible "Hindoo" tropes like wearing a turban, some Indians were able to make themselves distinguishable from African Americans and partially access white privileges, like entry into a number of "whites only" spaces.¹¹⁵

Rocklin analyzes within this period the techniques of "passing" as "Hindoo" employed by Caribbean-migrants (of both South Asian "East Indian" and African "West Indian" descent), Indians, and African Americans. At length, Rocklin writes of a self-declared yogi Hazrat Ismet Ali who in a New York courtroom is accused of being a fraud. Described in one advertisement as 'The Great Oriental Lecturer,' Ali's identity gains currency through an Orientalist stereotype perpetuated among Americans and

¹¹³ Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, 31; Alexander Rocklin, "'A Hindu Is White Although He Is Black': Hindu Alterity and the Performativity of Religion and Race between the United States and the Caribbean," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no. 1 (2016): 181–210, especially 185–9.

¹¹⁴ Prothero and Tweed, *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History*, 88–91; Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, 27–8.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1 and 33; Rocklin, "'A Hindu Is White Although He Is Black.'"

Europeans of the spiritual swami or guru from “the East,” donning a turban and beard, giving classes on an eclectic array of religious topics and practices, including yoga.”¹¹⁶ In the court trial determining Ali’s authenticity, the possibility that “he was not himself ‘Hindoo’ by race and ‘East’ Indian by nationality,” but instead “a ‘[B]lack’ West Indian,” would feasibly suffice to “invalidate his claims to being a teacher of ‘philosophy of the inner life’ of an Eastern variety.”¹¹⁷ Exposed in this (il)logical argument is the co-production of racial and religious essences; in other words, having a Hindu religious identity, it is assumed, precludes one from being also racially Black, and vice versa. The boundaries of race and religion police one another. In an act of subversive Orientalism (or “subaltern Orientalism”), African Americans who passed as Hindu through their embodiments of Orientalist stereotypes, were able to “circumvent the violence of segregation and Jim Crow.”¹¹⁸ Thus, performing “Hindu” altered racial identities, especially reifying and veiling Black subjects.

While the U.S. racial-religious formations of Hindu have been reified against blackness in pursuit of benefits exclusive to whites, several Indian and African American activists have sought to dismantle the hegemonic and hierarchical divide between brown and Black identities. Their ambitions were to unite and mobilize non-white racial identities against white supremacy, racism, colonialism, and other oppressions. Slate’s

¹¹⁶ Rocklin, “‘A Hindu Is White Although He Is Black,’” 181 and 189.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 197. Rocklin names these phenomena “subaltern Orientalism.”

Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India

(2012) is a testament to their shared struggle.¹¹⁹ The term “colored” which was employed by several African American and Indian social reformers, “transcended traditional racial distinctions” which would have divided South Asians from Africans and African Americans.¹²⁰ One of the most prominent forerunners in this “colored cosmopolitanism” was public intellectual and scholar William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963). Du Bois’s books—such as *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903) and *Dark Princess* (1928)—and founding editorship (from 1910 to 1934) with the NAACP’s *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* brought “colored” races and nationalities into a global alliance.¹²¹

Slate retells an episode from the life of Indian feminist and social reformer Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya who traveled through the United States from 1939 to 1941.¹²² When Chattopadhyaya refused to leave her seat in the “whites only” section when asked by a train ticket collector, the collector left and returned subdued to declare, “You are an Asian.”¹²³ When asked where she was from, Chattopadhyaya refused to answer nor did she mention that she was recently a guest at the White House; instead, she voiced, “I am a colored woman” and refused to move.¹²⁴ Slate concludes that in that

¹¹⁹ Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 65-92.

¹²² Nico Slate, “‘I Am a Colored Woman’: Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya in the United States, 1939-1941,” *Contemporary South Asia* 17, no. 1 (March 2009): 7-19.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

moment Chattopadhyaya aligned herself with millions of African Americans confronting the everyday dehumanization of “legalized bigotry” when self-identifying herself as “colored,” refusing to accept the premise of the privileges granted to her.¹²⁵ The Black American-Indian “colored” solidarities proved vital bridges, producing an abundant communication exchanges, mutual concern, personal meetings, national tours, international journalism, and mutual advocacy that challenged the dominant narratives clearly separating Black and American from Hindu and Indian.

2.8 Lingerin Observations

This chapter has been concerned with the non-emergence, inconceivability, and invisibility of Black Hindus, an identity at the intersection of race and religion. I have surveyed a number of dominant and influential discourses on ‘Hindu’ and ‘Hinduism’ to understand the boundaries of their meanings, which presumably have influenced the boundaries of our imaginings, research agendas, and knowledge. As religion, ‘Hinduism’ acquires legibility and boundary as a metonym for an ethnic people (Hindus) who are conceived of as people of a geographic place (India). In world religions, philology, Indology, and Orientalism, ‘Hinduism’ as religion is reified as an embodiment of *essential* qualities of non-Muslim, non-Christian Indians and India; to discuss Hinduism, is to discuss the past, present, and future of an entire civilization of distinguishable groups of people. I have remained purposefully quiet on foregrounding

¹²⁵ Ibid., 8.

others' debates—especially on the timing of religious construction—or my own conclusions—especially on the meaning and implications of the 'religion' category—to instead emphasize the sheer purchase of ethnicity and geography in any conception of 'Hinduism' or 'Hindu'.

From Indian borders to global shores, scholars (e.g., Vasudha Narayanan, Tulasi Srinivas) have certainly recognized a multitude of Hindu traditions spread across the earth, and the historic internal pluralism of religious life in India (e.g., Elaine Fisher).¹²⁶ Scholars have sought to revisit and revise the archive (e.g., Subaltern scholars Ranajit Guha and Gayatri C. Spivak), deconstructing and reconstructing the lens from which we see the "East" and the "West" (e.g., Nicholas B. Dirks, Michael S. Dodson, Brian Hatcher, Ronald Inden, Richard King).¹²⁷ More challenging, however, has been envisioning Hinduism as more than just India, the South Asian diaspora, and later, to some degree, white Americans and Europeans. Unfortunately, in the field of religious studies, the co-construction of the categories of race and religion have not been at the forefront of

¹²⁶ Vasudha Narayanan, "Rewriting the Hindu Traditions from Global Perspectives," in *Re-Imagining South Asian Religions: Essays in Honour of Professors Harold G. Coward and Ronald W. Neufeldt*, ed. Pashaura Singh and Michael Hawley, 1st ed., vol. 141, Numben Book Series (BRILL, 2012), 67–88; Tulasi Srinivas, *Winged Faith: Rethinking Globalization and Religious Pluralism through the Sathya Sai Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

¹²⁷ Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); Michael S. Dodson and Brian A. Hatcher, eds., *Trans-Colonial Modernities in South Asia*, Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Asia 74 (London ; New York: Routledge, 2012); Inden, *Imagining India*;

research in general.¹²⁸ Therefore, it is unsurprising that Hinduism, as a category, is underexamined as both a racial and religious formation, one not limited to epitomizing people of Indian descent. As scholar Richard King argued, reiterating Edward Said's thesis, the Orientalist gaze not only conceived and constructed the East; it crucially imagined the West (as materialistic, White, Christian, masculine, superior) in narrow terms as well.¹²⁹ This can be seen in much scholarship on Hinduism in America: scholars largely map American Hinduism among a South Asian diaspora (e.g., Narayanan 2006; Kurien 2007; Williams 2019), carried over by itinerant immigrant Indian gurus (e.g., Forsthoefel and Humes 2005; Neumann 2019), and focus on transmissions between Indians and white Americans (e.g., Rochford 1985; Bryant and Ekstrand 2004; Jackson 1994; Lucia 2014; Srinivas 2010).

As shown above, in the United States, 'Hindu' signifies a liminal racial identity, positioned between a white and Black race, as much as it does a religious identity. In the co-constructions of race and religion in 'Hindu,' the term can be mutually exclusive of other races, particularly a Black one. In light of how religion can and has been historically constructed along ethnic, national, racial, and geographic lines, it is unsurprising to find that 'Hindu' would function in similar ways in the racial landscape of the U.S. When scholar of religious studies Malory Nye asks, "when we speak of

¹²⁸ See Malory Nye, "Race and Religion: Postcolonial Formations of Power and Whiteness," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, c. 31, no. 3 (June 25, 2019): 210–37, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341444>; Theodore M. Vial, *Modern Religion, Modern Race* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹²⁹ King, *Orientalism and Religion*.

religion[,] are we in fact talking about race?," the answer for both him and me is yes.¹³⁰

Race and religion connote and conjugate one another, but perhaps more visibly in those religions which have been historically defined as "ethnic" against a supreme "world" religion.

Although the founding German scholar of the science of religion Max Mueller repeatedly opposed the coupling of physical racial and ethnological attributes to his coupling of linguistic families (languages) and sacred texts (religion), these racialized uses were nevertheless "in vogue" during his lifetime and regrettably came to usurp his philological research on "Aryan" languages and their religions.¹³¹ The implicit question warranted by recalling this bit of history is whether or not current scholarship maintains the racial formations and the colonialisms, especially if and when the same concepts of the past are employed?¹³² Can a Hindu be Black? Can history or modernity be made by brown and Black people in a study on Hinduism? Can Black Americans escape the parameters placed by the hermeneutics of the Black Church framework? And recalling the implications of place in American anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's classic article "Putting Hierarchy in its Place" (1988): do brown and Black people represent more than

¹³⁰ Nye, "Race and Religion."

¹³¹ Masuzawa, *Invention of World Religions*, 217 and 240-4.

¹³² This question is similar to the question raised at the end of *The Invention of World Religions*.

just their hyperreal geographic “places”?¹³³ I believe so. Taking cues from Indian and African American activists of the twentieth century, intersections can and must be made and doing so transgresses hegemonic racial-religious formations that essentializes, divides, and, ultimately, disciplines Black and brown peoples’ subjectivities.

¹³³ Arjun Appadurai, “Putting Hierarchy in Its Place,” *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (February 1, 1988): 37. Appadurai’s article reflects on the “native” in anthropology; natives are not only from a certain place, but “incarcerated, or confined, to those places”.

3. Between Swamini and Swami: Three Black Acharyas (Teachers) of Hinduism

And it [the Vedas] says, '*ācāryavānpuruṣo veda*' [Chhāndogya Upaniṣhad 6.14.2], which means that, in English translation, one who knows the acharya, knows what is what.

Acharya is a teacher, one who is to teach by example, and, particularly, an acharya is to be a medium between the material environment or the material world and the spiritual dimension.

— Bhakti Tirtha Swami (aka Swami Krishnapada)¹

In this second division of the dissertation, I am inspired by the lives of three Black American teachers who were each deeply revered and commanded pronounced authority across multiple domains of life in their intersecting religious, familial and professional networks. Thinking through their noteworthy legacies, I want to suggest that framing these figures with the Sanskrit term *acharya* (*ācārya*), that denotes a teacher, can be theoretically productive and sensitive to the specific oppressions of certain assemblages of racial, gender and class identities. Each *acharya* or teacher extended South Asian-American religious networks, particularly into Black communities, and

¹ Bhakti Tirtha Swami, "An Interview with Swami Krishnapada from 'The Drum' HDGBTS Washington DC USA June 16th, 1993," *BTSwami.com*, mp3, btswami.com/audio/archive.

altered global religious landscapes, particularly in the United States and Africa. Each established their own associations and institutions in the United States in the mid to late twentieth century; this often occurred tangentially outside of the boundaries of Hindu religious institutions with which they were affiliated. Collectively, they authored and published at least twenty-five literary works, started their own printing presses, spent decades as leaders of multiple institutions they created, became the subjects of biographies, films and newspaper articles documenting their legacy, and left behind volumes of recorded lectures, seminars, and interviews. The teachers of whom I speak of are Swamini Turiyasangitananda (also known as Alice Coltrane) (1937-2007), Krsnanandini Devi Dasi (1952-2020) and Bhakti Tirtha Swami (1950-2005).

Each of the individuals listed here have lived rich and fascinating lives worthy of scholarly attention. This work, though limited in space and scope, seeks to draw and generate renewed attention to the remarkable lives they lived. In the first section, I introduce a dissonance between the nomenclature for classifying the religious authority of each teacher. My hope is that by utilizing the Sanskrit term '*acharya*' (teacher) I may press beyond the restraints of the term 'guru' and its inequitable applications in lived religion. Following this, readers will find succinct chapters dedicated to each of the three *acharyas*, providing a biographical overview with illuminating commentary on their respective contexts, discussion of some of their most noteworthy contributions, and

closing remarks imagining what future research could do to integrate such individuals into academic fields.

3.1 On Becoming ‘Guru’: Gender Stratification

How is authority in religion a gendered domain? How might our nomenclature around Hindu religious authority replicate persistent gender marginalities in the religions we study? How might research better support Black women at the margins of religious authority rather than re-enact asymmetrical distributions of social power (including notoriety in academia)? These questions are raised particularly when considering the ambiguous positionality of Krsnanandini in her religious tradition, Gaudiya Vaishnavism and one of its modern successors, ISKCON or the “Hare Krishnas”. Her place in this chapter and in her life is precarious because although she had acquired significant local influence and authority, she could never be fully acknowledged formally in the ways male disciples, her “god-brothers,” could be recognized in her specific lineage. Titles like *Swami* (master), *guru*, and *sannyasi* (renouncer) and their associated privileged statuses, institutional legitimacy, and resources that these designations confer were not available for women during most of Krsnanandini’s life. Furthermore, Swamini’s route to guruhood is emblematic of the non-institutional routes that many female gurus take. To enter into a critical feminist analysis of religious power makes visible the privileges that masculinity and male bodies have in acquiring powerful forms of religious authority. It is recognizing the

gendered ways in which 'guru' is applied here that leads me in search of other terms, like 'acharya,' to acknowledge Krsnanandini as equal to Bhakti Tirtha Swami, her dear friend and "god-brother," and Swamini Turiyasangitananda, an institutionally independent religious authority.

Scholars such as Karen Pechilis and Lynn Teskey Denton have argued that the female guru and female ascetic respectively in Hinduism present challenges to certain received social norms regarding ideal womanhood.² In *Female Ascetics in Hinduism* (2004), an ethnographic study of female ascetics in the North Indian city of Benares (Varanasi), classical Hindu scriptures (*shastras*), such as the classical Sanskrit *dharmashastra* (scripture on right action) *Manusmriti*, prescribe that the social role for women (*stridharma*) is primarily domestic (e.g., as daughter, wife, and mother) with the accompanying protection of a male relative (e.g., father, husband, and then son).³ *Varnashrama* is an ancient and medieval Indian and Hindu social stratification model that divides the society's members into four *varnas* (classes or castes) and four *ashramas* (stages of life). The four *varnas* are the *brahman* or priestly and teaching class that give authoritative knowledge and advise to the society, the *kshatriya* or political ruling and warrior class that protect the citizenry and administer the law, the *vaishya* or merchant and agriculturalist class that produce goods for the society, and the *shudra* or laboring

² Karen Pechilis, ed., *The Graceful Guru: Hindu Female Gurus in India and the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Lynn Teskey Denton, *Female Ascetics in Hinduism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004).

³ Denton, *Female Ascetics in Hinduism*, 23-28.

and service class. In this order, these form a social hierarchy from highest to lowest. The four *ashramas* are *brahmacharya* or student, *grihastha* or householder, *vanaprastha* or retired, and *sannyasa* or the renunciate. Denton mentions that in the *Manusmriti* that women were positioned as part of the *shudra* class and prescribed not to enter the *sannyasa* stage which would effectively curtail imagining women as ascetics and gurus.⁴

For Swamini, as for many other female gurus, her asceticism (e.g., celibacy, seclusion, withdrawal from commercial music industry, and meditative practices) conformed to the “established, male behavioral modes for guruhood” (i.e., celibacy, renunciation, asceticism, spiritually perfected), although challenged the ideal roles for a woman.⁵ In one episode of her 1980s televised series *Eternity's Pillar* that originally aired late at night for KTTV Channel 11 in L.A., Turiyasangitananda, appearing dressed in the orange cloth of a renunciate and with her hair unbounded, led her viewers through devotional *bhajans* (one of which praises both Allah and Ishvara, Sanskrit “Lord”), and her teachings on absolute love and “liberation and realization in God.”⁶ In the near thirty-minute sequence, she presents herself as a spiritual musician and self-realized teacher, supplanting her other identities as widow and mother. Considering Pechilis’ conclusions of this tension for other female gurus, Turiyasangitananda’s asceticism

⁴ Denton, *Female Ascetics in Hinduism*, 26.

⁵ Pechilis, *The Graceful Guru*, 6-7.

⁶ *Eternity's Pillar* (TV show), Aired 1987, on KTTV Channel 11, <https://vimeo.com/411195654>.

combined with a deemphasizing of her familial duties substantiate her moral perfection and purity and follows male models of guruhood.

The domestic roles are still highly relevant social injunctions for female devotees in the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) as the religious institution aims to reestablish *varnashrama dharma* for modern society.⁷ The idealized domestic place for women, however, is woven into a complex array of equally applicable religious injunctions, many of which came from ISKCON's founder A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami (or, as simply called by his followers, Prabhupada). Note, for instance, that *varnashrama dharma* does not recommend that women take roles of public ritual worship involving uttering efficacious ritual mantras (e.g., like when the family priest performs lifecycle rituals, or the temple priest performs the ritual temple worship to the housed divinities). Radically, Prabhupada initiated for his religious lineage, however, women in the role of temple priests (i.e. *brahmans*), as well as female celibate communities (*brahmacharini ashrama*).⁸ An early female disciple of his, Yamuna Devi Dasi, recalls that Prabhupada reminded her that "you are not a woman, you are a Vaishnava [worshipper of Vishnu or, here, Krishna]," thus liberating her from *dharmas*

⁷ For more on ISKCON's complex use of *varnashrama dharma*, see Kim Knott, "Healing the Heart of ISKCON: The Place of Women," in *Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant*, ed. Edwin Bryant and Maria Ekstrand (New York, NY, USA: Columbia University Press, 2004), and Ekkehard Lorenz, "The Guru, Mayavadins, and Women: Tracing the Origins of Selected Polemical Statements in the Work of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami," in *Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant*, ed. Edwin Bryant and Maria Ekstrand (New York, NY, USA: Columbia University Press, 2004).

⁸ Denton, *Female Ascetics in Hinduism*, 23-28; Knott, "Healing the Heart of ISKCON," 301

(duty or right conduct) of her female body and reminding her of those devotional *dharmas* based on the latter permanent identification.⁹ This, in theory, meant female devotees were equal to men as servants of Krishna and in capabilities for spiritual advancement.

Unfortunately, beginning around 1974, commonplace male attitudes towards women in ISKCON grew sharply negative and degrading of women's status and nature, regarding them as obstacles to attaining the perceived superior male stage of *sannyasa ashrama*, celibate renunciation. This resulted in discriminatory practices that significantly curtailed women's equal participation in ISKCON temples—affecting everything from where they could stand and sit during temple services to what kind of worship or services they could no longer perform—and their resulting second-class status.¹⁰ Women were being excised from performing deity worship or giving lectures in ISKCON temples for years—what to speak of any viable path for becoming a guru? It was not until the late 1990s, with both compounding institutional crises creating shortages of human resources (“manpower”) and the activism of female devotees, that the lived, on-the-

⁹ Knott, “Healing the Heart of ISKCON,” 319.

¹⁰ Knott, “Healing the Heart of ISKCON”; Krishni Metivier, “Her Voice: Negotiating Gender in ISKCON,” in *The Worldwide Krishna Movement: Collected Essays on Half a Century of Growth, Impact, and Challenge*, ed. Graham Schweig (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); Nori J. Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit: My Life behind the Headlines of the Hare Krishna Movement* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Nori J. Muster, “Life as a Woman on Watseka Avenue: Personal Story I,” in *Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant*, ed. Edwin Bryant and Maria Ekstrand (New York, NY, USA: Columbia University Press, 2004).

ground ISKCON culture began to publicly acknowledge the mistreatment of women and recover women's status as equal practitioners.¹¹

Historically, ISKCON's parent religious lineage, Gaudiya Vaishnavism, has had matrilineal initiations or successions and female spiritual masters such as Jahnvi (also known as Jahnava Ishvari), a revered sixteenth-century South Asian religious leader and Nityananda's second wife, and Sita Devi, a sixteenth-century South Asian female guru and senior wife of Advaita Acharya who conferred mantra initiations on male (later, trans women) and female devotees.¹² Nevertheless, Prabhupada made considerable polemic (largely textual) statements on women that have been sources for reappropriation and misuse (e.g., misogyny and domestic violence) in ISKCON's fifty-four year history.¹³ This has contributed to polemical debates around the appropriate gender of a guru, and, by extension, the appropriate roles of women. The centralized process in ISKCON for approving gurus has slowly turned more in favor of female initiating spiritual masters after facing fierce internal criticism from pro-female guru

¹¹ Metivier, "Her Voice: Negotiating Gender in ISKCON."

¹² Jan Brzezinski, "Women Saints in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism," in *Vaiṣṇavī: Women and the Worship of Krishna*, ed. Steven Rosen, 1. ed (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1996), 59–85; Rebecca J. Manring, "Sita Devi, an Early Vaishnava Guru," in *The Graceful Guru*, ed. Karen Pechilis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195145380.001.0001>;

¹³ Ekkehard Lorenz, "The Guru, Mayavadins, and Women: Tracing the Origins of Selected Polemical Statements in the Work of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami," in *Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant*, ed. Edwin Bryant and Maria Ekstrand (New York, NY, USA: Columbia University Press, 2004), 112–28, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/alltitles/docDetail.action?docID=10183519>; Jyotirmayi devi dasi, "Women in ISKCON in Prabhupada's Time," in *The Emergence of Women's Voices in ISKCON: A Collection of Letters, Articles, Papers, and Conference Reports from 1988 to 2020*, ed. Pranada devi dasi (Virginia, USA: Bookwrights Press, 2020).

advocates for decades.¹⁴ In 2019 (though as early as 2005), the central administrative body, the Governing Body Commission (GBC), agreed with pro-female-guru advocates, affirming that there is not a Vedic nor Vaishnava theological basis to disqualify a female guru on the basis of gender.¹⁵ A female *diksha* (initiating disciples) guru has yet to be approved in ISKCON though.

Subsumed in this religious context, both Krsnanandini Devi Dasi and Bhakti Tirtha Swami ascended to becoming institutionally accepted charismatic teachers and leaders in and outside of ISKCON, undoubtedly on uneven ground. As is already apparent, Krsnanandini Devi Dasi was never formally acknowledged as a guru nor was she authorized to officially accept disciples. Across both public and private contexts, Krsnanandini was identified and named as a religious authority (e.g., “mother guru,” “spiritual authority,” “guru,” “Mata”), and as her closest family members believed, she was on a clear trajectory to becoming a guru had she lived long enough to benefit from the full dismantling of sexist practices in ISKCON.¹⁶ I turn to use the Sanskrit term

¹⁴ See Pranada devi dasi, ed., *The Emergence of Women’s Voices in ISKCON: A Collection of Letters, Articles, Papers, and Conference Reports from 1988 to 2020* (Virginia, USA: Bookwrights Press, 2020); in that edited volume, see especially E. Burke Rochford, Jr., “Women’s Voices and the Mobilization of Women within ISKCON,” and Kalakantha dasa, “Some Reasons Why SABHA Supports Vaishnavi Diksa Gurus (VDG) in ISKCON.”

¹⁵ ISKCON’s Governing Body Commission (GBC), “GBC Approves Vaishnavi Diksa Gurus in ISKCON,” ISKCON News, October 18, 2019, <https://iskconnews.org/gbc-approves-vaishnavi-diksa-gurus-in-iskcon,7126>; devi dasi, *The Emergence of Women’s Voices in ISKCON: A Collection of Letters, Articles, Papers, and Conference Reports from 1988 to 2020*, 540-7.

¹⁶ It may be of interest to know that in ISKCON, men who are married can become *diksha* gurus. I mention the word ‘Mata’ (mother), the most popular name for referring to Krsnanandini in her community, because mother does confer some authority. For instance, the mother is regarded as the first guru. As will be seen in

'*acharya*' to consciously integrate these three individuals into the pantheon of renowned teachers of South Asian religions and to recover some grounds from which to offer equitable regard across these figures.

In my observations at American Hare Krishna temples, informal descriptions of *acharya* emphasizes the behavioral and mimetic—the teacher whose good conduct or behavior is instructive for others or one who teaches through their very actions. Though the term 'acharya' has variable meanings depending on context, nevertheless, it readily denotes an esteemed teacher and a relationship that is mediated by knowledge. A formal definition from the Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism defines *acharya* as: "Someone who knows or teaches the rules (*ācāras*), especially a spiritual guide or teacher responsible for initiating and instructing individual pupils within a particular lineage (*paramparā*). In the Vedic tradition the *ācārya* performs the pupil's *upanayana* [initiation/sacred Brahminical thread ceremony], and is then responsible for teaching him all, or some, of the Vedas."¹⁷ To this raw definition, other usages have emerged and accumulated overtime that emphasize various characteristics and extends the range of meaning. In classical Sanskrit epic literature, for instance, *acharya* also denoted an authority (or scholar or professor) of a specific field of knowledge—not necessarily

subsequent chapters dealing with her, mother is a precarious designation that is not definitively liberating. I also would like to clarify that 'acharya' is not a term that I heard applied to Krsnanandini.

¹⁷ William John Johnson, "Ācārya," in *A Dictionary of Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); my italics.

pertaining strictly to religious domains—such as warfare (*yuddhācārya*) and dance and dramatic arts (*nāṭyācārya*).¹⁸ As indicated by this chapter’s opening quote by Bhakti Tirtha Swami in a 1993 interview on Howard University’s radio network (WHUR), an acharya may be an ambassador, messenger or other intermediary figure (a liminal figure in Turnerian respects) that integrates knowledge into actions and spiritual realities into the empirical present.

‘Guru’ also denotes a spiritual master or teacher. Importantly, there are some subtle differences between the terms ‘guru’ and ‘acharya’. In a close textual study comparing the use of ‘acharya’ and ‘guru’ in Sanskrit texts, Sanskritist Minoru Hara finds that ‘guru’ is more often than acharya “an object of honour (mānana, pūjana), veneration (nam-, praṇāma), sincere devotion (bhakti) and personal attendance (sevā, śuśrūṣā), and [...] these attitudes toward the guru are tinged very much with emotion.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, to establish a difference between the two words for those reasons is not my intent; in fact, I want to stress the aspects noted by Hara to advance an implicit way of acknowledging Krsnanandini as a guru, although she was institutionally barred from

¹⁸ See Minoru Hara, “Hindu Concepts of Teacher Sanskrit Guru and Ācārya,” in *Sanskrit and Indian Studies: Essays in Honour of Daniel H. H. Ingalls*, ed. M. Nagatomi et al., *Studies of Classical India*, v. 2 (Dordrecht: Holland; Boston: USA; London: England: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980), 95-96; Monier Monier-Williams, “Yuddha,” in *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Greek, Latin, Gothic, German, Anglo-Saxon, and Other Cognate Indo-European Languages*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1872), 854-5; Monier Monier-Williams, “Nāṭya,” in *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Greek, Latin, Gothic, German, Anglo-Saxon, and Other Cognate Indo-European Languages*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1872), 534.

¹⁹ Hara, “Hindu Concepts of Teacher Sanskrit Guru and Ācārya,” 100.

bearing the title.²⁰ Hara's analysis describes a range of devotional and reverential emotions and actions that are directed towards the guru. The guru is not only the recipient of veneration from personal disciples, but also from other teachers, the public, and, at times, by other beings and species.²¹ The reverence due to a venerable teacher is even considered in the case of teachers (either gurus or *acharyas*) that have questionable and denounceable motives in the revered *Bhagavad Gita*.²²

Historian of Religion Karen Pechilis in a comparative historical study of female gurus demarcates three salient characteristics of gurus in Hindu traditions:

First, they [gurus] are understood to experience and to embody the real, and are thus understood to be divine or perfectly spiritually self-realized; second, the message of the guru is the divinity of the inner self, and the necessity of her or his devotees' own self-realization, to which the guru guides the devotee; third, the guru is an ascetic, and is thus assumed to be pure in body and in spirit, especially in the sense of purity of motive through lack of self-interest.²³

What is incipiently suggested in Pechilis' first and second distinctions of the guru are patterns of relations, which depend upon public reception and recognition—the guru is

²⁰ Moreover, my discourse draws little distinction between 'acharya' and 'guru,' acknowledging the latter as apparently more institutionalized and gendered (in addition to the ways it is likely discursively racialized, as explored in Chapter 1)—another divergence that I accept.

²¹ Here, I think of the Bengali saint Krishna Chaitanya (1476–1533), who is considered an embodiment of the divine coupled Radha-Krishna for Gaudiya Vaishnavas. In the authoritative hagiography *Chaitanya Charitamrta* (CC), Chaitanya induces tigers and does with symptoms of religious ecstasy. The CC's author, Krsnadasa Kaviraja, explicitly parallels these events with the words of the Vrindavan gopis (Krishna's young female playmates) witnessing similar events unfolding with Krishna: " 'Blessed are all these foolish deer because they have approached Mahārāja Nanda's son, who is gorgeously dressed and is playing on His flute. Indeed, both the does and the bucks worship the Lord with looks of love and affection.' " (CC Madhya 17.36)

²² Arjuna raises this point in considering whether to fight in the war at Kurushetra where revered teachers are amassed on both sides of the battlefield. See BG 2.4-8.

²³ Pechilis, *The Graceful Guru*, 6.

seen or recognized by others. Guruhood, from both the textual and historical perspective, is intimately witnessed through individuals cathecting the guru through public and private acts of reverence, devotion, and service. The manifestation and embodiment of guru devotion (*guru bhakti*) is a significant part of the observable sociality around a self-realized teacher or guru and is normatively understood to establish the necessary basis for the mediation or imparting of truth or knowledge.

For instance, in the sacred dialogical treatise *Bhagavad Gita*, a text expounded upon by all three Black *acharyas* mentioned herein, Krishna, the Godhead and guru-friend, and Arjuna, the disciple-friend, repeatedly reveal to one another the widely accepted truth (of classical South Asia) of receiving knowledge through devotional acts towards the teacher:

Krishna: Lack of pride, lack of deceit, non-violence, endurance, sincerity, *servicing one's teacher* [*āchārya-upāsana*], purity, stability, self-control,

Dispassion with regard to the objects of the senses, freedom from egoism, perceiving the deficiencies of birth, death, old age, disease, and pain,

Non-attachment, distancing oneself from sons, wife, the home, etc., and constant even mindedness in the face of pleasing or unpleasing events,

Unswerving devotion to me through exclusive yogic discipline, seeking out an isolated place, dissatisfaction with the society of men,

Constancy in knowledge of what relates to the self, perceiving the purpose of knowledge of reality—*this, it is declared, constitutes knowledge; anything opposed to this is ignorance.* (BG 13.7-11)

Krishna: Know this: through your submission, through the questions you ask, *through your service* [*sevayā*], those who have knowledge, who see things as they are [*tattva-darśinah*], will teach you knowledge. (BG 4.34)

Arjuna: You are the father of the world, of moving and unmoving things; *you are its venerable teacher and object of worship* [pūjyaś ca gurur garīyān]. Nothing can be compared to you, so how, even in the three worlds, could there be anything greater? Unequaled power! (BG 11.43)

Thus, from the theological perspective of the *Gita*, we see that honoring one's teacher (through acts of service, veneration, or adoration) is the tangible expression of having knowledge (BG 13.7-11), the channel through which knowledge will be attained (BG 4.34), and the appropriate action when recognizing a venerable teacher (BG 11.43). The triangulation among the teacher, knowledge and student is one mediated by and permeated with embodied acts of general devotion.

Spiritual lineages (*paramparā*) of direct succession of (often male) gurus serve as one way of credibly securing a guru's (of any gender) efficacy or authority to teach Vedic knowledge; although, this is not a sufficient nor required model for becoming a religious authority, nor is the method for being inducted into a lineage the same across or within Hindu religious lineages.²⁴ Pechilis' volume has chapters devoted to "self-initiated" female gurus like Anandamayi Ma (1896-1982) and Mata Amritanandamayi (1953-).²⁵ Sathya Sai Baba (1926-2011) and Swamini Turiyasangitananda might also be

²⁴ Beyond the method of direct succession, there are guru lineages which passed from husband to wife after the husband passed away such as in the cases of Jahnava Ishvari (16th century), Sita Devi (16th century), and Rajeshwari Devi (1930-1991). The Mahabharata story of Ekalvaya, who becomes a disciple of Dronacharya, tells that he did so through fashioning and worshipping a statue of his guru. There are also hereditary lines of successions like that of the Pushtimarg *sampradāya* (disciple succession/school) of the fifteenth-century Vaishnava saint Vallabhacharya. See Marie-Thérèse Charpentier, *Indian Female Gurus in Contemporary Hinduism: A Study of Central Aspects and Expressions of Their Religious Leadership* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2010); and Pechilis, *The Graceful Guru*.

²⁵ For a discussion on female gurus' relationship and challenges to *paramparā*, see Pechilis, *The Graceful Guru*, 5-7.

considered self-initiated into guruhood; both became gurus through spontaneous means rather than directly through a living guru.²⁶ Each self-initiated guru, certainly to a large degree, depends on others acknowledging and recognizing their acquired religious authority and their teachings' efficacy. "[M]orality is constitutive of authority over others, through trust and loyalty."²⁷ For non-male gurus, the stakes and barrier are more often than not even higher as a result of the guru position having been normatively inscribed as a male role; therefore, the authority of a female guru has an additional impediment to navigate.²⁸

Still, in large transnational religious organizations, the process of recognition can be highly mediated, centralized and executed through an institutional body supplanting the students' active role in recognizing the guru. A historical example of this lasted for about a decade in the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON, or otherwise known as the Hare Krishna Movement) wherein ISKCON instituted a geographic-based system that predetermined the appropriate initiating guru for

²⁶ Under Kathleen M. Erndl's typology (which does not utilize the phrase "self-initiated" as Pechilis does), Amma and Satya Sai Baba fall under "spontaneous succession," which denotes those who have no human guru. Those in this category are often identified as authorities or guru-avatars from childhood or birth. Swamini Turiyasangitananda at various times is affiliated with, even initiated by, human gurus and their lineages, but is mostly independent and received her initiation through a divine visionary experience. For Erndl's complete typology for transmissions of Hindu authority, see Kathleen M. Erndl, "Afterword," in *The Graceful Guru* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195145380.003.0011>.

²⁷ Pechilis, *The Graceful Guru*, 7.

²⁸ Ibid.

interested practitioners.²⁹ Since then, a more traditional process of establishing guru-disciple relationships through individual choice has prevailed, yet the process of legitimizing an initiating guru in ISKCON today still involves a nomination and approval process through a nearly all-male Governing Body Commission (GBC).³⁰ In part, this is protective, safeguarding the organization's reputation, standards of conduct (subject to legal oversight) and members from discreditable gurus who may engage in illicit or illegal activities through decentralized and highly authoritative positions.³¹ Institutionally, gurus are publicly recognized as representatives (and vessels) of specific religious lineages, carrying forth in living form a body of teachings and practices (see chapter six on Bhakti Tirtha Swami). On the other hand, in fifty-four years, no non-male candidate has ever been confirmed as a guru in ISKCON as of early 2021.

Both Bhakti Tirtha Swami and Swamini Turiyasangitananda were initiating gurus in their lifetimes, conferring mantras to disciples and accepting vows, service

²⁹ The "zonal acharya system" instituted a severely restrictive model for accepting new gurus and initiating students into the movement. For example, under this system, each of ISKCON's initiating gurus were given exclusive rights to initiate in their designated region in the world. Edwin Bryant and Maria Ekstrand concluded that the system was "the single most devastating development in the postcharismatic period" in the movement resulting in a large number of the founder's disciples defecting from the organization; see Edwin Bryant and Maria Ekstrand, eds., *Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant* (New York, NY, USA: Columbia University Press, 2004), 433.

³⁰ For much of its existence, the ISKCON's Governing Body Commission (GBC) has been an all-male administrating body. "Members' Profiles," accessed February 27, 2021, <https://gbc.iskcon.org/members-profile/>; "List of Initiating Gurus in ISKCON," accessed February 27, 2021, <https://gbc.iskcon.org/list-of-initiating-gurus-in-iskcon/>.

³¹ Kritanananda Swami and Hamsadutta Swami are two examples of ISKCON gurus who famously eroded the trust and credibility of ISKCON gurus for engaging in weapons dealing, prostitution, drugs and physical abuse. See Nori J. (Nori Jean) Muster, *Betrayal of the Spirit: My Life Behind the Headlines of the Hare Krishna Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

(*sevā*) and worship (*pūjā*) from their disciples—though Krsnanandini was not afforded the position of guru nor did she apply the title to herself in her self-presentations. Bhakti Tirtha Swami, as part of the Hare Krishna movement, became a celibate student (*brahmacarya*) in 1973, entered the renounced order of life (*saṁnyāsa*) in 1979, and became a GBC-approved guru in 1985.³² Like the female gurus Anandamayi Ma and Mata Amritanandamayi (Amma), Swamini Turiyasangitananda (also called Swamini) may be considered self-initiated, an expedient term which is in need of further critical theoretical reflection.³³ Though Alice Coltrane received mantra initiation and a Sanskrit name (Turiya Aparna) from her close teacher Satchidananda Swami in 1970 and accepted avatar-guru Sathya Sai Baba as an incarnation of God (as his disciples do), Swamini was “self-initiated” in the sense that she became a renunciate (*saṁnyāsa*) and guru through mystic initiation in 1975.³⁴ This “divine initiation,” as her hagiographer and disciple Shankari C. Adams aptly names it, is said to have occurred between Swamini and God (named as Lord Ramachandra) after two years of onerous austerities (*tapasyā*) resulting in a profound loss of self- and worldly-interest.³⁵

³² Steven J Rosen, *Black Lotus: The Spiritual Journey of an Urban Mystic* (Washington, D.C.: Hari-Nama Press, 2007), 120-5, 387.

³³ It is outside of the scope of this project to fully theorize the term ‘self-initiated.’ The term was found in Pechilis’ introduction to *The Graceful Guru* (2004). In Pechilis’ usage, the term is applied to both Anandamayi Ma and Mata Amritanandamayi (Amma) and is intended to cover at least two distinguishable characteristics: the former’s self-initiation at twenty-six years old and the latter’s from-birth self-realization and union with Source. Swamini has more in common with Anandamayi Ma’s initiation than Amma’s.

³⁴ A. C. Turiyasangitananda, *Divine Revelations* (Agoura, California: Avatar Book Institute, 1995), 34-5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 35; Shankari C. Adams, *Portrait of Devotion: Spiritual Life of Alice Coltrane Swamini Turiyasangitananda* (self-pub., 2016), chap. “Re-Awakening Through Tapasya,” Kindle.

Krsnanandini Devi Dasi's particular religious context barred her and all non-male genders from achieving a formal or official guru role.³⁶ To become a guru in Krsnanandini's chosen religious institution (i.e., ISKCON) required a series of local and international institutional approvals which were processes only fully open to male candidates prior to 2019.³⁷ Therefore, I turn away from the term 'guru' here to recall that Krsnanandini worked within a religious society not fully ready to acknowledge their female representatives and teachers in equal social positions to their male counterparts. To use 'guru' as the dominant comparable frame of analysis here would overlook Krsnanandini's form of religious authority.

Thus, as employed here, *acharya* acknowledges that Black Americans such as Swamini Turiyasangitananda, Bhakti Tirtha Swami, and Krsnanandini Devi Dasi are all honorable and revered teachers who taught their pupils Vedic-based knowledge. The 'guru' framework, although not to be abandoned, is carefully displaced to acknowledge, at least for a moment, the institutionalized and culturally normative ways of gendering 'guru' that can empower (as in the case of Amma's reception as the goddess Devi) and, simultaneously, devalue women and other non-cis-male genders (as in the case of

³⁶ For an overview on the systemic barriers that women faced in ISKCON beginning as early as 1974, see Kim Knott, "Healing the Heart of ISKCON: The Place of Women," in *Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant*, ed. Edwin Bryant and Maria Ekstrand (New York, NY, USA: Columbia University Press, 2004), 112–28; for a recent ethnographic account of women's negotiation of identity in ISKCON temples, see Krishni Metivier, "Her Voice: Negotiating Gender in ISKCON."

³⁷ Although the polemic of female diksha gurus has been debated by the GBC since at least 2005, consensus on the debate was officially reached in 2019; see devi dasi, *The Emergence of Women's Voices in ISKCON: A Collection of Letters, Articles, Papers, and Conference Reports from 1988 to 2020* and ISKCON's Governing Body Commission (GBC), "GBC Approves Vaishnavi Diksa Gurus in ISKCON."

Krsnanandini). This is to say that a woman's impact may not be afforded equal regard nor accurate assessment in stature when using the position of guru as the lens or measure because of social-religious gender norms; this marginalization is, of course, in addition to racial-religious discourses (e.g., constructs of Hinduism and the Black Church) that already eclipse the visibility of non-Christian Black American religious figures in general.³⁸ Whereas Bhakti Tirtha Swami is able to leverage institutional legitimacy—such as when in press interviews, he is hailed as a “Hindu Swami,” “the only [B]lack swami in Vaishnavism” or the “[w]orld's first Vaishnava Hindu guru of African American origin”—in addition to his class privileges acquired through his Princeton University education, Swamini Turiyasangitananda and Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, on the other hand, did not always readily have such grand religious pronouncements or clear legitimizing frames to lean into.³⁹ Swamini Turiyasangitananda's Vedantic Center and Shanti Anantam Ashram were unaffiliated from Sathya Sai Baba's organization for over twenty years.⁴⁰ Krsnanandini could, at most, be recognized as a “Hare Krishna minister”

³⁸ See chapter one for a discussion of the impact of Hinduism discourse on narratives of race and religion. For a preliminary critique of the standard Black Church narrative in Black Religion, see William D. Hart, *Afro-Eccentricity: Beyond the Standard Narrative of Black Religion*, 1st ed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

³⁹ Bill Broadway, “Love, Not Lust: Hindu Swami Krishnapada Warns Against the Unrestrained Pursuit of Money, Power and Sex,” *Washington Post*, February 14, 1998, ProQuest; Suman Guha Mozumder, “First African-American Hindu Guru Dead,” *India Abroad*, July 15, 2005, ProQuest. This is not to mention other institutional resources that are made available to inheritors of the status guru in ISKCON, such as administration rights or influence over land development, real estate property usage, and human, monetary and institutional resources.

⁴⁰ Franya J. Berkman, *Monument Eternal: The Music of Alice Coltrane* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), 99.

within her religion.⁴¹ Insurgently and purposefully, I turn, instead, to recover the less reified Sanskrit term '*acharya*,' which also has a female equivalent *ācāryā*, to create a theoretical space wherein these teachers, regardless of their gender, can be equally regarded side-by-side. Therefore, may these figures be alternatively known as *acharyas*, spiritual masters.

⁴¹ Jacqueline Marino, "Better Together: Class Act or Work in Progress?," *Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH)*, September 14, 2003, America's News.

4. Swamini Turiyasangitananda (Alice Coltrane), August 27, 1937 – January 12, 2007

The spiritual metamorphosis of jazz musician Alice Coltrane into Swamini Turiyasangitananda (“The Transcendental Lord’s Highest Song of Bliss”) begins with encountering John Coltrane’s musical mysticism, precipitates as Swamini explodes her own musical legacy into thirteen records between 1968 and 1978, and advances and sustains as she enters into a life of monasticism (*saṃnyāsa*), records devotional *bhajans* (songs in praise of God) and establishes a spiritual community (i.e., the Vedantic Center and the Shanti Anantam Ashram, later Sai Anantam Ashram). For more than half of her life (approx. thirty-nine years), Swamini Turiyasangitananda imparted, expanded and embodied devotional practices and teachings profoundly shaped by South Asian musicality and Hindu religious traditions. If the modality of touch is at the epicenter of the efficacy of Amma’s exchange with her devotees and an expression of her embodiment of the real, *Brahman*, the source and all-pervading essence of existence, then sound is Swamini’s ultimate modality and medium to disseminate knowledge and for her devotees to experience her self-realization.¹ As with the teachings of many Indian gurus of the twentieth century, her sonic theology tends towards a Vedantic universalist approach to God, seeking to harmonize and integrate religious traditions, like ancient Egyptian religion, Christianity and Islam, with Vedanta (the summative philosophical

¹ Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, “Brahman,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen et al. (Brill, 2018), http://dx.doi.org.proxy.lib.duke.edu/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_2050290.

conclusions of the *Vedas*) and South Asian religious and musical traditions.²

Nevertheless, this does not seem to be in conflict nor inhibitive of her remarkably devotional compositions of South Asian lyrical songs of religious themes (*bhajans*) emblematic of her later compositions and paralleling her personal progression into guruhood.³

4.1 Biographical Overview

From the earliest experiences of Alice Coltrane's life, the provinces of religious praxis and embodiment and sound were inseparable. Born as Alice McLeod in a devout Christian family in Detroit, Michigan in 1937, Coltrane acquired an early musical education in improvisational rhythmic piano and organ by accompanying her local Christian church choirs (like the Lemon Gospel Choir at the Mack Avenue Church of

² Her universalism is illustrated in titles and liner notes of recordings like "Er Ra" (honoring an Egyptian God), "The Ankh of Amen-Ra," "Oh Allah," and "IHS" ("I Have Suffered"); see Alice Coltrane, *Huntington Ashram Monastery*, recorded May 14, 1969, Impulse! AS-9185, 1969, vinyl, liner notes; Alice Coltrane, *Universal Consciousness*, recorded 1971, Impulse! AS-9210, 1971, vinyl, liner notes; Alice Coltrane, *World Spirituality Classics 1: The Ecstatic Music Of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda*, With John Panduranga Henderson (vocals), Sai Ram Iyer (Tamil vocals), Shankari Adams (vocals), Radha Botofasina (vocals), et al., recorded between 1982 and 1995, Luaka Bop LBOP0087, 2017, CD.

In the liner notes to "One For the Father," Alice Coltrane (known as Turiya Aparna at the time) demonstrates this rather succinctly and clearly: "[A]t such time, I see the father [John Coltrane], his three sons, and the Holy Ghost, or Nilakantha ["blue throat"] who is Lord S[h]iva, the Destroyer of ignorance"; Alice Coltrane, *Transfiguration*, recorded at Shoenberg Hall, the University of California at Los Angeles, April 16, 1978. Warner Brothers WB 3218, 1978, vinyl, liner notes.

³ This dynamic universalism is particularly evident in Alice Coltrane's self-produced mid-80s TV show *Eternity's Pillar*. To view one episode, see Alice Coltrane, *Eternity's Pillar* (TV show), Aired 1987, on KTTV Channel 11, <https://vimeo.com/411195654>.

God in Christ) beginning at the age of nine.⁴ Her mother, Ann McLeod, was also an alto singer in the Senior Choir of Mt. Olive Baptist and played piano as well.⁵ Her father, Solon McLeod, worked as a truck driver after serving in World War I.⁶ In Detroit's Black churches, popular twentieth century American gospel and Motown artists—such as Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, and Aretha Franklin—powerfully emerged.⁷ The economic boom of the 1950s also produced a flourishing entertainment sector in Motor City postwar era which also nurtured modern jazz musicianship.⁸ Through African American musical subcultures—as opposed to the White pedigree of classical conservatories that Black people were historically excluded from—Alice resolutely pursued her musical advancement becoming a remarkable professional jazz pianist and bandleader. These influence of the postwar Motor City gospel and bebop jazz of her early developmental experiences are emergent in her later musical career.

In 1960, Alice moved to Paris, France with her first husband, singer Kenny “Pancho” Hagood, where she met pianist Bud Powell, a major musical mentor in Alice's development. At the same time, Alice's first daughter, Michelle was born. Although her musical ideas expanded during this time, her relationship with her husband deteriorated and she eventually returned to New York and then Detroit, divorced and a

⁴ Shankari C. Adams, *Portrait of Devotion: Spiritual Life of Alice Coltrane Swamini Turiyasangitananda* (self-pub., 2016), chap. “Her Appearance on Earth,” sec. “Natural Talents,” Kindle.

⁵ Berkman, *Monument Eternal*, 22.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 27-8.

single parent at twenty-three.⁹ Living with her parents and caring for her daughter, she soon found steady work playing the Detroit circuit of clubs and hotels as a bebop musician. She had already made notable impressions upon her ever-expanding network of musical contemporaries—which earned her a place in the Terry Gibbs band—when she met jazz saxophonist and composer John Coltrane in 1963 while playing opposite his Quartet. Prior to their meeting, Alice had developed a deep admiration for John’s modal jazz compositions; John soon returned the admiration when he witnessed a stunning performance of hers in the Terry Gibbs band.¹⁰ Recalling their fated meeting, Alice stated, “We were both traveling in a particular spiritual direction, John and myself. So it seemed only natural for us to join forces.”¹¹ Their romantic partnership turned to marriage and quickly produced three sons—John, Ravi (named after the Indian sitar virtuoso Ravi Shankar), and Oranyan (presumably named after the Prince of Ife, King of Yoruba).

Alice Mcleod, now Alice Coltrane, joined her husband John Coltrane in a San Francisco studio for the first time in February 1966 to record “Manifestation”.¹² She soon thereafter joined John’s new group as pianist, along with drummer Rashied Ali, bassist

⁹ Tammy L. Kernodle, “Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Alice Coltrane and the Redefining of the Jazz Avant-Garde” in Leonard Brown, ed., *John Coltrane and Black America’s Quest for Freedom: Spirituality and the Music* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2010), 77.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹² Berkman, *Monument Eternal*, 47-8.

Jimmy Garrison, and saxophonist Pharoah Sanders.¹³ Berkman's study is a much needed corrective to biographers who "have significantly underestimated Alice's deep influence on" John Coltrane's spiritual and musical development beginning with the album *A Love Supreme* (1964).¹⁴ During their short-lived relationship (July 1963 to July 1967), Alice and John recorded "six of the most unconventional and daring projects of his [John] career," writes Berkman, namely "heard on the albums *Cosmic Music*, recorded 1966-68; *Live at the Village Cosmic Music*, recorded 1966-68; *Live at the Village Vanguard Again!* 1966; *Live in Japan*, 1966; *Expression*, 1967; *Stellar Regions*, 1967; and *The Olatunji Concert*, 1967."¹⁵ Together as both marital and musical partners, John and Alice Coltrane pursued a limitless, universal experience through "higher dimensions in sound," approached by critics as avant-garde free jazz of which held dissonant aesthetics that consciously exceeded conventional musical structures (like regulatory meters, tonal sounds, and harmonic intonations).¹⁶ From a 1988 radio interview between Dolores Brandon (interviewer) and Alice Coltrane, Alice describes their family's home as a place of mutual pursuit of spiritual teachings and practices that supported innovations and virtuosity in the jazz music (of which is most often attributed solely to John):

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 49.

¹⁵ Ibid., 48-9.

¹⁶ Alice Coltrane, "The Evolution of Alice Coltrane – 1987," interview by Dolores Brandon, WBAI, 1988, <https://doloresbrandon.com/radioprofiles/the-evolution-of-alice-coltrane-1987/>. See also Anthony Brown's chapter "John Coltrane as the Personification of Spirituality in Black Music" in Leonard Brown, ed., *John Coltrane and Black America's Quest for Freedom: Spirituality and the Music* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2010).

I think all of it is a part of it because he was always inspired. He was very much a family man, always at home, if he was not traveling and concertizing. I do believe that all of those factors contributed to his higher involvement, his higher innovation in music . . . *As a result of our association, I saw him more one-pointed, focused in the direction he was going without question.* I think there were questionings from others around him, associates, musicians. But he seemed to focus on his goals with a conviction. *What we did was really to begin to reach out and look toward higher experiences in spiritual life and higher knowledge to be obtained in spiritual life. This is what we did. And our basic root was, of course, reading and hearing discourse, talk by spiritual leaders and teachers, as well as our own engagement in meditation.*¹⁷

One cannot help but wonder if Swamini Turiyasangitananda during that interview meant *ekāgra* by “one-pointed,” articulating then John’s state of mind as that of the yogic practitioner utterly absorbed in the sound of *Om*, also called *pranava* (*praṇava*), the sacred syllable and manifestation of *Ishvara* (*Īśvara*) (God) or *Nāda-Brahman* (see below).¹⁸

The Coltranes’ partnership continued John’s—and, now, their—delving deeper into a range of musical traditions, from Indian Hindustani to West African, and conscious consumption of religious teachings from Tibetan Buddhism, Zen, Swami Yogananda, Krishnamurti, Zoroastrianism, Islam, and Kabbalah.¹⁹ John’s own interest in India and Africa seems to have first stemmed from a desire to apply musical structures of India and Africa to develop his own musical improvisational techniques. From the North

¹⁷ Alice Coltrane, “The Evolution of Alice Coltrane,” interview by Dolores Brandon, WBAI, 1988, qtd. in Berkman, *Monument Eternal*, 50; emphasis added.

¹⁸ For a further discussion of *pranava* in Patañjali’s *Yoga-Sūtra* (~200 BCE), see Guy L Beck, *Sonic Theology: Hinduism and Sacred Sound* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 85-6.

¹⁹ Emmett G. Price III, “The Spiritual Ethos in Black Music and Its Quintessential Exemplar, John Coltrane,” in Leonard Brown, ed., *John Coltrane and Black America’s Quest for Freedom: Spirituality and the Music* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2010), 161; Kernodle, “Freedom Is a Constant Struggle,” 74; Berkman, *Monument Eternal*, 52; Jason Bivins, *Spirits Rejoice! Jazz and American Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 137.

Indian classical tradition, John studied *rāgas*, classical Indian scales conceptualized as productive of specific affects (emotional states). Ethnomusicologist Carl Clements states that as early as 1959, elements of Indian music can be heard in John Coltrane's music.²⁰ Clements remarks that Coltrane's understanding of *rāgas* developed through Ravi Shankar, the highly acclaimed Hindustani classical sitar musician who in the 1960s significantly increased the popularity of Indian musical traditions in the United States.²¹

Entering and sustaining interest in Indian musical traditions, like *rāgas*, through Shankar, inevitably meant that John was encountering and exploring Indian conceptualizations of sacred sound—"sonic theology"—and its millennia-long articulation in Hindu religious thought.²² Not only are *rāgas* and classical North Indian musical traditions linked with Vedic and Upanishadic conceptions of Brahman (the absolute foundation or essence of and in everything) through the concepts of *Śabda-Brahman* and *Nāda-Brahman* (both sacred sound as a form of Brahman), popular Indian teachers of day were aptly making U.S. audiences aware of those sacred connections.²³ Of the *rāgas*, melodic formulas, Ravi Shankar affirmed:

²⁰ Carl John Clements, "John Coltrane and the Integration of Indian Concepts in Jazz Improvisation," *Jazz Research Journal* 2, no. 2 (May 15, 2009): 155–75, <https://doi.org/10.1558/jazz.v2i2.155>.

²¹ Ibid.

²² To fully grasp the interconnection between sacred sound, musical practices, and classical and popular Hindu religion in India, see the phenomenal scholarship of historian of South Asian religions and musicologist Guy L. Beck, for example, Beck, *Sonic Theology*.

²³ Guy L. Beck, "Sacred Music and Hindu Religious Experience: From Ancient Roots to the Modern Classical Tradition," *Religions* 10, no. 2 (February 2019): 85, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10020085>. *Śabda* (word, sound, speech) refers to 'linguistic sound' or sound that has linguistic meaning whereas *nāda* only refers to 'voiced' sounds prior to meaning; see Beck, *Sonic Theology*, 8.

Our tradition teaches us that sound is God—Nāda Brahma. That is, musical sound and the musical experience are steps to the realization of the Self. We view music as a kind of spiritual discipline that raises one’s inner being to divine peacefulness and bliss. The highest aim of our music is to reveal the essence of the universe it reflects, and the Rāgas are among the means by which this essence can be apprehended. Thus, through music, one can reach God.²⁴

What appeared to begin as developing improvisational techniques and potential to affect human thought and feeling clearly became a meditative, “spiritual discipline” for John (and later, Alice) in the ways Shankar describes above, employing sound to realize God, to experience transcendence into the universal essence within ‘the ultimate vibration.’²⁵ In the original liner notes to the posthumously released album *Om* (1967), John describes the syllable *Om* as would be consonant with the concept of *Nāda-Brahman*:

Om means the first vibration - that sound, that spirit that sets everything else into being. It is The Word from which all men and everything else comes, including all possible sounds that man can make vocally. It is the first syllable, the primal word, the word of power.²⁶

When interviewed in 1962 by Don DeMicheal with Eric Dolphy, John described the music as “a reflection of the universe.”²⁷ In the liner notes to *Universal Consciousness* (1971), Alice Coltrane also experienced the auditory as a sacred mobility to traverse

²⁴ Ravi Shankar, *My Music, My Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 17 qtd. in Guy L. Beck, “Sacred Music and Hindu Religious Experience: From Ancient Roots to the Modern Classical Tradition,” *Religions* 10, no. 2 (February 2019): 85, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10020085>.

²⁵ See *Ibid.*; Bivins, *Spirits Rejoice!*, 137-8.

²⁶ John Coltrane, *The Major Works of John Coltrane*, tracks originally recorded in 1965, Impulse! GRD-2-113, 1992, liner notes. For examples of how sacred sound and the sacred syllable are historically conceptualized through the major chronological periods in Hindu religious thought in India, see Beck, *Sonic Theology*.

²⁷ John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy, “John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy Answer the Jazz Critics,” interview by Don DeMichael, April 12, 1962, <https://downbeat.com/microsites/prestige/dolphy-interview.html>.

sacred cosmology and experience utter transcendence and peace: “This music [specifically the song “Hare Krishna”] irrefutably transports my soul to one of the highest pavilions in creation. Near the spatial mansions of the Most High Paradise, I soar to the abode of the Exalted One, where up in the Gold Room, I lie down in perfect repose.”²⁸ In the same album liner notes, she wrote, “This experience and this music involve a Totality concept which embraces cosmic thought as an emblem of Universal Sound.”²⁹ For scholar of religious studies Jason Bivins, the total effect of John’s use of improvisational techniques and incorporation of chanting (of, for example, the syllable *Om* and verses of the *Bhagavad Gita*) amounts to enacting a ritual space or “form of worship” that transports the listener and the musician into a metaphysical or transcendent experience.³⁰

Often, John Coltrane is linked to Christian theology and the Black Church, but I can see a through line with his thinking and that of South Asian religious thought, and I suspect that it had a greater influence on his conceptualization of his spiritual identity and praxis towards the end of his life than did Christianity, even as he continued to reference Christian theology through the Trinity.³¹ Take, for example, Paramahansa Yogananda’s popular book *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946), which Alice and John owned.

²⁸ Coltrane, *Universal Consciousness*, liner notes, sec. “Hare Krishna.”

²⁹ Coltrane, *Universal Consciousness*.

³⁰ Bivins, *Spirits Rejoice!*, 137.

³¹ An explicit reference to the Christian Trinity, for instance, is made in the track title “The Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost” on John Coltrane’s album *Meditations* (1966). See John Coltrane, *Meditations*, recorded November 1965, Impulse!, 1966.

In his autobiography, Yogananda explicitly links the Christian Trinity of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost to the philosophically potent Sanskrit terms *Sat*, *Tat*, and *Om*:

These Biblical words refer to the threefold nature of God as Father, Son, Holy Ghost (*Sat*, *Tat*, *Aum* in the Hindu scriptures). God the Father is the Absolute, Unmanifested, existing beyond vibratory creation. God the Son is the Christ Consciousness (Brahma or Kutastha Chaitanya) existing within vibratory creation; this Christ Consciousness is the "only begotten" or sole reflection of the Uncreated Infinite. Its outward manifestation or "witness" is *Aum* or Holy Ghost, the divine, creative, invisible power which structures all creation through vibration. *Aum* the blissful Comforter is heard in meditation and reveals to the devotee the ultimate Truth.³²

Taken together, as described in *Bhagavad Gita* 17.23, *Om Tat Sat* are the three-syllable representation of Brahman known as eternal, primordial vibration. By connecting Christian theology to *Nada-Brahman*, God as sound vibration, eminent Indian gurus opened pathways in which John Coltrane could radically reconceive of Christianity and his identity anew: "I am [Christian] by birth . . . [but] truth itself doesn't have any name on it."³³

³² Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (Project Gutenberg, 2005 [1946]), chap. 14, footnote 2, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/7452>.

³³ Bivins, *Spirits Rejoice!*, 136. The longer quote reads as follows:

"I am [Christian] by birth, or my mother was and father was, and so forth. My early teachings were in the Christian faith. And now, as I look out upon the world, and it's always been a thing with me to feel that all men know the truth, see? So therefore I have always felt that even though a man was not a Christian, he still has to know the truth in some way. Or if he was a Christian, he could know the truth, or he could *not* ... The truth itself doesn't have any name on it. To me. Each man has to find this for himself, I think."

John Coltrane quoted in Ben Ratliff, *Coltrane The Story of a Sound* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 108-9; emphasis in original.

After John Coltrane's untimely death in 1967, Alice was left widowed with four small children, but gained financial freedom due to John's estate planning.³⁴ The next two and a half years marked a very arduous period in Alice's life, one in which she defined through *tapasyā*, voluntary austerity or penance.³⁵ *Tapasya* or *tapas* (heat) are practices of self-discipline in a number of South Asian religions that intends to elevate the individual through severe meditation, bodily mortification, special observances, and austerity, ultimately towards their intended outcome, self-realization and liberation. Both disciple and academic biographers remark this as a transformational and harrowing period of spiritual reawakening and physical suffering for Alice, now addressed and known as Turiya (pure consciousness completely united with *pranava* (Om) and Brahman as described in *Nādabindu Upaniṣad*).³⁶ Swamini frames her experience in some detail in *Divine Revelations* (1995):

April to September 24, 1970

During these months, there was a continuation of *tapasya*. The following excerpts [from *Monument Eternal*] give an account of what occurred:

'The mental and physical territories had to undergo a purificatory spiritualization to bring about the expansion and heightening of the consciousness- awareness level.

A human who is going through the austerity aspect of a spiritual revelation must be able to withstand the effects of purification which are analogous to the

³⁴ Kernodle, "Freedom Is a Constant Struggle," 84.

³⁵ Turiyasangitananda, *Divine Revelations*, 15-20.

³⁶ See Adams, *Portrait of Devotion* and Berkman, *Monument Eternal* as examples of each genre of biography for Alice Coltrane. For more on the meaning of *turiya*, the fourth state of consciousness, see Beck, *Sonic Theology*, 88-97. Alice Coltrane received the name 'Turiya Aparna' from Swami Satchidananda.

processes and the results of the empirical chemistry performed by an alchemist.... Aside from the workings of alchemy I had to endure many days of penance, sacrifice, and suffering with trials and conflicts created to test strength and endurance, measure and weigh all spiritual faculties, capacity, and tenacity of the soul. [...]

The procedures of tapas which encompass every aspect of spiritual and physical suffering have to be endured.[...]

During this time, African American bassist Vishnu Wood introduces Alice to one of her famed Indian gurus, Swami Satchidananda.³⁷ In 1970 and 1971, Alice travels with Satchidananda to India for a five-week pilgrimage and dedicates her fourth album, *Journey in Satchidananda* (1971), to him.³⁸ In her subsequent musical recordings, she progressively dedicates her musical praxis as an offering to God while further exploring and illuminating a Hindu cosmology. Her body of original arrangements of traditional Indian devotional chants, *bhajans*, are engaged as practices of meditation and worship to various names of God like Shiva, Ganesha, Krishna, and Rama. In *Portrait of Devotion* (2016), a devotional biography of Alice Coltrane written with the guidance of Swamini, author and disciple Shankari Adams describes an evolution (“evolved”) unfolding “from strictly instrumental to the more sublime devotional chanting,” though defined all forms of her music as “spiritual in nature” because of Swamini’s intent to make all her music an offering to the Supreme.³⁹

³⁷ Berkman, *Monument Eternal*, 72-3.

³⁸ Ashley Kahn, Liner notes for Alice Coltrane, *Spiritual Eternal*, Real Gone Music RGM-0692, 2018; Alice Coltrane, *Journey in Satchidananda*, recorded November 8, 1970, Impulse! AS-9203, 1971, vinyl, liner notes.

³⁹ Adams, *Portrait of Devotion*, chap. “Devotional Songs of Bliss,” sec. “Beyond Space and Time.”

Soon after meeting Swami Satchidananda and traveling on her first of many pilgrimages to India, Alice “Turiya” Coltrane founded the Vedantic Center in 1972 in a San Francisco storefront that focused on “devotional studies” of Vedanta (lit. “end of Vedas”) teachings, especially through texts like the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*.⁴⁰ Spiritual seekers in the center’s community were also instructed and engaged in “meditation, hatha yoga, chanting, and selfless service.”⁴¹ The center was later relocated next to her home when she moved to Woodland Hills, California (an upscale neighborhood in Los Angeles) in the mid-1970s.⁴² Though structured by Vedic texts and teachings, Turiya’s center fostered an universalist, interfaith approach, explaining all faiths ultimate unity and honoring and even incorporating other religions’ (e.g., Islam, Christianity, Buddhism) sacred narratives on God:

On numerous occasions Swamini cited Christ’s exemplary teachings to humanity. His life of sacrifice culminated in sincere submission to divine Will. He took up the cross, and although He fell several times, He went on to complete His mission of redemptive love. Christ’s life of dedication and sacrifice despite tests and trials continues to convey a profound message for all of humanity. During one of Swamini’s many discourses she spoke highly of Christ’s perseverance in the completion his Father’s holy mission. Emphasizing her point,

⁴⁰ Ibid., chap. “Transmitter of Divine Truth,” sec. “From Vision to Reality;” ⁴⁰ Berkman, *Monument Eternal*, 99; There is a bit of discrepancy between the dates offered by Berkman vs. those offered by Adams. Adams writes that the Vedantic Center was established in 1975 while Berkman places the founding in 1972. I have opted to go with the earlier date because I suspect that the 1975 date corresponds to the date the Vedantic Center was reestablished from the Bay area to Los Angeles.

⁴¹ Adams, *Portrait of Devotion*, chap. “Transmitter of Divine Truth,” sec. “From Vision to Reality.”

⁴² Berkman, *Monument Eternal*, 99; There is a bit of discrepancy between the dates offered by Berkman vs. those offered by Adams. Adams (2016) writes that the Vedantic Center was established in 1975. Berkman claims 1972.

she leaned forward in her chair and stated in a resonant, forceful tone of voice, "If, due to human frailty, you fall, do not stay down. Get up! Get up!"⁴³

During the years 1975 and 1976, Turiya undergoes a spiritual metamorphosis that marks her formal entry into celibacy and renunciation (*saṁnyāsa*) as well as her new role as a spiritual master or guru. The initiation, as explained in the last chapter, occurred through God intervening, having a living presence, in the lifeworld of Turiya, a world brimming with daily mystical experiences and divine encounters which she thoroughly documents in her writings, especially *Divine Revelations*. Around this same time, on January 1, 1976 she arrives in South India to have her first *darshan* with Sathya Sai Baba at his Prashanti Nilayam (abode of supreme peace) Ashram located in Andhra Pradesh in Puttaparthi.⁴⁴ Anthropologist Tulasi Srinivas writes that the Sai Baba movement in India grew from a pan-Indian to an international movement due to the rising tide of devotional literatures on Sai Baba created and circulated by a few entrepreneurial devotees (Alice is not mentioned) in California during the U.S. counterculture movement of the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁵ From 1976 onwards, Turiya becomes Swamini Turiyasangitananda, donning the traditional saffron-orange robes that aesthetically marked her as a renunciate—though, she still continues to raise her four

⁴³ Adams, *Portrait of Devotion*, chap. "Transmitter of Divine Truth," sec. "From Vision to Reality" and sec. "Dedicating All Action."

⁴⁴ Turiyasangitananda, *Divine Revelations*, 92-5. It seems Turiya stayed at least one month at Sai Baba's ashram.

⁴⁵ Tulasi Srinivas, *Winged Faith: Rethinking Globalization and Religious Pluralism through the Sathya Sai Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 11.

children at her home in California and complete her last two contracted albums for Warner Brothers Records.

In 1977, Alice, now Swamini Turiyasangitananda, writes and publishes the short fifty-three page *Monument Eternal*, her abridged autobiography detailing “her spiritual initiation, revelations and austerities.”⁴⁶ According to Adams, her autobiography was the first written text by Swamini made as a devotional offering and, similar to how she approached her musical compositions, she carefully inspected the quality and accuracy of each of her manuscripts.⁴⁷ At times, her disciples assisted her in writing forwards for her work and providing copy edit and graphic design for her writings.⁴⁸ Though currently out of print, the book seems to have initially attracted some of her earliest disciples, like Radha Botofasina, a Black and Latinx female musician, to seek Swamini as their guru.⁴⁹

In the serene lands of Agoura Hills, California, Swamini in 1983 established a spiritual sanctuary and small quasi-monastic community called Shanti Anantam Ashram on fifty acres of purchased lands.⁵⁰ Around twenty people, including single adults, married couples, and children, lived in rented housing at the ashram in the early

⁴⁶ “Monument Eternal,” Inner Path, accessed April 12, 2021, <https://www.innerpath.com/monument-eternal/>; Alice Coltrane, *Monument Eternal* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Vedantic Book Press, 1977).

⁴⁷ Adams, *Portrait of Devotion*, chap. “Transmitter of Divine Truth.”

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, chap. “Transmitter of Divine Truth” and sec. “About the Author.” Pages 43-44 and 164 in print edition.

⁴⁹ Radha Botofasina, interview with author, 2020.

⁵⁰ Berkman, *Monument Eternal*, 99.

2000s, with adult residents holding day jobs and children attending local schools.⁵¹ Members of the community living elsewhere visited the ashram to attend the weekly worship services and Sunday lectures given by Swamini; attendance reached around fifty people as noted by Berkman.⁵² A more detailed look at the ashram community can be found in chapter seven of this work. The ashram was renamed Sai Anantam Ashram in 1994, re-inaugurated in honor of Sathya Sai Baba, who she and her disciples—like Sai Baba followers—recognized as the living avatar of God.⁵³ Though, the date of the inauguration seems to be a culminating event of decades of interactions with Sathya Sai Baba rather than the initiation of their relationship, backed by at least a dozen religious pilgrimages to Sai Baba’s sacred and idyllic city in southern India from 1975 to 2005.⁵⁴

Though affiliated with other Sathya Sai Baba centers worldwide and placing his image throughout her ashram, the ashram functioned quite independently and differently than other centers, especially regarding Alice’s revered status as guru.⁵⁵ Berkman, who observed the ashram first-hand, recalls, “While Alice’s students read Satya Sai Baba’s discourses, revere him as an avatar, and made pilgrimages with her to South India to visit his him, until Alice’s death she [Swamini] was their personal guru, Alice, the one who answered their questions, looked after their spiritual wellbeing, and

⁵¹ Ibid., 100-1.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 99.

⁵⁴ Adams, *Portrait of Devotion*, chap. “Land of the Avatars;” especially pages 84-112 in the print edition; Turiyasangitananda, *Divine Revelations*, 134-9.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 100.

encouraged their spiritual progress on regular basis.”⁵⁶ In part, I agree with Berkman that the affiliation does not trump Swamini’s centrality in the religious life and thought of her devoted followers. Though, it seems detrimental for the future of this research to dismiss Sai Baba and his communities’ influence on Swamini and her disciples, especially when considering the many years she and her disciples voyaged in group pilgrimages to Puttaparthi, India, a sacred, ecumenical and cosmopolitan center for Sai Baba devotees worldwide.

Parallels in regards to Sai Baba and Swamini that I have noted include: theological importance of devotion and love towards a supreme God (numerously manifested as avatars like Rama, Krishna, and Shiva), the glorification of the virtues of devotional chanting (including utilizing the theological terms *namasmarana*, *namasankirtana*, and *nagarasankirtana* in this regard), the highest spiritual aspiration being *nirvikalpa samadhi* (a complete cognitive unity or oneness with God), Sai Baba as the age’s living avatar and Bhagavan, and Sai Baba teachings on five core human values (i.e., love, peace, truth, right conduct, and non-violence). Indeed, much more can be said about each of these parallels which are deserving of an in-depth study comparing Sathya Sai Baba’s guru-Avatar performativity, discourses (which number tens of thousands), instructed ritual praxis, moral community and sacred centers to Swamini’s theological discourses, written autobiographical narratives, disciples, and ashram’s

⁵⁶ Ibid.

aesthetic, ritual, and moral structure. A comprehensive analysis, which is beyond the scope of this project, would allow us to fully comprehend the depth of the interconnection and its particular transformations as well as the significance of her ancillary connections to other communities and teachers—such as to Bhaktivedanta Swami (Prabhupada) and the California Hare Krishna communities (see next section 3.2 for more on these connections).

In accordance with her roles as director and primary guru of her ashram, Swamini penned and published three revelatory scriptures, *Endless Wisdom Vol. 1* (1981), *Divine Revelations* (1995) and *Endless Wisdom Vol. 2* (1998) that preserve within their ornate gilded hardcovers sacred teachings, discourses, and revelations from Swamini's interactions with God and avatar Sathya Sai Baba.⁵⁷ These publications, both in literary content and aesthetic presentation, exist as sacred objects for the reader to behold. This is heightened in the second volume of *Endless Wisdom*, whose subtitle on an internal page is "The Second Testament;" volume encompasses fifteen chapters, divided into three parts, with numbered verses presented in two narrow columns on each page—much like a church *Bible*.⁵⁸ Each chapter invokes in bold, italic font the voice of God (e.g., "Of infinite wisdom and the principles of spirituality, thus saith the Supreme Lord:") and

⁵⁷ A. C. Turiyasangitananda, *Endless Wisdom Vol. 1*, (Los Angeles, California: Avatar Book Institute, 1981); Turiyasangitananda, *Divine Revelation*; A. C. Turiyasangitananda, *Endless Wisdom Vol. 2* (Los Angeles, California: Avatar Book Institute, 1998). Shankari Adams in *Portrait of Devotion* (2016) mentions a pending third volume, "Endless Wisdom III," to this series of scriptures by Swamini. This still has not been published, but may exist as an unpublished manuscript.

⁵⁸ Turiyasangitananda, *Endless Wisdom Vol. 2*, 15.

concludes each chapter with a closing refrain (e.g., “Thus ends the concluding chapter of the fifth book of ‘Endless Wisdom.’”).⁵⁹

Divine Revelations (1995) is published within a year of the re-dedicating of the ashram to Sathya Sai Baba in June 1994.⁶⁰ In *Divine Revelations*, the revelations are contained within journal-like entries dated between 1968 and 1995. This literature chronologically documents events, revelations, and dialogues had with Sathya Sai Baba, Lord Rama, and Lord Krishna (all of which are considered as historically manifesting avatars of God). The text distinguishes within itself a “remarkably unique” feature not found in the previous revelations of *Endless Wisdom Vol. 1*—that is, specific names or identities of God are revealed herein.⁶¹ The crown teaching that these named avatars hope to impart to the readers of the text is delineated in the text’s brief introduction: “When the great *Avatars* incarnate on earth, they consistently expound upon the importance of devotion, defining the fact that every great spiritual purpose can be accomplished through love and devotion for God.”⁶² Exemplars of those who have achieved the spiritual feat of devotion are then presented for consideration—the famed *bhakti* saints and poets Mirabai, Tulsidas, and (Sufi) Kabir..

These fascinating scriptures are vital sources for Swamini’s theology—though they are not nearly as accessible (i.e., their limited circulation and print copies) nor as

⁵⁹ Turiyasangitananda, *Endless Wisdom Vol. 2*, 115 and 191.

⁶⁰ Turiyasangitananda, *Divine Revelations*, 2-3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 9.

widely influential as Alice Coltrane's discography, music and musicking from the perspective of the general public. Their place in liturgical practice in the ashram is underexamined and partially uncertain. These texts go unmentioned in direct connection to ritual or communal worship practices both in my interviews and in Franya Berkman's study of Swamini. Swamini disciple and biographer Adams, however, states that *Divine Revelations* was studied by Swamini's students and they were personally instructed on proper hermeneutics for interpreting her revelations:

Additionally, Swamini's students studied *Divine Revelations* a book of spiritual notations and sacred teachings given to her directly from the Lord in meditation over a thirty-year period. She cautioned aspirants to avoid using an academic approach to study spiritual literature. Skillfully, she advised students to discern the spiritual message instead of focusing on literal meanings. Like all noble guides, she emphasized that learning requires heeding as well as hearing. In other words when spiritual truths are internalized and practiced, the teachings promote further growth.⁶³

Furthermore, Adams also documents that *Endless Wisdom Vol. 1* was sold in a local bookstore in Berkeley, California at its initial publication.⁶⁴ I estimate that there are about 10,000 to 15,000 copies of these three texts printed in total.⁶⁵

As the spiritual figurehead at her ashram, Swamini continued giving weekly Sunday discourses and leading devotional group chanting (*kirtan*) until her death in 2007 due to respiratory failure. She attracted many Black and Latinx Americans, mostly

⁶³ Adams, *Portrait of Devotion*, sec. "To Impart Divine Truths."

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, sec. "Presence of Sound."

⁶⁵ The number range is derived from the number of printed copies listed in copyright pages to these texts. I, unfortunately, did not acquire direct access to the out of print *Endless Wisdom Vol. 1*.

middle-class and educated, to her and her community. Some of these members continue to honor her legacy and life through their musical recordings of their own riffs on spiritual jazz, resembling Swamini's particular approach, as well as playing tributary renditions of Swamini's spiritual musical compositions.⁶⁶ Chapter seven offers an intimate portrait of life on the ashram from the perspective of Surya Botofasina, who aspires to carry forward the legacy he inherits as a child growing up in Swamini's spiritual community.

4.2 Commercial and Non-Commercial Musical Recordings of Alice Coltrane

Her discography on major record labels Impulse Records and Warner Brothers stands as a sonic and aesthetic testament to her spiritual journey from the Holiness and Baptist churches of her youth into Hinduism or rather her "journey in satchidananda" (also the title of her fourth solo album). The Sanskrit term *satchidananda* (*saccidānanda*) is an classical Indian philosophical formulation from Vedanta (the conclusions of the Vedic literature) that succinctly clarifies the characteristics of ultimate reality (*brahman*): eternal being/existence (*sat*), limitless consciousness (*cīt*), and unlimited bliss (*ananda*).⁶⁷ In her

⁶⁶ See, for example, Alice Coltrane, *Eternity's Pillar* (TV show), Aired 1987, on KTTV Channel 11, <https://vimeo.com/411195654>; "Om Shanti," streaming audio, track 8 on Lakecia Benjamin, *Pursuance: The Coltranes*, Ropeadope Records Rad-535, 2020, Spotify; Radha Botofasina, *Songs of the Eternal Soul*, Shaila Records, 2011; "Govinda Anantam," streaming audio, track 1 on Surya Botofasina, *Quickflight* #32, n.d., <https://www.suryabotofasina.com>.

⁶⁷ Monier Monier-Williams, "Sat," in *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Greek, Latin, Gothic, German, Anglo-Saxon, and Other Cognate Indo-European Languages*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1872); Monier Monier-Williams, "Saccid," in *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*

first record *A Monastic Trio* after John Coltrane's untimely death in 1967, Alice Coltrane pays tribute to and extends John Coltrane's coupling of avant-garde jazz and spirituality. Musicologist Tammy L. Kernodle detects her Black Christian upbringing when she "invoke[s] a swinging gospel sensibility within a largely free jazz context".⁶⁸ Echoing implicitly familiar theories on Black religious experiences as embedded in, and yet oriented towards overcoming dehumanizing terror, Kernodle hears the estrangement of the Black body that "wails" for God in this record.⁶⁹ Alice's capabilities can be said to be still highly legible as a Black jazz artist and spiritualist for both her employment of some aesthetic nods to the gospel music of her youth and the avant-garde techniques of her late-husband.⁷⁰ Though, as mentioned earlier, John and Alice Coltrane were well steeped in meditative practices, spiritual discourses from various teachers, and teachings that spanned multiple religious and musical traditions.

By her second record two years later, *Huntington Ashram Monastery* (1969), Alice's exploration and experimentation with fusing Indian religious and musical traditions with a Black American jazz lineage emerges prominently. In the liner notes to

Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Greek, Latin, Gothic, German, Anglo-Saxon, and Other Cognate Indo-European Languages, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1872); Ram-Prasad, "Brahman"; Renate Söhnen-Thieme, "Satya," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen et al. (Brill, 2018), http://dx.doi.org.proxy.lib.duke.edu/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_2050290.

⁶⁸ Kernodle, "Freedom Is a Constant Struggle," 91.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Berkman's description of Alice's compositional techniques serve as one piece of evidence of this kind of legibility and sonority. See Berkman, *Monument Eternal*, 68.

Huntington Ashram Monastery (1969), for instance, Alice Coltrane introduces her listeners to Indian gurus Paramahansa Yogananda (founder of the Self-Realization Fellowship), Swami Sivananda (founder of Divine Life Society) and Swami Chidananda (disciple of Sivananda) as not only sources of inspiration for the instrumental jazz tracks “Paramahansa Lake” and “Via Sivanandagar,” respectively, but also decidedly identifying them as authentic spiritual teachers for attaining “freedom from the bondage of human birth and death” (i.e., *saṃsāra*).⁷¹ Simultaneously, the compositional style of her first three albums showcases the piano blues aesthetic and improvisational styles of Detroit jazz, bebop, swing, and gospel.⁷² Between 1968 and 1970, just after the death of her husband, Alice undergoes a period of immense bodily and meditative austerity (*tapasyā*). Between 1970 and 1971, her records, such as *Journey in Satchidananda* (1971) and *Universal Consciousness* (1971), readily attested to Indian guru Swami Satchidananda’s influence on her music and spiritual development, her first five-week pilgrimage to India in 1970, and her arrangements of Sanskrit mantras and *bhajans* she encountered while in India. The sonic textures that she weaves into her music also express her attention to South Asian tonality, implementing Indian *rāgas* (musical patterns or scales) through melodic structure and instruments like the tamboura.⁷³ From the images in the liner notes, we see Turiya Aparna seated eyes closed, as if in meditation or prayer, just

⁷¹ Coltrane, *Huntington Ashram Monastery*, liner notes.

⁷² Berkman, *Monument Eternal*, 68-72.

⁷³ See, for example, Berkman, *Monument Eternal*, 72; Coltrane, *Journey in Satchidananda*; Kahn in Coltrane, *Spiritual Eternal*, liner notes;

near and below the feet (the Upanishadic proverbial place of a disciple) of Swami Satchidananda, who she took mantra initiation from in 1970.⁷⁴ In another image, she can be seen with her voluminous afro, wearing a pattern-filled *kurti* (loose, long shirt) and *dupatta* (a shawl commonly worn by women in South Asia); she is positioned in meditation sitting cross-legged with her hand placed upwards on her knees with her middle finger and thumb gently pressed together.

What she imparts to her listeners through her liner notes is that universal consciousness in its final and complete form is a blissful union (*yoga*) with God, an ultimate overcoming of ego and one's attachments to embodied life.⁷⁵ It involves passing through diverse religious and spiritual states of mind which can be read as distinct religious traditions, trials and tribulations, and an extensive analogy for the human's purification. The liner notes for "Battle at Armageddon" illustrate poetically a mystifying battle that "takes place within the nethermost regions of the human soul."⁷⁶ Undertaking this harrowing journey, the human soul must fight to overcome the enemy, the ego, in order to invite the Divine into the heart space. In the battle, the soul is assisted by many "Manifestations" including El Daoud, Swami Sivananda, Mother Kali, Jesus Christ, Sri Ramakrishna, Baha'u'llah, Tao, Hanuman, Ohnedaruth (name given to John Coltrane meaning compassion). Eventually Zoroaster, Moses, the Prophet

⁷⁴ Turiyasangitananda, *Divine Revelation*, 34.

⁷⁵ Coltrane, *Universal Consciousness*, liner notes.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Mohammed, Mary and Joseph, Isis and Osiris, Sri Aurobindo, Sphinx, and finally Buddha also come to “assist the soul” in regaining knowledge of the Truth, travel through astral, comic realms, entomb and burn all past misdeeds (“sins”), and undergo a final “Resurrection.”⁷⁷ At long last, the “final victory” and pinnacle of the soul’s journey finally arrives: “After the final victory is won over death ([i.e., death of] loving the things of this world, and not one’s Maker), May the Creator, who is Most High Bhagavan God and Lord, take His Seat, i.e., His Sita: wife (Bride, Christ, in Marriage, Coronation) in your heart (His Home).”⁷⁸

By the early 1970s, Turiya Aparna (Alice Coltrane) held a deeply inclusivist view of religion and spirituality that premised all religions as part of achieving perfected “universal” consciousness: “This music tells of some of the various diverse avenues and channels through which the soul must pass before it finally reaches that exalted state of Absolute [also, Universal] Consciousness.”⁷⁹ The human soul (*jiva*) takes up a path of “austerity-ascetic discipline” to purify their consciousness with the assistance of “many manifestations.”⁸⁰ This aligns with S. N. Dasgupta’s classification of “Yoga Mysticism”

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.; Sita is the consort or bride of Rama, who is regarded as an avatar of God by many Hindus. Bhagavan is a commonly used epithet for God in several South Asian languages.

⁷⁹ Ibid.; Swami Satchidananda’s repeated ecumenical aphorism “The truth is one, the paths are many” seems to be indicated by Alice’s far-reaching mystic presentation of divine beings and saints.

⁸⁰ This distinction is worthy of noting because there seems to be a reflexive association made between Alice Coltrane’s Indic philosophy and a generic Vedanta, interpreted through Advaita Vedanta. Though, Advaita Vedanta is a monistic school of thought that rejects any dualism between the individual *atma* and *Brahman*. Whereas yoga, as codified in the earliest and most authoritative treaty on yoga, Patanjali’s *Yoga Sūtras*,

which is defined by voluntary undertaking of moral, psychological, and physical asceticism to achieve an absolute oneness (*samadhi*) with pure consciousness—a process which can be hastened by surrender to God.⁸¹ Yoga, as systemized in the classical treatise on yoga, Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtras* (c. 200 BCE), is delineated as a disciplined psychosomatic practice that purifies the practitioner's changing consciousness (*citta-vṛtti*) to eventually achieve a state of unwavering, one-pointed consciousness (*samadhi*) (Y.S. 1.2, 1.32, 2.1, 2.2).⁸²

The illuminating final union between a male God (Bhagavan, an epithet for God) and His lover, Sita (the consort and bride of Rama, an avatar of God) is the culminating end of the liner notes for this track. This refines the earlier liner notes that state “the soul becomes re-united with God and basks in the Sun of blissful union.”⁸³ Through the nuptial references and gendered subjects in the track's liner notes, an intimate relationship between the soul and God is indicated by the formal and sanctioned union (marriage) between lover and beloved. The themes of romantic intimacy pervades the sea of Indian *bhakti* saints' poetry and theology such as seen in the poetry of the beloved female saint Mīrābāī (c. 1500 CE), who composed love songs to the divine persona

describes a disciplined practice that purifies the individual consciousness to eventually achieve a state of perfected consciousness (*samadhi, turiya*).

⁸¹ S.N. Dasgupta, *Hindu Mysticism* (Global Grey, 2019 [1927]), chap. 3.

⁸² Edwin F. Bryant, *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: A New Edition, Translation, and Commentary with Insights from the Traditional Commentators* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009).

⁸³ Ibid.

Krishna relating to God as her lover and her husband; the theological exaltation of Radha-Krishna's love is also found in the Chaitanya, Vallabha, and Radhavallabha lineages of Hinduism.⁸⁴ The seat of God being the heart of the individual shares too with Tamil *bhakti* poetry that fashions devotional bodies into a temple where God resides.⁸⁵ Though unlike the ecstatic expressions of love upheld in the medieval *bhakti* schools, Turiya (Alice) expresses here serenity (*śānta*) more in accordance with the ascetic yogic traditions: "I lie down in perfect repose."⁸⁶

Swamini's later compositions, such as *Radha-Kṛṣṇa Nama Sankirtana* (1977) and *Transcendence* (1977), almost exclusively present her original arrangements of devotional chants (*bhajans*) and instrumental track titles in praise of sacred names of God and sacred cosmologies associated primarily with the substrate of Hinduism. By this time, she had started frequenting both Sai Baba and Hare Krishna communities and made pilgrimages to India to meet their charismatic spiritual founders, Sathya Sai Baba and Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, respectively.⁸⁷ The album title for *Radha-Kṛṣṇa Nama Sankirtana* seems to borrow directly from the Hare Krishna movement that has since its inception sought to re-popularize the fifteenth-century Gaudiya Vaishnava devotional

⁸⁴ John Stratton Hawley, *Three Bhakti Voices: Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in Their Time and Ours* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005); Graham M. Schweig, *Dance of Divine Love: The Rāsa Līlā of Krishna from the Bhagavata Purana, India's Classic Sacred Love Story* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 14.

⁸⁵ An example from South Indian Shiva-*bhakti* poet, Appar, who made the body into a temple of worship, can be found in Karen Pechilis, *The Embodiment of Bhakti* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 154.

⁸⁶ Coltrane, *Universal Consciousness*, liner notes; Barbara A. Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment: Fashioning Divine Bodies and Devotional Bodies in Kṛṣṇa Bhakti*, Routledge Hindu Studies Series (London ; New York: Routledge, 2015), chap. 2, Apple Books.

⁸⁷ Alice Coltrane, *Transcendence*, recorded May 1977, Warner Brothers BS 3077, 1977, vinyl, liner notes.

practice of collective, public chanting (*saṃkīrtan*) the names (*nāma*) of Radha and Krishna.⁸⁸ In the daily ritual life of Hare Krishna temples, it is easy to grasp the centrality of *nama-sankirtana* (*nāmasaṃkīrtana*), conceived of as the ultimate *bhakti* and salvific ritual praxis.⁸⁹ Of the many ritual chants recited daily in Hare Krishna temples, there are the Sanskrit and English translation recitation of fifteenth-century *bhakti* saint Chaitanya’s eight-verse Sanskrit prayer, *Śikṣāṣṭaka*, which glorifies Krishna *nama-sankirtana*.⁹⁰

The LPs are complete with liner notes illuminating a number of traditional *bhajans* like “Govinda Jai Jai,” “Bhaja Govindam” and “Sri Nrsimha” through a *bhakti* hermeneutics that extols names (*nama*), forms (*rupa*), pastimes (*lila*), and qualities (*guna*)

⁸⁸ To further understand the soteriological importance of *nama-sankirtana*, one may refer to Tamal Krishna Goswami’s (a close and prominent disciple of Prabhupada) academic study of Prabhupada’s *krishna-bhakti* theology; see Tamal Krishna Goswami and Graham M. Schweig, *A Living Theology of Krishna Bhakti: The Essential Teachings of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), especially 177-183. See also Beck, *Sonic Theology*, 201-3.

In U.S. popular culture since the late 1960s, the Hare Krishna movement (a colloquial name for ISKCON that proves this point as well) has been represented by Hare Krishna devotees performing *nama-sankirtana*. For example, the popular Broadway musical *Hair* (1968) and later film adaptation (1979) feature scenes with the singing of the Hare Krishna mantra and young Hare Krishna devotees dancing and chanting. Also, there is the famous George Harrison song “My Sweet Lord” (1969) which popularized the chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra. See Goswami and Schweig, *A Living Theology of Krishna Bhakti*, 180.

Please note that ‘Hare’ in ‘Hare Krishna’ is the vocative form of *Harā* which is a name for Radha.

⁸⁹ See Goswami and Schweig, *A Living Theology of Krishna Bhakti*, 177-183.

⁹⁰ Two lines of Chaitanya’s eight-line poem is worth recounting for their similarity to Swamini’s own position on the names of God:

Saṃkīrtana of the name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is completely victorious, purifying the mirror of the mind, extinguishing the great conflagration of material existence, spreading moonlight to the night-blossoming lotus of good fortune, enlivening the bride of knowledge (*vidyā*), expanding the ocean of bliss (*ānanda*), arousing the taste of complete ambrosial nectar (*amṛta*) at every step, and bathing the souls of all.

You have manifested manifold names (*nāmans*) in which you have invested all of your inherent power (*śakti*), and no fixed time has been prescribed for remembering (*smaraṇa*) them. Such is your grace, O Bhagavān....

of God as well as various avatars and exemplars of surrender and devotion.⁹¹ For example, the liner notes for “Prema Muditha” reads as follow:

Prema Muditha: Prema Muditha manase kaho, Rama Rama Ram means, 'with a heart filled with love, say Rama Rama Ram'. Rama is another name of the Supreme Lord which means naturally rejoicing and delightful.⁹²

The liner notes of these records mention Sathya Sai Baba, Swami Prabhupada, and Hare Krishna and Sai Baba centers—all of which are recipients of Swamini’s gratitude and praise.⁹³ In the liner notes to the title track of *Transcendence*, Alice Coltrane, now Swamini Turiyasangitananda, addresses both the meaning and significance of *sankirtan* (pronounced without the final Sanskrit ‘a’ in English and Hindi) for her as well as revealing Swami Prabhupada’s influence:

Transcendence. A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, one of the world's most outstanding exponents on the science and philosophy of the Supreme Person, writes in his translation of Ch. 3, v15 [verse 15] from the Bhagavadgita, "...Consequently the all-pervading Transcendence is eternally situated in acts of sacrifice." *Sankirtan, or the chanting of the Lord's names is my favorite sacrifice, and transcendental loving service rendered unto to the Supreme Lord is my favorite offering.*⁹⁴

Through these records’ liner notes and tracks, one can see Swamini Turiyasangitananda foregrounding *bhakti* practices, particularly *nama-sankirtana*. At her Vedantic Center, founded in 1972, which attracted a number of talented musicians and singers, devotional

⁹¹ Alice Coltrane, *Radha-Krsna Nama Sankirtana*, recorded August 1977, Warner Brothers BS 2986, 1977, vinyl, liner notes; Coltrane, *Transcendence*, liner notes. Her articulation of *bhakti*, or embodied and devotional Hinduism, is decidedly non-sectarian, not exclusively appealing to one supreme personal form of God above other embodiments, but instead embracing a multitude of divine names and beings. This is evident when considering the full body of her musical and written works.

⁹² Kahn in Coltrane, *Spiritual Eternal*, liner notes, 21.

⁹³ Coltrane, *Radha-Krsna Nama Sankirtana*, liner notes; Coltrane, *Transcendence*, liner notes.

⁹⁴ Kahn in Coltrane, *Spiritual Eternal*, liner notes, 21; emphasis added.

chanting of God's names became part of liturgy and communal praxis, and for the first time, some of her Black American students are heard on these albums chanting alongside Swamini.⁹⁵

Following the end of her three-year commercial contract with Warner Brothers in 1978, Swamini's iconic arrangements of Indian devotional hymns—blended with her distinctive voice, Detroit gospel flairs, golden harp arpeggios, and the Wurlitzer organ resonance—were withdrawn from the commercial recording studios, nurtured, instead, in the intimate ritual life and liturgical practices of her Vedantic Center (est. 1972) in Woodland Hills, California. The center was later relocated to secluded lands in Agoura, California in 1983 and called the Shanti Anantam Ashram, where her disciples could “live and worship together according to the core principles taught at the Vedantic Center.”⁹⁶ In 1994, the ashram was renamed to the Sai Anantam Ashram in honor of recognizing guru Sathya Sai Baba as the living avatar of God.⁹⁷

The concluding of Swamini's commercial recording contract in 1978 perhaps indicated the limitations of commercial audiences and musical genres' ability to bend to and accommodate Swamini's devotional modality and Swamini's need to be further independent as a spiritual leader. Though we have seen that popular music today can

⁹⁵ Adams, *Portrait of Devotion*, chap. “Devotional Songs of Bliss,” sec. “Let the Children Lead;” “Sri Nrsimha,” featuring Shankari Adams, track 7, on Coltrane, *Transcendence*; Kahn in Coltrane, *Spiritual Eternal*, liner notes.

⁹⁶ Berkman, *Monument Eternal*, 99.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

accommodate *kirtan* artists like 2013 GRAMMY nominee Krishna Das, Swamini's music is a forerunner by at least a decade—if not three decades—to the popularization of new-age music of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century and American *bhajan* or *kirtan* artists.⁹⁸ One indicator of this is her pioneering use of the harp as a solo instrument in jazz, an instrument that would later be common to new-age music.⁹⁹ Harpist Andreas Vollenweider, who was the first recipient of the GRAMMY's "New Age Recording" category in 1986, seems to be the pivotal entry of the harp becoming mainstream to American audiences.¹⁰⁰ Interestingly enough, her later mostly *bhajan*-based ashram music only recently resurfaced into the wider public sphere posthumously in Luaka Bop's reissuing of her ashram arrangements on *The Ecstatic Music of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda* (2017).¹⁰¹

Remarking on the transition out of her Warner Brothers contract, Swamini saw it as part of her deepening spiritual responsibility in the world: "After fulfilling my Warner contract, I really wanted to go deeper into what the Lord had outlined for me to do." Although we might be led to believe that this meant a renunciation of the world, a life of seclusion, the next thirty years, however, were embedded in religious networks

⁹⁸ Ibid., 106.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 70.

¹⁰⁰ Berkman, *Monument Eternal*, 70. "GRAMMY Awards Winners & Nominees for Best New Age Album," GRAMMY.com, accessed April 12, 2021, <https://www.grammy.com/grammys/awards/winners-nominees/187>; John Schaefer, "New Sounds: Andreas Vollenweider," *Spin*, October 15, 2019, <https://www.spin.com/2019/10/new-sounds-andreas-vollenweider/>.

¹⁰¹ Alice Coltrane, *World Spirituality Classics 1: The Ecstatic Music Of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda*, with John Panduranga Henderson (vocals), Sai Ram Iyer (Tamil vocals), Shankari Adams (vocals), Radha Botofasina (vocals) et al., recorded between 1982 and 1995, Luaka Bop LBOP0087, 2017, CD.

that spanned up and down California, reached into other U.S. cities, and crossed the ocean into India (at least a dozen trips to India between 1989 and 2005).¹⁰² Adams documents Swamini and her students booking flights and selecting and practicing *bhajans* to chant at the annual Ratha-yatra (“Chariot”) Festival (in celebration of the deity Jagannatha) organized by ISKCON’s Berkeley temple and hosted at San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park.¹⁰³ They were also invited to perform at the same festival held in Venice Beach, California. The recounted scenes of these *kirtan* festivals illustrate ecstatic feelings stirring the audience as they chanted these *bhajans*, further evidencing typical embodiments of *bhakti*:

Once again, Swamini’s organ accompaniment of the chanting propelled the energy upward. The large audience of enthused chanters responded with unrestrained joy. Their fervent singing of the Holy Names and playing of percussion instruments evoked spontaneous ‘holy dancing’ from many.¹⁰⁴

The *bhajans* and group chanting (*kirtan*) at the heart of Swamini’s ashram orthopraxis produced a material body of non-commercial recordings through her independent label and publishing house Avatar Book Institute: *Turiya Sings* (1982), *Divine Songs* (1987), *Infinite Chants* (1990), and *Glorious Chants* (1995). These recordings are her most devotional (*bhakti*) and Hindu-influenced works and remain wholly underappreciated. Quoting *Endless Wisdom I*, one of three recondite volumes of divine

¹⁰² Adams, *Portrait of Devotion*, chap. “Devotional Songs of Bliss” and “Land of the Avatars;” Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, interview with author, July 14, 2020.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, chap. “Devotional Songs of Bliss.”

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, sec. “Sounds of Spirit.”

revelations penned by Swamini, the text of her first cassette tape *Turiya Sings* implicates her musical compositions as intentionally rooted in religious praxis: “As it was in the beginning... let your music be the sacred act of supreme worship, dedication and devotion.”¹⁰⁵ On *Divine Songs*, the accompanying liner notes recognizes and embraces the Sanskrit chants’ devotional intent and acknowledges their origination in India.¹⁰⁶ With folded hands, draped in a bright garment and surrounded by temple architecture, Swamini evokes an Indian religious aesthetic to invite her listeners of *Infinite Chants* into her “Mandir” (temple) where devotional chanting of traditional Indian hymns remixed with modern jazz transports you/us into transcendence:

“In this Mandir, you are hearing chanting like no other chanting in the universe. I can say that with all clarity and verification by God that nobody chants like this....I see what is occurring on the inner plane, and it is beyond ordinary human experience.”

- Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda¹⁰⁷

Adams’ description of the multi-layered devotional recording process begins in the communal worship space with the *bhajans* being recorded to cassette tapes during the

¹⁰⁵ Alice Coltrane, *Endless Wisdom Vol. 1* (Los Angeles, California: Avatar Book Institute, 1982) qtd. in Stephen Hill, Liner Notes for Alice Coltrane, *Turiya Sings*, Avatar Book Institute AB-100, 1982, cassette, accessed June 24, 2021, <https://www.alicecoltrane.com/turiya-sings-full>.

¹⁰⁶ Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda, *Divine Songs*, with students of the Vedantic Center (vocals, percussions), Avatar Book Institute AB-101, 1987, cassette, <https://www.alicecoltrane.com/divine-songs-full>, liner notes.

¹⁰⁷ Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda, *Infinite Chants*, with John Panduranga Henderson (lead vocalist) and Students of the Vedantic Center, Avatar Book Institute AB-102, 1990, cassette, <https://www.alicecoltrane.com/infinite-chants>, liner notes.

Sunday worship service.¹⁰⁸ Later, additional arrangements, instruments, vocals, and professional edits were added to finalize each song.¹⁰⁹

Swamini describes the chanting of God's names as 'the greatest musical offering' above instrumental sound.¹¹⁰ Of the meaning of the devotional musical praxis of chanting (*kirtan*), Swamini describes the soul is able to achieve higher states of consciousness and liberation from chanting the sacred names of God:

There may not be any words in the English language to truly describe this. However, one becomes immersed in the glory of the Names – the soul is enlivened. It is uplifted when hearing the Names of the Lord. People should open their hearts to experience the chanting. Let it permeate within. Experience its truth. One need not be a musician, nor of a certain age. Hearing the chanting of the Holy Names will produce spiritual good. *The sound itself allows the spirit to soar and be transported to higher realms of divine consciousness.*¹¹¹

To be able to grasp Swamini's exegesis on devotional chanting, one must have a basic comprehension of the illocutionary power attributed to sound, particularly Sanskrit speech, found in the earliest Vedic texts and still powerfully operative today in modern Hinduisms. The four ancient Vedic texts (*Rg*, *Yajur*, *Sāma*, and *Atharva*) are taken by orthodox Brahminical Hindu schools to be authoritative, primordial revelations heard (*śruti*) or seen by the seers or sages (*rishis*) engaged in meditation.¹¹² The heard hymns and mantras, which were precisely preserved through tedious memorization and oral

¹⁰⁸ Adams, *Portrait of Devotion*, sec. "Universal Call to Heal."

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Adams, *Portrait of Devotion*, sec. "The Greater Instrument."

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*; emphasis added.

¹¹² Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment*, chap. 4.

transmission by Brahmin priests, were taken to be eternal truth and divine knowledge. The Sanskrit mantras, which are essential to efficacious performance of the ancient Vedic rituals, operated not as symbols or signifiers for an object, but rather merged with what they signified, existing as sonic object invested with living presence of the gods (*devas*), and when uttered and deployed properly, such invested sound produces, structures, conveys and shapes the phenomenological world.¹¹³ In the later, post-Vedic theistic *bhakti* theologies, the chanting of the revealed names and glories of God is not so much concerned with shaping the cosmos as 1) expressing the state of devotion and 2) purifying and liberating the sojourning devotee.¹¹⁴ Similar to the Vedic perspective of mantras, the name of God is non-different from God, and by reciting God's names, the self is directly encountering and experiencing God.¹¹⁵ In the final analysis, Swamini reiterates this perspective in full:

If you recite the Names with devotion, you have the great opportunity to draw closer to God. Liberation (from future birth) has even been granted to certain ones who chanted ceaselessly with consecration and devotion. The Holy Names are a healing stream from the living waters of God's Causeless Mercy. The Holy Names are very powerful; they are a panacea for human ills. Often they are heard resounding within the depths of one's being... After awhile, one's self is not singing anymore. One is hearing his or her voice blend into another Voice that belongs to God. When you hear that glorious Voice, you never want to hear anything else again... only God.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Ibid.; Beck, *Sonic Theology*, 23-34.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 188; Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment*, chap. 4.

¹¹⁵ Holdrege, *Bhakti and Embodiment*, chap. 4.

¹¹⁶ Adams, *Portrait of Devotion*, sec. "Language of Soul."

4.3 Crafting an Academic Foray into Swamini

Although this religio-historical narrative attempts to summarize Alice's aesthetic transition from commercial to non-commercial artistry that parallels her progressive spiritual development from spiritual seeker to guru, it may be useful to note that other temporal narratives of this progression have been used to serve other constructive purposes. Late-ethnomusicologist Franya Berkman divides Alice's commercial discography into three discrete periods, each corresponding to both musical and spiritual milestones in Alice's intensifying journey. In the first period, from 1968 to early 1970, Berkman frames Alice's sound within the musical interventions of John Coltrane's jazz legacy. The second period discussed is between 1970 and 1971 is marked by her personal relationship with Swami Satchidananda and the fruits of exploring Vedanta and India's religio-musical traditions. In the final period between late 1971 to 1978, Berkman finds Alice's work to be a marvelous exhibition of her extraordinary "creative omnipotence" and "idiosyncratic religious synthesis."¹¹⁷ These albums include *Universal Consciousness* (1971), *World Galaxy* (1971), *Lord of Lords* (1972), *Eternity* (1975), *Transcendence* (1977), *Radha-Krsna-Nama-Sankirtana* (1977), and *Transfiguration* (1978). Through this analytical framing, Berkman stands against the gendering of jazz virtuosity

¹¹⁷ Berkman, *Monument Eternal*, 67.

and inner artistic genius as a decidedly male province, a pervasive motif of jazz biographies that sidelines the equally extraordinary artistry of Black women.¹¹⁸

Berkman's scholarship pioneers by positioning Alice Coltrane's Hindu religious influences as central to apprehending Coltrane's body of musical compositions. The study, however, aims to examine her musical virtuosity and genius rather than positioning her as contiguous with other female Hindu gurus, Black American religious engagement with India, or a broader history of Afro-Asian formations.¹¹⁹ Thus, Coltrane inevitably becomes an exception that reinforces what is understood to be normatively true—that is, Asian religions are not Black religions, nor vice versa. Her study, though indispensable, is not well-positioned to push the research agenda towards challenging religious and racial discourses that make Coltrane more likely to be at the margins or wholly unseen. Swamini Turiyasangitananda is certainly an extraordinary person, but, importantly, not a historical anomaly, especially for the American counterculture period

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 13 and 17.

¹¹⁹ There is one notable exception. Howard and Sue Bailey Thurman are acknowledged as part of the first African American cohort to visit India and meet Mahatma Gandhi in Berkman's study, thus acknowledging Black precedents to Alice's dozen or so journeys to India. For areas and research that Alice Coltrane could be positioned in relations to, see Rebecca Kumar, "'Let Yo Booty Do That Yoga': Black Goddess Politics," *Scholar & Feminist Online*, Feminist and Queer Afro-Asian Formations, no. 14.3 (2018), <http://sfonline.barnard.edu/feminist-and-queer-afro-asian-formations/let-yo-booty-do-that-yoga-black-goddess-politics/>; Karen Pechilis, ed., *The Graceful Guru: Hindu Female Gurus in India and the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Vijay Prashad, "Black Gandhi," *Social Scientist* 37, no. 1/2 (2009): 3–20; Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001); Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012).

and the Black freedom movements of the 1960s, as evidenced by two other African American Hindus and their communities discussed in this dissertation.

Since before the twentieth century, African Americans promulgated, debated and positioned themselves within the global affairs of Asiatic countries—politically, culturally and religiously.¹²⁰ In 1869, Frederick Douglass delivered a speech entitled “Our Composite Nationality” to reason in favor of Chinese immigrant’s human rights and home in America.¹²¹ From African Methodist Episcopal Church publications of the late nineteenth century to eminent African American scholar W. E. B. Du Bois, African American newspapers and some Black intellectuals long envisioned a common struggle against imperialism, colonialism and racism in a global solidarity of both Asian and African races, conceived of as the nonwhite or “darker races” of the world.¹²² In *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903), W. E. B. Du Bois succinctly proclaims: “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colorline,—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.”¹²³ In the 1930s and 1940s, African Americans such as Sue Bailey Thurman, Blanche Wright Nelson, and

¹²⁰ Marc Gallicchio, *African American Encounter with Japan and China* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Quinton Hosford Dixie and Peter R. Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World: Howard Thurman’s Pilgrimage to India and the Origins of African American Nonviolence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011); Prashad, “Black Gandhi”; Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*.

¹²¹ Stephen R. Prothero and Thomas A. Tweed, *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 67-70.

¹²² Gallicchio, *African American Encounter with Japan and China*, 10; Prashad, “Black Gandhi”; Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*.

¹²³ W. E. B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. Brent Hayes Edwards (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 15.

Pauli Murray encountered Indian society and implemented Gandhi and Gandhian ideas into their interreligious and secular initiatives for the benefit of both Indians and African Americans.¹²⁴ From Alice Walker to Tina Turner, Erykah Badu, Beyoncé, and Willow Smith, Black female artists have a critical history of channeling Buddhism and Hinduism as sacred and ancestral grounds for advancing Black female liberation from misogyny and anti-blackness.¹²⁵ If we are able to grasp the long political and cultural history of Afro-Asian formations, we will not be surprised that there exists a rich religious history as well that goes well-beyond Gandhi's influence on Thurman's Christian mysticism as seen in his classic treatise *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1949).¹²⁶

The research to come will need to consider this history in order to advance new inquiries. For instance, we may begin to comparatively ask how does Blackness intersect with Orientalism in the history of Black formations of Asia and Asian religions? Does it produce a liberatory that achieves a radically subversive and subaltern intent against colonialism? Did Coltrane's ashram or teachings evoke W. E. B. Du Bois' secular racial politics, positioning Black and Brown devotees as a unified religious body, thus,

¹²⁴ Dennis C. Dickerson, "Gandhi's India and Beyond: Black Women's Religious and Secular Internationalism, 1935–1952," *The Journal of African American History* 104, no. 1 (January 2019): 59–83, <https://doi.org/10.1086/701106>.

¹²⁵ Nathalie Aghoro, "Agency in the Afrofuturist Ontologies of Erykah Badu and Janelle Monáe," *Open Cultural Studies* 2 (November 1, 2018): 330–40, <https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2018-0030>; Kyle Garton-Gundling, "'Ancestors We Didn't Even Know We Had': Alice Walker, Asian Religion, and Ethnic Authenticity," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 6 (March 1, 2015); Rebecca Kumar, "'Let Yo Booty Do That Yoga': Black Goddess Politics"; Tina Turner, *Happiness Becomes You: A Guide to Changing Your Life for Good*, (New York: Atria Books, 2020).

¹²⁶ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996 [1949]). See also Dixie and Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World*.

naturalizing them as partners against their mutual and distinct oppressions? How might normative depictions of Asian spirituality and femininity discursively mask the political potency of Black artists like Alice Coltrane? Could Coltrane's religious teachings and musical compositions be seen as postcolonial and implicitly challenge White Christian authority in wholeheartedly endorsing Satya Sai Baba as a living avatar, thus, provincializing Jesus Christ? This provincializing of Christ is evident in many of her liner notes wherein Christ is positioned alongside other powerful "manifestations" like Mother Kali, Sri Ramakrishna, Persian founder of Bahá'í, Bahá'u'lláh, Egyptian God Ptah (El Daoud), and Sri Aurobindo; also positioned among those exemplars believed to exhibit pure love of God and sacrifice like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Swami Satchidananda.¹²⁷ Is this decolonizing in ways comparable to early twentieth-century African American political solidarity with India and Gandhi?

Research ahead can also make a serious consideration of one remarkable difference between Swamini and many of the social justice activists of the Civil Rights movement who drew inspiration from Gandhi. Whereas Gandhi's philosophy and practice of *satyagraha* and *ahimsa* are often translated and deployed for fighting against American racism, Coltrane advances, instead, her assemblage of positionalities— for example, as a jazz musician, African American, and woman—toward racial, gender, sexual (i.e., her celibacy), and religious liberation with pronounced *fidelity* to the

¹²⁷ Coltrane, *Huntington Ashram Monastery*, liner notes; Coltrane, *Universal Consciousness*, liner notes.

religious aims of Indian guru movements she encountered. While Thurman in *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1949) appropriates Gandhi to re-frame Christianity as politically and racially sustainable for African American civil rights, Coltrane's musical integration of Indian *rāgas*, the tamboura, and *bhajan* lyrics centrally elucidates and continually investigates themes of *satchidananda*, *Bhagavān*, self-realization, *mokṣa*, *tapasyā*, and *bhakti*.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*. A point worth considering is whether or not such fidelity reproduced other characteristics of the Indian models she received from her teachers and travels in India. For instance, one wonders if the gender roles and separation at the ashram were impacted by norms prevalent in Indian Hindu temples. I read the following dress codes focused primarily on women on the official website to Swamini's Vedantic Center that stated: "Dress Code for TVC Events: Visitors should dress modestly. Female visitors, please avoid wearing sleeveless dresses, sleeveless blouses, halter tops, shorts, pants or short skirts. Long skirts, dresses, saris or salvar kameez are fine." See The Vedantic Center, "Contact Information," accessed April 13, 2021, <http://thevedanticcenter.org/contactus.html>.

5. Krsnanandini Devi Dasi (Clarissa Jones), January 5, 1952 - November 13, 2020

5.1 Biographical Overview

Krsnanandini Devi Dasi was an influential Black American *ācāryā* (female teacher), orator, author, and pioneer in a Hindu guru-disciple lineage and tradition known as Gaudiya Vaishnavism.¹ In the transnational religious organization ISKCON (modern Gaudiya Vaishnavas), her foremost contributions and accomplishments pioneered the building of social and religious resources for supporting Vaishnava families and couples (the *grhastha* ashrama) and the creation of racially and religiously inclusive sacred spaces.² Her community leadership addressed two early limitations of the Hare Krishna movement (ISKCON): 1) limited family integration into religious life; and 2) racial inequity. The institutions she co-founded and lead directly contributed to a central social change in the Hare Krishna movement from young monastic ascetics who denigrated marriage and family life in the countercultural days of the '60s and '70s to a congregation-based society dominated by nuclear families from the 1980s onward.³

¹ Gaudiya (or Bengali) Vaishnavism is a religious theology and lineage originating from 11th century Bengal, India that emphasizes a devotional relationship (*bhakti yoga*) with God, primarily in a primordial feminine and masculine forms of Srimati Radharani (Radha) and Sri Krishna.

² The *grhastha* (householder) ashram is the second of four life stages of a late-Vedic religious life model. The stages in sequential order are *brahmacharya* (unmarried religious student), *grhastha* (householder), *vānaprastha* (retiree) and *sannyāsa* (renunciate). For further reading on the ashrama system in India and Hinduism, please see Patrick Olivelle, *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

³ For an in-depth sociological study of ISKCON's social reorganization from zealous young monastics to congregational householders, see E. Burke Rochford, *Hare Krishna Transformed* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

Furthermore, her initiatives, such as co-founding Krishna's African Soldiers and the Cleveland Nama Hatta with Parvati Devi Dasi (another Black American woman/Vaishnavi), created inclusive and diverse religious spaces in American Hinduism. These were partially in response to facing racial discrimination in predominantly White Vaishnava Hindu spaces in the 1970s. Her deference for her Christian family background and to the Islamic religious commitments of her Black American husband Tariq Saleem Zayid engendered their professional and community works with an interfaith and pluralist vision, and practitioners of other religions counted Krsnanandini amongst their allies.⁴ In forging new and expanded routes for accessing Hindu devotionalism (*bhakti*) for families, Black people, and a broader range of religious and spiritual aspirants, she addressed ongoing barriers to the transmissibility of Hindu devotional practices and discourses.

Over the course of nearly fifty years, Krsnanandini co-founded the Radha Shyamasundar Loka Temple of ISKCON (1973-1978), Krishna's African Soldiers (c. 1982), the Dasi-Ziyad Family Institute (DZFI) (1996-Present), the Cleveland Nama Hatta Program (1996-Present), the Lord Have Mercy Festival (1997-c. 2008), and the Grihastha

⁴ Evidence of this can be found in a number of projects in Cleveland, Ohio, such as their work with the Cleveland Catholic Diocese's Couple Ministry in 1998, their organizing of the Lord Have Mercy Festival (1997 – c. 2008), and their organizing of Cleveland's first Black Marriage Day in 2008 in Eastview United Church of Christ in Shaker Heights. See Margaret Bernstein, "Couples Renew Vows on Black Marriage Day Ceremony Showcases Husbands and Wives in Bid to Build up the Institution," *Plain Dealer (Cleveland)*, March 31, 2008, NewsBank; Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, "'The Lord Have Mercy' Festival Celebrates Interfaith Harmony," ISKCON News, August 23, 2008, <https://iskconnews.org/the-lord-have-mercy-festival-celebrates-interfaith-harmony,670/>; and Rebecca Freligh, "Marriage Tightens Couples To Counsel Others In Campaign To Cut Divorce Rate," *Plain Dealer (Cleveland)*, October 17, 1998, NewsBank.

Vision Team (GVT) (2002-Present).⁵ The Cleveland Nama Hatta Program (now ISKCON of Greater Cleveland) was for over twenty-five years the central gathering space for Cleveland ISKCON devotees and held mostly in Krsnanandini's Cleveland home (independently of ISKCON).⁶ In general, it has been an ongoing weekly religious gathering involving discussion on Vedic scriptures, extoling of God's names (not limited to Hindu names), eating *prasadam* (sanctified food) and developing meaningful social relationships.⁷ Black participants are visibly at the forefront of this program and represent a large presence in ways that ISKCON temples have not always consistently shown.⁸ Similarly, Krishna's African Soldiers was a small group intentionally created by and for "Black-bodied devotees" to build connections and co-create new religious spaces and programs for the Black community.⁹ The new spaces and programs presented

⁵ "About Us," Dasi-Ziyad Family Institute, accessed February 18, 2021, <http://dasiziyadfamilyinstitute.org/our-mission/about-us/>; Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, interview with author, July 14, 2020; Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, "'The Lord Have Mercy' Festival Celebrates Interfaith Harmony," ISKCON News, August 23, 2008, <https://iskconnews.org/the-lord-have-mercy-festival-celebrates-interfaith-harmony,670/>; Uttama Devi Dasi, "Blessed by the Best," Vaishnava Family Resources, November 20, 2020, <https://Vaishnavafamilyresources.org/en/blessed-by-the-best/>;

⁶ During this period, the official ISKCON temple in Cleveland had closed down leaving a much needed space to congregate,

⁷ "Cleveland Nama Hatta Program Facebook Group," Facebook Group, Facebook, n.d., <https://www.facebook.com/groups/975564429128594/>; "ISKCON Greater Cleveland YouTube Channel," YouTube Channel Page, YouTube, n.d., [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrLK1HGgT1SiyQIFs3GiOeA](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrLK1HGgT1SiyQIFs3GiOeA;); In Honor of HG Krsnanandini Devi Dasi Appearance Day, streaming video (Zoom, 2021), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpvKz7gLLk>; "ISKCON Greater Cleveland Facebook Page," Facebook, accessed February 24, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/IskconCle>; Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, interview with author, July 14, 2020.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, interview with author, July 14, 2020.

Vaishnavism in non-exclusive religious and racial terms holding space to validate and promote religious pluralism, racial diversity, and multiculturalism.¹⁰

As early as 1973, Krsnanandini, Bhumata Devi Dasi (her mother), and Rupchand Dasa (her stepfather) began creating Black-inclusive sacred Hindu spaces and programs, including a temple (now defunct) in East Cleveland (named the “Radha Shyamasundar Loka Temple of ISKCON”). The initial impetus to create these types of community spaces was as much of a product of their family’s engagement with Indian philosophical-religious literatures, such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, as it was of their experiences with anti-Black racism in the Hare Krishna temples in East Cleveland in the early 1970s. At the peak of the anti-Black racism they endured, the temple administrators attempted to have Krsnanandini’s mother (who was a local spiritual teacher) and her student arrested, which initiated a cascade of decisions that led their family on an intuitively guided road trip to the Hare Krishna temple in Dallas, TX. There, they had an unexpected meeting with the Bengali founder of the Hare Krishna movement, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami (henceforth “Prabhupada,” an honorific title used by members of ISKCON). At twenty years old in 1972, Clarissa Jones, pregnant with her second child, became an initiated disciple of Prabhupada from whom she received her Sanskrit name Krsnanandini Devi Dasi. At the initiation ceremony at the

¹⁰ Dasi, “‘The Lord Have Mercy’ Festival Celebrates Interfaith Harmony;” Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, interview with author, July 14, 2020.

Radha Kalachandji Temple in Dallas, Texas, Krsnanandini's mother (Bhumata Devi Dasi), stepfather (Rupchand Dasa), and two younger brothers (Ashutosh Dasa and Shubanu Dasa) received initiation too, taking the standard four prohibitive and one prescriptive vows, receiving their spiritual Sanskrit names and becoming disciples of Prabhupada.¹¹

As co-founder of the Dasi-Ziyad Institute, Krsnanandini along with her husband Tariq provided numerous counseling sessions, seminars, workshops, resources and retreats to educate couples and families on strong parenting and relationship skills.¹² A number of her community initiatives for Ohio families received press coverage in Ohio newspapers.¹³ Achieving a reputable professional and community status eventually unlocked more formal and prominent opportunities in her religious community. Krsnanandini was invited in 2001 by ISKCON's Congregational Development Committee to give several marriage and family workshops in India.¹⁴ Following her first trip to India, she returned with the encouragement of Bhakti Tirtha Swami and

¹¹ Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, interview with author, July 14, 2020. The prohibitive vows, known as "the four regulative principles," are abstentions from eating meat (including fish and eggs), taking intoxicants (including alcohol, tobacco, drugs and caffeine), gambling, and having sex outside the bond marriage and/or for purposes other than procreation; see Rochford, *Hare Krishna Transformed*, 220.

The prescriptive vow is to chant sixteen rounds (one round is 108 mantras) of the Hare Krishna mahamantra every day; this daily japa meditation takes about two hours to complete.

¹² Resources dedicated to same-sex couples, however, were wanting.

¹³ Bernstein, "Couples Renew Vows on Black Marriage Day Ceremony Showcases Husbands and Wives in Bid to Build up the Institution"; Freligh, "Marriage Tightens Couples To Counsel Others In Campaign To Cut Divorce Rate"; Jacqueline Marino, "Better Together: Class Act or Work in Progress?," *Plain Dealer (Cleveland)*, September 14, 2003, NewsBank.

¹⁴ Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, interview with author, July 14, 2020.

Anuttama Dasa, both members of ISKCON's GBC, to continue her counseling services for Vaishnava couples and families to help address the longstanding lack of resources exposed by high rates of divorce, separation, and dissatisfaction in ISKCON marriages.¹⁵ Thereafter, she established with her husband and other Hare Krishna devotees the Grihastha Vision Team (an organization also independent of ISKCON) which began to address the lack of professional family and partner resources for Hare Krishna devotees. In the Hare Krishna community, her reputation as the leading family life and marriage educator and guide now precedes her. Adjunct to the professional achievements and community labor that bolster this reputation, her excellence as a mother raising and homeschooling her ten children and nine stepchildren (who are now doctors, scientists, artists, and writers) heightens her eminence in this field. Furthermore, her interfaith marriage also has drawn considerable appreciation, receiving positive recognition in relationship coach Kathy Dawson's book *Cleveland Couples*, in *Essence Magazine's* April 2019 issue, and in recent articles by ISKCON News, the official news agency of ISKCON.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid.; Rochford, *Hare Krishna Transformed*, 231-2.

¹⁶ Kathy Dawson, *Cleveland Couples: Their Lives, Their Love, and Their Story of Commitment* (Cleveland, OH: Gray, 2004); Madhava Smullen, "Interfaith Vaishnava and Muslim Couple Featured in *Essence Magazine*," ISKCON News, accessed February 22, 2021, <https://iskconnews.org/interfaith-vaishnava-and-muslim-couple-featured-in-essence-magazine,6931/>; Madhava Smullen, "When the Husband Is Not a Devotee: The Grihastha Vision Team Responds," ISKCON News, accessed February 22, 2021, <https://iskconnews.org/when-the-husband-is-not-a-devotee-the-grihastha-vision-team-responds,2824/>.

Posthumously, she was awarded Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) Emeritus status from the National Council of Family Relations, honoring her extensive contributions in Family Life Education, including developing at least ten educational curricula for DZFI, years of community seminars, talks, events and workshops, and founding the Grihastha Vision Team.¹⁷ She is the author of two Vaishnava children's books, a book on religious chanting, and a succinct spiritual treatise (*The Booklet of Eights*), co-author of the GVT's book *Heart and Soul Connection: A Devotional Guide to Marriage, Service and Love*, and contributing author to a definitive marriage prep volume, *All-in-One Marriage Prep*.¹⁸

5.2 Perceiving Krsnanandini Devi Dasi's Authority

The academic community and public presently struggle to imagine a Black Hindu figure, their character, aesthetic, positionality, theology and influence—let alone a Black woman's authority in a conservative Hindu religious lineage. As indicated earlier, gender arguably plays a significant role in whether or not a religious authority will be considered historically significant or not. This is particularly true as it pertains to the

¹⁷ "CFLE Emeritus Status," National Council on Family Relations, accessed February 24, 2021, <https://www.ncfr.org/cfle-certification/maintain-your-certification/emeritus-status/>; "In Memoriam: Krsnanandini Devi Dasi," National Council on Family Relations, accessed February 24, 2021, <https://www.ncfr.org/news/memoriam-krsnanandini-devi-dasi>.

¹⁸ Susanne M Alexander, *All-in-One Marriage Prep: 75 Experts Share Tips & Wisdom to Help You Get Ready Now*, 2019; Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, *The First Book of Hare Krishna Puzzles, Quizzes and Riddles*, n.d.; Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, *The Narayana Number Book*, n.d., <http://krsnanandini.com/product/the-narayana-number-book/>; Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, *The Booklet of Eights: A Concise Guide to Spiritual Living* (Prema Press, 2015); Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, *The ABCs of Chanting the Holy Names of God* (Prema Press, 2018); Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, interview with author, July 14, 2020; The Grihastha Vision Team et al., *Heart and Soul Connection: A Devotional Guide to Marriage, Service, and Love* (BookBaby, 2014).

category of ‘guru,’ a lens from which both Hindu religious communities and their scholars can assert, evaluate, and reproduce *legitimized* religious authority. As a positionality, ‘guru’ has normatively been constructed as a male role within many of the Hindu religious communities that scholars study. If the category is adopted *in toto* without theoretical reflection, it will likely remain not only incapable of capturing how other genders wield ample religious authority, but also reproduce subordinate and auxiliary treatment of any historical figure who is not a man.

The following condensed account, though mediated through my position as participant-researcher, affords an opportunity to initiate consideration of Krsnanandini as a Black Hindu *acharya*, a teacher with religious authority imparting Vedic knowledge. The retold event occurred within the public religious context of ISKCON, her institutional home, which for much of Krsnanandini’s lifetime systematically limited what positions of authority or public appearance women could take—a barrier not faced by Bhakti Tirtha Swami. I employ the descriptive textual practices of ethnography to illustrate Black female religious authority acquired despite gender and race-based institutional barriers. This religious authority is similar in significance and legitimacy as those who bear the title of guru, but, admittedly, it is of a subaltern nature. As Amanda Lucia cited in her analysis of female avatar-guru Mata Amritanandamayi, Bruce Lincoln helpfully examines authority as “best understood in relational terms as the effect of a posited, perceived, or institutionally ascribed asymmetry between speaker and audience

that permits certain speakers to command not just the attention but the confidence, respect, and trust of their audience, or — an important proviso — to make audiences act as *if* this were so.”¹⁹ Similarly, we can perceive Krsnanandini’s authority in conveying Vedic and Hindu teachings through her public interactions and relationships with her audience. The conveyance of authority and standing through observational witnessing of relationships is perhaps parallel to how Krishna’s authority and legitimacy is perceptible immediately and personally to Arjuna, his friend-student interlocutor, and Sanjaya, the afar witness and narrator of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

The unstated theme of the lecture she gives is interfaith social work and overcoming interreligious conflicts, topics which she is intimately familiar with through her marriage to her Muslim husband Tariq and their years of interfaith community work. All direct quotes without citations in this vignette are taken from the publicly available recording of the live-streamed event, which I attended as a Zoom participant during its live recording.²⁰ I primarily chose this particular event for how it powerfully illustrates how Krsnanandini is regarded and received among members of the international Hare Krishna religious community. Secondly, the vignette offers insights into her own engaged social theology. Lastly, one can and should begin to

¹⁹ Bruce Lincoln, *Authority: Construction and Corrosion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 4 qtd. in Amanda J. Lucia, *Reflections of Amma: Devotees in a Global Embrace* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), emphasis in original.

²⁰ Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, “Krisnanandini Devi May 20th 2020 ISKCON of New Jersey (Towaco Temple),” streamed live on May 20, 2020, YouTube Video, 1:28:36, <https://youtu.be/GGYudnrUG2o>.

appreciate the complexity, sophistication and weightiness of her theological labor as her interpretations manifest her assemblage of positionalities as a Black American woman and Gaudiya Vaisnava devotee, mother of Black (and queer) children (particularly susceptible to state acts of violence), committed partner in honoring her husband's Islamic religious identity and community, and kin of three Christian minister aunts. This is all while avoiding having her own legitimacy and authenticity as a respected disciple of her preeminent guru diminished in a religious institution predominately administered by heterosexual White male leaders.²¹ One has to stand in awe at how she managed to thrive in such a precarious situation.

5.2.1 An Ethnographic Vignette of Black-Female-Hindu Authority

I met Krsnanandini for the first time seven years ago when she was the first (and only) woman of color speaker I saw giving a temple class at ISKCON Chicago.²² Since then, I had several opportunities to meet her again, such as during her large home-warming (or "blessing") gathering when she moved to North Carolina just two summers ago or during Hare Krishna festivals in 2019. She granted me an hour-long one-on-one interview in the summer of 2020. From these encounters and her lectures, she appeared to me to be immensely sincere, graceful, compassionate, warm, and with purpose and vision. On one summer evening on May 20th, 2020, when live online

²¹ Boundaries included ones based on sex-like claiming substantial religious authority,

²² I lived in Chicago for four years between 2010 and 2014 and regularly frequented the ISKCON Chicago temple for about three of those years.

gatherings were the near ubiquitous substitutes to “in-person” gatherings in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, an online Zoom session with over 250 participants commenced for a Krsnanandini Devi Dasi lecture. That year, from her home in Chapel Hill, NC, Krsnanandini gave at least a dozen online public lectures to online audiences, mostly North American, from May to November 2020.²³ The gathering occurred at a rather poignant moment in Krsnanandini’s life. Her voice choked as she began with an offering of gratitude to all those who she knew and who had given her love and support, especially then, as she transitioned into home hospice care. She had advanced stages of cancer plundering her body. She would only live for about six more months.

Unlike last autumn, when I attended the annual temple celebration for Radhastami at a local Hare Krishna temple with other temple goers including Krsnanandini and some of her adult children, we would not be crammed into an open room for this gathering, nor seating ourselves on the floor, wherever we could see the floor, as the invited speaker settled into the *vyasa-asana* (the seat of the guru) and adjusted the microphone ever closer.²⁴ We might not see how members of ISKCON New Goloka in North Carolina embody their respect and honor for Krsnanandini and her family by bowing their heads with folded palms when they see her or how they called

²³ For chronological selection of Krsnanandini’s public lectures available on YouTube recorded from May to November 2020, see Appendix B.

²⁴ Radhastami is a Hindu holiday that marks and celebrates the birthday of Radha, the consort of the God Krishna who embodies the divine feminine power (*shakti*) of Godhead. In Gaudiya Vaishnava theology, Radha is the highest embodiment of devotion (*bhakti*). The holiday occurs annually in early Fall (August-September).

and ushered her and her family to the front of the multiethnic and multiracial temple crowd of mostly South Asians and North Americans (though South Americans, Europeans, and Caribbean persons were present as well). In a moment of clear acknowledgement of her stature in ISKCON communities, Krsnanandini Devi Dasi was given the honor of being the first to perform the ritual bathing of the small Radha and Krishna deities on the annual celebration of Radha's appearance day (Radhastami).

Instead, we would all be sitting physically isolated from one another behind web cameras and screens. As a participant-observer of Krsnanandini's zoom lecture hosted by ISKCON of New Jersey (Towaco, NJ), I anticipated that "reading" the emotional energy of the room would be not only challenging, but even somewhat monotonous. I certainly did not expect an embodied experience like the feeling of sound waves reverberating in and around me as temple guests play instruments and sing devotional (*bhakti*) songs to various expansions, incarnations, close associates and characteristics of God throughout a typical evening program at a temple. The curtains (or other physical barriers) opening and closing to reveal and conceal the beautifully decorated and ritually venerated deities would not be coming in and out of the foreground of activity. Neither the physical circulation of offered flowers to smell, burning ghee lamps to waver hands over, water droplets to feel sprinkled onto our heads, the background sounds of friends catching up nor children delightfully playing were to be anticipated in this new terrain. Therefore, I was genuinely surprised at the feelings of excitement and outpour

of emotions that did soon swell and engulf us at this most innocuous virtual space over the course of seventy-five minutes.

“Mother Krsnanandini does not need much of an introduction,” said Kenyan Madanana-gopala Das (also written as Madana-gopala Dasa), the Director of Education and Communications at ISKCON of New Jersey and host of this zoom meeting.

“Everybody knows her. She has touched the lives and the hearts of practically everyone who’s here and hundreds of other devotees who are not here. [...] as well as members of other faith communities worldwide by her selfless service.” For the benefit of the assumed few who may not know her, he briefly stated that Krsnanandini is a senior disciple (initiate) of Prabhupada, the founder of ISKCON. Her specific location in the religious institution of ISKCON always already elicits esteem and respect for the communal value placed on both member seniority and direct discipleship to the founder. Three of Krsnanandini’s noteworthy accomplishments were raised as central to her identity and importance: 1) Her successful interfaith marriage to Tariq Saleem Ziyad (or simply referred to as Tariq Prabhu) who is Muslim; 2) Her co-founding of the non-profit ZDFI through which she and her husband offer a range of services as Certified Family Life Educators (CFLEs); and 3) Her co-founding of the Grihastha Vision Team (GVT), a group of certified mentors and professionals dedicated to providing resources to support Gaudiya Vaishnava couples and families. These highlighted elements of Krsnanandini’s identity fit within the prescribed domestic roles of *varnashrama dharma*

for women. Her authority, as presented here, is her expertise in domestic affairs such as marriage, parenting, and other familial relationships. As aptly summarized by Madanana-gopala, Krsnanandini has “saved your families, saved your marriages, [and] saved your relationships.”

With this short, but enthusiastic introduction, the screen was set to hear from Krsnanandini who then appeared seated and adorned with a long and narrow u-shaped tilak (generally, a forehead marking conventional to India) with a single leaf hanging at the bottom; this bodily aesthetic and its specific shape publicly announced her as a Gaudiya Vaishnava. Wrapped in a silky white sari paired with a sienna red choli (a shortened blouse often worn with a sari), Krsnanandini wore intricate dangling silver earrings, necklaces and a dark amber headwrap fully covering her scalp—with the ends twisted and then secured around at the back of her head, appearing like a fabric crown. Visibly, she shone with Hindu (Gaudiya Vaishnava), African American and South Asian aesthetic influences, as I normally saw her dressed.

After honoring first her Indian Vaishnava guru, then her African American Vaishnava mother, then her African American Muslim husband, and finally all her children (including her ten biological and others who she embraced as her own), Krsnanandini moved to expound on a verse from the *Srimad Bhagavatam* (SB), also known as the *Bhagavata Purana* (BP), a seminal text for Vaishnavas. The latter title literally translates to “the old story of God,” which Krsnanandini also alludes to in her

opening. SB is one scripture that is very commonly read in ISKCON (and elsewhere) and contains an expansive variety of interlocking philosophical and theological stories and, in this case, extensive commentary by ISKCON's founder and Krsnanandini's guru. The program unfolded as many ISKCON scriptural classes did. In sequence, there was first a call and response singing of *Jaya Radha Madhava* written by Indian philosopher Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinoda and the mantra "*Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya*," followed by chanting the selected SB Sanskrit verse (SB 8.7.8) and reading an English translation and commentary by Prabhupada, and, finally, singing several Sanskrit *praṇāma* mantras (verbalized venerations) to Radha, Krishna, past gurus, and Vaishnavas. Outside of this, her class on the verse offered her audience evocative openings to connect the SB to other religious or spiritual perspectives and vice versa through her interpretative work. Just before singing the bhajan (devotional song) *Jaya Radha Madhava*, for instance, she announced, "I'm just going to do a little invocation to invite the spirit to take over." This framing, which opens a range of theological and philosophical perspectives on the Sanskrit song, is not unusual for Krsnanandini.²⁵

²⁵ In other public and recorded seminars and lectures, Krsnanandini's framing of Sanskrit mantra invocations similarly presented them ecumenically. For example, she states in one lecture that she wants to "invoke some prayers because we need the help of the divine," and offered respects to "the all-pervading God," her spiritual master Bhaktivedanta Swami, and "all the spiritual teachers." These seem to be intentional frames adjusted to accommodate the religious context she finds herself within. See Krsnanandini Devi Dasi "Racism and Spirituality," ISKCON Toronto, streamed live on July 15, 2020, YouTube Video, 1:32:44, <https://youtu.be/UbsF0sao9rk> and "Krsnanandini Devi Dasi: Faith and Surrender," Sadhvi Sanga, May 29, 2020, YouTube Video, 1:08:33, <https://youtu.be/imXFWsVasDE>.

As background to this verse, she retells the well-known puranic tale of the churning of the ocean of milk when the demigods or celestials (devas) appealed to Vishnu to help them defeat despotic or malevolent celestials (asuras) who had taken control of the celestial planets. As Krsnanandini tells, in order to regain control of the celestial planets (“heavens”), Vishnu advises the devas to make an alliance with the asuras to churn the ocean of milk to produce a nectar of immortality (*amṛta*). This was a somewhat unusual alliance to make because of the differences in aims between the two groups. This nectar, once acquired, would allow the devas to overcome their obstacles and regain their powerful positions. Here, as well, Krsnanandini creates space for cross-religious interpretations: the demigods could be alternatively understood as angels (“demigods or angels”), and the struggle between the devas and asuras in SB was analogized to a similar story of war between Satan’s followers and God’s angels in the Bible.

While speaking to her audience, her body is animated, adding hand gestures and movements that mark and emphasize her points—like a hand on her heart when mentioning God or a parent’s sense of satisfaction and pointing towards the camera to give an instruction. She speaks with conviction, clarity, sincerity and the aptitudes of a

I also have noted that she uses ISKCON-specific or Gaudiya Vaishnava language in contexts with a recognizably intra-ISKCON focus. For instance, see “Vaishnavi Sanga with H.G H.G [original has typo] Krsnanandini Devi Dasi,” Vaishnavi Ministry North America, August 10, 2020, YouTube Video, 1:57:36, <https://youtu.be/I5bqrkAmZB4>.

public orator—slowing her pace and softening when inviting curiosity, pausing to allow for marination of an idea, speaking directly to specific experiences relevant to her audience (e.g. the parent-child relationship and quarantining), and increasing tempo and volume when directing and instructing.

Continuing on, she mentions familiar episodes within the story that occurred while attempting to implement this grandiose scheme of Vishnu and the celestial demigods. She recalls, for instance, how Shiva took the burden of drinking the horrendous poison that seeps out the ocean's churning, and the golden mountain, an enormous snake (as rope) and the tortoise avatar of Vishnu (or Krishna, which is interchangeably used in this retelling) which were vital to accomplish the task at hand. Undeterred by the uncustomary nature of this plan (e.g., partnering with the asuras), the devas faithfully followed Vishnu's instructions given along the way. Rhetorically, Krsnanandini interjects a framing question during her retelling: "Now, you all might ask a question: 'Now, Mother Krsnanandini that sounds all well and good, but what does that have to do with us today?'"

At this juncture, as will happen again, Krsnanandini offers a bit of theological challenge to rigid religious communal boundaries through a graceful transposing of the names 'Allah' and 'Krishna':

"We are in a similar situation [as the devas]. Somehow, we are faced with great challenges [...] and it almost appears that God's people are not so fortunate [...]"

But Krishna has a plan. And as my Muslim friends say, 'Allah is the best of planners. We just have to go along with his plan.'"²⁶

While not as forthright as Prabhupada's theological statements, Krsnanandini, nevertheless, crucially is engaged in theological labor that is subtle and swift to position the religious registers and communities of Islam and Hinduism in intimate communion.

What follows persistently pursues the ambitions of her interfaith work:

One of the things that came to me when I read this story, and it touches my heart very deeply, is that we got to form some alliances. We have *got* to [her emphasis] form some alliances with other servants of God. And how do we do that? We are the 'Hare Krishnas.' And we have what we think is a particular unique sort of approach and science to living and life, but God has other servants in this world. They may call themselves a Christian, or a Muslim, or Baha'i, but they are sincere people and the time has come for us to figure out how we can align ourselves with these other sincere servants of the Lord so we can churn this ocean of milk and get the nectar that we are all craving.

The drinkable nectar that will reinvigorate the devas' strength to regain control of the celestial planets becomes symbolic of the anticipated realizations relished and imbibed

by an advancing spiritual aspirant:

And the nectar has to do with an understanding of who we are, what life is about, and what our relationship is with life. Because one of the fundamental principles we start off learning from *Bhagavad Gita*, is that we are not the body. And yet, that is one of the most difficult concepts to actually imbibe in our life. [...] The question is—the Lord wants us to use our intelligences—how to cooperate to make the world a better place.

²⁶ The theological work that she accomplishes here can be paralleled with her guru Swami Prabhupada's theology. One of many examples comes from a recorded class given by Swami Prabhupada on Oct. 13, 1974 in Mayapur, India. In the lecture, Prabhupada stated, "So you can call the Supreme Lord 'Kṛṣṇa' or something else. Just like Muhammadans, they say: 'Allah.' Allah means 'the Supreme Being.' Allahu akbar. And the Christian says: 'God is great,' and we say, 'param brahma param dhāma' or 'Kṛṣṇa, all-attractive.'" See "741013 - Lecture SB 01.08.33 – Mayapur" *Vanisource*, last modified on June 9, 2020, https://vanisource.org/wiki/741013_-_Lecture_SB_01.08.33_-_Mayapur.

As the orator for this retelling of the Hindu religious tale, Krsnanandini instills the narration with instructions to 1) create alliances with other religious or spiritual aspirants while relinquishing exclusivist and pretentious religious identities, 2) to regard other religious groups as appropriate allies and kindred and 3) see barriers as an opportunity to fortify the metaphysical teachings of the self that permeate the *Gita*.

There is another claim that she emphasizes as well here: human divisions and discriminations—pointing to both sexism and racism as examples—are products of perceiving beings as radically identified with an empirical, physical body with unequivocal and indisputable material differences. These differences of anatomy and genetic expression do not necessitate nor cause divisions in society. As Krsnanandini contends, it is the ignorance of those who misperceive the material differences of the body—in “looks,” “goals,” and “talk”—as a legitimate basis for discrimination. As she repeats, “we are not the body” and are, ultimately equal in the eyes of God. Not being the body, however, does not entail ignoring the very real social inequalities that oppressions based on bodily characteristics produce. In another live-streamed lecture dedicated to the topic of racism and spirituality, Krsnanandini does not shy away from calling for the acknowledgement of the inequalities and injustices well and welcomed collective public actions seeking racial justice, relaying her family’s harrowing

experience when police officers racially profiled and arrested her Black son.²⁷ Her statements on the body aim to dismantle a central truth claim of hegemony that declare the inequities, inequalities, abuse and discrimination are natural and legitimate—similar to how affirming that race is a social construct, not a biological fact, dismantles and undercuts the ontological basis of racism.

For Krsnanandini, it is a fundamental to change how the body is perceived and related to for social divisions to be addressed. She restates a familiar teaching from *Bhagavad Gita* (BG)—*sarvasya cāham hṛdi sanniviṣṭo* (“I [Krishna] am seated in the heart of all”).²⁸ In other words, the Source and God of all lives in each living being (including humans, animals, and the ecosystem) alongside a person’s individual essence (*ātman*). She directs her listeners to continuously connect with the Absolute God (*paramātmā*) in every living thing, discerning how to collaborate with them in order to “get the job done.”

The labor that is envisioned steadily calls for reimagining spirituality, a domain sometimes thought of as personal, apolitical and individual, as the source of interpersonal, political, and social transformation. The spiritual labor does not preclude emotional and interpersonal labor, such as to “appreciate” and “get along with” others. The spiritual labor cannot preclude the social and political labor, such as overcoming

²⁷ Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, “Racism and Spirituality.”

²⁸ BG 15.15.

racism, sexism, food insecurity, and global climate crisis—areas of concern named by Krsnanandini. They are an essential, non-substitutable part of realizing and imbibing fundamental spiritual teachings, such as that each being is not the mere physical body, but, more importantly, eternal spiritual selves, that God has unequivocal love for every being (even as we suffer), and that life is fundamentally sacred.²⁹ This spiritual praxis, as Krsnanandini emphasizes repeatedly, must be fundamentally cooperative and socially responsible—that is, benefitting the whole of society.

She concluded her lecture with a clear directive to seek a transformation of both self and action in the here and now:

Right now, we are in a quarantine-type situation and I know that many of us, as servants of God, when we get back to the temple, or the church, or the mosque, we will say (pause)

‘Hallelujah. (with one hand raised up, open palm facing her camera)

We are back where we can be with one another,’ but I would say then, what would we do different? (raising her index finger up and motioning her hand across her chest)

What will we do *different* than before all of this happened? (tapping three fingertips as if driving a little stake into the ground)

Because [pause] we should come out of this *thang* (emphatically pausing and pointing downwards back and forth across her left and right side) as some *very* different people.

We should come out more kind. (pushing her hand toward the camera with each appeal) We should come out more compassionate. We should come out more educated. We should come out more understanding. When we leave this particular incident [the pandemic], this particular hindrance that has been created by God, we should all come out better servants of God with a *willingness*

²⁹ Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, “Racism and Spirituality.”

to open our hearts to other servants of God and figuring out how we can work together to get that nectar.³⁰

As her twenty-five-minute lecture came to an end, the meeting turned to fielding questions from the audience. During this one-hour period of audience-speaker interaction, only two questions were asked at the beginning: 1) a fair-skinned man from Portugal asked how to have interfaith conversations about murtis, “idols,” and 2) a Brown man asked how to become fearless, like Krsnanandini in her battle with cancer. What started as an ordinary Q and A period quickly became filled with an outpouring of appreciation, gratitude, praise, storytelling, singing, and eventually tears. Long-time friends and mentees from the community Krsnanandini co-founded in her home in 1973, the Cleveland Nama Hatta, were among those who retold their beloved memories of Krsnanandini.

A young Brown married couple recalled a marriage retreat from many years earlier where Krsnanandini gave a class on a *Srimad Bhagavatam* verse. As Krsnanandini listened with a wide-open smile with expressive joy filling her body, the young wife, referring to Krsnanandini as “Mata” (mother), spoke frankly into the camera:

From one retreat many years ago, there is one Bhagavatam class that you gave, and you chose a really controversial verse from *Srimad Bhagavatam* to speak on at the Grihastha Vision [Team] Marriage Retreat and it was a verse which was one of those verses from Bhagavatam that was like really hard on women. And when I was hearing you read the verse, I was like [pause], ‘Why is Mata choosing this

³⁰ In this quote, I have added in non-verbal expressions (in parentheses) and emphases (in *italics*) to replicate Krsnanandini’s body language and verbal cadence.

verse to talk about like at a marriage retreat? Shouldn't we be hearing something that is a little more encouraging. Like why? Why is she speaking about this verse? And that class honestly has stayed with me for all those years because you, through your realness, challenged me and us to see beyond those words—and your faith in Prabhupada, and your confidence in his love—and to see beyond the designation of man and women to spirit soul.

And you're so poignant about making the point that anytime we come across something challenging in Krishna Consciousness that it is our responsibility to remember Srila Prabhupada's love and go deeper to figure it out and reconcile what it means. And it was just so real. And I don't think I've ever heard anybody attack a controversy in that manner, just so boldly and so fearlessly. [...] Thank you for always making me stronger and loved whenever I'm around you.

The woman recalled her cherished memory of Mata to illustrate the following point:

“You spoke of the importance of the example, but I think, Mata, for us, you are the true example of what it means to be a devotee—and in every aspect of your life! And that has impressed us, and it has changed the trajectory of, I think, our lives and how we see Krishna Consciousness and our relationship.”

Appearing later were married couple Ekavira Dasa and Black Belize American Vrajalila Devi Dasi, a couple that is distinguished among Bhakti Tirtha Swami's disciples for their palliative care and years of service to their spiritual master Bhakti Tirtha Swami. Similar to others in the audience, they expressed that Krsnanandini was a “life-long example” and embodiment of what she spoke on that evening. Vrajalila and Krsnanandini are particularly close, having both served on the Grihastha Vision Team for decades together; they expressed this closeness through calling each other “my love” in their smile-filled exchange as we, the audience, witnessed. Streaming in the

background, written comments overflowed the Zoom chat such as “Haribol Mother Krishnanandini Prabhu [a commonly used gender-neutral term here meaning "master"]]. Thank you for a life of service and example. Your association is a blessing. I pray to be able to follow in your footsteps.” In the gallery view, you could see the videos of women wiping away tears from their eyes as they listened, watched, and remembered Krsnanandini’s life.

Seated next to a white woman from Kazakhstan, a white man, Kasisvar, appears on screen to speak next. Immediately upon seeing Kasisvar, Krsnanandini points to her screen and elated declares, “that’s one of my spiritual sons right there.” He begins with an explanation of why his camera is pointed at his screen:

Kasisvar: You see this camera in front of me?

Krsnanandini: Mhmm.

Kasisvar: You can know that there is another wonderful soul in the opposite side of this globe her name is Malika [...] from Kazakhstan. She’s a great spiritual leader from the community and she is watching you with tears in her eyes and we can be sure that this message which you gave to all of us, you’ll be watched by thousands of devotees in Russia.

Krsnanandini: Oh, please give my love to Malika. We had such a touching connection—”

Kasisvar immediately begins to translate Krsnanandini’s words to tell Malika.

Kasisvar: I’m translating. You keep saying. I’m simultaneously translating.

Krsnanandini: Tell her I miss her!

Turning the live streaming phone around, Kasisvar reveals Malika full of emotion who says, “I’m so happy and I cry and cry and cry, because [taking a deep breath and turning away] I cannot speak.” Lifting her face from her hand that covers her eyes, she says, “I love you,” only to fall back into her palms softly weeping.

Many knew and remembered the well-known Krsnanandini’s familial history of their harrowing trials with hostility and racism in ISKCON temples in the early 1970s when her “fearless soldier in the army of the Lord” mother and her children (including Krsnanandini) were not welcomed at an ISKCON temple in Ohio—a story I retell in section 5.1. As Kamagiri Devi Dasi, an elder Black American female devotee and longtime friend of Krsnanandini, puts it, “They [Krsnanandini and her mother] were on the battlefield trying to become Krishna’s devotees.” In her enthusiastic retelling of the mother and daughter’s unplanned journey from Ohio to Dallas, TX, Kamagiri emphasizes Krsnanandini’s fierce matriarchal inheritance from her “spiritual warrior Mother” (Bhumata Devi Dasi) who, from Kamagiri’s point of view, trained Krsnanandini in her spiritual determination, leading and “going places that others won’t go.” As indicated by audience members verbal and non-verbal expressions while listening, the community recalled how the family, despite their low economic class, came by car to Dallas, Texas, determined to find their spiritual refuge; coincidentally, the family arrived during their soon-to-be spiritual master’s fortuitous arrival to the same Dallas ISKCON temple. Kamagiri narrates this story of obstacles (such as racial

discrimination) and perseverance as evidence of Krsnanandini's fearlessness and determination in her spiritual pursuits. As she put it, this retelling illustrates "why Mother Krsnanandini is the way that she is and why everybody loves her so much [...] and so many battles have been fought [...] she is definitely a spiritual warrior on the battlefield of the Lord." This exchange concluded with Krsnanandini singing to her friend Kamagiri, "You and me girl, go a long way back. Yes, a long, long, long way and we love each other so that we cannot let one another go," a lyric from the African American R&B band Bloodstone's 1982 song "We Go a Long Way Back." Her expressions of intimate affection and easy relatability were also why she was adored.

The virtual gathering concluded with Krsnanandini expressing to the large audience that they each have a place in her heart. She used the metaphor of a mother's love to explain that the mother's love expands to include every child she has as each new one is born. She weaved in that she had consoled her daughter who worried about loving her coming second child as much as the first by describing the analogous way in which God has love for all in abundant and non-diminishing capacities. "The love keeps on growing," she echoed the memory's moral.. With that farewell, over 250 people then gathered over Zoom to chant the Hare Krishna mantra and began individually and collectively saying their good-byes and well wishes, waving their hands at the camera, wiping away tears, smiling as they said "*haribol*" (a popular Hare Krishna greeting and farewell), and pressing their palms together in reverential *namaskāra*. During this

outpouring of overlapping expressions of care, Gaura Vani, a well-known Hare Krishna *kirtan* musician, captured what could be seen and felt with the pithy sentence, “The devotees are truly ecstatic.”

5.2.2 Krsnanandini’s Theological Methods and Message

A transposition is the movement of one thing into another’s place. Throughout this discourse, Krsnanandini engages in a series of transpositions: ‘Krishna’ and ‘Allah’ interchange, the church, mosque, and temple are recalled interchangeably, and the physical body (that the *Gita* proclaims is a secondary identification) and the body of religious community very subtly interchange. These transpositions seek to enable in listeners a dismantling of conceptual boundaries between Muslim, Hindu, and Christian religious tenets and a range of God-worshipping religious spaces and communities. Verbally mirroring this overt message of her lecture, she labors to create bridges (perhaps, new neuropathways) between distinct, even divergent conceptions through repetitious transpositions, shortening the distance between one religious register and another with hopes that mimetic behavioral actions will follow from her audience.

The religious or spiritual community that Krsnanandini seeks to evoke is broadly interfaith with ever-growing inclusivity, nourishing of inner growth in the face of crisis, and aims to see human flourishing. The audience of Vaishnavas, theists and spiritual seekers are embedded in this envisioned society, guided to participate in alleviating the society of global collective suffering (e.g. climate change, racism, sexism), but only on

cooperative and humanistic terms, dependent on individual and collective development. The analogy Krsnanandini uses to explain God's pleasure is that of the happy parent seeing their children getting along; it is not, for instance, a God calling back lost children or planet (a savior model), or a God seeking to re-establish their authority over their children or Earth (a rulership model). Her model starkly stands in opposition to utilizing a centralized authoritarianism to accomplish these social aims.

Eminent feminist philosopher and scholar of religion Grace Jantzen fruitfully discerns that the latter models permeate and dominate theological arrangements in male-centered or male-governed discourses on religion, whereas Krsnanandini's model is reflective of Jantzen's insight on woman-centered or feminist theologies that are arranged around the dynamic of nourishing the individual's inner potency to flourish a harmonious life.³¹ Jantzen hears in the feminist theological model of "flourishing" a "life-validating" principle that emphasizes positivity and strength, rather than insufferable 'calamity' and 'loss', and is remarkably 'desirable' rather than 'intolerable'.³² The model of 'flourishing' is evident in Krsnanandini's lecture when she structures the

³¹ My own understanding of Jantzen's feminist philosophy of religion is based on Francis X. Clooney's insightful reading and use of her theory in his work *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother* (2005). Francis X. Clooney, "Three Hindu Goddesses, Mary, and Reading Ahead," in *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1093/0195170377.003.0005>; Francis X. Clooney, "Śrī, Devī, Apirāmi, and Mary: Who and Why," in *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1093/0195170377.003.0001>.

³² Grace M. Jantzen, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, 1st ed., Manchester Studies in Religion, Culture and Gender (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1998), 160, qtd. in Francis X. Clooney, "Śrī, Devī, Apirāmi, and Mary: Who and Why," in *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother: Hindu Goddesses and the Virgin Mary, Divine Mother, Blessed Mother* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1093/0195170377.003.0001>.

Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences of disassociation as empowering catalysts for inner evolution:

“We should come out more kind. We should come out more compassionate. We should come out more educated. We should come out more understanding. When we leave this particular incident, this particular hinderance that ha[s] been created by God, we should all come out better servants of God with a willingness to open our hearts to other servants of God and figure out how we can work together to get that nectar.”

Jantzen’s conceptual framework warrants the scholar to further appreciate and distinguish Krsnanandini’s distinctly feminist theological contributions to Gaudiya Vaishnavism and the Hare Krishna movement.

Krsnanandini’s theology notably subsumes all the religious groups she mentions under “servants of God” and makes them nearly indistinguishable from one another. One might speculate that those outside of the “servants of God” grouping are the demons or asuras, yet there is a deliberate silence regarding who the asuras might be. Conceivably, perceiving beings as ‘asuras’ is itself may be considered a misperception or expression of ignorance for as far as Krsnanandini is concerned God is in every being and all obstacles are the will of God. A further indication of her lack of concern for the asura figure who is from an orthodox perspective ordinarily dangerous and feared is that she never mentions the words ‘asura’ or ‘demon’ after her initial reiteration of the puranic tale early on. It never gets translated fully nor directly into her lecture’s discussion of the present condition. Such a silence, I believe, is crucial to the interfaith work she hopes to inspire—one that aims for a deeply harmonious, utopian existence just

on the horizon within our reach. Perhaps, the inherent social good of her peaceable mission need not be sacrificed, even conceptually, to any number of daunting forces that stand in its opposition. This theological positioning again connects Krsnanandini to Jantzen who notes that overwhelming evil and danger is conspicuously absent in the theology of flourishing, replaced by vigorous vitality, nourishment and abundance.³³

Krsnanandini's silence on asuras is implicated in three realizations.

Krsnanandini's theology asks each listener to deepen and grow: the first perceives the individual self (whatever the body) in relation (rather than separation) to all other beings, the second perceives the sectarian and rigidly delineated religious or communal body and seeks to connect with all other religious communities, and the third perceives the unity of all existence with a loving (parent-like) and all-pervading Creator, known as both Krishna and Allah. Each transcends a problem—discrimination and prejudice, interreligious conflict, and cosmic disunity and earthly destruction. With each realization that she shares, Krsnanandini moves us further and further beyond physical and conceptual boundaries that would prevent even the imaging of harmonious relationships of a productive and abundant earth. Krsnanandini's theology warrants additional academic study as a viable direction to demarginalize female (and Black) theological perspectives in Gaudiya Vaishnavism—which theological scholarship may skew in favor of theologies of prominent male teachers due to the systemic gender bias

³³ Ibid.

around public religious leadership found in some religious communities as noted earlier. This brief digest suggests a few possible starting points for her theological incorporation.

5.2.3 Krsnanandini as ‘Mata’ or ‘Mother’ and Feminine Religious Authority

You are my mother guru.

- Audience member to Krsnanandini Devi Dasi³⁴

Within the polyvalent Hindu religious ecology, the assemblage of mother and guru fits within quite common formations of feminine spiritual leadership models. Examples include female gurus like Anandamayi Ma and Amma who are venerated by their disciples as both their spiritual master and a living embodiment of the Divine Feminine (the Goddess) who is regarded as *Ma*, the divine mother. Though not integrated in exactly the same way in ISKCON, the potent figure of the mother as experienced in Hinduism can illuminate a dynamic interplay in Krsnanandini’s religious authority. When Krsnanandini is identified as ‘mother,’ ‘Mata,’ and ‘my mother guru,’ the efficacy and potency of Krsnanandini as conduit of knowledge, nourishment and care are indicated.

³⁴ Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, “Krisnanandini Devi May 20th 2020 ISKCON of New Jersey (Towaco Temple).”

It is a common vernacular practice for both ISKCON men and women to refer to women, of youthful and elder age, as 'mataji' or the English equivalent 'mother' regardless of childbearing, or marriage status. It is purported by devotees that the first guru of any life is the mother and within the expanse of Vedic literatures, Mother Earth (Bhūmā) is the revered life-giving Goddess (Bhūdevī) sustaining all creation. Therefore, calling an individual presenting as female 'mother', 'mata' or 'mataji' is an encouraged communal practice presumed to be a term expressing reverence, endearment, respect and even the divine feminine. In the case of Krsnanandini (also referred to as Mother Krsnanandini, Mata, and Krsnanandini Mata), those who call her mother are indeed embracing her with veneration, care and honor. At the same time, the practice of calling women 'mataji' in ISKCON is often also encouraged as a way to temper sexual desires between men and women by reframing relationships with women in terms that are decidedly non-sexual (with exception for one's romantic partners).³⁵ This is quite transparently a rationale benefitting the heterosexual male gaze—whose advantage, it is quickly assumed, aids all other gender and sexual identities. Indirectly and directly, the use of 'mataji' and the heteronormative male positionality are contested and met with disdain by many within ISKCON. Some of the reasons women and men oppose the usage of 'mataji' or 'mother' include the historical circulation of the term in ISKCON

³⁵ devi dasi, *The Emergence of Women's Voices in ISKCON: A Collection of Letters, Articles, Papers, and Conference Reports from 1988 to 2020*, 187-88 and 242-3.

contexts where misogyny and contempt for women were blatantly pervasive, discursive practices and connotations of the term that indicated a lower status for women, inappropriate usage for certain younger age groups and for one's peers, and its conceptual emphasis on a self-identity embedded in a temporary physical body as opposed to an eternal transcendent self.³⁶

Despite this fraught history of the gendered term 'mother' and its equivalents within ISKCON, the phrase 'mother guru' does not circulate commonly and freely in ISKCON spaces as far as I am aware. Its application to Krsnanandini could be singular, in that it has been solely applied to her or that it is an outlier occurrence. Nevertheless, Krsnanandini seems to have found herself in an unofficial, non-formalized guru-disciple relationship with some of the devotees which was perceptible in the hour-long segment dedicated to allowing audience participants to speak to Krsnanandini. Indicating devotees' acknowledgement of Krsnanandini's position as their teacher (*acharya* or guru) occurred often within or alongside the normative (read: accepted) lens of the venerable mother (also "mata").³⁷ The full statement made by the devotee who called Krsnanandini "my mother guru" demonstrates this quite readily:

³⁶ Ibid., 93, 208, and 413.

³⁷ It should be acknowledged that there is a Sanskrit term that encompasses these informal instructor relationships within ISKCON: Shiksha (*śikṣā*) guru. A shiksha guru is one who is acknowledged as a mentor but did not give formal initiation to the student. There are several reasons this might be the case: 1) the student has already taken formal initiation from another guru, 2) the shiksha guru is not officially recognized as an initiating "diksha (*dīkṣā*)" guru and, thus, cannot formally take vows or perform initiating rites in ISKCON, or 3) the shiksha guru and student have mutually decided not to pursue a formal initiation for their relationship.

Hare Krishna Krsnanandini Mataji, please accept my humble obeisances to your lotus feet. I want to take this opportunity to humbly express my gratitude and affection for you and tell you that I absolutely adore you and I'm very grateful for everything you've done, how you taught us to relate to each other, my husband and me, and how to communicate because we've attended your seminars and classes. And just besides that, every time I look at you, my heart fills with a lot of affection and love and I just cannot, cannot stop smiling because I see this beautiful person in front of me so motherly, so loving, so kind, and how you took the advice of Srila Prabhupada and like having a big family and big responsibilities. You carry on, you did it and such a great example. It's just you're my mother guru and I love you dearly and I want you to know that your ways will live in our hearts and the ways [in which we] will remember you through your teaching through your advice and through your beautiful smile. I love you very sincerely. Thank you.

While viewing Krsnanandini as mother, the female devotee, very easily, magnifies the motherly trope until it articulates the adoration of a disciple to the guru—including, as seen here, the use of the Upanishadic metaphor of being close to the feet of the guru, indicating oneself to be asymmetrically receiving knowledge from the revered and worshiped teacher. A further intertextual reading compounds the durability and likelihood of the coalescing of the spheres of mother and *acharya* in Krsnanandini. In the Atharva Veda (11.5.3), the intimate and indispensable bond between the *acharya* and the disciple is expressed through the metaphor of birth: "The master (*āchārya*), welcoming the new disciple into his bowels, takes the celibate student. / Three nights he holds and bears him in his belly. / When he is born, the Gods convene to see him."³⁸

³⁸ Hallstrom, *Mother of Bliss*, 131.

Krsnanandini's positionality as mother reinforces her feminine identity. That identity is also subject to be positively interpreted to indicate characteristics of her that make it possible for her to be read as *acharya*. For instance, two male devotees during the gathering emphatically exclaimed, "Thank God you're not a man," which they intended as recognition and praise of her direct and legitimate connection to God through her womanhood. The relevant paradigmatic religious model implied with such a statement is of the direct female closeness to God of Radha, the Goddess and consort of Krishna, and the gopis, Radha's female friends/attendants; both Radha and the gopis are said to be the most intimate companions and lovers of Krishna. Another interrelated perspective of Radha circulating among ISKCON devotees approaches Radha as Divine "Mother of Devotion" who sweetly engages the devotees in "service to her beloved Krsna [Krishna]." ³⁹ Krsnanandini as potently feminine and as '*Mata*' facilitates positioning her in relation to the paradigmatic females in Gaudiya Vaishnava theology and, through orthodox theology, begins to circumvent the institutional barriers limiting human women from being institutionally regarded fully as spiritual masters, models and teachers.

As shown in many of the expressions of audience participants, the public reception and devotional embodiments that follow the guru-disciple relationship were

³⁹ Yasodamayi Dasi, "American Tour," Spring/Summer 1992, BtSwami.com, <https://btswami.com/vault/tour-reports/1992-spring-summer-american-tour-no-11>.

palpable. Instances include participants' expressed desire to "follow in the footsteps" of Krsnanandini, statements naming Krsnanandini as a "guru" or "leader," offering to render services to her (e.g., "we want to serve you"), rendering, in real time, voluntary translation services in order to get her message to a broader audience (a traditional service of ISKCON disciples to their gurus), and her being the object of substantial honor, veneration, and devotion (e.g., "I love you" and "I absolutely adore you"). Her particular conjugation of knowledge giver (teacher, educator) reflects the relational receptivity of an authority, particularly that of a guru or, as read here, an *acharya*. Furthermore, these examples can be paralleled against the ritual behavior and embodied experiences of devotees in the presence of male gurus. From my ethnographic observations in ISKCON, I consider Krsnanandini's elicited responses from her public assembly of attendees to be remarkably similar in emotional pitch and attunement of in-person lectures of male ISKCON gurus like Radhanath Swami.

6. Bhakti Tirtha Swami (John Favors), February 25, 1950 – June 27, 2005

I have interviewed over 100 [B]lack Princeton alumni and have found John Favors '72 a.k.a. Bhakti-Thirtha Swami to be the most fascinating.

— Melvin McCray, Founder of Blacks at Princeton History Project¹

Hare Krsna, I have been requested by the devotees who are so dearly worshipped within my heart to speak a message concerning the life of one of the greatest Vaishnava[s] of the modern world. HH [His Holiness] BTS [Bhakti Tirtha Swami] Maharaj.

— Radhanath Swami, New York Times Bestselling Author and Guru²

The globe-trotting Black American *acharya*, initiating guru, and social futurist Bhakti Tirtha Swami was a charismatic speaker and leader visibly engaged in cross-racial and transnational dissemination of a socially engaged *bhakti*. For over thirty-five years, whether as a Princeton campus revolutionary or the first African American

¹ Melvin McCray, "Articles," *Blacks At Princeton*, accessed March 25, 2021, <http://www.blacksatprinceton.com/articles>.

² Radhanath Swami, "A Life of Compassion, Dedication and Love - His Holiness Bhakti Tirtha Swami Maharaj," *Radhanath Swami Lecture Transcripts* (blog), September 28, 2005, <https://www.radhanathswami.net/yearwise/2005/radhanath-swami-on-a-life-of-compassion-dedication-and-love-his-holiness-bhakti-tirtha-swami-maharaj>.

Gaudiya Vaishnava Hindu guru, Swami continuously developed an Afro-Asian futurism—a vision of a post-racial, post-sexist, post-anthrocentric, post-sectarian, postwar and postcolonial *global* utopia built through the conjoining and coalescing of Black and Asiatic cultures, histories and communities.³ These vectors of his vision are prominent themes throughout his major television and radio appearances, nineteen books, and hundreds of recorded speeches and lectures as well as his founding of the Institute for Applied Spiritual Technologies (IFAST) (est. 1990) in Washington, D.C. and directorship (1995-2005) of the Gita Nagari farm in Pennsylvania, USA.⁴ Even in his earliest written work, his 1972 undergraduate senior thesis, the seeds for his later projects were sowed. Swami placed immense value and respect on Black and Asiatic formations, theologies, philosophies, and cultures in ways that were not before performed nor initiated in the global transmission of Gaudiya Vaishnavism.

Bhakti Tirtha Swami was both a respected Hindu guru and crowned in 1990 as one of five High Chiefs of the Okpe Kingdom (population of 301,917 in 2006, located near Warri, Nigeria).⁵ He was honored High Chief for successfully resolving

³ See Ibid.; John E. Favors, “Yoga and Western Psychology: Or Does Mankind Have a Future?” (Undergraduate, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University, 1972), Princeton University Archives; and “Bhakti-Tirtha Swami Krsnapada to Lecture at Karamu,” *Call and Post (1982-1991)*, February 11, 1988, Cleveland edition, 184547945, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Cleveland Call and Post.

⁴ Rosen, *Black Lotus*, 388. IFAST was located on 600 9th St., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002. Gita Nagari is located at 534 Gita Nagari Rd, Port Royal PA 17082. For an online archive of audio recordings, see BTswami.com, “Audio Archive,” accessed March 20, 2021, <https://btswami.com/audio/archive>.

⁵ Steven J. Rosen, *Black Lotus: The Spiritual Journey of an Urban Mystic* (Washington, D.C.: Hari-Nama Press, 2007), 225; Ovaborhene Isaac Idamoyibo, “Sources of Inspiration for Music Composition in Okpe,” *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa* 8, no. 1 (March 2011): 23–47, <https://doi.org/10.2989/18121004.2011.652355>; John

interreligious conflict between Christian and Muslim factions in Nigeria.⁶ As a guru in the religious lineage of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, Bhakti Tirtha Swami initiated hundreds of disciples—probably nearing one thousand—mostly in the United States, West Africa, and Eastern Europe (see Figure 1 and 2 below). Washington D.C.’s Black American radio hosts like Cathy Hughes, Ernest P. White Jr., and Rev. Ambrose Lane Sr. interviewed him for their audiences and several prominent Black world leaders such as first President of Zambia Kenneth Kaunda, the then-President of South Africa Nelson Mandela and Ben-Amin, Leader of African Hebrew Israelites kept close ties to him.⁷ His world speaking tours, involving upwards of thirty-two countries, brought him into radio stations, newspapers, universities, temples, and public venues globally, circulating and increasing his notoriety in leadership, conflict resolution, and spiritual consultant.⁸ Unraveling Swami’s influence and impact as a Black Hindu world leader amounts to uncovering a significant Afro-Asian development in the Black Atlantic.

Tokpabere Agberia, “The Adane-Okpe Masquerade Festival of the Okpe People,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 41, no. 3 (June 1, 2006): 261–73, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909606063884>.

⁶ “Holy Man of Many Parts,” *South China Morning Post*, May 25, 2001, <https://www.scmp.com/article/348007/holy-man-many-parts>.

⁷ Rosen. *Black Lotus*, 250-9, 388; “Audio Archive,” *BTSwami.com*, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://btswami.com/audio/archive?title=interview>.

⁸ “Holy Man of Many Parts.”

Cumulative Sum of Initiations Per Year (1976 - 2005)

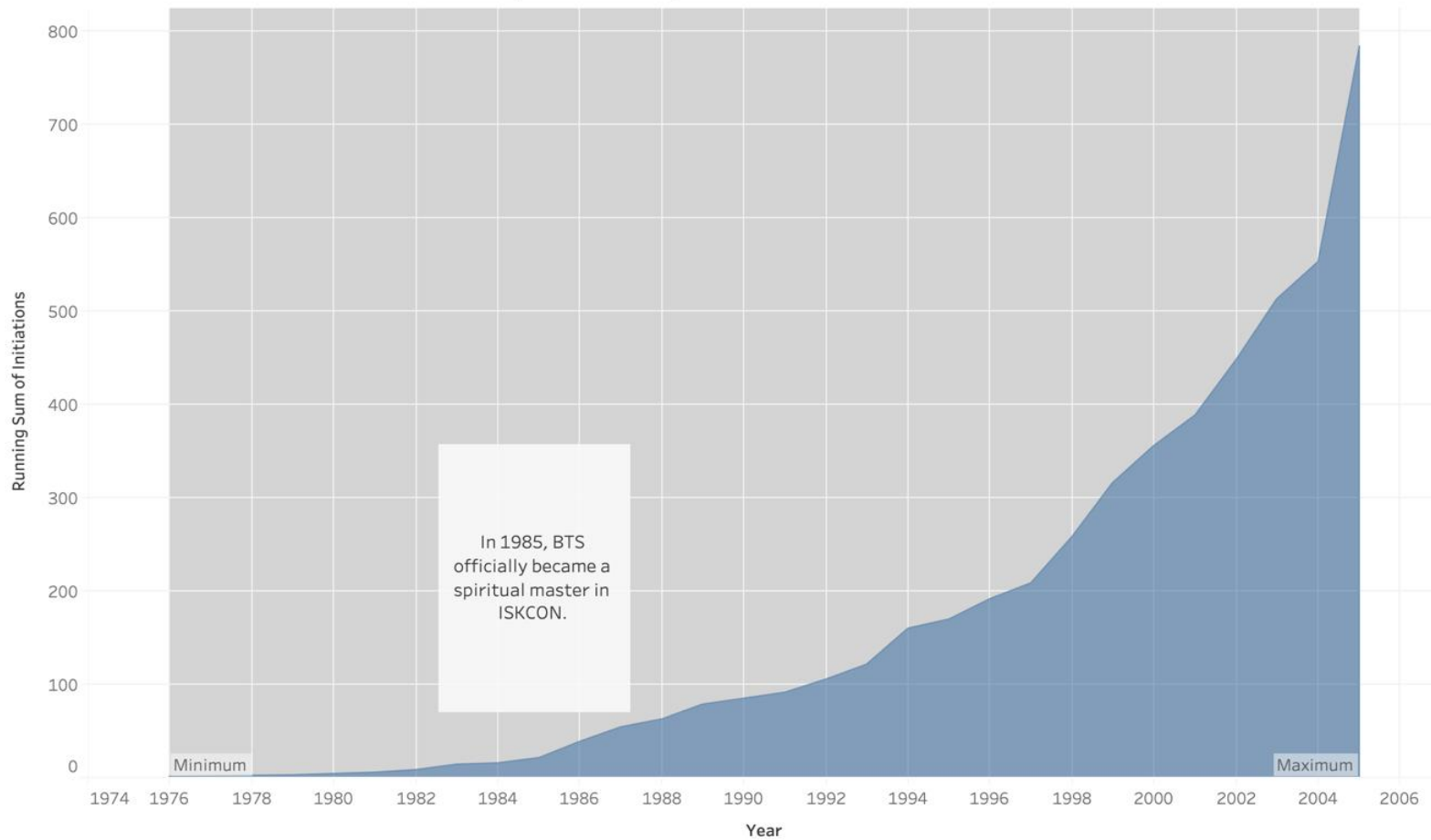


Figure 1: Graph of Cumulative Sum of B. T. Swami Initiations Per Year

Initiations By Country

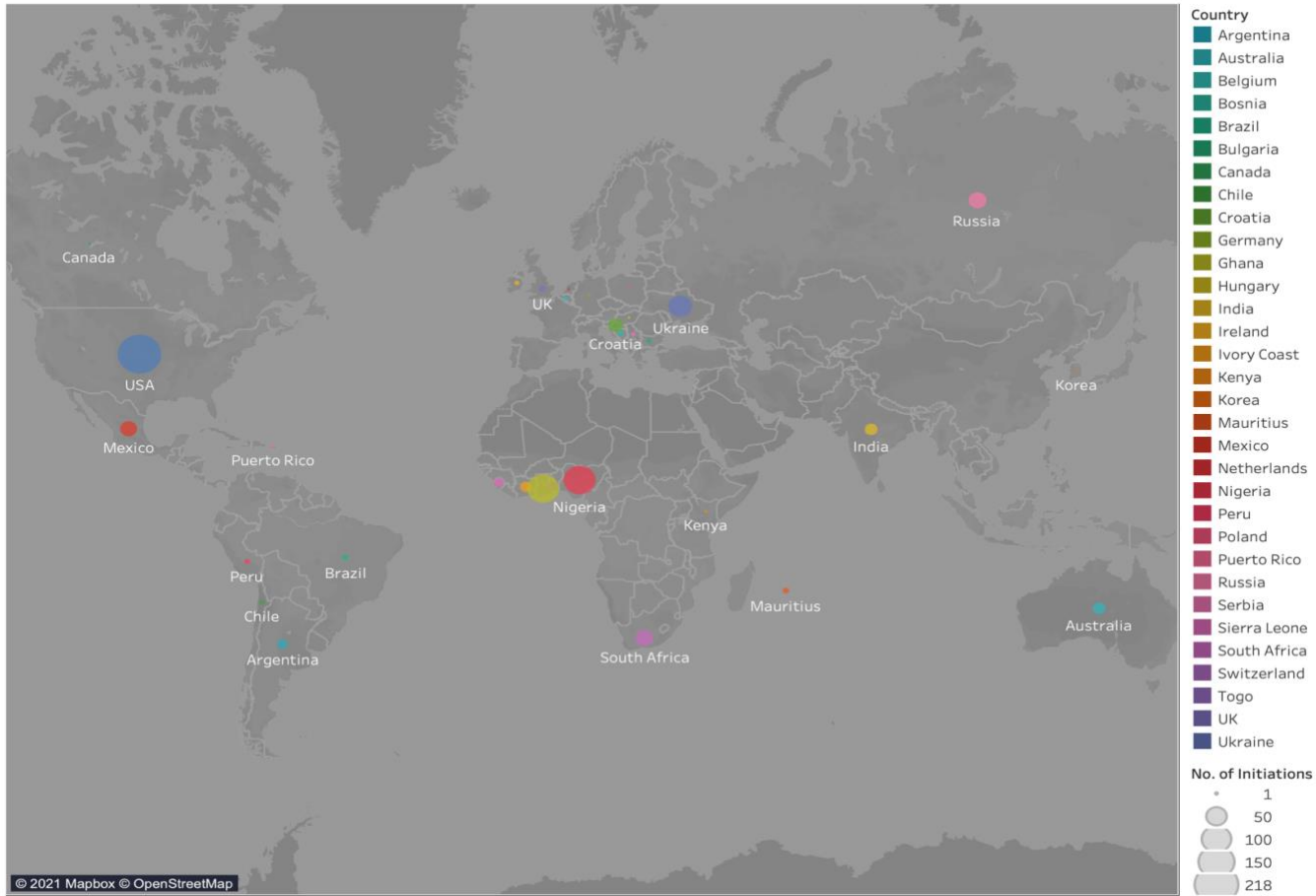


Figure 2: Map of B. T. Swami Initiations by Country

The single most comprehensive resource on Bhakti Tirtha Swami's life is *Black Lotus: The Spiritual Journey of An Urban Mystic* by Steven J. Rosen, who is a scholar and close godbrother of Bhakti Tirtha Swami (i.e., they share the same initiating spiritual master). Rosen, also known as Satyaraja Dasa, has written a robust and penetrating biography filled with first-hand accounts from Bhakti Tirtha Swami's disciples, friends, relatives, former mentors, and eminent associates. Published through Swami's publishing house Hari-Nama Press, *Black Lotus* is an undertaking of public memory and legacy building that seeks to harmonize both etic and emic perspectives throughout. This biography has no parallel at this time and does not seem to be a known resource in either Hindu or Black Studies. From *Black Lotus*, we have a foundation for grasping Bhakti Tirtha Swami; though, the full significance of Bhakti Tirtha Swami's vision and influence in the Black Atlantic and transnational Hinduism remains to be fully seen and examined.

6.1 Biographical Overview

Born as John Favors in 1950 and raised in Cleveland's Forgotten Triangle, a deeply impoverished and isolated area, he became a child evangelist mentored by his Baptist mother Pearlina Favors (née Pearlina Hill) and a Christian Charismatic community leader, Vivian DuBose Jordan.¹ In the late 1960s, while a young student beneficiary of Upward Bound, a federally funded program to prepare low-income and

¹ Rosen, *Black Lotus*, 17-39.

first-generation students for college, John began his social justice activism becoming a Midwest youth leader in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), where he met both Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., then President of SCLC, and Rev. Randel T. Osborn, a chief strategist of SCLC.² A combination of his pronounced academic successes and close ties to eminent civil rights leaders and movements earned him one of two spots granted to Black students at the upper-class, predominantly White Hawken preparatory school in Gates Mills, Ohio in 1967.³

John's detour into a highly selective, elite preparatory high school allowed him to experience the culture and customs of the wealthiest families. Through Upward Bound and Hawkens, John became part of the "Privileged Poor," a socioeconomic subcategory coined and defined by sociologist Anthony Abraham Jack.⁴ Within any class, there can be intergroup differentiation. Jack identifies among the lowest economic class a small subset that acquires some privileges through socialization and access to educational resources normally accessible only to the wealthy. Without becoming accustomed and socialized to elite academic spaces, lower-income students are far less prepared (i.e., "Doubly Disadvantaged") for the cultural, racial and class paradigms of

² Ibid., 58-61.

³ Ibid., 65-6.

⁴ Anthony Abraham Jack, *The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019), 10-1.

elite universities and thus, are far more likely to experience isolation and underperform.⁵ By way of his senior year at an elite preparatory high school, John not only arrived to Princeton University on a well-treaded express entry route, but also entered with the cultural capital needed to thrive in that environment.⁶ As a cis-male, John also inhabited a privileged gender space allowing him to attend the then all-male Hawkens school and later benefited from being institutionally legitimized as a Hindu guru in 1985. It is also not lost on this author that his earlier faith, leadership, and relationships in Christian traditions may have afforded him further cultural capital advantageous to navigating both White and Black American spaces where Christianity is a privileged religious domain.⁷

During his four undergraduate years at Princeton, John's identity and ideology underwent significant transformation and experimentation, as more generally occurred for much of America's youth during the '60s and '70s. African American journalist, professor, and Princeton alumnus Melvin McCray published an article in the February 1983 issue of *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, later republished in ISKCON's *Back To Godhead* magazine in November 1983, on Bhakti Tirtha Swami's "two lives:" one as political

⁵ Jack, *The Privileged Poor*, 28-9; Jack calls this group of lower-income students without elite preparatory experience the "Doubly Disadvantaged."

⁶ Rosen, *Black Lotus*, 65-71; Jack, *The Privileged Poor*, 10.

⁷ Some of the affordances of Christian privilege in higher education institutions are examined in Tricia Seifert, "Understanding Christian Privilege: Managing the Tensions of Spiritual Plurality," *About Campus* 12, no. 2 (June 5, 2007): 10-17. For a broader examination of the term, see Khyati Y. Joshi, *White Christian Privilege: The Illusion of Religious Equality in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

activist and the other as spiritual aspirant and monk.⁸ McCray recalls that when he first met John in 1970, John was an impassioned speaker and leader for African American students on campus and he aesthetically emphasized his African heritage dressing in “leopard-print dashiki and matching fez-like hat, with walking stick, pipe, bushy afro, and full beard.”⁹ As part of Class of 1972, John was a fierce political activist going by the name Toshombe Abdul, a name he adopted for a short period. He became the president of the Association of Black Collegians (ABC), and the founder of the Third World Center (now, the Carl A. Fields Center), a proposed space for housing the political, social, and cultural movements and groups of Black, Latinx, Native American, and Asian students at Princeton.¹⁰

Of John’s revolutionary political activism, McCray writes:

A newly formed Third World Coalition, composed of [B]lack, Latino, Asian-American and American Indian students, occupied Firestone Library in March of 1971 to press their demand to increase minority enrollment. During this period activist Angela Davis and Black Panther Party Chairman Huey Newton addressed large audiences at Princeton.

Favors joined the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, the Black Panther Party, and other activist groups. He developed an ideology that stressed his African roots, and he began traveling extensively in [B]lack nationalist and socialist circles in the U.S. and abroad.¹¹

⁸ Melvin McCray, “The Two Lives of John Favors ‘72,” *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, February 9, 1983.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ “Carl A. Fields Center for Equality + Cultural Understanding — Princeton University,” Carl A. Fields Center, accessed March 26, 2021, <http://fieldscenter.princeton.edu>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

During those same revolutionary years, Favors studied as a psychology major and began exploring hypnotherapy, past life regression, dream psychology, and the paranormal which eventually led him into an interest in reincarnation.¹² He also began studying yogic systems with popular gurus such as Sri Chinmoy and Swami Satchidananda, and regularly visiting Hare Krishna temples.¹³ McCray's interviews and interactions with Bhakti Tirtha Swami, before as John Favors and after, reveal John at Princeton as committed to changing the world for the better, particularly for underrepresented Black people, but still in search of the best means to accomplish the herculean endeavor.¹⁴

Leading to the culmination of both his undergraduate studies and his search, John submitted his Princeton senior thesis, titled "Yoga and Western Psychology, Or, Does Mankind Have a Future?".¹⁵ The thesis is Bhakti Tirtha Swami's earliest written work, to the best of my knowledge, and is dedicated to his mother and his unnamed "Yogi teacher who is a Guru of the highest caliber."¹⁶ It is surmisable that his dedication was to Bengali guru Sri Chinmoy (1931-2007) who he had taken initiation from during this time, but it could possibly be to Swami Prabhupada who would initiate him next.¹⁷

¹² Rosen, *Black Lotus*, 86-92.

¹³ McCray, "The Two Lives of John Favors '72"; Rosen, *Black Lotus*, 95.

¹⁴ Melvin McCray, Facebook Messenger call with author, March 25, 2021.

¹⁵ Favors, "Yoga and Western Psychology".

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, ii.

¹⁷ Rosen, *Black Lotus*, 101-3; Bhakti Tirtha Swami, *Reflections on Sacred Teachings I: Sri Siksastaka* (Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 2011), chap. "Introduction," sec. "My Story," Kindle.

The main aim of the text is to explain the yogic system to the reader, how it compliments or completes modern theories of psychology (e.g., that of William James, Sigmund Freud, and Carl Jung) and its potential to address global crises threatening human and ecological destruction. The preface and nine chapters span two-hundred and thirty pages and cover *hatha* yoga, *raja* yoga, *jnana* yoga, parapsychology, dreams, and reincarnation. According to the text, the contributions of *bhakti* yogis are not discussed fully because its primary modality, devotion, was difficult to discuss in relation to psychology's research. The universality and shared parallels of yogic philosophy to the psychological research of the time and the yogic system's benefit to addressing the world's material and political crises are central arguments advanced in this thesis.¹⁸

For John, the planet's extinction is imminent without addressing the interconnected dangers of self-interest, maximum productivity and consumption, "nuclear war, over-population, depletion of resources, poverty, oppression and inequality." "If any one of these is not controlled, it does not matter which one, man will be in danger of extinction because one factor left uncontrolled will inevitably produce several others."¹⁹ John's opening pages are fraught with pessimism and cynicism; it is an unlikely wager, for him, that the necessary changes will take place and even more doubtful that humanity will have the necessary time to successfully change. In the

¹⁸ Favors, "Yoga and Western Psychology"; Bhakti yoga in these early pages of his thesis is discussed in relation to the "universal intelligence" not a personal God.

¹⁹ Ibid., 11.

thesis, Favors writes with great attention to global and national politics. Therein, his presentation of yoga is not, in fact, presented as an immaterial, apolitical, spiritual compliment to the lifestyle of “the West,” but a rather politically relevant solution to and critique of the very *human* (embodied) condition. It is in this thesis that we begin to see the burgeoning of his Afro-Asian futurism.

After graduating from Princeton University in 1972, he soon joined the Hare Krishna movement and became an initiated celibate student (*brahmacharya*) of Swami Prabhupada, receiving the ordination name, Ghanashyam Dasa, “servant of the beautiful dark cloud” (an epithet referring to Krishna who is described to have blackish complexion).²⁰ This new direction in John’s life was propelled by the Kentucky-born Afro-Asian American (i.e., Blasian) spiritual guide Norman Anderson (1922-2000) of Cleveland who informed the young and newly-initiated John Favors that Sri Chinmoy was not, in fact, his guru, but instead Swami Prabhupada.²¹ An eclectic spiritual teacher, Norman would teach Moorish Science harmonized with yogic philosophies, Freemasonry, and Sufism and became somewhat of a well-known local adept of Moorish history and spirituality. To the young people gathered at his home on Friday nights, Norman would declare in his discourses that ‘God is Krishna. He is a little blue dude’ and go on to connect it to Moorish science and the like.²² John followed Norman’s

²⁰ Ibid., 386.

²¹ Ibid., 107-113; Norman Anderson’s grandmother was from India. His parents were Black Americans.

²² Ibid., 111-2.

instructions, took initiation from Swami Prabhupada, and then traveled in the United States and the Eastern bloc of Europe for six years distributing his guru's books to academic institutions with a traveling band of Hare Krishna booksellers. Thereafter, Ghanashyam Dasa accepted the vows of a renunciate (*sannyasa*) in 1979 and was named Bhakti Tirtha Swami by his then godbrother Kirtanananda Swami.²³ Bhakti Tirtha Swami returned years later to Norman and initiated him into Gaudiya Vaishnavism, honoring him with the name "Nanda Maharaja" (i.e., the name of Krishna's father).

Following his initiation into *sannyasa*, Bhakti Tirtha Swami began preaching in Africa and Washington D. C. in 1979.²⁴ In Washington D. C., he established a popular vegetarian restaurant (name unknown) and a mission called the International Committee for Urban Spiritual Development (ICUSD). The ICUSD, which was independent of ISKCON, aimed to address the economic, health, social, political and spiritual needs of Black American and African communities. Unfortunately, there are few sources from this initiative available for study.²⁵ From what is known, the project had wide-ranging goals from environmental and economic sustainability through agricultural education and development to healthcare through nutrition, naturopathic

²³ Rosen, *Black Lotus*. At this time, Kirtanananda Swami had not yet been ex-communicated from ISKCON because of crimes for which he would later be convicted.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 189-92.

²⁵ Besides *Black Lotus*, see Yasodamayi Dasi, "Good News: At the Feet of God," *Positive Energy Newsletter*, June 1, 1989, <https://btswami.com/vault/press-articles/good-news-at-the-feet-of-god>; Joseph Teh, "Krishnapada: Bringing Harmony to Mankind," *New Liberian*, n.d., <https://btswami.com/vault/press-articles/krishnapada-bringing-harmony-to-mankind>.

clinics, AIDS treatment centers, stress management and yoga workshops, and martial arts and meditation classes.²⁶ Its target audience seemed to include every class of society including prisoners, addicts, the homeless, the poor, students, educators, middle-class professionals, world peace leaders, academics, and monastics. No less than a visionary, Bhakti Tirtha Swami invested decades to building up a new society and community that “would identify itself as part of ‘an interplanetary family’.”²⁷

In the early ‘80s, motivated by a dream he had of his guru, Bhakti Tirtha Swami turned his efforts to Africa to build temples, ashramas, clinics, schools, cottage industries and farm communities.²⁸ As Rosen explains, there were neither ISKCON temples in Africa, nor a vivacious interest in the Hare Krishna movement among Africans before the arrival of Bhakti Tirtha Swami and his disciples.²⁹ Leaders of ISKCON declined to take on Africa as a region for their preaching—although Hinduism had entered the religious landscape of Africa through merchant trade routes between India and East Africa long before Europeans and Americans’ arrival.³⁰ From 1982 to 1984, Bhakti Tirtha Swami progressively acquired administrative permissions and managerial functions from ISKCON’s Governing Body Commission to implement his

²⁶ Ibid., 191-2.

²⁷ Ibid., 190.

²⁸ Ibid., 198; Yasodamayi Dasi, “Good News”; Albert Wuaku, *Hindu Gods in West Africa: Ghanaian Devotees of Shiva and Krishna* (Leiden, Netherlands: The Brill, 2013), 152-3.

²⁹ Ibid.; Rosen, *Black Lotus*, 194-5 and 205.

³⁰ Rosen, *Black Lotus*, 194-5 and 205; Purnima Mehta Bhatt, *The African Diaspora in India: Assimilation, Change and Cultural Survivals* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 6-12.

vision in Africa (see Appendix E). Across Africa, he opened and oversaw the development of over twenty temples and two farm communities, and supported two public schools.³¹ He seemed to be particularly successful in countries in West Africa, like Ghana and Nigeria; Bhakti Tirtha Swami's personal secretary reported that in Nigeria the initiation ceremonies were larger than in Washington, D.C. by the early '90s, involving upwards of 130 people to be initiated at a time.³² However, he also reached Africans in Angola, Botswana, DR Congo, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

In 1990, on the *Cathy Hughes Show* (a popular TV program), Bhakti Tirtha Swami announced a landmark development in his U.S. outreach as a spiritual leader—the establishment of the Institute for Applied Spiritual Technologies (IFAST, also known as the Institute) in Washington, D.C.³³ At the time, the facility had yet to be established, but he announced the ambitious vision for the Institute that would come to be later housed in a renovated former church building near Capitol Hill.³⁴ Prior to this, the Institute's initial series of lectures were held at Howard University (at Howard Plaza Towers) and

³¹ Satyaraja Dasa [Steven Rosen], "Rain of Mercy: The Exemplary Life of Bhakti-Tirtha Swami," Krishna.com, accessed April 8, 2021, <http://www.krishna.com/rain-mercy-exemplary-life-bhakti-tirtha-swami>.

³² Indrani Devi Dasi, "American Tour Part II 1991," May 1991, BtSwami.com, <https://btswami.com/vault/tour-reports/1991-may-american-tour-part-ii>, 5.

³³ Rosen, *Black Lotus*, 243.

³⁴ Ibid.; Vrajalila Devi Dasi, "American Tour," Summer 1992, BtSwami.com, <https://btswami.com/vault/tour-reports/1992-summer-america>, 13.

led by a small group of Black American spiritual teachers—a few BTS disciples, two women of the Divine Universal Sisterhood, and D.C. celebrity and health food entrepreneur/enthusiast Kibwe Bey.³⁵ The Institute provided a space for hosting weekly lectures, open Q and A discussions, spiritual teacher training courses, meditation and vegetarian cooking classes, communal feasting, and guru *darshan* (face-to-face personal and spiritual exchanges with BTS). The most public and popular lectures of the Institute were given on Wednesday nights and, when Bhakti Tirtha Swami traveled back to America and personally gave these lectures, one to two hundred guests were in attendance. In the beginning, the Institute's Wednesday night lectures were advertised on local radio stations arranged by Institute staff, but their popularity swelled eventually to the point that they found it unnecessary to advertise at all. The titles of some of his 1991 lectures given at the Institute indicate the themes discussed: "Spiritual Pitfalls", "Demi-Gods and other Angelic Beings, and Their Involvement in the New World Order", "Activities in the Spiritual World", and "Psychic Defense".³⁶ Other themes of his classes and workshops include discussion of time and space, conflict resolution, stress and time management, and mind control.³⁷ Beyond the attraction garnered by eye-catching lecture topics, the popularity of the space also benefited from

³⁵ Rosen, *Black Lotus*, 247; Anonymous, "Brother Bey, Nutritional Guru, Dies," *Washington Informer*, 2010, ProQuest.

³⁶ Yasodamayi Devi Dasi, "American Tour I," April 1991, BtSwami.com, <https://btswami.com/vault/tour-reports/1991-april-american-tour-i>.

³⁷ "American Tour III," 1990, BtSwami.com, <https://btswami.com/vault/tour-reports/1990-american-tour-part-ii>.

Bhakti Tirtha Swami's simultaneous public appearances on radio and television in the D.C. area that were fostering cross-cultural and interreligious relationships and discourses.

He regularly gave lectures and interviews at Howard University, various churches, radio stations, TV programs, and health and metaphysical symposiums. The public engagements often became distributable cassette tapes through IFAST's Tape Ministry (an association likely ran by a volunteer group of his personal disciples) and were then circulated among eagerly awaiting Institute members and disciples in African countries and other parts of America. The tape ministry struggled to keep up with the demand, especially once cassettes were being bought and resold by local bookstores. Several internal secretarial reports from the earliest years of the Institute describe that IFAST attracted a religiously diverse crowd of D.C. professionals (in government and business) who had encountered Bhakti Tirtha Swami speaking in radio and television programs locally; it is reported that they arrived out of a desire to personally connect with Bhakti Tirtha Swami and his teachings further.³⁸ These reports, written by female initiates for BTS disciples, also reveal that many classes at the Institute were

³⁸ The following secretarial reports on Bhakti Tirtha Swami's tours were most closely examined: "American Tour Part III," 1990, BtSwami.com, <https://btswami.com/vault/tour-reports/1990-american-tour-part-ii>; Yasodamayi Devi Dasi, "American Tour I," April 1991, BtSwami.com, <https://btswami.com/vault/tour-reports/1991-april-american-tour-i>; Indrani Devi Dasi, "American Tour Part II 1991," May 1991, BtSwami.com, <https://btswami.com/vault/tour-reports/1991-may-american-tour-part-ii>; Yasodamayi Dasi, "American Tour;" Vrajalila Devi Dasi, "American Tour"; Laghima Siddhi Devi Dasi, "The Institute for Applied Spiritual Technology Tour Report," Tour Report (The Institute for Applied Spiritual Technology, August 1997), <https://btswami.com/vault/tour-reports/1997-july-august-america>.

systematically structured around an in-vogue or trending topic that would be linked to applicable and viable spiritual and ritual practices and theology of Gaudiya Vaishnavas. The discussed principles, practices and values were presented as universal and non-sectarian, often paralleled or compared with other religions and cultures. The reports also reveal that Swami's popularity in Washington D.C. consumed much of his time when touring the United States, not allowing him much time to visit other parts of the country during those spring and summer tours.

The stated aim of the Institute in the 1990 mission statement was to build a self-sufficient, self-supportive "nonsectarian" community of spiritualists, with an emphasis on advancing in *applying* "God-centered techniques and principles" from "whatever scriptures we [any participant] hold dear".³⁹ From the list of topics that the Institute members explored, one might consider their sheer breadth—conflict resolution, "psychic defense" (mind-body practices, like mindfulness), stress and time management, death and dying (reincarnation), yoga (particularly *bhakti* yoga), tai chi and other martial arts, homeopathy and herbology (holistic health care), vegetarian and vegan diets, "consciousness transformation", "male-female relationships" (heterosexual partnerships), and youth organizations. The Institute also organized African, Central American, and Indian exchange programs and relocation services to live in Africa. The Institute fulfilled many social roles and community needs beyond just spiritual labor,

³⁹ Rosen, *Black Lotus*, 246-7. The mission statement I refer to here is reproduced in Rosen, *Black Lotus*.

perhaps in similar ways to how African American religious institutions have historically operated. From psychological and mental to physical and nutritional and from familial to professional resources and support, the institute nourished and catered to a diversity of religious and spiritual practitioners (including Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Hebrew Israelites, and unaffiliated spiritualists) in numerous ways.⁴⁰

The mission statement also reveals the same semantic of urgency that was detected in John Favor's 1972 undergraduate thesis and is certainly audible and visible in a number of Bhakti Tirtha Swami's books and speeches. Swami often used the grammar of emergency, crisis, and urgency to convey and propel his private and public spiritual endeavors.⁴¹ "Emergency consciousness" and "we're on borrowed time" are remembered by a close disciple of his as oft-said remarks.⁴² The secretarial reports also show evidence of disciples endeavoring to increase the pace of or expand their services

⁴⁰ From one artifact, a secretarial report written in 1992, we can see the variety of religious communities represented at the Institute: "An entourage of enthusiastic devotees from the Sserulanda Planetary Spiritual Community of New York under the direction of Bambi Baaba [...] There were representatives from the Original Hebrew Israelite Community, the Muslim community, the Buddhist community, Self-Realization Fellowship, A.M.E. Zion Church, ISKCON, cultural nationalists, and many other people not necessarily affiliated with any organization." Vrajalila Devi Dasi, "American Tour."

⁴¹ Some illustrative examples include the closing reflections to his book *Spiritual Warrior I: Uncovering Spiritual Truths in Psychic Phenomena*, the introduction and first chapter in *Spiritual Warrior II: Transforming Lust into Love*, chapter three in *Spiritual Warrior III: Solace for the Heart in Difficult Times*, and chapter one of *Spiritual Warrior VI: Beyond Fanaticism, Terrorism, and War: Discover the Peace Solution*. See Appendix C for full citations.

⁴² Rosen, *Black Lotus*, 245-6.

based on a “constant reminder given to us by our Gurudeva”; the authors of the reports frame this most often as a superb, albeit challenging, task.⁴³

In 1995, Swami accepted a request by his god-brother Tamal Krishna Goswami (also an ISKCON GBC member) to direct and revive a then flailing 350-acre ISKCON farm community called Gita Nagari in Port Royal, Pennsylvania.⁴⁴ At around the same time, Swami was elected to be the GBC’s vice-chairman, despite many of his most successful projects operating independently of ISKCON.⁴⁵ Though clearly a valuable asset and leader in the transnational religious organization, Swami was a somewhat controversial figure among ISKCON’s administrating body. For five years (1989-1994), he was the subject of a number of disciplinary sanctions by the GBC: in 1990, he was suspended from initiating any new disciples; from 1991 to 1994, he was suspended from his role as a member of the GBC for failing to fulfill all GBC member requirements and follow a religious retraining protocol for his reinstatement (see Appendix E). In 1998, the GBC raised concerns about Swami’s dress aesthetic, because rather than always donning the customary saffron robes of a renunciate guru, he sometimes wore bright African textiles and carried a custom-made wooden cane with Nrsimhadeva (half-man, half-lion avatar of Krishna) carved into it.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, once reinstated, Bhakti Tirtha Swami

⁴³ Vrajalila Devi Dasi, “American Tour” 14-5.

⁴⁴ Rosen, *Black Lotus*, 316-7.

⁴⁵ Rosen, *Black Lotus*, 316; also, see GBC Resolutions in 1995 in Appendix E.

⁴⁶ See Appendix E; Swami, “A Life of Compassion, Dedication and Love - His Holiness Bhakti Tirtha Swami Maharaj”; and photos in Rosen, *Black Lotus*.

progressively acquired administrative responsibilities over ISKCON temples and centers in Africa, Dole, France, Maryland, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Switzerland, Washington, D.C., and West Virginia; in 1994, he even was tasked with “enhancing worldwide recognition” for ISKCON (see Appendix E).

Bhakti Tirtha Swami and his Institute disciples made substantial changes to life at the Gita Nagari farm that contributed directly to its contemporary success as a modern sustainable Hare Krishna farm community, retreat center, cow sanctuary, and educational facility and partner, and the first U.S. *ahimsa* (non-violence) commercial milk producer. Their late '90s interventions developed the interpersonal bonds, event programming, community rituals and knowledge of practical agricultural and rural-based self-sufficiency skills of the community members. Conferences, seminars, workshops and retreats were implemented as well as plans for food production, a learning center, waste management, community health care and guest housing. Early on, Swami envisioned that the farm would come to host seminars and workshops with guest facilities attracting both Hare Krishna devotees and the general public to their retreats.⁴⁷ Now, under the leadership of another Black American guru, Devamrita Swami, Gita Nagari certainly carries forth that vision and labor today as an eco-farm retreat center attracting about 5,000 visitors every year through offering farm work/study alternative

⁴⁷ Laghima Siddhi Devi Dasi, “The Institute for Applied Spiritual Technology Tour Report.”

breaks for university students, yoga teacher training, custom family summer packages, seminars, and meditation retreats and religious festivals.⁴⁸

Self-sufficient farms and agricultural projects fit rather well into Bhakti Tirtha Swami's persistent recognition of burdening crises (e.g., malnutrition, widening wealth gap, gun violence, addictions) plaguing society. Living congruent to nature becomes a holistic spiritual solution to an entrapping nexus of growing urban development, materialism, and ecological devastation. In *Spiritual Warrior III*, Swami communicates this eco-theological dynamic rather frankly:

A life of simplicity and self-sufficiency creates a potent antidote for almost all material ills because it does not feed the flames of materialism and brings about a harmonious attitude toward Mother Nature. Simplicity helps us recognize the essence of life and, because it provides few external factors to distract us, makes us less vulnerable to temptation. We gain more control of our environment and experience less stress.⁴⁹

He continues to clarify his eco-theology or eco-politics further:

We can learn to live more simply by using natural resources in a proper, balanced way rather than abusing and exploiting them. When we recognize and connect with the earth as a living organism we naturally feel more whole and secure knowing that we are in harmony with our surroundings, resting on our mother's bosom. When we develop a genuinely respectful attitude toward our environment—not just in words, but in actions—we receive more assistance and protection from all the wonderful guardians provided by our Mother-Father God.

⁴⁸ Madhava Smullen, "Gita Nagari Lifestyle Project Invites Devotees To Experience Village Life," *ISKCON News*, April 13, 2018, <https://iskconnews.org/gita-nagari-lifestyle-project-invites-devotees-to-experience-village-life,6534/>; "Gita Nagari Eco Farm and Sanctuary," Gita Nagari Eco Farm and Sanctuary, accessed April 9, 2021, <https://gnecofarm.org/>; Sam Newhouse, "Philly Yoga and Meditation Center Links City Dwellers Back to Nature," *Metro Philadelphia*, July 12, 2017, sec. News, <https://philly.metro.us/philly-yoga-and-meditation-center-links-city-dwellers-back-to-nature/>.

⁴⁹ Bhakti Tirtha Swami, *Spiritual Warrior III: Solace for the Heart in Difficult Times*, (Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 2000), 246, Kindle.

We must move toward self-sufficiency and live in accordance with divine law. Self-sufficiency allows us to be independent, and it is natural to have control over the variables in our lives. We must remove ourselves from the “opulence” that technology has convinced us is a necessity. When we depend on these technologies excessively, we live an unnatural life, experience mental and physical stress, and have few inner resources to fall back on when difficulties arise. When we are slaves to luxury, we are vulnerable and we miss out on the real joys of life.⁵⁰

An attractive alternative to a crowded, bustling life in D.C., Gita Nagari attracted a fair number of Institute members and families to eventually relocate to join Swami’s moral and ecological mission there.

Bhakti Tirtha Swami directly transfigured the racial, ethnic, and national image, discourse, and reception of *bhakti* and Gaudiya Vaishnavism by taking up the position of a Black initiating guru in a transnational Gaudiya Vaishnava organization, building partnerships and infrastructures in predominately Black communities and among diverse religious practitioners, and directly initiating large number of Africans and African Americans into a Gaudiya Vaishnava lineage. At the age of 54, Swami was diagnosed with stage four melanoma cancer in his left foot and diabetes. For at least several years prior to this diagnosis, he had been suffering from chronic health issues that even led him to seek care from a cancer specialist.⁵¹ There is a very well-known

⁵⁰ Ibid., 264-5.

⁵¹ See “Holy Man of Many Parts;” Himavati Dasi, Laghima-Siddhi Devi Dasi, and Bhakti Tirtha Swami, “August-October 1999: France, Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, England,” Tour Report (The Institute for Applied Spiritual Technology, October 1999), BTswami.com, <https://btswami.com/vault/tour-reports/1999-august-to-october-europe-and-africa>; and Paramesvara Devi Dasi et al., “Summary Tour Report,” BTswami.com, June 2001, <https://btswami.com/vault/tour-reports/2001-april-may-june-worldwide>.

living memory that accompanies remembering Swami's diagnosis. It is often recalled by those who knew Bhakti Tirtha Swami well that his calamity was a direct result of a repeated prayer he made in the months prior to experiencing unusual pain in his foot: he prayed to release the suffering (*karma*) of the world and, instead, have it placed upon himself.⁵² At what seemed to be the peak of his prominence, Bhakti Tirtha Swami eventually accepted his imminent death, sought treatment, but eventually decided to spend his remaining days in the company of his extended spiritual family at Gita Nagari, where his *samadhi* (final resting place) is now placed.⁵³

Swami vigorously communicated an expansive, all-encompassing vision of humanity through his nineteen books translated into an extensive host of non-English languages. He continues to have an active presence online through Instagram (@bhaktitirthaswami), Facebook, and YouTube (B.T. Swami Vault) social media accounts and a fascinating archive on his legacy website (BTSwami.com) run by his followers.⁵⁴

⁵² Rosen, *Black Lotus*, 329-33; Radhanath Swami repeats one version of this memory in one of his lectures in 2005:

"He was giving seminars, he was preaching, he was doing kirtans, he was personally counseling anybody that would come to him. That year he traveled to 32 countries! It was a victorious tour. But he said still devotees need help therefore he prayed to Srila Prabhupada, 'Let me take the spirit of Vasudev Dutta and let me suffer. If you so desire Prabhupada, if you so desire Krishna, let me suffer and let my suffering remove the obstacles, so the devotees can have a happy life in Krishna Consciousness and go back home back to Godhead.['] He offered this prayer from his heart. Soon after he was diagnosed with Melanoma Cancer." See Swami, "A Life of Compassion, Dedication and Love - His Holiness Bhakti Tirtha Swami Maharaj."

⁵³ *Samadhi* is used in ISKCON to refer to burial sites of revered teachers in addition to its more common meaning as the meditative state of complete concentration or absorption. The term *mahasamadhi* is also used among Swamini's disciples when referring to Swamini's earthly departure (i.e., death).

⁵⁴ Bhakti Tirtha Swami (@bhaktitirthaswami), "Bhakti Tirtha Swami," Office of Bhakti Tirtha Swami (www.BTSwami.com), Instagram, user account, accessed April 12, 2021,

His posthumous Instagram account has the largest number of followers (twelve thousand) of all his social media accounts.⁵⁵ The seemingly small following actually conceals the fact that he has several influential celebrity followers including New York Times Bestselling author Jay Shetty (@jayshetty), American bass player Liam Wilson (@liam_wilson), Life Coach and Nutritionist Zach Rancey (@zachrancey), German spiritual coach, podcaster, and author Laura Malina Seiler (@lauramalinaseiler), Actress Lauren London (@laurenlondon), and Actress Jada Pinkett Smith (@jadapinkettsmith).⁵⁶ Smith is both his biggest follower in terms of the independent influence she commands (a whopping 10.7 million followers on Instagram alone), and his biggest celebrity endorser at the moment.⁵⁷ In March 2021, she circulated images and videos of Swami, including his picture, words, and books.⁵⁸ Of his book *Spiritual Warrior II: Transforming Lust Into*

<https://www.instagram.com/bhaktitirthaswami>; B. T. Swami Vault Team, "B. T. Swami Vault," YouTube, channel, accessed April 12, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsuYyWRuLUZ5Vdpc6sW_NBg; B. T. Swami Vault Team, "B. T. Swami Vault," Facebook, page, accessed April 12, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/btswamivault>; @btswamiquotes, "B. T. Swami Quotes," Facebook, page, accessed April 12, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/btswamiquotes>; InterIFast (@InterIFast), "International Institute for Applied Spiritual Technology," Facebook, page, accessed April 12, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/InterIFAST>; InterIFast (website), "International Institute for Applied Spiritual Technology," accessed April 12, 2021, <http://interifast.com>; B. T. Swami (website and online archive), accessed April 12, 2021, <http://btswami.com>.

⁵⁵ Bhakti Tirtha Swami (@bhaktitirthaswami), "Bhakti Tirtha Swami," Office of Bhakti Tirtha Swami (www.BTswami.com), Instagram, user account, accessed April 12, 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/bhaktitirthaswami>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Jada Pinkett Smith (@jadapinkettsmith), "Jada Pinkett Smith," accessed April 12, 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/jadapinkettsmith>.

⁵⁸ Jada Pinkett Smith (@jadapinkettsmith), "Happy Sunday 🌸🙏🌸," Instagram photo, March 14, 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CMZ--CHjik-/>; Jada Pinkett Smith (@jadapinkettsmith), "If you are REALLY about that spiritual life ... this book made it very clear for me what I needed to change in my life and cleared

Love (1998), she posted a video showing the book and offering her endorsement: “I wanted to share this book with you guys. This is by a man I consider to be one of my teachers, Bhakti Tirtha Swami. This book got me all the way together so check it out. It is really really good.”⁵⁹ Wrapped on her wrist are *japa mala*, the wooden meditation stringed beads used in mantra chanting practices in the Hare Krishna movement. Smith has not only been inspired by Bhakti Tirtha Swami, but also Black American and New York-based Gaudiya Vaishnava *kirtan* artist Acyuta Gopi, who is a featured episode speaker in Smith’s new Facebook Watch series *Jada’s Essentials* showcasing Black women.⁶⁰ Without a doubt, Bhakti Tirtha Swami (and other Black Vaishnavas) continue to be the recipients of admiration from influential elites, even in afterlife.

6.2 Black Utopia: Futuring with Bhakti Tirtha Swami

Krishna Consciousness is not a religion. It is a spiritual scientific society.

up A LOT of misperceptions I had around spirituality,” Instagram video and photos, March 28, 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CM9-jvWjI7j/>.

⁵⁹ Smith (@jadapinkettsmith), “If you are REALLY about that spiritual life.” It should be noted that Will Smith has also mentioned the same book as part of his spiritual development on Adrienne Banfield-Norris’ podcast *Positively Gam* in 2020. See Sheiresa Ngo, “Will Smith Says He Became ‘Deeply Unfulfilled’ By Material Things,” *Newstex Blogs The Cheat Sheet* (blog), December 20, 2020, <https://www.cheatsheet.com/entertainment/will-smith-says-he-became-deeply-unfulfilled-by-material-things.html/>.

⁶⁰ Facebook Watch (@facebookwatch), “Jada’s Essentials · Facebook Watch: Join Jada Pinkett Smith in her new series featuring a group of women who have inspired her. This series showcases Black Women and illuminates their super powers,” Facebook video, March 29, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/facebookwatch/videos/271621827947135/>.

– Bhakti Tirtha Swami⁶¹

When one thinks of a swami (a spiritual leader), one imagines a sedate Indian man. However, his Grace Srila Bhakti-Tirtha Swami Krshnapada—by appearance—would be the direct opposite of this image. He is 38 years-old, a Princeton-educated [B]lack man and a former civil rights leader.

– *Afro-American Newspaper* (Baltimore, MD), c. 1988⁶²

From a Hindu studies perspective, Bhakti Tirtha Swami appears to be a quintessential itinerant guru figure, barring his racial identity as a Black American man. Both his spiritual authority is traceable to a direct line of transmission or succession from his guru and his institutional and public role and practices as a renounced spiritual teacher could make him easily comparable to other transnational Hindu gurus like Paramahansa Yogananda, Swami Satchidananda, and Sri Chinmoy. The potential issue, however, may not so much be how to fit Bhakti Tirtha Swami into the category of a Hindu guru, but rather ensuring the religious framing does not overdetermine him—making him excessively familiar. Excessive familiarity under the codified lens of an

⁶¹ Alma Kaufman (staff writer), “Krishna From Cleveland Comes Home,” n.d., sec. Religion, Vault - Press/Articles, BtSwami.com, accessed April 12, 2021, <https://btswami.com/vault/press-articles/krishna-from-cleveland-comes-home>.

⁶² Diana Carter, “Peace Begins Within: Black Guru Advocates Reliance on Inner Strengths,” *The Afro-American*, n.d., sec. The Living Church, accessed April 12, 2021, <https://btswami.com/vault/press-articles/peace-begins-within-2>. The date for this article should be c. 1988 based on the Bhakti Tirtha Swami turning thirty-eight in February of that year.

itinerant, celibate spiritual teacher could foreclose fruitive opportunities to place him in conversation with other Black visionaries and political thinkers who are not religious or spiritual figures. Indeed, there is a diversity of religious, political, and cultural Black communities evidently and richly manifest in Bhakti Tirtha Swami's life and projects—why exclude him from moving between these spaces posthumously?

In *Black Utopia*, political scholar Alexander Zamalin recovers a hidden Black intellectual history of utopian thought.⁶³ From W. E. B. Du Bois' Afro-Asian romantic vision of a Global South utopia in the novella *Dark Princess* (1928) to Octavia Butler's Black resiliency in Sci-Fi dystopic worlds, Black American reflections on utopias contain potent political imaginings of the Black human in society:

Black utopians and antiutopians detailed new visions of collective life and racial identity. They outlined futuristic ways of being. They warned about the disastrous ways of contemporary life, while espousing radical notions of freedom. They speculated on the ideal conditions for fulfilling human desire, while exploding its extant meanings. Human potential was given a new lease on life. Justice was transfigured. They theorized what was scientifically improbable and a new [B]lack citizen that seemed impossible.⁶⁴

Turning towards Black utopia is like flipping the coin around on experiences of dystopic subjugation, dehumanization, and violence upon the Black subject.⁶⁵ Such a focus acknowledges that within the terror, there was, is, and will be transformative visions

⁶³ Alex Zamalin, *Black Utopia: The History of an Idea from Black Nationalism to Afrofuturism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

and hope. I turn now to Bhakti Tirtha Swami's notion of the "spiritual warrior" to illustrate the elements of Black utopian thinking present.

Positioning Bhakti Tirtha Swami's intellectual labor as part of a tradition of Black utopian thought excavates a living theology attuned to dire contemporary conditions while exhibiting transcendent hope and possibility of fully liberating oneself in spiritual community. Bhakti Tirtha Swami's six volume book series *Spiritual Warrior* (1996-2005) continually explores this interplay. For his religious lineage, Swami perhaps coined—or is at least most associated with—the coupling "spiritual warrior," an identity which he develops on the premise that the world is ever-toxic and destabilized, a formidable place for attempting any moral, ethical, or non-exploitative pursuits.⁶⁶ The idea of a spiritual warrior and, by extension, a spiritual army has overtones of warfare, violence, enemies and confrontation to deliberately accentuate the tragedies of earth and humanity (such as human rights violations, school gun violence, addictions and global environmental catastrophes) as so immense and horrific that they require immediate counteractions—an army of spiritualists to heal the planet with austerity, compassion, wisdom and love.

The connotation of war is also reticent of the *Gita*, wherein Krishna and Arjuna speak on

⁶⁶ A basic key word search of the phrase "spiritual warrior" on Bhaktivedanta Vedabase, a comprehensive digital database of Prabhupada's writings, letters, and audio transcripts, yields zero instances. Though, anyone familiar with Prabhupada's theology and personality would not hesitate to admit that the idea of a spiritual warrior is readily expressed. See Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (website), accessed April 12, 2021, <https://vedabase.io/en/>.

a literal and figurative battlefield; the latter being waged inside the self as the self comes to its own liberation and self-realization.

Spiritual Warrior III: Solace for the Heart in Difficult Times (2000) opens with the sentence “Humanity stands at the brink of a spiritual emergency—and a profound spiritual awakening,” capturing both the urgency of the crisis as well as the extant resolution. The illusion of political modernity’s promise—whether as the American Dream or Marxism—to the worker and the society are dismantled early on here as insufficient utopias that fall apart because they commodify a human’s value, ultimately dehumanizing and isolating a person from an interconnected interplanetary family of the divine “Mother-Father God”, demigods (or extraterrestrial life forms), embodied eternal souls, and non-embodied beings (e.g., ghosts and spirits).

In his retelling of an event he attended with the invited Marxist guests of then-President Kaunda of Zambia, Bhakti Tirtha Swami probed:

“You call yourselves Marxists,” I said. “Yet, you are also Africans and spiritual people. You have grown up surrounded by ancient prophecies and ancient wisdom. Don’t you see how incongruous Marxism is with your Afro-spiritual orientation? Marxism is a behaviorist perspective that presumes that a human being is merely a mechanical entity, not coordinated with the universe or with any higher scheme of existence. How can these two philosophies harmonize when they are naturally opposites?”

Once I had their attention, I acknowledged that Marxism has good intentions, because in essence it deals with being your brothers’ and sisters’ keeper. It also attacks class distinctions and racism. Despite its good intentions, though, it does not follow through on its own premises. How can you be your brothers’ and sisters’ keeper when you deny the existence of your divine Mother and Father? What makes you brothers and sisters unless you have common parents? Similarly, how can you be your brothers’ and sisters’ keeper when you

rely solely on material commodities that are completely transitory and temporary?

We see now that, worldwide, the communist order has fallen apart. But, spiritually speaking, there is little or no difference between a so-called capitalist nation and a communist one, because neither truly encourages higher consciousness. Both of these political and economic systems share a similar materialistic view of reality. They also have a common core motivation: exploitation. What does it matter whether you are exploited by the communists or by the capitalists, by a monarchy or by an oligarchy? Exploitation is exploitation.⁶⁷

The political solution, which is also a spiritual one, to unending exploitation is the development of “a new type of human being”—the spiritual warrior—who “can express spiritual realities in the midst of the turmoil of daily life,” is trained in universal “spiritual technologies,” and ultimately overcomes the onslaught of materialism. This warrior is rarely violent, but is undoubtedly aggressively and covertly attacked at psychological, emotional and even physical levels—Buddha, Jesus, and St. Teresa of Avila are among the illustrative cases.⁶⁸ The new human being recognizes an identity that transcends the limitations and suffering of the human body, readily experiencing “sublime ecstasy” and “true liberation” of their “whole, healthy, [and] joyful” self that is lovingly serving God and all of humanity.⁶⁹ The new human being becomes *beings* and enters into community. The community is identified as the ideal place of refuge; indigenous peoples of Africa, India, Tibet, and South America are given as examples of

⁶⁷ Swami, *Spiritual Warrior III*, 18-9.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 204-5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 159-161 and 182.

those capable of resilience in the face of vulnerability.⁷⁰ Through self-sufficient, integrity-filled, independent communities, the spiritual warrior experiences both internal and external release from the violence of selfishness, greed, and exploitation.⁷¹

It is the spiritual warrior in community that brings the reader to the crux of the full utopian vision that Bhakti Tirtha Swami attempted to generate and stimulate globally:

Around the planet, the communities in which spiritual warriors live must become so powerful that everyone becomes surcharged with spiritual energy. People should feel that they have entered another dimension when they visit these communities. They will see the love and respect that spiritual warriors have among themselves and be inspired to join our powerful community, or create their own. That is how the positive energy can spread.⁷²

In this community, the interplanetary, cosmic community of highly divine and conscious forces permeate, attract, and multiply, utterly upending the vast phenomenon of crises plaguing humanity—at least in some corners of earth. Burgeoning with idealism, the vision invigorated Bhakti Tirtha Swami and his community to engage in rural community-building projects (e.g. Gita Nagari in Pennsylvania). Swami forcefully remained not only cognizant, but directly respondent to innumerable antiutopian forces

⁷⁰ Ibid., 266. I read Bhakti Tirtha Swami's notion of the empowering spiritual community as a translation and expression of Rupa Goswami's *sadhu sangha*, which is present in ISKCON's official canon of translated Gaudiya Vaishnava literatures. In addition, through Swami's valuation of traditional and indigenous practices he witnessed in his frequent sojourns in Africa, Swami edifies his readers on the ways of intentional collective life and, still, while still comparing them to similar aspects found in Vedic texts (e.g., reincarnation, *samskaras* (rites of passage life rituals), *Purusha* (ultimate person, source), mantra, *gunas* (a typology of three predominant material energies), *karma*).

⁷¹ Ibid., 260-1.

⁷² Ibid., 279.

his “army” encountered—anxiety, anger, lust, exploitation, grief, depression, addiction, negative metaphysical experiences, interreligious conflict, racism and sexism, to name a few themes addressed in his books. Through the persona of Bhakti Tirtha Swami, the vision of the “new [B]lack citizen that seemed impossible,” the paradigmatic spiritual warrior, becomes a living reality. Therefore, it is possible to say that he theorized his own improbable existence—the Black-bodied swami—as the basis for re-imagining the human and humanity.

Further research on the intellectual work of Bhakti Tirtha Swami could take a comparative approach to his development of the spiritual warrior concept comparing it with Martin Luther King’s beloved community and Gandhi’s *satyagraha*—which also involved reimagining and producing ideal modern spiritual communities. Swami’s promotion of African and indigenous practices as well as comparisons of ancient Egypt and ancient Vedic ritual life seems indicative of what scholars like Linda Selzer and Kyle Garton-Gundling have seen in “Black Dharma” (African American practices of Asian religions) broadly—namely that Asian religions, when represented to African Americans, usually appeal to an “often-contested prerogative to remain loyal to one’s ethnic roots.”⁷³ History becomes a vessel for reinterpreting future possibilities. In Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982), she “imagines Hindu religious principles emerging

⁷³ Kyle Garton-Gundling, “‘Ancestors We Didn’t Even Know We Had’: Alice Walker, Asian Religion, and Ethnic Authenticity,” *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 6 (March 1, 2015), 2.

from African sources, hiding the influence of Asian religions” until later essays and speeches make the connect explicit.⁷⁴ Similarly, in Swamini Turiyasangitananda’s hagiography, *Portrait of Devotion*, Alice’s “pure-blooded” Native American great-great grandfather and Chief is reasoned to be a vital “physiological linkage to Asia and her spiritual, holy land of India.”⁷⁵ Figuring Asia and Asian religious concepts into the physical bond of ancestors in Walker’s fiction and Swamini’s biographical portrait works to appeal to ideas of cultural and ethnic authenticity and legitimacy. Both represent a field of inquiry to situate Bhakti Tirtha Swami’s myriad approaches to illustrating shared ancestry across the Americas, India, and Africa.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁵ Shankari C. Adams, *Portrait of Devotion: Spiritual Life of Alice Coltrane Swamini Turiyasangitananda* (self-pub., 2016), chap. “Her Appearance on Earth,” Kindle.

7. Roots: Black Matriarchies and Kinship

7.1 Introduction

One of the central advantages of employing ethnographic methodologies in the study of religion is the opportunity to move beyond prescribed and idealized religious thought and “History” to the discourses, practices, and formations of living religious persons (i.e. lived religion). I think of the insights of Robert Orsi’s ethnographic historiography of Catholics’ everyday sacred-secular relationships and Karen McCarthy Brown’s *Mama Lola*, a participant-collaborative ethnographic portrait of a Black Vodou matriarch, as forebearers to this scholarship.¹ Both elucidate ethnography as a potentially decolonizing method of research that elucidates the experiences of those from within non-hegemonic, subaltern, maligned and suppressed groups; those who by virtue of their non-dominant and Other-ed positionalities within a society or culture are relegated to the footnotes of historical narratives and archives and thus, are made to be forgotten or excised in due time.

Constructing the self in relationship to others in oral histories and recounted memories reorients History with a capital ‘H’ (i.e., the hegemonic social construction of the past), adjusting the vantage point, the concerns worthy of raising, and the social players worthy of remembering. It also informs how we understand the present and

¹ Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, Comparative Studies in Religion and Society 4 (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2001). I also am indebted to Black feminism, as a critical social theory and praxis, for elucidating how formations of the past are sites of insurgency against oppressions.

how we envision the future. In informal conversations, formal interviews, and presence in intimate home and public community spaces of my U.S. ethnographic fieldwork between 2019 and 2021, nineteen Black American practitioners in the vast and multifaceted religion known as Hinduism had the opportunity to discuss with me who and what are central to each of their religious and spiritual identities and practices.

In this chapter, I examine how several participants' oral histories, mostly collected from our one-on-one interviews, designated women, particularly Black women, as spiritual authorities, often through a matrifocal (i.e. mother-centered) framework. The familial religious matriarchies that participants reassembled in interviews reveal themes of place-making and belonging as well as the construction of kin in their religious networks, what African American religious studies scholar Todne Thomas calls "kincraft".² By discussing kinship relationships, this chapter disrupts possible suppositions that Black Americans' relationships with Asian religions are already always defined by an individualist pursuit and an adoption of a wholly "foreign" religion, which are perspectives taken-for-granted in studies on Asian

² Todne Thomas, *Kinraft: The Making of Black Evangelical Sociality*, Religious Cultures of African and African Diaspora People (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021). It should be noted that in relation to Thomas' ethnographic work, 'kinraft' invites us to think of "family beyond 'the family'" (7). That is bit of a problematic for me because the construction of 'the family' is mediated by hegemonic heteronormative discourses that privilege certain blood and legal ties which exclude a plethora of legitimate family arrangements. Thomas is aware of that, but does not make 'the family' more than that dominant narrative. In this study, 'the family' is part of the overarching process of familial fashionings, 'kinraft' if you will, and always has been.

Religions in the United States.³ In fact, nearly one third of the participants I interviewed grew up in a Black (in one case, Afro-Cuban) Hindu family.⁴

While this chapter acknowledges biological (blood and legal) kinship as a means of transmission of Hindu practices and beliefs to Black Americans, it is also galvanized by feminist and queer critiques to acknowledge that reducing the familial arrangement (traditionally imagined in the United States as patriarchal, heterosexual nucleus) to biogenetics and legalities frames other social constructions (e.g., adoptions, LGBT families, matriarchy) of relatedness as deviant and less than substantial (see the anthropological category “fictive kin”).⁵ Therefore, the non-biological relations (also known as “voluntary” or “chosen” kin) articulated in participants’ interviews are preserved as they formed constituent parts of their religious and spiritual family trees.

Crucial to this chapter, I asked participants in formal structured interviews to share with me who are the “people you feel are most important to your spiritual or

³ See, for example, Garton-Gundling, *Enlightened Individualism* and Lucia, *Reflections of Amma*. In Lucia’s U.S. based study, ethnicity and culture were correlated with distinct religious interpretations. Analyzing intersections of gender and ethnicity in the religious organization of Indian guru Mata “Amma” Amritanandamayi, Amanda Lucia argues that “inheritors” (i.e. plainly, those of Indian ethnicity) and “adopters” (i.e. mostly non-Indian, White Americans) interpret Amma’s re-sacralizing of a prototypical feminine in distinct ways. The issue that I have with the discourse that this framework uses (i.e. inheritors vs. adopters) is that it reifies an image of Indian ethnicities as naturally inheritors of Hinduism and non-Indic ethnicities as converts. It also utilizes a colorblind interpretative terminology to veil its own racial lens which does not allow us to have substantive dialogue about our racial logics, biases and assumptions.

⁴ Most of these participants were from ISKCON-affiliated families. One participant, Surya Botofasina, is the son of a disciple of Turiyasangitananda.

⁵ See, for instance, American anthropologist Kath Weston classic study in homosexuality and kinship, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. See also Patricia Hill Collins’ *Black Feminist Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), particularly chapter four’s discussion of the oppressive image of Black matriarchy produced by a U.S. government report and American sociologist Moniyen.

religious practice during your lifetime” and followed up with subsequent demographic questions about the individuals they named and the nature of their relationship with those individuals (see Appendix D).⁶ Among the individuals mentioned were occasionally texts (e.g. Yogananda’s *Autobiography of a Yogi*), historical figures (e.g. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X), and divinities (e.g. Krishna, Shiva, Jesus, Mary, God) which resulted in fascinating questions and answers about the race of God and the perceived relationality and closeness one has to texts and cultural and religious icons. Despite my own curiosities about those answers, I will prioritize in this chapter the more frequently cited gurus, mentors, friends, and family members that shaped the religious practices of participants, particularly those situated in the language of kinship. In this chapter’s discussion of our encounters (both found in formal and subsequent informal settings), I have taken an analytical approach, indebted to anthropology, that seeks to convey how Black actors in American Hinduism constitute, enact, and make sense of their religious past, present and future through their personal networks and narratives. In moving from embodied experience to discourse, as participants and I did and as I do now to again re-articulate the gathered conversations, experiences, artifacts, and

⁶ At minimum, each person consented and participated in one structured formal interview with four parts (see Appendix D). An exception was made for Krsnanandini Devi Dasi’s one hour interview of which the structure was modified to be less structured to accommodate her tenuous health state at the time of interview. It is not always the case that every question asked was answered. Participants had the option to skip questions and end interviews early, if desired. Of nineteen participants, sixteen participants fully completed, two partially completed, and one did not complete “Part Two” questions of the questionnaire (see Appendix D). Although the questions were influenced by sociology and social network theory, the data functions within an anthropological framework focused on interpretative analysis and was designed to be exploratory rather than sociologically comparative or statistically representative.

fieldnotes into these writings, the ethnographic project might be envisaged as a series of translations pursuing mutual legibility and shared sensoriality amid shifting religious, cultural, racial, gendered, and class registers and environs. As anthropologist Kathy McCarthy Brown remarked “interpretation [is] both the subject matter and the end product of ethnographic work.”⁷

My resolution to highlight narratives of mother, family, kinship and Black womanhood is driven by what my participants chose to disclose to me in interviews. Seven participants named a Black woman as their “spiritual authority” and/or “guru”. Of these seven, four self-identified as women and three as men. Four were affiliated with ISKCON, two with Turiyasangitananda’s Sai Anantam Ashram, and one with Integral Yoga founded by Satchidananda Swami. Ten participants, more than half, named mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and other female relatives among the “most important” people to their spiritual or religious practice during their lifetime, whereas male relatives almost inevitably went unmentioned. In both interviews and conversations, the religious influence of female relatives was recalled at greater length and frequency than legal or biological male kin (e.g. father, grandfather, brothers, husbands, uncles).⁸ Knowing of multi-generational Black Hindu-practicing families, I

⁷ Brown, *Mama Lola*, 14.

⁸ Though, in general, male figures were named more often than female figures. The correlation between those who grew up with Hindu traditions and the prominence of these male figures in their narratives, however, was not indicated strongly, or remained second to other female figures. At this point, I can only admit that these gendered findings are likely a byproduct of the groups and people I could be most in

had anticipated writing about their familial-based experiences of sacred Hindu literatures, songs, practices, and theologies. Taking cues from several participants who interpreted their religious histories as matriarchies (i.e., women-led), I retell their matrilineal and matrifocal construction of religious kinship.

7.2 Constructing Images of the Black Matriarch

In this chapter, I discuss my interviewees discourse using a tripartite lexicon—matriarchy, matrilineal(ity), and matrifocal—to differentiate between intersecting, but distinguishable women-centered features and power arrangements. A matriarchy is any social arrangement or embedded sector that emphasizes or centers the authority of women or female-identifying members. By matrilineality, I refer to lineages of women or mothers and daughters, or descent traced primarily through female-identifying kin. Whereas matrifocal hones specifically on the role of the mother and the framing of individuals as mothers.

The discourses on Black matriarchy and Black motherhood have had salient social histories worth bringing to bear in this conversation.⁹ Matriarchy as applied to U.S. Black women since the 1960s pathologized the Black female head of household as

contact with during this study since this is not a representative sample nor was the study intentionally designed to make such a comparison.

⁹ In this regard, I find useful the intersectional approach to Black feminism of Patricia Hill Collins and Izabella Penier's critical study of Black women fiction authors. See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* and Izabella Penier, *Culture-Bearing Women: The Black Women Renaissance and Cultural Nationalism* (Warsaw; Berlin: De Gruyter Open Poland, 2019).

the *cause* of Black poverty and Black cultural inferiority. Patricia Hill Collins in her classic work *Black Feminist Thought* (1990) outlines circulating controlling images or stereotypes of Black womanhood in the U.S. including the Black matriarch among other “controlling images” like the mammy (the asexual domestic servant), the jezebel (the lust-filled beauty), the unfeminine educated professional (“the Black lady”), and the welfare mother.¹⁰ The racialization of the single Black mother as the matriarch arose prominently from a 1965 U.S. government study and report *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* by American sociologist and Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel P. Moynihan.¹¹ Collins contends that the Black matriarch thesis proposed by the Moynihan report worked as a powerful symbol to mask the racial and class economic inequalities of American capitalism, undermine Black feminist activism, evidence Black cultural inferiority, and reinforce the dominant gender ideology of an apolitical, feminine, and private female caretaker. In short, the Black single mother who entered the labor market and political arena was deemed unfeminine in her strength and politics and targeted as the root cause of her own suffering, her children’s suffering and her community’s suffering for, so the myth goes, emasculating her male partners and neglecting her home and children by working. The culpability of underfunded public schools, a criminal system targeting Black people, and racial discrimination, as Collins points out, become

¹⁰ Collins, “Chapter 4: Mammies, Matriarchs, And Other Controlling Images” in *Black Feminist Thought*, 69-96.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 75-6.

invisible forces of the body politic.¹² The Black Power Movement, brimming with paternalistic and patriarchal ideology, scorned the independence and authority of Black women too following the 1965 report.¹³ Black women were not only damned for the economic state of Black communities, but for curtailing the Black Revolution and driving Black men away from their families because they prevented ‘the men to take charge,’ as African American Sociologist Robert Staples put it in 1979.¹⁴

The figures of the Black mother and matriarch were not wholly lost, however. Black feminist intellectuals and authors powerfully reclaimed Black womanhood writing their own stories of tradition and past while constructing knowledge of their present selves for their own emancipation apart from the liberation movements of Black men and White women.¹⁵ Izabella Penier’s *Culture-Bearing Women* (2019) centers on African American and African Caribbean literature of the Black Women’s Renaissance (BWR) of the last decades of the 20th century. Penier writes that in the 1980s BWR fiction writers turned to the narrative domain of remembered pasts and lineages to revalue and foreground matrilineality and the position of Black mothers:

¹² Ibid., 77.

¹³ Penier, *Culture-Bearing Women*, 46.

¹⁴ Ibid; the quoted text are the words of African American Sociologist Robert Staples. In the original text that from which this quote is cited, Staples makes a number of apologetic arguments supporting forms of toxic masculinity such as the following one on page 28: “That [B]lack men are not staying with their families is due to a confluence of certain factors, not the least among them is the fact that some women do make the decisions and desertion is his form of masculine protest.” For the original text, see Robert Staples, “The Myth Of Black Macho: A Response To Angry Black Feminists,” *The Black Scholar* 10, no. 6/7 (1979): 24–33.

¹⁵ Ibid, 16.

Such novels as Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), or Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* (1980) proposed complex new strategies for empowering women through bonding between mother and daughter and within female networks. Many novels took the form of historical narratives that suggested that healing could be achieved through engaging with the 'ancestral matriarchal past' (Williams, "Contemporary African American Women Writers" 75).¹⁶

Collins contextualizes Black women's polyvocal views of motherhood against the oppressions of white supremacy that devours Black women's personhood through defining narratives; thus, for Collins, reasserting Black motherhood becomes a site for resistance and survival to an onslaught of "controlling images" of Black womanhood.¹⁷ While Collins sees Black women's revaluation of motherhood as having political and economic significance, Penier notes that the Black women writers' focus on an Afro-centric identity can be a regressive feminist politic lacking a focus on radical class redistribution and instead centering on identity politics and representation.¹⁸ The positive effect of reclaiming the past for Black women's self-esteem cannot be overlooked, however, when they/we face everyday devaluation and erasure; that remains true even while recognizing the dangers of essentializing Black identities. Moving through this chapter, I find it valuable to bear these critical theories of Black Feminism in mind to consider what the histories and memories of Black matriarchs do for Black Americans at the sites of Hinduism—how it grounds and fortifies them against forces that seek their erasure and removal. With this knowledge of the past, I think they

¹⁶ Penier, *Culture-Bearing Women*, 19-20 and 27.

¹⁷ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 22, 100, 118, 176-77, and 201-2.

¹⁸ Compare Collins to Penier, *Culture-Bearing Women*, 171-4.

powerfully can assert to themselves and to others that they intimately belong as they continue in their religious practices.

7.3 “I’m a minority in a minority, in a minority”

Yeah, sometimes I laugh, Krishna, and say that, ‘I’m a minority in a minority, in a minority,’ you know? First of all being in this religion, it’s not the majority religion in America right now. Then, being in a Black body, Then, being in a woman’s body.

– Krsnanandini Devi Dasi¹⁹

Before entering into direct discussion of Black Americans born into Hindu American religions, I want us to step back to briefly highlight the challenges of the foremothers who brought Black families into these once novel religious spaces. The above statement by Krsnanandini sets the scene well. It was expressed to me in the context of our interview in the summer of 2020 when I asked her to share with me her experiences as a woman in her religious context. The response she gave immediately recognized the intersecting matrix of race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and gender structuring the challenges of being Black, American, Hindu, and female. Systemic racism and racial prejudice in America that pathologizes Black bodies, especially of lower social economic status, as inherently and expectedly prone to criminality and questionable

¹⁹ Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, interview with author, July 14, 2020.

morality were everyday lived experiences for Krsnanandini and her mother Bhumata Devi Dasi (also known as Mother Bhumi). Their experiences involved struggles on multiple fronts due to social and cultural weaponizing of race, gender, and class. For example, the White Cleveland Hare Krishna temple administrators' attempted to use the state (i.e. police) to criminalize Mother Bhumi's presence and bar her entry in the late 1960s. The temple space was, thus, safe and open for White bodies at the time, but uncertain and perilous for a lower-income Black woman.

In another perilous event, an anonymous "concerned neighbor" reported Krsnanandini to authorities at Child Protection Services. The neighbor's complaint was over concerns that she was homeschooling most of her children until about 10th or 11th grade in an isolating Hindu religious ethos involving learning to read through sacred texts like *Bhagavad Gita* and *Bhagavata Purana* and eating a vegetarian diet (which was not a popular diet and ethical choice during the 70s and 80s). In our 2020 interview, Krsnanandini explained this harrowing experience, how she dealt with it, and a bit of the religious context around the event:

Krsnanandini: Well, my family being—I came from a large kind of extended family, and they did not understand or really appreciate initially why we were giving up Lord Jesus Christ for some cult. So that was very hard. They thought we were crazy, and especially because there were so few Black people in the movement, and especially because sometimes it appeared like we were not so welcomed in certain places [of the religion]. So that was a challenge, Krishna, that our family didn't really understand what we were doing and why were we doing it. And so there was some isolation. And part of that was, I would say maybe our father also, because we were new and we were zealous and we were very protective. And so that was definitely a challenge.

And with the homeschooling, you know, we were vegetarian, right? And also that was not so popular in the eighties and seventies. Really, it really wasn't. So then our children didn't watch TV and all that kind of stuff. So sometimes people thought, 'oh, you know, you're really isolating your children and you're not letting them—they won't be socially adept.' And, you know, so many things. In fact, Krishni, I was even reported to Child Protection Services by some anonymous person who said that we didn't allow our children to do social activities and they didn't eat meat. So they thought they were unhealthy. And that was a scary time for me because like right now, so many people are open to vegetarianism and veganism, but then, no. But thank God, the Lord arranged where when I did have a [court] hearing, I think I got two of the older children to the hearing and the magistrate or whatever questioned them. And they [the magistrate] said, these children look healthy and they're intelligent and they just kind of dismissed the case.

Krishni: Wow. That's very lucky. Yeah, that could have gone a different way.

Krsnanandini: Yes, it could. Yes, it could. And so also a challenge too was that we were different from the norm in society and we like having association [social interaction] for the children. And the way the Lord gave us to handle that, we would do field trips with the children to parks [and] to museums; they would take swimming classes and stuff. So they had outside exposure.²⁰

Prevailing constructions about what it means to be Black religiously and the controlling images around Black motherhood rendered her suspect to neglect her children as a Black Hindu mother (see section Constructing Images of Black Matriarchs above) and attempted to criminalize her for her deviation. Krsnanandini's mothering demonstrate that she had the support, strength, and wisdom to provide for her children's needs even while being othered, isolated and ostracized; the solution did not require criminalizing her nor relinquishing her new religious praxis. Her ethical dietary praxis informed by Hindu traditions further compounded suspicion of her raising her children in an

²⁰ Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, interview with author, July 14, 2020.

insufficient, dangerous, violent, superstitious, idolatrous cult, a stereotype that is part of a legacy of longstanding evangelical Christian American prejudices against Hindus.²¹

Her extended Black Christian family did not accept the *murtis* (empowered divine images) of Radha and Krishna being worshipped, invoking Christian prejudice against what they thought of as idolatry; this created some initial severance between her immediate circle of relatives (i.e., parents, children, and friends) who practiced Krishna *bhakti* and her extended Christian kin (e.g., aunts and uncles). That dynamic, however, shifted over time:

Krsnanandini: And thankfully, over the years, Krishni, my family saw that this was really a good thing, that we were godly people and we were better people. And for the most part, most of my family right now is very favorable. But it didn't start off that way. And then you have the worship of the deities, which for Christians, it's like idol worship. And even now that some of my Christian relatives, they just sort of stand back. But like I said, over time, I guess they could see that we were not giving this up—It's been almost 50 years since I've been a devotee—and that it's made us better people.²²

For Black women entering into Hindu spaces in America in the 60s and 70s, they were faced with severe compounding challenges for pushing against what was expected of their gender and race. What harm is there in Krsnanandini being a homemaker and teacher to her own children? What constructed images of Black womanhood intersected with make her suspect of being a deficient person both in Black and White communities? It is certainly a challenge to the mammy stereotype of the Black female domestic worker

²¹ Michael J. Altman, "The Construction of Hinduism in America," *Religion Compass* 10, no. 8 (2016): 207–16, <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12204>, 208-9.

²² Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, interview with author, July 14, 2020.

who should care for wealthier white families at the expense of their own. Is it also viewed as a social and economic threat based in images of Black women at home with children as “welfare queens”? Was it problematic also that Krsnanandini homeschooled her children with Hindu sacred texts instead of the Bible? Living with constricting paradigms of who a Black woman should be, as Collins points out, requires “considerable inner strength” to discern and maintain one’s whole, authentic self.²³ This is undoubtedly part of why community members today celebrate Mother Bhumi and Krsnanandini as “spiritual warriors”.

Though to take on the considerable challenges of sustaining one’s identity outside of the controlling narratives, Collins contends that it takes constructing new frameworks and self-understanding to challenge the oppressive narratives.²⁴ For Krsnanandini, this involved accepting a philosophical-theological framework that positioned her permanent self beyond her temporary physical embodiment:

And I'll tell you another challenge, Krishni, was, even though we have this really exalted and powerful philosophy of saying we're not the body, [and] because that takes some time to realize, people still sometimes treated us like we were the body. And I imagine we did that also. Just because until you become purified and to become, you know, more mature spiritually, you will act like that. So that's been somewhat of a challenge, [but] not a big one because Prabhupada helped us with that. I mean, in the beginning, we wrote him letters about prejudice in the movement and Prabhupada, being a spiritual scientist and a top pure devotee, cut through the chase.

You know, I remember getting a letter from him, Krishni, and he said, 'If someone mistreats you because of the color of your skin, that is their ignorance.

²³ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 100.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

But, if you accept it, that's your ignorance.' That was very powerful for me because I realized, yes, I had been accepting it and then, I didn't have to accept it anymore. And that's a liberating position. And you know, this idea that we're all eternal servants of God and everyone has equal value [in relation] to God is fundamental to our Krishna Conscious philosophy. So if you really become a real devotee, you have to get to that place.²⁵

The role of ignorance in her guru's message frames knowledge of the self as paramount to liberation from racial prejudice. Knowing oneself to be *in* a body and not the body, but rather an eternal soul frees one from accepting racial prejudice as factual. Though her guru emphasizes that no one is the body, the social reality or fact is that she has a body, which she acknowledges is racialized, sexed and classed in particular ways in the world that provoke prejudice, unfortunately, in her everyday experiences.

The theological resources provided by her guru and her religion fortify Mother Bhumi and her daughter Krsnanandini to resist accepting an identity or treatment as less than equal generally. The contact, however, between Krsnanandini's family and their guru Prabhupada was admittedly limited by his declining health and enormous responsibilities to ensure the future of the religious institution that he began in America in his seventies—though, they had ample access to his lectures and writings. Learning to navigate the world embodied as a Black woman in a minority Hindu religious sect in America was practical knowledge Mother Bhumi and Krsnanandini had to construct and learn as they practiced over the decades.

²⁵ Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, interview with author, July 14, 2020.

In our hour-long interview together, Krsnanandini names her guru, her mother, and her husband as the most important people to her religious or spiritual practice during her lifetime; though, it is her mother who is mentioned thirty-one times and the word 'mother' is the 6th most mentioned word in our interview (without my probing). Mother Bhumi, as is described in later sections of this chapter, was a resolute, independent and opinionated woman who led her children and husband into ISKCON temples. I suspect that the near and living example of Krsnanandini's mother made navigating the world as a Black Hindu woman substantially easier and tangibly conceivable.

Krsnanandini: Like, for me, I never wanted to lead anything, Krishna. I was so shy when I was younger and all that. And part of why I do what I do is a direct act of gratitude or service for my guru and my mother. 'Cause what they gave me and what they put into me, I felt like I owed them to be that example. And so that pushes me beyond my comfort zone. To share and to be, and, you know, sometimes you have to challenge these notions that people have about women, Black people, okay? So we're on a battlefield like Arjuna in *Bhagavad Gita* and these relative thoughts about women and Black [people], we have to fight them in ourselves and others. And I think that's the key.

For this age, I foresee that many women, even children, will take leadership roles. As long as they have the impetus or the push or the concern or the burden to do something to make the world a better place or you have something that's valuable, then it's your responsibility to share it whether you're a woman or a child or whatever. And if people don't like that, well? And the potency is that when you are sharing spiritual science sincerely and with backing it up by your own practice, then that's the sort of empowerment, and people can feel that. And they feel blessed by that. That gives them empowerment too.²⁶

²⁶ Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, interview with author, July 14, 2020.

I see a distinction between Krsnanandini's narration of her becoming a Black American female leader in Vaishnavism and Swamini Turiyasangitananda's articulation of her authority. Swamini's autobiographical writings describe her discipleship and initiation as esoteric and defined by challenges (*tapasyā*) and immense solitude— notwithstanding the very present divine beings like Lord Ramachandra and the avatar Sathya Sai Baba.²⁷ Around the time of her divine initiation into *saṁnyāsa*, her sacred text *Divine Revelations*, written much like a series of diary entries, raises a question of her authenticity and belonging as an American, Black, Christian woman as a Hindu guru:

July 3, 1975

On this day, Lord Sri Rama said, "Several persons in this country (USA) are inquiring amongst themselves as to 'how does an American, [B]lack, Christian lady become an East Indian *swamini*'?"

In this regard, Baba said, "It matters not whether public inquiry and opinion are favorable or unfavorable; one's country and nationality are of no underlying criterion. If one has dedicated his life in devotion to God, He can be selected to become a candidate for initiation into the renounced order of *sannyas* [saṁnyāsa]."²⁸

Through the voices of the divine avatar Rama and guru-avatar Sathya Sai Baba who impart to Swamini revelations in her meditative solitude in *Divine Revelations*, this dialogically presented question around Alice Coltrane's burgeoning religious identity is asked. The question implicitly acknowledges the intersecting scripts of race, nationality, and gender around the construction of South Asian religious authority. Such scripts, or

²⁷ A. C. Turiyasangitananda, *Divine Revelations* (Agoura, California: Avatar Book Institute, 1996).

²⁸ Turiyasangitananda, *Divine Revelations*, 87; reproduced with original formatting and italics.

discourses, make a Black, Christian woman's presence a direct challenge to constructed hegemonic images of the male Indian Hindu guru. In addition to the question illustrating these constricting narratives, it also indicates the absence of a Black female example for Swamini to emulate. She is the first Black American woman, that I am aware of, to become a substantial figure of authority in Hinduism. Conceivably, having Mother Bhumi—in addition to having the support of her guru—may be why Krsnanandini does not express in her list of challenges a question of whether or not a Black woman *could* take up positions of religious authority in ISKCON. In terms of her race, gender, and nationality, Swamini is similarly maneuvering in a world that does not see the attributes of her body as a typical embodiment of religious authority in Hinduism. Swamini has a somewhat distinctive and additional task of establishing her authority as a self-realized guru without direct institutional recognition or support from Sri Sathya Sai International Organization (SSSIO).²⁹ Unlike Mother Bhumi and Krsnanandini, Swamini benefits from the wealth garnered from her and her husband's legendary jazz careers which allows her to unilaterally and privately establish and sustain her Vedantic Center and Sai Anantam Ashram on acres of secluded lands. Her financial

²⁹ The SSSIO does not recognize anyone other than Sri Sathya Sai Baba as their guru. The predicted successor incarnation of Sathya Sai Baba, Prema Sai, has not yet been identified by the organization.

independence undoubtedly supports her ability to establish her spiritual independence of any institution.³⁰

For Swamini's disciples and Krsnanandini's children and community, and even Krsnanandini herself, the tensions around the appropriate race and gender of Asian religions in America is further abated by these three remarkable Black American women entering into Hindu religious spaces. In remembering these noteworthy women, many Black men and women of which I spoke with are aided in substantiating and authenticating their own religious praxis. As legacy-making women and closely visible role models, they become substantial and integral figures in the process of constructing self-definitions for the next generation of Black Americans committed to the Vedas. The next two sections present Black Americans from my ethnographic research divided along two historically parallel matrifocal lineages—that of Swamini Turiyasangitananda, and Mother Bhumi and Krsnanandini Devi Dasi.

7.4 The Coltrane Matriarch

This is somebody [Swamini] that I look at as my spiritual matriarch.

- Surya Botofasina, disciple of Swamini Turiyasangitananda³¹

³⁰ It should be noted that in general the Sathya Sai Centers are not supported financially by the SSSIO. See "About Us," Sri Sathya Sai International Organization, accessed June 2, 2021, <https://www.sathyasai.org/about-us/organisation>, sec. "Sri Sathya Sai Centers".

³¹ Andrew Purcell, "Rising from the Ashram; STAGE," *The Age*, August 5, 2017, sec. Spectrum, LexisNexis.

Wearing the iconic purple and gold jersey of the Los Angeles Lakers basketball team and a Black National Basketball Association (NBA) headband around his grown-out fade haircut, Surya Botofasina, an Afro-Cuban American father approaching mid-forties, appeared on my laptop screen from the living room of his New York apartment.³² If not for the sleeveless jersey revealing his right arm's tattoo of a Sanskrit Om and the serene face of Swamini Turiyasangitananda appearing just below, I, even with my knack for spotting the bodily aesthetics of American Hinduisms, would not be able to visually discern that he had grown up on the idyllic 48-acre Southern California ashram, Sai Anantam Ashram, founded and owned by Swamini. Although, his name, Surya, would have piqued my interest immediately, being that it denotes the Sun or Sun deity in Sanskrit and a number of other Indic languages. It is similar to how my name, Krishni, produces a certain, immediate curiosity among those familiar with the blackish, playful divinity Krishna.

Affinities, some intellectual and others more kin-like, are rapidly crafted thereafter. We reminisced over our similar life experiences of growing up with Sanskrit-Hindu names, learning as children how to chant and sing Sanskrit mantras from our mothers, eating a vegetarian diet (and being bullied for it in school), reading and re-enacting the stories of Rama and Sita, and, of course, getting regular reminders from our mothers that the mother is the "first guru". In all of our conversations, Surya and I

³² A fade is a type of short haircut.

laughed a great deal as he had a talent for sandwiching his lived experiences between clever remarks and witty jokes.

The ashram that Surya's mom moved to when he was an infant was expansive, filled with trees, a creek that cut through the middle of the property, and a long road that passed through the entry gate. After Swamini's passing in 2007 and wildfires that destroyed the original ashram property in 2018, the ashram community rituals of worshipping through *kirtan* and celebrating Hindu holidays (like Janmashtami) has migrated into the homes of some of the ashram families in Southern California. Prior to the dissolution of the ashram, there were about four residential buildings where a few families lived on one side of the creek.³³ A bridge crossed the creek to the *mandir* (temple) that could hold about a hundred people; this is where Swamini gave her classes and lead *bhajans*. Attached to the *mandir* was the communal kitchen, and, also on that side of the creek, a couple of more dwellings for residents. Day-to-day life, outside of Sunday, involved leaving the ashram to work, if an adult, or attending public schools, if a child. When not working or studying, the ashram residents lived communally, splitting up "karma yoga" or duties for upkeeping the ashram; this usually occurred on Saturdays. For a time, they gathered on Wednesday nights for a communal meal, rotating between the homes. Early mornings and in the evenings of most days, residents

³³ Braudie Blais-Billie, "Alice Coltrane's Ashram Lost in California Wildfires," *Pitchfork*, November 18, 2018, <https://pitchfork.com/news/alice-coltranes-ashram-lost-in-california-wildfires/>.

might gather for some chanting and meditation. Sundays were focused on prepping the ashram for Swamini's weekly arrival to give a lecture or lead the community (visitors and ashram residents) in chanting; Swamini lived about fifteen to twenty minutes away by car in her separate nearby residence.

Ethnomusicologist Franya Berkman had the opportunity to visit the Sai Anantam Ashram in the early 2000s as part of her doctoral research and offers her observations of the Sunday services at the Ashram:

The ashram's stunning *mandir*, or temple, rises white as a cloud against the hills. In winter and spring, a brook in front of the temple splashes along, joining a tireless chorus of insects and birds. Several modest homes are set back into the hillside. Ashram inhabitants and visitors—mostly African American men, women, and children—are dressed in South-Asian attire: the women wear saris, the men kurtas. Speaking quietly among each other and greeting Sunday guests, they make their way with visitors to the steps of the *mandir*, remove their shoes, and enter the sanctum, men turning to the left and women to the right. The interior of the temple is simple and unadorned: there is a guest book and basket of hymnals by the entrance, a stretch of blue carpet and yellow cushions on the floor, and a small organ at the far end. Behind the organ stand two life-size posters of Sathya Sai Baba. On the right, out of sight, is a raised altar bearing an oil lamp, flowers, fruit, and images of Hindu deities. Once inside, the members of the small congregation silently sit down on the floor.³⁴

The ashram had predominantly Black residents, but included Black, White, and Latinx families living as fellow spiritual aspirants and familial neighbors. When I asked about the nature of the relationships among ashram members growing up, Surya emphatically responded with a delineation of the three generations of Swamini's ashram:

³⁴ Franya J. Berkman, *Monument Eternal: The Music of Alice Coltrane* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), 1.

It's like a village, man. There're generations, you know. So like you got the elder, you know, the OGs [original gangsters]. You know, you've got them there. Then you've got my generation that came afterwards, you know, or our parents are the elders of my generation. And then even in my generation, you have some that were like my age or maybe a couple years older, or a couple of years younger. But, you know, kids of the 80s mostly, and then, you know, early 90s. And, then, you have like the younger generation of those who are maybe like my generation's kids or maybe like some of the youngest, but it's really just those three generations that we have, which is the elders, the OGs, us, me, and my peers, and then maybe some of us now that have our own children.³⁵

The old adage that it takes a village to raise a child aptly reflects the lived dynamic between the ashram children and the elders or adults of the ashram who became the “mothers and fathers” in the “ashram family.”³⁶ Surya entertainingly illustrated the point through retelling a memorable experience:

I had a reputation as a growing youngster. One of my ashram mothers, she likes to tell the story all the time of when her mother was coming to visit her at her house and, you know, on the ashram, and one day I just walked in the house, as I typically did without knocking. And I walked in the house and I went straight to the refrigerator and I opened it up to look for something to eat because I was hungry. 'Cause that was, like, you know, it was cool, and they used to love it, like we all, we're all big fans of vegetarian food, so we were all like, you know, 'What you got?' You know what I mean? So, she said her mother looked at this like, like—³⁷

His words begin to flutter, dancing with excitement, as a rushing outburst of laughter tries to break forth. Reflexively, I jump in first to finish the thought, “Like, ‘who is this?’” Surya’s words burst forth, “‘Man, who is this dude walking in, you know, like from, from the wilderness. Come in and just open the refrigerator like it's cool. Like, like hold on.’ [my laughter] ‘Anybody want to explain what I just witnessed?’” With laughter in

³⁵ Surya Botofasina, interview with author, June 24, 2020.

³⁶ Surya Botofasina, interview with author, June 19, 2020.

³⁷ Surya Botofasina, interview with author, June 24, 2020.

his voice, Surya concludes the vignette acknowledging his neighbor's family as his own family through terms of possessive kinship like "my ashram sister," "our grandmother," and "my elder":

So she loves telling me this story all the time because her mother, her mother, you know, this is one of my elders. So this would be like, you know, like my ashram sister, this is their grandmother who's watching this whole thing. And she loves telling this story because you know, well, one of *our* grandmothers is like, this is hilarious, you know, but that would be not an uncommon thing. [...] This is the aspect of family. I'm just trying to illustrate a small example of how it was such a family growing up. So for me, spiritual life, you know, as a person of color, as we like to call ourselves, as a Black person, you know, in this Eastern philosophy, in this community, I feel very fortunate that I was able to experience that kind of freedom, if you will.³⁸

The freedom that Surya conveyed narratively in remembered life events was the intimate physical and emotional space to be a devotee and a child of Swamini's ashram. It was also the freedom to express Hindu-based religious devotion in community as an African American. As a musician and parent today living on the opposite coast of the California Ashram, Surya struggles to find that spiritual communal space again.

For Surya, Swamini was both matriarch in the sense of spiritual authority and in a familial sense as a grandmother figure. In one poignant moment early in our conversation, Surya described her as both physically embodied and, yet, exceeding her own embodiment; she is fully accessible and present and yet, capable of holding a direct connection to God: "She's almost a mythical entity, emissary of God energy. I've seen her, I've spoken to her. I've been raised by her. I've been in her home. I've seen her in

³⁸ Ibid.

other places in the world and to this day, she still seems unreal to me. I also miss her a lot.” Descriptions of Swamini as a profound, perfect spiritual master embodying transcendence, yet intimate as a grandmother who raised him echo in our conversations:

Surya: [...] And we also were being led by this regal Black woman [who] superseded all, just transcended all aspects of humanity that we could fathom. Like the perfect person. It's just, it's rare to meet someone who has no flaws, man. You know? Especially someone who's humble and she was that for us. Swamini was not only our Guru, she was our guide. For us, our generation, she was like a grandmother, you know what I mean? Like that one, that matriarch who you just straighten up when that grandmother is around. But you also straighten up because you know a compliment from her, a smile from her would carry you for years. She had that kind of profound effect on us. And we were absolutely devoted to her for so many reasons, in a childlike devotion. It wasn't like our parents who, you know, were walking down the street wherever they lived and ran into an Alice Coltrane record with Pharoah Sanders and decided to go watch a concert, got blown away and decided to follow her teachings. We never had a choice. And as we didn't have a choice, I grew up [he pauses], I grew up more comfortable singing in Sanskrit than I did English.³⁹

Not only was Sanskrit more intimate than English to Surya in childhood, but so were the pastimes of Rama, Sita, Krishna, and Shiva in his *Amar Chitra Katha (ACK)* comic books that he and his peers would playfully reenact as children. It was also the familiar sight of the renunciate's orange cloth that Swamini, Satya Sai Baba, and renounced residents would wear. It is, as Surya suggests, an experience distinctive from his parent's generation who during the counterculture revolution of the 60s and 70s *discovered, identified with, and found* Swamini's music and teachings. Surya's mother, Radha Botofasina, a talented multi-instrumentalist, singer and music producer, for instance, discovered Swamini through the early jazz albums and Swamini's

³⁹ Surya Botofasina, interview with author, June 19, 2020.

autobiographic book *Monument Eternal*. These initial encounters convinced Radha to seek an opportunity to meet Swamini. Not too long after attending her first Vedantic center program did Radha decide to quit the music industry, for a time, at the age of thirty-one and take formal initiation as a disciple of Swamini. For the ashram kids born in the '80s and '90s, there was less discovery—lest coming to learn of Swamini's legendary status as a jazz musician as they got older. For Surya, inhabiting both a Black body and a Hindu-based spirituality always were intertwined. This kind of familiarity and relatedness not only gave birth to an identity at the intersection of Hindu and Black, but, importantly, a relationship to the intersection that could be defined as, more often than not, a natural place of belonging and home.

Inhabiting a self-awareness of being Black and Hindu are not elusive to Surya. Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King were named as significantly influential by Surya to his religious or spiritual practice during his lifetime. They are figures representing both a Black cultural and Hindu religious inheritance for him. How is that so? Each is perceived, at least in part, through Swamini's self-framing of her own religious experiences as *tapasyā* and orally transmitted teachings on *dharma* (one's responsibilities or duties). Just as his guru Turiyasangitananda underwent a period of austerity and sacrifice (*tapasyā*) that tested her resolve to her commitment to a spiritual self-evolution, civil rights leaders up to today's modern Black Lives Matter protesters are further examples of leaders who undergo voluntary suffering and penance (*tapasyā*), like

boycotts and protests, to enact their *dharma* in the world.⁴⁰ Malcolm X and Dr. King are rendered not just cultural heroes, but also spiritually and religiously-fortified individuals enacting their *dharma*, a responsibility to evolving the society's consciousness towards self-liberation, self-actualization, and tangible equality.⁴¹ Importantly, however, neither Malcolm X nor Dr. King are rendered as Hindu in Surya's descriptions. They are each recognized as embedded in Islam, in the case of Malcom X, and Christianity, in the case of Dr. King. In fact, Malcom X's relationship to Islam has inspired Surya to fast during the month of Ramadan.

It was his "first guru," his mother, that encouraged him to read *The Autobiography of Malcom X* as a young teenager interested in gaining perspective on inhabiting a Black body. It was Swamini, his grandmotherly guru, who reminded him that his skin was indeed Black; to engage a practical understanding of the body did not conflict with "the Vedantic path" that they practiced and perhaps, as for many Black families, serves to prepare young Black Americans for the racism and violence they may have to endure in the world. Furthermore, it was not unfamiliar to Surya to see Black leaders—whether as ashram musician, female guru, mothers, fathers, or civil rights activists—as folks engaged in their *dharma*, suffering *tapasyā*, and, all the while,

⁴⁰ Surya Botofasina, interview with author, June 24, 2020; This is similar to how Turiyasangitananda describes Jesus, Gandhi and King in the liner notes of *Huntington Ashram Monastery* (1969).

⁴¹ It should be noted that Gandhi is not mentioned in Surya's interviews with me, neither in published interviews with him. I suspect that it is partially because his religious perspective of the American civil rights movement is not mediated primarily through the lens of Gandhi, but instead Swamini.

cultivating their spiritual awareness. These connections were, in a sense, an extension of Surya's readily accessible living Black spiritual authorities and family—Swamini and Radha.

The cohesive tapestry of Black and Hinduism, however, becomes punctured and frayed when Surya entered into spaces outside of the ashram, like public schools or other Hindu American spaces. He related it to another experience we share, the experience of being biracial. As Surya succinctly put it, "I think it's very akin to equate [the experience] to a [what] lot of people would be, you know, say is a biracial individual. I wasn't Black enough here and wasn't white enough there."⁴² Being visibly identifiable as Black in other Hindu spaces is an experience Surya summed up with two questions: "Are you lost?" and "Do you know what your name means?" The first question refers to the looks and expressions he received in other Hindu American spaces where he was treated as someone out of place. The second question regarding his name is a question he often received that strikes as a bit patronizing. By asking the question, there is an assumption on the part of the stranger that his relationship to his name—and by extension, his religious identity—is unintentional or superficial. Would this happen if he were Brown instead of Black? In a separate case, one of Krsnanandini's adult children also expressed how frustrating it is to receive this question, in her case, from mostly South Asians. That these questions are often coupled with "good-intentioned" attempts

⁴² Surya Botofasina, interview with author, June 19, 2020.

to educate the Black individual on, for instance, the teachings of *Bhagavad Gita* further injures the Black child of Hinduism. When such experiences in other Hindu spaces is added to Surya's experiences of being bullied in public schools where White Judeo-Christian America is the privileged position, Surya, then, was both not White and Christian enough for American schools and too Black for Hindu American spaces.

Despite the recurrent tensions and pressures on his identity, Surya's solace and grounding remains firmly rooted in growing up with Turiyasangitananda:

That's where for me, it was interesting, you know, and that's where, see, the having a Black woman as a guru, yeah, it wasn't like going to other situations where you would have like 'Oh, this is the guru or this is the priest of the situation of the temple or whatever, or this is the leader of this particular group.' You know? 'This is the guy whose house is that.' It wouldn't be like based in this Indian family or this Indian person, or Indian individual would be the authority on the matter, [and] therefore, you know, like, [I would be treated like,] 'are you lost?' No. It was like, not only am I *not* lost like *I come from a tradition where there's the most spiritual human being I've ever encountered in my life, is leading the ashram of where I grew up in and is giving me my whole entire background of my spiritual expression, at least in this lifetime, so I don't feel lost at all.* [emphasis added] If anything, you want to sit down, hand me those tambourines so we can get down, like what's up? What we doing, you know what I mean? You want to pass the samosas afterwards. Like I'm with it.⁴³

We both laugh at his tongue-in-cheek deployment of "tambourines" (a non-traditional instrument used in American-dominated *kirtans*) and "samosas" (an Indian food). His playful retelling makes light of his exhausting attempts to prove he is an insider to Hindu spaces, while, ironically, playing a bit of the naïve, simple outsider that he is so often assumed to be.

⁴³ Ibid.

With a pair of ISKCON bookselling devotees in Union Square in New York City, Surya remarks that he had another kind of experience of dissonance when he is asked to buy a *Bhagavad Gita* that he already owns. Though a disconcerting experience, it further affirms to him that he is grounded in his religious identity by Swamini:

Because Swamini, in her discourses, she'd always quote the *Bhagavad Gita*. *Bhagavad Gita*, in Sanskrit, without zilch and then translate it to us always to the point. [...] When I was in college, around that time, she was giving us lessons on the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *slokas* [verses], what they meant and making us study and analyze it and asking us questions. It was a little course. And so that kind of, like, that kind of involvement with her, it was great. Then, I will take it back to [returning back to the story of] a Hare Krishna, who [I] would be like, 'you know, isn't it amazing the science of self-realization how Lord Krishna was allowing himself to drive the chariot of Arjuna, you know, on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Wasn't that deep? Especially when he's going, him along with the other four Pandhava brothers, against Duryodhana and his brothers. Like isn't that deep, you know?

[And the Hare Krishna bookseller said,] 'huh?' I'm like, 'Do you even know what you're hawking [slang: selling]? Do you even know the story behind it? Are you aware of the *Mahabharata* at all?' And that's where for me, I'm like okay, number one, it was the reaction of, like, 'are you lost? how did you get here?' and then secondly, I'm like, 'Wait a minute. Not only am I here, I'm about this life, homie. About it.' And not only am I like I'm about it, I can tell it to you. Which way you want it? Want it street? Want it hood? Want it philosophical? Like, let's come together on this.⁴⁴

Despite these reoccurring interactions that attempt to relocate him into a pervasive stereotype of Black religious identities being as far flung as the next galaxy from Hinduism, Surya remains reassured by his own familial lineage from Swamini to his

⁴⁴ Ibid.; The five Pandhava brothers are part of the ruling class and are central characters in the epic *Mahabharata*. They are excised from power through a series of unfortunate events, many perpetuated by their cousins the Kauravas and, principally among the Kauravas, Duryodhana. The familial power struggle culminates in a total war between all the warriors of the epic. The battlefield, Kurukshetra, is the stage where the famed dialogue takes place between Arjuna, a Pandava, and Krishna, his cousin and God incarnate, of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

mother and then to him. This memory of the past allows him to confidently reassert his self-definition in the face of all-too-common challenges.

It is precisely the memory of the past, his consciousness of his matrilineage, that weighs upon him as a responsibility to carry forward the imbibed devotional intentions, morality, study of sacred texts, chanting of *bhajans*, *ahimsa* (non-violent) vegetarian diet, meditation on the sacred Sanskrit syllable *OM*, and the offering (*puja*) of incense and garlands to the guru. Striving to be a good steward, in part, is what led him to act as the musical director for the Sai Anantam Ashram singers who toured North America and Europe in 2017 with the Luaka Bop record label to represent and recreate the sacred, spiritual experience and chants Swamini led in the ashram.

Surya described his relationship in terms of shared and passed along accountability through the metaphor of a relay race in which he has just been handed the baton from his mother who received it from Swamini Turiyasangitananda:

In our spiritual sense, we're carrying this flag, or carrying this baton. See, this is the work that's done before us. I was born onto an ashram life. My mom had to do all that running before to get there. She's the one that had to survive the mean streets of New York City on her own from an early age. So she had to hand that to me. So for me to take that and be able to run with it, I'm running with her. She's put in more effort than I ever can, frankly. So just don't drop the baton.⁴⁵

Regarding her as both his spiritual authority and friend, Surya's mother, Radha, looms large as a major influence in his religious identity and practice. If Swamini is number one, then Radha is one-a, as Surya explained, but he was not hesitant to move

⁴⁵ Surya Botofasina, interview with author, June 24, 2020.

back and forth between naming the other as primary to him.⁴⁶ Radha is described as an energetic, independent Afro-Cuban woman who fiercely led herself with her infant into Swamini's ashram. Interviewing her as well, I am struck by her candid, frank demeanor and unwavering discipleship to her guru Swamini. He pondered with me the significance of such a young woman's journey, especially now as a parent himself, remarking that the path she—and other ashram elders of her generation—took to come to the ashram involved challenging and significant life altering choices. For instance, Radha's decision to be a celibate student of the ashram was a divergence from her family's religion, Catholicism, or her beloved visits to her Black neighbors' music-filled Christian churches; she also legally changed her name and her son's name to Radha and Surya, respectively. He deeply admires and respects her for scouring the broader society to arrive at a trusted, God-realized person and spiritual family.⁴⁷

The matrifocality of Surya's religious identity brings out an indebtedness to a tradition that he has received from his foremothers. This matrilineal ancestry, like that of Black female writers' assertion of a matrifocal ancestral past, is a site of resistance that defines the present through remembering the past ways that are personally empowering. Through establishing his identity in Swamini's lineage, Surya asserts his racial and religious identity in the face of competing suppressive narratives about Black

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ "Spiritual family" is a phrase used by Radha Botofasina in my interviews.

and Asian religiosity. To reminisce of the Sai Anantam Ashram community, his mother-guru Radha and guru-grandmother Swamini, he reaffirms and reclaims his relationship to Hinduism as intimate kin.

7.5 A Black Vaishnavi Matriarchy

I turn to another matrilineal network in a separate American Hindu lineage, Gaudiya Vaishnavism (a devotional lineage oriented toward the divine couple Radha and Krishna), within the transnational religious organization ISKCON. Please note that for the sake of preserving anonymity of some participants, the following opening vignette with Chandra Devi Dasi, a pseudonym, is a partially fictionalized, composite narrative of multiple interviews I had with several Black Vaishnavas in ISKCON. Others I interviewed also appear later on. For every pseudonym used, I indicate each as such.

When I arrived at the unassuming house that stood on just a bit of flat land, I did not knock nor ring a doorbell before entering. I was told by Chandra Devi Dasi, a Black woman in her late thirties, that it would be a futile attempt to get her attention when I arrived because she would be in her room cleaning with the music on. In the public portion of the home, there was an open concept kitchen-living-dining room layout decorated with large, lush plants and lavender walls. In the corner of the kitchen, on the counter sat an altar with stainless steel plate and cup for ritually offering daily food (*prasadam*) in front of three images of ISKCON's founder Prabhupada, and a picture of

Bhakti Tirtha Swami that I had never seen before.⁴⁸ The latter was not wearing the traditional saffron robes of a renunciate guru but instead a formal black suit, standing upright, calmly and charmingly gazing into the camera lens. Several months later, a photograph of Krsnanandini, after her passing from cancer, joined the kitchen altar.

On the kitchen island, I could see the 2020 winner of the Robert F. Kennedy book award *Dying of Whiteness* by Jonathan M. Metzler. *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander sat on a bookshelf of what looked like mostly academic books near the backdoor. Among pictures of Radha and Krishna, I could also see on the wall one large poster of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Barack Obama, Nelson Mandela, and Bob Marley that read, “Focus on the hard times ahead with thoughts of those who came before you. [...] Peace. Power. Respect. Dignity. Love.” As I followed the sounds of my host’s voice welcoming me, I caught a glimpse of the six-volumes of *Spiritual Warrior* by Bhakti Tirtha Swami all lined up. From the small room’s bed that became my interview chair, a button of the wide-eyed and Black skinned deity Lord Jagannatha (Sanskrit: “Lord of the World”) peaked from an open storage box, along with some additional modern *bhakti* books like Radhanath Swami’s *The Journey Home*. I greeted Chandra with a hug. She never tired of reminding me that I was her sister and part of the family; today

⁴⁸ In many Hindu lineages and homes, food is offered to God or guru (or both) to sanctify the food. It is believed that by offering the food before eating it, the offering is qualitatively transformed by mantra and/or ritual worship into *prasadam*, which can be literally translated as mercy. When *prasadam* is consumed by the devotee, the body is qualitatively purified transforming the devotee’s physical and subtle body (mind, intellect and consciousness).

was no exception. Over the course of several years now, we had become quite close—exchanging peculiar jokes regularly, confiding in one another, and supporting one another when the opportunity arose. As she organized things standing at the foot of the bed, she narrated for me the impact of Krsnanandini Devi Dasi and Bhumata Devi Dasi (Mother Bhumi) on her identity and religious practices, beginning in a place that was familial. I sat wondering briefly if this home resembled the family home she grew up in Cleveland.

Within the Black Gaudiya Vaishnava family of Krsnanandini Devi Dasi, four generations exist beginning with Bhumata Devi Dasi, who is the mother of Krsnanandini Devi Dasi (also called Mata), grandmother to Krsnanandini's ten biological adult children, and great grandmother to Krsnanandini's children's children. The family's religious inheritances of Gaudiya Vaishnava's practices and teachings has been traditionally retold and passed down through the retelling of the trailblazing mother and daughter duo, Bhumata and Krsnanandini, who overcome the material obstacles of racism and sexism to miraculously arrive at the weighty beginnings of a Vedic spiritual path, the feet of the guru, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.⁴⁹ I retell this history in chapter four and also illustrate examples of how it is invoked in public, communal settings in the ISKCON community. Not only is this history well-

⁴⁹ The feet of the guru can be both the metaphoric place where a student sits to receive spiritual knowledge and the literal ritual place where devotees often prostrate near to show respect and submission.

circulated transnationally along ISKCON networks, but it is also a family heirloom carried by succeeding generations. Chandra inherited this heirloom from her foremothers Mata and Mother Bhumi.

Chandra recalled, “I don't know what date that they [Mata and Mother Bhumi] received the *Bhagavad Gita*. But it was in the late '60s when they got it. And once they did, they tried to go to the temple, but there was a lot of prejudice going on even in Krishna Consciousness [ISKCON], so.” She momentarily paused, cleared her throat, and continued with a hint of delight, “We come from a *kshatriya* kind of family. We don't really take no for an answer. Just because you said 'no' doesn't mean that 'no' is accurate, especially when you know that this is the real truth, something that can change lives and did, in fact, changed theirs [Mata and Mother Bhumi's].” That sense of admiration followed her voice as she indicated some of Mata's and Mother Bhumi's well-known trials and triumphs from Cleveland, Ohio to Dallas, TX, for instance, covering when temple staff called the police on Mother Bhumi in an attempt to prevent her from entering. It carried into her descriptions of her grandmother as a bold, determined, and tenacious woman and her mother as a more diplomatic variant.

As she recalled the past, she defined herself as part of a *kshatriya* (Sanskrit: *kṣatriya*) family. *Kshatriya* is the second of four major *varnas* (Sanskrit: *varṇa*, social orders) in Vedic and post-Vedic Indian society. It is regarded as part of the caste system which became a prevalent hereditary class system to stratify society—albeit legally and

culturally contested in India. Modern reinterpretations of caste have emerged, some of which have attempted to recover the four *varnas* as a classification system based solely on merit and individual aptitude rather than based on birth.⁵⁰ This is the interpretation employed by Chandra, and other ISKCON devotees in general. The willingness to resist oppression, fight for truth, protect others in society, and be a bold and strategic leader are the major characteristics attributed to the *kshatriya*, or, as it is translated in this context, the warrior.

Chandra located herself somewhere between her grandmother and mother, distinguishing the two using the *varnas kshatriya* and *brahmin* (Sanskrit: *brāhmaṇa*), a member of the priestly and teaching class: “Mata is a *kshatriya* too, but she has more Brahminical qualities, meaning that she knows how to be more diplomatic.” Laughing, she notes, “I like to say, I’m like right in the smack dab in the middle of that, ‘cause like I can be diplomatic, but I also call people on their stuff, just like I call myself.” Mata’s inner strength and affinity for teaching religious knowledge (often called a “spiritual science”) was often palpable as evidenced by her commitment to giving a steady stream of online lectures while in home hospice care. Recalling her foremothers’ strength and advice gave Chandra immense bravery and courage as she faced periods of grief and

⁵⁰ One prominent nineteenth-century Hindu proponent of this kind of caste reform is Swami Dayananda Saraswati, founder of Arya Samaj; see Meera, “Arya Samaj and Caste System: A Study of in United Provinces”. For more modern reinterpretations of caste by Indians, see J. E. Llewellyn, “The Modern Bhagavad Gītā: Caste in Twentieth-Century Commentaries,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 23, no. 3 (December 2019): 309–23.

trauma in her life, such as during her palliative care to her mother in her final months during my fieldwork in 2020. As her family moved through the gravity of illness and death, Chandra's continual refrain was "I am a *kshatriya*."

The weight of being the daughter of warrior women struck me, at times, as a heavy load to bear. How to live up to great mothers and what happens when you do not? Over time, I realized these were naive questions to ask that turned these women's resiliency into a problem to be solved. In the end, far more central to Chandra's life were the particularities of the battlegrounds that called for fortitude and aptitude to navigate. Microaggressions in her workplace, the kind that a wealthier class can perpetuate out of sight onto the workers of the service economy, regularly entered into casual conversations about her day. An aging White man who needed her labor but would never let her feel superior to him and thus, took pleasure in opportunities to describe in gruesome detail how to kill and roast a pig. Mind you, Chandra is a lifelong vegetarian, practicing *ahimsa* (non-violence) and compassion through her diet. He also did not mind looking upon her with resentful aversion when he heard on the news that Black and Latinx populations were more likely to have the Covid-19 virus—ignoring that those trends were driven by these groups holding a substantial share of jobs in the "essential" labor economy during a pandemic. Managing emotions on the job, the emotional labor required for Chandra's work, was part of the battlefield—so, too, were the emotionally

and financially abusive partners, the estrangement in personal relationships, and the random male strangers who trailed her at night.

Chandra called herself *kshatriya* when managing her family's reputation by quelling some misinformation rapidly spreading about her mother's cancer treatment after the publication of a partially misleading online article on a popular Hare Krishna news syndicate. During that phone conversation, Chandra weightily said, "Even though I am really at peace right now, it is not a constant. I- I am taking it one day at a time." In earnest, I responded, "I admire how you honor, respect your emotions." Chandra replied candidly, "I had to learn to do that. That was a learning curve." Pausing to laugh, she continued, "I use to fear my emotions. Fear sadness. Fear anger. I knew my anger could really do something. I would see that if I do this and that, I could really hurt somebody. So..." Chandra let her voice trail off into the silence. Reflecting, I rejoined, "I understand. It is like a knife. In the hand of a surgeon, it could save a life," pausing for a moment to find my words. "Or take a life," I resolved. Chandra exclaimed, "Exactly! Exactly! Growing up, I really enjoyed the story of Hanuman. He had this power, this super strength. But when he was young, he was so mischievous, though people would not take it that way. They would not see he was just a child. So, he had to learn how to manage it effectively to do service for the Lord."⁵¹

⁵¹ Hanuman is a popularly worshipped immortal being with the body of a monkey and is an important figure in the story of Prince Rama and his wife Sita (i.e. the *Ramayana*). Hanuman is hailed as a model for devotion (*bhakti*) for the great deeds he performed in service to the avatar of God Rama. In his childhood,

In that conversation and back in the small bedroom, Chandra gave tribute to her mother for teaching her how to manage herself and navigate the social milieu, while remaining in service to God: “I have to give credit to my mama. Because that did not naturally come to me. I have to give credit because me and my movements are not always the same as her. I just learned from her [Mata] how to maneuver in the world as a God conscious person.” I inquired, “What did she teach you about maneuvering in the world?” Part of the answer she gave was devoted to learning to cooperate—particularly, in a household with many other siblings—with many differing opinions. This, of course, extends to interfaith cooperation that was exemplified by Mata’s community building projects that often-involved interfaith partnerships with a plurality of religious representatives. These undertakings and her teachings on interfaith cooperation, made it acceptable and possible for her children to have interfaith marriages and have fruitful discussions around the meaning of religion with their partners of different faiths. The insular nature of ISKCON communities and rampant purity ideals in much of the twentieth century that can be seen in the circulation of the derogatory term ‘karmi,’ derived from *karma* (action and reaction). A ‘karmi’ (noun) is one who is engaged in fruitive or material endeavors for material purposes (e.g., economic concerns, pride, self-

Hanuman was known to play a number of pranks and was eventually cursed by a powerful sage to forget his special powers until adulthood. For more detailed information regarding Hanuman, see Philip Lutgendorf, *The Hanumāyana: Forty Tales of Hanuman, Hanuman’s Tale* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

pleasure), which is unilaterally opposed to engaging in the devotee's "pure" devotional service to Krishna (with added emphasis on Krishna being the specific divine personality of highest worship). Mata's interfaith projects and teachings were (are) quite radical in that they defy the insularity and purity trends in ISKCON pursuing instead pluralism, genuine friendship, and mutual admiration with those of other religions.⁵²

Moreover, Chandra conveys that she learned to overcome her traumas—the details of which I am omitting. I quote her at length to allow her to explain her own beliefs gathered from her mother's influence; they, ultimately, reveal how seamlessly the "religious domain" blends into life:

It's how to recover from adverse situations. Like without the help of my mother, I wouldn't be standing here today, both literally and figuratively. Meaning, like, meaning she birthed me into the world and, you know, I'm here because of her and my father and especially Krishna, you know, Krishna chose these parents for me, but also when I had a significant life issue [...] Mata was one of the main ones that was able to get through to me as to the importance of keep fighting for Krishna in the midst of it and to do the best that you can. [...] Also, just referencing spiritual scriptures on a regular basis gave me solace to be able to have compassion, be forgiving. Understand that there's such thing as righteous anger [...]

For example, being honest about the fact that there was a lot of trauma involved, and that requires not just spiritual help, because sometimes people go overly spiritual to the point where they're not being present in where we are in the material world and dealing with it in a real balanced way. Because, spirituality is important because it gives you a reference point of what's your ultimate goal and your ultimate aim. However, when you're here, you can't sugarcoat it and say, just let go of everything.

⁵² Much of Bhakti Tirtha Swami's projects and preaching techniques did as well which led him to be, at times, in conflict with the GBC of ISKCON. Defying is not the same as abandoning. In lineage-based religions, it may be significantly harder to directly and radically abandon a previous norm. It is far easier and viable to circumvent the norm through reinterpretation or invoking a counter norm to justify a new praxis.

There is an identified predilection Chandra points to here—that of spiritual practitioners to alleviate themselves of the responsibility to confront the unresolved and messiness of human life. We might call this predilection “spiritual bypassing,” a term developed by Buddhist teacher and psychotherapist John Welwood.⁵³ For Welwood, the term refers to the use of spiritual ideas and practices to bypass the messy work of healing emotional wounds and self-development work.

Chandra and Krsnanandini’s family have labored against spiritual bypassing in their community work and their family life. For instance, Chandra describes her internal labor to overcome personal traumas and resolve the resulting anger that accompanied. She described that she had to advance her initial perceptions of anger that saw anger as a protective force for others, but not herself. Considering the theological value placed on personal qualities of mercy, compassion, and non-violence in ISKCON communities, she did not desire to assert her anger. Thus, she continued:

So for me, anger and fighting is like a last resort. I'd like to use my intelligence and reasoning to help them to come to a sense of intelligence and reasoning within themselves so that we don't have to do that base level interaction, like fighting. I think it's like Arjuna on the battlefield because Arjuna was like, 'Why can't I just work it out?' Like, 'Why does it have to be this whole fight?' And so I really understand Arjuna on the battlefield. I really understand how he feels. I [also] understand how Draupadi feels.

She does not explain the connection to Draupadi’s feelings. The allusion she makes though, is likely to the famous *Mahabharata* scene wherein Draupadi, wife of Arjuna, is

⁵³ John Welwood, *Human Nature, Buddha Nature: An interview with John Welwood*, interview by Tina Fossella, Spring 2011, <https://tricycle.org/magazine/human-nature-buddha-nature/>.

forcibly dragged and attempted to be stripped in public by her cousin-in-law Duryodhana.⁵⁴ This event is pivotal to the war that breaks between Duryodhana and the Pandava brothers, Draupadi's husbands, which is all part of the essential background to the battlefield of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Was Draupadi furious, helpless or transcendent through her harrowing trial? The ancient epics of Hinduism circulate orally—though written down—gaining renewed meaning, relevance, and even added details that make it ever fresh and, now, a bit elusive and open to interpretation.

“So, did you feel like you had to use your anger?” I asked. “Yeah, because otherwise I would have been bullied and I didn't think about what it meant to value myself,” Chandra replied. “So you had to let your anger come forward to protect *you*,” I said, with emphasis on “*you*.” Chandra concurred and expanded, “Yeah, I did, but not let it become about vengeance and wrath. It needed to be about using it to propel me to do more forward-action to assist other people. Being honest, being honest is very helpful because other people understand that it's not all roses in spirituality like, in fact, roses have thorns.” We both laughed at the irony of the rose. Chandra carried on, “So. Yeah, that's what I mean by anger, is using it constructively, because people have this—there's a whole stigma around anger. And when it's destructive, that is problematic because it's

⁵⁴ In the Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata*, Arjuna is Draupadi's husband. Draupadi suffers a great public trauma when she is nearly stripped naked while on her period in the royal courts by the request of Arjuna's cousin Duryodhana. This is made possible, in part, because Arjuna and his brothers lose their wife (a polyandrous relationship) in a rigged game of dice.

not building or adding anything. It's tearing something down. And that's not my motivation for my anger, righteous anger.”

It was not lost on me that earlier in the conversation, she clarified that she grew up in a conservative religion with a culture of submissiveness, especially for the women of the community. Women, ideally, would be submissive to God *and* their local lords—their husbands. For every Hare Krishna devotee, regardless of gender, submission was of the highest spiritual aims—*atma-nivedanam*, the complete surrendering of oneself (*atma*) to the service of God. A pure consciousness completely and utterly surrendered and devoted to Krishna is the ideal expression of Krishna consciousness or *bhakti* (devotional love). However, key to Chandra’s story is that Mata and her found a way to make that religious embodiment not at the price of enduring emotionally, psychologically, and financially abusive situations.

We continued in conversation. I alleged possible circumstances I could see her having to navigate in ISKCON communities, ones wherein fellow practitioners might say she was not very “advanced” in having succumbed to the “lower emotion” of anger. Elongating she uttered in agreement, “Yeahhhh, I heard those things attributed to me when I chose to be upfront and honest. And actually, it doesn't bother me. It might have in the past. It doesn't now, because I understand that people want a sense of peace in their lives or they don't want to rock the boat.” And with self-affirmation, she resolved,

“And I’m a boat rocker.” Seeking another affirmation, I asked, “So would you say, like, Mata helped make that okay for you?” Chandra clarified:

Yes, because my mother, Mata, is more Brahminical than I am in nature, so she is able to find balance more quickly or just like go through a situation whereas my grandmother—I have to reference them both because my grandmother was like my father at a point, as my father, once they [her father and Mata] separated and divorced, was doing his own thing. So, the protective person in my life who was fatherlike was my grandmother for the bulk of the time. And she had been dealt a very tough hand by life also, but she was very effective at getting things done.

She was very direct, very focused, had a lot of compassion, but she was also used to being the boss so sometimes that would lock heads with people because they want to feel like their opinions, their thoughts, their ideas matter too and she knew how to do that, but again, she was like grandfather Bhishma [a fierce warrior in the *Mahabharata*], actually, in terms of her potency and in terms of her strength of character and in terms of her love for the Lord. It sometimes may look a little bit different from the outside looking in because of some of the challenges that she was dealing with.

My grandmother really liked me a lot because I was one of the people that was not afraid to say no, I have a different opinion than this. A lot of people were afraid because she was so powerful. She was tiny, but powerful so they would be afraid to state their opinion because they knew that there might be some push back. But [that was] the reason that she valued me a lot. [...] It was just like we were fine tuning each other, you know, just 'cause she knew that I admired and appreciated her a lot. Because of her, we are devotees now or aspiring [to be]. I can't call myself a devotee right now. I'm like still in the process. Let's keep it humble.

We both burst out in vivacious laughter. Laughing with her, I repeat “Let’s just keep it humble.”

In delving into Chandra’s past, I listened to how her foremothers were immensely influential to her self-formation and the transformation of how she implemented religious ideas and practices from Vaishnavism and her Hare Krishna community in her life. Her mothers resolutely paved the way for this; they both initiated

a lifelong Gaudiya Vaishnava praxis for the family growing up and supplied the moral apparatuses needed to continue in a diverse American Hindu religious community as outspoken, trailblazing, self-respecting, capable Black female devotees and a racialized society that offers little protections for Black women, especially if in a lower socioeconomic class.

Those of Chandra's siblings whom I spoke with similarly named Mata and Mother Bhumi among the most important people to their religious or spiritual practices during their lifetime. Syamasundara (pronounced Shyamasundar) Das, an IT professional and son of Krsnanandini, emphasized his grandmother's vital role in leading the family into their religious practices: "She was amazing. Because of her, me and my mother, we are associated with Krishna Consciousness. And that's irreplaceable. Like, there's no value that I can put on that."⁵⁵ He also illustrated her *kshatriya*-like character through stories of her political activism in Cleveland and her determination to serve God intimately through her religious seeking through Christianity, Seven Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Islam to finally settling in *bhakti* with the Hare Krishnas and her guru Srila Prabhupada in 1972.

Syamasundara's retelling, like Chandra's, followed the familiar matrilineal legacy of the mother and daughter from Cleveland to Dallas, along the way

⁵⁵ Syamasundara Dasshort, interview with author, July 13, 2020.

interspersing how his present connected to his foremothers.⁵⁶ A memorable connection he made was between his initiation from Giriraj Swami and his foremothers' initiation ceremony in Dallas, TX on September 12, 1972. His initiation was the same Dallas temple where Mata and Mother Bhumi were once begrudgingly welcomed and initiated in during the installation ritual ceremony of the temple deities, Radha and Kalachandji (an epithet for Krishna that means the "black moon"-faced one). Forty years later, in becoming an initiated disciple, Syamasundara renews part of his family's religious legacy.⁵⁷ Indeed, it is an awareness of renewal and continuance of matrilineal Hindu legacies in their present that is shared across Chandra, Syamasundara, and Surya's oral narratives.

Similar to Surya, Chandra and Syamasundara's home life was like that of an ashram, and, more often than not, it actually did serve as a communal space of worship, even as a temple for a period of time (i.e. the Radha Shyamasundar Loka Temple). The standard Hare Krishna temple practices such as rising early, taking cold showers, chanting the *mahamantra* (the Hare Krishna mantra), listening to Prabhupada's lectures, and studying the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, and *Srimad Bhagavatam* (i.e., *Bhagavata Purana*) were part of daily life in the Mother Bhumi and Krsnanandini

⁵⁶ Although, at the time of this study, not every member of the family was affiliated with ISKCON nor necessarily identified as a Gaudiya Vaishnava. The family members I interviewed were actively affiliated with Gaudiya Vaishnavism at the time.

⁵⁷ It is worth mentioning that the temple receives his family warmly, having hosted Mata as a speaker several times.

household. Unlike many other parents in ISKCON who in the '70s and '80s sent their children to ISKCON boarding schools (*gurukulas*), Mata consciously chose to develop a rich educational and religious curriculum at home for her children. In addition to the several children's books Mata wrote, Chandra remembers the devotional lullabies her mother created and sang with them, the Socratic discussions on sacred texts that valued every person's opinion regardless of their age, the nourishment and support Mata gave to each of their individual talents like illustrating and writing, and the gratitude rituals she created around celebrating birthdays, special life moments and holidays.

In those Socratic home discussions, Chandra recalls the multitude of diverse divine, semi-divine, and human personalities that populate the sacred ecology of the epics and scriptures of India. She emphatically stated, "There's nothing excluded from God's kingdom. God's kingdom is diverse." Though, she laments that much of the religious artwork her family consumed in temples and popular Hindu media did not fit the descriptions they read in the texts:

"Prahlad is Black as the 'ointment of the eye,' but you never see that [depicted]. [...] You don't see that represented frequently and when you try to talk about it there's no reference point, so people always think it is exclusive, like it is just light, blue-sky blue guy [Krishna]. And it's like what happened to the Black with a tinge of blue? Like where did that go?

So Vyasadev[a] actually [is dark], Mohini-murti is dark, Lord Vishnu is dark. Arjuna, I am not sure about. I get varying accounts of Arjuna. Like in the *Mahabharata* [retold by] Krishna Dharma, Arjuna is dark as Nara-Narayana. I don't know because when I see Nara-Narayana *rishis* [sages], I see one light and one dark sort of like Ram[a] and Lakshman[a]. [...] Yeah, and like Rukmini had

green eyes. I remember that from childhood. She had green eyes and I was like that's fascinating. Balarama was obviously whitish like the moon. Lord Chaitanya and Lord Nityananda they were all golden."⁵⁸

After describing these examples, Chandra reiterated her point, "What I am saying is that there was a varigatedness to the descriptions of people. It wasn't one thing that [which] is what you typically see."⁵⁹ I curiously inquired as to what her mother's response was to her siblings and her discussing these discrepancies between written discourse and visual discourse. Chandra replied, "She [Mata] use to quote that Srila Prabhupada said he [Prabhupada] gave us fifty percent, but the rest, fifty percent, we have to do." Mata and Mother Bhumi's encouragements and financial investments in her siblings' artistic talents encouraged them to produce the diversity that was visually missing from sacred art circulating in the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (publishing house of Prabhupada's translations and commentaries) publications and ISKCON temples.

⁵⁸ Prahlada is a young child hailed in the *Bhagavata* and *Visnu Puranas* as a great devotee of Vishnu though he is the son of a demon king named Hiranyakashipu. Krishna in Sanskrit refer to the color Black, so too does the epithet Śyāmasundara (Sanskrit, beautifully Black) refer to Krishna's dark skin. Sources for descriptions of Krishna's color can be found in the *Bhagavata Purana* (e.g., 10.3.9-10) and *Gopāla-Tāpanī Upaniṣad*. Born out of wedlock to a fisherman's daughter, Vyasa is the traditionally acclaimed compiler of the Vedas and author of the *Mahabharata*; he was named Krishna Dvaipayana by his father because of his dark complexion. Mohini-murti is Vishnu embodied as a beautiful woman who tricks demons in the famous churning of the ocean Purana story. Vishnu is considered the ultimate sustainer of the world. Vishnu, outside of Gaudiya Vaishnava theology, is often taken to be the supreme person/God from whom all other avatars originate. According to Gaudiya Vaishnava theologians, the Supreme, original source of all avatars is Krishna with Vishnu as one incredible subsidiary avatar of Krishna. Nara-Narayana are two sages that are considered as one (dual) incarnation of Vishnu on earth; Arjuna and Krishna in the *Mahabharata* are said to have been Nara (man) and Narayana (the source/abode of man), respectively. Prince Rama is another incarnation of God and Lakshmana is his brother. Rukmini is the first queen of Krishna in the *Bhagavata Purana*.

⁵⁹ Similar themes were noted in a separate interview with Krishna Avatar, a Black American man who as a child lived in ISKCON's earliest *gurukula* (house of the guru) boarding school in Vrindavan, India in the '70s and '80s. In our conversations the overwhelming whiteness of devotional artwork in ISKCON was noted.

Beyond homemaker and educator, Mata was a community leader and organizer, running festivals like the Lord Have Mercy Festival for over a decade which brought together Christians, Muslims, Baha'i Faith practitioners, and Hare Krishna devotees to showcase whatever talents they had to offer (e.g., chess tournaments, musical and drama performance, and poetry slams) as expressions of love and appreciation to God. She even organized a public concert (*kirtan*) at Cleveland State University with Swamini Turiyasangitananda and Bhakti Tirtha Swami as headliners. Krsnanandini's family as such was embedded in a vivacious social network of religious leaders and spiritualists. This is particularly evidenced by comparing the responses I received when I asked interviewees to list the names of Black or African Americans they know who have previously practiced or currently practice Hinduism during their lifetime (See Appendix D). In this survey section, Krsnanandini's daughters produced by far the longest list of names, generating between fifty and seventy names or connections each.

In their expansive social network, a number of secondary maternal figures, who were all close friends of Mata, and their families emerged as further kin of the family. Bhakti Tirtha Swami, his mother Pearline, and his siblings—who resided in Cleveland—became part of this expansive familial network too. Chandra, Syamasundara, and their siblings were deeply close to Bhakti Tirtha Swami who they saw as their loving “uncle.” They remember him not as a globetrotting guru or international public speaker, but rather as a caring uncle who valued them as kids and would make innumerable visits to

their home. In these memories, Bhakti Tirtha Swami was immensely local and familial to them.

In this relationship, as in many of the closely-knit, lifelong relationships they had to Gaudiya Vaishnava teachers, their mother, Mata, is the mediating or gravitational force that made such relationships possible. Krsnanandini in an interview with me explained the lifelong friendship she had with Bhakti Tirtha Swami and his family:

So Bhakti Tirtha Swami and I, we met him really kind of not very long after we came back [...] from Dallas and Nashville. So I want to say maybe 1974, '75, right in there. He actually heard that there were some Black devotees in Cleveland and so he came. He looked us up because he was born in Cleveland as well. And he looked us up, and we had a really good connection. My mother and I were living—we had a temple downstairs, we had the Radha Shyamasundar Loka temple, and then we lived in apartments. She on one side and me on the other upstairs, and thus began a really lifelong friendship and love. And he asked us to look out for his family, to connect with his family there. And so I met his mother Pearlina, his sister Francis, all his family, brother, and actually, [we] became very close to his family. And we would sometimes go and serve prasadam to his mother or take her places and stuff like that.

And this was actually before he became Bhakti Tirtha Swami. He was Ghanashyam [the name given before Bhakti Tirtha Swami took his formal renunciation (sannyasa) vows]. And we named one of my sons after him. We were so impressed with this wonderful young man. And so I want to say it was about 1974, '75, we met Bhakti Tirtha Swami. And he was always very, very supportive of our efforts to spread Krishna Consciousness. He, [at the] Lord Have Mercy Festival, he was often the top guest there. With the devotees that we attracted, so many of them became his disciples, the ones we attracted to the [Cleveland] Nama Hatta [one religious community home program led by Mata and Mother Bhumi]. And so because of our connection with Bhakti Tirtha Swami, whenever, he would come in our [home].

Krsnanandini and Mother Bhumi, however, were not only the prominent matriarchs leading their families, but also appeared as such in their communities. Mata described Mother Bhumi as a locally recognized spiritual teacher and guide in

Cleveland, Ohio in the 1970s. Mata emerged in a matrifocal light in other matrilineal narratives in interviews with other Black Vaishnavas. Devika (a pseudonym), a middle-class Black woman in her thirties, expressed that she regarded Krsnanandini as her mother, guru and spiritual authority, and Krsnanandini correspondingly regarded her as her daughter:

Mother Krsnanandini is also a mother to me. She took me in as her own daughter. So as a mother cares for her daughter, [in] the same way she cared for me. And she is my lifeline. Lifeline meaning I can speak with her about everything and anything and not feel judged, anytime or any place. So she gave me that space to be myself completely, to feel loved and accepted and appreciated [...] That is what has kept me going in my Krishna-conscious life.”

Devika said that she was initially attracted to Krsnanandini because of her high regard for all religious faiths. Devika appreciated that Krsnanandini advised her to find herself to choose a religious path appropriate for her, without prejudice for which religion she might choose. She ended up choosing to be a Hare Krishna devotee because the theological answers she received satisfied her inquires and she felt that the religious injunctions (e.g., not eating meat, onion, or garlic) resonated with her natural inclinations as a child. Devika regarded Mata as one of the most important people to her religious practice during her lifetime and regarded her a “lifeline”. In public settings too, as shown in chapter four, Krsnanandini was claimed as both mother and religious authority.

7.6 Conclusion

Similar to Surya's connection to Swamini and Radha, Mata and Mother Bhumi were easily invoked by Chandra and Syamasundara as touchstones that increased the significance, intimacy, and domesticity of inherited religious practices. Defying the assumption of discrete racial and religious groups, the ancestral kinship connections to Swamini, Radha, Mother Bhumi, and Mata effectively legitimized Surya, Chandra and Syamasundara's intimate knowledge of, past with, and place in the constructed domain of Hinduism. Nevertheless, by disrupting the implicit racial, class, gender, and performativity axes of Hinduism (as habitus), many Black Americans continue to face compounding marginalization and prejudice. Invoking an ancestral past rooted in Black matriarchs fueled self-definitions that could assert Chandra, Surya, and Syamasundara as legitimate religious participants in various circumstances (including this ethnographic one) and spaces (i.e. temples, lineages and rituals) against the typical models *of* and *for* Hinduism; I mean here Hinduism as a vastly accumulated ethnoracial and religion-making habitus, like Black Religion, that more often than not leaves little formal space for a concurrent Black racial identity or body. Through ethnographic encounters and personal interviews, I have attempted to illustrate that the retelling and memory of a Black matrilineal past reframes the present to demarginalize the marginalized and reestablish continuity and legitimacy in these interlocutors' self-formations.

It should be remembered that the negotiations of religious kinship-making, or in Todne Thomas' terminology, "kincraft," presented herein are performed on a stage where Hinduism is defined as both world religion and national, ethnoracial social body—neither self-evident formations— that are part of ongoing struggles to delineate the terms of inclusion and exclusion of variable associated categories (e.g., Hindu, Vaishnava, Vedic, Yogi, *Bhakta*).⁶⁰ The Black participants on this stage are having to negotiate identifying their religious practices (and their familial heritage) as historically part of the content of Hinduism that are accessible through globalization (e.g. migrant laborers, traveling merchants and teachers, commercial yoga studios, circulating printed and digital resources, online ritual space), and yet, still socially inaccessible (or illegible, incongruent, or incoherent) exclusive of having particular racial and ethnic bodies or identities that fit the cognitive structures and social frameworks we have imagined so far. Though this chapter honors the immense significance and influence of kinship and Black matrifocal and matrilineal legacy in assisting the process of Black religious self-fashioning and becoming, I must also acknowledge that this also demonstrates the immense labor required of Black Americans to dismantle, defy, defend against, or dismiss perpetually racialized, gendered and nationalized aspects of their religious practices and beliefs. These narratives are deeply and personally liberating for those

⁶⁰ Thomas, *Kincraft*.

who have them, but certainly a small boat to the beating waves of tsunami-size racial-religious discourses.

8. Conclusion

In the course of this dissertation, I have sought to comprehend whether or not a Hindu can be Black, or, put differently, whether a Black person can be Hindu. I began with assessing the question at the theoretical and conceptual level raising concerns about the persistent invisibility of Black Hindus particularly in the study of religion, a discipline that often overlooks questions of race within itself. Thus, my analysis begins with modern academic polemics around the conceptualizing of 'Hinduism' as religion, which led into a long genealogy of historical imaginings of 'Hindu'. Religion emerges as part of the process of making and knowing a people in a particular place, extending meaning and distinction to their bodies. In time, 'Hindu' becomes metonym for a geographic body, a national body, an aesthetic body, and a racial body. There are moments in history where it seems that the imagined, quintessential 'Hindu' could be disembodied like in world religions discourse in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, yet we see that religion, whether as the Sanskrit textual corpus of the Vedas or popular vernacular practices, becomes emblematic of India and Indian people forming integral parts of race making processes. The accumulated thrust of these representations is that a Hindu is almost certainly not Black nor American. The unimaginable possibility commands the mind, limits academic curiosities and upholds hegemonic racial

formations cozily resting upon our religious representations. And, in the words of Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Race is the child of racism, not the father.”¹

That small question—can a Hindu be Black?—that stirs this work forgoes all simple conclusions, however, as each unfolding chapter digs for further truths standing from the interrelated vantage points of theory, history, and anthropology. On the one hand, there is very little capacity for imagining a Hindu that is Black in theoretical and representational praxis, and yet, in consideration of the historical evidence, there she stands in majestic prominence draped in saffron on the cover of a Warner Brothers Records album cover. There, on channel 11 late-night KTTV programming candidly singing “Rama Rama, Sri Bhagavan,” she is—Swamini Turiyasangitananda, the spiritual master. With her is her contemporary Bhakti Tirtha Swami, a Black Vaishnava guru. And if we step away from the frame of guru, as I have argued for in chapter two, we are able to recover also Krsnanandini Devi Dasi alongside Swamini and Swami. Together, the three acharyas implicate also overlapping networks of religious communities, inclusive of other Black teachers, writers, poets, musicians, and entrepreneurs. These include the temple president (Benny “Balabhadra Bhattacharya Dasa” Tillman) of ISKCON Atlanta, *kirtan* recording artist and poet Acyuta Gopi in New York City, Swami Satchidananda disciple and health entrepreneur Manu Dawson, and poet Darrell “Dhira

¹ Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York, NY: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 7.

Krishna Dasa” Roberts. Historical fact would suggest that the intersection of Black and Hindu exists and persists against the high tide of race-religious paradigms.

Though, the discussion cannot conclude there. In the course of clarifying the historical and contemporary Black Hindu networks in the U.S., I have illustrated a number of tensions that arise in Black religious experiences of Hinduism. Krsnanandini and her mother Bhumata Devi Dasi in the 1970s lack the proper racial and gender bodies fit for entry into an ISKCON temple in Cleveland. Hundreds of miles to the west in California, Swamini Turiyasangitananda reflexively juxtaposes her Black, female and Christian identity to that of an East Indian Hindu guru, wondering in the voice of the imagined spectator how can it be possible for the two to become one figure; she proceeds to candidly demonstrate how. Bhakti Tirtha Swami becomes a controversial figure for a time in his institutional home, ISKCON, partially for dressing in African prints, wearing watches and jewels, and carrying a custom lion (Narasimha) cane. His aesthetic body is part of the formation of his religious body and identity and the former renders the latter suspect when employing an aesthetic suitable for his positionality in West African high society, but distinctly other from the dress of a renunciate in South Asian custom. Surya and Chandra in the final chapter wrestle with routine experiences of others’ incompressibility of their racial-religious intersection when they are assumed to be ignorant of their Sanskrit names’ meanings and the sacred epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata that they grew up reading. Therefore, although we must acknowledge

they are there, their positionality and identity undergo regular and ongoing contestation in everyday life.

Beyond ocular identification of individual Black bodies in Hindu spaces and some careful listening, there is not a dedicated and named space—neither physically nor intellectually—for a Black and Hindu intersection to thrive, unlike the Black and yoga intersection which has, at minimum, the Black Yoga Teachers Alliance. But ‘yoga’ and ‘Hindu’ are two very different words with distinct semantics. ‘Hindu’ implies a racial identity (brown), ethnic/national identity (Indian), and religious/cultural identity whereas ‘yoga’ in the global capitalist market has been stripped of nearly all of those would-be connotations and instead advertises well—though very contested—as a middle-class Euro-American woman’s body-mind practice with spiritual edge. ‘Hindu’, as opposed to ‘yoga’, is too hefty and totalistic a term to be seen as compatible with the racial identities of Black Americans.

In this project, I have strategically deployed the terms ‘Hindu’ and ‘Hinduism’ to make legible and coherent my interviewees’ religious identity and praxis, and to resist further excising them from several academic fields that I believe need their valuable presence. Though effective and expedient, the terms are partially unsatisfying. I set aside some of my preconceptions when I inquired openly and asked, “What is your present religion, if any?”. The multitude of answers I received indicated a range of naming practices that were generally reticent on using the term ‘Hindu’ and, to a lesser degree,

'Hinduism'. Of nineteen interviews, only four responded to the above question with the term 'Hinduism' and only one person identified as a "non-practicing Hindu". Sri Chinmoy's disciples mentioned both their Christian denominations and their guru's name. Swamini's disciples Radha and Surya answered, "a spiritual path which is Vedic" and "follower of a Vedantic path" respectively. Krishnanandini Devi Dasi represented her religion as "Gaudiya Vaishnavism" and "the Hare Krishna movement" interchangeably while framing her religious teachings as "a spiritual science," indicating it as both systematic and wider than a particular religion. She, too, still considered herself a Christian as does Radha. Other Hare Krishna devotees preferred comparable terms like "Krishna Consciousness" and "Vaishnavism". The overall avoidance of the words 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' triggers a number of non-conclusive thoughts: 1) broad surveys that rely on world religions categories may not capture overlapping religious identities nor Black disciples of gurus or Vedanta well, 2) 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' are, indeed, reified as racial formations in the U.S. and, therefore, less-than-perfect for racial diversity, and 3) improved conceptual frameworks for these religious phenomena and identities are wanting. I am hopeful that future research, mine or others, will share in intention to explore how might other theoretical constructs from within Hinduism be poised to be valuable to both practitioners and scholars.

In simply inquiring into whether or not a Hindu can be Black, both theoretically and empirically, my research sheds light on some of the implications of ignoring race in

religious studies: the curtailing of research, an ignored intersection marred with marginalization and invisibility, and the perpetuation of essentialized religious and racial subjects. For the three acharyas, I recognize them as eminent Black teachers on Vedic and post-Vedic theology and praxis, and yet, acknowledge their continuities with legacies of Black American connections to Asia, particularly India and Indian Hindu religious thought and practices. Here, Swamini is *not* the concession that justifies and reinscribes our racial-religious imaginary. She is part of an ongoing Black artistic engagement with South Asian cultural and religious forms that offer reprieve from the gridlock of authorized modalities and histories in “the American life”.² With B. T. Swami, I envision him as a continually liminal figure intersecting the frames of Hindu guru and Black intellectual such that he can be perceived for his accomplishments in making Afro-Asian religious and cultural formations viable and authentic for the Black Atlantic. In Krsnanandini, we have an opportunity to attune our theory to recover, call out, and demarginalize subaltern and gendered forms of religious authority and clarify the inequitable conditions that shaped it. Moreover, the ethnographic portraits highlight historical multigenerational Black Hindu families that should have a place in both theories of Black religion and Hinduism. Therefore, this discerning doctoral project is

² For an excellent example of this line of research and analysis, see Kyle Garton-Gundling, “‘Ancestors We Didn’t Even Know We Had’: Alice Walker, Asian Religion, and Ethnic Authenticity,” *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 6 (March 1, 2015) and Rebecca Kumar, “‘Let Yo Booty Do That Yoga’: Black Goddess Politics,” *Scholar & Feminist Online*, Feminist and Queer Afro-Asian Formations, no. 14.3 (2018), <http://sfonline.barnard.edu/feminist-and-queer-afro-asian-formations/let-yo-booty-do-that-yoga-black-goddess-politics/>.

poised to open up the conceptual space for the intersection of Black and Hindu to be researched further in South Asian religions, American Religion, and Black studies, disrupting our "commonsense" knowledge about the "who" at the center of America, the "religion" at the center of Black religion, and the "race" at the center of Hindu.

Appendix A: The Works of Alice Coltrane

This appendix lists the works of Alice “Swamini Turiyasangitananda” Coltrane organized by kind. I have also included three websites dedicated to her as well.

Books

Monument Eternal. Los Angeles, California: Vedantic Book Press, 1977.

Endless Wisdom Vol. 1. Los Angeles, California: Avatar Book Institute, 1981.

Divine Revelations. Agoura, California: Avatar Book Institute, 1995.

Endless Wisdom Vol. 2. Los Angeles, California: Avatar Book Institute, 1998.

Turiya Speaks: Divine Discourses Volume 1. Avatar Book Institute, 2007.

Discography

Cosmic Music with John Coltrane. With John Coltrane. Recorded 1966-68. Impulse! AS-9148, 1969, vinyl.

A Monastic Trio. Recorded 1967-8. Impulse! AS-9156, 1968, vinyl.

Huntington Ashram Monastery. Recorded May 14, 1969. Impulse! AS-9185, 1969, vinyl.

Ptah the El Daoud. With Pharoah Sanders and Joe Henderson. Recorded January 26, 1970. Impulse!, 1970, vinyl.

Journey in Satchidananda. Recorded November 8, 1970. Impulse! AS-9203, 1971, vinyl.

Universal Consciousness. Recorded 1971. Impulse! AS-9210, 1971, vinyl.

World Galaxy. Recorded November 1971. Impulse!, 1971, vinyl.

Lord of Lords. Recorded July 1972. Impulse! AS-9224, 1972, vinyl.

Illuminations. With Carlos (Devadip) Santana. Columbia PCQ 32900, 1974, vinyl.

Eternity. Recorded August 1975. Warner Brothers P-10156W, 1976, vinyl.

Transcendence. Recorded May 1977. Warner Brothers BS 3077, 1977, vinyl.

Radha-Krsna Nama Sankirtana. Recorded August 1977. Warner Brothers BS 2986, 1977, vinyl.

Transfiguration. Recorded at Shoenberg Hall, the University of California at Los Angeles, April 16, 1978. Warner Brothers WB 3218, 1978, vinyl.

Marian McPartland's Piano Jazz With Guest Alice Coltrane. With Marian McPartland (interviewer). Recorded December 4, 1981. The Jazz Alliance TJA-12020, 1995, CD.

Turiya Sings. Avatar Book Institute AB-100, 1982, cassette.

Divine Songs. With students of the Vedantic Center (vocals, percussions). Avatar Book Institute AB-101, 1987, cassette.

Infinite Chants. With John Panduranga Henderson (lead vocalist) and Students of the Vedantic Center. Avatar Book Institute AB-102, 1990, cassette.

Glorious Chants. With Sandhya Sanjana (vocals), Sai Ram Iyer (vocals), and Students of Sai Anantam Ashram. Avatar Book Institute ABI-104, 1995, CD.

Translinear Light. With Ravi Coltrane (percussion, saxophone), Oran Coltrane (saxophone) et al. Impulse! UCCI-1010, 2003, CD.

ER RA. Luaka Bop LBOP0087, 2017, CD.

World Spirituality Classics 1: The Ecstatic Music Of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda. With John Panduranga Henderson (vocals), Sai Ram Iyer (Tamil vocals), Shankari Adams (vocals), Radha Botofasina (vocals), et al. Recorded between 1982 and 1995. Luaka Bop LBOP0087, 2017, CD.

Video

Eternity's Pillar (TV show). Aired 1987, on KTTV Channel 11.
<https://vimeo.com/411195654>.

Appendix B: The Works of Krsnanandini Devi Dasi

This appendix lists the works of Krsnanandini Devi Dasi organized by format.

With regards to her born virtual lectures, only those which were given at the time of research, recorded and made available online are listed here.

Books and Chapters

The First Book of Hare Krishna Puzzles, Quizzes and Riddles, n.d.

The Narayana Number Book, n.d.

And Grihastha Vision Team et al. *Heart and Soul Connection: A Devotional Guide to Marriage, Service, and Love*. BookBaby, 2014.

The Booklet of Eights: A Concise Guide to Spiritual Living. Prema Press, 2015.

The ABCs of Chanting the Holy Names of God. Prema Press, 2018.

And Tariq Saleem Ziyad. "Prepared Marriages are a Better Option" and "The Law of Relationship Order" in Alexander, Susanne M. *All-in-One Marriage Prep: 75 Experts Share Tips & Wisdom to Help You Get Ready Now*. Marriage Transformation, 2019 [2010].

"How to Marry a Winner" in Alexander, Susanne M. *All-in-One Marriage Prep: 75 Experts Share Tips & Wisdom to Help You Get Ready Now*. Marriage Transformation, 2019 [2010].

Online Lectures Consulted

"Krisnanandini Devi May 20th 2020 ISKCON of New Jersey (Towaco Temple)," streamed live on May 20, 2020 on Zoom and YouTube, YouTube Video, 1:28:36, <https://youtu.be/GGYudnrUG2o>.

“Krsnanandini Devi Dasi: Faith and Surrender,” Sadhvi Sanga, May 29, 2020, YouTube Video, 1:08:33, <https://youtu.be/imXFWsVasDE>.

“Remembering Who We Are: Krsnanandini Devi (Full),” Upbuild Channel, June 9, 2020, YouTube Video, 58:51, <https://youtu.be/GfWxwse3lOA>.

“Special Online Spiritual Evening with Her Grace Krsnanandini Mataji -14 June 2020,” ISKCON of Harrisburg, streamed live on June 14, 2020 on Zoom, June 15, 2020, YouTube Video, 1:39:33, <https://youtu.be/9bkz3fp-H-Y>.

With Uttama Dasi, “Musings on SB 9.3.10.The Relationship of Cyavana Muni and Sukanya.,” Grihastha Vision Team, July 3, 2020, 43:40, <https://youtu.be/YJ-UaZbETqY>.

“Krsnanandini Dasi // 2020-07-12 // Family Life in Krishna Consciousness,” ISKCON Alachua Hare Krishna Temple, streamed live on July 12, 2020, YouTube Video, 1:24:48, <https://youtu.be/zgToS4u7dic>.

“Racism and Spirituality,” ISKCON Toronto, streamed live on July 15, 2020, YouTube Video, 1:32:44, <https://youtu.be/UbsF0sao9rk>.

“Vaishnavi Sanga with H.G H.G [original has typo] Krsnanandini Devi Dasi,” Vaishnavi Ministry North America, August 10, 2020, YouTube Video, 1:57:36, <https://youtu.be/I5bqrkAmZB4>.

“HG Krsna Nandini - Janmasmtami 2020,” August 16, 2020, Dwaraka Iyengar [ISKCON Dallas], recorded on August 11, 2020, YouTube Video, 54:02, <https://youtu.be/2dCRS1xX7Ss>.

“Sunday Feast - In the Absence of God by HG Krsnanandini dasi,” ISKCON Chicago, streamed live on August 16, 2020, YouTube Video, 59:19, https://youtu.be/W_47BNnfbKc.

With Grihastha Vision Team, “GVT Q&A Panel,” Grihastha Vision Team, October 10, 2020, YouTube Video, 2:09:37, <https://youtu.be/y8SIND2owIY>.

“Preparing for Life’s Final Exam with Krsnanandini and Family,” Dandavats.com, November 13, 2020, YouTube Video, 1:03:38, <https://youtu.be/Ead5eOQ2DuQ>.

Appendix C: The Works of Bhakti Tirtha Swami

This appendix lists the literary publications of Bhakti Tirtha Swami organized by series. The digital archive used to access his recorded lectures and tour reports is located at btswami.com.

Published Works (By Series)

Leadership for an Age of Higher Consciousness: Administration from a Metaphysical Perspective. Hari-Nama Press, 1996.

Leadership for an Age of Higher Consciousness II: Ancient Wisdom for Modern Age. Hari-Nama Press, 2002.

Reflections on Sacred Teachings I: Sri Siksastaka. Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 2002.

Reflections on Sacred Teachings II: Madhurya-Kadambini. Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 2003.

Reflections on Sacred Teachings III: Harinama Cintamani. Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 2004.

Reflections on Sacred Teachings IV: Sri Isopanisad. Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 2005.

Reflections on Sacred Teachings V: Srila Bhaktisiddhanta's Sixty-four Principles for Community. Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 2007.

Reflections on Sacred Teachings VI: Radha-Sunya: Missing Mercy. Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 2009.

Spiritual Warrior I: Uncovering Spiritual Truths in Psychic Phenomena. Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 1996.

Spiritual Warrior II: Transforming Lust into Love. Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 1998.

Spiritual Warrior III: Solace for the Heart in Difficult Times. Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 2000.

Spiritual Warrior IV: Conquering the Enemies of the Mind. Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 2004.

Spiritual Warrior V: Making the Mind Your Best Friend. Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 2004.

Spiritual Warrior VI: Beyond Fanaticism, Terrorism, and War: Discover the Peace Solution. Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 2005.

Surrender: The Key to Eternal Life. Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 2013.

The Beggar I: Meditations and Prayers on the Supreme Lord. Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 1994.

The Beggar II: Crying Out for the Mercy. Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 1999.

The Beggar III: False Ego: The Greatest Enemy of the Spiritual Leader. Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 2002.

The Beggar IV: Die Before Dying. Washington, D.C: Hari-Nama Press, 2005.

Unpublished Work

Favors, John E. "Yoga and Western Psychology: Or Does Mankind Have a Future?" Bachelor's thesis, Princeton University, 1972. Princeton University Archives.

Appendix D: Structured Interview Questions

Below is the four-part structured interview protocol. The questions were asked in the order presented below. Parts two and three are derived from the subdiscipline of Social Network Analysis (SNA) to generate specific lists of people and apprehend the size and closeness of those relationships (ties) to participants in comparable ways. In subsequent interviews and conversations, I followed up on answers and themes that arose in this first interview.

Part One: Demographics

Questions:	Read Answers (if any):
AGE: What is your age range?	Under 18 years old 18-24 years old 25-34 years old 35-44 years old 45-54 years old 55-64 years old 65-74 years old 75-84 years old 85 years or older
GENDER: How do you identify your	Woman

gender?	Man Non-Binary Other (Please State)
RACE: Which one or more of the following would you say best represents your race?	White Black or African American American Indian or Alaska Native Asian or Asian Pacific Islander
RELIGION: What is your present religion, if any?	
RELIGION START: What year did you start practicing your present religion or spirituality?	
MARITAL: Are you ____?	Single Married Divorced Widowed Separated A Member of an Unmarried

	Couple/Partnership
EDUCATION: What is the highest level of education you have completed?	<p>Never attended school or only attended kindergarten</p> <p>Grades 1 through 8 (Elementary)</p> <p>Grades 9 through 11 (Some high school)</p> <p>Grade 12 or GED (High school graduate)</p> <p>College 1 year to 3 years (Some college or technical school)</p> <p>College 4 years or more (College graduate)</p> <p>Postgraduate</p> <p>Prefer not to answer</p>
INCOME: Which of these describes your annual income last year?	<p>Less than \$19, 999</p> <p>\$20,000 to \$34,999</p> <p>\$35,000 to \$49,999</p> <p>\$50,000 to \$74,999</p> <p>\$75,000 to \$99,999</p> <p>Over \$100,000</p>
CHILD: How many children less than 18 years of age live in your household?	

Part Two: Participant's Network of Most Important People to Religious or Spiritual Practice During Lifetime

Name Generator Question:

Please tell me the first name and last initials of people you feel are most important to your spiritual or religious practice during your lifetime. It is acceptable if they are living or dead or whether you met them personally or not.

Follow-Up Questions for Each Person Named:

TIME: How long have you known [NAME]? Less than a year, 1-3 years, 4-6 years, 7-9 years, or 10 or more years?

REL: Are any of the people you named affiliated with a religious organization or religion? If so, which one? They could work there, visit as a place of worship, etc.

CLOSE: Is this person your family, friend, acquaintance, someone you know of, or other?

RACE: What is [NAME] race?

GENDER: What is [NAME] gender?

FREQ: How often do you see or communicate with [NAME] now? Daily, weekly, monthly, less than monthly, or never?

ROLE: What relationship do you have to each of the people you named? Are they:

Kin/Family

Boss/Work Supervisor/Coworker

Guru/Spiritual Authority

Mentor/Teacher

Friend

Mentee

Or Other (please state)?

Part Three: Participant's Network of Black American Participants in Hinduism

Name Generator Question:

Can you list the first name and last initial of any Black or African Americans who you know that practice or have practiced Hinduism?

“Practicing” could be interpreted as engaging in religious rituals or practices from any Hindu tradition or having religious beliefs or a religious authority derived from any Hindu tradition.

Follow-Up Questions for Each Person Named:

REL: Are any of the people you have just listed affiliated with a religious organization?

If so, which participants and which organization?

LOC: If you know, which state or country did or does each person reside in?

GENDER: What are the genders of each of the people you named?

CLOSE: Is this person your family, friend, acquaintance, or someone you know of?

Part Four: Initiation, Transmission and Practice

INITIATION PEOPLE: Can you name the people who most influenced you to start practicing your religion or spirituality? If so, who?

INITIATION PLACES: Can you name any places which influenced you to start practicing your religion or spirituality?

INITIATION PRACTICES: Can you name any practices which influenced you to start practicing your religion or spirituality?

TRANSMISSION: Please tell me which of these statements apply to you and please let me know how frequently or often (daily, weekly, monthly, less than monthly, or never):

- 1) I perform or have performed service or worship at a public religious place of worship, like a temple or center. (If so, please state the name of the place)
- 2) I attend class, aarti, or other events at a local (insert appropriate religious organization location).
- 3) I share with persons outside of my own religion (like family, friends, or acquaintances) about my religion or its associated practices or beliefs (like prasadam, *kirtan* or meditation).

- 4) I have a meditation practice (if so, please state)
- 5) I participate in live *kirtans*, satsangs, sangha, or religious programs or events outside of a temple, center, or church.
- 6) (ISKCON only, maybe) I distribute prasadam (sanctified food) outside of the temple.
- 7) I distribute books, literature, or other media information about my religion to those outside of my religious or spiritual community.

PRACTICE: In what ways do you most often practice your religion or spirituality?

Appendix E: Bhakti Tirtha Swami in GBC Resolutions

This appendix provides a chronological list of mentions of Ghanashyama Dasa and/or Bhakti Tirtha Swami in ISKCON's Governing Body Commission's (GBC) yearly resolutions. The GBC holds an annual administrative meeting in Mayapur (located in West Nadia in Bengal, India) that produces a set of yearly written resolutions. The GBC Resolutions for each year from 1975 to present are published online (<https://gbc.iskcon.org/gbc-resolutions/>). A keyword search within each GBC resolution from 1975 to 2020 produced the following list of instances where Bhakti Tirtha Swami or Ghanashyama Dasa, his name prior to his second initiation, are mentioned. Below, I retain original formatting and grammar, including many spelling errors and erroneous spaces. For the sake of clarity, I did not reproduce mentions in duplicated information. For instance, countries are assigned to GBC members for managing ISKCON administrative and missionary work in those places and often co-GBC members for a particular region are mentioned again under their co-GBC's list of countries; these secondary mentions for Bhakti Tirtha Swami are omitted. Years without any references are omitted. Brackets in-text are in original documents except for my elisions (i.e., "[...]").

1978:

3.Sannyasa candidates for 1978 are as follows:

[...]

Satsvarupa Goswami – Jayadvaita, Ghanashyama.

1979:

5. Resolved: That those who are accepted for Sannyasa this year are:

Ghanasyama Das : Kirtanananda Swami

1982:

3. That His Holiness Bhakti Tirtha Swami will be assistant GBC along with Srila Jayatirtha Goswami and His Holiness Brahmananda Swami for West and East Africa.

3. New zonal assignments:

[...]

H.H. Bhakti Tirtha Swami : assisting GBC E. Africa.

1983:

8. That Bhakti Tirtha Swami will be an acting-GBC member. [...]

g. HDG Kirtanananda Swami.

Ohio, West Virginia, Indiana, Kentucky, Central Africa (assisted by Bhakti Tirtha Swami [...])

o. HH Brahmananda Swami

West and part of Central Africa including Angola, Zaire, Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Nigeria, Chad, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Gambia, Senegal, Mauritania, Upper Volta. -assisted by Bhakti Tirtha Swami.

p. HH Bhakti Tirtha Swami co-GBC with Atreya for North Africa

Acting co-GBC with Kirtanananda Swami for Central Africa, with Bhagavan Goswami. Ethiopia, Uganda, East Africa and with Brahmananda Swami for North West Africa including the countries of Western Sahara, Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Senegal, Mali, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Niger, Sudan, Chad, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Djibouti, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic, Sao Tome & Principe, Gabon, Congo, Zaire, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Burundi, Tanzania, Angola, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Botswana, Swaziland. [...]

7. The co-GBC for North Africa are HH Brahmananda Swami and Atreya Rsi, assisted by HH Bhakti Tirtha Swami.

1984

4. Resolved that HH Bhakti Tirtha be accepted into the body as a full GBC secretary. [...]

8. Zonal assignment for the year 497 Caitanya Era, (1984-85) are as follows:

A. Sriman Atreya Rsi Prabhu: Northwestern USA (including Berkely, Calif., but excluding Seattle, Washington), co-GBC with Bhaktitirtha Swami for North Africa, Morocco, Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, and Afganistan. GBC-Iran, Turkey, Lebanon, Persian Gulf Countries, Iraq, Syria, Jordan. [...]

Q. HH Bhakti Tirtha Swami: Central Africa, co with Bramananda Swami for Northwest Africa and all other Africa not already mentioned, co with Atreya Rsi for North Africa. Co with HDG Gopal Krsna for kenya.

1985

5. Bhaktitirtha Swami is empowered to begin giving diksa initiations.

1987

30. That with Bhaktitirtha Maharaja's approval, the GBC will request Visvambhar Maharaj to preach in French-speaking Africa for the coming year. [...]

e) Bhaktitirtha Swami

GBC: Central Africa

Co-GBC with Gopal Krsna Swami: Kenya

Co-GBC with Harivilas: North Africa

Co-GBC with (not determined): Northwestern

Africa and all other Africa not already named

1988

Bhaktitirtha Swami: GBC–Central Africa, Northwestern Africa

1989

52. That Bhaktitirtha Swami increase his association with senior ISKCON devotees by spending one month in Vrindaban during Kartik and one month in Mayapur during the upcoming year. [...]

56. That Balavanta das, Bhaktitirtha Swami, Giriraj Swami, and Guru Prasad Swami be granted a sixty day extension, until May 15, to submit their annual report to the Corresponding Secretary. Failure to do so will result in automatic censure by the GBC Body. [...]

Bhaktitirtha Swami:

co-GBC with Gopal Krsna Goswami and Giriraj Swami for Central Africa, West Africa

co-GBC with Hari Vilas for North Africa

1990

69.{90} That Bhaktitirtha Swami shall be placed on probation for the following:

- a) Failing to attend the Annual GBC Meetings for four years.{90}
- b) Failing to submit an Annual Report for at least two years.{90}
- c) Failing to pay the 1989-90 GBC Executive Committee Assessment fee of \$250.{90}
- d) Failing to follow the guidance of the GBC Body under Resolution 89-52 giving him a specific program to increase his association with senior ISKCON devotees.{90}

The specific program of rectification is as follows:

- a) He must function through the year under the continuing direct supervision of the GBC Executive Committee.{90}
- b) He must bring the procedures in his zone for the honoring and worshiping of guru into conformity with those prescribed in the laws of ISKCON.{90}
- c) He must cooperate with the co-GBC's assigned to his zone and render whatever assistance is required for them to execute their responsibilities.{90}
- d) He must rectify the above censurable offenses by attending the 1991 Annual GBC Meetings, submitting an Annual Report by May 31, 1990, and paying the \$250 arrears, plus all current assessments on a timely basis.{90}
- e) He must spend one month in Mayapur during June/July and one month in Vrindaban during Kartika.{90}

Furthermore, whereas Bhaktitirtha Swami has repeatedly failed to follow the directives of the GBC Body such that the GBC Body has serious doubts as to his

abilities to instill in his disciples the importance of following the ISKCON's authorized authority structure, he is hereby placed on probation as an ISKCON guru. During the period of probation he must cease initiating any new disciples.{90}

The Executive Committee of the GBC shall monitor Bhaktitirtha Swami's compliance with the terms of these rectification procedures. Should they determine that he is not following the terms of the GBC Body probation, they are empowered to suspend Bhaktitirtha Swami from the GBC Body. Should they determine that he is not following the terms of the probation as guru by further initiating disciples, they are empowered to suspend Bhaktitirtha Swami as an authorized ISKCON guru. Bhakticaru Swami is appointed as liaison to communicate with Bhaktitirtha Swami on all matters related to this resolution.{90} [unanimous] [...]

77.{90}That Giriraj Swami travel with Kavicandra Swami through Bhaktitirtha Swami's zone at least once during 1990.{90} [...]

Bhaktitirtha Swami:

co-GBC with Kavicandra Swami and Giriraj Swami for Central Africa, West Africa

co-GBC with Hari Vilas for North Africa

1991

37. Whereas, in pursuance of Resolution 90-69 wherein Bhakti Tirtha Swami was placed on probation from the GBC Body and given a program of rectification for the 1990-91 year, which was in the mood of rehabilitating him as a GBC member in good standing through association with the holy dhams and senior ISKCON vaisnavas who reside there; and whereas he unfortunately failed to comply with these specific terms of rectification

Therefore, the GBC Body, with deep regret, is compelled by its rules to hereby suspend Bhakti Tirtha Swami as a member of the GBC.

It is the GBC's primary concern to see Bhakti Tirtha Swami reinstated as a member in good standing, and in order to achieve this, a program of rectification is given as follows:

He must cooperate with the GBC's assigned to the areas in which he is preaching.

For maintaining international standards, he must encourage his disciples to bring the procedures in his zone for the honoring and worshiping of guru into conformity with those prescribed in the Laws of ISKCON.

He must pay the \$250 arrears for GBC assessment fees accumulated during his tenure as a GBC in good standing.

He must accept the hospitality of ISKCON Mayapur or Vrindaban for one month

during 1991.

However, should Bhakti Tirtha Swami not take the necessary steps to implement this prescribed program of rectification by the end of 1991, it shall be understood that in fact he has no desire to continue as a GBC member. He would then be subject to removal from the GBC Body at the 1992 Annual Meeting. {91}

1993

70. That the GBC Chairman shall write a letter to Bhakti Tirtha Swami expressing the Body's appreciation for his vaishnava qualities and achievements in preaching. But we regret that, for personal reasons, he has not been able to attend the GBC meetings in Mayapura. We would like to have his association and to hear his realizations.

Regular attendance is one of the prescribed duties of a GBC Member. The GBC Body feels that if he is unable to participate fully, specifically by attending the meetings, he should tender his honorable resignation from the GBC body, as several others have done. If he doesn't resign during the year, nor attend the 1994 meeting, we may take such action as an unspoken resignation.

During this year GBC members should as far as possible visit and correspond with Bhakti Tirtha Swami and discuss with him about how he can be accountable to the GBC Body, and how he and his Godbrothers on the GBC can improve their relationships to the point where he can be brought into full participation on the Body.

1994

38. That Bhakti Tirtha Swami is reinstated as a member in good standing of the GBC and his suspension of 1991 is removed. [...]

42. That the GBC Body endorses in principle the vision and strategies for the twelve petals of Centennial activities as presented by the GBC Centennial Subcommittees, and affirms the following Centennial leadership plan:

Centennial Minister: Lokanatha Swami

Global Executive Coordinator Naveen Krishna Das

Global Petal Coordinators:

Increasing Prabhupada Consciousness: Lokanatha Swami

Raising Spiritual Standards Krishna Ksetra Das

Uniting Srila Prabhupada's Family Lokanatha Swami

Strengthening ISKCON Management Naveen Krishna Das

Spreading the Holy Name Lokanatha Swami

Producing and Distributing Books Rohini Suta Das

Expanding Prasadam Distribution Mukunda Goswami

Offering Special Achievements Lokanatha Swami
Building Congregations Jayapataka Swami
Establishing Memorials Lokanatha Swami
Enhancing Worldwide Recognition Bhakti Tirtha Swami
Celebrating 1996 Events Lokanatha Swami [...]

45. That a GBC Committee is established to review, modify and approve the final draft of the GBC Survey, including the goals of the survey. Professor Burke Rochford will conduct the survey through a network of zonal and temple coordinators appointed by GBC Zonal Secretaries and Temple Presidents. This committee will also receive the compiled and analyzed results from Burke Rochford and prepare a Survey Report to the members of ISKCON GBC. The cost of the survey shall not exceed US\$ 5,000.

The Committee shall consist of Jayapataka Swami, Madhusevita Das, Bhakti Tirtha Swami, Ravindra Swarup Das, Hridayananda Goswami, Lokanath Swami, Gopal Krishna Goswami [...]

Bhaktitirtha Swami:

co-GBC with Kavicandra Swami for Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Benin, Togo, Liberia, Camaroon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Zaire, Gabon, Rio Muni, Central African Republic, and Congo

1995

b. Bhakti Tirtha Swami is elected as GBC vice-chairman. [...]

C.

1. THAT Urmila devi dasi is appointed "Accreditation & Curriculum Development Coordinator." She will develop standards for accrediting schools and the writing & printing of the curriculum.

2. THAT a committee of Bir Krsna Swami, Bhakti Tirtha Swami, and Badrinarayana dasa will meet with Muralivadaka Dasa and Urmila devi dasi to implement this revised system. [...]

e. Bhakti Tirtha Swami and Radhanath Swami shall be co-GBC for West Virginia. They shall act as liaison between the GBC body and New Vrindaban during the transition to full ISKCON affiliation. [...]

70. THAT the GBC shall send a three man committee to Toronto to investigate the complaints about the temple management. The Committee shall consist of Bir Krsna Swami, Naveen Krishna dasa and Bhakti Tirtha Swami. [...]

Bhaktitirtha Swami:

co-GBC with Kavicandra Swami for Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Benin, Togo, Liberia, Camaroon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Zaire, Gabon, Rio Muni, Central African Republic, and Congo

co-GBC with Radhanatha Swami for West Virginia

co-GBC with Ravindra Svarupa for Detroit and Gita Nagari

co-GBC with Bhakticaru Swami and Giriraja Swami for South Africa

1996

3. H. H. Bhakti Tirtha Swami is elected as GBC Second Vice-chairman for 1996-97. [...]

102.

The GBC Body shall establish an International Women's Ministry. This Ministry will address the following concerns in a clear, mature, and deliberate manner:

1. Appreciating the contribution of ISKCON's female devotees.
2. Increasing understanding of the serious concerns of women in ISKCON.
3. Providing facility, communication and support for all female members of ISKCON.
4. Addressing issues of abuse and sexual impropriety in ISKCON.
5. Defining the different female devotee situations (e.g. grhastha women, older, renounced women, and brahmacarinis).
6. Working with temple authorities and GBCs to identify role models and encourage them to inspire and train junior Vaisnavis.

The first duties of this Ministry:

1. Establishment of Regional Ministers (who will serve on a worldwide Women's Ministerial Council.)
2. Selection of an International Women's Minister.
3. Communication with regional GBC, temple presidents and other leaders as to the purposes, understanding and practical application of the Women's Ministry in each individual region.
4. Positive, regional guidelines for protecting ISKCON women, including domestic violence, sexual impropriety, etc.

The first objectives of this Ministry:

STEP ONE: (Complete by July 1996)

Appoint Regional Ministers. The regional minister will be chosen conjointly by local senior Vaisnavis, GBC, and other ISKCON leaders. Her qualifications include: ability to communicate maturely with local leaders, senior and junior female devotees and female congregation; genuine understanding of the needs and concerns of ladies; ability to proceed with Women's Ministry responsibilities

in a non-confrontational yet serious manner.

STEP TWO: (Complete by October 1996)

Choose an International Minister. The International Minister will be chosen as follows:

1. Senior Vaisnavis from each region will nominate appropriate candidates.
2. Discussion of these candidates will ensue via COM, mail and phone.

Sudharma dasi, with the help of Bhaktitirtha Swami, Madhusevita Prabhu, and Bir Krishna Goswami will ensure the completion of these tasks.

410.

1. The ISKCON Foundation and the Ministry of Management Finance, represented by Naveen Krsna dasa, shall appoint three devotees to oversee the grants to the scientific preachers. These three devotees shall comprise the 'GBC Funding Committee'. One of the three devotees shall be the Minister of Management Finance. It is recommended that for ease of management, all three should be resident in North America and not engaged in scientific preaching. They should be completely neutral parties without allegiance to any particular fashion of the BI. All their decisions must be made unanimously by all committee members.

2. The additional members initially be : Hari Vilas dasa, Bhakti Tirtha Swami. and Sesa dasa. Sesa das will be the chairman.

The duties of this committee of three devotees are as follows:

1. To find out after the yearly BBT Trustees meeting (approximately end June) the amount of BBT funds available for scientific preaching.
2. To receive these funds in an ISKCON Foundation bank account from the BBT International
3. To create a standard grant request application and procedures specifically designed to get the best understanding of the economic requirements, including progress reports and plans, of the scientific preachers.
4. To receive grant requests from the BI as a whole, if it is functioning in that manner, or otherwise by individuals who are engaged in scientific preaching which is recognized as valuable by the GBC Funding Committee.
5. To carefully analyze these grant requests.
6. To carefully scrutinize the yearly statement of accounts, progress reports and plans, which the receivers of past funding must provide before receiving new funds.
7. To determine how much money shall be given to all parties deemed worthy of receiving funds.
8. To obtain final approval of intended grants from Harikesa Swami.
9. To disburse these funds to properly constituted bank accounts of the entities receiving the funds.

In order to protect the members of the committee and anyone mentioned in this resolution, and to insure that the interests of the GBC and BBT are protected, there shall be no lobbying or protests from the applicants either before or after the decisions are made. If the applicants lobby and protest, their application will be rejected. This is standard procedure for grant approval organizations.

The applicants are allowed one written appeal which will go to the committee and Harikesa Swami. Their decision after reviewing the appeal shall be final for the fiscal year which will be July 1st – June 30th.

The relevant GBC Ksetra committee shall review this resolution and its implementation on a yearly basis at the annual GBC meeting. Naveen Krsna das shall present the decisions of the committee on COM as soon as they are available.

506.

THAT from end of March 1996 onward, all ISKCON dealings with South African President Dr. Nelson Mandela, Deputy President Mr. Mbeki and Zulu leader Mongotsu Bhutelezi—anywhere in the world—will be undertaken only with the prior sanctions and arrangements of His Holiness Bhakti Caru Swami or Bhakti Tirtha Swami or their appointed representatives such as Sruti Kirti prabhu, ISKCON Temple president. [...]

514.

In order to preserve the integrity of preaching to public figures, VIP's and other people of influence including opinion leaders, a global standing Committee / Advisory board should be constituted, to assess the preaching to such individuals. The principle is to encourage and assist preaching which is already going on between devotees and important persons. ISKCON officers and managers are requested to notify the aforesaid committee about contacts with such persons as they occur in their area.

As needed the committee will provide appropriate guidelines for such preaching.

Suggested Committee members

Bhakti Tirtha Swami, Bhakti Caru Swami, Mukunda Goswami, Radhanath Swami Giriraj Swami, Gopala Krishna Goswami, Gaura Lila Prabhu [...]

705.

That the GBC members extend their heartfelt gratitude to the 1996 GBC

Executive Committee (Badrinaryana prabhu, Bhakti Tirtha Swami, and Naveen Krishna prabhu), meeting secretary Kalakantha prabhu, permanent secretary Manjari mataji, and meeting assistants Sumitra mataji, Arjuna Sakhi mataji, Bhaktin Alexandra, Radha Govinda prabhu, Nitya Dham prabhu, Devaki Pran prabhu, Yadunandana prabhu, Nitya Siddha Gopal prabhu, and Siddha prabhu. Special thanks to the Mayapura devotees and gurukula students under the direction of H. H. Bhakti Vidya Purna Swami, for preparing and serving Krishna prasadam. [...]

Bhaktitirtha Swami:

co-GBC with Kavicandra Swami for Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Benin, Togo, Liberia, Camaroon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Zaire, Gabon, Rio Muni, Central African Republic, and Congo

co-GBC with Radhanatha Swami for West Virginia

co-GBC with Ravindra Svarupa for Detroit and Gita Nagari

co-GBC with Bhakti Charu Swami and Giriraja Swami for South Africa

1997

C. ISKCON Communities and Socio-Economic Functions Committee whose members are: Jaya Sila Das (Chairman), Lokanatha Swami, Bhakti Charu Swami, Bhaktitirtha Swami, Giridhari Swami, Kavichandra Swami, Radha Charan Das, Pancaratna Das, Hari Sauri Das and Prasanta Dasi, [...]

Bhaktitirtha Swami:

co-GBC with Kavicandra Swami for Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Benin, Togo, Liberia, Camaroon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Zaire, Gabon, Rio Muni, Central African Republic, and Congo

co-GBC with Radhanatha Swami for West Virginia

co-GBC with Ravindra Svarupa for Detroit and Gita Nagari

co-GBC with Bhakti Charu Swami and Giriraja Swami for South Africa

1998

HH Bhakti Tirtha Swami

Bhakti Tirtha Swami will work with the Communications Ministry with present and future books to see if certain editing is necessary to enhance his books for the devotee community.

It is recommended that he adhere more closely to the standard sannyasi dress code, at least while in ISKCON temples. The sannyasa minister must approach him to discuss this and decide what standard is suitable, including the use of a cane.

It is recommended that he try to increase the sastric content in his classes and preaching. [...]

Bhakti-Tirtha Swami:

co-GBC with Kavichandra Swami for Nigeria , Ghana, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Benin, Togo, Liberia, Camaroon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Zaire, Gabon, Rio Muni, Central African Republic, and Congo

co-GBC with Radhanatha Swami for West Virginia

co-GBC with Ravindra Svarupa for Detroit and Gita Nagari

co-GBC with Giriraja Swami for South Africa

Co-GBC with Ravindra Svarupa for Potomac

2000

The BBT Construction-Grant Allocation Committee

622 [ACTION ORDER] 1. A BBT Construction Grant Allocation Committee is hereby formed and empowered to decide the allocation of the annual BBT construction and renovation grant to ISKCON, according to the principles established by Srila Prabhupada. The members of this committee are: Ramai Swami, Bhakti-tirtha Swami, Sivarama Swami, Hridaya Caitanya Das, the GBC annual chairman, the BBT treasurer, a member nominated by the BBT trustees. [...]

Bhaktitirtha Swami:

GBC: Switzerland, Dole (France).

Co-GBC for Benin, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Togo, Zaire;

GBC: USA: West Virginia, Michigan (Detroit), Pennsylvania (Gita Nagari), Washington D.C., Potomac, MD.

2001

613. [ACTION ORDER] **BBT Construction-Grant Allocation Committee**

Whereas:

- The trustees of BBTI have informed the GBC Chairman that it does not want any ex-officio BBT representative on the BBT Construction-Grant Allocation Committee, nor does it wish to nominate a member;
- A BBT resolution of 1999 states that the members of a BBT Construction-Grant Allocation Committee should be selected by the GBC Chairman and the BBTI trustees Chairman;
- The GBC wishes to harmonize its decision with that of the BBT trustees; and
- The two Chairmen have duly met and agreed upon their selection.

Therefore it is resolved THAT:

The 2000 Action Order Resolution 623 which now reads:

“A BBT Construction-Grant Allocation Committee is hereby formed and empowered to decide the allocation of the annual BBT construction and renovation grant to ISKCON, according to the principles established by Srila Prabhupada. The members of this committee are: Ramai Swami, Bhakti-tirtha Swami, Sivarama Swami, Hridaya Caitanya dasa, the GBC annual chairman, the BBT treasurer, and a member nominated by the BBT trustees.”

Shall be amended to read:

“A BBT Construction-Grant Allocation Committee is hereby formed and empowered to decide the allocation of the annual BBT construction and renovation grant to ISKCON, according to the principles established by Srila Prabhupada. The members of this committee are:: Ramai Swami, Bhakti-tirtha Swami, Sivarama Swami, Hridaya Caitanya dasa (as convener), and the annual GBC Chairman.” [...]

617. [ACTION ORDER] **Letter of Censure**

THAT the GBC hereby censures Advaita Krishna dasa, Sumitra-devi dasi, and Govinda Candra dasa, and has issued a letter of censure to each one of them stating:

“Please understand that an ISKCON devotee is a member of Srila Prabhupada’s family and as such has the duty to act in a befitting Krishna conscious manner demonstrating concern for your own and others spiritual welfare and for the well-being of ISKCON. Due to the reasons stated below you have been censured. A censure expresses disapproval of your conduct. A censure is an official note of caution. Please take due notice thereof and rectify the situation.

“Reasons for censure.

“Based on a preponderance of evidence provided, the GBC Body has found you along with others to be responsible for writing to the Immigration Department of Mauritius requesting that Trivikrama Maharaja be barred from entering the country.

“This has already happened once before in Mauritius when Bhakti-tirtha Maharaja was barred from entering the country.

“Whilst this in no way suggests you are responsible for the earlier event this is a warning that this type of action is not condoned by ISKCON.

“It is also a warning that you have to be diligent in adhering to the orders and guidelines given by the GBC and GBC Representative.

“You must not abuse the authority conferred upon you as a Temple leader and spiritual authority within ISKCON.” [...]

Bhakti-tirtha Swami:

GBC: Switzerland, Dole (France).

GBC: USA: West Virginia, Michigan (Detroit), Pennsylvania (Gita Nagari),
Washington D.C., Potomac, MD.

Co-GBC for Benin, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Gabon, Ghana,
Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa,
Togo, Zaire.

Bibliography

Online Primary Sources Consulted

“Alice Coltrane.” Luaka Bop. <https://www.alicecoltrane.com>.

Botofasina, Surya. <https://www.suryabotofasina.com>.

Botofasina, Radha. <https://radhaharp.com/>.

BTSwami.com. <https://btswami.com/>.

Dasi-Ziyad Family Institute. <http://dasiziyadfamilyinstitute.org/>.

Dublab. “Ashram Tapes: The Devotional Music of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda.”
Produced by Mark “Frosty” McNeill. <https://ashramtapes.com>.

GBC ISKCON. <https://gbc.iskcon.org/>.

Gita Nagari Eco Farm & Sanctuary. <https://gnecofarm.org/>.

IFAST. <https://ifast-bts.com/>.

Inner Path. <https://www.innerpath.com/>.

ISKCON News. <https://iskconnews.org/>.

Krsnanandini Devi Dasi. <https://krsnanandini.com>.

Sri Sathya Sai International Organisation. <https://www.sathyasai.org/>.

Vaishnavi Ministry. <http://vaishnaviministry.org/>.

Vanisource. <https://vanisource.org/>.

The Vedantic Center. <http://thevedanticcenter.org>.

Other Primary and Secondary Sources

- Adams, Jimi. *Gathering Social Network Data. Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences*; 180. Thousand Oaks, California : Sage, 2020.
- Adams, Shankari C. *Portrait of Devotion: Spiritual Life of Alice Coltrane Swamini Turiyasangitananda*. USA: Self-published, 2016.
- Agberia, John Tokpabere. "The Adane-Okpe Masquerade Festival of the Okpe People." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 41, no. 3 (June 1, 2006): 261–73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909606063884>.
- Aghoro, Nathalie. "Agency in the Afrofuturist Ontologies of Erykah Badu and Janelle Monáe." *Open Cultural Studies* 2 (November 1, 2018): 330–40. <https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2018-0030>.
- Alan Cooperman, Gregory Smith, Besheer Mohamed, and Jessica Martinez. "America's Changing Religious Landscape: Christian Decline Sharply as Share of Population; Unaffiliated and Other Faiths Continue to Grow." USA: Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015. <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.
- Alexander, Susanne M. *All-in-One Marriage Prep: 75 Experts Share Tips & Wisdom to Help You Get Ready Now*. Marriage Transformation, 2019.
- Altman, Michael J. *Heathen, Hindoo, Hindu: American Representations of India, 1721-1893*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- — —. "The Construction of Hinduism in America." *Religion Compass* 10, no. 8 (2016): 207–16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12204>.
- Anderson, Victor. *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism*. New York: Continuum, 1995.
- — —. *Creative Exchange: A Constructive Theology of African American Religious Experience*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.
- Anthony Abraham Jack. *The Privileged Poor : How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019.
- Appadurai, Arjun. "Putting Hierarchy in Its Place." *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (February 1, 1988): 36–49.

- Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.
- — —. "Reading a Modern Classic: W. C. Smith's 'The Meaning and End of Religion.'" *History of Religions* 40, no. 3 (2001): 205–22.
- Atiemo, Abamfo Ofori. "Returning to Our Spiritual Roots." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 47, no. 3 (2017): 405–38. <https://doi.org/10.2307/26571895>.
- Baber, Zaheer. "Racism without Races: Reflections on Racialization and Racial Projects." *Sociology Compass* 4, no. 4 (April 2010): 241–48. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2009.00270.x>.
- Baham III, Nicholas Louis. "The Alice Coltrane Experience." In *The Coltrane Church: Apostles of Sound, Agents of Social Justice*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2015.
- Balaji, Murali. "Review Gerald Horne, *The End of Empires: African Americans and India*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008. Pp. 266. Cloth \$54.50. Paper \$26.50." *The Journal of African American History* 95, no. 1 (2010): 112–14. <https://doi.org/10.5323/jafriamerhist.95.1.0112>.
- Bald, Vivek. *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Barker, Philip. *Michel Foucault: An Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998.
- Beal, Frances M. "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female." *Meridians* 8, no. 2 (2008): 166–76.
- Beck, Guy L. "Kīrtan and Bhajan." In *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, edited by Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, and Vasudha Narayanan. Accessed June 25, 2021. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_2040060.
- — —. "Sacred Music and Hindu Religious Experience: From Ancient Roots to the Modern Classical Tradition." *Religions* 10, no. 2 (February 2019): 85. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10020085>.
- — —. *Sonic Theology: Hinduism and Sacred Sound*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1993.

- Benjamin, Lakecia. *Pursuance: The Coltranes*. Ropeadope Records Rad-535, 2020.
- Berg, Travis Vande, and Fred Kniss. "Iskcon and Immigrants: The Rise, Decline, and Rise Again of a New Religious Movement." *The Sociological Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (February 2008): 79–104. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2007.00107.x>.
- Berkman, Franya J. "Appropriating Universality: The Coltranes and 1960s Spirituality." *American Studies* 48, no. 1 (2007): 41–62. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40644001>.
- — —. *Monument Eternal: The Music of Alice Coltrane*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2010.
- Bernstein, Margaret. "Couples Renew Vows on Black Marriage Day Ceremony Showcases Husbands and Wives in Bid to Build up the Institution." *Plain Dealer*, March 31, 2008. America's News.
- "Bhakti-Tirtha Swami Krsnapada to Lecture at Karamu." *Call and Post (Cleveland Edition)*, February 11, 1988. ProQuest.
- Bhatt, G. P. and J. L. Shastri. *The Bhāgavata Purāṇa Parts I – V*. Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1950-1955. Internet Archive.
- Bhatt, Purnima Mehta. *The African Diaspora in India: Assimilation, Change and Cultural Survivals*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2018.
- Bīrūnī, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad. *Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A.D. 1030*. V. 1. Translated by Eduard Sachau. Trübner's Oriental Series. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1910. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015008727623>.
- — —. *Alberuni's India. An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A.D. 1030*. V. 2. Translated by Eduard Sachau. Trübner's Oriental Series. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1910. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001231857>.
- Bivins, Jason. *Spirits Rejoice! Jazz and American Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Blais-Billie, Braudie. "Alice Coltrane's Ashram Lost in California Wildfires." *Pitchfork*, November 18, 2018. <https://pitchfork.com/news/alice-coltranes-ashram-lost-in-california-wildfires/>.

Blake, Alfred Egbert. *Convoy to India*. Brooklyn, NY: Trilon Press, 1953.
<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009981240>.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. 3rd ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010.

Botofasina, Radha. *Mantram*. Shaila Records, 1999, compact disc.

— — —. *Songs of the Eternal Soul*. Shaila Records, 2011, compact disc.

Brady, Shaun. "World Spirituality Classics 1: The Ecstatic Music of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda (Luaka Bop)." *JazzTimes*, April 25, 2019.
<https://jazztimes.com/reviews/albums/alice-coltrane-turiyasangitanandaworld-spirituality-classics-1/>.

Braithwaite, Dawn O., Jenna Stephenson Abetz, Julia Moore, and Katie Brockhage. "Communication Structures of Supplemental Voluntary Kin Relationships." *Family Relations* 65, no. 4 (2016): 616–30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12215>.

Braithwaite, Dawn O., Betsy Wackernagel Bach, Leslie A. Baxter, Rebecca DiVerniero, Joshua R. Hammonds, Angela M. Hosek, Erin K. Willer, and Bianca M. Wolf. "Constructing Family: A Typology of Voluntary Kin." *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 27, no. 3 (May 1, 2010): 388–407.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407510361615>.

Broadway, Bill. "Love, Not Lust: Hindu Swami Krishnapada Warns Against the Unrestrained Pursuit of Money, Power and Sex." *Washington Post*, February 14, 1998. ProQuest.

"Brother Bey, Nutritional Guru, Dies." *Washington Informer*, October 7, 2010. ProQuest.

Brown, Anthony. "John Coltrane as the Personification of Spirituality in Black Music." In *John Coltrane and Black America's Quest for Freedom: Spirituality and the Music*, edited by Leonard Brown. New York City: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Brown, Jayna. *Black Utopias: Speculative Life and the Music of Other Worlds*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021.

- Brown, Karen McCarthy. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Comparative Studies in Religion and Society 4. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2001.
- Brown, Leonard, ed. *John Coltrane and Black America's Quest for Freedom: Spirituality and the Music*. New York City: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Bryant, Edwin, and Maria Ekstrand, eds. *Hare Krishna Movement : The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant*. New York, NY, USA: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Bryant, Edwin F. *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali: A New Edition, Translation, and Commentary with Insights from the Traditional Commentators*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009.
- Brzezinski, Jan. "Women Saints in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism." In *Vaiṣṇavī: Women and the Worship of Krishna*, edited by Steven Rosen, 1. ed., 59–85. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1996.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Carl A. Fields Center. "Carl A. Fields Center for Equality + Cultural Understanding — Princeton University." Accessed March 26, 2021. <http://fieldscenter.princeton.edu>.
- Carter, Diana. "Peace Begins Within: Black Guru Advocates Reliance on Inner Strengths." *Afro-American (Baltimore, MD)*. n.d., sec. The Living Church. Accessed June 25, 2021. <https://btswami.com/vault/press-articles/peace-begins-within-2>.
- Carter, J. Kameron. *Race: A Theological Account*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton Studies in Culture, Power, History. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad. "Brahman." In *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, edited by Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, and Vasudha Narayanan. Brill, 2018. http://dx.doi.org.proxy.lib.duke.edu/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_2050290.

- Champakalata Dasi. "ISKCON's Journey Through Apartheid With Mandela - A Tribute to Nelson Rohihlaha Mandela (1918-2013) Father of the South African Nation." ISKCON News, December 6, 2013. <https://iskconnews.org/iskcons-journey-through-apartheid-with-mandela-a-tribute-to-nelson-rohihlaha-mandela-1918-2013-father-of-the-south-african-nation,4182/>.
- Charpentier, Marie-Thérèse. *Indian Female Gurus in Contemporary Hinduism: A Study of Central Aspects and Expressions of Their Religious Leadership*. Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2010.
- Cheah, Joseph. *Race and Religion in American Buddhism: White Supremacy and Immigrant Adaptation*. AAR Academy Series. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Chipumuro, Todne Thomas. "'Coming Alongside': Relatedness and Transcendence in a (Black) Atlantic Church Community." PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2011. ProQuest.
- Chryssides, George D. "Satchidananda." In *Historical Dictionary of New Religious Movements*, 274–75. Blue Ridge Summit, USA: Scarecrow Press, 2011.
- — —. "Satya Sai Baba." In *Historical Dictionary of New Religious Movements*, 275. Blue Ridge Summit, USA: Scarecrow Press, 2011.
- Clements, Carl John. "John Coltrane and the Integration of Indian Concepts in Jazz Improvisation." *Jazz Research Journal* 2, no. 2 (May 15, 2009): 155–75. <https://doi.org/10.1558/jazz.v2i2.155>.
- Clifford, James. "On Ethnographic Authority." *Representations*, no. 2 (1983): 118–46.
- Clifford, James, and George E. Marcus. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Edited by Kim Fortuny. 25th Anniversary edition. Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2009.
- Clooney, Francis X. *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0195170377.003.0005>.
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. New York, NY: Spiegel & Grau, 2015.
- Cohn, Bernard S. *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*. Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.

- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 2000. EBSCOHost.
- Collins, Patricia Hill, and Sirma Bilge. *Intersectionality*. Key Concepts Series. Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016.
- Coltrane, Alice. "The Evolution of Alice Coltrane – 1987 – Dolores Brandon." Interview by Dolores Brandon. Accessed June 9, 2021. <https://doloresbrandon.com/radioprofiles/the-evolution-of-alice-coltrane-1987/>.
- Coltrane, Alice Turiyasangitananda. *Divine Songs*. With students of the Vedantic Center (vocals, percussions). Avatar Book Institute AB-101, 1987, cassette. Accessed June 24, 2021. <https://www.alicecoltrane.com/divine-songs-full>. Liner notes.
- — —. *Infinite Chants*. With John Panduranga Henderson (lead vocalist) and Students of the Vedantic Center. Avatar Book Institute AB-102, 1990, cassette. Accessed June 24, 2021. <https://www.alicecoltrane.com/infinite-chants>. Liner notes.
- Coltrane, John. *The Major Works of John Coltrane*. Recorded 1965. Impulse! GRD-2-113, 1992.
- — —. *Meditations*. Recorded November 1965. Impulse!, 1966.
- Cooper, Anna Julia. *A Voice From the South*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2000. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/church/cooper/cooper.html>.
- Craven, Christa, Iris López, Dána-Ain Davis, Mary K. Anglin, Khiara M. Bridges, Elizabeth Chin, Aimee Cox, Christa Craven, Dána-Ain Davis, and Faye V. Harrison. *Feminist Activist Ethnography: Counterpoints to Neoliberalism in North America*. Blue Ridge Summit, USA: Lexington Books, 2013.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>.
- Curtis, Tracy. "Born into This Body: Black Women's Use of Buddhism in Autobiographical Narratives." In *Reading African American Autobiography: Twenty-First-Century Contexts and Criticism*, edited by Eric D. Lamore. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2017.
- Dalmia, Vasudha. *Hindu Pasts: Women, Religion, Histories*. Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2018.

- Dalmia, Vasudha, and Heinrich von Stietencron, eds. *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*. New Delhi; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995.
- Dasa, Satyaraja [Steven Rosen]. "Rain of Mercy: The Exemplary Life of Bhakti-Tirtha Swami." Krishna.com. Accessed April 8, 2021. <http://www.krishna.com/rain-mercy-exemplary-life-bhakti-tirtha-swami>.
- Dasi, Champakalata. "ISKCON Cherishes Mandela Visits." *Post (South Africa)*, December 11, 2013. LexisNexis.
- Dasi, Himavati, Laghima-Siddhi Devi Dasi, and Bhakti Tirtha Swami. "August-October 1999: France, Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, England." Tour Report. The Institute for Applied Spiritual Technology, October 1999. BtSwami.com. <https://btswami.com/vault/tour-reports/1999-august-to-october-europe-and-africa>.
- dasi, Jyotirmayi devi. "Women in ISKCON in Prabhupada's Time." In *The Emergence of Women's Voices in ISKCON: A Collection of Letters, Articles, Papers, and Conference Reports from 1988 to 2020*, edited by Pranada devi dasi. Virginia, USA: Bookwrights Press, 2020.
- Dasi, Krsnanandini Devi. "'The Lord Have Mercy' Festival Celebrates Interfaith Harmony." *ISKCON News*, August 23, 2008. <https://iskconnews.org/the-lord-have-mercy-festival-celebrates-interfaith-harmony,670/>.
- Dasi, Paramesvara Devi, Raga Devi Dasi, Laghima Siddhi Devi Dasi, and Bhakti Tirtha Swami. "Summary Tour Report," June 2001. BtSwami.com. <https://btswami.com/vault/tour-reports/2001-april-may-june-worldwide>.
- dasi, Pranada devi, ed. *The Emergence of Women's Voices in ISKCON: A Collection of Letters, Articles, Papers, and Conference Reports from 1988 to 2020*. Virginia, USA: Bookwrights Press, 2020.
- Dasi, Uttama Devi. "Blessed by the Best." Vaisnava Family Resources, November 20, 2020. <https://vaisnavafamilyresources.org/en/blessed-by-the-best/>.
- Dasi, Yasodamayi. "American Tour," Spring/Summer 1992. BtSwami.com. <https://btswami.com/vault/tour-reports/1992-spring-summer-american-tour-no-11>.

- — —. "Good News: At the Feet of God." *Positive Energy Newsletter*, June 1, 1989. Accessed June 25, 2021. <https://btswami.com/vault/press-articles/good-news-at-the-feet-of-god>.
- Dawson, Kathy. *Cleveland Couples: Their Lives, Their Love, and Their Story of Commitment*. Cleveland, OH: Gray, 2004.
- Deegan, Mary Jo. "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Women of Hull-House, 1895–1899." *The American Sociologist* 19, no. 4 (December 1988): 301–11. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02691827>.
- Delgado, Richard, Jean Stefancic, and Angela Harris. *Critical Race Theory*. 3rd ed. New York: New York University Press, 2017.
- Denton, Lynn Teskey. *Female Ascetics in Hinduism*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004. ProQuest.
- Devi Dasi, Indrani. "American Tour Part II 1991," BTswami.com, May 1991. <https://btswami.com/vault/tour-reports/1991-may-american-tour-part-ii>.
- Devi Dasi, Laghima Siddhi. "The Institute for Applied Spiritual Technology Tour Report." The Institute for Applied Spiritual Technology, August 1997. <https://btswami.com/vault/tour-reports/1997-july-august-america>.
- Devi Dasi, Vrajalila. "American Tour," BTswami.com, Summer 1992. <https://btswami.com/vault/tour-reports/1992-summer-america>.
- Devi Dasi, Yasodamayi. "American Tour I," BTswami.com, April 1991. <https://btswami.com/vault/tour-reports/1991-april-american-tour-i>.
- Dickson, Port. "Guru Brings Message of Spiritual Healing." *New Straits Times (Malaysia)*, May 30, 2000. LexisNexis.
- Dickerson, Dennis C. "Gandhi's India and Beyond: Black Women's Religious and Secular Internationalism, 1935–1952." *The Journal of African American History* 104, no. 1 (January 2019): 59–83. <https://doi.org/10.1086/701106>.
- Dirks, Nicholas B. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.

- Integral Yoga Magazine. "Divine Music: The Spiritual Journey of Alice Coltrane," August 24, 2018. <https://integrallyogamagazine.org/divine-music-the-spiritual-journey-of-alice-coltrane/>.
- Dixie, Quinton Hosford, and Peter R. Eisenstadt. *Visions of a Better World: Howard Thurman's Pilgrimage to India and the Origins of African American Nonviolence*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2011.
- Dodson, Michael S., and Brian A. Hatcher, eds. *Trans-Colonial Modernities in South Asia*. Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Asia. London; New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Doniger, Wendy. "Hinduism by Any Other Name." *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 15, no. 3 (1991): 35–41.
- Du Bois, W. E. B., ed. *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*. 41 vols. New York, NY: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1910–. Hathi Trust.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. *Dark Princess: A Romance*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995.
- — —. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Edited by Brent Hayes Edwards. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Du Bois, W. E. B., and Isabel. Eaton. *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. Philadelphia: Published for the University, 1899.
- Erndl, Kathleen M. "Afterword." In *The Graceful Guru*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195145380.003.0011>.
- Ernst, Carl W. *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center*. SUNY Series in Muslim Spirituality in South Asia. Albany: SUNY Press, 1992. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=7566&site=ehost-live>.
- — —. "Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconsideration of Arabic and Persian Translations from Indian Languages." *Iranian Studies* 36, no. 2 (2003): 173–95.
- Evans, Curtis J. *The Burden of Black Religion*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

- Farquhar, J. N. *The Crown of Hinduism*. London: H. Milford, 1913.
<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015026271646>.
- Fauset, Arthur Huff. *Black Gods of the Metropolis: Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971.
- Fisher, Elaine M. *Hindu Pluralism: Religion and the Public Sphere in Early Modern South India*. South Asia across the Disciplines. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017.
- Fitzgerald, Timothy. *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity: A Critical History of Religion and Related Categories*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- — —. "Hinduism and the 'World Religion' Fallacy." *Religion; London* 20, no. 2 (April 1, 1990): 101.
- — —. *The Ideology of Religious Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Forsthoefel, Thomas A., and Cynthia Ann Humes, eds. *Gurus in America*. SUNY Series in Hindu Studies. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005.
- Foucault, Michel. *Archaeology of Knowledge*. London ; New York: Routledge, 2002.
- — —. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 2012.
- — —. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, edited by Donald F. Bouchard, 139–64. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- Freligh, Rebecca. "Marriage Tightens Couples To Counsel Others In Campaign To Cut Divorce Rate." *Plain Dealer (Cleveland)*, October 17, 1998. NewsBank.
- Frykenberg, Robert Eric. "Constructions of Hinduism at the Nexus of History and Religion." In *Defining Hinduism : A Reader*, edited by J. E. Llewellyn and Russell T. McCutcheon. London: Routledge, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315475653>.
- Gallicchio, Marc. *African American Encounter with Japan and China*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Gandhi, Leela. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. St Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 1998.

- Garland, David. "What Is a 'History of the Present'? On Foucault's Genealogies and Their Critical Preconditions." *Punishment & Society* 16, no. 4 (October 2014): 365–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474514541711>.
- Garton-Gundling, Kyle. "'Ancestors We Didn't Even Know We Had': Alice Walker, Asian Religion, and Ethnic Authenticity." *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 6 (March 1, 2015).
- — —. *Enlightened Individualism: Buddhism and Hinduism in American Literature from the Beats to the Present*. Literature, Religion, and Postsecular Studies. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2019.
- ISKCON News. "GBC Approves Vaishnavi Diksa Gurus in ISKCON." Accessed December 1, 2020. <https://iskconnews.org/gbc-approves-vaishnavi-diksa-gurus-in-iskcon,7126/>.
- Gleig, Ann, and Lola Williamson, eds. *Homegrown Gurus: From Hinduism in America to American Hinduism*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2013.
- Goldberg, Philip. *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation: How Indian Spirituality Changed the West*. 1st ed. New York: Harmony Books, 2010.
- Gopi, Acyuta. *Prema Mala: A Garland of Poems, Prayers and Meditations on Love*. 1st edition. Self-published, CreateSpace, 2018.
- Gossett, Thomas F. *Race: The History of an Idea in America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997.
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/duke/detail.action?docID=241567>.
- Gosvāmī, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja. *Śrī Caitanya-Caritāmṛta of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī: With the Original Bengali Text, Roman Transliteration, Synonyms, Translation and Elaborate Purports*. Translated by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. New York: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1973. <https://vedabase.io/en/library/cc/>.
- Goswami, Tamal Krishna, and Graham M. Schweig. *A Living Theology of Krishna Bhakti: The Essential Teachings of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- GRAMMY.com. "GRAMMY Awards Winners & Nominees for Best New Age Album." Accessed April 12, 2021. <https://www.grammy.com/grammys/awards/winners-nominees/187>.

- Grihashta Vision Team. *GVT Q&A Panel*, 2020.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8SIND2owIY&list=PL0EQwB7JZ6kLOMKZPyXIE2AV7-ordjfwT&index=21&ab_channel=GrihashtaVisionTeam.
- — —. *Musings on SB 9.3.10. The Relationship of Cyavana Muni and Sukanya.*, 2020.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJ-UaZbETqY&list=PL0EQwB7JZ6kLOMKZPyXIE2AV7-ordjfwT&index=2&ab_channel=GrihashtaVisionTeam.
- Grihashta Vision Team et al. *Heart and Soul Connection: A Devotional Guide to Marriage, Service, and Love*. BookBaby, 2014.
- Guha, Ranajit, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds. *Selected Subaltern Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Gupta, Charu. "Anxious Hindu Masculinities in Colonial North India: Shuddhi and Sangathan Movements." *Cross Currents*, December 2011. Gale Academic OneFile.
- Gutting, Gary. *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Hall, Stuart. *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017.
- Hallstrom, Lisa Lassell. *Mother of Bliss: Ānandamayī Mā 1896-1982*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Hansen, David. "A Defiant Dance of Power, Not Sex: Beyoncé, the Super Bowl and Durga," February 4, 2013.
<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/davidhenson/2013/02/a-prophetic-dance-of-power-not-sex-beyonce-the-super-bowl-and-durga/>.
- Hara, Minoru. "Hindu Concepts of Teacher Sanskrit Guru and Ācārya." In *Sanskrit and Indian Studies: Essays in Honour of Daniel H. H. Ingalls*, edited by M. Nagatomi, B.K. Matilal, J.M. Masson, and E.C. Dimock Jr. Studies of Classical India, v. 2. Dordrecht, Holland; Boston, USA; London: England: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980.
- Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 575–99.

- Hart, William D. *Afro-Eccentricity: Beyond the Standard Narrative of Black Religion*. 1st ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- — —. *Black Religion: Malcolm X, Julius Lester, and Jan Willis*. 1st ed. New York ; Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Hawley, John Stratton. *A Storm of Songs: India and the Idea of the Bhakti Movement*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015.
- — —. "Global Hinduism in Gotham." In *Asian American Religions: The Making and Remaking of Borders and Boundaries*, edited by Tony Carnes and Fenggang Yang, 112–37. New York: New York University Press, 2004.
- — —. "Naming Hinduism." *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 15, no. 3 (1991): 20–34.
- — —. *Three Bhakti Voices: Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in Their Time and Ours*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Hawley, John Stratton, and Vasudha Narayanan, eds. *The Life of Hinduism*. The Life of Religion. Berkeley, California, USA: University of California Press, 2007.
- Heinrich von Stietencron. "Religious Configurations in Pre-Muslim India and the Modern Concept of Hinduism,," In *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, edited by Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron. New Delhi; Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1995.
- Hess, Linda. *Bodies of Song: Kabir Oral Traditions and Performative Worlds in North India*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Hill, Stephen. Liner Notes for Coltrane, Alice. *Turiya Sings*. Avatar Book Institute AB-100, 1982, cassette. Accessed June 24, 2021. <https://www.alicecoltrane.com/turiya-sings-full>.
- Holdrege, Barbara A. *Bhakti and Embodiment: Fashioning Divine Bodies and Devotional Bodies in Kṛṣṇa Bhakti*. Routledge Hindu Studies Series. London; New York: Routledge, 2015.
- Holt, Linda. "Threads of Yoga: The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali." Master's thesis, California State University, Dominguez Hills, 1993. ProQuest.
- "Holy Man of Many Parts." *South China Morning Post (China)*. May 25, 2001. <https://www.scmp.com/article/348007/holy-man-many-parts>.

- Horne, Gerald. *The End of Empires: African Americans and India*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2008.
- Idamoyibo, Ovaborhene Isaac. "Sources of Inspiration for Music Composition in Okpe." *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa* 8, no. 1 (March 2011): 23–47. <https://doi.org/10.2989/18121004.2011.652355>.
- Immigration Act of 1917. Pub. L. No. 301, § Chap. 29, 10384 H. R. 874 (1917).
- Inden, Ronald B. *Imagining India*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.
- Ingold, Tim. "Anthropology Contra Ethnography." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7, no. 1 (March 2017): 21–26. <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau7.1.005>.
- ISKCON's Governing Body Commission (GBC). "GBC Approves Vaishnavi Diksa Gurus in ISKCON." ISKCON News, October 18, 2019. <https://iskconnews.org/gbc-approves-vaishnavi-diksa-gurus-in-iskcon,7126/>.
- ISKCON News. "Mr. Mandela's Speech at Hare Krishna Event Remembered." Accessed September 19, 2020. <https://iskconnews.org/mr-mandelas-speech-at-hare-krishna-event-remembered,4183/>.
- Iwamura, Jane. "The Postwar Religious World, 1945 and Following: The Case of Asian Religions in the United States." In *The Cambridge History of Religions in America*, edited by Stephen J. Stein, 126–48. Cambridge University Press, 2009. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521871082.007>.
- Jackson, Carl T. *Vedanta for the West: The Ramakrishna Movement in the United States*. Religion in North America. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Jackson, William J. *Soul Images in Hindu Traditions: Patterns East & West*. New Dehli, India: B. R. Publishing, 2004.
- Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Jantzen, Grace M. *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. 1st ed. Manchester Studies in Religion, Culture and Gender. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998.
- Jayawardene, Sureshi M. "Racialized Casteism: Exposing the Relationship Between Race, Caste, and Colorism Through the Experiences of Africana People in India

and Sri Lanka." *Journal of African American Studies* 20, no. 3–4 (December 2016): 323–45. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-016-9333-5>.

John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy. "John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy Answer the Jazz Critics." Interview by Don DeMichael, April 12, 1962. <https://downbeat.com/microsites/prestige/dolphy-interview.html>.

Johnson, Charles. *Turning the Wheel : Essays on Buddhism and Writing*. New York : Scribner, c2003., 2003. <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE003440133>.

— — —. *Taming the Ox : Buddhist Stories and Reflections on Politics, Race, Culture, and Spiritual Practice*. Boston: Shambhala, 2014. <https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE006678891>.

Johnson, Kent M., and Kathleen S. Paul. "Bioarchaeology and Kinship: Integrating Theory, Social Relatedness, and Biology in Ancient Family Research." *Journal of Archaeological Research* 24, no. 1 (March 1, 2016): 75–123. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10814-015-9086-z>.

Johnson, William John. "Ācārya." In *A Dictionary of Hinduism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Joshi, Khyati Y. "The Racialization of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism in the United States." *Equity & Excellence in Education* 39, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 211–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680600790327>.

— — —. *White Christian Privilege: The Illusion of Religious Equality in America*. New York: New York University Press, 2020.

Kahn, Ashley. Liner notes for Coltrane, Alice. *Spiritual Eternal*. Real Gone Media RGM-0692, 2018, 2 CDs.

— — —. Liner notes for Coltrane, Alice. *World Spirituality Classics 1: The Ecstatic Music Of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda*. With John Panduranga Henderson (vocals), Sai Ram Iyer (Tamil vocals), Shankari Adams (vocals), Radha Botofasina (vocals), et al. Recorded between 1982 and 1995. Luaka Bop LBOP0087, 2017, CD.

Kaufman, Alma. "Krishna From Cleveland Comes Home," BtSwami.com, accessed April 12, 2021, <https://btswami.com/vault/press-articles/krishna-from-cleveland-comes-home>.

- Kernodle, Tammy L. "Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Alice Coltrane and the Redefining of the Jazz Avant-Garde." In *John Coltrane and Black America's Quest for Freedom: Spirituality and the Music*, edited by Leonard Brown. New York City: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- King, Richard. *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "the Mystic East."* London : New York: Routledge, 1999.
- — —. "Orientalism and the Modern Myth of 'Hinduism.'" *Numen* 46, no. 2 (1999): 146–85.
- — —. "Taking on the Guild: Tomoko Masuzawa and The Invention of World Religions." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 20, no. 2 (2008): 125–33. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006808X283543>.
- Kinsley, David. "Devotion as an Alternative to Marriage in the Lives of Some Hindu Women Devotees." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 15, no. 1 (January 1, 1980): 83–93.
- Klostermaier, Klaus K. *A Survey of Hinduism: Third Edition.* Ithaca, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007.
- Knauft, Bruce M. "What Is Genealogy? An Anthropological/Philosophical Reconsideration." *Genealogy* 1, no. 1 (March 2017): 5. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy1010005>.
- Knoke, David, Song Yang, and David Knoke. *Social Network Analysis.* 2nd ed. / David Knoke, Song Yang. Los Angeles, California; London, UK: Sage, 2008. <http://methods.sagepub.com/book/social-network-analysis>.
- Knott, Kim. "The Reassertion Of Women Within ISKCON: Vaishnavis and Their Critics." Vaishnavi Ministry. May 8, 2015. <http://vaishnaviministry.org/the-reassertion-of-women-within-iskcon-vaishnavis-and-their-critics/>.
- Kumar, Rebecca. "'Let Yo Booty Do That Yoga': Black Goddess Politics." *Scholar & Feminist Online, Feminist and Queer Afro-Asian Formations*, no. 14.3 (2018). <http://sfonline.barnard.edu/feminist-and-queer-afro-asian-formations/let-yo-booty-do-that-yoga-black-goddess-politics/>.
- Kurien, Prema. "What Is American about American Hinduism? Hindu Umbrella Organisations in the United States in Comparative Perspective." In *Public*

- Hinduisms*, edited by John Zavos. Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications, 2012.
- Kurien, Prema A. *A Place at the Multicultural Table: The Development of an American Hinduism*. Piscataway, USA: Rutgers University Press, 2007.
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/duke/detail.action?docID=320728>.
- — —. "Multiculturalism and 'American' Religion: The Case of Hindu Indian Americans." *Social Forces* 85, no. 2 (December 2006): 723+.
- Lal, Vinay. "Gandhi, 'The Coloured Races', and the Future of Satyagraha: The View from the African American Press." *Social Change* 51, no. 1 (March 1, 2021): 51–69.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0049085721991573>.
- — —. "King and the Mahatma: Gandhi in African American Eyes," *Open The Magazine*, September 27, 2019. <https://openthemagazine.com/essay/gandhi-in-african-american-eyes/>.
- Lincoln, Bruce. *Authority: Construction and Corrosion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Lipner, Julius. *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. Florence, UNITED KINGDOM: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010. ProQuest.
- — —. "On Hinduism and Hinduisms: The Way of the Banyan." In *The Hindu World*, edited by Sushil Mittal and Gene R. Thursby. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- — —. "The Rise of 'Hinduism'; or, How to Invent a World Religion with Only Moderate Success." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 10, no. 1 (April 1, 2006): 91–104. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11407-006-9004-6>.
- Llewellyn, J. E and Russell T. McCutcheon. *Defining Hinduism: A Reader*. London: Routledge, 2017. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781315475653>.
- Llewellyn, J. E. "The Modern Bhagavad Gītā: Caste in Twentieth-Century Commentaries." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 23, no. 3 (December 2019): 309–23. <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.lib.duke.edu/10.1007/s11407-019-09266-z>.
- Loar, Jonathan. "From Neither/Nor to Both/And: Reconfiguring the Life and Legacy of Shirdi Sai Baba in Hagiography." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 22, no. 3 (December 2018): 475–96. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11407-018-9246-0>.

- Long, Jeffery D. "The Transformation of Yoga and Hinduism: Negotiating Authenticity, Innovation, and Identity in a Global Context." *Religious Studies Review* 40, no. 3 (September 1, 2014): 125–32. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rsr.12162>.
- Lorenz, Ekkehard. "The Guru, Mayavadins, and Women: Tracing the Origins of Selected Polemical Statements in the Work of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami." In *Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant*, edited by Edwin Bryant and Maria Ekstrand. New York, NY, USA: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- Lorenzen, David N. "Who Invented Hinduism?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 4 (October 1999): 630–59.
- Luaka Bop. "World Spirituality Classics 1: The Ecstatic Music of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda by Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda." *Luaka Bop*, May 4, 2017. <https://www.luakabop.com/products/copy-of-xx-world-spirituality-classics-1-the-ecstatic-music-of-alice-coltrane-turiyasangitananda>.
- Lucia, Amanda. "Hinduism in America." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*. Oxford University Press, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.436>.
- — —. *Reflections of Amma: Devotees in a Global Embrace*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.
- Lutgendorf, Philip. *The Hanumāyana: Forty Tales of Hanuman. Hanuman's Tale*. Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Ma, Swami Sarvaananda. "The Integral Yoga School in Historical Perspective." PhD diss., University of Connecticut, 1980. ProQuest (8103241).
- Madan, T. N. "Thinking Globally about Hinduism." *The Oxford Handbook of Global Religions*, October 26, 2006. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195137989.003.0002>.
- Maitland, Padma D. "Black Buddhist: The Visual and Material Cultures of the Dalit Movement and the Black Panther Party." In *Global Raciality: Empire, PostColoniality, Decoloniality*, edited by Paola Bacchetta, Sunaina Maira, and Howard Winant, 1st ed., 171–94. Routledge, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429402203-10>.

- Malone, Calvin. *Razor-Wire Dharma: A Buddhist Life in Prison*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2008.
- Manring, Rebecca J. "At Home in the World: The Lives of Sītādevī." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 2, no. 1 (April 1998): 21–42. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11407-998-0007-3>.
- — —. "Rādhāntram: Rādhā as Guru in the Service of the Great Goddess." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 23, no. 3 (December 2019): 259–82. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11407-019-09264-1>.
- — —. "Sita Devi, an Early Vaishnava Guru." In *The Graceful Guru*, edited by Karen Pechilis. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195145380.001.0001>.
- Manuel, Zenju Earthlyn. *The Way of Tenderness: Awakening through Race, Sexuality, and Gender*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2015.
- Marino, Jacqueline. "Better Together: Class Act or Work in Progress?" *Plain Dealer (Cleveland)*, September 14, 2003. NewsBank.
- Masuzawa, Tomoko. *Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- — —. "Our Master's Voice: F. Max Müller after A Hundred Years of Solitude." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 15, no. 4 (January 1, 2003): 305–28. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006803322697399>.
- Matory, James Lorand. *Black Atlantic Religion : Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- McCarty, Christopher, Miranda J Lubbers, Raffaele Vacca, and José Luís Molina. *Conducting Personal Network Research: A Practical Guide*, 2019.
- McCarty, Christopher. "Social Network Analysis." Gainseville, Florida: Nureau of Economic and Business Research, 2004. https://www.bebr.ufl.edu/sites/default/files/Research%20Reports/sna_encyclopedia_entry_0.pdf.
- McCray, Melvin. "The Two Lives of John Favors '72." *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, February 9, 1983.

- McCutcheon, Russell T. *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- McLucas, Karla. "African Americans, Dalits and Tribals: A Comparative Analysis of Subaltern Communities in India and the U.S.A." *The Review of Black Political Economy* 43, no. 2 (June 2016): 3.
- McNeill, Mark "Frosty." "The Ashram Albums of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda." *Ashram Tapes: The Devotional Music of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda* (blog). Accessed March 5, 2021. <https://ashramtapes.com/About-Alice-s-Ashram>.
- McNicholl, Adeana. "Being Buddha, Staying Woke: Racial Formation in Black Buddhist Writing." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 86, no. 4 (November 29, 2018): 883–911. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfy019>.
- Meer, Nasar. "Racialization and Religion: Race, Culture and Difference in the Study of Antisemitism and Islamophobia." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 3 (March 1, 2013): 385–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2013.734392>.
- — —. "Semantics, Scales and Solidarities in the Study of Antisemitism and Islamophobia." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 3 (November 9, 2012): 500–515.
- Meera. "Arya Samaj and Caste System: A Study of in United Provinces." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 19, no. 5 (2014): 68–72. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-19516872>.
- Metivier, Krishni. "Her Voice: Negotiating Gender in ISKCON." In *The Worldwide Krishna Movement: Collected Essays on Half a Century of Growth, Impact, and Challenge*, edited by Graham Schweig. New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, forthcoming.
- Mitchell, Samuel A. *A System of Modern Geography, Comprising a Description of the Present State of the World and Its Five Great Divisions: America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Oceanica: With Their Several Empires*. Philadelphia: Thomas, Coperthwait & Co., 1844. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hn1mt6>.
- Mittal, Sushil, and Gene R. Thursby, eds. *The Hindu World*. The Routledge Worlds. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Monier-Williams, Monier. "Saccid." In *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Greek, Latin, Gothic, German, Anglo-*

- Saxon, and Other Cognate Indo-European Languages*, 1135. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1872.
- — —. “Sat.” In *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Greek, Latin, Gothic, German, Anglo-Saxon, and Other Cognate Indo-European Languages*, 1134. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1872.
- — —. “Yuddha.” In *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Greek, Latin, Gothic, German, Anglo-Saxon, and Other Cognate Indo-European Languages*, 854–55. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1872.
- Moon, Vincent, and Priscilla Telmon. *ASHRAM: The Spiritual Community of Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda*. Produced by Luaka Bop, Boiler Room, and Petites Planetès. 4:3, 2019. YouTube Video, <https://youtu.be/94P0pqjiZ0>.
- Mozumder, Suman Guha. “First African-American Hindu Guru Dead.” *India Abroad (New York)*, July 15, 2005. 362818802. Ethnic NewsWatch. <https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/first-african-american-hindu-guru-dead/docview/362818802/se-2?accountid=10598>.
- Mueller, F. Max. *India, What Can It Teach Us?: A Course of Lectures Delivered Before The University of Cambridge*. London; New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910.
- Muster, Nori J. *Betrayal of the Spirit: My Life behind the Headlines of the Hare Krishna Movement*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1997.
- Naidu, M. “The Feminine Divine, the Hug And Feminine Hindu Spiritual Leadership.” *Journal of Social Development in Africa* 32, no. 2 (2017): 43–60.
- National Council on Family Relations. “In Memoriam: Krsnanandini Devi Dasi.” Accessed February 24, 2021. <https://www.ncfr.org/news/memoriam-krsnanandini-devi-dasi>.
- Narayan, Kirin. “How Native Is a ‘Native’ Anthropologist?” *American Anthropologist* 95, no. 3 (n.d.): 671–86. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1993.95.3.02a00070>.
- Narayanan, Vasudha. “Gods, Goddesses, and Divine Powers (Overview Article).” *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, edited by Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, and Vasudha Narayanan. Brill, 2018. <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/brill-s-encyclopedia-of->

hinduism/gods-goddesses-and-divine-powers-overview-article-COM_103?s.num=10&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism&s.q=mother.

— — —. “Hindu Communities Abroad.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Global Religions*, edited by Mark Juergensmeyer. Oxford University Press, October 26, 2006. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195137989.003.0007>.

— — —. “Hindu Communities Abroad.” *The Oxford Handbook of Global Religions*, October 26, 2006. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195137989.003.0007>.

— — —. “Hinduism in America.” In *The Cambridge History of Religions in America*, edited by Stephen J. Stein, 1st ed., 331–56. Cambridge University Press, 2009.

— — —. “Rewriting the Hindu Traditions from Global Perspectives.” In *Re-Imagining South Asian Religions: Essays in Honour of Professors Harold G. Coward and Ronald W. Neufeldt*, edited by Pashaura Singh and Michael Hawley, 1st ed., 141:67–88. Numen Book Series. Brill, 2012.

Nehru, Jawaharlal. *Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda*. Electronic resource. 2nd ed. Almora: Advaita Ashrama, 1953. <https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/25303>.

Nelson Mandela. “Speech by President Nelson Mandela at the Food for Life Festival.” Speech presented at the Food for Life Festival, South Africa, April 23, 1997. http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS466.

Nelson Mandela Foundation. “List of Speeches for May 1994 to April 1995.” List. NMS1211. Accessed September 19, 2020. http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS1211.

Neumann, David J. *Finding God through Yoga: Paramahansa Yogananda and Modern American Religion in a Global Age*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019.

Newhouse, Sam. “Philly Yoga and Meditation Center Links City Dwellers Back to Nature.” *Metro Philadelphia*, July 12, 2017. <https://philly.metro.us/philly-yoga-and-meditation-center-links-city-dwellers-back-to-nature/>.

Ngo, Sheiresa. “Will Smith Says He Became ‘Deeply Unfulfilled’ By Material Things.” *Newstex Blogs The Cheat Sheet* (blog), December 20, 2020. LexisNexis.

<https://www.cheatsheet.com/entertainment/will-smith-says-he-became-deeply-unfulfilled-by-material-things.html/>.

Nicholson, Andrew J. *Unifying Hinduism: Philosophy and Identity in Indian Intellectual History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

Nobili, Roberto de'. *Adaptation*. Translated by S. Rajamanickam. Electronic resource. Palayamkottai: De Nobili Research Institute, 1971.

Nobili, Roberto de', and Svarimuthu Rajamanickam. *Roberto de Nobili on Indian customs*. Palayamkottai: De Nobili Research Institute, 1972.

Nye, Malory. "Race and Religion: Postcolonial Formations of Power and Whiteness." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, c, 31, no. 3 (June 25, 2019): 210–37. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341444>.

Obeng, J. Pashington. *Shaping Membership, Defining Nation: The Cultural Politics of African Indians in South Asia*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007.

— — —. "Religion and Empire: Belief and Identity among African Indians of Karnataka, South India." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 1 (2003): 99–120.

Oddie, Geoffrey A. "Constructing 'Hinduism': The Impact of the Protestant Missionary Movement on Hindu Self-Understanding." In *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication Since 1500*, edited by Robert Eric Frykenberg, 155–82. Independence, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2003.

Olivelle, Patrick. *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Orsi, Robert A. *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.

— — —. *History and Presence*. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016.

Patel, Payal K. "On the Path of the Maharajah of Bwodpur: The Global Problem of the Color Line in W. E. B. Du Bois's Dark Princess." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 15, no. 2 (October 7, 2015): 119–56.

- Patel, Youshaa. "Muslim Distinction: Imitation and the Anxiety of Jewish, Christian, and Other Influences." PhD diss., Duke University, 2012. ProQuest.
- Pechilis, Karen. *The Embodiment of Bhakti*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- — —. "Illuminating Women's Religious Authority through Ethnography." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 29, no. 1 (2013): 93–101.
<https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.29.1.93>.
- Pechilis, Karen, ed. *The Graceful Guru: Hindu Female Gurus in India and the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Penier, Izabella. *Culture-Bearing Women: The Black Women Renaissance and Cultural Nationalism*. Warsaw; Berlin: De Gruyter Open Poland, 2019.
<https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE009866990>.
- Pennington, Brian. *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Pinn, Anthony B. *Introducing African American Religion*. World Religions Series. London; New York: Routledge, 2013.
- — —. "Introduction: African American Religion Symposium." *Nova Religio: NR: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions; Chappaqua* 7, no. 1 (2003): 7–10.
<http://dx.doi.org.proxy.lib.duke.edu/10.1525/nr.2003.7.1.7>.
- — —. *Terror and Triumph: The Nature of Black Religion*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003.
- — —. *Varieties of African American Religious Experience: Toward a Comparative Black Theology*. Twentieth anniversary edition. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2017.
- Prasad, Leela. *Poetics of Conduct: Oral Narrative and Moral Being in a South Indian Town*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Prashad, Vijay. "Black Gandhi." *Social Scientist* 37, no. 1/2 (2009): 3–20.
- — —. *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001.
- — —. *The Karma of Brown Folk*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

- Price III, Emmett G. "The Spiritual Ethos in Black Music and Its Quintessential Exemplar, John Coltrane." In *John Coltrane and Black America's Quest for Freedom: Spirituality and the Music*, edited by Leonard Brown. New York City: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Prothero, Stephen R., and Thomas A. Tweed. *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Purcell, Andrew. "Rising from the Ashram; STAGE." *The Age*. August 5, 2017, sec. Spectrum. LexisNexis.
- "Question of 'Prophets' Identity." *The Pittsburgh Courier*. August 3, 1929, sec. 1.
- Raghavan, Srinath. "How the US Managed the Presence of 200,000 Soldiers in India in World War II with Dynamic Propaganda." *Scroll.In*, June 15, 2018. <https://scroll.in/article/882264/how-the-us-managed-the-presence-of-200000-soldiers-in-india-in-world-war-ii-with-dynamic-propaganda>.
- Ratliff, Ben. *Coltrane: The Story of a Sound*. New York: Farrar, Staus and Giroux, 2007.
- Renate Söhnen-Thieme. "Satya." In *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, edited by Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, and Vasudha Narayanan. Brill, 2018. http://dx.doi.org.proxy.lib.duke.edu/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_2050290.
- Rev. John Henry Barrows, ed. *The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World's First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection with the Colombian Exposition of 1893*. Vol. 2. Chicago, IL: Parliament Publishing Company, 1893.
- Richardson, E. Allen. *East Comes West: Asian Religions and Cultures in North America*. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1985.
- — —. *Seeing Krishna in America : The Hindu Bhakti Tradition of Vallabhacharya in India and Its Movement to the West*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2014.
- Robbins, Kenneth X., and John McLeod, eds. *African Elites in India: Habshi Amarat*. Ahmedabad; Ocean Township, NJ: Mapin Publishing, 2006.
- Roberts, Darrell A. *Pure Love Passing Through*. Self-published, 2006.

- Robinson, Benjamin G. "Racialization and Modern Religion: Sylvia Wynter, Black Feminist Theory, and Critical Genealogies of Religion." *Critical Research on Religion* 7, no. 3 (December 1, 2019): 257–74.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2050303219848065>.
- Robinson, Benjamin G. "Racialization and Modern Religion: Sylvia Wynter, Black Feminist Theory, and Critical Genealogies of Religion." *Critical Research on Religion* 7, no. 3 (December 1, 2019): 257–74.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2050303219848065>.
- Rochford, E. Burke. *Hare Krishna in America*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1985.
- — —. *Hare Krishna Transformed*. New York, US: New York University Press, 2007.
- — —. "The Changing Faces of God: The Hinduisation of the Hare Krishna Movement." In *Revisionism and Diversification in New Religious Movements*, edited by Elieen Barker, 31–46. Brookfield, GB: Ashgate, 2014.
- Rocklin, Alexander. "'A Hindu Is White Although He Is Black': Hindu Alterity and the Performativity of Religion and Race between the United States and the Caribbean." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no. 1 (2016): 181–210.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417515000614>.
- — —. "Diaspora in Trinidad." Oxford University Press, February 28, 2017.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780195399318-0177>.
- — —. *The Regulation of Religion and the Making of Hinduism in Colonial Trinidad*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019.
- Rosen, Steven, ed. *Vaiṣṇavī: Women and the Worship of Krishna*. 1. ed. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1996.
- Rosen, Steven J. *Black Lotus: The Spiritual Journey of an Urban Mystic*. Washington, D.C.: Hari-Nama Press, 2007.
- Rubin, Mike. "Alice Coltrane's Ashram Recordings Finally Have a Wide Release." *The New York Times*, May 2, 2017,
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/02/arts/music/alice-coltrane-ashtram-world-spirituality-classics.html>.
- Ryan, William. *Blaming the Victim*. Pantheon Books, 1971.

- Sachy, Sandra Kumari de. *Vision of Peace: The Interfaith Teachings of Sri Swami Satchidananda*, 2015.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 1st edition. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
- Schaefer, John. "New Sounds: Andreas Vollenweider." *Spin*, October 15, 2019. <https://www.spin.com/2019/10/new-sounds-andreas-vollenweider/>.
- Schibsby, Marian. "Naturalization in the United States Part IV: Racial and Cultural Conflicts and Education: Chapter XXVI." In *One America: The History, Contributions, and Present Problems of Our Racial and National Minorities*, by Francis J. Brown, 524–38, 1945. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.immigration/oahcpp0001&i=538>.
- Schweig, Graham M. *Dance of Divine Love: The Rāsa Lilā of Krishna from the Bhagavata Purana, India's Classic Sacred Love Story*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Seifert, Tricia. "Understanding Christian Privilege: Managing the Tensions of Spiritual Plurality." *About Campus* 12, no. 2 (June 5, 2007): 10–17.
- Sharma, Arvind. *New Focus on Hindu Studies*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd., 2005.
- — —. *Sleep As a State of Consciousness in Advaita Vedanta*. Ithaca, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004.
- — —. "What Is Hinduism?" In *The Study of Hinduism*, edited by Arvind Sharma, 1–19. Studies in Comparative Religion. Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 2003.
- Sharma, Arvind, ed. *The Study of Hinduism*. Studies in Comparative Religion. Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 2003.
- Slate, Nico. *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012.
- — —. "'I Am a Colored Woman': Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya in the United States, 1939-1941." *Contemporary South Asia* 17, no. 1 (March 2009): 7–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09584930802624638>.

- Smith, Brian K. "Questioning Authority: Constructions and Deconstructions of Hinduism." In *Defining Hinduism: A Reader*, edited by J. E. Llewellyn and Russell T. McCutcheon. London: Routledge, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315475653>.
- Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind*. Mentor Books. New York: New American Library, 1964.
- Smullen, Madhava. "Gita Nagari Lifestyle Project Invites Devotees To Experience Village Life." *ISKCON News*, April 13, 2018. <https://iskconnews.org/gita-nagari-lifestyle-project-invites-devotees-to-experience-village-life,6534/>.
- — —. "Interfaith Vaishnava and Muslim Couple Featured in Essence Magazine." *ISKCON News*, April 26, 2019. <https://iskconnews.org/interfaith-vaishnava-and-muslim-couple-featured-in-essence-magazine,6931/>.
- — —. "When the Husband Is Not a Devotee: The Grihasta Vision Team Responds." *ISKCON News*, August 20, 2011. <https://iskconnews.org/when-the-husband-is-not-a-devotee-the-grihasta-vision-team-responds,2824/>.
- Soyer, François. "Faith, Culture and Fear: Comparing Islamophobia in Early Modern Spain and Twenty-First-Century Europe." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 3 (March 1, 2013): 399–416. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2013.734383>.
- Srinivas, Tulasi. "Sathya Sai Baba." In *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, edited by Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, and Vasudha Narayanan. Brill, 2018. http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism/sathya-sai-baba-COM_9000000267?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.brill-s-encyclopedia-of-hinduism&s.q=sathya+sai+baba.
- — —. *Winged Faith: Rethinking Globalization and Religious Pluralism through the Sathya Sai Movement*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Staples, Robert. "The Myth Of Black Macho: A Response To Angry Black Feminists." *The Black Scholar* 10, no. 6/7 (1979): 24–33.
- Starn, Orin, ed. *Writing Culture and the Life of Anthropology*. Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2015.
- Stewart, Tony K. "Facing the Peril of Disintegration." In *The Final Word: The Caitanya Caritamrita and the Grammar of Religious Tradition*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

- Swami, Bhakti Tirtha. "An Interview with Swami Krishnapada from "The Drum" HDGBTS Washington DC USA June 16th, 1993." *BTSwami.com*, MP3. btswami.com/audio/archive.
- Swami, Radhanath. "A Life of Compassion, Dedication and Love - His Holiness Bhakti Tirtha Swami Maharaj." *Radhanath Swami Lecture Transcripts* (blog), September 28, 2005. <https://www.radhanathswami.net/yearwise/2005/radhanath-swami-on-a-life-of-compassion-dedication-and-love-his-holiness-bhakti-tirtha-swami-maharaj>.
- Sweetman, Will. "'Hinduism' and the History of 'Religion': Protestant Presuppositions in the Critique of the Concept of Hinduism." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 15, no. 4 (January 1, 2003): 329–53. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006803322697407>.
- Talbot, Cynthia. "Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 4 (1995): 692–722.
- Taylor, Dianna. *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*. Durham, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014.
- Teh, Joseph. "Krishnapada: Bringing Harmony to Mankind." *New Liberian*, n.d. <https://btswami.com/vault/press-articles/krishnapada-bringing-harmony-to-mankind>.
- Thapar, Romila. "The Theory of Aryan Race and India: History and Politics." *Social Scientist* 24, no. 1/3 (1996): 3–29. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3520116>.
- Thomas, James M. "The Racial Formation of Medieval Jews: A Challenge to the Field." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33, no. 10 (November 1, 2010): 1737–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419871003706766>.
- Thomas, Todne. *Kincraft: The Making of Black Evangelical Sociality*. Religious Cultures of African and African Diaspora People. Durham: Duke University Press, 2021.
- — —. "Strangers, Friends, and Kin: Negotiated Recognition in Ethnographic Relationships." *Anthropology and Humanism* 41, no. 1 (2016): 66–85. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anhu.12108>.

- Thor, Eliza. "Relationship Quality in Kin and Chosen Kin Familial Networks." Master's thesis, University of Nebraska, 2020.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/sociologydiss/61>.
- Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Tsioulcas, Anastasia. "By Any Name, Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda Was A Force." *National Public Radio*, May, 21, 2017,
<https://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2017/05/21/529124610/by-any-name-alice-coltrane-turiyasangitananda-was-a-force>.
- Turner, Tina. *Happiness Becomes You: A Guide to Changing Your Life for Good*. New York: Atria Books, 2020.
- Tweed, Thomas A. *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- United States v. Thind, 261 U. S. 204 (1923). <https://www.loc.gov/item/usrep261204/>.
- Venkatesan, Archana. 'Bhū(devī)'. In *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online*, edited by Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, and Vasudha Narayanan. Brill, 2018. Accessed June 25, 2021. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_1030270.
- Vial, Theodore M. *Modern Religion, Modern Race*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Vivekananda, Swami. "Hinduism." In *The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World's First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection with the Colombian Exposition of 1893*, edited by Rev. John Henry Barrows, 2:968–78. Chicago, IL: Parliament Publishing Company, 1893.
- — —. *Modern India*. Electronic resource. 3rd ed. Almora: Advaita Ashrama, 1939.
<https://dds.crl.edu/crldelivery/17770>.
- Walden, Narada Michael. "Pages of Fire: Articles: Narada Michael Walden." Interview by Rick Mattingly. *Modern Drummer*, October 1987, 16-21. Accessed June 25, 2021.
<https://www.moderndrummer.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/md95cs.pdf>.

- Washington, Joseph R. *Black Religion: The Negro and Christianity in the United States*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984.
- Weisenfeld, Judith. "Invisible Women: On Women and Gender in the Study of African American Religious History." *Journal of Africana Religions* 1, no. 1 (January 3, 2013): 133–49.
- Welwood, John "Human Nature, Buddha Nature: An interview with John Welwood." Interview by Tina Fossella, Spring 2011. <https://tricycle.org/magazine/human-nature-buddha-nature/>.
- Weston, Kath. *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Williams, Angel Kyodo. *Being Black: Zen and the Art of Living with Fearlessness and Grace*. New York: Viking Compass, 2000.
- Williams, Juan, and Quinton Hosford Dixie. *This Far by Faith: Stories from the African-American Religious Experience*. 1st ed. New York: William Morrow, 2003.
- Williams, Raymond Brady. *An Introduction to Swaminarayan Hinduism*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Willis, Janice. *Dreaming Me: An African American Woman's Spiritual Journey*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2001.
- . *Dharma Matters: Women, Race, and Tantra: Collected Essays*. Somerville, MA, USA: Wisdom Publications, 2020.
- Wuaku, Albert. *Hindu Gods in West Africa: Ghanaian Devotees of Shiva and Krishna*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013.
- Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui. "Goddess across the Taiwan Strait: Matrifocal Ritual Space, Nation-State, and Satellite Television Footprints." *Public Culture* 16, no. 2 (2004): 209–38.
- Yetunde, Pamela Ayo. "From StrongBlackWoman to Remarkably Relationally Resilient Woman: Black Christian Women and Black Buddhist Lesbians in Dialogue." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 37 (2017): 239+.
- Yogananda, Paramahansa. *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Project Gutenberg, 2005 [1946]. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/7452>.

Yudell, Michael. *Race Unmasked: Biology and Race in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Yule, H., and A. C. Burnell. "Hindoo." In *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*, 415. London: J. Murray, 1903. Internet Archive.

— — —. *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*. New ed. edited by William Crooke, B.A. London: J. Murray, 1903. Internet Archive.

— — —. "India, Indies." In *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*, 433–37. London: J. Murray, 1888 1903. Internet Archive.

Zamalin, Alex. *Black Utopia: The History of an Idea from Black Nationalism to Afrofuturism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019.

Biography

Krishni Metivier began her higher education studies as a dual enrollment high school student at Broward College in Florida where she graduated with an Associate's Degree in Political Science with highest honors in 2010. Prior to starting her doctoral studies at Duke University, she graduated magna cum laude with honors in Religious Studies from Northwestern University, earning her Bachelor of Arts degree in 2014. While at Northwestern, she completed an award-winning thesis on her ethnographic research on women's negotiations of gender in two American Hindu temples and was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa.

Krishni earned a Master of Arts degree in Asian Religions in 2019 and completed her Doctorate in 2021 at Duke University. Her primary areas of research are Hinduism, ethnography, identity, and praxis, with special interest in cross-cultural and transnational encounters in the Americas and South Asia. Krishni's graduate education, Hindi language studies, research, and writing have been kindly supported by the following grants and organizations: Dean's Graduate Fellowship, Critical Language Scholarship (from U.S. State Department), Gurney Harriss Kearns Summer Research Fellowship and Travel Grant, International Dissertation Research Travel Award, Genentech Foundation Summer Fellowship, and American Association of University Women (AAUW) American Dissertation Fellowship. Her first academic publication will be a chapter titled "Her Voice: Negotiating Gender in ISKCON" in a forthcoming

Oxford University Press volume. She is also a public advocate in higher education, and recently published an op-ed, "Envisioning Higher Education as Antiracist," in *Inside Higher Ed*.