NEGOTIATING LINGUISTIC AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY: A TAMIL HINDU TEMPLE IN AUSTRALIA. OXON, UK: ROUTLEDGE

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ABSTRACT

In this article, Perera's book titled "Negotiating Linguistic and Religious Diversity: A Tamil Hindu Temple in Australia" is reviewed. In this book Perera presents the Tamil temple with the pseudonym 'Saiva Temple' in a case study format and demonstrates the ways in which an immigrant religious institution is undergoing linguistic and religious changes and transformation. This is a study of how this temple deals with addressing challenges related to religious super-diversity. Perera's PhD thesis, on which this book is based, received the 2018 Australian Linguistics Society/Applied Linguistics Association Michael Clyne prize for the best thesis on immigrant bilingualism and language contact.

Keywords: Tamil language; Diaspora; Hindu temple; Australia; Diversity

The strong and close connection between Saivism and the Tamil language has been well established in the literature. How these two social practices have enhanced each other has also been historically investigated. The survival and development of the language and religion have been critically analysed in terms of Tamil-speaking communities in their homelands (Tamilnadu, India and Sri Lanka). Peterson (1989) for example, has delved into detail the connection between Tamil and Saivism particularly in terms of tevaram, the devotional hymns of the 4th to 6th centuries, analysing how they transformed the language, literature and culture of the Tamils. In the modern settings of globalization, Hornabrook (2016) examines the role of devotional hymns at temples (London) in the diaspora in bringing Tamils together through Carnatic music performances. The proliferation of South Indian religions in Western countries, particularly in the US, as a result of increased migration, has also been documented (Leonard, 2016). However, Perera in this book investigates the complex dynamics of Tamil language maintenance and practising of Saivism in the diasporic context of Australia. While the focus is on Sri Lankan Tamils and Saivism in Australia, how the younger generation of Sri Lankan Tamil origin deals with their identity as Hindu, Sri Lankan, Tamil and Australian is also explored. Perera's PhD thesis, on which this book is based, received the 2018 Australian Linguistics Society/Applied Linguistics Association Michael Clyne prize for the best thesis on immigrant bilingualism and language contact. In this book, the author presents the Tamil temple with the pseudonym 'Saiva Temple' in a case study format and demonstrates the ways in which an immigrant religious institution is undergoing linguistic and religious changes and transformation. This is a study of how this temple deals with addressing challenges related to religious super-diversity. Recent migration to urban centres of Australia have added complexity to religious cultures and practices making the setting super-diversity. As Professor Suresh Canagarajah has commented about this book, "Languages and religions have ensured

continuity with each other for generations. Perera reveals a new paradox of this dynamic in recent forms of migration. Traditional identities and beliefs are still entrenched for Sri Lankan Tamils in the Australian Diaspora as Saivism and Tamil language morph into the new social ecology. "

Hinduism is followed by many language speakers (such as Tamil, Hindi, Telugu or Malayalam) and Tamil language speaking communities consist of people of various religions such as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. For this reason, whether language or religion (among others) is the key marker of Tamil people's identity becomes a question. The strong language religion connection such as Judaism – Hebrew or Islam – Arabic is difficult to find in the case of Tamil language and Hinduism. Religion could be seen as a source seriously affecting social cohesion in a religiously diverse setting. Language maintenance of immigrants in a predominantly English-speaking country like Australia also could limit this process as some people view. The perspective that Tamil language and Saivism have coexisted and co- functioned for centuries is so powerful that Tamil people "believe from generation to generation that Tamil means Saivism and Saivism means Tamil" (Suseendirarajah ,1980, p. 347 cited in Perera, 2022). Since Australia is a nation where whiteness and Anglo-centricity dominate, the task of maintaining linguistic and cultural identity of immigrants could face many challenges. Perera demonstrates how a Hindu temple as a migrant religious institution representing a religion that has been imported from the Global South to an Anglo-Celtic Christian dominant host society is handling these challenges.

Chapter 1 Language and Religion in superdiverse times

Chapter 2 Lankan Tamil diaspora and Hinduism

Chapter 3 Language and faith challenges in an Australian Hindu Temple

Chapter 4 Approaches to language policy and faith transmission

Chapter 5 Talking Saivism in the Temple's Sunday school

Chapter 6 Negotiating Lankan Tamil youth faith, language, and identity in the temple

Chapter 7 Evolving koovil (temple)

The book comprises seven chapters including an introduction chapter. Chapter 2 outlines the social, political and historical background of the Sri Lankan Tamil immigrants who were the main participants in the study so that readers can understand the context clearly. To understand the complex identity issues facing the temples, we need to know the factors that drove Sri Lankan Tamils from their homeland and influence why they seek to perpetuate the culture, religion and language in the diaspora. Perera discusses the importance of Hinduism and the pan-Hindu diaspora, explains how Hinduism was transplanted to Australia, and focuses on the phenomenon of templeization. The author also provides a brief history of Tamil migration from Sri Lanka to Australia and the host country's national policies over the years affecting the situation of the temples and their devotees.

Chapter 3 presents challenges to language and faith practice at the study site, a Saiva temple. It offers insight into the diversity within temples and its impact on religious practices in terms of believer ethnicity and language. The issues of cultural and language transmission are discussed in detail. The author argues that differences in practices between generations mean that the continued involvement of young people in religious institutions is a key issue for the temple's future sustainability. The interests and attitudes of young people in the temple are part of the temple's inner diversity.

Chapter 4 continues on the theme of the two intersecting challenges of super-diverse devotees and second-generation engagement. Perera takes a closer look at the language policy of the institution and how this affects the languages used in various spaces. It should be noted that Hindu priests interestingly use Sanskrit (an ancient and classical language of India) as a sacred language to perform prayers (pooja) in addition to Tamil. Sanskrit is a dead language that most devotees cannot understand. Campaigns for performing prayers in Tamil in Tamilnadu have been strong, however Sanskrit is primarily used. In a way, this is justified as a common language. Language policy is shaped by ideologies that connect the practice of Saivism with the Tamil language, and these ideologies are explored to help understand why Tamil is given precedence in the temple's constitution. The temple's programmes to engage the second generation in this regard are outlined and the tensions surrounding their effectiveness are discussed.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the Temple's main youth engagement program, the Saiva School. If the readers want to know how language policies are implemented at the micro level, how second generations interact with educational institutions, and how first generations make efforts to communicate their religious and cultural ties, these are the chapters to look at. Chapter 5 details the structure and operations of the school. The author's description of class members and their exposure to their language of origin, culture and religion helps us understand the impact on their language practice. To illustrate clearly the author critically analyses and presents two excerpts from the 9th grade classroom discourse.

Perera articulates her encounters with teenage students at the weekly religious school run by the Saiva Temple in a city of Australia. This is a first-generation attempt to transmit critical aspects of Tamil identity to their children who are second-generation Sri Lankan Tamils born and/or raised in Australia. The drive to continue Tamil culture away from the homeland is evident in the diverse array of Tamil linguistic, cultural and religious activities available in this city of Australia, and most of these activities are packed into the two free days of the weekend. One question that arises from this is how effective these activities are in endowing a heritage (Tamil) identity in post-migration generations and instilling engagement in transnational practices between Australia, Sri Lanka and beyond.

Chapter 6 looks at their weekly Tamil activities to give further insight into the background of these students and show how heritage practices are embedded in their lives. Perera methodically provides data of the real conversations between the students and teacher at the temple school during classtime. This informs the readers about the types of real life interactions and choice of language(s) by the students. The author continues her investigation of classroom discourse to examine how adolescents use language in school to index their religious and cultural identity. Understanding how they relate to their faith communities and how they

construct their faith stories is enhanced. This helps the readers to understand what the future holds for language and cultural practices in Saiva temples.

Chapter 7 is the conclusion, where the main themes of the book are discussed. This includes a detailed look at Sri Lanka's Tamil Hindu diaspora that shapes the temple's identity, and a discussion of its implications for the future of the temple and why it is important to Australia. Perera sums up by, saying about the contribution of the study "What it supports is the notion that religion is a significant but under- recognised factor in the study of language maintenance for migrants" (p148).

"While the use of Tamil might enable the young to feel closer to their religion and faith community, we should not assess their use of English as an indication of a weakening religious commitment" (p148).

This study provides a rich picture of changes in linguistic practices in diaspora religious institutions. Perera examines linguistic ideological considerations in the complex context of institutional linguistic politics and how such politics manifest themselves in linguistic use in temple rooms. This includes temple's Sunday school where language and religion play together in the identification and discourse of young people from second-generation immigrant backgrounds. This ground-breaking study spotlights the deep connection between religion and language, asking how Hindu temples, immigrant religious institutions, are adapting in an era of religious hyper-diversity.

Importantly a chapter on "Tamil weekends" describes how second-generation migrants are actively involved in an intensively packed mix of Tamil linguistic, cultural and religious activities. These activities take place mostly on the weekends, as part of the first generation's attempts to (re)create home. Methodically following an ethnographic study in a Tamil Hindu temple, this chapter also explores how adolescent students perceive the transmission efforts of the first generation. It elaborates clearly what it means for their sense of belonging and their sense of Tamilness in the homeland of Sri Lanka and the new home of Australia. The author brilliantly highlights how first and second-generation ideologies regarding Tamil identity and belonging are changing with time. Because of new interpretations of "being Tamil" that vary between and within generations, their attempts to represent are critically analysed. At the same time, as a result of the threat to Tamil culture in Sri Lanka, there is an enduring sense of duty to maintain the language, religion and culture outside of the homeland.

This book is a suitable resource for researchers, graduate and postgraduate students who would like to know the link between language and religion in a complex socio cultural setting. Parents, community members and social workers also could understand the pattern of behaviours in terms of the reactions of the younger generation.

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