

Pandits, power and profit: religious organization and the construction of identity among Surinamese Hindus

Cors van der Burg and Peter van der Veer

Free University of Amsterdam and The State University of Utrecht

After all, a priest was only a kind of tradesman, so to speak.

He did a job and was paid for it, in cash or in kind, or in both.

Seepersad Naipaul, *The Adventures of Gurudeva*

1. Introduction

A third of the population born in the former Dutch colony of Surinam has emigrated to the Netherlands. The migration curve rises from 1964 and shows a sharp peak in the years preceding Surinamese independence in 1975. The general public in the Netherlands had, and probably still has, the stereotyped image that the Surinamese are negroid Creoles. This image was probably based on the fact that migration to the Netherlands from Surinam in the fifties and sixties consisted predominantly of Creoles. In the seventies, however, a cross-section of the Surinamese population migrated, and this included large groups of Javanese and Hindustanis (East Indians). The stereotype that Surinamese are Creoles was challenged by this influx of Asians, but the fact that the major ethnic group among the Surinamese is Hindustani (37 per cent of the population) still seems to be incredible to the Dutch.¹

The mass migration of the Hindustanis in the seventies cannot be interpreted in terms of labour migration comparable to the West Indian migration to Britain (cf. Peach, 1968; Bovenkerk, 1983). It was not the demands of the labour market, but the economic and political stability of the Dutch welfare society, in a period of great political turbulence in Surinam, which provided the *pull* for migration. In the eyes of the migrating Hindustanis *push* would be a more correct term, since they prefer to call their migration a flight from Creole oppression. British Guyana is often mentioned as a terrible example of the oppression of a Hindustani majority by a Creole minority. Stereotyped fears such as 'they will rape our daughters' and 'they will kill our leaders' have given an often exaggerated ethnic colouring to the motives for migration. Ethnicity is, therefore, an important aspect of the Hindustani migration

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to the Netherlands. The Dutch government acknowledged this aspect by urging the Hindustani élite to form associations for the welfare of the group. It is clear that the government needed a Hindustani leadership for the implementation of its migration policy. The élite were certainly willing to take up the ethnic leadership and left the general Surinamese associations, because 'the concept "Surinamese" had till now only a juridical meaning' (Lalla Rookh, 1978:3). Ethnicity seems therefore to be the basic principle for the Hindustani migration to the Netherlands, as well as for the formation of organizations aimed at serving Hindustani interests in the Dutch plural society.

This clear picture becomes somewhat clouded when we enquire into the content of the Hindustani definition of 'self' in relation to 'other'. Ethnic identity is part of the answer, but religious identity is even more important. Hindustani people are largely Hindu (76 per cent) and the remainder is either Muslim (20 per cent) or Christian (4 per cent). Ethnic identification is necessary when greater political mobilization is required, and for the outsider it often seems the only important thing. For the Hindustani religious identification is of greater importance, at least in his interactions with other Hindustanis. It is well known that ethnic identity can be an important principle in the formation of interest groups, but the same is true of religious identity. Generally speaking, group identities are not static, but the product of forces operating on the individual and the group from within, and those impinging on them from without (Epstein, 1978:102). For us, identity construction is primarily a political process, in which religious and ethnic competition should be seen in relation to long-term processes of state-formation and nation-building.

The present article undertakes a description of the construction and maintenance of the multiple identities of Surinamese Hindus in Surinam and the Netherlands. We would argue that the dynamics of religious politics have been basic not only to the construction of a Surinamese Hindu identity, different from an East Indian Hindu identity, but also to the construction of a Hindustani ethnic identity in Surinam. Ethnicity derives its importance in Surinam from ethnic politics at a certain stage of state formation, whereas in the Netherlands it is important in the context of the organization of the welfare society. To understand its workings in both cases, however, we have to enquire into the relation between religious and ethnic organization and leadership.

2. Surinam

Caste-system and Brahmanism

The caste system is no doubt one of the most important features of Hindu society and religion. It divides up the whole society into a large number of hereditary groups which are hierarchically ranked according

to the religious principle of purity. We might call it a 'total' system, since it organizes most aspects of social life. Therefore it is of great significance that the caste system is absent from Hindu society in Surinam. The indentured labourers who left the United Provinces of North India for Surinam not only lost their caste in the eyes of those who stayed behind in India, but did so in fact. The social boundaries between castes in India concerning food-exchange, marriage and economic specialization could not be maintained either during the passage to Surinam or in the context of the plantation economy. This does not mean, of course, that from the moment the labourers embarked in Calcutta in the last decades of the previous century the caste system had disappeared. It disappeared only gradually in the period of 'indentured' labour when strong links with India were maintained through the constant arrival of new labourers and the departure of some of the labourers who had finished their contract. The British decision in 1919 to stop the labour migration to the West Indies severed these links and from then on caste became more and more irrelevant. Social research in the sixties shows that caste was not an important factor in the crucial boundary maintaining mechanisms of marriage and kinship (Speckmann, 1965). The economic aspects of the caste system had already disappeared long before.

What are the implications of the disappearance of the caste system for the identity of the Surinamese Hindu? This is a vexed question among Surinamese Hindus to the present day. Some do not like to hear the opinion expressed that caste has disappeared. Others, on the contrary, argue that it has never been of any importance. Therefore it is clear that the subject 'caste' still evokes strong sentiments, although it has disappeared as an empirical social fact. This is not difficult to understand, since there is a direct relation between Hinduism and the caste system. The opposition between purity and impurity is central to the social relations between groups and individuals, as well as to the relations between gods and human beings. According to Harper (1964) the division of labour realized in the caste system is a necessary condition for the worship of gods in Hinduism. Dumont in his influential study of the caste system *Homo Hierarchicus* (1972) argues that the cult of the gods is only a reflection of the hierarchy of purity in the caste system. A Hinduism without the caste system as its social basis appears from these studies to be very problematic. Religion should not, however, be regarded as a cultural system of meaning divorced from social change. It is not 'given' or 'static', but conditioned by changing social circumstances (cf. Asad, 1983). The key notion 'purity' underlying both society and religion has become a mere sentiment in Surinamese Hinduism, colouring but not determining religious practices and discourses.

The disappearance of caste boundaries implies the integration of a group with a common Hindu identity. Rituals and ceremonies peculiar

to specific castes disappeared, as well as the division between a brahmanical religion of the higher castes and a folk religion of the lower castes. Mandelbaum (1966) gives a model of Indian Hinduism, in which a *transcendent complex* of universal gods, Sanskrit texts and rituals, dominated by priests of Brahman castes, is differentiated from a *pragmatic complex* of local gods and traditions dominated by low-caste priests. The important ritual field of spirit-possession, illness and magic belongs especially to this pragmatic complex. Since only a small number of Brahmans migrated to Surinam – only 5 per cent of the Surinamese Hindus – and low castes made up almost half the immigrants (De Klerk, 1953: 103–4), it would be reasonable to expect that the pragmatic complex had expanded in Surinam. The opposite is the case. It has gradually disappeared as a separate complex of folk beliefs and low-caste organization, whereas the transcendent complex of Brahmans organization has come to dominate the entire religious sphere. The Surinamese Brahmans have made Surinamese Hinduism brahmanical by purifying it from unacceptable aspects as for example the offering of cattle to ‘illness deities’. The magical aspects of brahmanical Hinduism were emphasized to cope with spirit possession and illness. In a kind of double movement the low-caste specialists of the pragmatic complex were removed from the religious arena by the expansion of brahmanical influence and – a particularly interesting aspect – by the competition of low-status experts from other ethnic groups in Surinam, as for example the Creole *Winti* specialist *Bonuman*. Through this process Surinamese Hinduism becomes brahmanized. This development is not unique, but very similar to the one described by Jayawardena (1966) in British Guyana. It is certainly also well known in anthropological literature on Indian Hinduism as *sanskritization* (Srinivas, 1952). From our perspective it is better to call this a process of *brahmanization*, since this term emphasizes the growing power of Brahmans.

Since Hinduism in Surinam became brahmanized it is essential to examine the position of the Brahman *pandit*. To say that the Brahmans are the only caste existent among Surinamese Hindus would not be correct, because it is not relevant to employ the term ‘caste’ when the caste system has disappeared (cf. Dumont, 1972:274). Nevertheless they are still a relatively closed endogamous group of religious specialists. The status of the caste is not, however, guaranteed by its purity as in the Indian caste system, because there are no specialists available to clear away the impure aspects of life and the Brahmans were incorporated in the plantation economy like all the other indentured labourers. Their status was maintained by the successful integration of the Surinamese Hindus under the banner of Brahmanism. As *pandits* they monopolized the sacred knowledge of rituals and Sanskrit texts, so that ritual knowledge replaced purity as the legitimation of the Brahman’s status. In the field of sacred knowledge the Brahman’s rival in India was the leader of a sectarian movement, the ascetic *guru*. These movements

were absent in Surinam, so that the Brahman priest became the monopolist of Hindu religion in the last decades of the previous century and the first decade of this century.

Brahmanism is organized through personal networks of Brahman priests and lay clients. This personal bond between priests and clients (*jajmans*) is still called *jajmani* in Surinam, though the *jajmani* system as the economy of caste society has disappeared. In Indian rural economy a dominant caste controls the means of production and divides part of the harvest among specialist castes, like the Brahmans, in exchange for their services. The dominant caste is called *jajman*, which can be translated as 'patron'. In Surinam this translation becomes awkward, since there are no dominant castes and the lay worshippers are still called *jajmans*. The priest is indeed paid for his job as stressed in the quotation from the work of V. S. Naipaul's father with which we began this article, but he is at the same time not a client, but a central person in the social and religious organization of the Surinamese Hindus. The Brahman priest is among the *prominenti* of the Hindu community, acting as broker in the contacts with the colonial bureaucracy. In the period of indentured labour the Brahmans acted as interpreters for the Dutch and as spokesmen of their community (De Klerk, 1953:143-4).

Brahmanism is very ritualistic and is based on the Vedic ritual. The greater part of these rituals are private, which means that the Brahman is in the first place a family priest (*kula-purohit*) who performs house-rituals. In India the Brahmans were divided into occupational groups which were specialized in particular rituals, but in Surinam these differences have disappeared. An ironic aspect of this development is that at present the Surinamese Brahmans in the Netherlands claim their role in funeral rites as their main activity, whereas in India Brahmans try to avoid this activity because it is seen as of low status and inauspicious (cf. Parry, 1980). The organization of Brahmanism in Surinam is therefore informally based upon the relations between families of lay Hindus and Brahmans. Temple worship in congregations is rather unimportant compared with the house rituals. The Brahmans had small temples near their own houses in Surinam, for their own use and for some greater festivals. Because of the informal type of organization, there is a considerable doctrinal freedom and a lack of interest in theological disputes among the lay people.

The rise of the Arya Samaj

The first important fact in the construction of a Surinamese Hindu identity separate from the North Indian, was the expansion of Brahmanism. The second was the rise of a reform movement based upon the Sanskrit texts as Brahmanism. From 1912 the Neo-Hindu movement Arya Samaj started missionary activities in Surinam. This movement was founded in India by Swami Dayanand Sarasvati and

desired a 'return to the roots' of Hindu culture. It condemned the caste system, the veil for women, the self-immolation of the widow at her husband's death and child marriage, so that we may call it a social reform movement. Its religious content is brahmanical, because it propagates a return to the Veda. Its ritual of worship is the Vedic sacrifice, whereas polytheism and image worship are condemned as later undesirable developments in Hinduism. *Although the movement is brahmanical the organization is anti-Brahman in content.* Every knowledgeable lay person can become a priest, because it is not purity of birth that is of importance, but knowledge of the sacred texts and rituals. The Arya Samaj resembles in many respects the Islamic reform movements occurring in several parts of the world in the same period. These movements aim at replying to the challenge of the Western Christian culture which is penetrating the ancient civilizations of the East. In Surinam the rise of the Arya Samaj finds its Islamic counterpart in the Ahmadiya movement.

The Arya Samaj had a significant success in the West Indies among the Indian expatriates. In Surinam it obtained a following of sixteen per cent, whereas the movement remained marginal in India. This success is not difficult to understand in the light of the developments described in the previous paragraph. The Arya Samaj demanded social reform, which had already taken place in the West Indies. Its ideology legitimated this reform as truly Hindu. It rejected the actual religious practices of India, so that its followers could be better Hindus than their family in India. Moreover in the Arya Samaj everyone could become a priest by achievement, which checked the expansion of the Brahman's influence. The religion of the Brahman could be attacked as being insufficiently Vedic. The Arya Samaj obtained the support of the upwardly mobile, the better educated, who wanted to rid themselves of the Brahman's power. It would therefore have been quite logical that, with the emancipation of the Hindustani group in Surinam, the Arya Samaj were able to dominate the religious field. The rise of the Arya Samaj set a dialectical process in motion which consisted of a competition between Brahmans and leaders of the Arya Samaj and resulted in a better organization of the Surinamese Hindus and consequently of the Hindustani community.

The rise of the Arya Samaj could only be countered by an organization of Brahmanism better than the mutually exclusive networks of priests and jajmans. A considerable weakness in this informal organization was the inherent competition of Brahman priests to obtain more jajmans. The common enemy Arya Samaj checked this competition and forced the priests to formalize their organization. They sought and found support from conservative Brahman circles in India in their struggle with the Indian based Arya Samaj. Contact was made with the conservative Brahman freedom-fighter Malaviya, one of the leaders of the Bharata Dharma Mandala, a worldwide organization of Brah-

manism, of which the political branch was the reactionary Hindu Mahasabha (Klimkeit, 1981:160). In 1930 a formal association of Brahmanical Hinduism was founded in Surinam with the name of Sanatan Dharm (the eternal religion). In the same period the Arya Samaj started an organization in Surinam, called the 'Arya Dewaker (the Aryan Sun) (De Klerk, 1953:193 ff.).

The rise of the Arya Samaj therefore resulted in a formalization of the religious organization of Surinamese Hinduism in two sections: Sanatanis and Aryas or, as these terms are confusingly translated: Orthodox and Moderns. The formal organization of Brahmanical religion implied a greater influence of laymen and a greater interest in communal activities, social and religious. Both organizations, Sanatan Dharm and Arya Samaj were socio-religious and therefore fundamental to the later development of a Hindustani political party. Before the Second World War the Hindustanis were organized in this way into Hindu and Muslim socio-religious associations, which flourished thanks to an internal opposition of 'orthodox' and 'modern'. The construction of religious identities, different from Indian caste identities and strong enough to keep Christian mission at a distance (cf. De Klerk, 1953: 219), formed the core of this process.

The construction of a Hindustani identity

Within the Hindustani immigrant group in Surinam the important thing to know about someone was whether he was Hindu or Muslim and knowing that, whether he was 'modern' or 'orthodox'. In the interaction with other groups it was of some importance that Hindustanis were different from Creoles or Javanese, but these interactions were marginal up to the Second World War. After the completion of the period of indentured labour in the plantations most Indians chose to stay in Surinam. Those who stayed on received from the Dutch colonial government a piece of land for cultivation. The Hindustanis became peasants, as they had been in India. The other major ethnic group in Surinam, the Creole ex-slaves, had left the rural area for the town Paramaribo. They entered administrative and educational jobs. Therefore the rural-urban dichotomy in Surinam reflected to a great extent the ethnic dichotomy Hindustanis-Creoles. Both major ethnic groups occupied separate economic and geographic niches in the plural society of Surinam, so that the ethnic integration of Hindus and Muslims as Hindustanis was not yet important. This became important during and after the Second World War, when Hindustanis started to leave the rural area for jobs and education in Paramaribo. When ethnic competition in the same niche grew and when the Hindustanis succeeded in developing vital sectors of the Surinamese economy like trade and transport, ethnic integration was inevitable. The competition with the Creoles produced a strong tendency within the Hindustani group to neglect the internal socio-religious differences and to stress the fact that Hindustanis were a

group originating in India, having a common history and therefore a common identity.

The religious organizations could be used for the formation of a Hindustani political party in 1949. To be united in the competition with other ethnic groups became increasingly important in the fifties and sixties, but it is good to remember that ethnic identity still remained only an umbrella. Religious identity and organization remained the backbone of Hindustani society, for Hindus as well as for Muslims. The Brahman priests remained the grass-root leaders for the majority of the Hindus and therefore for the majority of the Hindustanis. Religious factionalism was very important in the politics of the United Hindustani Party, but on major issues the party could represent the Hindustanis as a whole. No doubt economic differences were also important within the Hindustani community and increasingly so among the urbanized and educated. External politics remained, however, largely ethnic and internal politics largely religious.

It is significant to observe that the ethnic leaders of the Hindustanis were not Brahmans and not even high-caste people. The most important Hindustani political leader in Surinam was the low-caste Lachmon. The Brahman priests avoided central positions in national politics. It seems to be a common aspect of religious leadership that there is a fear of loss of authority should the official political arena be entered. We find the same attitude not only among Brahman priests and *gurus* in India, but also among the Catholic clergy in different parts of the world. In the Surinamese setting it is, of course, quite clear that unity of the various religious groups would be difficult under the leadership of Brahmans. This does not mean that religion is unimportant at the national level. In the first place religious associations are the organizational elements composing the political party. In the second place religion is a treasury for the political rhetoric of which Lachmon and the party-ideologist Adhin make an intelligent use. A good example of this kind of rhetoric is given by Dew (1978:176), in which Lachmon compares the situation of the Hindustanis in 1972, three years before the Independence of Surinam with that of the gods Rama and Sita in the famous Hindu epic Ramayana, when he addressed a mass-meeting of 20,000 Hindustanis. He, Lachman, was like his namesake in the epic, the loyal ally of Rama in fighting the dark powers to protect the honour of the beautiful Sita. It is clear that this religious imagery is skilfully used to evoke the situation after Independence, when the dark powers (i.e. the Creoles) would come to violate Hindustani daughters and wives. It is also clear that this kind of rhetoric greatly contributed to the atmosphere of fear, in which most Hindustanis decided to leave for the Netherlands.

As we remarked earlier, the ethnic Hindustani identity served only as an umbrella under which the diverse religious identities were much more important to the participants. This is true of the rural areas, where the interaction between the different ethnic groups was marginal in

comparison with the situation in Paramaribo. The disintegration of the caste system made a gradual separation of a religious and a secular culture possible. Whereas in Indian traditional society it is difficult to separate these two, as is borne out by the Sanskrit word *dharma* which means both the religious and the social order, in Surinam, and more especially in the urban areas, this is increasingly possible. A secular culture of Hindustanis is immediately recognizable to the outsider through the clothing, the taste in music, movies and food. In this field there are no differences between Hindu, Muslim or Christian Hindustanis. Moreover this secular culture is not impervious to Creole influences, although it is far fetched to speak of a national culture. To some extent we may speak of a cultural continuum in Paramaribo, in which a broad variety of symbols can be used to emphasize either unity or diversity (cf. Drummond, 1980). It is, however, important to notice that this cultural continuum is very much influenced by political processes (cf. Norton, 1983). As Vincent (1974:376) remarks correctly: 'ethnic identifications are broadened when greater political mobilization is required and narrowed when exclusion is sought'. Ethnic and religious identifications depend on the changing interests of the social actors as well as being a function of the forces impinging on these actors from the outside.

3 The Netherlands

How are the Hindu and Hindustani identities maintained in the context of the Dutch welfare society? We have seen that the disintegration of the Hindu caste system implied an integration of the Surinamese Hindu community, having as its core a Brahmanistic identity with either 'orthodox' or 'modern' accents. This identity became the principle of articulation in the formation of associations like the Sanatan Dharm and the Arya Dewaker, which were, in turn, the elements from which the United Hindustani Party was built up. We have also seen that the ethnic identification became increasingly important in Surinamese society, so that there is a delicate relation between religious organization and identification on the one hand, and ethnic organization and identification on the other. We will describe below how this relationship develops in the context of Dutch society.

Pandits and profit

In 1968 there were only very few Hindustanis in the Netherlands. From a small community of some 18,000 Surinamese only some 10 per cent were Hindustanis (Van Amersfoort, 1970). In the seventies a great number of Hindustanis came to live in the Netherlands, some 80,000 today, and most of them professed only verbally the desire to return to Surinam. The mechanism of this migration was the use of kinship-ties

with immigrants who had already settled in the Netherlands in order to find a house and employment, so that we can call it chain migration. With the approach of Surinam's independence, however, the migration took place on such a large scale that this mechanism was no longer sufficient and the government had to open institutions for immediate reception and distribution over the country. The Dutch government developed a policy of dispersal to prevent the new immigrants all settling in big cities like Amsterdam and The Hague. Pandits, like lay people, also migrated to the Netherlands. Although it is sometimes ironically said in Hindustani circles that they became priests in the plane to Amsterdam, most of them were already pandits in Surinam. They succeeded in maintaining their existing relations with jajmans or in entering into new relations. Due to the Dutch policy of dispersal of the population the jajmans were spread all over the country. In contrast to the Surinamese situation, in which certain rural districts had a dense population of Hindustanis, in the Netherlands there were small pockets of isolated Hindustanis in different parts of the country. The only exception to this is The Hague, which has a population of about 18,000 Hindustanis. This situation has the effect that the religious organization depends more on the personal networks of pandits and jajmans than in Surinam, where the formal organization of the laity was much stronger. Another effect is that the relations between pandits and jajmans become less intense, because the pandit can only come for short visits, just to perform rituals. He cannot enter into a deeper, pastoral relationship with his clients, since they live too far from his place of residence. We can therefore acknowledge a process of deformalization in the religious organization. This process leads to a situation, in which the pandits become free entrepreneurs in the market of religion, vying with each other to attend to as many clients as possible. Some of them are so successful, that the clients who feel they have lost control over their pandits, sourly label them as merchants and money-grubbers. Efforts to come to a more formal organization of religion are frustrated by the conflicting interest of different families of pandits.

One such effort was made in Amsterdam in 1973. In that year the religious association T. was founded. The founder tells us about his first difficulties: 'When I came to the Netherlands in 1971 there was nothing for the Hindus. True, there was something for the aryas in The Hague, but for us, the sanatanis, there was nothing. I lived in Amsterdam, where the Hare Krishnas were active. I liked that, but it was not a Hinduism for the Hindustanis. Together with my friend S. I established the association T. in 1973, but soon a conflict arose, because he wanted to pay more attention to dance and drama (natak), while I wanted to emphasize religion (dharma). I continued my efforts until I could have a first idol-worship (puja) performed in a locality in the suburb Bijlmer. There were already a number of priests in Holland, including myself, who could perform the ritual. Moreover a priest of Demarara (Guyana)

origin came regularly from London. There was a meeting every Sunday and these were a great success.'

This success was not to last for long. Having availed itself of a locality for worship for three years, the association got the opportunity to use permanently a part of a house, squatted in by a Creole group. In the same period a welfare organization for Hindustanis was established in Amsterdam. The association T. disassociated itself from this organization, because it had a Muslim name and also a Muslim chairman. The Creole group, however, took sides with the welfare organization and gave the allotted room to them. After this episode, the board of T. decided to purchase a building with a prayer-room of its own. By collecting money in house-visits to Hindus, funds were received to do this. Some people really gave a considerable sum of money for purchasing and doing up the building. These sums were informally collected on the basis of mutual trust without sound book-keeping. Once the building was ready and the first worship had taken place, the chairman and founder had become 'a big man' in his own words. In his version of the events this was reason enough for efforts to get rid of him. Some members of the board insisted upon a public meeting at which a financial account should be given of the purchase and repair of the building. In a tumultuous public meeting of some four hundred Hindus this faction asked for the dismissal of the chairman, because he could not present adequate accounts. The pro-chairman faction, however, called in the police and succeeded on formal grounds, in expelling this faction and its supporters from the association. The chairman had now become very dependent on his supporters, not least financially. The expelled members, with the help of lawyers, demanded a refund of their financial contributions. This dependence made the chairman leave the association, which is still the stage for continuing strife. The expelled members founded a new temple in the same area, of which the future is also unsure.

This case-history is fairly typical of Hindu religious organizations in the Netherlands. As soon as a leader or a certain family obtained a prominent place in the organization, it broke up. There is not enough pressure from inside or from outside to come to more formal, church-like types of religious organization. For the Dutch outsiders this situation is a sign of religious fragility due to a process of secularization, as they themselves have experienced. This is not, however, altogether true, since it is not the congregation but the *jajmani* relation that has always been the backbone of Hindu religious organization. The more congregational type of worship had become important, as we have seen, in reaction to the expansion of the *Arya Samaj*. We may conclude that the *sanatani-arya* competition had not been important enough till now to force the *sanatani* pandits to form another type of organization. Moreover, the pandits are still comfortable enough as free entrepreneurs in the Dutch religious market.

The Dutch situation resembles to some extent the religious configuration in Surinam at the turn of this century. Again, the priests were only a kind of tradesman, as Naipaul observed in Trinidad. They are not yet checked by the emergence of socio-religious associations, as they were in Surinam, so that there exists a free market for religious enterprise. In the long run this will, however, damage the position of the pandits. The superficial contacts with their jajmans will alienate the younger generations from religion. In the Netherlands the pandits are not members of a closed group, in which they control the laymen and the laymen control them. Moreover, the ritual content of Brahmanism had been sufficient for the construction of a distinctive Hindu identity in Surinam, due to the lack of independent theological and historical information from India. In the Netherlands, India is much nearer in terms of oriental information and the presence of devotional sects like the Hare Krishnas. In this way the difference between Surinam and the Netherlands resembles that between Guyana and Fiji as described in a study of Jayawardena (1980). The Surinamese Hindus in Surinam could, like the Guyanese, invest their concept of India with more usable meanings. In the Netherlands, the pandits will not be able to continue to have the monopoly on information about what Hinduism really is. Unless they try to give Brahmanism a more theological content, ritualism may become a marginal aspect of a predominantly secular life.

Ethnic identity in a welfare society

When the Hindustanis came to the Netherlands in the seventies they entered a welfare society, in which religious identity had been a dominant principle in the formation of interest groups. Groups like the Protestants and the Catholics each had their own political parties as well as a complete system of social organizations, covering almost the entire education and welfare sectors and the recreational sphere. Central to the organization of the Dutch welfare society was the existence of a great number of denominationally divided welfare associations paid for by the government and supported by their political representatives in parliament. In the sixties, however, the determinant role of religious affiliation declined and in the welfare associations a secular professional identity became more important than a religious identity.

This being the configuration in the seventies it might seem surprising that the Hindustanis as well as other immigrants could claim their own welfare associations on an ethnic and not a professional basis. Religion had indeed become suspect as a social determinant, but ethnicity, as a new phenomenon, had not. That people from Third World countries should organize themselves to resist economic and social exploitation was quite a popular idea in the seventies. Moreover, the Dutch government needed to address a kind of leadership in the immigrant groups for the implementation of its policies. Members of the

Hindustani élite were therefore asked to form welfare associations comparable to the well-known Protestant and Catholic associations, but in this case on an ethnic basis. Surinamese welfare associations did already exist in the Netherlands when most of the Hindustanis arrived, but they were dominated by the already established Creoles. The foundation of the Hindustani welfare association Lalla Rookh was therefore defended in terms of the bipolar ethnic competition between Creoles and Hindustanis typical of Surinamese politics: 'Up to the present day one cannot speak of the Surinamese people, however eagerly some wish to do so. The notion "Surinamese" has as yet only a juridical meaning' and 'the Creoles do not appear to be willing to recognize the Hindustanis as equal partners and they envy them their rightful place and position.' (Lalla Rookh, 1978:3,8). Lalla Rookh is thus an ethnic organization based upon the competition between Creoles and Hindustanis. It unites Hindus and Muslims, as the United Hindustani Party did in Surinam, and has the same function as this party, that is to act as a broker between the government and the Hindustani group. In the context of the Dutch welfare society the political party has been transformed into a welfare association.

Lalla Rookh with its many local branches faces the same problem as its political counterpart in Surinam. It depends on the support of the grass-root religious leaders. This problem is aggravated in the Netherlands, because these leaders are free entrepreneurs, who are not yet forced to cooperate in formal organizations. On the other hand there are no elections in which its organizational strength is tested. The Dutch government gives money without much control as to how it is spent, so that an effective organization is less necessary than in Surinam. A good example of the internal welfare politics is offered by the local branch in The Hague, where 18,000 Hindustanis live. In 1980 there were in this town some twenty-one foundations with a self-coopting board. These foundations were established at a fast rate, when the local branch of Lalla Rookh, the federation Eekta was established. The main reason for their foundation was to obtain influence in Eekta, which was organized on a system of one vote for every organization, no matter how small (Boedhoe, 1980:3-6). Most of the foundations only consisted of one or a few influential families, who wanted to have a say in the affairs of Eekta, which was recognized by the Hague municipal authority, and which distributed the money for welfare activities as the official representative of the Hindustanis. This pattern can be found in all parts of the Netherlands where Hindustanis live.

Ultimately the Hindustani welfare organizations are in danger when they depend too much on the Dutch government. Ethnic welfare politics are distrusted in the Hindustani group, for it is seen as a policy of the Dutch authorities to divide and rule the Hindustani group. The following quotation from the charter of a recently formed Hindu organization is illuminating. 'Most probably as early as that time the

experienced government saw a possibility of granting subsidies with the only view that they should not organize themselves. Besides, in order to attain this end more easily the Hindustanis were dispersed all over the country. In the first instance the migrants expected to receive subsidies for ever and for this reason they did not allow themselves to be organized. Instead of uniting in the common interest, every household and family began to found an association to reap financial benefit' (Pravasi Bhartiya Sachiwalaya, 1982). This is the danger of every imposed organization, but in this case the danger is added to by the fact that the competition between Creoles and Hindustanis has become more and more unimportant in the Netherlands, for they are only an insignificant minority in Dutch society instead of being the major ethnic groups, as in Surinam. As we have seen, the bipolar opposition of Creoles and Hindustanis was the reason for the unity between Hindus and Muslims and for the construction of a Hindustani identity. We may therefore expect that ethnic identification loses its force in view of the religious identification. We should, however, remember that the latter is threatened by the entrepreneur-like activities of the pandits, as well as by that secularization of social life which we have already encountered among the educated Hindustanis in Paramaribo.

4 Conclusion

For the Dutch public the ethnic diversity of the Surinamese community is confusing. It becomes even more so when they discover that the Hindustanis are divided into Hindus and Muslims and that this religious distinction is of great social importance. It is not likely, however, that members of the Dutch dominant group will become interested in these distinctions. The social distance between the established and the outsiders makes it possible to put migrant labourers from the Mediterranean in one category with the ex-colonial Surinamese as 'those backward minorities' or in the official parlance of Dutch politicians as 'the weak and disadvantaged'. In the case of the Hindustanis the Government is only interested in ethnic leadership organized in welfare organizations. This perspective from the outside is no doubt important, but it obscures the internal politics of the Hindustani group, in which religious ambitions and identifications are central. A neglect of the 'internal' dynamics of ethnic and religious identification may lead to a total failure of whatever policies the Dutch officials may have in mind for the Hindustani group. The integration of Hindustanis in Dutch society depends, as it did in Surinam, on these dynamics.

Note

1. This persistent Creole stereotype of West Indians does not only exist in the Netherlands, but also in Britain. In British publications on West Indians in Britain no

distinction is generally made between Creoles and East Indians. Moreover, these publications often compare West Indians as a group with East Indians from Africa and India/Pakistan. It is, however, quite possible that East Indians from Guyana and Trinidad feel a certain affinity with East Indians from other parts of the world, while they feel opposed to other West Indians, like the Creoles. To accept a nationalistic ideology of a homogeneous West Indian immigrant population is to avoid important research problems.

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