

# Hindus and Others in Sri Lanka and in the Diaspora

Journée d'études organisée dans le cadre de l'atelier de recherche  
**Les Hindous, les Autres et l'Ailleurs : Asie du Sud et Diaspora**

P.Y. Trouillet - Hindu Procession in Paris during the Ganesh Festival, 2006



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Seran Amaralingam - Nallur Temple Procession in Jaffna (Sri Lanka), 2011



Centre d'études et de  
recherche sur l'Inde,  
l'Asie du Sud et sa diaspora

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Nadia Gargueta

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**17 février 2015**  
**Salle 638, 9h30~17h**  
**190 avenue de France 75013 Paris**

# Hindus and Others in Sri Lanka and in the Diaspora

The "Hindus and Others in South Asia and Overseas" research program, hosted by the *Center for South Asian Studies of Paris* (CEIAS, UMR 8564 EHESS/CNRS), considers Hinduism as a historical point of contact between various religious traditions and ethnic groups. Countless situations of contacts with other religious groups have left their marks on Hinduism, contradicting the ethnic dimension many scholars have focused on. Such relevance of contact in the history of Hinduism is well known in South Asia but must also be analyzed in diasporic contexts.

The aim of this conference, co-organized by the *Center for South Asian Studies of Paris* and the *Center for Studies and Research on India, South Asia and its Diaspora* of Montréal (CERIAS/UQÀM), is to focus on Sri Lankan Hinduism and to initiate a discussion on how Hinduism and Hindus interact with other groups and religions they encounter on the island and overseas.

Accounting for 15% of the 21 million inhabitants of the country, Hindu communities live in very different contexts around the island. In the Northern Province, where Tamils make up more than 80% of the population, they are a large majority. In the Eastern Province and in Colombo, where the share of Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims is approximately equal, Hindus live together with Muslims, Christians and especially Buddhists (whose religion is the official religion of the state). The Up-Country Tamils, descendants of South Indians, live in the island's central hills in remote areas surrounded by Sinhalese. For them, religious practices are also a way to assert their identity and to differentiate themselves from the Sinhala Buddhists and Hindu Tamils of the coastal provinces.

The emigration of Sri Lankan Hindus is an old phenomenon. During British rule, the colonial state recruited many Jaffna Tamils to work in their administration or in the railway sector in Malaya. After Independence, because of the deterioration of interethnic relations and war, many Tamils fled the island for India and Western countries. These expatriates and refugees often set up temples in their host country, where they try to rebuild their lives and their religious practices. In these contexts, Sri Lankan Hindus live with other Hindu groups as well as other ethnic and religious communities. They also have to negotiate their status and sometimes transform their practices to be accepted by the host state.

During this conference, Sri Lankan Hinduism will be regarded as a contact point between different traditions, groups and territories both on the island and in the diaspora. Drawing on several case studies located in Sri Lanka, Paris and Montréal, the papers will question the relations to others within Sri Lankan Hindu communities (in terms of castes, regional or ethnic traditions, etc.) as well as to other religions and religious groups. Thus this conference should help to understand how Sri Lankan Hindus interact with groups and spaces perceived as exterior, and what these interactions reveal in terms of religious, social and territorial dynamics. It should also provide a good appraisal of the consequences of these contacts on the nature of contemporary Sri Lankan Hinduism in terms of religious practices and representations, and in terms of politics.



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## PROGRAM

9h30 - **Welcome address**

MATHIEU CLAVEROLAS (CNRS-CEIAS) & PIERRE-YVES TROUILLET (CNRS-CEIAS)

9h45 - **Introduction**

DELON MADAVAN (CEIAS-CERIAS) & ÉRIC MEYER (INALCO-CEIAS)

10h15 ~ **DELON MADAVAN (CEIAS-CERIAS)**

**The weight of the Hindu community and the hierarchical caste system  
in Jaffna Town until the end of cease fire period**

DISCUSSANT MATHIEU BOISVERT (CERIAS-UQÀM)

11h00 - Pause

11h15 ~ **MARK BRADLEY (CERIAS-UQÀM)**

**Tamil Hindus and others in the Montréal Diaspora**

DISCUSSANT PIERRE-YVES TROUILLET (CNRS-CEIAS)

12h00 - Lunck Break

13h30 ~ **SHOBHANA XAVIER (Wilfrid Laurier~Waterloo University)**

**Lighting Incense and Oil Lamps during Jum'ah:  
Hindu-Sufi Practices in Contemporary Jaffna, Sri Lanka**

DISCUSSANT MICHEL BOIVIN (CNRS-CEIAS)

14h15 ~ **DANIEL BASS (American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies)**

**The Goddess of the Tea Plantations:  
Hindu Festivals and Diasporic Identity in the Up country of Sri Lanka**

DISCUSSANT MATHIEU CLAVEROLAS (CNRS-CEIAS)

15h00 - Pause

15h15 ~ **ANTHONY GOREAU-PONCEAUD (Université de Bordeaux-CERIAS)**

**When Kali speaks to me directly:  
Religious Dynamics of Hindu Tamils in Paris**

DISCUSSANT CHRISTINE MOLINER (EHESS-CEIAS)

16h00 - **General discussion & conclusion**