

**South and Southeast Asian Diasporas: Carriers and Shapers of Heritage**

**NANETTE SPINA**

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

**290 S. Jackson St., Department of Religion, Peabody Hall 208**

**Athens, GA 30606 USA**

Email Address: [spinan@uga.edu](mailto:spinan@uga.edu)

**Abstract:** This paper is focused on the Toronto Adhi Parasakthi Temple Society of Canada and the ways in which religious traditions are (re)constructed and (re)presented in a Diasporic context. This religious community is an example of Hindu tradition in both its Diasporic and transnational dimensions. The society described below has formed under a specific set of beliefs and values; some of which re-conceptualize the parameters of gender and ritual authority, ritual participation, and community that they knew in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. The local community is part of the larger transnational Adhi Parasakthi movement, a *guru* - centred Sakta religious organization that maintains a direct connection to the mother temple in Melmaruvathur, Tamil Nadu, India as the centre of religious authority and pilgrimage. At the same time, the Toronto temple is a very local religious institution, which reflects the strong immigrant presence in Scarborough where many of the Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka have settled. One of the most prominent aspects of the Adhi Parasakthi tradition is that women are privileged as ritual leaders. This movement in the Toronto context has been instrumental in fostering a new religious community (established 2002) by embarking upon patterns of worship that demonstrate gender & caste inclusivity, and direct ritual participation. In this capacity, the religious practices serve to promote and bolster the ethical preferences articulated within this community in the Diaspora. This study illustrates how the combined elements of theology, Sri Lankan culture, women's ritual authority, and the community's ethical discourse have shaped the identity of this Tamil Diasporic community in Toronto.