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Hinduism in Zambia – Main Concepts of the Religion in Cognitive Perspective

In memory of Dr Suren Naicker

Abstract

There are approximately 4400 Hindus in Zambia, with five Hindu temples in Lusaka and two in Kafue. The majority of Zambian Hindus are descendants of people who migrated from India in the 20th century or from the boarder Indian diasporas. However, during our research temple priests and leaders said that there were about 60 indigenous Africans and 30 white¹ Europeans who embraced Hinduism in their pursuit of spiritual growth and the feeling of protection. They frequent some of the temples included in this study. The aim of this paper is to explain how Zambian Hindus understand the concept of God, the belief

¹ The denominations ‘white’ and ‘black’ are used without racial negative connotations in Southern Africa. In some countries they used in legal regulations, e.g. in South African in government BEE Programme. All our informants, no matter what ethnic group, used them on daily basis without meaning any disrespect. Hence, the usage in this article.



in reincarnation and caste system, the extent to which Hinduism in Zambia is influenced by African Traditional Religions (ATR), and whether or not the Hindu community in Zambia deliberately engages in proselytising and converting the local populace. These issues are examined in an interdisciplinary approach. This paper uses two methodologies. While the first part uses the anthropological method, the second employs the cognitive approach (conceptual metaphor theory, CMT).²

Keywords: Hinduism, Zambia, African Hindus, cognitive metaphors analysis

Introduction

This paper examines how Zambian Hindus congregated in ISKCON Temple, Radhakrishna Mandir, Rama Krishna Vedanta Centre, BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, and Hanuman Temple understand the principal tenets of their religion: the concept of God/gods, whether or not Hinduism is a polytheistic or monotheistic religion, the concept of reincarnation, and the caste system which still permeates the entire Hindu population in India. We also aim to establish the continuity and discontinuity between the Zambian and Indian forms of Hinduism resulting from and reflecting the African cultural context of the Zambian form of Hinduism, i.e. its interaction with African indigenous religions.

All our informants used metaphors to explain their idea of God and divinity. Consequently, we will employ the conceptual cognitive analysis theory to analyse our informants' perceptions of the concept of God. This is an appropriate tool for understanding the thinking patterns behind metaphors. To our knowledge, no similar study has been done so far. Therefore, this is a new addition to academic knowledge of Zambian Hindus and their religious beliefs.

We also sought to understand whether one becomes a Hindu through birth only (being born into the faith) or also through recruitment and conversion. If conversion is an open avenue for membership in Hinduism what recruitment strategies do Zambian Hindus employ? The question arose because in many countries, certain Hindu sects, especially ISKCON, actively proselytise, and in India there are ashrams and other religious centres which try to convert people from other competing faiths. When we spoke to ISKCON members in Poland, the United Kingdom and India, they all encouraged us to join their organisation, claiming that this was the purest form of Hinduism and the best form to praise God and stop the reincarnation cycle. This is the genesis of our interest in the proselytising aspect of Hindu temples in Zambia.

² The field studies in Zambia were supported by the Polish National Science Centre (Narodowe Centrum Nauki), Poland, project no. 2017/25/N/HS1/02500.

Religious situation in Zambia

Zambia is a landlocked country in Southern Africa with a population of 19,610,769, a growth rate of 3.4% and an average household size of 4.8 people. Approximately 60% of the population lives in rural areas and 40% in urban areas.³ With its 73 languages, Zambia is an ethnic melting pot. The dominant religion is Christianity, and the most popular forms of Christianity are Catholicism, Anglicanism, grass-root churches, mainly Pentecostal and Charismatic.

Religiously, Zambia is a tolerant country. Even though the constitution from 1991 (amended in 1996) calls Zambia a Christian country, Article 19 secures the freedom of faith and ‘to manifest and propagate his [citizen’s] religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance’.⁴ Religion is taught at school as a core subject. Christianity is also accepted as a subject for university entrance, with various Christian denominations influencing the curriculum.⁵ To make religious education more tolerant and open, other religions have, since 1984, also been included in the curriculum as a part of religious education (RE) classes. ‘The junior secondary syllabus gave about 33 percent attention to Christianity, 17 percent to Traditional Religion, 16 percent to Islam and Hinduism, and 33 percent to life issues including Zambian Humanism’.⁶ Carmody, citing Jackson, states that the curriculum ‘has been crafted by Christians with minimal if any consultation’ with other religions’ representatives.⁷ However, our Hindu informants do not find RE oppressive to Hindus because their religious activities are neither suppressed by the government nor local authorities.

Almost all of our informants were born in Zambia, educated in the local school system, and live harmoniously with other people within an environment of religious tolerance, mutual acceptance and freedom. Simuchimba points out that living in an environment of religious diversity results in reciprocal influence and the cross-fertilisation of ideas.⁸ This reciprocal influence can be observed within Christian churches permeated by pre-Christian beliefs, e.g. in ancestral spirits.⁹ Almost all of our informants were born in Zambia, educated in the local school system, and live harmoniously with others within an environment of religious tolerance, mutual acceptance and freedom. Simuchimba points

³ Zambia Preliminary Census 2022 Report, Viewed 27 April 2025, <https://www.zamstats.gov.zm/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2022-Census-of-Population-and-Housing-Preliminary.pdf>.

⁴ Constitution of Zambia, Viewed 27 April 2025, <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/26620/90492/F735047973/ZMB26620.pdf>.

⁵ Brendan Carmody, ‘Religious Education and Pluralism in Zambia’. *Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association* 98/2 (2010), p. 151.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 148.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 152.

⁸ Melvin Simuchimba, ‘Religious Education in a ‘Christian Nation’: The Case of Zambia’, *British Journal of Religious Education* 23/2 (2001), p. 109.

⁹ For more see: Agnieszka Podolecka and Austin Cheyeka, ‘Ng’anga – Zambian healers-diviners and their relationship with Pentecostal Christianity. The intermingling of pre-Christian beliefs and Christianity’, *Journal for the Study of Religion* 34/2 (2021), pp. 1–30.

out that living in an environment of religious diversity results in reciprocal influence and the cross-fertilisation of ideas.¹⁰ This reciprocal influence can be observed within Christian churches permeated by pre-Christian beliefs, e.g. in ancestral spirits.¹¹ Having noted how ATR has influenced Christianity in Zambia, we sought to find out the extent to which Zambian forms of Hinduism have been similarly affected. The influence of traditional African beliefs on Hindu traditions can also be observed, though much less than within Christianity.

Hinduism in Zambia

It is almost impossible to accurately establish how many Hindus live in Zambia because different sources give different data. There is no information about the Hindu population in the 2022 Census. According to the 2010 Census, 4,400 Hindus live in Zambia. The International Religious Freedom Report published by the United States Department of State in 2022 estimated the number of Hindus to be 10,000 persons in 2019, who live mainly in the Eastern, Copperbelt and Lusaka Provinces.¹² Phiri estimates that there are 15,000 Indians, 70% of whom are Hindu, and the rest are Muslim (Phiri 2001). The article 'Hinduism in Zambia' on Fandom Wiki reports 25,000 Hindus. Wikipedia is not a reliable source because it does not provide any references.¹³ Our Hindu informants (especially priests and community leaders) agree with approximately 4400 Hindus. Their estimation is based on the number of people who attend and participate in Hindu religious festivals.

First and foremost, Hindus born in Zambia consider themselves Zambians.¹⁴ Only after that do they describe themselves as Hindus, and last, as people of Indian roots. The young generation call themselves *mwenye*, a Bemba and Nyanja term for Hindus. Others call themselves Zambian Hindus.¹⁵ Other researchers also emphasize a 'profound feeling'

¹⁰ Melvin Simuchimba, 'Religious Education', p. 141.

¹¹ For more see: Agnieszka Podolecka and Austin Cheyeka, 'Ng'anga – Zambian healers-diviners and their relationship with Pentecostal Christianity', pp. 1–30.

¹² There is no information about the Hindu population in the 2022 Census report. Therefore, I use the data from the previous census (2010). International Religious Freedom Report for 2022 estimates the number of Hindus 10,000 in 2019, but my Hindu informants (especially priests and community leaders) estimate about 4000, like in the 2010 Census. Consequently, I use this number in the main body text. Zambia census 2010, Viewed 27 April 2025, <https://www.zamstats.gov.zm/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/2010-Census-of-Population-and-Housing-Administrative-Report.pdf>. Zambia International Religious Freedom Report for 2022, United States Department of State, Viewed 27 April 2025, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/441219-ZAMBIA-2022-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>.

¹³ Viewed 27 April 2025, https://religion.fandom.com/wiki/Hinduism_in_Zambia.

¹⁴ Joan Haig, *Situating Strangers. Understanding Hindu Community Life in Lusaka* (PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2010), p. 80.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 81.

of Zambian patriotism among these Hindus.¹⁶ All our informants, except newcomers, also feel, first and foremost, as Zambians. They call themselves Hindus and Zambians, not Indians.¹⁷ This shows a strong affiliation towards the country of residence. Some of them, especially those who have not lived in Zambia for long, feel an allegiance to Zambia and their country of origin.

The history of the early Indian diaspora in first Northern Rhodesia, later Zambia, can be recovered from the archives of the Oriental and India Office Collection. The India Office was created in 1858 and 'acted as an intermediary for the Colonial Office in London, the Governor's Office in Northern Rhodesia, and the Government of India in New Delhi'.¹⁸ The records show the economic and social situation of Indians, both Hindu and Muslim, their place in the society, complaints against various forms of injustice and the refusal to grant entry to Indian authorities into Northern Rhodesia to assess the situation under British colonial rule. India Office Records actively collected information until 1947, when India gained independence and focused on internal affairs, not on the diaspora of Indians in African colonies. As a result, the India Office was closed. Independent India's politicians did not pay much attention to the Indian diaspora. For example, Prime Minister P.J. Nehru dismissively referred to Indians in Africa as 'guests' on the continent. Consequently, Indians were left to fend for themselves. After 1947, information concerning the affairs of the Indian diaspora comes mainly from British sources. Haig, citing Gerber, reports that 'the India Office Library and Records were siphoned into the Commonwealth Relations Office. In 1968 they were transferred to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and in 1982 were deposited with the British Library.' Data on the Indian diaspora 'after 1948 can be found in the Commonwealth Relations Office records and the Colonial Office records'.¹⁹

Hinduism arrived in Zambia in the early 20th century. Most Hindus came from India as indentured labourers, while others came from other colonies in Southern-Eastern Africa. Indians, both Hindus and Muslims, were allowed to become traders. Between 1931 and 1946, the number of Indians in Northern Rhodesia increased fivefold. The reason for this meteoric increase remains unexplained.²⁰ Some chose emigration to a different continent because of heavy taxation and subsequent poverty in colonial India. Others were actively encouraged by 'the colonial master to get better paid jobs in Eastern Africa. The ulterior motives of these western colonial masters was to create an extensive pool of cheap labour with which they planned to develop their colonies, such as in laying railway tracks and

¹⁶ Kamini Krishna and Dorothy Mwansa, 'Indian Communities Experiences and Challenges in Zambia: Before and After Independence', *International Journal of Latest Research in Humanities and Social Science (IJLRHSS)* 3/08 (2020), p. 103.

¹⁷ Interviews August 2021.

¹⁸ Joan Haig, 'From Kings Cross to Kew: Following the History of Zambia's Indian Community through British Imperial Archives', *History in Africa*, 34/1 (2007), p. 56.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

²⁰ Floyd Dotson and Lilian O. Dotson, *The Indian Minority in Zambia, Rhodesia and Malawi*, New Haven 1968, p. 285.

on their sugar cane plantations. The 'import of cheap manufactured cotton material from British almost shut down the cottage industries' depriving people of income and forcing them to seek other life opportunities.²¹ Dotson points out that Indians had to change their lifestyles and economic activities. Before coming to Africa, they were mostly farmers, and upon their arrival in Africa, they became industry workers or traders.²² Haig claims that the Hindus who came directly to Northern Rhodesia instead of via South Africa were 'skilled artisans or [came] as commercially-driven Passengers'.²³ Hindus settled mainly in the mercantile business, even though British colonial regulations made their trade limited and difficult. Their rights were also restricted to where they were designated to live – in Lusaka's Second Class zone, where most Hindus still live and do their businesses and cultural activities today. The arrival of Indians, both Hindu and Muslim, in Zambia was not met with enthusiasm by the white population, especially merchants. Krishna et al. state that the majority of black people living in the area perceived the Indians as yet another group superior to them, alongside the white population. They viewed them as competitors for the limited, better-paying jobs in the country. In contrast to indigenous Africans, Indians gradually became involved in local politics during the colonisation, though their position was undoubtedly much lower than their white counterparts.²⁴

In 1954, the British colonisers introduced a law that prevented new immigration, except for the immediate dependents, and the press published unfavourable articles about the Indian diaspora.²⁵ After gaining independence in 1964, the situation changed. India was and still is a critical economic player and its support for the newly liberated country was important. People of Indian origins played a significant role in trade and commerce and the newly independent government allowed their business to continue. Unfortunately for them, however, the situation deteriorated in 1970 due to the Zambian Government's Economic Reforms, which reserved retail and wholesale trade to African Zambians and forced many Indian traders (both Hindu and Muslim) out of business. With time, things gradually changed, and by the end of President Kaunda's era, people of Indian descent living in Zambia took a more active role in political parties and the economy.²⁶ Kaunda's philosophy of 'Zambian Humanism' (1967) included all religious beliefs and ethnic groups, and Hindus and Muslims could freely express their political and religious views and opinions.²⁷ Despite the social and political turmoil in Zambia during the 20th century, Hindus were allowed religious freedom and were not forced to convert to Christianity, the dominant religion in the country.

In the 2020s, when we conducted this research, Hindus continued to arrive in Zambia, but some also emigrated to other countries. Most Hindus who reside permanently in

²¹ Kamini Krishna, Dorothy Mwansa, 'Indian Communities Experiences', p. 97.

²² Ibidem, pp. 96–97.

²³ Joan Haig, 'From Kings Cross to Kew', p. 57.

²⁴ Kamini Krishna, Dorothy Mwansa, 'Indian Communities Experiences', p. 97.

²⁵ Floyd Dotson and Lillian O. Dotson, *The Indian Minority in Zambia*, p. 218.

²⁶ Kamini Krishna and Dorothy Mwansa, 'Indian Communities Experiences', p. 97.

²⁷ Joan Haig, *Situating Strangers*, p. 105.

Zambia do not have Zambian citizenship and hold passports from India, the UK, the USA and their countries of origin. This is primarily because of the cumbersome procedures for acquiring Zambian nationality.²⁸ Most Hindus live in the capital city of Lusaka, the Copperbelt, and Southern Provinces urban areas.²⁹ This fact was confirmed by our informants in 2021. The Hindu community is well integrated with the rest of society, though in 1996 ‘three days of rioting and looting occurred in Livingstone in which shops owned by the city’s affluent Hindu (and Muslim) community were explicitly targeted. However, wealthy Hindu Zambians have contributed generously to famine relief, among other charitable deeds, and have played a role in the pro-democracy movement’.³⁰ Hindus helped to secure a trade deal with India in 2003 and now run successful businesses.

Methodological issues

Klostermaier emphasizes that even though India is a modern country, ‘much of its ancient tradition is still alive’.³¹ Hinduism in India is not a religion but a lifestyle. Religious beliefs permeate society, and even atheists must fit into social strata based on the caste system, in which elevation from lower to higher caste is virtually impossible. Ancient texts, art and customs form the way of life, and even though Hinduism has changed and adapted to modern times, tradition permeates the Indian society.

Hinduism is a complex religion, and it is comprehended in multiple layers: differently by well-educated people who treat the elaborate and expanded universe of deities in philosophical terms and differently by millions of uneducated people in India who understand the multiple gods and deities literally, and not as aspects of one superior God.³² The following issues were discussed with our informants in Zambia: the caste system, arranged marriages and the concepts of divinity portrayed in pictures and sculptures. The latter was addressed in the context of the abundance of divinities and Hinduism and establishing if Hindus in Zambia consider their religion as monotheistic or polytheistic. As discussed below, these values are not as critical in Zambia as in native India. While our questions may arise from an academic perspective and interest, we are also mindful that our informants are ordinary practising Hindus. Their responses and explanations come from a confessional Hindu faith, not a Western scholarly perspective. We call our informants Hindus because this is what they call themselves. They are grouped around Hindu temples. This is why we consider them followers of Hinduism. Regardless of the great diversity within Hinduism, the pantheon of gods is as prevalent as the belief in reincarnation and other beliefs discussed by our informants. Hence our use of the term ‘Hinduism’.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 110.

²⁹ Scott D. Taylor, *Culture and customs of Zambia*, Westport 2006, p. 36.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 37.

³¹ Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism: Third Edition*, Albany 2007, p. 5.

³² Ibidem, p. 36.

It is tough to talk about Hinduism as a whole. As Vishvanathan writes, “One of the most striking advances in modern scholarship is the view that there is no such thing as an unbroken tradition of Hinduism, only a set of discrete traditions and practices reorganised into a larger entity called ‘Hinduism’”.³³ India is a country that comprises many disparate regions, with different languages and different historical and cultural developments, plus diasporas in various parts of the world (UK, USA, Southern African countries and others). In each of them, the beliefs and behaviours recognised as Hindu look different, starting with the deity professed (Viṣṇu, Śiva, Goddess, local village deities) and ending with the rituals performed. However, a few fundamental elements can be identified that unite the followers of this protean religion.³⁴ These are: 1) the belief that the universe is permeated with the Divine, which is also present within the human soul and which manifests itself in material images through which it can be worshipped; 2) the belief that one is responsible for their actions, and not only in one life but also in subsequent lives, the shape of which depends on responsibility, 3) the belief that perfection can be attained by various means, both through love and devotion to God and active action in the world, as well as through renunciation of the world, 4) the conviction that one can only become a Hindu by birth and that everyone is born into a particular social group (a caste) whose precepts, both religious and social, apply throughout life. These include the recommendation of marriage within a particular caste and the performance of prescribed rituals and practices. Our examination of the Zambian form of Hinduism considered all these aspects.

The methodology adopted in this study is interdisciplinary. In the first part, the methodology was participant observation and in-depth, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews, which not only answered researchers’ questions but also sparked additional spontaneous information. This interview data was then analysed using conceptual metaphor theory (CMT).

The interviews were conducted in August 2021 with the following informants: priest Popadhai Dhakar from Radhakrishna Mandir (Lusaka), monk Swami Guneshananda from Rama Krishna Vedanta Centre (Lusaka), priest Jaya Govind Dasa from ISKCON Hare Krishna temple (Lusaka), Priyank Patel from BAPS Swaminaraya Mandir (Lusaka), elders from Hanuman Temple (Kafue, there is no residing priest in the Kafue region), and 40 members of the congregations, half of them men and half women. All female informants were secular. They were chosen from supplicants who visited the temples during our research there. We also met them privately. Information was also gathered via e-mails. Names are used with informants’ permission; otherwise, the words ‘informant’ or ‘temple elder’ are used. Where names are used in parentheses without dates, they indicate informants’ names and quotations acquired in August 2021.

³³ Gauri Vishvanathan, ‘Colonialism and the Construction of Hinduism’, in: Gavin Flood (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, Malden, Oxford 2005, p. 26.

³⁴ On various aspects of Hinduism, see, among others, Flood 1996, 2005, Sugirtharajah 2003, Rinehart 2004, Hawley, Narayanan 2006, Klostermaier 2007, Doniger 2014, Llewelyn 2014, Vemsani 2018, Tharoor 2019, Brekke 2019.

To establish how Zambian Hindus understand the main concepts of their religion and if they believe this is the same Hinduism as in its native India, the following research questions were asked:

1. In Hindu temples, there are portraits of various gods. Does it mean that people worship different gods, or are these gods/idols the manifestation of a supreme God/deity/energy?
2. Is Hinduism in Zambia influenced by native African beliefs (e.g. by the reverence³⁵ of ancestral spirits), or is it the same as in India?
3. Does the Hindu community proselytise and convert people? Are there any native African people who converted to Hinduism?
4. Do Hindus in Zambia believe in reincarnation?
5. Is the caste system applied in Zambia?
6. How do you imagine God? What kind of entity is God? Can you describe God?

The article analyses the answers to the questions and shows Zambian Hindus' points of view and beliefs. The informants, both priests and secular, explained how they imagined God. The idols in temples are mere artistic images people do not worship. These images only enhance their concentration in prayers to God, the highest energy, represented by several gods.

During the description process of God, the informants used many metaphors, which authors interpret with the aid of conceptual metaphor theory. This theory was launched in 1980 by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their book *Metaphors We Live By*. Since then, the theory has been developed and elaborated within cognitive linguistics. The subject of research in cognitive linguistics is the relationship between a sign (linguistic and non-linguistic) and the mind on the one hand and experience on the other. The theory assumes that thinking is embodied and motivated by experience, both biological and cultural. Cognitive linguistics investigates three ways of thinking: conceptual metonymy, conceptual metaphor and conceptual blending. These processes are expressed in signs. Therefore, the study of signs allows for their reconstruction. Culturally specific metaphors show how deeply they are entrenched in tradition and how their logic governs the thinking and speaking of informants.

God, gods and idols

The concept of idols is described in Hindu sacred texts: *Vaiṣṇava* (Vishnu-centric form of Hinduism) and cultic scriptures. They present the belief that despite the transcendent form of divinity, God can be found in early representations like sculptures. 'In the Imminent form, God is present within us as the Indwelling self, while the idol is the most concrete

³⁵ One can encounter the term "ancestors' worship", but it is wrong. In Southern Africa, including Zambia, Africans do not worship ancestors; the worship goes to God if they are Christians or gods and deities if they practice ATR (African Traditional Religions). People speak to ancestors, offer them food, and sometimes sacrifice an animal, but do not pray or worship them. Hence, the term 'reverence' is more correct.

of God's forms. It is called *arcāvatāra*, and the belief is that God descend into the idol and makes it divinely alive, so that he may be easily accessible to his devotees'; this is the reason for the importance of home shrines and altars with idols.³⁶ All our informants showed respect towards idols and even left some offerings like flowers or fruit, but at the same time, they said they left the gift offerings to God, not to the sculptures or paintings.

Asked about the numerous gods and idols, all our informants explained that Hindu gods and demigods represent one God, the divine energy that created the universe and everything in it. For them, the existence of these numerous deities is not a coincidence. Each representation and every incarnation of deities teaches people about the cause and the result in a unique and specific way. This attitude shows that they are well-educated and have a more philosophical attitude towards religion than people who treat myths and religious dogma literally. Our informants confirmed that the Hindu diaspora in Zambia is educated in the Western system while equally rooted in the Hindu religion.

Belief in one supreme God does not contradict the belief in multiple divine representations. For most contemporary Hindus in Zambia, the supreme deity is so omnipotent that the human mind cannot comprehend and process its complexity and wholeness. This is why they divide it into smaller parts to understand God and all its aspects. 'There are so many gods in Hinduism who represent and reflect the complicated human nature. Human beings are complex creatures God created in this way. Gods and deities help us understand our own complexity and that of the universe. God shows itself in such a multiplicity to help us understand the truth about creation and our place within it'.³⁷

People go through many stages in their lives that make them need the multifarious aspects of God. Most secular female informants poignantly expressed this view in their discussions on the natural changes in their lives. For example, one informant stated: 'Teenagers have dreams and needs that differ from those of either single or married women or mothers. Therefore, their prayers are different and they expect different divine intervention'.³⁸ When people concentrate on a specific aspect of their life, they choose a representation of God to make thinking and praying easier. 'There is one God who created us all but it is easier to pray to the aspect that is closest to my heart at a particular moment. I pray to Parvati because she is the goddess of maternity and this is the most important thing in my life. I want the best for my children. I want them to grow up to be good people. So, Parvati is the one to whom I pray but I know she is a part of the supreme God like all other gods. I do not pray to her picture, I pray to her'.³⁹

Male informants also said that people find themselves in multiple life situations somewhat similar to those experienced by divinities. The holy texts and epic poems depict the lives of deities in conditions that mirror human experiences (e.g. family quarrels). While some aspects of life are more pertinent and significant at a young age, others are

³⁶ Arvind Sharma, *Classical Hindu Thought: An Introduction*, New York 2000, p. 67.

³⁷ Elder of Hanuman Kafue Temple.

³⁸ Female informant, age 34, Lusaka.

³⁹ Female informant, age 34, Lusaka.

more important at the end of life. Similarly, while some aspects of life are more important for women (e.g. taking care of children), others are important for men (e.g. participating in war). People seek solace in those forms of divinities which are closest to their hearts and life situations. This explains the existence of idols of disparate deities in temples and at the houses of devotees. ‘We must also remember that we create gods ourselves – when we pray to Ganesha, we give power of our thoughts and energy to him, and he gives this energy back. Through prayer, food offerings and decorating paintings and sculptures, we show our respect to the gods and the God that created all’.⁴⁰ A congregation member explained: ‘We have many idols in the temple but we know that each represents a different strength that humans need. Today I pray to Hanuman because it is Monday and it is his day. Every day is offered to a different god, not only days of the week but each day of the year. So I like to pray to the god of the day. I pray to Lakshmi because I need her wisdom and help in this stage of my life. I need to fix my finances and she is the goddess that represents wealth. I just feel that praying to her will bring help faster. But I know that when I pray to Hanuman or Lakshmi, I really pray to the omnipresent God in whom we all live’.⁴¹

Zambian Hindus do not perceive their religion as polytheism. They believe in one God. The fact that God has multiple manifestations and images does not make their religion polytheistic. Informants believe that God is in everything and everyone. So it does not matter to which representation people pray. A prayer directed to Vishnu or Lakshmi is equally addressed to the highest God, in the form the believers understand the best at a certain stage of life. ‘The human mind is limited, so it is easier for people to pray to a certain aspect of divinity. Even if simple, uneducated people pray to an idol, they still pray to the highest God, because it (God has no gender) created the materials from which idols are made. But most people pray to the god represented by the idol, not to the idol itself’.⁴²

People try to conceptualise God in ways that mirror their lives. This is unsurprising because images of God in many cultures and religious traditions are based on what the human mind can comprehend and associate with. In African pantheons, the God-creator is usually a distant figure who made the world and withdrew from it, thus becoming disinterested in the daily affairs of humanity. There are many lesser deities like water, fire, thunder and other elemental deities, but prayers and offerings do not go to them. Ancestral spirits are venerated by many indigenous Africans in Southern Africa, including many Christians. In Judaism and Christianity, God is a fatherly figure. Given the overt patriarchal nature of the ancient Jewish society, it is unsurprising that the Jewish Supreme Being ultimately emerged as a domineering Father figure (God, the Father). Once Christianity adopted this conception of God from the Jewish culture, Father God begot an equally powerful son to become the inheritor of his father’s kingdom. This religious construction

⁴⁰ Male informant, age 44, Lusaka.

⁴¹ Female informant, age 40, Lusaka.

⁴² Dhakar, informant.

corresponds to social realities and power relations in most societies. As in other religions, Hindus transferred their life experiences to religion. They have created a pantheon that helps them understand life and social relations and find the sense of their existence. People with an unwavering faith in God firmly believe that God created them, not that people created God and religions in their images.

Zambian Hindus' image of God and its various forms extends to the changes people go through in their lives. As they believe that everyone evolves, becoming a better version of themselves during their lifetime and in the reincarnation process, they project this belief onto gods who are forms of God. 'Gods can incarnate to help people. For example, Krishna is the reincarnation of Vishnu. People can be incarnations of gods, and they can become gods. Sri Ramakrishna is a good example. Since childhood, he was very spiritual because of his previous incarnations. He worshipped the goddess Mother Kali most often and begged her to show him her true form. Kali appreciated his worship and manifested herself to him. This experience made him even more convincing, and he became a powerful teacher, followed by millions. We now worship him because he became one with God and his teachings help us become pure and enlightened and stop the reincarnation cycle.⁴³ Asked why Hindus dress idols for different occasions, the informant explained; 'this is our way of worship. When we dress the figures that represent gods, we offer them our admiration and adoration'.⁴⁴

The only different answers come from ISKCON temple priest Jaya Govind Dasa. He explained that Krishna was the first God and that he was the highest divinity. He was before Rama, Shiva and Vishnu. Therefore, it is wrong to view Krishna as an incarnation of Vishnu. 'Krishna is the first and the highest God. His worldly life is the supreme representation of the highest God. Other gods are part of him, in the same way people are also part of him. The universe and all living beings were created for the pleasure of God. So, our task is to become better and evolve until we finally stop the reincarnation cycle, and become one with God. Krishna created himself, and then expanded himself to Lord Balaram, then to four Vishnus (Samkarshan, Anirudh, Badumana, Vasudara). Samkarshan expanded further as Mahavishnu, also called Karmadakshyi Vishnu, and then as Garbodakshai Vishnu, and from his navel a lotus flower grew, and from it Brahma was born. We can compare Krishna to milk that expanded into yoghurt: gods are yoghurt, they cannot become milk, but milk can always become yoghurt. Krishna is so omnipotent. You can also compare Krishna to a president of a country and other gods are like ministers. If you have a chance to speak to the president, you will not speak to ministers, so why pray to other gods when you can pray to Krishna. That is why conscious people pray directly to Krishna. However, if they pray to other gods and demi-gods whose pictures we have in our temples, they still praise the highest God. The pictures and sculptures help to pray but this is Krishna we pray to, not his statue'.⁴⁵

⁴³ Guneshananda, informant.

⁴⁴ Guneshananda, informant.

⁴⁵ Dasa, informant.

All our informants are adamant that no matter how long they may live outside India or are born in Africa, their understanding of God is similar to that of Indian Hindus. God is omnipresent and omnipotent. God, the creator of the universe, is too great and complex for the human mind to comprehend fully. This is the reason for having multiple deities. They help people pray and make contact with God as much as it is humanly possible.

Is Hinduism in Zambia influenced by native African beliefs?

All our informants feel strongly that African indigenous religious beliefs have not influenced Zambian Hindu beliefs. Although Christian missionaries attempted to eliminate ancestral veneration, the practice remains prominent among Africans. Many Zambians from various ethnic groups believe in their ancestors' presence and intervention in the daily lives of the living. Some people view ancestral spirits in ways that resonate with the Roman Catholic Church's conceptions of saints, while others put them at par with ancient prophets who conveyed prayers to God.⁴⁶ There is a belief in ATR and Hinduism that ancestral spirits can help or harm their descendants. As a result, these spirits receive great respect. However, in Hinduism, they are often treated as deities or semi-gods, while in African beliefs they are not. Many African Christians also believe Jesus was a kind of Great Ancestor because he called everyone his brothers and sisters who had one father in heaven. Hence, spirits can communicate with Jesus and in this way help their families.⁴⁷

Kumar and Cincala explain that for Hindus, ancestors are forever crucial because of the 'reverence, obedience, and the transmission of traditions/values from one generation to the next are some of the most profound responsibilities for families, clans, and tribes'.⁴⁸ This belief in ancestors' importance aligns with Southern African beliefs, but the practices differ. In Hinduism, the attitude towards ancestors is dissimilar because of the belief in reincarnation: people owe their physical birth to their lineage. This situation leads to the interchangeable use of the terms worship and veneration. In contrast to ART, Hindus have specific religious festivals dedicated to ancestors. They offer prayers called *pitrupaksha* for the repose of their souls. Also, devotees decorate small shrines at homesteads at stipulated moments of the year. The most important festival is *Pitru Paksha Shradh*, preceding the autumnal *Navratras*. Within ATR, contacts with their ancestors consist of

⁴⁶ Agnieszka Podolecka and Austin Cheyeka, 'Ng'angas – Zambian Healers-Diviners and their Relationship with Pentecostal Christianity: The Intermingling of Pre-Christian Beliefs and Christianity', p. 22.

⁴⁷ Ibidem. Such beliefs are not limited to Zambia. For more see: Agnieszka Podolecka, 'Spiritual healers in the Basotho society: An overview of traditional beliefs in the Christianised Lesotho', *Studies in African Languages and Cultures* 55 (2021), pp. 59–184; and: Agnieszka Podolecka and Peter White, 'The intersection of Indigenous African beliefs within Prophetic and Pentecostal African Christianity: a case study of the Owambo in Namibia', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 171 (2021), pp. 65–79.

⁴⁸ Santosh Kumar and Petr Cincala, 'Faith, Force, and Fear: Factors that Influence Ancestral Worship among Hindus', *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 16/1 (2020), p. 157.

daily practices such as offering good word, or a little food or drink. Applicants do not celebrate their ancestors via festivals.

When asked about ancestral reverence in African tradition and its potential influence on Hinduism in Zambia, all our Hindu informants said they have their own beliefs and do not need African ones. 'Hinduism in Zambia is the same as in India or other countries. African beliefs in spirits do not permeate our belief in Krishna. When one dies, their soul goes on in the reincarnation cycle'.⁴⁹ 'We know that the belief in the spirits' help is strong in Zambia but it does not affect us. And if black Africans embrace Hinduism, they understand that the soul goes to the next life after the death of the body. We build little shrines for our ancestors to commemorate them. Although we believe their energy is with us momentarily, we don't pray to them. We don't ask for help from them because they cannot help us in any way. They are gone, their souls have passed on'.⁵⁰ 'Hinduism in Zambia is the same as Hinduism in India. There is no belief in spirits like African in India, and there is none in Zambia'.⁵¹ None of our informants believed Hindus in Zambia mix Hinduism with African indigenous beliefs.

Do Hindus in Zambia proselytise and convert people?

Hinduism has no requirement for converting people of other religions to Hinduism. Holy texts do not require such actions, and in India, the fundamental belief in the responsibility for the previous deeds (*karma*) and the caste system attests that people are born to specific modes of life (including religion) as the result of their actions in previous lives. It is not forbidden to accept non-Hindus into Hinduism, to allow Europeans or Africans to change their beliefs, but it is also not expected from anyone to bring new believers to Hinduism.

There is no academic research that would show any active converting in Zambia. Even ISKCON, active in this field in other countries refrains from seeking new congregants among local people. They are open to receiving new believers, no matter their skin colour or background, but do not organise events or visit prisoners to find 'new souls'. There are several reasons for that: no tradition of such actions among Zambian Hindus, respect to their new country, focusing on Hindus (and taking believers over from one temple to another makes no sense as often people frequent two or three temples according to their needs). All informants state that there is no proselytisation in Zambia. 'We never convert people. God accepts reverence from every religion. It is important to be good and praise God to move up in the reincarnation cycle. There is no ritual that changes a Christian or Muslim into a Hindu. Everyone is welcome to the temple. I gladly speak to anyone who wants to learn but I never try to convert people'.⁵²

⁴⁹ Dasa, informant.

⁵⁰ Female informant, age 40, Lusaka.

⁵¹ Dhakar, informant.

⁵² Dasa, informant.

Priests are open, and the inclusiveness in some places attracts people to Hindu temples. In Rama Krishna Vedanta Centre, one can see a picture of Jesus and Mary hanging on the wall. ‘We wish all the people the best. If they are good people practising Christianity, let them do it. It may be their way of connecting to God. Some people do it through Krishna, others through Jesus. We want them all to feel welcome in our temple. Converting is not a proper thing to do. Everyone should find their own religion and ways in life’.⁵³ As a result, the number of Hindu believers is stable, though some white and native Africans have joined congregations in recent years. They did it of their own accord rather than due to deliberate proselytization endeavours. All priests state that there are less than 100 native Zambian people who embraced Hinduism, probably 60–70 persons. Their reasons for changing religion are spiritual. Most of them just come to temples to find peace, meditate, and seek protection from God. They do not change religion because of marriage or for financial reasons. They merely seek spiritual growth – declared all priests.

Reincarnation as the central belief

Reincarnation (in Sanskrit: *samsāra*) forms the base of Hindu beliefs. In the oldest Indian texts (*R̥gveda*, ca 13th century BC), there is evidence of rebirth within the same lineage.⁵⁴ The concept of reincarnation as we know it today only emerged around the 6th century BC in the Upanishads. Newer Buddhist and Hindu texts further elaborated the reincarnation theory. According to the new assumptions, the form into which a person reincarnated after death depended on the actions committed during life. This theory teaches that individuals are responsible for their actions and destiny. One’s actions determine the shape of their future incarnations. Actions and responsibility for them are called *karma* (Sanskrit: *karman*). If actions are good, the future incarnation will be favourable. If they are bad, it will be unfavourable. The ideal incarnation is in human form, as humans possess all cognitive tools that allow for ultimate liberation from the cycle of rebirth, which is the highest goal of life.⁵⁵

Therefore, whatever good or bad happens to a person untraceable to contemporary life must be the effect of the previous incarnation. On the one hand, the belief in the irresistible influence of the responsibility for the previous deeds (*karma*) and reincarnation explains the social system in India and a person’s place within it.⁵⁶ On the other, reincarnation reflects people’s belief in the possibility of change. If someone cannot achieve perfection during one lifespan, incarnating into a new life is the chance for redemption and improvement. Reincarnation has been the central religious idea in Hinduism and other religions that originated in India, such as Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. It is also prevalent in the

⁵³ Guneshananda, informant.

⁵⁴ Joanna Jurewicz, *Fire and Cognition in the R̥gveda*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 305–309.

⁵⁵ Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, p. 290.

⁵⁶ Arvind Sharma, *Classical Hindu Thought*, p. 98.

indigenous beliefs of some African communities, although there are no traces of the belief in the reincarnation of deities in Southern Africa. It is a belief that a soul is an immortal entity that goes from one body to another. Therefore, death is only a passage to the next life rather than its end or the passage to some esoteric purgatory or hell.

There is no strict definition of a soul, even though Hindus believe in it. *Bhagavad Gītā*, the sacred Hindu text, describes the soul as something which cannot be destroyed, which is eternal, but describable: 'Never there was a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings; nor in the future shall any of us cease to be. As the embodied soul continuously passes, in this body, from childhood to youth to old age, the soul similarly passes into another body at death'.⁵⁷ In most denominations of Hinduism, the soul is wholly or partly identical to God.

When asked about the belief in the concept of reincarnation, all priests and secular congregation members are adamant: there is no Hinduism without reincarnation. The idea of reincarnation equally applies to gods, even though they are particles of the supreme God. 'Even gods incarnate, people do as well. People can go back in the reincarnation cycle when they commit crime. They can also grow when they do good and practice spirituality. The aim of human existence should be perfection that ends the rebirth cycle'.⁵⁸ 'The great Trinity of Hinduism shows the wholeness of life: Rama is the creator, loyal husband and a good son who teaches people how to be good role models for everyone. Vishnu is a maintainer who comes to rescue when humanity is in danger. He incarnated nine times, and his final incarnation was lord Krishna. Shiva is a destroyer of evil. These deities are representations of one greatest divinity. When people finish their reincarnation cycle, they join this divinity and become one'.⁵⁹

Also, secular Hindus believe that gods can incarnate and see no contradiction in the fact that gods are God, but in many forms. 'Your question how gods can incarnate is a typical European, non-Hindu question. Why should they not? Yes, they are part of God but God is energy, and it is not a person. We are created from this divine energy and we incarnate in any bodies. Why then could gods, who come from the same divine energy not incarnate?' – asked one of the congregants. His two friends nodded their heads and agreed with him. 'People come to the temple to praise gods. They know that gods also reincarnate, the most famous example is Krishna who is Vishnu's incarnation. If gods incarnate, so must do the humans. You cannot practice Hinduism, if you do not believe in reincarnation. Reincarnation is like changing clothes. Once they are used, you use new ones. Our souls do the same'.⁶⁰

Zambian Hindus believe that religion permeates every aspect of life and revolves around reincarnation. All informants vehemently stated that reincarnation was at the centre of Hinduism. 'Truth is one, no matter which religion you follow, you will incarnate as long as it is necessary for you to become entirely pure and ready to become one with God.

⁵⁷ *Bhagavad Gītā* 2: 12.

⁵⁸ Dasa, informant.

⁵⁹ Elder of Hanuman Kafue Temple.

⁶⁰ Patel, informant.

All Hindus know that. All people, who come to the temple, and call themselves religious, believe in reincarnation'.⁶¹ Some informants were honestly surprised that a question about their belief in reincarnation was even raised. 'Of course we believe in reincarnation. It is the centre of our religion. You cannot be Hindu without believing in reincarnation' (male informant, age 50, Lusaka).

Caste system in Zambia

In India, reincarnation is the basis and explanation of the caste system. Both are fundamental tenets of the Hindu religion. Caste 'judgement' is a sort of evaluation of a soul, its current state and its progress in previous lives. Unless purified and released through extraordinary efforts, every soul must suffer the wanderings of transmigration. Its status in worldly life depends on the collected responsibility for the previous deeds (*karma*). There is a general belief in India that people get what they deserve, and if they are born into a low caste, they must have earned it in their previous lives. To change their life status, people must obey their caste's rules and obligations and accept their fate. They can only upgrade their caste by fulfilling their life's reason, doing good and change their karma into better.⁶² Instruction how to live a good life, eliminate bad responsibility (*karma*) and collect a good one are given in holy texts, although they are usually addressed to men. Hindu society has always been patriarchal, hence the focus is on men.⁶³ However, Hindu literature provides ample examples of righteous women to follow. Also great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi 'not only defended the rights and dignity of women but found them valuable fellow fighters', a role that was previously assigned to men.⁶⁴ Women can also influence their deeds (*karma*), and hence, future lives.

Even though the caste system is a critical part of Indian Hindus' social life, it seems to have lost its power in Zambia. In the beginning, with first two generations, it played an important law. The immigrants fresh from India remembered the social structures of the old country perfectly and applied them to the new ground. This even caused problems for the leadership, as people from lower castes wanted to get rid of the problems of the old continent and truly start anew, on equal terms. With time situation changed. Dotson believes that it is the result of moving to a very different social structure than in India: it 'has been eroded by the status battle with Whites; (...) traditional patron-client relations are all but destroyed; joint family organizations have changed towards a more nuclear form'; also the smaller number of Hindus caused limited potential of marrying

⁶¹ Guneshananda, informant.

⁶² H.N.C. Stevenson, 'Status Evaluation in the Hindu Caste System', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 84 (1954), p. 47. Arvind Sharma, *Classical Hindu Thought*, p. 98.

⁶³ Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, pp. 139, 177.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 320.

within the same caste.⁶⁵ The migration to Africa of the lower caste opened up new opportunities for them to better their lives elsewhere. When that opportunity presented itself, they seized it.

In 21st-century Zambia, neither does the caste problem exist nor a marriage system based on castes, family connections or dowries. These traditions are prominent in India. There are several reasons for this: many Hindus are Zambians in their third or fourth generation, and young people rebel against arranged marriages and want to find spouses themselves and form love relationships. Such practice would be difficult to enforce in Zambia among the 4400 Hindu minority comprising different castes. Also, newcomers from India must accept a reality in which Zambian Hindus do not know what caste their ancestors were when then they immigrated to Africa decades or even 100 years ago.

Some priests also reject the caste system because it is an affront to the modern ideals of a more inclusive and egalitarian society. In the case of ISKCON, such changes are inevitable because they have temples and devotees worldwide and from all races. In Zambia, they profess the idea of inclusiveness and openness. 'ISKCON is famous for inviting everyone. We are inclusive and have people of different races and backgrounds among us. We do not divide people. As a result, we do not uphold the caste system. In India, social tradition rather than religion divides people. This tradition was present in Zambia a few decades ago but no longer subsists. Young people choose their spouses themselves. They can marry a non-Hindu person since the caste system is no longer important'.⁶⁶ We encountered a similar sentiment in the Kafue community, where the temple is part of an agricultural and religious life. The leaders of the farming community, which consists of both Hindus and native Africans, are also the leaders in their agrarian enterprise. Community elders clearly stated: 'We do not have a caste system. Everyone is welcome to the temple, and we are very inclusive'.⁶⁷

Informants admit that there are some remnants of the caste system among older people, 'but 90% of marriages are love marriages now. Our parents give us a choice. They do not demand dowry like in India'.⁶⁸ Our informants revealed the abandonment of the dowry tradition and cessation of arranged marriages, which we will explain later. The informant freely gave the information in the context of discussions on the caste system.

Priests state that although the caste system has been a feature of religion for thousands of years, it is not a spiritual or religious thing. 'It is a social custom that started thousands of years ago, to protect women. Traditionally, sons inherited land and real estate. Therefore, the reason for paying the dowry was to give women a share of the family wealth. Unfortunately, with time it lost its good intentions and became an abuse of women. The same applies to the caste system. It is a social invention that has

⁶⁵ Floyd Dotson and Lillian O. Dotson, *The Indian Minority in Zambia*, p. 94

⁶⁶ Dasa, informant.

⁶⁷ Elder of the Hanuman temple.

⁶⁸ Female informant, age 30, Lusaka.

nothing to do with God. Fortunately, in India it is slowly changing. Inter-caste marriages are becoming more and more common and popular. Here in Zambia, it does not really apply. Most parents allow their children a choice of a spouse. I believe that the more spiritual people become, the less the caste system will matter'.⁶⁹ '20–30 years ago some parents wanted their children to stay within their caste. But we are a small community here in Zambia, just several thousand people. And sometimes we do not know to which caste we belong. So, parents do not force this system on us anymore. We do not judge people by their birth but by their deeds, and how much we like each other. We choose our friends the same way as Europeans do, based on love and friendship'.⁷⁰ Zambian Hindus give themselves much more freedom than is possible in India, even though their religion is the same as in the country of their origins.

What is God like – cognitive analysis of metaphors used by informants

This part of the paper analyses the images and concepts the informants use to describe God. This analysis employs the conceptual metaphor theory. According to this theory, conceptual metaphor is a process of thinking which takes place between two concepts (called conceptual domains) during which one concept (called the source domain) maps part of its features and its basic logic onto another (called the target domain). Usually, the target domain is more abstract than the source domain, and its metaphorical conceptualization facilitates its understanding. Conceptual metaphors are activated either *via* verbal or non-verbal signs. This analysis of the signs allows us to reconstruct the mental processes which motivate them.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) explain in their book *Philosophy in the Flesh*⁷¹ that concepts which seem to us abstract and which philosophers commonly use evolved from metaphorical thinking. Among other things, they discuss metaphors, COGNITION IS SEEING, and COGNITION IS LIGHT Descartes used. These metaphors map the basic logic of the source domain onto the target domain, according to which we can see when it is light. When we can see, we can cognise. They strongly motivate Descartes' ideas, attested in his concept of the light of reason. Thanks to metaphors, COGNITION IS SEEING, and COGNITION IS LIGHT; the reader understands that reason functions like light, i.e. that it enables cognition. We treat the concept of 'the light of reason' as an abstract because the deep entrenchment of these metaphors in Western culture makes its target domain lose its connectedness with the source domain, except for its basic logic. Thus, to understand it, we do not need to refer to any other elements of the source domain. We use this kind of abstract metaphor in this part of the paper.

⁶⁹ Guneshananda, informant.

⁷⁰ Female informant, age 30, Lusaka.

⁷¹ For more see: George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh. The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*, New York 1999.

Some metaphors are universal or transcultural (i.e. they can be found in many cultures), while others are culture specific. We will discuss more universal metaphors (Metaphor of Container, President-and-Country) and several culturally specific metaphors (Metaphor of Expansion, Lotus, Tree, Yoghurt, Play and Spectacle). We shall conclude with a fundamental metaphor rooted in the thought attested in the oldest Indian texts: the notion that knowledge precedes existence, and that a word, spoken at the appropriate time, in the appropriate place, and by the appropriate individual within the context of a ritual, possesses creative power – a metaphor of God-Creator-and-Being-Created.

Metaphor of Container

‘He is here and now, in India and your country too (...). You cannot capture God because “he is all around and inside us. Even atheists have God inside them, even though they do not believe. (...) God encompasses the whole Universe. He is the Universe and everything inside it” (male informant, age 44, Lusaka).’⁷² “He is outside and inside us. He is in every person, animal and plant” (Guneshananda). “God permeates everything. He is inside and outside” (Patel).

Most informants state that God is omnipresent. He is both inside and outside the cosmos and human beings. This metaphoric way of thinking about God uses an elemental concept of CONTAINER as its source domain. This concept belongs to the group of concepts called image schemas (Johnson 1990). Image schemas are pre-conceptual and pre-linguistic patterns of movements of our body, created in our very early childhood. The image schema of the CONTAINER is created when infants place something in their mouth and take it away from it (or not), throw toys out of the cot, and parents put them back there. Infants learn the three structural elements of a container: interior, boundary, and exterior.⁷³

There is a simple logic inherent to image schemas. In the case of a container, an object is either inside or outside. It cannot be inside and outside the container at the same time. This logic negates the use of the image schema of the container as a source domain for conceptualizing God. Consequently, we imagine the cosmos and human beings in terms of the CONTAINER, but at the same time, we understand that God has a peculiar nature of being simultaneously inside and outside the cosmos. What is impossible in everyday human experience is possible for God. Thus, we understand that God is a reality entirely different from everything we know, capable of transcendence.

The image schemas are general, and often concretized in metaphorical thinking, as we will see below. The Container metaphor may symbolize a pregnant woman’s womb (See Metaphor of Lotus below).

⁷² Secular male informant, age 50, Lusaka.

⁷³ Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*, Chicago 1990; George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind*, Chicago 1987.

Metaphor of President-and-Country

‘You can compare Krishna to a president of a country and other gods are like ministers. If you have a chance to speak to the president, you will not speak to ministers. So why does one pray to other gods when they can pray to Krishna? This is why conscious people pray directly to Krishna’ (Dasa).

One’s relationship with God and other gods is modelled after and conceived in terms of the relationship between the President of a country, his ministers and ordinary citizens. The concept of a king and his people is used in early Indian philosophical thinking (beginning with *Upaniṣads*) to conceive the relationship between the absolute Self (*ātman*) and other cognitive faculties. The gods are also seen as the cognitive faculties in the cosmos and other sentient beings (*Aitareya Upaniṣad* 1). Therefore, the metaphor the informant and the ISCKON Krishna temple priest evoke is more consistent than it appears at first glance. In the traditional metaphor SELF IS A KING, cognitive faculties are his people, and the dependence of cognitive faculties on the Self is highlighted. The informant highlights a hierarchy of power relations between manifestations of God and their possible acceptability.

Metaphor of Expansion

‘Krishna created himself, then he expanded himself to Lord Balaram, then to four Vishnus (Samkarshan, Anirudh, Badumana, Vasudara). Samkarshan expanded further as Mahavishnu, also called Karmadakshyi Vishnu, and then as Garbodakshai Vishnu, and from his navel a lotus flower grew, and from it Brahma was born’ (Dasa).

The creation of the Universe is conceived in terms of the expansion of God into his consecutive manifestations. As far as we know, no cognitive analysis of the Expansion metaphor has been carried out. However, based on Indian philosophy, the essential source domain of the expansion metaphor is the outflow of water (as during a flood or tide). The outflow of water is a complex concept with many features. Used as the source domain, it only maps its basic logic to expansion. Its strength, and to a large extent, its independence from human will, is life-giving. In these categories, world creation is an overwhelming manifestation of the only reality which gives life to everything. This way of thinking about creation is attested to in the oldest Sanskrit texts (*R̥gveda*), in which the concept of water outflow as the source domain is explicitly mentioned.⁷⁴ The Sanskrit word *śṛṣṭi*, for ‘creation’, comes from the verb *śṛj-*, meaning ‘to emit, pour forth, shed, cause to flow.’

Successive generations of philosophers have used this metaphor not only in relation to the creation of the world but also in relation to the mind. The use of this metaphor in relation to the mind is appropriate when one considers that the common belief in Indian

⁷⁴ Joanna Jurewicz, ‘*Tātaḥ kṣarati ākṣaram*. A history of a philosophical notion’, *Indologia Taurinensia* 38 (2012), pp. 106–121.

philosophy is that the creative manifestation of God is the mind. The persistence of the oldest ways of thinking adopted at the dawn of culture is evidenced by the fact that, as Suren Naicker has shown, the Water metaphor is one of Swami Vivekananda's most important metaphors.⁷⁵ The fact that the concept of water outflow motivates thinking about the creation of the world is confirmed by the words of the informant that a lotus flower has grown out of Garbodakshai Vishnu's navel, and as experience shows, lotuses grow in the water.

If one perceives creation and God's omnipresence in terms of the outflow of water, i.e. that it can be inside and outside containers, this metaphor becomes problematic unless the boundaries of containers are not fixed. This scenario contradicts our sedentary everyday experience. We cannot imagine a container from which water leaks not in one place but through all its walls. Is it still a container or not?

Metaphor of the Lotus

The creation of the universe in which we live begins when a lotus appears in the navel of the last manifestation of God (Karmadakshyi Vishnu), from which Brahma is born. This metaphor is deeply entrenched in tradition. Already in the *Mahābhārata* (the turn of the eras, e.g. 12.175.15), the image of the lotus emerging from the navel of God appears, in which Brahma arises. Brahma is a manifestation of God within the cosmos that finalises, organises and creates perfection. Within the frames of this metaphor, God is conceived in terms of a pregnant female, who gives birth to her child. The umbilical cord is conceived in terms of the stalk of the lotus, a symbol of her womb from which Brahma ensues as her baby. This metaphorical thinking indicates that every person is as safe with God as inside the mother's womb. The concept of the mother's womb is specific instance of the image schema of a CONTAINER (Metaphor of Container).

To fully understand the metaphorical correspondences, it is necessary to delve deeper into the tradition where the source domain for understanding creation was the delivery of a calf or foal. In this case, the lotus is the amniotic sac (for more detail, see Jurewicz (2010)). Understanding creation in terms of childbirth agrees with the metaphor of water: after all, amniotic sac is filled with amniotic fluid. Therefore, the image of Brahma unites two metaphors, the source domains of which are a lotus growing from water and leading to childbirth. These source domains map their basic logic onto the target domain. The concept of growth of a plant gives the basic structure and scenario. The phenomenon of birth highlights the relationship between humans and the manifestations of God. In traditional Indian thinking, the son is his father's replica. Informants do not think about a real lotus that grows or how a real child is born. They do not believe either that the cosmos appeared from a lotus. However, they use this metaphor in this context to understand and explain the complex and abstract concept of the creation of the cosmos.

⁷⁵ Suren Naicker, *A Cognitive Linguistic Analysis of Conceptual Metaphors in Hindu Religious Discours With Reference to Swami Vivekananda's Complete Worlds* (PhD Thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 2016).

Metaphor of the Tree

‘All gods and demigods are important but none as much as Krishna. Gods are like a tree, and what do you water when you want a tree to grow? The roots!. So Krishna is the root of everything. When you water Krishna with love and prayers, all the gods benefit like the trunk and branches of the tree. The gods then protect you’ (Dasa).

The informant uses the metaphor of watering a tree to explain how worshipping God (Krishna) pleases the gods. He compares the importance of worship to water, without which a tree cannot grow. This metaphor highlights the essential role of water in the growth of the tree while intentionally ignoring other characteristics of trees that, though numerous, are not relevant to his current discussion.

The image of a tree also appears in the *R̥gveda*, which discusses the creation of the cosmos. In this metaphor, God is symbolically equivalent to the roots of a tree. The roots nourish and support the trunk and branches, the symbol of the cosmos in this context. According to the *R̥gveda*, a great plant grows until it reaches the heavens, ultimately merging with the ocean wave. The moist soil in which this plant thrives highlights the importance of water as a symbol of the life that springs from God. Thus, this imagery illustrates and grounds the belief in the intricate relationship between God, the cosmos, and human existence (4.58.1).⁷⁶

Metaphor of Yoghurt

‘We can compare Krishna to milk that expanded into yoghurt. The gods are yoghurt. They, they cannot become milk, but milk can always become yoghurt’ (Dasa).

The use of the imagery of the transformation of milk as the source domain in philosophical metaphors is as ancient as Indian culture itself. Composed by ancient warriors, cowherds and priests to capture thinking under the influence of hallucinogenic plant called Soma, this imagery features in the *R̥gveda*. In later texts, like *Br̥hadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (ca 6 BCE), the concept of transformation of milk into cream is used to conceive the first creative manifestation of God identified with thinking Death (1.2.3).⁷⁷ The same concept is activated in the *Mahābhārata* (the turn of the eras) as the source domain of the complex creation of the nectar of immortality and other desired goods (1.1.15–17). In the classical philosophy of Sāṃkhya (ca 5 CE), the concept of transformation of milk into yoghurt is conventionalised when used to conceive the creative transformation of nature (called *prakṛti*). The main feature of this source domain transposed onto the target domain, is as follows: the creative transformation of one God who manifests as more perceptible and more material is seen in terms of transformation of milk into more solid

⁷⁶ For more see: Joanna Jurewicz, ‘*Tātaḥ kṣarati ākṣaram*’.

⁷⁷ Joanna Jurewicz, *Fire, Death and Philosophy. A History of Ancient Indian Thinking*, Warszawa 2016 (reprint: Delhi 2018), pp. 406–417.

and thicker form, i.e. yoghurt. This source domain is conceptually connected with the source domain of the outflow of water, especially since water is often identified with milk in Indian traditional thinking (e.g. *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.3). The informant highlights another feature of this transformation, i.e. the irreversibility of the process. While milk can become yoghurt, yoghurt can never become milk again. Thus, the gods are manifestations of God, but they cannot give up their divine bodies, unlike God, who exists both in its original pre-creation form (in terms of milk) and in its secondary form, the cosmos and its beings ('It does not matter which God you pray to because he or she is a part of the highest, ever-present God' said secular male informant in Lusaka). In this way, the existence of God again proves to be contrary to everyday experience; the logic of the source domain is not only mapped to the target domain but also split to express the sublimity and incomprehensibility of God.

The images of God are manifested and contained within the believers' perceptions of lesser deities and idols, highlighting God's presence through these forms. One informant poignantly captures this view thus: "God is in the idols we decorate and in you, and in me" (Dasa). God's omnipresence and ubiquitous presence in the created order justify image or idol veneration. Consequently, "Although they pray to other gods and demi-gods whose pictures we have in our temples, they still praise the highest God. The pictures and sculptures help to pray but it is Krishna we pray to, not his statue" (Dasa).

According to the logic of the source domain, the relationship between gods and God is similar to the milk-yoghurt relationship. It is a difference of degree and level rather than substance. The same is true for God's manifestation in human beings. "People can be incarnations of gods and they can become one with God, as exemplified by Sri Ramakrishna. The God we pray to is Swaminarayam, who used to be a living man. However, God blessed him and he evolved so much that he is God now. God is everywhere and if humans try, they can become God as well" (Patel). All our informants display a strong belief in reincarnation. Belief in reincarnation is crucial for understanding this metaphor because turning a person into God takes many lifetimes, just as milk does not instantaneously become yoghurt.

Metaphor of the Spectacle

'Reincarnation is like changing clothes. Once they are used, you use new ones. Our souls do the same' (Patel). Conceptualization of reincarnation in terms of changing clothes is explicitly expressed in the *Bhagavad Gītā* (2.22): 'As a person puts on new clothes, giving up old ones, similarly, the soul accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones'. This text was composed approximately between the 2nd century BCE and the 2nd century CE; thus, the aforementioned metaphor is deeply rooted in tradition.

It is worth outlining a broader experiential context. Patel himself evokes the experience of changing clothes once they become worn out in the same way that, when the body

ceases to function properly, it is replaced with a new one by our immortal essence, the soul – the same across successive incarnations and in all living beings. However, yet another experience might have shaped traditional Hindu thought, one closely tied to the metaphor of Play that will be discussed below. It is about watching a spectacle.

Within this framework, the cosmos is a stage upon which a performance takes place. Both the stage and the actors themselves are manifestations of the one divine reality, which is at the same time the spectator of the drama they enact. In everyday life, people forget this truth and live as if they were separate from one another and from the divine observer. Yet, from its perspective, it is the one who reveals itself to itself under various guises. Just as all actors eventually exit the stage when their roles conclude, so too does the divine reality, embodied in a particular human, cease its manifestation within them, only to change its costume and reveal itself anew. This absolute cognitive perspective is also accessible to human beings, notably through love and devotion to God.

Metaphor of Play

‘The universe and all living beings were created for the *pleasure of God* so our task is to become better and better and finally stop the reincarnation cycle and become one with God’ (Dasa).

The Metaphor of Play explains the creation and existence of the cosmos, which is viewed as a manifestation of God. This metaphor is prominently featured in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (1.4), although it is traceable back to earlier texts and oral traditions. Its most significant philosophical implication is that God does not depend on the world. As Huizinga and other play theorists have indicated, play is an autotelic activity that exists for its own sake.⁷⁸ It pleasures without external justification and occurs in a specific time and space governed by defined rules. Furthermore, only a free being willing to submit to its rules can engage in play. Play is repetitive and replicable.

These characteristics of play can be mapped onto to God’s creative activity. God freely participates in this play, limited only by His own will in His manifestations. Just as a human being is reborn after death, the cosmos cyclically arises and disappears. The goal of human life is to achieve perfection in this divine play, ultimately completing the cycle of reincarnation and becoming one with God. In this way, one participates in the play from the perspective of the whole of reality rather than from the viewpoint of a single manifestation.

⁷⁸ The opinion was expressed by: Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens. A Study of the Play-element in Culture*, London, Boston and Henley 2006 (first edition 1944); Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, Urbana and Chicago 2001 (first French edition 1958); Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety: Experiencing Flow in Work and Play*, San Francisco 2000; Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play. Game Design Fundamentals*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London 2004.

Metaphor of God-Creator-and-Being-Created (CREATION IS COGNITION)

Male secular Informant from Lusaka explains that gods created people but they also create gods themselves: ‘when we pray to Ganesha, we give power of our thoughts and energy to him, and he gives this energy back. Through prayer, food offerings and decorating paintings and sculptures, we show our respect to the gods and the God that created all’.

The above view reflects a conviction deeply rooted in Hinduism: that cognition expressed in words precedes existence, and that being is the creation of a word spoken at the beginning by the Creator, who transforms into the world. Man, in an appropriate state of consciousness and under the appropriate circumstances (ritual), enacts this principle on a microcosmic scale, transforming a mere image into a living manifestation of the Creator. This very metaphor – CREATION IS COGNITION – underpins the metaphors of Play and Spectacle, where the enactment of an activity is preceded by the assignment of roles to the participants and the provision of appropriate props.

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The analysis above highlights the significance of conceptual metaphors for Hindus in Zambia, including universal and culturally specific examples. One such metaphor is that of the Container, which is also prevalent in Christianity. In Christian thought, for example, the human body is a vessel for the soul or the Holy Ghost.⁷⁹ Christianity, as a dualistic religion, clearly distinguishes between the container and its contents. In contrast, Hinduism often presents fuzzier boundaries for this distinction.

The relationship between God and humanity, as well as the world, in both traditions, can be understood through metaphors of rulership, such as presenting God as a king or a shepherd, similar to depictions in Judaism and Christianity.

The metaphor of Expansion, particularly illustrated through the outflow of water, appears to be more culturally specific. However, there are parallels between this notion and the concept of emanation found in Neoplatonism and Sufism. Further investigation into these issues is still necessary.

The culturally specific metaphors identified by respondents demonstrate the resilience of cultural thinking, even among individuals raised in diverse social and cultural contexts. The motivation behind these metaphors is rooted in everyday experiences, reinforcing the enduring nature of these conceptual frameworks. The embodiment of cognition allows abstract thinking to be accessible through logic and scenarios derived from daily life. This context makes these ideas intelligible to respondents, as everyone is familiar with the growth and blooming of a lotus or other flowers, the appearance of trees, the process of making yoghurt, or the nature of a play or spectacle.

⁷⁹ 1 Corinthians 3: 16 reads; ‘Do you not know that you are the God’s temple and that God’s spirit dwells in you?’. See also: Timothy 2: 21, where Paul enjoins Timothy to become a vessel of gold and honour unto God.

Conclusions

All informants clearly state that Hinduism in Zambia is the same as it is in India, although their attitudes toward the caste system and arranged marriages are generally more relaxed. Almost 100% of Zambian Hindus are of Indian origin. Even though some individuals are third or fourth-generation Indians born in Africa, they have not blended their beliefs with indigenous African religions, unlike in the typology of African Christianity.

The fundamental aspects of Hinduism have remained intact, including beliefs in the responsibility for the previous deeds (karma) and reincarnation, the concept of a multi-faceted omnipresent God with various representations, and the human duty to fulfil life's purpose to achieve a better existence in the next incarnation. Zambian temples structurally resemble those in India. They contain numerous idols representing various gods and pictures. All the essential sculptures are imported from India, while locally produced artefacts must adhere to specific specifications regarding colour and style to avoid any aesthetic discrepancies with the imported religious items. These images closely depict and maintain the essential attributes of the respective gods.

What sets Zambian Hindus apart from their Indian counterparts is their general disregard for the caste system, a sentiment shared by not only the more impressionable and rebellious youth but also mature, secular individuals and priests. Research indicates that although Zambian Hindus appear to be more progressive regarding social freedom, their religious belief systems align closely with Hinduism in India. They believe in an omnipresent God represented by various deities, reincarnation, and the cause-effect cycle of responsibility (karma), while their beliefs remain distinct from native African traditions.

Cognitive analysis reveals the durability of cultural concepts and models. The images invoked by informants to explain religious and philosophical issues are rooted in the Sanskrit tradition developed in India over 2,000 years ago and preserved through culture. These concepts are passed down from generation to generation, transcending geographical distances to enable a uniform conception in India and Africa. The cognitive tools used in this analysis have enabled the researchers to recognize the internal coherence and logic that facilitate a prolific articulation of complex ideas. Abstract thinking is grounded in simple experiential concepts such as the lotus flower or yoghurt-making. Furthermore, the metaphors based on image schemas reveal thinking patterns that extend beyond the boundaries of a single culture.

However, the purity of Hinduism in Zambia and its freedom from African beliefs' influence raises some doubts. In colonial times, society was divided but Indians could interact with Africans, they were allowed to intermarry, but they did not. In the 21st century post-colonial Zambian Hindus still keep to themselves. The group of newcomers is small and does not come from marriage, but rather from a fascination with this religion. A group of young female informants admitted that they came from India to marry in Zambia. These were partially arranged marriages: Zambian Hindu men asked for wives and Indian parents chose their daughters. It cannot be suspected that all Hindus deliberately pursue a strategy of isolating themselves from outside influences by avoiding marriage with

white or black persons. Their relations with whites used to be limited by colonial social divisions, while relationships with Africans were usually good or neutral.⁸⁰ However, Hindus were more wealthy than black Africans, and often employed them as servants, they did not socialise.⁸¹ Nonetheless, thanks to inter-marrying among themselves, Hindus have been keeping their religion pure from any outside influence. Also, the non-proselytization tactics impacts Zambian Hinduism and maintains its puritanism. And here logical questions arise: Did (and still do at least some Zambian Hindus deliberately isolate themselves, not wanting any influence from other peoples and religions? Did they keep away from non-Hindus and their influence because they were used to staying within their own group, like in their caste in India? If Africans became members of their society, would they not be treated as inferiors, would they not become a lower caste by default? Was not the isolation from African influences a transfer of caste thinking to African soil? The above questions will remain unanswered because all Informants are aware that the caste system is perceived by mostly Christian Zambians, both black and white, and those of mixed heritage, as unjust, backward, and unable to keep up with changes in the modern world. Also, within their own society, Zambian Hindus do not employ the caste system, all Informants were adamant that all Hindus are equal.

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⁸⁰ Haig 2010, p. 128.

⁸¹ Garry Bridge, 'Gentrification, Class and Community: a Social Network Approach', in: Rogers, A. & Vertovec, S. (eds.) *The Urban Context: Ethnicity, Social Networks and Situational Analysis*, Oxford 1995, p. 281.

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