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Multiculturalism, Ethnicity, Religious Identity
and the 1.5 and Second Generation
in Two Los Angeles-Area Sri Lankan Buddhist Temples

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts
in Asian American Studies

by

Mihiri Uthpala Tillakaratne

2012

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2012

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Multiculturalism, Ethnicity, Religious Identity,
and the 1.5 and Second Generation
in Two Los Angeles-Area Sri Lankan Buddhist Temples

by

Mihiri Uthpala Tillakaratne

Master of Arts in Asian American Studies
University of California, Los Angeles, 2012
Professor Purnima Mankekar, Chair

ABSTRACT:

This qualitative study examines religious engagement and ethnic and religious identity formation in 1.5 and second generation Sri Lankan American young people at Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra and the Sarathchandra Buddhist Center, two Sri Lankan Sinhala Theravāda Buddhist temples in the greater Los Angeles area. This study analyzes data from participant observation at 3 temples, 10 in-depth interviews, and a survey of 50 respondents. It explores the two different approaches these temples take toward their noncoethnic congregation and the 1.5 and second generation: *cultural reconstitution* and *cultural preservation*. Specifically, the study considers these generations' varied temple experiences, relationships with clergy, and negotiations of multiple layered identities. Ultimately, regardless of self-labels, 1.5 and second generation's views on self-identity participate in different types of resistance: resistance as pride in their difference, resistance against a mainstream American identity, and resistance against being racialized as Other.

The thesis of Mihiri Uthpala Tillakaratne is approved.

Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo

Min Zhou

Purnima Mankekar, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study illustrates how temples, in running a congregation in America, are spaces that shape ethnic and religious identity. In examining how 1.5 and second generation Sri Lankan Americans in Southern California interact with their ethnic identity, religion, and religious spaces, I begin with the assumption that religious institutions are also social institutions, both in the homeland and in the immigrant community in America. However, these institutions take on a particularly significant role in the lives of immigrants, especially in the lives of the younger generation born and raised in America. Despite the decades-long history of Sri Lankans in America, there has been little academic work on 1.5 and second generation Sri Lankan Americans. This study examines how the 1.5 and second generations participate in both the Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra and the Sarathchandra Buddhist Center, two Sri Lankan Sinhala-majority Theravāda temples in Southern California.¹ Dharma Vijaya, located in Los Angeles' Crenshaw/Arlington Heights area, began in the late 1970s and was officially established in 1980. The Sarathchandra Center, located in North Hollywood, began in 1995, with a satellite temple opening in 2011. Both the temples also differ from other Southern California Sri Lankan temples in their congregations' racial and ethnic makeup, as they have been consistently and purposefully multicultural and multiracial since their founding. I begin by exploring how these two temples approach the propagation of Buddhism in America. That is, how do they approach the 1.5 and second generation, and what approaches do they take towards fostering a multicultural congregation? Most importantly, how do these approaches affect how the 1.5 and second generation see themselves as Sri Lankan, American, and Buddhist?

¹ The Sinhala are the majority ethnicity in Sri Lanka, with a vast majority identifying as Theravāda Buddhist.

The Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra and the Sarathchandra Buddhist Center differ in many ways, mainly in the numbers of years they have existed and the role of the lay community. Though both temples are similar in their purposeful catering to a noncoethnic community, throughout the course of my research, two distinct approaches to the 1.5 and second generation emerged. I call these two approaches “cultural preservation” and “cultural reconstitution.” Cultural preservation, as I use it here, is the passing down of cultural beliefs and practices to the next generation as they exist in the homeland. Cultural reconstitution, however, is the passing down of beliefs and practices in such a way that allows for change in a new environment. The distinction is that cultural preservation requires a sense of performativity and preservation. It is, therefore, a less reliable indicator of the actual passage of cultural norms, as it requires that the exact trappings of culture are reproduced in full without making it necessary for the next generation to understand what it is they are doing. In contrast, cultural reconstitution requires active socialization and is therefore more likely to produce enculturated subjects, since subjects both have an understanding of cultural practice and have a sense of how their culture fits with their diasporic world.

I argue that the Sarathchandra Center approaches the 1.5 and second generation through the lens of cultural preservation, while Dharma Vijaya’s approach involves cultural reconstitution. As such, the monks at the Sarathchandra Center consider this generation as an extension of the first generation, assuming that the 1.5 and second generation’s religious engagement in their religious spaces and personal beliefs are the same as the first. The maintenance of Buddhism in America, then, is dependent on preserving Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition and hierarchal relations as they exist in the homeland. In contrast, the monks at Dharma Vijaya take an adaptational approach to this generation, recognizing that the 1.5 and second

generation is a different entity than the first. Dharma Vijaya has more egalitarian lay/clergy relations, and the temple actively encourages the younger generation to take leadership roles. With this approach, the continuity of Buddhism depends on change for a new context.

In this study, I explore the dynamic nature of these temples spaces and the people therein, and acknowledge the complex nature of a lived religion. Buddhist religious studies narrowly focus on doctrinal and theoretical aspects of the religion, and omit discussions of people and practice. The existing discussion on Buddhism in America that explores people and practice separates “Asian” from “American,” effectively ignoring those individuals who encompass and go beyond these categories – that is, Asian Americans. Further, this discussion assumes that religious identity is both static and dichotomous. It is into this existing discussion that this study intervenes, by examining how these binaries play out, if they exist at all, in these two temples.

The Sri Lankan Population in America

Current Populations

Sri Lankan Americans were only listed as a separate group starting with the 2000 U.S. Census. Prior to that, they were listed under “Other Asians.” However, U.S. immigration statistics have Sri Lankans as a specific category arriving in America starting from 1972, before which they were previously listed as “Other Asians,” as with the U.S. Census. As seen in the table below, California and Los Angeles County have the highest concentration of Sri Lankans in the United States, and U.S. immigration statistics list California and the city of Los Angeles as the most-used port of entry for Sri Lankan immigrants since 1972.

TABLE 1.1: Sri Lankan American Population in the U.S.²

Location	2000	2010
U.S. Total	38,596	45,381
California	7,212	11,929
New York	3,480	6,153
Texas	1,384	2,916
Maryland	1,430	2,836
New Jersey	1,357	2,656
Virginia	798	1,529
Florida	660	1,517
Illinois	646	1,320
Massachusetts	771	1,254
Pennsylvania	496	1,100
Ohio	553	1,029

TABLE 1.2: Sri Lankan Population in Southern California³

Location	2000	2010
California Total	7,212	11,929
Los Angeles County	3,716	5,380
Orange County	843	1,523
Riverside County	254	555
San Diego County	223	451
Santa Barbara County	106	125

1972-1980s

My mother immigrated to the United States in 1981 to begin a Ph.D. program at UCLA. When she arrived in the United States, however, she was initially unable to find any fellow Sri Lankans. Since she was part of the first wave of Sri Lankan immigrants to the States, i.e. those that came in the late 1960s (or even earlier) through the early 1980s, there were few support systems fostered by chain migration. From 1972-1979, 3,230 Sri Lankans were admitted to the

² U.S. Census.

³ Ibid.

country, and during the 1980s, 5,546 Sri Lankans immigrated.⁴ As a result, there were only a few thousand Sri Lankans living in the U.S. when my mother first arrived in Los Angeles. It was only after meeting Bhante Walpola Piyananda, a monk at the newly established Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra, did my mother integrate herself into the Southern California Sri Lankan community. Thus the temple became a way of connecting immigrant Sri Lankans together and helping them adjust to America. Over 30 years later, Dharma Vijaya has expanded to include several homes adjacent to the temple, where recent immigrants (whether they are Buddhist or not) can stay until they find a more permanent place. The temple, then, became an ally not just for religious individuals, but also for those who are trying to find their way in a new environment. It was through Dharma Vijaya that she found the Sri Lankan American Association of Southern California (SLAASC). SLAASC was founded in 1972 when only 40 Sri Lankans were naturalized as American citizens. By the time my mother arrived in 1981, 155 Sri Lankan Americans had naturalized, and by 1991, 464 had naturalized.⁵

In the early 1980s, those Sri Lankan families who had settled were almost all were adults: for example, in 1984, out of 8,813 non-immigrants arriving in the U.S., 760 were under 15 years old, and 232 were between 15-19 years old.⁶ This first wave of Sri Lankan immigrants consisted primarily of older, more established professionals and/or scholars. Raymond Williams notes that “South Asian immigrations in the 1970s were about the best educated, most professionally advanced, and successful of any immigrant group, and their income recorded in the 1980 census

⁴ Statistical Yearbooks of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1972-1997.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

ranked second highest among ethnic groups in the county.”⁷ Further, most of these professionals had received an English medium instruction and spoke English fluently. Most were upper-class Sri Lankans, whose parents – and in some cases, grandparents – had grown up speaking English, as Sri Lanka had been a British colony only a few decades prior. Younger, non-professional immigrants, like my mother, were mostly undergraduate and graduate students who also spoke English well. Therefore, at a place like Dharma Vijaya, even though the 1.5 and second generation was physically present at the temple, because of their backgrounds, neither they nor their parents were very involved in making the temple a more cultural institution. Further, the second-generation Sri Lankan American children who regularly attended temple services during this time were the children of professionals, all of whom had either never visited Sri Lanka or had only been there once or twice in their lifetimes.

Mid-1980s-1990s

The mid-1980s and early 1990s saw a change in direction for South and Southeast Asian Buddhist groups in America. Now, “the most pressing concerns were related to second-generation issues. As children and grandchildren became thoroughly Anglicized and Americanized, the process of translating Theravāda traditions into American forms began in earnest...”⁸ There such a sudden shift in focus for these institutions because those institutions that started in the late 1970s and early 1980s became established and stable enough by the 1990s. Perhaps it is only because these temples became established that the role of the temple in immigrant life began to change. However, this change occurred largely because of the new types

⁷ Raymond Brady Williams, “South Asians in the United States – An Introduction,” in Harold Coward, John R. Hinnells, and Raymond Brady Williams, editors, *The South Asian Religious Diaspora in Britain, Canada, and the United States* (Albany: The State University Press of New York, 2000), 215.

⁸ Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 139.

of immigrants that arrived in the U.S. The more established and professional Sri Lankan immigrants of the first wave soon became the new type of American; half of the naturalized U.S. citizens from 1981-1990 were born in Asia.⁹

As this first wave became settled in their new lives as American citizens, a new group of Sri Lankans was arriving in the U.S. Compared to 1980, 1990 saw a rise in immigration from Sri Lanka to the U.S. by 275.3%.¹⁰ With this new wave of Sri Lankans also came a new type of immigrant. Though some of these new immigrants were the older, more established professionals of the 1970-1980s period, most were not as educated and did not have a professional background. In the past 20 years, more and more Sri Lankans have arrived in the U.S. Much of this is a result of the U.S. Diversity Visa lottery, which is the “congressionally mandated Diversity Immigrant Visa Program makes available up to 55,000 diversity visas (DVs) annually, drawn from random selection among all entries to persons who meet strict eligibility requirements from countries with low rates of immigration to the United States.”¹¹ From 1995-2010, 5,254 Sri Lankans came to the U.S. under the diversity visa lottery.¹² Every year, those Sri Lankans that win this lottery bring their families with them, significantly increasing the population of Sri Lankans in the U.S. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, there were 45,381 people of Sri Lankan descent in the U.S., with current estimates measuring this population at 51,259 people.¹³

⁹ Williams, 214.

¹⁰ Ibid., 215.

¹¹ U.S. Department of State. “Diversity Visa (DV) Program.” Online at http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/types/types_1322.html. Accessed 7 June 2012.

¹² Immigrant Visas Issued by Issuing Office (All Categories, Including Replaced Visas) Fiscal Years 1992-2011. Online at <http://www.travel.state.gov/pdf/MultiYearTableXV.pdf>. Accessed 7 June 2012.

¹³ U.S. Census Bureau. American Fact Finder. <http://factfinder2.census.gov>. Accessed May 14 2012.

For the most part, the new wave of diversity visa lottery immigrants are not professionals and are not part of the “Brain Drain,” since the diversity lottery requires a two-year work related experience or the equivalent of a high school diploma. These diversity visa immigrants approach the issue of the second generation differently than the 1970s and 1980s immigrants, as many of these immigrants speak Sinhala, not English, at home with their children. Since they have had this exposure to language, this 1.5 and second generation has a different relationship with their heritage, and many of them were born and/or have memories of Sri Lanka. As some of the young people I encountered during this study related, those who are not able to speak or pronounce Sinhala are still able to comprehend it when it is spoken to them. Further, immigrants arriving in the late 1990s or later applied to bring their parents over in a chain migration pattern, even for only several months. As a result, the 1.5 and second generation are able to connect to their homeland through their grandparents, as well.

The early 1990s saw a definite change in the ways Sri Lankan Buddhists interacted with each other. Mahinda Deegalle notes that, in going to a temple, Sri Lankans “have the opportunity to meet and share their experiences with other Sri Lankans who are in a similar situation. They can communicate in Sinhala and have [the] opportunity to partake in Sri Lankan food, drink tea, discuss religious matters, social problems... [and] problems in creating a Sri Lankan atmosphere at home...[and] to seek facilities to nurture children in a Sri Lankan way.”¹⁴ This change in the type of immigrant brought about further changes in the religious institution. The same connections that brought my mother to Dharma Vijaya, and the same social space of the temple, were now being used to create new ways of connecting the younger generation to Sri

¹⁴ Mahinda Deegalle, “Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhism in London: Religiosity and Communal Activities of a Diaspora Community,” in Jacobsen, Knut A., and P. Pratap Kumar, eds. *South Asia in the Diaspora: Histories and Religious Tradition*. (Boston: Brill, 2004), 69. Though Deegalle is describing the experiences of the Sri Lankan diaspora in the United Kingdom, his description of the altered nature of the Buddhist temple is particularly relevant.

Lanka. As a result, the structure of some of these temples had already begun to change during the early 1990s. At Dharma Vijaya in particular, instead of rote Buddhist study, now “following the religious class period, the children ... [dispersed in different groups to] learn both to read and write Sinhala.”¹⁵ Further, the temples that began during this time also included Sinhala study into their curricula. Therefore, religious institutions were required to change in order to meet the new demands of the lay communities they served.

Examining the role of temples with respect to ethnic identification is significant because unlike many other ethnic groups, the Sri Lankan Sinhalese do not settle in ethnic enclaves. As alluded to earlier, temples and other religious spaces, then, become sites for both religious and social congregation. Dharma Vijaya and Sarathchandra in particular, with their relatively large congregations (compared with the 10 other Sinhala Buddhist temples in Southern California), provide a lens into how temples as social spaces shape ethnic identity in their adaptations to running a congregation in America.

Raymond Williams argues that:

Ethnicity is a product of local environment; hence migration always transforms ethnicity as migrants create new groups in new contexts... [Ethnicity, then] is created new in each setting. Thus ethnic and religious groups are ‘Made in the USA’ by new immigrants, and the relationship between ethnicity and religion is recreated and transformed in the geographical and temporal transitions.¹⁶

For example, this new ethnicity and religion is created when a first generation Sunday school teacher at Dharma Vijaya uses history of the Buddhist flag’s design to discuss colonialism in Sri Lanka and the anti-colonial Buddhist revivalism of the 19th century. When she discusses Wesak (the May celebration of the birth, enlightenment, and passing of the Buddha) and Poson (the June

15 Numrich, Paul David, *Old Wisdom in a New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravada Buddhist Temples* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 103.

¹⁶ Williams, in Coward et al, 151.

celebration of the transmission of Buddhism to Sri Lanka) with her students, she gets recent Sri Lankan immigrant children to describe their memories of the actions and “fun” of the festivals. Though she discusses the Buddhist meaning of these objects and festivals, she also connects it to Sri Lankan cultures, art, and music. This is something unique to the religious diaspora. Though it is true that Sinhala Buddhists and Sinhala Christians share similar cultural experiences, as members of the majority ethnicity in Sri Lanka, it is when these experiences are translated to a new environment that they are changed. As a result, “religious commitments... allow the individuals to express different elements of identity in different contexts.”¹⁷ Further, “many immigrants affirm that they are even more religious following immigration than in their native place... when everything is changing, religion provides a firm, transcendent base from which to negotiate those changes.”¹⁸ In this way, these immigrants use religion strategically to invoke the homeland. This reference to the home country reflects the new role that religion takes in immigrants’ lives after they arrive in America, as well as the ways that these immigrant-run religious institutions are transformed as a result of the new concerns being an immigrant community brings.

Interrogating My Role as Insider

I selected one of these sites because of my personal history with it. My mother is on Dharma Vijaya’s board of directors and both of my parents were Sunday school instructors (my mother was the principal in the 1990s). I have attended the temple since I was a toddler as a Sunday School student and eventually, as a Sunday school instructor. As such, I have a familiar and a familial relationship with both the temple’s clergy and its more influential lay members

¹⁷ Ibid., 152.

¹⁸ Ibid., 144.

and board members. In addition, the Chief Abbot of Dharma Vijaya, Rev. Dr. Walpola Piyananda, has encouraged me over the past eight years to assume a more active role within and outside the temple. Within the temple, he has had me deliver sermons and emcee during events on festival days. Outside the temple, he has me be a voice of the temple and to represent Buddhism in general during important media-heavy events (for instance, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and its subsequent anniversaries). As a result, I am a visible presence at the temple as well as a figure of authority for the younger members of the congregation. Thus, there were definite power dynamics at play both during my formal interviews and with my more informal conversations with congregation members. In fact, during one event at which I was the emcee, I managed the physical temple space by directing congregation members toward where I felt they needed to go. As much as I strived for transparency during the course of my research, my role no doubt influenced not only my own reflection of events and conversations but, also, other clergy and laity's interactions and discussions with me. In the same way, since the monks at the Sarathchandra Buddhist Center ask me to give presentations on festival days and occasionally teach *daham pāsala* ("Buddhist religious school") I am a visible presence there as well.

Several texts have helped me examine my own methodology and findings and have helped me fine-tune my data collection techniques, especially since I was concerned about my own role as an active member of the temple and Sunday school instructor. Ruth Behar's *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* specifically deals with the intricacies of ethnographic research blurring the researcher/researched dichotomy when the researcher is closely connected to his or her field site. In *When Women Come First: Gender and Class in Transnational Migration*, Sheba George conducts her research on immigrant experience within an Indian Orthodox Christian Church through the regular avenues of interviews and

participant observation. Her research methodology becomes more complex once she becomes embedded in her field site by volunteering in a nursing home, getting involved in the community church, and staying in the homes of her interviewees. George discusses how her presence affects the communities she is in, and how she has to “maneuver between the identities of researcher and community member.”¹⁹ For example, she mentions that her clothing at an event resulted in a separate discussion meeting about young women’s clothing in general. In this way, George ends up transforming the very field she has sought to “capture.” Val Colic-Peisker also discusses the implications of being an ethnographer insider, where research into one’s own community with one’s peers reflects individual experience.²⁰

Similarly, Mary Pattillo’s *Black on the Block* is an ethnography of her own community, where she takes stock of her own role in the neighborhood and how that affects her research by “interrogating [her] own role.”²¹ Pattillo writes,

Doing this research, I have had access to many audiences and been involved in diverse forums. In some I am an expert and in others I am an untutored neophyte, but in all of them I am a *participant observer* and it is my voice that is requested and respected.²²

My access and navigation of a various spaces depended on my social capital. Though much of my social capital was gained through my parents’ involvement and achievements, I have received some recognition as well. My Sinhala and Pāli language ability, involvement at

¹⁹ Sheba George, *When Women Come First: Gender and Class in Transnational Migration* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 12-13.

²⁰ Val Colic-Peisker, “Representing One’s Own ‘Ethnic Community’: The Experience of an Awkward Insider,” in Hume, L. & Mulcock, J. (eds.) *Anthropologists in the Field: Cases in Participant Observation* (West Sussex: Columbia University Press, New York, 2004).

²¹ Mary Pattillo, *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 141.

²² Ibid.

Dharma Vijaya as a Sunday school instructor, my nonprofit work in Sri Lanka, and the perceived prestige of my Harvard degree gives me an “authenticity” in my “Sri Lankan-ness,” and in my supposed commitment to Sri Lanka/Sri Lankan values, and as an educated person. All of this allowed me access to spaces I otherwise might not have had.

In interrogating my own role within my community, I turn to Monisha Das Gupta’s discussion of South Asian American immigrant rights activists. Das Gupta explores the differences between what she terms “place-taking politics” and “space-making politics,” which “operate concurrently but in tension with each other.”²³ The former indicates the “India-centered, elite, accommodationist politics” of the mid 1980s and 1990s, while the latter “struggle to transform oppressive institutions and systems go through collective action and empowerment.”²⁴ The difference, then, is that the changes that place-takers make are changes that benefit them and reflect the cultural and political hegemony in the homeland, while the changes the space-makers make are challenging this hegemony. Das Gupta makes an important point on cultural preservation when she notes, “place-takers rework notions of culture to restore the social privileges they enjoy at home.”²⁵ This place-taking is especially true of the Sri Lankan community in Southern California. This reshaping of culture “in their own image,” so to speak, is an integral parts of community events.

As Pattillo interrogates her own role in her community and the power dynamics therein, I must interrogate my own role at both temples, particular Dharma Vijaya. Pattillo brings up the

²³ Monisha Das Gupta, *Unruly Immigrants: Rights, Activism, and Transnational South Asian Politics in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 256.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

issue of allegiances “being implicated” in certain philosophies.²⁶ Though Pattillo discusses economic implications based on funding sources, I am implicated in certain political point of views. For instance, the Rev. Dr. Walpola Piyananda has a leadership role in the current Sri Lankan government, where he is the Chief Advisor to the President of Sri Lanka on International Religious Affairs. Further, Sri Lanka’s current Defense Minister, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, was an active member of Dharma Vijaya and was previously a member of its Board of Directors. In this way, my active role in the temple and even my research on it has been interrogated by diasporic members of Sri Lanka’s Tamil minority as privileging the Sinhala Buddhist majority. Further, my Sunday school lessons primarily discuss Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhist theology, mythology, history, and art. By solely presenting a Sinhala Buddhist worldview during these lessons, I am in fact perpetuating the erasure of minority histories, privileging Sinhala Buddhist history, and participating in place-taking.

Religion, Temples, and the 1.5 and Second Generation

Many authors have examined the role that religion plays for the Asian American 1.5 and second generation. For example, Min Zhou and Carl Bankston argue that, for Vietnamese Americans, “involvement with ethnic religious institutions can strengthen ethnic identification while also reaffirming ethnic affiliation.”²⁷ In fact, the more youth went to their religious institution, the more likely they were to identify as their ethnicity/nation (i.e. Vietnamese), and not as a “hyphenated-American.” As Zhou and Bankston discovered, there was a linear relationship between church/temple attendance and coethnic friendship. In this way, the

²⁶ Pattillo, 145-146.

²⁷ Min Zhou and Carl L. Bankston, *Growing Up American: How Vietnamese Children Adapt to Life in the United States* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1998), 99.

religious community and ethnic community are equated. However, since the temples I am examining are multicultural, this issue of self-identification or self-description is something that is vital to my research. Therefore I explore what self-descriptors these young people use when being Buddhist does not necessarily mean being Sri Lankan.

Further, Sharon Kim examines multiraciality at Korean churches in Los Angeles, specifically founded and developed by the second generation. Similar to this study, Kim finds competing notions of what it means to be Protestant, where some pastors seek to preserve the church as a monoethnic space, while the second generation wishes to expand the church outside of ethnic ties and encourage the development of a multicultural congregation.

Natalie Quli examines the lay/clergy relationship in four Northern California Sri Lankan Buddhist temples, and increase in lay founded, funded, and operated temples.²⁸ She also examines noncoethnic presence within Sinhala majority congregations, and focuses primarily on the transnational patterns of laicization of Buddhist temples in both Sri Lanka and California. She only discusses the second generation briefly, and only within an examination of first generation issues with language. Bhikkhu Deba Mitra examines the relationship between the first generation and second generation Sri Lankan Canadians in Toronto.²⁹ Though he focuses on Sri Lankan second generation religious identity, he does so through the lens of the first generation, and specifically on the particular texts the first generation use in attempting to pass on Buddhist knowledge. While Bhikkhu Deba Mitra explores the intersections of Sri Lankan and Buddhist, I explore the intersections of Sri Lankan, American, and Buddhist.

²⁸ Natalie Quli, "Laicization in Four Northern Californian Sri Lankan Buddhist Temples" (PhD diss, Graduate Theological Union, 2010).

²⁹ Bhikkhu Deba Mitra, "Dhamma Education: Transmission and Reconfiguration of the Sri Lankan Buddhist Tradition in Toronto"(PhD diss, Wilfrid Laurier University), 2011.

American Buddhism

Post-1965 Asian American Buddhist congregations have been a popular topic of study over the past twenty years. Though Buddhism in America is a widely researched topic, much of the theoretical frameworks and discourse has been stagnant. In this section, I will examine the problematic nature of placing Buddhism in America into dichotomous categories, while also exploring the history of the dialogue on Buddhism in America.

Definitions: "American Buddhism," "Ethnics" versus "Converts"

Before we begin, we must define several keywords that are crucial to this discussion. Firstly, we must explore what exactly "American Buddhism" is, and how it differs from the phrase "Buddhism in America." "American Buddhism" supposedly refers to any type of Buddhism as it is practiced in America by anyone who chooses to practice it. Charles Prebish first discussed the concept of two Buddhisms in *American Buddhism*. With respect to its actual usage in academia, as well as the mainstream, and within the discourse of Buddhism in America, it refers to the practice of Buddhism in America by non-"ethnic" Buddhists. This brings us to our second definition, which lies in the dichotomy between supposed "ethnic" and "convert" Buddhists. Kenneth Tanaka categorizes four types of Buddhists, two of which are "ethnic" or "Asian American" Buddhists, while the other two are "convert" Buddhists. The "ethnic" Buddhist category includes "New Asian American Buddhists (those who have mostly arrived in the United States since the 1960s: Vietnamese, Thai, Korean, Cambodian, Myanmar, Laotian, and Sri Lankan)" and "Old-line Asian American Buddhists (those who were established before World War II: Chinese and Japanese)."³⁰ That is, since these "ethnic," or "heritage" Buddhists

³⁰ Tanaka, Kenneth. "The Individual in Relation to the Sangha in American Buddhism: An Examination of 'Privatized Religion,'" *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Vol. 27, 2007, 116.

have been born into Buddhism, they have more of a familial and cultural connection to Buddhism rather than a religious one. “Convert” Buddhists, on the other hand, are those individuals who discovered Buddhism later in life and have since converted (as the name implies). Notably missing are several types of Buddhists: 1) those Buddhists who are children of converts and therefore were born into Buddhism (who, from this categorization, we could consider “ethnic” or “heritage” Buddhists), 2) Buddhists of color who may have a distant familial connection to Buddhism that they are rediscovering, and 3) the 1.5 and second generation. It is this third category that I explore in my study.

Jan Nattier: The “Baggage” of “Ethnic” Buddhists

Inherent to this discussion of “ethnic” and “convert” is the idea that “ethnic” Buddhists practice a less pure version of Buddhism, one that is “colored” by culture and ritual. Similarly, Jan Nattier describes such ethnic Buddhists as “baggage Buddhists.”³¹ This use of the word baggage to some would suggest the transnational nature of Buddhism. However, Nattier’s and others usage of the term “baggage” suggests the pejorative sense – as in, such Buddhists bring too much “baggage” with them to the table of American Buddhism. It is assumed, then, that “American” means non-ethnic, white, and that “American Buddhism” is something fresh without the supposed “baggage” of the past. I will not try to deny that cultural continuity is an important aspect of Sinhala Buddhist temples, or that the members of these temples are trying to recreate something they themselves experienced in the homeland. In fact, this study looks at how these two temples approach both cultural preservation and reconstitution. However, to sweep this

³¹ Nattier, Jan. “Who is a Buddhist? Charting the Landscape of Buddhist America,” in Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth Tanaka eds., *The Faces of Buddhism in America*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998, 190.

under the rug of “baggage” denies “ethnic” temples and other congregations of color complexity, and ignores that these temples are a uniquely American phenomena.

Numrich: Parallel Congregations and the 1.5 and Second Generation

One of the seminal books on this dichotomy is Paul Numrich’s *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Theravāda Buddhist Temples*. It is an often-cited and discussed work, and I have a very personal connection to it: in the 1990s, when I was a child attending Dharma Vijaya, Paul Numrich did his research for his book on the temple. I intend to analyze Numrich’s notion of “parallel congregations,” and the problematic nature of presenting Buddhists in a dichotomous relationship. Numrich’s primary theoretical argument and contribution to this discussion is his notion of “parallel congregations.” Numrich claims that these two congregations exist within the same space, but do not interact with one another. If we take Numrich’s conceptual framework as fact, we can assume that the experience of 1.5 and second generation Sri Lankan American congregants at Dharma Vijaya will resemble a monoethnic temple. In fact, Numrich’s framework would suggest that there will be no real difference between the two temples.

Despite this binary framework, Numrich does mention the second generation (in which he also places the 1.5 generation), which he calls “a special case of the immigrant experience...”³² As such, Numrich places the second generation firmly within the context of “Asian immigrant” Buddhism, with little regard to the complexity of 1.5 and second generation experience. He writes “The Asian members of these temples comprise first- and second-generation immigrants [*sic*] ... whose religious understanding and ritual behavior typify

³² Numrich, 65.

traditional Theravāda Buddhism.”³³ There are many issues with this statement, the first of which is that Numrich incorrectly characterizes the second generation as immigrants. Secondly, Numrich assumes that the second generation has the same experience with Buddhism as the first generation. This completely ignores the fact that the 1.5 and second generations’ “religious understanding” is affected by both by their lives in America and the very different experience of temple life that belonging to a Buddhist temple in America brings. Further, this ignores that the 1.5 and second generation may engage in other types of religious behavior that is atypical of Theravāda Buddhism. Numrich is also insufficient and ineffective in his discussion of the second generation, with less than four pages about this group in the book. In addition to this issue, Numrich characterizes the second generation as a “problem” for the ethnic Buddhist temples he studied, which disparages the complexity of this group’s experience.³⁴

My Intervention and Thesis Goals

Throughout this examination of scholarship on Buddhists in America, we have seen how the vocabulary used to discuss these issues is problematic. This discussion, by creating categories that can only exist as mirrors to each other, is very Orientalizing. That is, the discussion has set the so-called “East” and “West” against each other, without allowing for a hybridity that incorporates aspects from both. This way of viewing Buddhism in America is a way for academics, to paraphrase Jane Naomi Iwamura, “to manage Asian American religious communities by *re-*presenting Asian spiritual heritage in a specific way- that is, by reinforcing

³³ Ibid., 64.

³⁴ Ibid., 104.

certain comforting assumptions and presenting the Other in a manner that is recognizable and acceptable.”³⁵

This study not only explores an under-examined aspect of academic examination of Buddhism in America, but will also offer a new point of view for this current conversation, that of an American ethnic second generation scholar-practitioner. Through this study, I explore a group, Sri Lankan American Buddhists, which has not been sufficiently written on. Further, I examine whether this simplistic notion of “parallel congregations” actually succeeds in categorizing these temples, and where the 1.5 and second generation see themselves fitting within or out of this dichotomy. This study also attempts to enter into dialogue with the aforementioned scholars who have set the tone for discussing Buddhism in America. In doing so, I hope to address the marginalization of Asian American Buddhists and the exclusion of second generation Buddhists of color within both academic and non-scholarly discourse. Further, this study attempts to fill in the void in the current discourse on Buddhism in America by focusing on 1.5 and second generation Asian Americans. This study addresses the fact that 1.5 and second generation Asian American Buddhists exist both across and beyond the “ethnic”/“baggage” or “convert”/“American” dichotomy. Most importantly, however, this study seeks to understand how these 1.5 and second generation young people self-identify and see themselves in relation to this dichotomy. This study allows these young people to explain in their own words what has, up until now, has only been didactically discussed by academics.

³⁵ Iwamura, Jane Naomi. *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, 22.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

I conducted a qualitative ethnographic study of the Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra and the Sarathchandra Buddhist Center using methodological triangulation of data using three main data collection methods, 1) participant observation, 2) formal in-depth interviews, and 3) an anonymous online survey, as well as informal conversations, archival documents, and photographs. For participation observation, I attended either one or both temple's events once a week which included festival days, Sunday school classes, meditation nights, and *dhamma* discussions over the course of 6 months. I formally interviewed seven 1.5 and second generation young people, ranging from 18 to 32 years old, and had informal conversations with around forty 1.5 and second generation individuals about these issues during my participant observation. I also interviewed three monks in a leadership role at both temples. I am also taking a semi-quantitative approach by using an online survey component in which 50 individuals responded. This online survey helps draw out particular themes in the larger 1.5 and second generation Sri Lankan American Buddhist community. In this section, I describe the different methods used to conduct this research, the reasoning behind my choice of methods and why they are applicable and beneficial to the study, their limitations, and the problems I encountered during the course of this research.³⁶

Participant Observation

Table 2.1 below lists the hours per week and other temple attendance for the purposes of participant observation over the course of the study period.

³⁶ This study was approved through the University of California, Los Angeles Human Research Protection Program's North General Institutional Review Board.

TABLE 2.1: Participant Observation Conducted

Event	Dharma Vijaya	Sarathchandra
Daham pāsala	3.5-4 hours/week	3.5-4 hours every other week
Meditations	N/A	2-3 hours/week
Sutta classes	3 hours/week	N/A
Monthly full moon pūjās	3 total	4-5 total
Festival days	- Wesak - Poson	- Wesak - Poson

For the participant observation portion of this study, I spent as much time as possible at each of the field sites. I attended most of the weekly Sunday School and meditation classes offered at these temples over a period of around 18 months. Further, I attended any special events (such as Kathina, New Year’s, Sri Lankan New Year, Wesak, and Poson), and *bodhi pūjās* or *dānas* that occurred. Since many temple programs occur on the weekends, I also spent time at each temple during the weekdays, to get a fuller picture of temple life. By observing these temple events while also engaging monks and members of the congregation in conversation, I gained a full and immersive experience of both temples. During the course of my participant observations, I also spoke informally with monks at both temples, noncoethnic lay ministers from Dharma Vijaya, noncoethnic congregation members at both temples, first generation members, and additional 1.5 and second generation members of each temple from a variety of age groups. There are two different types of 1.5 and second generation members that I interacted with during my study: those below the age of 17 and young adults. Those below the age of 17 are current Sunday school students with whom I had informal conversations with regarding their experiences. Those over 17 who I had informal conversation with were mostly former Sunday school students, and their ages varied from 18-38. Any names referred to, with the exception of monks, are pseudonymous.

Participant observation is a viable method for this research, since I am examining the specific ways in how temples publicly engage in cultural reconstitution and preservation. Attending temple services and events on a regular basis not only allowed me to answer my research questions, but also find answers to questions I may not have anticipated. Further, participant observation was an ideal method for my study, since I have an insider view into Dharma Vijaya. I have attended Dharma Vijaya regularly as a Sunday school student as a child and was also a Sunday school teacher there as an adult. As such, I have insider status and a rapport with the monks that is very familial. Prior to this study, I infrequently attended the Sarathchandra Center for *dānas* and festival days, and was asked to speak on occasion on various topics at its *daham pāsāl* during special events. I also have a good rapport with the monks at the Sarathchandra Center, as well as with 1.5 and second generation members of both temples. The monks and many members of both congregations both know and have seen that I have used the temple as a site for several previous academic projects. This insider status allowed me to complete a close review of each temple's approaches to the 1.5 and second generation. All of these factors facilitated my entry into the field.

Interviews

In order to make my interview aspect of my research as thorough as possible, I selected appropriate interviewees who could speak to a variety of experience. I conducted intensive formal interviews with monks and with second generation members of the temples' congregations. For the second generation formal interviews, I used snowball sampling through my contacts at both temples. Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- 1) either a 1.5 or second generation person or a monastic
- 2) a legal adult (i.e. at least 18 years old)
- 3) of Sri Lankan descent
- 4) affiliated with either the Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra or the Sarathchandra Buddhist Center.

I conducted a total of 10 interviews with 3 monks, 1 second generation Sri Lankan American lay minister, and 6 lay second generation Sri Lankan Americans. Of the seven second generation interviewees, I interviewed 2 men and 5 women, with ages ranging from 18-32, all of whom currently live in Southern California. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 2.5 hours, and were all conducted using informed consent. Prior to an interview, I provided all interviewees with a list of questions that I would potentially address with them.

Interviews are beneficial to this study because they allowed me to explore the monks' and congregants experiences in their own words, and provided an in-depth perception of temple members, whether lay or clergy. I encountered perspectives that are different from my own experience of these temples, which allowed me to scrutinize those divergent experiences more closely. The number of interviews conducted provided a wide range of responses and experiences for analysis. Interview questions varied depending on the type of person the interviewee was (i.e. 1.5 and second generation, clergy, etc.), but all interviews included some form of the following open-ended queries:

- What is your experience of the temple?
- What is your earliest memory of the temple?
- What do you like about coming to the temple?
 - o Alternatively: Describe a moment when you really enjoyed/were happy attending the temple.
- What do you dislike about the temple or what would you change about the temple?
 - o Alternatively: Describe a moment when you did not enjoy attending the temple.
- How do you feel about non-Sri Lankan attending or not attending the temple?
- Should the younger generation of Sri Lankans (born or raised here) attend temple?
 - o Why or why not?

- What does being Buddhist mean do you?
- How should Buddhism be passed on to the next generation?
- Do you feel the same way about the Buddhist temple now than you have had in the past? What, if anything, has changed? Why?
- How does this temple compare to other Sri Lankan temples in Southern California?
 - o How does it compare to other Buddhist temples or centers in Southern California/Los Angeles?
- What would you like the temple to be like now?

Surveys

TABLE 2.2: Anonymous Online Survey Responses

	Agree/Disagree Statements (11 Questions)	Short Answer: Identity (3 Questions)	Short Answer: Temple Experience (4 Questions)
Most number of respondents	50	46	40
Least number of respondents	N/A	44	36

Finally, I surveyed 1.5 and second generation Sri Lankan Americans in the wider Sri Lankan American community in order to examine the broader implications of issues of religious engagement and ethnic and religious identification outside these two specific environments, and gather particular themes and potential points of discussion to supplement the interview data. Though I initially focused on those young 1.5 and second generation individuals who are in their later teens and early twenties (i.e. from high school seniors to those who have graduated college within the last few years), several Sri Lankan Americans in their late thirties and early forties also participated.³⁷ I anonymously surveyed them using SurveyMonkey, an online survey tool. This survey included questions that required them to agree or disagree with certain statements based on a sliding scale or continuum. Finally, the survey also included sections that allowed the respondents to reply to specific short answer questions related to their experiences as Sri Lankan

³⁷ Though the survey was anonymous, at least 3 individuals made reference to being in this age range in their responses.

Americans at their respective temples. I emailed young people from temple membership lists, with the clergy's permission. Further, I relied on word of mouth and my own connections within the Sri Lankan American community to find contact information for the relevant subjects. In total, I emailed 71 1.5 and second generation individuals, and at most 50 individuals responded. Further information about response rate can be seen in Table 2.2. I later discovered that my email had been forwarded to other young Sri Lankan Americans outside of Southern California.

Surveys provided information to observe larger trends, and made it easier to gather data from a wide range of subjects. Further, using this online method, rather than a phone survey method, for example, allowed for anonymity and assured that the respondents provide thoughtful answers based on thorough analysis of the question. The ages of respondents spanned 18 to 40 year olds, which includes current high school students, current college students, graduate students, young professionals, and beyond. This wide age range allowed me to account for not only changes in temple dynamics over the years, but also differing perspectives between those teenagers who directly experience Sunday School on weekly basis and those young adults whose experiences with the temples are now more removed and may be restricted to major holidays and events.

The short answer survey questions included some of the relevant interview questions, as well as several additional questions:

- If someone asked you, "Where are you from?" or "What are you?" what would you say?
- What does "Sri Lanka" mean to you? What does "Sri Lankan" mean to you?
- Have you ever gone back to Sri Lanka? If so, when was the last time you went back? How often do you travel to Sri Lanka?

The range or continuum questions included such statements as:

- I have had a positive experience at my temple.
- Being Buddhist is important to me
- Having others see me as Sri Lankan is very important to me.
- Having others see me as American is very important to me.
- I feel more Sri Lankan than American
- I feel more American than Sri Lankan.

Limitations

The limitations of participant observation were more pronounced at Sarathchandra Buddhist Center than at Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra. At the Sarathchandra Center, though the monks and some 1.5 and second generation members were aware of me and my research, many non-ethnic and first generation members of the congregation did not know me very well. As a result, my entry into the field was somewhat restricted. Further, I am not as much of an active participant in temple proceedings at the Sarathchandra Center as I am at Dharma Vijaya. I attempted to counter this by taking a more active role in Sarathchandra Center's activities and therefore becoming more visible to congregation members, so that they would feel more comfortable speaking with me. For example, the Chief Abbot of the Sarathchandra Buddhist Center asked me to begin teaching *daham pāsala* on a biweekly basis there, which provided me access to 1.5 and second generation members as well as their first generation parents. However, there were also some limitations to my research at Dharma Vijaya, as I am actively involved in the temple's various events. For instance, the shift from active member of the congregation to researcher affected my observations. However, I was fully open about my status as researcher before beginning conversations with temple members, and assured anyone I spoke with that any off-the-record comments would not be quoted nor would names be published.

Though I attempted to conduct my participation observation in similar ways at the two temples, my previous relationship and interactions with Dharma Vijaya's clergy and congregation affected this. For example, I could easily observe how the Sarathchandra monks conducted *daham pāsāl* classes and interacted with youth. Though some of the children knew me and commented on my presence, after a minute or two, I was not a major distraction, as I sat quietly in the back of the shrine room. At Dharma Vijaya, however, such hands-off observation was not possible. Most of the clergy and lay ministers conducting classes expected me to act as teaching assistant. If the monks were called away to attend to other temple duties, for example, I was asked to step in and continue the lesson. Further, unlike the Sarathchandra Center, where most of the children only know me as "Akki," (elder sister), the children at Dharma Vijaya know me as a teacher, authority figure, and documentarian. As part of UCLA's Ethnocommunications program, I directed a documentary on the temple as a social space, told through the eyes of two mid-twenties Sri Lankan Americans who attended the temple as children. I spent many hours at Dharma Vijaya each week for almost 6 months, filming the *daham pāsāl* classes and the monks' interactions with the children. Though many of the older children knew me as their former Sunday school teacher, most of the younger children got to know me during this period and became comfortable with my ubiquitous presence.

There are also several limitations of conducting interviews. Formal interviews sometimes diverged into tangents, forcing me to conduct multiple interviews with the same person to find relevant information for my research topic. Further, the possibility that my interviewees told me what they thought I wanted to hear or withheld certain information because they were uncomfortable cannot be ignored. I attempted to counter this by not only providing my interviewees with straightforward and comprehensible consent forms, and by also constantly

reassuring my interviewees about the confidentiality and privacy of their statements during the interviews themselves.

The limitation of surveys, especially in an ethnographic study such as this, is that identity issues cannot be easily quantified, and the use of the continuum may be too limiting for some of the respondents. In order to counter this, I provided optional space for the respondents to expand upon their selected answers. Further, since I asked my respondents to discuss very complex issues in short answer questions, they may have simplified their responses: for the sake of time, because they did not feel comfortable answering such questions, or because they did not have the sufficient vocabulary to address their multifaceted lives. To remedy this, I allowed the respondents the option of also having a formal interview in case they wished to discuss their answers in further depth. However, none of the respondents took this option.

**CHAPTER 3: MULTICULTURAL CONGREGATIONS AND APPROACHES TO THE
1.5 AND SECOND GENERATION**

TABLE 3.1: Temple Populations

Temple	Coethnic Families	Families Providing Dāna	1.5 and 2nd Generation Individuals	Consistent Daham Pāsāl Attendance	Noncoethnic Individuals
Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra	500	30 monthly food donations 45 monthly monetary donations	200-250	30-40 youth (aged 3-17 years)	200 (consistent monthly attendance)
Sarathchandra Buddhist Center	300	100-150 (total)	100	20-30 youth (aged 4-12 years)	15-20 (consistent monthly attendance)

Though Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra and the Sarathchandra Buddhist Center are similar in that they are Sri Lankan-majority temples with multicultural congregations, the two temples diverge in their respective Sri Lankan American and noncoethnic populations, as see in Table 3.1. The Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra has approximately 500 Sri Lankan American families, with 30-31 monthly *dānas* and 45 monthly monetary donations regularly. The 1.5 and second generation population comprises of about 200-250 youth, with 30-40 children that consistently attend Sunday school, ranging in age from 3-17 years old.³⁸ Approximately 200 noncoethnic individuals consistently attend the temple monthly, whether for *dāna*, meditation classes, *dhamma* discussions, to or receive blessings. The Sarathchandra Center has approximately 300 families, while 100-150 of those families give *dāna*. The 1.5 and second

³⁸ When referring to Dharma Vijaya, I will use *daham pāsala/daham pāsāl* and Sunday school interchangeably.

generation population comprises of about 100 youth, with 20-30 children that consistently come to *daham pāsala*, ranging in age from 4-12 years old. The temple’s monthly noncoethnic attendance varies from 50 to 200 individuals, but approximately 15-20 people consistently attend every month. The temple’s branch in Palmdale, the Paññāsīha Meditation Center, has around 25 families, with 10-15 children that attend Sunday school, ranging in age from 4-15 years old.

Dharma Vijaya: Cultural Reconstitution in a Multicultural Religious Context

Location

Founded in 1980, the Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra is located near Crenshaw and Washington Boulevards, in the Crenshaw/Arlington Heights area of Los Angeles. Dharma Vijaya, meaning “victory of Buddhist teachings,” is colloquially known to its congregation members as “the Crenshaw temple.” In fact, many 1.5 and second generation young people I spoke with were unaware of its actual name. The location of Dharma Vijaya in itself is a contradiction: it is in a place that is simultaneously quiet and bustling. The temple is adjacent to Lafayette Square, a century old semi-gated neighborhood full of large historical homes, but it also lies on the main road of Crenshaw near the I-10 freeway, so the cacophony of traffic sounds can be heard even inside the shrine room. From the outside, the temple property only looks like four homes. The leftmost building serves as the “monastery” of sorts, i.e. where most of the religious services are held and where the six current monks’ living quarters are. The next building holds living quarters for additional monks and lay ministers, while also holds office and meeting space for the Los Angeles chapter of the Jungto Society, a Korean Buddhist movement. The rightmost homes were bought much later, and were renovated so they are now apartments

for individuals of any ethnicity who are down on their luck or who have recently immigrated to the U.S. to use as a temporary residence, though there are some long-term residents there as well. These adjacent properties also provide ample parking for both monks and laity.

The Politics of Clergy, Adaptation, and Women

In exploring the clergy's role at Dharma Vijaya, one thing becomes abundantly clear: the future of Buddhism in America is a significant part of the planning and execution of temple events and interactions, and Chief Abbot Bhante Piyananda's political activities reflect this. Bhante Piyananda, who is first generation Sri Lankan American in his sixties, wears the orange or saffron robes and the shaved head of a Theravāda Buddhist monk. Normally, he is a very open and congenial man, but I noticed that once I began asking him questions about the temple's history of multiculturalism, he put on an air of authority and began a dialogue that he had clearly had before and was repeating for the interview. As Bhante Piyananda bears many responsibilities, there is an aspect of performativity to this change in demeanor. That is, Bhante Piyananda is in a leadership position among several organizations, e.g. the Sri Lankan Sangha Council of America and Canada and in the Sri Lankan government, where he is the Chief Advisor to the President of Sri Lanka on International Religious Affairs. In addition, during my participant observation, many in the political arena were present during both festival days and on less populated days. I met the Thai Consul General's family on a quiet weekday as they were giving a *dāna* at the temple, and a Sri Lankan Member of Parliament and their family were brief guests in the temple another day. The Thai Consul General's wife and the Sri Lankan Consul General were judges during the youth speech and chanting contests for the Wesak celebration one year. These intense political interactions and political visibility seems to be part of Bhante Piyananda's strategy in fostering Buddhism in America.

The necessary adjustment of this temple and Buddhism in general to American life is something is constantly stressed at Dharma Vijaya. I spoke with Michael, a white resident lay minister at Dharma Vijaya in his sixties, who is also an active Sunday school instructor and congregation member. Michael mentioned that in order for Buddhism to survive in America, temples need to adapt to a changing populace and changing practitioners, and that is was vital for the “future of Buddhism in America. You just have to.” This emphasis on necessity is something that Bhante Piyananda stresses as well when he discusses how other Sri Lankan temples in Southern California emphasize complete cultural preservation: “I would like to have a very good Sri Lankan custom, culture, tradition to keep. Same time, some of them are not appropriate in this country.” Bhante Piyananda is very frank about how some Sri Lankan traditions do not translate well to American life. For instance, he discussed how in Sri Lanka, monks do not wear shirts underneath their robes, and thus bare one shoulder, while the other shoulder is covered. He claimed that such exposure would “not be polite” in an American context. He spoke about other changes that Dharma Vijaya has made, and it seemed that he was very concerned about how best to present all aspects of Buddhism (i.e. the teachings as well as the *Sangha*) to non-immigrant congregants to the temple. Further, he compared Dharma Vijaya to other temples in the Southern California area. He claims that Dharma Vijaya is a more liberal Sri Lankan Buddhist temple, and that with the opening of other temples in the greater Los Angeles area, former Dharma Vijaya congregation members have gone with them. “That’s okay! They should go to what they like,” he says, acknowledging that the way “things are done” at Dharma Vijaya may not satisfy everyone, particularly the more conservative members of the Southern California Sri Lankan Buddhist community. Despite this, as he spoke, it seemed that

he considered Dharma Vijaya's approach to clergy/laity relations and the clergy's close relationship with the laity unique to other temple's approaches.

Further, the visible role of women at Dharma Vijaya in positions of relative authority is once such adjustment to cultural reconstitution. This authority is not necessarily religious one, since there are no resident *bhikkhunis* (i.e. nuns) at Dharma Vijaya, but a lay authority. Quite controversially, Bhante Piyananda encourages the revival of the *bhikkuni* Buddhist order in Sri Lanka. The *bhikkuni* order died out in Sri Lanka over 1100 years ago and many conservative Sinhala Buddhists place importance on lineage, or the unbroken passage of ordination from master to student. Bhante Piyananda's willingness to restart a dead lineage has been met with disapproval by the more fundamentalist Sinhala Buddhists in both Sri Lanka and America. Besides this break from traditional lineages, Dharma Vijaya's activities and events are organized primarily by lay women.

For instance, Robin, a Japanese American Buddhist lay minister in her sixties, primarily works behind the scenes to work out logistics of both daily temple life as well as events. She is an administrative assistant to the temple. She organizes donations, coordinates Bhante Piyananda's speaking engagements, designs and prints flyers for events, and more. Despite her active involvement with the temple's logistics, however, her understanding of temple dynamics is somewhat limited because she mainly stays in the temple office. For example, because one Wesak celebration coincided with Mother's Day weekend, Bhante Piyananda bought almost 200 presents for the mothers that would be attending the event. Robin thought that this many gifts were excessive, but I explained to her that Wesak was equivalent to Christmas or Easter, in which many non-regular church members attend. In the end, the temple had just enough gifts of colorful scarves to give the mothers in attendance. Robin's limited knowledge of increased

Wesak attendance is understandable, as she spends the entire Wesak celebration calculating the judges' scores from various contests and printing out certificates for winners and participants. Robin is arguably the backbone of Dharma Vijaya; without her, the temple would not be able to function as smoothly as it does. Despite her vital role, and perhaps because she is a noncoethnic, her experience of the temple is incomplete in this manner. We will discuss the implications of this in a later section.

In addition to Robin, the mothers of the Sunday school children are actively involved in their children's Buddhist and Sri Lankan education. They organize meals for special events, festival days, *sil*, meditation retreats involving the 1.5 and second generation, and practices for festival day preparations. In contrast, snacks and food for weekly Sunday school sessions are organized by parents of all genders. Women are also involved in logistics for festival days. One day, the temple was full of mothers in an assembly line, stuffing 1,300 envelopes with event programs and donation requests for the upcoming *Kathina* festivities in October. Speaking to these women about their investment in this temple reveals that they do so with an eye on the future. For example, one of these congregation members argued that the only reason for first generation women to be involved in a religious space is to ensure that their children absorb some of their cultural and religious heritage. However, two women in particular counter this. Pushpa, who organizes the devotional singing, or *bhakthi gee*, has three children in college. Theoretically, then, she has no reason to continue to be as heavily involved in the temple as she is. Another person who counters this is my own mother, who taught Sunday school while I was in college and who continues to be involved as a Sunday school instructor and mentor for the younger generation. Regardless, it seems that the congregation members consider the continued

active role of women as essential for the future of Dharma Vijaya as a temple and Sri Lankan American youth as a generation.

Dharma Vijaya as a Multicultural Site: Physical and Social Effects

Though Dharma Vijaya is a majority Sri Lankan Sinhala temple, many other Buddhists from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds make up its congregation. The primary noncoethnic population has been Thai Buddhists, followed by other Southeast Asian (i.e. Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese) Buddhists. There is also a significant Korean population at Dharma Vijaya because of the Jungto's Society's location within the temple premises. In addition to this population, there is also a growing number of Latina/o members, while most of the lay ministers are white or African American. These individuals participate in a variety of activities: meditation classes, *dhamma* discussions, *sutta* classes, festival days, receiving blessings, *pūjās*, and *dānas*. The presence of non-Sri Lankans at the temple has sometimes been a thorny issue for some of these parents in the Sri Lankan community, an issue I will return to in the next section.

The multicultural nature of the temple is physically apparent on the bodies of every person who attends Dharma Vijaya, as it is apparent on my own wrist as I type. In the past during certain ceremonies, a ball of sturdy white thread is passed among the entire congregation, so that each person has a hold on the extremely long string that threads its way through the gathered congregation. In this way, the congregation is connected to both each other and the monks for several minutes while the monks chant blessings. After the ceremony, the monks take up the string and cut it into pieces, so that pieces can be tied around each congregation members' wrist. Thus, even after the ceremony the congregation is connected to each other. This is called

pirith noola, or literally “thread of chanting,” and this simple white thread is a reminder that one is Buddhist and also provides protection.

However, several years ago, a small group of the temple’s Latina/o congregation members began regularly making brightly colored braided *pirith nools*. These *pirith nools* resemble friendship bracelets, and come in a variety of designs: the braided colors of the Buddhist flag (white, blue, orange, yellow, and red), white or yellow threaded through with silver or gold, and fire engine reds. Many of these have brightly colored beads on them as well. This has changed the way post-chanting ceremonies have been conducted, as many times, congregation members want to pick particular colors or designs and hold up the line. In some ways, this lessens the impact of wearing the traditional white *pirith noola* – that is, it takes away from wearing something that physically connects a person with the rest of the congregation. In other ways, however, it brings one’s connection with Buddhism more to the surface. That is, all of the *pirith nool* colors are significant to Buddhism – yellows, oranges, reds, and whites are colors of both the robes that clergy wear but also the colors on the Buddhist flag.

Another important effect of the multicultural nature of Dharma Vijaya is the presence of non-Sri Lankan authority figures. One Japanese resident is monk affectionately known as “*sensei*,” and is part of the monastic community at the temple and even speaks some Sinhala. As I discussed before, Robin is a vital member of the temple, and has been a significant part of Dharma Vijaya’s current and continued survival, despite the fact that she is noncoethnic. Every time I was at the temple during my research, Robin was in the temple office surrounded by teetering bookshelves and wrapped in a thick shawl. She has personalized her space with pictures of her bi- and multiracial children and grandchildren. Robin’s college-aged granddaughter is a frequent visitor to the temple, though she also restricts herself to the temple

office space and is frequently found curled up in an armchair, textbook in hand. In essence, then, a noncoethnic *woman* is both the backbone and an important authority figure to a primarily Sri Lankan temple that is populated by only male clergy.

These noncoethnic individuals are also a significant part of the temple's day-to-day life. Every Wednesday, a local Thai restaurant provides a *dāna* of food for the monks. *Dāna*, in Pāli means "giving," and is the laity's act of serving monks and nuns food before noon, as Buddhist clergy are not supposed to eat after that time. I spoke to a Vietnamese American family that was in charge of one day's *dāna*, in which three monks and one *bhikkhuni* ate. The monks were all Sri Lankan, while the *bhikkhuni* was originally from Vietnam. While waiting for the clergy to finish eating, the *bhikkhuni*'s niece's boyfriend, Hubert (also a Vietnamese immigrant) spoke to me at length about his girlfriend's continued involvement with this particular temple, despite the fact that she lives in Pasadena.

The presence of noncoethnic authority figures is also apparent on festival days like Wesak. For instance, many judges for the speech and chanting contests on Wesak are noncoethnic. Some of these individuals are politicians, while others are experts in the Pāli language and Buddhist verse. Some are very involved with issues pertaining to Sri Lanka, even though they have no ethnic or familial ties to the country. For example, one white lay congregation member blogs about Sri Lankan politics. James, a white professor and layperson who has been a congregation member since the temple's inception and who is fluent in Sinhala, recently involved the Sunday school children in a four month-long fundraising activity for the construction of a cultural center in southern Sri Lanka. He and a Taiwanese American undergraduate gave a presentation about the project, and handed out piggy banks decorated with various popular cartoon characters to each of the children. In four months' time, the children

were to bring the coins and money they had collected, all of which would be used for the project. In this way, it is a noncoethnic member of the temple who fosters transnational ties between the 1.5 and second generation and Sri Lanka.

When I asked Bhante Piyananda about non-Sri Lankans at the temple, he immediately discussed the Southeast Asian Theravāda Buddhist congregants who attend the temple, and compared them to the “American” (by which he meant non-immigrant) members of the temple. Bhante Piyananda spoke of how the Southeast Asian devotees were more interested in *dāna* and religious and personal counseling, and less involved in discussing complex Buddhist concepts. He was primarily concerned that “American” devotees desired to “jump into” meditation and discussions of philosophy without first practicing Buddhist virtues such as charitable giving. Extrapolating from this, it seems that the non-Sri Lankan South/Southeast Asian devotees provide more support for the temple than the “American” devotees. Bhante Piyananda’s discussion of this suggests that he finds this difference vexing, both from a practical standpoint and a religious one. From a practical standpoint, Bhante Piyananda is frustrated with the lack of contributions for the temple from “American” congregants to support the temple. The monks do not have salaries, so the temple is only maintained through laity’s donations of money, food, and various supplies.³⁹ From a religious standpoint, it seems that he finds that all of the non-Sri Lankans’ experience of the temple incomplete; i.e., the Southeast Asian devotees practice Buddhist concepts without educating themselves on the complexities of the *dhamma*, while the “American” devotees learn about Buddhism and Buddhist teaching without actively practicing the concepts they learn. Of note was the immediacy with which Bhante Piyananda slips into this more authoritative politically minded voice as anytime I brought up multiculturalism, whether in

³⁹ While it is not required, nor do the monks solicit donations, many coethnic and South/Southeast Asian American attendees contribute monetary donations for the cost of utilities, homegoods for monastic and lay use, and volunteer their labor to repair the temple building and clear the temple grounds.

casual conversation or in a formal interview. It seems that this is a discussion he has had many times, and so he has ready answers to many of my questions. This media-ready voice is at odds with Bhante Piyananda's demeanor during casual interactions with congregation members. He is kind, and is easy to approach and interact with, joking with congregation members, both old and young.

Multiculturalism and the 1.5 and Second Generation

Sunday School

Dharma Vijaya's Sunday school, or *daham pāsala*, is well-organized, and offers multiple levels of engagement for different age groups. Chanting services for all ages begin at 2:30 PM, and are followed by regular classes at 3:00 PM that end between 4:30 – 5:00 PM. There are four different classes for the 1.5 and second generation: one for 4 to 7 year olds, two for 8 to 11 year olds, and one for youth who are in middle and high school. All classes except for the oldest age group are taught by coethnic individuals. The younger age group classes are taught by monks in Sinhala, while one 8-11 year old class and the senior class is taught by a one second generation lay minister in English. Michael, another lay minister, also teaches the middle and high schoolers in English. Additionally, there is a class for first generation parents of these children (and any other adult who would like to participate) taught in Sinhala by Bhante Piyananda. The chanting services are attended by children and adults alike, with the children sitting closest to the Buddha statue in the shrine hall, and the parents and other adults sitting in the back. Children who arrive early help one of the younger monks set up pillows in rows, and make sure a chanting folder is placed on each pillow. These folders contain the Pāli verses with English translations,

both of which the children read. After classes, the youth convene on the temple's kitchen, where each week different lay members and/or parents provide snacks and drinks for everyone.

During one Sunday, I arrived at Dharma Vijaya with the temple aflutter with both parents and children rushing around. *Daham pāsā* began with its usual chanting services and meditation, but instead of normal classes, the children prepared for a visiting Korean Buddhist minister. Around ten children from multiple classes stood under the *bodhi* tree, practicing the Dharma Vijaya Sunday School song, which they were to sing to welcome the minister. One child was pulled away by his mother to go change into the Sri Lankan national dress, a white loose long sleeved shirt with a long white sarong. Exactly what time the Korean congregation would arrive was unclear – Michael commented wryly, “With this temple, you never know the schedule because there is no schedule.” There was a consensus among the clergy that the Korean congregation would arrive between 4:00 – 4:30 PM. However, the minister arrived ten minutes before 4:00 PM. Some adults ran inside to get the children still changing, while one teen grabbed a large Korean flag and frantically handed a large Sri Lankan flag to her partner. As the minister stepped out of the gray minivan, an older teen held the Sri Lankan traditional cloth umbrella over his head. This parade of second generation Sri Lankan Americans walked through the temple property, ending at the *bodhi* tree in the center. Afterwards, everyone entered the big shrine room, where one of the older teenagers gave a speech in English, which was then translated by a Sri Lankan monk who was part of the Korean minister's retinue. Another teen gave a speech in Korean – though she did not know the language, she had it transliterated into English. The visiting minister and his guests were visibly impressed with her speech.

This is not the first time Dharma Vijaya Sunday school students have been heavily involved in the noncoethnic Buddhist community in Southern California. Dharma Vijaya

regularly sends its second generation members to other Buddhist events as part of a Sri Lankan Buddhist contingent. Most of the time, this contingent is made of up mostly minors who do Sri Lankan dances, sing devotional Sinhala Buddhist songs, and perform short skits about the Buddha's life or past lives. For Dharma Vijaya, where connections between local noncoethnic communities are instrumental to the propagation of Buddhism, it is the 1.5 and second generation that is tasked to represent Buddhism. For Bhante Piyananda in particular, this not only gives the younger generation an active stake in their temple community and beyond, but also creates in the younger generations' mind the idea of a community of Buddhists, regardless of denomination or ethnicity.

Michael: Considering Noncoethnic Authority Figures

Michael is a respected Sunday school instructor who has an affectionate rapport with his students. For instance, before an essay competition for Wesak, he gathered up the noisy teenagers outside and lead them in a guided meditation in the shrine room, in order to calm their minds, as he said, "so you can do your best." During the essay competition, which I proctored, one student made a snarky comment on the essay prompt he had received at random. Michael, who was walking through the room, lightly smacked the student in the head with the newspaper in hand, to the laughter of everyone present. Even though Michael's lessons are focused entirely on Buddhist thought and doctrine, rather than the cultural implications of Buddhism, he is appreciated by both the younger generation as well as the first generation.

Michael teaches the senior Sunday school class, which the students call "Team Enlightenment." Though the students are mostly middle and high school students, there are one or two elementary school-aged students who prefer the senior class to the junior classes.

Michael's lessons begin and end with meditation, led by one of the students and followed by a brief discussion on that day's meditation experience. Then he has two students unfold and set up the Metta Map on the floor. The Metta Map, conceived by Dr. Barbara R. Wright, uses Buddhist concepts in conflict resolution.⁴⁰ The map is divided into 15 different parts which represent different states of mind. Michael applies the teachings of the Buddhist Eightfold Noble Path to the map, and always reiterates which section of the map correlates with which part of the Path, though one student called these constant reviews "somewhat repetitious." The class uses the map to explore issues ranging from terrorism and racism to interpersonal conflicts, though much of it involves Michael lecturing the students and less intra-class discussion.

Though much of the conversations on interpersonal issues are fruitful, when the topics of racism or inequality arise, the class discusses them in very simplistic terms. The systematic and pervasive nature of racism and other inequalities is not acknowledged, and instead the only racism discussed is extreme examples involving the Ku Klux Klan and Nazism. The 1.5 and second generation adult individuals I surveyed and spoke with discussed facing racist microaggressions, which is no doubt also a part of these Sunday school youth's lives. First coined by Chester M. Pierce in 1970, the term "microaggressions" refers to "put-downs, done in automatic, pre-conscious, or unconscious fashion."⁴¹ As defined by Derald Wing Sue et al.,

Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group. They are not limited to human encounters alone but may also be

⁴⁰ More detailed information on the Metta Map and its uses for conflict resolution can be found at <http://www.themettasystem.com>.

⁴¹ Chester M. Pierce, quoted in Daniel G. Solórzano, "Critical race theory, race and gender microaggressions, and the experience of Chicana and Chicano scholars," *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 1998, Vol. 11, No. 1, 121.

environmental in nature, as when a person of color is exposed to [a setting] that unintentionally assails his or her racial identity.⁴²

These moments of racism are subtle, and can be overtly insulting comments or remarks, invalidations of experience, statements declaring individual colorblindness (and thus denying racism), and Eurocentrism.⁴³ Acknowledgement of everyday microaggressions precludes an understanding that racism is not merely an issue of prejudicial thoughts, but is an issue of institutional and systematic inequalities that can often manifest in unconscious and inconspicuous ways. In this senior class, perhaps the 1.5 and second generation feels uncomfortable verbalizing their feelings because they perceive that a noncoethnic authority figure cannot understand the experiences of young people of color. Accordingly, much of the discourse around racism and inequalities in the class takes on a more generalized tone, leading to this conflation of racism and prejudice.

One weekend, Team Enlightenment held an all-day retreat organized by two young men in the senior class, under Michael's guidance, for temple youth of all ages. The retreat ended with a discussion and activity involving David R. Hawkin's Map of Consciousness applied kinesiology technique, in which one can purportedly determine - or "calibrate"- the consciousness level of any person. This consciousness level can supposedly be measured by people in pairs by pushing down on a volunteer's arm and determining levels of resistance to this pushing. Michael began by discussing the difference between subjective and objective reality, and claimed that the only way humans can determine absolute truth from falsehood is by using the consciousness calibration method. "This works in your acupuncture energy chakra system," he said. At this point, two teenaged girls became skeptical and whispered, "But how can you

⁴² Derald Wing Sue et al., "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice," *American Psychology*, May-June 2007, 273-274.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 276.

know?” amongst themselves. The youth then divided into pairs testing this method out on various people (ranging from Barack Obama and Mitt Romney to Justin Beiber) and media (ranging from the television show *Teletubbies* to the film *The Dark Knight Rises*). The youth clearly enjoyed the chance to get up and move around, as they had been sitting for the entire day for a variety of meditation and discussion activities. After the retreat, however, the temple received multiple complaints about this last activity. The main concerns of parents were that the activity was not rooted in Buddhist teachings and discouraged critical thinking. One parent in particular was concerned when his teenaged daughter came home and calibrated one of her friends at a low level of consciousness, and refusing to have any contact with the friend as a result. This quantification of people’s mental and spiritual worth was a particular concern. Bhante Piyananda privately spoke with Michael about these complaints, and the Hawkins activity was not repeated.

This event and its subsequent consequences illustrate the active role the first generation takes in their children’s religious futures. More importantly, however, this illustrates the depth of communication that exists between the first and second generation. No members of the first generation were present during the activity, so it was the second generation that relayed the details of the Hawkins activity to the first. After the activity, several parents mentioned how they had taken the time to listen to their children’s experience, and most of these conversations resulted in examinations on Buddhist suttas on critical thinking and healthy skepticism. As such, the first generation at Dharma Vijaya actively communicates with the 1.5 and second about complex doctrinal and practical issues.

Upeksha: Considering Second Generation Coethnic Authority Figures

Upeksha is a second generation lay minister in her early thirties, and takes an active role in the temple, as she began teaching Sunday school regularly a few years ago. She was in high school when she first came to Dharma Vijaya for Sunday School. She views her role as lay minister as “just teaching,” and it is clear that she enjoys working with the children at the temple. One day, she did not have enough time to lesson plan for her Sunday school class. Instead, she held an informal discussion with that day’s class of six 9-11 year old children, and asked them if there were any problems and issues in their lives. Immediately the children began talking of bullying and teasing they had been through, especially when their friends made fun of their Sri Lankan names or their accents (in the case of a 1.5 generation child). For the most part, she gave them mostly secular advice, bringing in Buddhist ideas occasionally. For example, when one nine year old complained of her friends was shoving and hitting her regularly, she first firmly said, “You never let anyone touch you. You don’t have to stand for it.” She then brought in the Buddhist idea of *kalyānamitta*, or good spiritual friends, explaining that in Buddhism, you keep good and kind friends and disassociate from friends who are not kind. Further, she allowed other students to answer and extrapolate, saying “You’re helping each other.” She consistently made sure that the conversation was an intra-class discussion, telling the children not to look at her when answering: “Talk to her, you’re giving *her* advice.” She also encouraged students to go to each other for help with these issues as well. For example, she told a second grader to talk more in depth with a fourth grader who shared the experience of being teased about her name: “She’s older than you, so she has more experience.”

Though the class did not explicitly naming it as such, these children were discussing complex topics of race, racism, identity, and xenophobia. Unlike Michael’s class, instead of

discussing multifaceted issues like interpersonal racism in dualistic terms, they are addressing that racism can come from any source, including one's own friends. Michael's lessons espouse colorblindness and an adherence to a certain philosophies without critically engaging and asking questions. Upeksha tackles these issues in more subtle ways, but takes an approach that acknowledges the reality of what the children face on a daily basis. Further, Upeksha expresses her own fallibility saying, "I don't know everything," and "Don't think you're too young to teach me! I'm still learning, too." In this way, she encourages the students to not only explore and question, but also to view her as fellow Buddhist walking the same spiritual path as them.

With the diversity of teachers at Dharma Vijaya is the diversity of teaching approaches. In the situation described above, Michael applied an unorthodox and somewhat controversial lesson plan, without Bhante Piyananda's knowledge or approval. However, the atmosphere of Dharma Vijaya is such that laypeople feel comfortable voicing their concerns, concerns that the clergy take seriously and take steps to correct. Bhante Piyananda's experience dealing with both monastic politics as well as governmental politics allows him to see all sides of a situation, no matter how divisive. As such, he was able to handle the situation diplomatically by speaking with Michael privately and ensuring that future lessons would not include the Map of Consciousness activity. As we can see, there are advantages and disadvantages to Dharma Vijaya's approach of cultural reconstitution. For instance, Dharma Vijaya creates more involved and engaged young people, who take on leadership roles in both learning and teaching Buddhism. Part of this is through the use of teachers with a better ability to relate to youth on both a language and cultural level, and with the benefit of different worldviews. However, with the use of noncoethnic teachers, there can be a lack of understanding of what growing up Sri Lankan in America entails.

Passing the Torch, Contradictions, and the Future of Buddhism

Dharma Vijaya's attitude towards the 1.5 and second generation is unique, compared to other temples I have visited in the Southern California area. Bhante Piyananda accepts that tradition must undergo some change in a new environment. He wants "American" devotees to be more involved in temple events and activities, and accepts that 1.5 and second generation youth cannot be compared to their counterparts in Sri Lanka. Unlike in Sri Lanka, where children act relatively subdued in religious spaces, Bhante Piyananda notes that at Dharma Vijaya, "[The youth] jumps here, jumping here and there, running here. That is not bad thing – they are active children!" In short, in a reversal of the stereotypical idea that the first generation seeks to hold on to tradition, while the 1.5 and second generation wants to adjust this tradition in a new environment, it is Bhante Piyananda who recognizes and espouses the change of Sri Lankan Buddhist temple life in America.

The temple caters to the younger generation by acknowledging their needs and desires. For instance, in 2010 a junior monk began a tradition of holding a Sri Lankan New Year festival on the temple premises. This festival provided an alternative to the more business oriented/farmers' market-like atmosphere of other annual secular Sri Lankan American organizations' New Year's festivals. Dharma Vijaya's festivals focused entirely on the children's experiences, including fun, games, and food. More significantly, it encourages the younger generation to take active leadership roles – the emcees for these festivals are usually second generation former Sunday school students.⁴⁴ In addition to this, the younger generation is pushed into the spotlight during events like Wesak. Students must get up on stage and perform in front of a large audience for speech, chanting, and debate competitions. Even children as young as three have been encouraged to participate. According to Bhante Piyananda, these

⁴⁴ In fact, I co-emceed twice, while a second generation young woman undergraduate also emceed.

contests are a way for not only those students involved to learn more about Buddhism and the role of the religion in Sri Lankan history, but also a way for non-Sunday school and non-participating youth to absorb Buddhist teachings. As he says, “They won’t listen if it’s me. But they will listen if it is another child like them.” This focus on the younger generation has attracted attention from different parts of the Southern California Sri Lankan community. Maya, a doctor currently in her thirties and one of the first Sunday school students at Dharma Vijaya, remarked “this is the Harvard of Sunday schools.” She makes it a point to bring her children to Dharma Vijaya on festival days, despite the fact that she lives in Orange County and is closer to at least two other Sri Lankan Buddhist temples.

Therefore, we see that Dharma Vijaya’s unique approach to the changing dynamics of Buddhism in America has a profound effect on the 1.5 and second generation. Earlier, I mentioned that there are many contradictions to Dharma Vijaya: its location in a simultaneously quiet and loud area, its position as a place of cultural reconstitution that is shaped by noncoethnic members, and its status as both an informal space but also a religious one. What we also see at Dharma Vijaya is the continuation of culture that is put firmly in the hands of the 1.5 and second generation, not the first. Diana Eck, a scholar on religious pluralism in America, puts it best:

“The impulse toward preservation... and the impulse toward transformation... may, in time, converge. It is not enough to preserve a religious or cultural heritage; that heritage must also nourish a new generation in a new environment...”⁴⁵

What we see at Dharma Vijaya, then, is the convergence of not only these two impulses, but also the explicit passing the torch of a religious tradition to the next generation. Bhante Piyananda and the Dharma Vijaya clergy are very cognizant of the fact that Sinhala Buddhist tradition must

⁴⁵ Diana Eck, quoted in Prebish, Charles S., *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 31.

change in order to survive in America. As a result, they have made adaptations so that women, noncoethnic members, and the 1.5 and second generation can not only participate but also write this next chapter on Sri Lankans, Buddhism, and America.

Sarathchandra Buddhist Center: Cultural Preservation in a Multicultural Meditation

Context

Founded in February 1995, the Sarathchandra Buddhist Center in North Hollywood was originally a two bedroom home purchased by Mrs. Kumari Sarathchandra in memory of her husband, Dr. P.M. Sarathchandra. Over time, construction, renovations, and added property transformed the temple from a home into a visibly religious space. Immediately, one can tell that the Sarathchandra Buddhist Center is both a Buddhist temple and a Sri Lankan Buddhist temple in particular. From the moderately busy Oxnard Street (which gives it its colloquial name) on which the temple grounds sit, any passerby can see the enormous Buddha statue in the courtyard. The high silver gates leading to the courtyard are marked with lotuses, a traditional Buddhist motif. The temple's design purposefully makes visual reference to Sri Lanka. For instance, the temple grounds are surrounded by a small 4 foot concrete border with a cloud motif, or *walākulu bamma*. It is made to resemble the edge of Kandy Lake in Sri Lanka, which is adjacent to the famous Dalada Maligawa (the Temple of Buddha's Tooth). The ground in middle of the courtyard has a *sandakadapāhana*, or moonstone (a Sri Lankan architectural motif of a carved stone that marks entrances), framed by statuary of *devas* and elephants.

In 1998, the temple expanded to include a two story building, which includes residences for the temple's two monks and restrooms for laity on the top floor, a shrine hall on the bottom floor, and an outdoor kitchen area for laity. Like Dharma Vijaya, the sounds of the city outside

pervade even the shrine room, since the temple is in the middle of the flight path for Bob Hope Airport in Burbank. The temple has no parking lot for laity, so laypeople usually park on the street in the surrounding neighborhood, though the monks and others who reside in the temple park in the courtyard. Unlike Dharma Vijaya, where the main temple doors stay unlocked until the monks go to sleep, the temple buildings at Sarathchandra are almost always locked. However, because the kitchen is outdoors, the laity is able to prepare for *dānas* and *pūjās* outside until a monk arrives to let them in for religious services.

The two current monks who began the Sarathchandra Center and who are officially Trustees of the temple are Bhante Kolitha and Bhante Siriniwasa, two first generation Sri Lankan American monks. Bhante Kolitha is friendly but reserved, and does not engage in extraneous conversation with laity. Ultimately, he commands an air of respect. In private conversation, several of the first generation adults said they found him intimidating. However, his interactions with the first and second generation differ, as he is especially kind and patient with the Sunday school children he teaches. Bhante Siriniwasa is jovial and exceedingly open, and has no qualms speaking with anyone who may come to the temple. Both monks are animal lovers, as there are at least ten cats they have adopted, that roam the temple grounds, and an additional two that live inside the temple itself. At one of the meditation discussions, one white lay attendee told a story about unexpectedly meeting Bhante Siriniwasa at Costco buying oversized bags of cat food. The cats themselves are very much a part of the temple; during some services and *dhamma* discussions, and during my interview with Bhante Kolitha, an indoor cat wandered and curled up in his lap.

Involvement and Involving the Sri Lankan Lay Community

The temple is very active with the Sri Lankan lay community, and also conducts projects to keep its lay congregation members involved. For example, the temple has been the focus of fundraising from the wider Southern California Sri Lankan lay community. The proceeds from Ranwan Rayak, an annual performance of dance and music from Sinhala-language films, go to the temple. This financial collaboration between the temple and Ranwan Rayak organizers also extends to Ranwan Rayak's practices, which are held in the main temple hall. When I curiously commented on the fact that lay activity was happening in a sacred space, Bhante Kolitha informed me that prior to the dance practice, the monks remove the Buddha statue from the hall. "It wouldn't be right," he said. In this way, the hall space is actually very fluid, taking on both secular and religious dimensions depending on the presence of the Buddha statue itself. In addition, the monks participate in Sri Lanka Day, an annual festival organized by the secular Sri Lanka Foundation held at the Third Street Santa Monica Promenade. Alongside secular charities, textiles, travel, and insurance booths, there is usually a booth for the Sarathchandra Center. For a small donation, anyone can get a *pirith noola* tied around their wrist while a monk chants blessings. Buddhist books and pamphlets in both English and Sinhala are also available, for another small donation. Usually, this material is picked up by noncoethnics interested in Buddhism or meditation. The temple's involvement with secular community events, then, is both financially beneficial and also furthers the temple's goal of spreading Buddhist teachings.

Not only is the Sarathchandra Center involved with lay events, but it also purposefully involves the lay community in religious projects. For Wesak 2012, the temple unveiled a 25 foot tall elaborately decorated paper lantern (or Wesak *kuduwa*), with hundreds of smaller intricately lanterns hanging from the main lantern. The entire structure slowly rotated and softly changed

colors. During the unveiling, the monks acknowledged the three families that provided funds, designed, and engineered the physical structure and lighting for the project. There was definitely a feel of community during the event; some first generation women were pointing at various parts of the lantern and talking with each other about how they contributed a certain part. This project then, allowed all members of the congregation to contribute towards one very tangible and visible goal. One second generation high school student told me that her father helped build the wooden frame holding the paper. She said did not have time to participate, however, “since I had APs, you know.” Though some older 1.5 and second generation participated in the lantern’s construction, not many 1.5 and second generation youth participated in the building of the lantern – young children did not have the control necessary to do intricate design work, and the older youth were busy preparing for the annual Advance Placement exams in school.

In the summer of 2011, the temple added a satellite temple, the Paññāsīha Meditation Center in Palmdale, to serve the Sri Lankan American community living in the Palmdale, Lancaster, Santa Clarita, and Newhall areas. This temple is a converted ranch house at the top of a hill, overlooking the neighboring home’s stables, with a large amount of land that will be renovated for use as parking, gardens, and space for meditation. This meditation space will provide accommodations for extended meditation retreats, in which lay people can live comfortably for days or weeks at a time and meditate. However, the main reason the temple extended to this branch was because of a lack of Sri Lankan Buddhist temples in the area. Bhante Kolitha said, “...in that area there isn’t even one! These people have to drive an hour to come to a temple in this area. That’s why we thought to make it easier on people to build one

closer to them.”⁴⁶ In this way, the Sarathchandra Center monks bring the temple to the people, and accommodate the logistical needs of laity.

Sarathchandra Center as a Multicultural Site: Location, Ordination, and Multicultural Meditation

Location

The multicultural nature of the Sarathchandra Center is manifest in the foundations of the temple property. In 2004, the temple was able to expand extensively after a noncoethnic American couple donated property to the immediate east and west of the original temple grounds. The couple had consistently attended meditation sessions and retreats, and had essentially converted to Buddhism. The properties were originally willed to the temple by the couple, to be donated after both individuals’ passing but, after her husband’s death, the widow donated the property.⁴⁷ Like Dharma Vijaya’s additional land, some parts of these properties have been renovated into rental properties as apartments for both coethnic and noncoethnic individuals, while other parts have been added to the temple’s courtyard space. These rental buildings are painted in bright yellows and oranges reminiscent of monks’ and nuns’ robes. In this way, then, noncoethnics are living in a Buddhist space. Further, for 18 months, the monastic building itself housed one young Latino man in his twenties who was raised attending Buddhist temples.

⁴⁶ Bhante Kolitha, interview. Translated from Sinhala by the author.

⁴⁷ Bhante Kolitha and Bhante Siriniwasa., “Sarathchandra Buddhist Center,” 1. Unpublished manuscript. Translated into English by Sumedha Jayasena.

Ordinations

Like Dharma Vijaya, the Sarathchandra Center has noncoethnic figures of religious authority, namely monks who are ordained into the Theravāda tradition. Bhante Samitha Thero was the first noncoethnic monk ordained in the Sarathchandra Center in November 1995, only 9 months after the temple was established.⁴⁸ He was born Christian, but became a lay Buddhist until seeking ordination, after which he left the temple but continued as a monk elsewhere. The second noncoethnic monk was ordained in December 2001 as a *sāmanera*, or novice monk, where he lived until Bhante Kolitha took him to Sri Lanka to receive higher ordination, or *upasampadā*. Finally, in May 2009, Bhante Siridhamma was ordained after learning extensive Buddhist teachings from Bhante Siriniwasa. As a lay Buddhist, he realized that “after learning Buddhism, through the Dhamma, his mind was more pure. He said that in order to know Dhamma fully, one must be ordained.”⁴⁹

Bhante Siridhamma was the noncoethnic authority with whom many of the 1.5 and second generation interacted with during their visits to the temple. He was an elderly man, affectionately called “*Sudu Hāmarduruwo*,” or “white monk,” by both clergy and laity. He walked slowly and carried an oxygen tank with him that he used at all times, but like the rest of the monks at the Sarathchandra Center, he always had time to speak with the youth. Bhante Siriniwasa was Bhante Siridhamma’s main caregiver. Though technically Bhante Siriniwasa was a senior monk since he was ordained before Bhante Siridhamma, he respected Bhante Siridhamma as an elder. After Bhante Siridhamma’s death in December 2011, almost all of the mourners at his funeral were of Sri Lankan descent. His obituary announced him as “*Sudu*

⁴⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 10. Translated into English by author.

Hāparduruwo” first, and this was the first time that many Sarathchandra Center affiliated 1.5 and second generation youth even knew the Bhante’s ordained name.

Like Dharma Vijaya, the monks at the Sarathchandra Center are invested in propagating Buddhism in America and adapting Buddhism to an American context. The monks are strategic even in naming temples – the North Hollywood site is purposefully called a “Buddhist Center” rather than “temple,” while the Palmdale site is purposefully a “Meditation Center.” The only acknowledgement of the sites being Sri Lankan-operated is in their names, though both temples are named after individuals, rather than a Buddhist ideal. Bhante Madihe Paññāsīha established the first Theravāda Buddhist temple in Washington, D.C. in 1964. Bhante Kolitha explained:

People like meditation, right? When you put the name “meditation,” then Americans will come. In a book, I saw a quote by Ananda Maitreya Thera. “It is meditation centers that are the future of this religion.” Also sometimes when you put “Buddhist Vihāra,” some people don’t understand it.⁵⁰

Though regular attendees colloquially refer to these temples by their locations (i.e. “the Oxnard Temple” and “the Palmdale Temple”), their official names strategically invoke non-monastic ideas. However, the Paññāsīha Meditation Center is called the Palmdale Buddhist Temple by laity and even is referred to as such in the outgoing message on its answering machine. In contrast, the Sarathchandra Center’s website, www.meditatewithus.org, makes no mention of it being a monastic site.

Multicultural Meditations

The Sarathchandra Center attracts a regular noncoethnic population. In fact, it is not unusual to walk into the temple courtyard and hear active conversations in Spanish, as most of the meditation session members are Latina/o. The next largest demographic are white attendees,

⁵⁰ Bhante Kolitha interview. Translated into English by author.

followed by the occasional first generation member. In several months of attending meditations, I observed that I was the only second generation member for all except one session. One gregarious white individual in particular occasionally brings his soft-spoken teenage son to these sessions. In past years, the two were regular attendees. He told me that his son became interested in Buddhism as a child, and so they began visiting the temple and attending its meditations. He said that both he and the monks think his son was a devout Buddhist in a past life, which is why the son was immediately drawn to the religion. In fact, this young man, who is noncoethnic and non-Asian, can be considered a first generation Buddhist, as it is the only religion he has ever known. In this way, the noncoethnic community at the Sarathchandra Center is both multilingual and multigenerational.

There are meditations every Friday starting at 7:00 PM. The sessions begin with a 30 minute *metta* (loving kindness) meditation, followed by a 2-3 minute break, and a 30 minute breathing meditation. Prior to this, the temple is mostly quiet and empty, with only the temple's numerous cats roaming the main courtyard. The attendees trickle into the main hall closer to 7:00 PM, coming in mostly casual and comfortable clothes. Any early members immediately get to work unrolling four narrow rugs and setting pillows atop them for the meditators' comfort. Attendance varies – anywhere from 5 to 30 people can show up to the meditations each week – but anyone setting up always makes sure to set up pillows for at least 30 people to sit. The attendees make casual conversation in English and Spanish before the sessions. Following meditations is recitation of Buddhist verses, with small stapled pages of verses written in transliterated Pāli with English translations. During some days, this is followed by a recitation of the *Karanīya Metta sutta* (Discourse on Loving Kindness) in both Pāli and English. This is usually followed by a discussion. During this time, one monk and some meditation group

members serve drinks to the assembled group. One member in particular, a Latino man named Mercurio, consistently helps serve the juice or tea that the monk has prepared, and makes a point to serve the more senior monk first before any group members.

During a two week period over the summer, these post-chanting discussions were replaced by a formal *dhamma* discussion class, led by an elderly monk who is well-known for his insightful sermons that apply Buddhist thought to cognitive neuroscience and psychology. These sessions were attended by as many as 40 people per class, most of whom were Latina/o and white, though there were around 5-7 people of Sri Lankan descent, all first generation congregation members older than 30 years old. Two regular Latino attendees of the meditation sessions organized to film and edit these classes into DVDs. As the monk sat down, the two young men set up lighting and microphones around the elderly monk. I asked Oscar, a young man in his mid-twenties who developed the idea to film the classes, why he chose to do this. He said that the eventual DVDs could be used as a resource by “people who come to meditation or anyone who visits the Center and is interested in Buddhism.” This suggests that these DVDs are not necessarily for the people who already attended the temple regularly – namely the Sri Lankan American congregation.

In this way, the Sarathchandra Center seems to demonstrate a version of Numrich’s parallel congregations, especially during meditations, where sometimes I was the only non-monastic person of Sri Lankan descent present. This even extended to a physically divided congregation during Wesak, where most of the Sri Lankan congregation were in gathered around the large lantern or in the shrine room, while most of the noncoethnic population sat in chairs in the temple courtyard. However, the supposed parallel congregation at the Sarathchandra Center is not as entirely separated as in Numrich’s framework, since during

Wesak, the regular meditation attendees participated in chanting and the communal passing around of candles, flowers, and trays of incense and food during the *pūjā*.

Sarathchandra Buddhist Center Approach to Second Generation

Though the clergy are very concerned with the propagation of Buddhism in America, when it comes to the second generation, they are primarily concerned with preservation of traditional Sri Lankan Buddhist lay/clergy relationships. Bhante Kolitha also had a particularly compelling reason for starting the Palmdale branch:

In that area [i.e. in Palmdale, Lancaster, and Santa Clarita] some of the parents, since they didn't have anywhere to take their children, took them to a Hindu *kovil*. And we thought, somehow we have to give religion to those children. If they grow up with nothing, it wouldn't be right. They took them to the Hindu *kovil*, but now, all of them started coming to the Buddhist temple. It's ours, right?⁵¹

In this way, the monks are focused on giving the younger generation a proper Buddhist upbringing. More often, however, this translates itself into a drive for reproduction of Sri Lankan norms without considering the American context these young people have grown up in.

Daham pāsāl at the Sarathchandra Center is held every other Saturday from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM. It is held in the small carpeted shrine room adjacent to the main hall, since the adults need access to the outside kitchen and preparation area. The singular *daham pāsāl* class, consisting of anywhere from 10-20 children, briefly ends for a 10 minute break for the children. However, during a few Sunday school sessions, the 10 minute snack break was extended to 30 or even 40 minutes. The monks' classes at Sarathchandra are geared mainly towards very young children at or below the age of 7, while the oldest 2-3 students are middle schoolers, who are 13-14 years old at most. The children also seem to feel at ease running around the temple premises,

⁵¹ Bhante Kolitha, interview. Translated from Sinhala by the author.

dancing and singing during their breaks. However, though they are active and feel comfortable with the temple space and the monks, they are quiet and reserved during the classes. Bhante Kolitha usually teaches the class in English, but discusses complex Buddhist concepts that the children find difficult to understand. As a result, many of the children space out, since they are unable to engage with their religion. Nevertheless, at least 30 children participate in devotional singing during Wesak.

The temple is a place of community for Sarathchandra Center attendees. “It’s a good crowd of people that come – good people,” said one first generation parent. She spoke nostalgically about giving her first *dāna* at the temple for her daughter’s birthday. Though she finds the monks friendly for the most part, she feels that she is not able to verbalize feedback or constructive criticisms about the way *daham pāsala* is run. She, like other first generation members, thinks the monks perhaps overestimate the children’s abilities, and are teaching for a Sri Lankan context, not an American one. In Sri Lanka, children have Buddhism classes 5 days week as part of the official curriculum; here, it is every other week. “This is America,” she says, suggesting that this aspect of the temple must change. One parent asked me to suggest that the monks teach Buddhist *Jātaka* tales that the kids can understand, because currently at the temple, “the kids don’t really remember what they learn – what they do remember are stories.”

Starting at 7:00 PM, after *daham pāsala* ends, there is an *atavisi Buddha pūjā* (*pūjā* for the 28 Buddhas). Most of the *daham pāsala* students participate in the *pūjā*, though some go home. This is followed by a reception at 9:00 PM, where the family in charge of that week’s *pūjā* provides food for the lay attendees. The 1.5 and second generation teens and young adults I observed who came to the temple on Saturdays came mainly for the *pūjās*, not *daham pāsala*. Mostly, these young people spend time outside the temple buildings or even gates until the

official ceremony begins. Some young people only participate in certain parts of the religious activities. At one *pūjā*, there were three teenagers hanging outside the temple gates, one with an earbud hanging out of one ear, talking. At another festival day, a group of young teens were sitting in the courtyard while most everyone was packed in the shrine room participating in the chanting services. Though those that selectively participate are not engaging with Buddhism, the temple is still a social space. It becomes a space where they do not encounter their religion, but each other. Those 1.5 and second generation members who do interact with both their temple space and its inhabitants are presented with a very socially conservative worldview. For example, one second generation member chose to celebrate his 21st birthday at the temple with a *pūjā*. A visiting monk gave a sermon on the importance of listening to parents and not questioning their authority. Further, he derided young people who bring birthday cakes into the temple, claiming that it was not Buddhist. Bhante Kolitha did not openly contradict him, but instead allowed a lay woman to give a brief speech to congratulate birthday boy, where she openly disagreed with the monk's sentiments. Afterwards, one teenage second generation member present later pulled me aside and asked me, confused, "Do they not have birthday cakes in Sri Lanka?"

This lack of attention to the younger generation's ignorance of ethnic and/or religious norms is a fairly common phenomenon. In discussing South Asian American religious institutions, Richard Hughes Seager explains that initially, South Asian temples and other immigrant institutions have many more problems to deal with: cultural adjustment, as well as legal and economic issues. As a result, "religious life in the temple [is] often rudimentary," and emphasis is placed on "attempting to reconstitute the religious life of their homelands."⁵² That

⁵² Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 139.

is, no thought is given to the second generation's disconnection from their parent's culture. Instead, "the new first generation of immigrants arriving... preserves contacts with religious leaders and institutions in South Asia..."⁵³ Similarly, in preserving and relying on these contacts from the homeland, this new wave of Sri Lankan immigrants to America are unable to make the necessary adjustments to religious rituals and traditions to include the second generation. In the case of the Sarathchandra Center, this includes policing what the children wear. For example, before one *bana*, or sermon, Bhante Kolitha made an announcement to the congregation in Sinhala, directed at parents. "Make sure you and the children wear white [on festival days]," he said. "We must do it the right way." With this, we see that the Sarathchandra Center is a religious institution approaches the 1.5 and second generation population through the invocation of traditional Sri Lankan lay/clergy hierarchical relationships.

Comparisons

Coethnic and Noncoethnic Community Orientation

It is evident that Dharma Vijaya and the Sarathchandra Center are different in several significant ways. To visually represent these similarities and differences, we turn to Wendy Cadge, who explores how first generation institutions foster multiethnic and multiracial congregations while simultaneously fostering ethnic interactions, so that "diverse organizational forms exist side by side."⁵⁴ Though she does not discuss the 1.5 or second generation, I use

⁵³ Raymond Brady Williams, "Religion and Ethnicity in America," in John R Hinnels, ed. *Religious Reconstruction in the South Asian Diasporas: From One Generation to Another* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 236.

⁵⁴ Wendy Cadge, "De Facto Congregationalism and the Religious Organization of post-1965 Immigrants to the United States: A Revised Approach." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, June 2008, Vol. 76 No. 2, 345.

Cadge’s framework to measure levels of both ethnic and noncoethnic community orientation in these two temples below.⁵⁵ Cadge uses these measures to determine the levels of a temple’s involvement in the coethnic and noncoethnic communities. The number of activities a temple engages catered to a particular population in determines its community orientation measure towards that population.

TABLE 3.2: Ethnic Community Orientation Measure Comparison

Ethnic Community Orientation Measure	Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra	Sarathchandra Buddhist Center
Has community celebrations of secular holidays	X	X
Offers language classes		
Offers cultural classes		
Formally involved with social and political issues directly pertaining to coethnics (in either U.S. or country of origin)	X	X
TOTAL	2/4	2/4

We can see that the temples are similar in the ways they engage their coethnic communities, though the Sarathchandra Center is more active in the coethnic community. In contrast, Wat Thai, a large Thai Theravāda temple complex only a few miles away from the Sarathchandra Center, is primarily involved in the coethnic community, and holds many secular activities for laity and the Southern California Thai community. Wat Thai provides Thai language and culture classes, and has a weekend food court, in addition to its religious education classes. The Wat Thai temple, then would have a 4/4 ethnic community orientation measure.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 359-360.

TABLE 3.3: Noncoethnic Community Orientation Measure Comparison

Noncoethnic Community Orientation Measure	Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra	Sarathchandra Buddhist Center
Offering classes or teachings in English directed towards noncoethnics	X	X
Involvement in local and or regional community not specifically focused on coethnics	X	
Involvement in any regional noncoethnic Buddhist groups	X	
TOTAL	3/3	1/3

Though they greatly differ in the ways they connect with noncoethnics, the strategic multicultural nature of the Sarathchandra Center and Dharma Vijaya has been evident from each temple’s beginnings. Sarathchandra purposely named itself a “Buddhist center” rather than a “temple” in order to attract non-Sri Lankans who are agnostic or religiously adventurous. Dharma Vijaya has a Sinhala word for temple in its name (“Vihāra”), but has a non-Sri Lankan contingent that is active both in the temple’s daily life as well as on its Board. The monks at each temple consider the spread of Buddhism in America among noncoethnics a priority. Unlike Numrich’s parallel congregations framework, in which “ethnic” and “convert” Buddhists exist in the same space but use these spaces differently, those noncoethnics at both temples that attend regularly are part of both communities. In addition, they participate in the academic and theory-focused aspects of American Buddhism by attending meditation classes and discussion groups. They also participate in the “ritual” or practice aspects of Buddhism by attending festival days, and reciting Pāli verse.

However, as we can see in Table 3.3, Dharma Vijaya is much more active in its engagement with noncoethnics. The clergy at Dharma Vijaya go into the wider Los Angeles-area non-Sri Lankan community to network with the local neighborhood. Further, they seek collaborations between various Theravāda temples (across diverse ethnic and national lines), and

as well as other Buddhist temples (across different denominations). Though Sarathchandra is deliberately a “center,” there seems to be no attempt to network with the local non-Sri Lankan community, though many noncoethnics in the area find their way to the temple. However, while a main mission of Dharma Vijaya is to foster ties among various Buddhist denominations, the Sarathchandra Center makes it a point to involve many laity in both religious and secular events. Thus, the Sarathchandra Center caters to and takes an active role in the Southern California Sri Lankan lay community because it focuses on cultural preservation in their approach to its coethnic community. Dharma Vijaya, on the other hand, takes an active role in the noncoethnic community because it focuses on the adaptation of Buddhism in an American context, an adaptation that includes both coethnics and noncoethnics.

Philip Kasinitz et al. discuss how 1.5 and second generation members exist in such multicultural congregations. Specifically regarding second generation Catholics and Protestants, they note:

Those who are involved in organized religion attend churches and temples where they are likely to come into contact with other ethnic groups. Thus, far from being a cultural reinforcer, religion tends to be an assimilatory force.⁵⁶

In the same way, the Sri Lankan younger generation at these temples meets and interacts with many noncoethnic members, both as figures of secular and religious authority and as fellow congregants. However, the presence of noncoethnics does not seem to work as an “assimilatory force,” as Kasinitz et al. claim. In fact, in both formal interviews and casual conversation, many 1.5 and second generation interviewees felt their temples are Sri Lankan Buddhist spaces that noncoethnic members just happen to participate in. Further, Kasinitz et al. note that the minority

⁵⁶ Philip Kasinitz, et al, *Inheriting the City: The Children of Immigrants Come of Age* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008), 265.

of the Puerto Rican and Chinese American second generations who attended religious institutions were most actively involved in their religious community. They claim,

This involvement did not reinforce an ethnic cultural experience, however. Their experiences in churches do not generally emerge from the interviews as sites of interethnic contact. This may be because worship in places like Catholic churches does not lead to sustained interactions among parishioners who come together for mass and then scatter afterward.⁵⁷

This is true of some of the young people I spoke with, though certainly not all. Some individuals see their temples as sites of cultural preservation and a way of reaffirming their Sri Lankan Sinhala identity, while others are able to see these spaces as multiethnic and multiracial. Unlike the churches mentioned above, many at both temples do not “scatter afterward.” In fact, after official religious ceremonies are over, most congregants stay and talk for hours afterward. Part of this is because the temple spaces are relatively small and have space to sit and talk. In addition, most religious ceremonies are immediately followed by meals, which also allows for coethnic and noncoethnic interactions.

Further, at both temples, it seems that first generation parents expect too much of the monks regarding the 1.5 and second generation. For example, at the Sarathchandra Center, there is no parental organization of snack-time, which caused an issue one particular evening. During the children’s break, Bhante Kolitha asked parents who were socializing in the main hall if there were snacks for the children. There were not, so Bhante Siriniwasa searched for and found juice while Bhante Kolitha found cookies in the temple’s kitchen. Further, at both temples first generation members expect the monks to use temple resources in order to serve the lay community in secular ways. However, this type of life may not be what their monastic and academic education prepared them for. That is, the monks spent years training and studying Buddhist teachings and rituals, not how to handle issues of laity on their own. The monks are

⁵⁷ Ibid., 266-267.

expected to be all things to all people – the first generation, the 1.5 and second generation, the noncoethnics, etc. For example, one parent I encountered at Dharma Vijaya lamented that the monks do not properly equip children with Sinhala language ability. I suggested that, perhaps, the monks’ priorities lie in passing on a Buddhist way of life and imparting Buddhist teachings on the younger generations. The parent said that that was the issue – too much Buddhism and not enough language, and she implied that that was the reason she did not bring her now teenaged child to *daham pāsala*. This is actually a problem at both temples that I observed - i.e. parents do not realize that language ability is a responsibility of the parents who see their child every day, not the monks who see the child only a few hours weekly or bimonthly.

Second Generation Assessments: Celebrations, Knowledge, Appearances, and Monks

As we have seen, at both Dharma Vijaya and the Sarathchandra Center, second generation individuals feel a sense of comfort and rootedness in their temple, and consider these religious spaces places in which they belong. However, during both my interviews and informal conversations with young people, I noticed that several compared the Sarathchandra Center more favorably than Dharma Vijaya with respect to tradition and cultural preservation. For example, while serving food to the congregation during the Sarathchandra Center’s Wesak celebrations, I spoke with briefly with Ajith, a 1.5 generation seventeen year old who attends Dharma Vijaya mostly regularly. As he had been at Dharma Vijaya’s Wesak celebrations the week before, I asked him how the Sarathchandra Center’s celebrations compared. “I like this better,” he said, almost immediately. “It feels more like it’s in Sri Lanka. More traditional.” When I asked if there were anything he liked at all about Dharma Vijaya’s Wesak, he shook his head. He did not approve of the fact that Dharma Vijaya’s Wesak spent less than an hour on *pūjā* in the shrine

room. Instead, the main events of the day, such as the Buddhist skit in Sinhala, *bhakthi gee*, and the youth's chanting, speech, and debate contests, though religious in nature, were mainly presented by laity and the 1.5 and second generation. However, Thilakshi, a second generation young woman in college, feels that Dharma Vijaya's focus on "more for the kids," is positive, and hopes this trend will continue in the future.

Thilakshi, Anoma, and Ranil, are all second generation young people and primarily attended the Sarathchandra Center as children, but later attended to Dharma Vijaya as teenagers. For all of them, though they felt the Sarathchandra Center provided a good Buddhist foundation, they found that it was insufficient for their continued Buddhist study as they grew older because it did not have classes that catered to older youth. Instead, they went to Dharma Vijaya, which has specific classes for high school aged young people. Though Thilakshi enjoyed lessons at Dharma Vijaya, Ranil and Anoma were not pleased with their experience there. For Anoma, the temple did not look sufficiently Buddhist:

I feel like it's an office. It looks - I don't feel like it's a temple. It felt like a house to me, 'cause it *is* a house... It's been around for a while, and they haven't made much progress in making it look more like a public temple. I know that's *the* temple where all the other temples got started and it's really known everywhere, and they're doing that stuff, like spreading Buddhism. But the place itself is not very spiritual. The Oxnard temple looks more like a temple and feels more like a temple. Looks really make an impression on how I feel. The gate [i.e. the new concrete border with the Buddhist motif] makes [the Sarathchandra Center] look more temple-y.

Anoma is clearly aware of Dharma Vijaya's status among other Sri Lankan temples in Southern California as a place where monks are trained to propagate Buddhism, but she brushes that significant point aside since it does not look like what she imagines a traditional Sri Lankan Buddhist temple should look like.

Ranil also feels that, socially, Dharma Vijaya's atmosphere does not feel Buddhist enough: "The Crenshaw temple's lost a lot of it's - it doesn't hit me that way. For me, it's more like a gathering area. It just doesn't have *that*." For him, heavy involvement of laity and a communal feel are not what a proper Sri Lankan Buddhist temple consists of. In the same way, Anoma claimed that "The Crenshaw monks are cool, but they're kind of chatty. You can have a nice conversation over tea or something. Maybe when it comes to like Piyananda Sādhū you can like, talk about Buddhism." Though she likes the monks, she disapproves of their interactions with the laity. Both believe that the more a monk interacts with laity in a strictly spiritual sense, the better they are as a monk.

This, however, does not take into the account the realities of running a Sri Lankan Buddhist temple in America. For example, there is a strategic reason why the monks at Dharma Vijaya are "chatty." That is, this chattiness has less to do with these monk's personalities and more to do with Dharma Vijaya's unofficial mission statement. Bhante Piyananda's goal is the propagation of Buddhism in America and ensuring a cultural reconstitution of Sinhala Buddhism in America. As such, Bhante Piyananda recruits monks who are more liberal and are able to interact with lay Sri Lankan Americans and the 1.5 and second generation in meaningful ways. Therefore, more liberal-minded first generation parents bring their children to Dharma Vijaya, and as a result, these young people respond favorably to this particular environment, as we will see in the next chapter. On the other hand, those 1.5 and second generation young people who have attended the Sarathchandra Center take issue with Dharma Vijaya monks' interactions with laity. More conservative parents are drawn to the Sarathchandra Center because it is more concerned with cultural preservation, and so the second generation who are exposed to that environment as children become socially conservative young adults.

Ultimately, we see that though both temples are invested in the propagation of Buddhism in America, especially amongst noncoethnics, they both differ in their approaches toward the 1.5 and second generation. Dharma Vijaya gives this generation leadership roles, and caters to the younger generation's needs, while also listening to and addressing first generation lay concerns. Perhaps this is because it is an older temple, or perhaps it is due to Bhante Piyananda's goal of adapting Buddhism to an American context and taking into consideration the experiences of the 1.5 and second generation. This differs from the atmosphere at the Sarathchandra Center, where the temple is involved in lay community events and creates new religious spaces like the temple in Palmdale for laity, but where laypeople feel apprehensive voicing their concerns. Though the Sarathchandra Center is visibly a Buddhist space, and Dharma Vijaya's Buddhist nature is less overt, places do not necessarily have to look Buddhist for Buddhist things to occur there. In this case, the "less Buddhist-looking place," as Anoma describes it, is the one that caters to and is more successful at teaching future Buddhists, i.e. the 1.5 and second generation.

CHAPTER 4: 1.5 AND SECOND GENERATION RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

The anonymous online survey and interviews with 1.5 and second generation individuals reveal their varied experiences within their temple settings and in their self-identifications. Most have had positive experiences at their temples, but opinions diverge at definitions on what and who a Buddhist entails, and when discussing noncoethnic presence. Further, these young people view their identity as tools for resistance: 1) to generate pride in their difference, 2) against a subsuming mainstream America, and 3) against being racialized as Other. The anonymous online survey covered a variety of 1.5 and second generation temple attendance, engagement, and self-identification. Most spoke of their temples in general terms, but several respondents explicitly mentioned their temples by name. However, compared to the individuals interviewed and the 1.5 and second generation members that attend Sunday school and festival days, some survey respondents seemed to lack very basic knowledge of both Theravāda Buddhism and Sri Lanka. For example, several respondents referred to chanting *gāthās* as “praying” to the Buddha for assistance, when Theravāda ideology states that after the Buddha achieved the cessation of existence, or *nirvana*, he did not nor will not return. One respondent wrote, “I dislike that many of the teachings are done in Sanskrit and Sinhala,” but Sri Lankan Theravāda chanting is done in Pāli. Another individual, in a response to the question “What does being Sri Lankan mean to you?” wrote:

Being Sri Lankan means first of all to be able to speak Sri Lankan at least little bit, and represent all the positive culture and traditions that makes us Sri Lankan and unique... Talk Sri Lankan to young ones [that are] growing up here in USA.⁵⁸

However, there is no “Sri Lankan” language – multiple languages are spoken in Sri Lanka (such as Sinhala, Tamil, and English) – but one can assume that this respondent meant Sinhala,

⁵⁸ Spelling and capitalization errors in some survey responses have been corrected to improve readability.

considering the context. Nevertheless, though this person is not well-informed of their heritage, he or she is very concerned with cultural preservation. This speaks to the variety of both experience with and understanding of Buddhism.

The interviews with second generation members cover a variety of engagement with their temples, both past and present, and a variety of relationships with Sri Lanka. The individuals interviewed who attend Dharma Vijaya are Sujatha, Piyumi, Upeksha, and Dinesh. Sujatha is a young woman in her early twenties who arrived in the U.S. with her family when she was four and a half years old, and attended the temple very rarely as a child. She has been back to Sri Lanka a total of five times, and within the past ten years, she had only returned to Sri Lanka twice. She was bit nervous and hesitant speaking about her experiences, and considered every question carefully before answering. Piyumi is a second generation woman in her mid-twenties, who was born and raised in Southern California. Our conversation was a back-and-forth of frank discussion, and she discussed her temple experience affectionately and with visible amusement. Unlike Sujatha, Piyumi attended almost every Sunday school session, but is less involved now, though she occasionally volunteers during festival days. Piyumi's first experience with Sri Lanka was at the age of fourteen, but since then she has also been to Sri Lanka every 2-3 years. Dinesh is biracial man in his mid-twenties, with a Sri Lankan father and a white Jewish mother. He was very honest during our interview, and seemed frustrated when speaking about his struggles with identity. He has gone to Sri Lanka every 2-3 years since he was born, and in 2011 spent 2 months there without his parents in the home of his paternal relatives. He was more involved in the temple as a child than Sujatha but less involved than Piyumi, as he divided his time between Sunday schools at Dharma Vijaya and his synagogue. However, he is more involved with the temple now compared to the other two, as he volunteers during festival days

and tried to take on a leadership role at the temple whenever he returned home from college. Finally, Upeksha is a second generation lay minister in her early thirties who first attended Sunday school as a high schooler. My interview with her was the shortest at 45 minutes, as she is very succinct, no nonsense, and to the point. She has gone to Sri Lanka perhaps four times in her life, the most recent being in 2003. Unlike the other interviewees, who each stay in Sri Lanka for at least a month, she stays for 2-3 weeks at most, and does not plan on returning because of environmental allergies. As discussed in detail in the previous chapter, she teaches Sunday school at Dharma Vijaya.

Those second generation Sri Lankan American interviewees who attend the Sarathchandra Center are Ranil, Anoma, and Thilakshi. As explained in the previous chapter, all have experience attending Dharma Vijaya as well. Ranil is a genial second generation undergraduate in his early twenties who has been to Sri Lanka with his family four times. He went he was 11 years old when he first visited. He attended *daham pāsala* at the Sarathchandra Center from the ages of 9-17, and later attended Dharma Vijaya's Sunday school. Anoma is a first year undergraduate who has visited Sri Lanka three times – once each in elementary, middle, and high school. At first glance, she appeared to be a very quiet young woman, but she spoke passionately about her experiences. She was a *daham pāsala* student at the Sarathchandra Center from the age of 4 until she was in high school, when she also began going to Dharma Vijaya's Sunday school. My conversation with her was the longest, at 2.5 hours, since she was very opinionated on second generation behavior at the temple and temple appearances. Thilakshi is a first year undergraduate who has visited Sri Lanka every summer with her family since birth. She is verbose and honest, and spoke emotionally about her experience. Like Ranil and Anoma,

though she attended the Sarathchandra *daham pāsala* as a child, she also attended Dharma Vijaya’s Sunday school in high school, and her older brother attended Dharma Vijaya as a child.

Temple Experience: Religious Engagement, Traditional and Familial Spaces, and Clergy

Religious Engagement

The 1.5 and second generation engages with their temples in different ways, though several trends emerged among survey respondents, as seen in the table below.

TABLE 4.1: Survey Short Answer – Positive Temple Experiences

What do you like about going to your temple? (Or: describe a moment when you really enjoyed or were happy attending your temple.)	
Response	Percent of total
For religious reasons	43.6
To interact with Sri Lankan community	20.5
To both interact with Sri Lankan community and for religious reasons	28.2
Dissatisfied with temple experience	5.1
No opinion	2.6
TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS = 39	

One fifth of respondents discussed the temple as a place to meet other Sri Lankans of multiple generations, and either engaged more with their temples as community or cultural spaces than religion ones, or did not mention religious reasons for attending. However, the majority of the respondents enjoyed attending their temple for religious reasons only, and did not mention any secular cultural reasons for attending. Instead, several spoke of the “peacefulness” the temple space made them feel, and the spirituality of being in a religious space. Many of them discussed observing *sil*, or the taking of the eight or ten precepts during some retreats, as a major factor of their temple attendance. For these individuals, observing *sil* was transformative, and made them feel “more in-tune with [their] own peace and as well as...engulfing [themselves] in the religion.” Though others felt the temple was a space for learning about Buddhism only, the

vast majority of the responses focused on the feelings that arose when at the temple: “It is a symbol of calm, peace, and tranquility. I always feel better when I go to temple.” Regardless, those that considered religion the primary motivator for attending temple wrote the least, with most responses being succinct 1-2 sentence answers.

In contrast, those that engaged with their temples in both religious and cultural ways were more verbose and detailed in their answers. Their experience was varied, but all felt strongly about their temple spaces. One respondent wrote, “I like how it’s a communal activity and brings people together. I like the unifying sense of temple and the calmness and inner peace it brings.” For this individual, and for many others, the temple is a place that reaffirms both Buddhist and Sri Lankan identity. This unification is not only Buddhist in nature; it is also secular in its community-building. Speaking specifically about Dharma Vijaya, another respondent spoke similarly:

What I like about going to temple (and I have to confess I [used] to only go once a year) is the cohesiveness of the Lankan community. The community has grown so much since I was young and it is nice to see familiar faces and new ones. I also like that we have been able to keep the traditions going in America. I have also liked a few sermons given at the Crenshaw Temple. The other temples I attend don’t tend to give sermons on specific topics. There tends to just be the traditional chanting rituals but not a message to the congregation.

Even though this person’s engagement with Dharma Vijaya is infrequent, the space still has a huge effect on them.

TABLE 4.2: Survey Short Answer - Negative Temple Experience

What do you dislike or what would you change about your temple? (Or: describe a moment when you did not enjoy attending your temple.)	
Response	Percent of total
Language barrier	21.6
Temple politics/the perception of temple as a business	10.8
Logistical issues	16.2
Gossip	10.8
Not accessible to second generation	8.1
Temple is specifically Sinhala Buddhist/not multicultural	5.4
Too cultural/not enough focus on religion	5.4
Dissatisfied with Buddhism (as a religion)	5.4
Satisfied with temple experience	16.2
TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS = 37	

Though most spoke of their temple experiences positively, there were some issues in engaging in their temple spaces. Most felt that a lack of language knowledge detracted from their temple experience. They wrote of the dearth of English-speaking clergy, and their reliance on their parents to translate the teachings for them. Several knew the Pāli verses by heart, but did not know what they meant. The next issue with the most respondents was mainly logistical, and these individuals discussed various problems at their temples: that their temple was not environmentally friendly, the indoor and outdoor spaces being crowded on festival days, their temple’s location and/or distance from their home, and the length of religious services. The language barrier was problematic for the interviewees, as well. Sujatha shared the following anecdote about a moment shared between herself and Dinesh:

And I remember, this sticks to me, because he [Dinesh] – we were in the hall with the big table and they were chanting in the other hall... He was like, “What are they saying?” And for a second, I thought I knew. But I’m like, “Wait a second, I don’t know what they’re saying at all.” I was just like, “I don’t know, I don’t know, man.” [I was] maybe seven. Seven or eight. And so we would just play.

In relaying the story, Sujatha appeared wistful and sad. In this particular instance Sujatha (a child with two Sri Lankan parents) was seen by Dinesh (a child with one Sri Lankan parent) as a

gatekeeper to cultural knowledge. She was unable to be that gatekeeper, a disappointment she vividly remembers over 15 years later.

Traditional and Familial Spaces

Sujatha was adamant about the temple being a place where “you should do things the way they are in Sri Lanka.” She mentioned an incident at another Southern California Sri Lankan Buddhist temple where a monk had offered a customary blessing for departed loved ones, and read off a list that had been provided for him. At the request of some congregation members, he also read off the names of two people who had died only two days before in Sri Lanka. Sujatha described how her mother had been furious at the monk for accepting the request of the congregation members (whom Sujatha’s mother did not know), since in Sri Lanka, it is not acceptable to religiously acknowledge the passing of a loved one until seven days after the death. Sujatha, in turn, became angry at the monk, and she was visibly upset while she was telling the story, exclaiming:

He [the monk] should have said something, and taught them... They [the monks] should be more vocal about, you know, this is how it’s done. Because it shouldn’t be my mom who’s going around telling everybody, “This is how it’s done!”... That’s part of the culture, as a tradition... At a Sri Lankan Buddhist temple, you should carry that on.

When I suggested that, perhaps, the monk did not know that the two individuals were only recently dead, as he was reading a list written by others, she immediately stopped her tirade. It was as if the thought had not occurred to her until that moment. Clearly, Sujatha views the temple as a site for cultural preservation.

Similarly, Anoma feels that she had in-depth experience of Theravāda Buddhism because of her mother’s very traditional views on Buddhist living. “My mom is really strict on what

people wear and how they act at the temple,” she said, stating that she is only allowed to wear skirts to the temple, never jeans or pants. During high school, Anoma woke up at 5:30 AM every day with her mother to go and do a morning *pūjā* at the temple, and would sometimes also go to the temple right after school. She felt forced to go, and was annoyed at having to do so, but she eventually began to get used to it. As a result, she says, “I become judgmental, because I know how you’re supposed to act at temple. And it makes me mad. Like, some people just don’t know how to act at temple.” Here, we see that Anoma uses “judgmental” in a positive way, claiming that her traditional upbringing makes her an expert in the proper ways of being a Buddhist. Ranil also speaks to the idea that there are certain things that are done at the temple in a certain way. Compared to his childhood, he finds the temple

...fun in a different way [now.] You’re more mature, you start kind of doing things – you’re doing the things you came to temple for. What you’re supposed to be doing at the temple, kind of? It should be that, instead of thinking of the temple as a gathering area for your friends and stuff. It’s a more religious turn, a more spiritual turn.

Piyumi, however, feels that the temple is a place for familial-like connections among members of the Sri Lankan Buddhist community, saying that “the temple is kind of like a Sri Lankan community center,” where she can meet people and fully immerse herself in the experience of being Sri Lankan.

You’re going to hear the language, you’re going to see the food, the priests are going to speak to you in Sinhala. It’s kind of like, yeah, it’s a mini community center. (*laughs*)

It is evident that Piyumi sees her Sri Lankan identity wrapped in the experience of people, language, and food, and not necessarily religion. Similarly, Dinesh finds the temple a place where he can find belonging:

I only fit in at the temple here at Crenshaw. Because I know the people. It's like "Oh, I've known you since I was a little kid... Oh, that's that uncle or there's that auntie."...I never feel too self-conscious when I'm at our temple because I know generally most of the people and the monks. It's kind of like "Oh, okay whatever, like, going to the temple." But if I were to go to another temple, I don't really know people. It just comes down to feeling accepted or not with those people. It's even beyond feeling Sri Lankan, it's just feeling accepted, you know?

Piyumi and Dinesh focus on the temple as spaces of family and belonging, perhaps because they have had more experience with Sri Lanka as adults than Sujatha, and can thus use the temple space as a community-oriented and religious one, rather than a site for preserving culture alone.

Upeksha also sees the temple as a community-oriented space, but as one that should have a specific purpose. For example, she thinks, "The temple is a useful tool or vessel for us to help... and actually get people together." However, she feels that this togetherness should be funneled into socially active secular projects or events in Los Angeles community. She suggested a project volunteering in downtown to feed the homeless population or a fundraiser for at-risk children. Though these projects are secular in nature, and focused towards noncoethnics, she sees the donation of time and effort as a type of *dāna*, and hopes the Sri Lankan community at Dharma Vijaya would be more willing to participate if presented in more religious terms.

Though Sujatha, Piyumi, Dinesh, and Upeksha attended Dharma Vijaya in the 1990s, much of their experience is similar to current Sunday school youth. I would often speak with some of the current teenage Sunday school students on how they felt about their temple experience. Many of these conversations were brief, as the individuals in question were alternately climbing up the roof of the temple, creating human pyramids, or lighting as much incense as possible in the shrine room. One thing was clear: these young people clearly felt comfortable in this religious space. I noticed during one of Michael's guided meditations that all of the youths' feet and socks were filthy, suggesting that they had felt comfortable enough to go

without shoes around the outside of the temple buildings. One group of girls comfortably reclined in front of the golden Buddha statue one afternoon, the incense crumbling after that morning's *dāna*, discussing television. Many of them were confused when I explained my research, as it seemed to not occur to them that the temple was worthy of study; it was just a place where they "get to hang out with people." This casualness in discussing the temple is telling – the temple, then, is an informal space where they experience their religion and their culture.

Relationships with Clergy

In addition to their views on the temple as a whole entity, these second generation young people have differing views on the relationship between the second generation laity and monks. Anoma sees the monks as people she can have conversations about religion with, saying that "The monks really know Buddhism. Kolitha Sādhu - he's a really good person to go ask things... It's really nice that you can always talk to them and really learn from them." To Anoma, knowing that the monks are willing to share knowledge enables her to feel more comfortable in asking them difficult questions. Ranil's conception of this relationship is similar, though it evolved as he aged. He first saw monks as friends, and as a child even had favorite monks he would prefer to speak with. As a young adult, he now sees the monastic/second generation relationship as more in line with a teacher/student relationship. He has come to appreciate monks as spiritual advisors: "The monks are really good examples of Buddhists, you know. Of a really good monk. They're focused on really the actual Buddhist stuff." These comments suggest that he compares monks he's encountered to one another. As such, Ranil puts value on a perceived authenticity and tradition of Buddhism. Sujatha, on the other hand, expects

monks be disciplinarians, claiming, "...[the monks] should be a lot more stricter. Some of them don't know how to control the kids." Sujatha sporadically attended Dharma Vijaya growing up, and rarely attends now, yet she stresses that both the religious and social customs of Sri Lanka must be reproduced in America. All three view the ideal second generation/monastic relationship as affirming solidly set hierarchal relations.

In contrast, Piyumi sees the monks at Dharma Vijaya in personal terms, and feels comfortable in speaking with the monks on both secular and religious issues:

I think they're just really cute and adorable! (*laughs*) And the fact that they're not like so... like, put you at an arm's distance. It's like a family. It's like, those are your uncles that you're not supposed to hug. (*laughs*) They just want to talk to you, and know how your life is, and hope you're doing well.

She acknowledges that her view of this relationship is unusual, but her experience also reflects Thilakshi's interactions with for the monks at the Sarathchandra Center. Thilakshi spoke fondly about how Bhante Kolitha and Bhante Siriniwasa were the first monks to see her after she was born. Even though she was a newborn, and thus could not remember that experience, she says "It's just really special to me. I feel really close. And I have major respect for them." In this way, Thilakshi engages with the monks not solely on spiritual terms, but through the bonds of friendship and family. One survey respondent who attends Dharma Vijaya appreciated that the monks encourages critical thinking: "I really liked learning about Buddhism in the aspects of a Sri Lankan-American child. I got to question the religion but also got answers [in] return." Unlike the Ranil's teacher/student relationship, this person engaged with monks in a one-to-one and more egalitarian manner.

Who is a Buddhist? Views on Noncoethnic Congregation

Who is a Buddhist?

Who exactly these 1.5 and second generation people consider Buddhist is central to the examination of Buddhist self-identification. To some survey respondents there was a sense of an exclusivity of Buddhism. One respondent wrote, “I love the fact that [noncoethnics] attend the temple because they want to learn about our religion.” Still another wrote, “I think it’s great that people of other cultures find our religion and culture interesting.” This label of Buddhism as “*our* religion” suggests a sense of ownership, implying that Buddhism belongs to Sri Lankans only, not noncoethnics. This invalidates noncoethnic engagement with Buddhism as less authentic than coethnic engagement.

In contrast, others recognized the variety of Buddhist background, distinguishing Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhism as one of many Buddhisms. One survey respondent who attends Dharma Vijaya wrote, “I love it when non-Sri Lankans attend my temple. It helps bridge together multiple worlds and also brings together different branches of Buddhism as well,” which acknowledges the diversity of Buddhist experience. Another Dharma Vijaya respondent wrote:

As a kid, I enjoyed learning about the history of Buddhism in other places, such as Thailand and China. I remember a documentary about the destruction of Buddhist temples in China by Communist Party members. While a terrible event, I was appreciative of the fact that I was able to learn a bit more about world history from a perspective that might not be taught in your average school.

This person’s temple experience fostered a sense of connection between Buddhists and a shared sense of history, resulting in a more inclusive view of what a Buddhist entails (i.e. not just Sri Lankan). In addition, Dinesh acknowledged the multiplicity of Buddhist identity, suggesting that noncoethnic individuals were just as much insiders as coethnics. Speaking specifically of

Arturo, one Latino young man in his twenties who attended Dharma Vijaya regularly as a child and continues to attend today, he said, “I don’t feel like he’s an outsider. He’s, he’s *people*, you know?” Dinesh considers Arturo more of a part of the Dharma Vijaya community than any Sri Lankan American who comes intermittently on festival days. Dinesh’s temple experience, then, allows for an expansive definition of “Buddhist.”

Attitude Towards Noncoethnic Temple Congregation

TABLE 4.3: Survey Short Answer - Attitude Towards Noncoethnic Congregation

How do you feel about non-Sri Lankans attending or not attending your temple?	
Response	Percent of total
Positive	82.5
Positive with Caveats	12.5
No opinion	5.0
TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS = 40	

Almost all respondents felt that the presence of non-Sri Lankans was positive. Like several of the interviewees, some had caveats, warning that they were only comfortable with noncoethnics “as long as they are attending for the right reasons.” Another respondent noted that “as long as they act respectfully to the [religion] as well as those who are [practicing] the religion,” they approved of noncoethnics. Some warmly welcomed the presence of noncoethnics. One respondent wrote, “Buddhists come in all races and I feel that if the religion helps someone then they should be welcome.” Further, several of the respondents that spoke positively of having noncoethnic congregation members spoke negatively about Sri Lankans:

I am totally for non-Sri Lankans attending the temple because they come with a more focused mindset. It’s great that others are willing to learn and live by Buddhism, when so many of our own people aren’t.

This suggests that noncoethnic members are more Buddhist than coethnics, or are able to engage more with Buddhist teachings than coethnics. Another respondent privileged noncoethnics over coethnics saying, “I think it is good and makes it a more legitimate temple and less of just an enclave for Sri Lankan people to insulate themselves from other Americans.” That is, having enclaves are negative, while noncoethnics bring legitimacy in the eyes of the American mainstream to the religious space. This implies that temples without multicultural or multiracial presence are not genuinely Buddhist. Another person was positive about noncoethnic presence, but was skeptical that it could work at their temple, derisively suggesting that something is lacking in the Sri Lankan congregation itself:

I know in the community that will not always be looked at positively. I feel they would allow it because that is what Buddhists should do, but I feel that there has been an ethno-centric surge with new Lankan emigrants and they would not really want the mixing at heart.

Other respondents were generally positive of the presence of noncoethnic members, but expressed concern over how it would affect their temple experience:

I was fine with it, because I think it should be open to all, but I’m not sure I would have enjoyed temple as much if it weren’t mostly Sri Lankans, given that it was more of a cultural activity than a religious activity. That being said some of the most profound religious lessons I learned at temple were from a non-Sri Lankan.

For all of the 1.5 and second generation people involved in both temples, the presence of noncoethnic individuals was encouraged. Dinesh said, “It shows how accepting our community is... Compared to the Koreans [i.e. the Jungto Society] next door - so close but so far. I feel like I have to be Korean to even step inside.” Though Dinesh also finds the temple as a site where he can connect with his community, he also wishes that it could become more of an explicitly multicultural site. Though his interest in the temple is more focused on Buddhist thought and practice, he sees the temple “as a place for Sri Lankanization.” Frustration is evident in his voice

when he tells me that he would like the temple to cater more to non-Sri Lankans. He was the first biracial individual to go through the Sunday school system, but he is by no means the last. Piyumi spoke highly of those noncoethnic members who come regularly to Dharma Vijaya and who were willing to be exposed to Sri Lankan culture: “I think it’s great especially to know that even though it’s mostly Sri Lankans attending, we have an open door policy and people feel comfortable enough to come... Especially since *they’re* comfortable being the minority in that situation.” Anoma also spoke about the how engaged the noncoethnic congregation was at the Sarathchandra Center, and the understanding with which they practiced:

I’ve met some of the people at the meditation class. There’s like this white guy who comes with his son. I think he really truly means what he’s doing. He’s really devoted to it. Also there’s like this Mexican woman who goes, and she like understands it. She understands the chanting, she understands the dharma, like, she gets it.

To Anoma, understanding the Buddha’s teachings, or dhamma, is key to proper religious engagement for noncoethnics. However, she holds coethnics to different standards, requiring that they act with propriety on temple grounds in accordance with Sinhala Buddhist cultural norms.

Even as they spoke about the positive aspects of noncoethnic congregation members, some saw potential for problems. Sujatha felt uncomfortable with non-Sri Lankans attending Sunday school, saying that any non-Sri Lankan children should be placed in separate Sunday school classes than their Sri Lankan American counterparts. Further, though Thilakshi enjoyed the presence of non-Sri Lankans, she felt that the monks at both temples “treat them more favorably,” specifically non-Asians. “I understand that they want religion to spread, though,” she said, suggesting that a different approach towards non-Asian noncoethnics was a necessary condition of propagating Buddhism outside of Sri Lanka. Further, both Piyumi and Anoma

spoke about the dangers of cultural appropriation in a multiracial Buddhist context. As an undergraduate, Piyumi took a class on Buddhist philosophy in an attempt to explore Buddhism.

However, the experience was quite negative:

I *hated* it. I hated it. [The professor] was kind of like, he completely - it was philosophy, but he completely downplayed the cultural aspect of the religion. Like it was nonexistent. But it's not. You can't talk about a religion without, like - there are cultural things that come along with it.

Later, she was furious describing her frustration at fellow noncoethnic undergraduates at her college who were interested in only certain aspects of Buddhism:

[It's] gentrification of the religion! You're commodifying it so that's more widely represented so that you're comfort- so that white America is comfortable in the Buddhist realm, but it was *never your own!*

Here, we see that even though Piyumi does not attend Dharma Vijaya regularly as an adult, she still feels a sense of ownership over Buddhism. As with Piyumi, race was an issue with Anoma's experience with cultural appropriation with one or two white individuals who only attended the Sarathchandra Center meditation sessions once:

'Cause if they're just there cause it's cool, I feel like it's cultural appropriation. It's not okay, you can't - just because it's "cool" to do these chants. That's like, stupid. I have no respect for people who go because they think it's, like, hipster.

Anoma takes Buddhism and her temple space incredibly seriously and only directly interacts with noncoethnic temple attendees only if they are as serious about the religion as she. Inherent in all of these concerns is a fierce protection of closely valued beliefs. Noncoethnics can participate in the temple community, but only if they do so respectfully, in a manner that defers to historical and cultural context.

Self-Identity as Resistance: On Being Different

What “Sri Lankan” and “Sri Lanka” Means

Regardless of how survey respondents and interviewees self-identified, many discussed Sri Lanka and being Sri Lankan in terms of community. For one respondent,

It means a belonging to a fun-loving, highly social community which is both a blessing (one will never be lonely being Sri Lankan) and a mild curse (I have way too many parties and family functions to attend), rich cultural heritage, exotic delicious cuisine and international experience of “family.”

Being Sri Lankan, for this person, is active, and is not an individual experience but a communal one. This “international experience of ‘family’” suggests transnational ties, while the mention of parties suggests an involved a local (i.e. Southern Californian) Sri Lankan network. Being Sri Lankan, then, can happen anywhere there are Sri Lankan people to connect with. For another respondent,

Being Sri Lankan means speaking the native language, knowing about the history and the people of the island, and fully immersing one self into the culture singing the great *baila* songs and dancing the night away.⁵⁹

To this person, not only is the experience of being surrounded by Sri Lankans (“dancing the night away”) vital to their definition of being Sri Lankan, but knowledge of their heritage. Here, language ability is crucial to being Sri Lankan. Perhaps this individual considers their second generation peers who lack the ability to speak Sinhala inauthentic.

Others viewed Sri Lanka and being Sri Lankan in sensory terms. When asked about what Sri Lanka meant to her, and what the immediate images and memories that come up when she hears “Sri Lanka,” Sujatha replied:

It’s where my family is. It’s where I came from. The *motherland*. (*laughs*) Sri Lanka is a gem, like a tropical gem. And a juicy mango! (*laughs*) It’s the coconut

⁵⁹ *Baila* is a genre of popular dance music in Sri Lanka originating from community of Sri Lankan *kaffirs*, who are descended from Sinhalese and Portuguese slave traders and African slaves forcibly brought to Sri Lanka.

drink that your uncle cuts from the tree, and makes a spoon to scoop out the meat and drink it right then.

We see that Sujatha associates “Sri Lanka” with both family as well as sensory memory.

Sujatha’s more descriptive characterizations of Sri Lanka invoke jewels and tropical fruit, two things that Sri Lanka is known for. Though Sujatha mentioned interacting with her cousins in an offhand manner, she was more prolific and detailed in the more sensory descriptions of Sri Lanka. Her answer was telling, since it suggests the concept of Sri Lanka does not exist as a general place but in clear moments of memory. One survey respondent used sensory descriptions similarly:

Being Sri Lankan means a lot of different things to me. If I had to think of the things that most symbolize Sri Lanka for me, I’d think of tea with milk, monks, humidity, mosquitoes, beautiful beaches, a lyrical language, tropical fruits, the [reddish] dirt in the villages, and a whole slew of other things. Being Sri Lankan is part of who I am.

Unlike Sujatha, whose memory of Sri Lanka coalesce family and food, this description do not involve people. Here, the only people mentioned are monks, though even then it seems more symbolic of monasticism than any individual monk. This response is more focused on descriptive definitions of the country, definitions that are objectifying. These images read more like a Sri Lankan travel brochure than expressions of lived experience. The last sentence, “Being Sri Lankan is part of who I am,” indicates that these images are key to this person’s self-identification, and suggests that “Sri Lanka,” to this 1.5 or second generation person, is more a place rather than a country full of people.

Several of the interviewees considered parental involvement as cultural gatekeepers a significant element of being Sri Lankan. Thilakshi identifies as being more Sri Lankan as American, which is why she identifies as such. She feels a “strong connection” to that label,

saying, “I think it’s because of the way my parents raised me, I have a really strong connection to, like, the culture and the religion and the people.” For Ranil, too, his parents seem to be a big part of how he identifies. He claims that he can call himself Sri Lankan because “Both my parents are Sri Lankan, born and raised...I’m like a purebred Sri Lankan.” He spoke of this purity and authenticity with pride, adding, “I don’t think that being born here, I don’t think there’s that a big difference from someone born in Sri Lanka.” In his mind, since he speaks Sinhala, behaves in traditional Sri Lankan Buddhist ways, and seeks out further knowledge of Buddhism, he is just as Sri Lankan as someone who is Sri Lankan by birth. In this way, Ranil views being Sri Lankan as something that is evident through one’s actions, not as an aspect of identity. Dinesh’s connections to Sri Lanka through his father are complicated by his biraciality. He spoke emotionally and anxiously about his fears:

The only thing I hold onto is my relationship with my family there. Because I’ve always thought, you know, when my dad passes away, you know, what is my relationship going to be like with Sri Lanka? Because I always feel comfortable in Sri Lankan settings when I’m with my dad.

Dinesh’s father is his cultural gatekeeper and the way in which he is able to connect and communicate with his family in Sri Lanka. Without him, Dinesh fears he may not go back to Sri Lanka as often because the entire experience of being Sri Lankan in Sri Lanka would drastically change.

Self-Identity as Pride in Being Uniquely Sri Lankan

Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut discuss four different patterns of self identification: 1) foreign national origin, 2) hyphenated American that acknowledges a single nation origin, 3) an unhyphenated American national identity only, and 4) a panethnic minority

identity.⁶⁰ They found that Vietnamese Americans are most likely to identify with a hyphenated identity, while a slight majority identify through national origin only.⁶¹ In turn, Mexican Americans identify mostly as hyphenated or using panethnic identities. The survey responses varied greatly, as seen in the table below. Most of the respondents identified with a foreign national origin, and answered with “Sri Lankan” or “Sri Lanka.” Though only two individuals explicitly used a hyphenated identity in their answer, a significant number mentioned both Sri Lanka and America in their responses, and a small minority identified with their American place of birth only. No respondent used a panethnic racial identity (i.e. “South Asian” or “Asian”).

TABLE 4.4: Survey Short Answer - Self-Identification

If someone meeting you for the first time asked you, "What are you?" or "Where are you from?" what would you say?	
Response	Percent of total
Sri Lanka/Sri Lankan Only	48.9
U.S. Region/Town of Birth Only	11.1
Response mentions both Sri Lanka and America	40.0
TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS = 45	

Most of the survey respondents viewed their identity in a positive manner; the words “unique” and “different” were used alongside “pride” and “proud.” Threaded through the responses was the idea that being Sri Lankan was extraordinary because of its rarity. “Being Sri Lankan is special to me, because not everyone can say they’re from Sri Lanka, or are of Sri Lankan descent,” said one respondent. For many of them, this pride manifests itself in explaining that they are Sri Lankan and where Sri Lanka is. For example:

As a Sri Lankan I am very proud to say that I am Sri Lankan because it is what makes me stand out in the crowd and able to give people insight on what this little

⁶⁰ Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 154.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Table 7.2, 162-163.

island is all about. I love to share the island's history and culture with all the people that I meet.

These explanations enable this “uniqueness” and pride, as several individuals outright rejected a panethnic identity, considering it insufficient to describe their experience. One respondent wrote, “Being Sri Lankan means having a uniquely non-Indian, South Asian or brown identity.” This suggests not only resistance to mislabeling of “Sri Lankan” as “Indian,” but also a firm declaration of difference. Another respondent spoke to this mislabeling or erroneous grouping, saying,

Sri Lanka means more than just a place of origin in Asia. Culturally [I] feel like we stand much different than Indian or other Asian country we have been grouped with. I feel like being Sri Lankan is important to my lifestyle as well as my overall view in life.

The notion of actively representing Sri Lanka to be Sri Lankan pervaded my discussion with Sujatha. She peppered the conversation with exclamations of “Pride!” “Represent!” and “Stand up and be counted!” Similarly, another respondent said, “Sri Lankan is a very rare nationality that should be talked about more because in my experience not a lot of people still know what or where Sri Lanka/Sri Lankan is.” Again this pride comes from both the relatively small Sri Lankan population as well as pride in explaining their different heritage. The visibility of difference for Sujatha was vital for her self-identification, not only as a Sri Lankan, but also as an American. Seeing monoraciality in Sri Lanka was uncomfortable for her: “Going back right out of the airport there's like a whole sea of brown people. Where's the diversity that you find in America? That's a bit alienating, I guess, that you don't see difference.” She finds herself “more at ease” in a multiracial environment, mainly because she can wear and proclaim her difference proudly.

Self-Identity as Resistance to Mainstream America

Others viewed their identity as unique, not because of pride or a need to assert themselves as Sri Lankan, but because they viewed mainstream American identity as overshadowing and an insufficient definition. One respondent found the label of “American” too all-encompassing to reflect their experience, saying,

I feel like I have a history that precedes me and that is essential to knowing who I am. Even though I came here at 10 months old and looking past my distinct “valley” accent I am well versed in my heritage and I embrace it... Being Sri Lankan will always be the true definition of who I am.

That history prevents this person from considering themselves American. Another respondent wrote, “I feel proud because being Sri Lankan make[s] me unique from rest of the society I live in,” suggesting that their Sri Lankan identity sets them apart from mainstream America. Another second generation young person found mainstream America alienating:

Although I was born and raised in Los Angeles, I feel a connection to the motherland that I sometimes cannot even comprehend for myself. I often feel like a stranger in America, whereas in Sri Lanka, I feel alive and happy. If the saying “home is where the heart is” can be applied to my own life, then I definitely consider Sri Lanka to be my home...

This person’s self-identification as Sri Lankan is tied to a sense of comfort and home that is not available to them in the mainstream.

Anoma and Upeksha both identify as Sri Lankan American, but in different ways. For Upeksha, she tells people, “I’m Sri Lankan American because my parents are Sri Lankan and I was born here.” She is sure of who she is because she considers it a very simple matter, and find no other definitions encompassing of her experience. For Anoma, however, the idea of being American is uncomfortable for her:

I don't like just being American... Sri Lanka - it's like my culture, it's like my roots. I can't just erase that, because that's what I am... I don't like being American – like whitewashed, Americanized. It gives me unique qualities and sets me apart from everyone else.

This conception of Americanization seems to follow from her generally socially conservative upbringing and her current focus on the importance of tradition and the proper way things should be done, though she also includes “American” in her self-label because “I also want them to know that I'm Sri Lankan. I want to integrate both parts of my life, to create like a new lifestyle for me... I can do both.” Anoma recognizes that her identity is complex and multilayered, and resists the urge to erase any one part of it.

Piyumi, like Sujatha, Thilakshi, and Ranil, defines herself as solely Sri Lankan, but does so for very different reasons. At first, she describes herself in similar ways, stating, “Being Sri Lankan is like my sense of culture. I feel like it represents me.” She finds the temple as a rare place where she can find this representation and feel a part of a majority:

Outside of the temple, Sri Lankans are a minority. It's hard to find another one, there's not like a huge community. And when we do group together there is this sense of you can be yourself...and seeing a resemblance and not having to explain themselves.

Piyumi's discussion of “not having to explain [oneself]” suggests weariness with constantly being marked as “Other.” Her temple, then, is a place where she can immerse herself in community that is non-judgmental. However, we see exactly what that representation entails when I asked whether having others see her or consider her as American important to her:

P: Not at all. I guess I have, like, a negative connotation to that. I feel like it's a downgrade to say that. *(pause)*

MT: In what way?

P: I guess in a sense of giving in to where I was born and raised... To say, “I'm American,” it just it sounds ugly. *(laughs)* It feels funny coming out of my mouth! I guess I would rather say “I'm Californian.” “American” is like, I just

think of the flag and Republicans, and things that I'm so not... And I think that goes along with my personality just kind of being the outsider and not the majority essentially, here. And not knowing what it's like to feel like the majority...

I feel like I'm more Sri Lankan than American, but [from] like a Sri Lankan-born-and-raised-there perspective I'm obviously more American. *(laughingly)* But I don't like that when people say that. It's bothersome to me, so. I'm just in a place of denial of the whole "Sri Lankan American" being hyphenated. *(laughs)*

Piyumi conceives herself as Sri Lankan and Sri Lankan alone, as a way of setting herself apart from a subsuming American culture which does not represent her unique ethnic and national identity.

Self-Identity as Resistance to Being Racialized as Other

The table below takes only those respondents whose responses discussed both Sri Lanka and America in the question, "If someone meeting you for the first time asked you, 'What are you?' or 'Where are you from?' what would you say?" and categorizes the nature of their answers.

TABLE 4.5: Survey Short Answer - Self-Identification Responses Discussing Both Sri Lanka and America

If someone meeting you for the first time asked you, "What are you?" or "Where are you from?" what would you say?	
Response Discusses Both Sri Lanka and America	
Response	Percent of total
Mentions Sri Lankan, followed by specific state or region in U.S.	16.7
Explicitly mentions respondent is U.S.-born	33.3
Explicitly mentions parents are Sri Lankan	38.9
Sri Lankan American	11.1
TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS = 18	

For the responses that included both Sri Lanka and American, only eleven percent categorized themselves in this hyphenated identity. A third explicitly mentioned that they were

born in the U.S., while the majority made it a point to say that their parents were Sri Lankan, implying that they were instead American. “I usually say ‘I’m Sri Lankan,’” one respondent wrote. “Well, my parents are from there.” While this immediate clarification that these individual’s parents are from Sri Lanka may seem a way to distance themselves from Sri Lanka, the responses reveal that these young people do so to combat the issue of being perceived as perpetual foreigners. Though they do not explicitly name it, many survey respondents are aware that they are racialized as Other: “[Being Sri Lankan] means being a minority all the time, but looking like I’m Indian. It means some people don’t know where it is and I have to get over it.” Many individuals also discussed constant interrogations by noncoethnics to define themselves:

Even though technically the answer to “Where are you from” is California, I find that when I say California people say something like “No, where are you parents from or where are your people from?”

Clearly, this response of “No” invalidates this person’s self-identity. Another person strategically makes it a point to answer these questions with anything *but* “Sri Lankan” unless directly asked:

Usually someone has to ask me the question a second time (that is, they would have to say rephrase and say “where is your family from?” or “what’s your background?”) for me to answer Sri Lankan.

Anoma, as well, finds these microaggressive conversations tiring: “I want to skip the whole...I don’t want to go through whole explaining thing. People ask me if I was born here or not. Because my name’s Anoma...they think I’m born there.” To others, even her name marks her as perpetual foreigner, despite the fact she was born and raised in America, and speaks with a distinctly American accent.

Dinesh defines himself in multiple ways, depending on the situation, and speaks to Anoma’s frustration of others’ interrogations of their identity. At the temple, he is Sri Lankan

American and Jewish, and he regularly calls himself “Sri Lankan JewBu” in casual conversation. However, this self-label changes when he encounters situation in which he is implicitly labeled. Dinesh discussed a moment in college when a person learned his name and asked if he was Indian. He immediately said “No,” and responded that he was from Los Angeles. “Because they don’t want to hear that I’m American,” he says wryly. “It really doesn’t matter what your past was, if you’re born here, you’re American. You don’t have to fit some image.” Unlike Piyumi and Anoma, Dinesh refuses to be marked as “Other,” and instead pointedly expresses his American identity. While they differ in their self-identifications, all three do so as a form of transformative resistance to white American mainstream culture and racial microaggressions. Daniel D. Solórzano and Dolores Delgado Bernal discuss such “challenges to dominant ideology.”⁶² Though the authors examine more active forms of resistance, such as student protests, Piyumi, Anoma, and Dinesh’s resistance is by no means passive. These acts of defiant self-identification arise in response to what they feel is a lack of inclusion. Piyumi and Anoma do not see themselves nor their experiences reflected in mainstream American culture, while Dinesh purposefully inserts himself into the narrative of what an “American” consists of.

Encounters and Looking Towards the Future: the Convergence of Sri Lankan and Buddhist Identity

Buddhist and Sri Lankan Identities

The two tables below show that the majority of survey respondents felt very positively about their respective temple experience and Buddhist identity. However, eighty percent felt that an American identity was important to them, and over half felt more American than Sri Lankan,

⁶² Daniel G. Solórzano and Dolores Delgado Bernal. “Examining Transformational Resistance Through a Critical Race and Latcrit Theory Framework: Chicana and Chicano Students in an Urban Context.” *Urban Education* 2001, Vol. 36 Issue 308, 313.

suggesting that both a strong Buddhist identity and American identity can coexist. Further, despite the fact that half felt more American, a majority of respondents felt it important for others to see them as Sri Lankan. Despite this, many of this majority also strongly identified as Buddhist, as described in earlier sections. Unlike the individuals interviewed, who all identified as being Buddhist, those surveyed had a wide variety of Buddhist experiences. Some disliked their temple experience so much that they avoid all Sri Lankan Buddhist functions entirely. Still others disliked the secular and community aspects of their temple, while enjoying the teachings, while others enjoyed both.

TABLE 4.6: Survey Continuum - Responses to Statements on Religious Engagement

Statement	% Agree	% Disagree	% No Opinion
I have had a positive experience at my temple.	80	6	14
Being Buddhist is important to me.	80	6	14
I think Buddhism should be passed on to the next generation.	82	2	16
I think the younger generation of Sri Lankans (born or raised here) should attend temple.	78	4	18
I like/would like having non-Sri Lankan people at my temple.	78	6	16
TOTAL RESPONDENTS = 50			

TABLE 4.7: Survey Continuum - Responses to Statements on Identity

Statement	% Agree	% Disagree	% No Opinion
Being Sri Lankan is important to me.	88	4	8
Being American is important to me.	80	6	14
Having other people see me as Sri Lankan is important to me.	82	10	8
Having other people see me as American is important to me.	68	18	14
I feel more American than Sri Lankan.	52	22	26
I feel more Sri Lankan than American.	38	46	16
TOTAL RESPONDENTS = 50			

The table below takes only those respondents who agreed to the statement “Being Buddhist is important to me,” and analyzes their other survey continuum answers.

TABLE 4.8: Buddhist Identity, External Identification, Self-Identification

Statement	% Agreed	% Disagreed	% No Opinion
Being Buddhist is important to me + Having others see as Sri Lankan	87.5	7.5	12.5
Being Buddhist is important to me + Having others see as American	62.5	22.5	12.5
Being Buddhist is important to me + feel more Sri Lankan than American	42.9	45.2	16.7
Being Buddhist is important to me + feel more American than Sri Lankan	45	25	30
TOTAL RESPONDENTS=40			

Of those that agreed that being Buddhist was an important part of their lives, having others view them as Sri Lankan was just as important, suggesting that both are vital to how they present themselves externally. Internally, their self-identifications become less clear. Almost equal percentages feel more Sri Lankan and/or more American. Those that view Buddhism as key to their self-identification do not necessarily feel that Sri Lankan is necessary for their self-identification. This suggests that a Sri Lankan identity and a Buddhist identity can exist separately. For many respondents, though the temple was a place for encountering other Sri Lankans, their engagement with the temple was mainly for religious reasons only. Most discussed attending temple as a family activity, done mostly when parents pushed them to attend as children. However, all of the respondents were over 18 – college-aged and above – and some spoke of a new relationship with their temple space. As adults, they can attend the temple in their own time on less-crowded days, and engage in their religious space on their own terms. Their focus, then, turned from cultural engagement to religious engagement. In contrast, all of

the interviewees' Buddhist identity and national identification informed the other. The interviewees spoke of being Buddhist as part of multiple negotiations of identity.

Spaces of Encounter Between Coethnic Peers

Despite different self-identifications, all discussed their temples as spaces of encounters where they found relationships they could not experience in other spaces. One respondent enjoying attending their temple because

I like that the Sri Lankan community gets together, and you are really able to connect with your own people in ways you can't with your friends from different countries. There's a feeling of solidarity that arises from being surrounded by Sri Lankans, and it's my only outlet to have a taste of Sri Lanka when I am away from the real thing.

This acknowledges the temple space provides something other places cannot: the affirmation of national identity. This person's friendships with noncoethnics are insufficient when considering identity. Further, this person sees the temple a mirror for Sri Lanka – it is an “outlet” and Sri Lanka is “the real thing.” The temple becomes not just a religious space, but a representation of national space as well. Another respondent felt positively about their temple experience, but said, “To me, temple was mostly about connecting with the Sri Lankan community more than a religious activity... I mostly enjoyed that it was a main gathering point for our community and kept us tied to Sri Lankan culture.” This person also engages with their temple space as a national space, similar to Piyumi, who views the temple as a “Sri Lankan community center.”

As the temple provides a way for connection for the Sri Lankan 1.5 second generation, the temple space also fosters a potential for long-term connections. Ranil's *daham pāsāl* experience enabled him to “[make] a good amount of friends that [he] probably wouldn't have

made elsewhere, friends that are Sri Lankan.” This was important for his sense of being Sri Lankan, as he could not find other Sri Lankans in his daily life outside the temple community:

There’s not that many [Sri Lankans] around at times... Like when you’re at school, you see like one other Sri Lankan but you don’t really know them. But here [at the temple], you see like five or six or eight of them and they’re all going through [what] you’re going through... They came here early or they were born here, too. We’re the same type of people who are trying to figure it out, too. So it’s really nice to have that common ground, you know. And we would talk to each other outside of Sunday school.

Through the Sarathchandra Center, Ranil was able to find not only like-minded friends, but friends who also understood the struggles of unique to the 1.5 and second generation. Though he left *daham pāsāl* several years ago, he is still friends with his former classmates, and they meet regularly. In addition to friendly connections, one young man at Dharma Vijaya discussed how he enjoyed going to temple not only because he could meet up with other Sri Lankans, but because of the potential for romance with a fellow 1.5 or second generation congregation member:

A [little] part of me just likes to go there and flirt around... I’m not saying like hook up... I see someone I like and, just kind of...approach people. Or be approached or whatever. I feel more comfortable doing it there even though it might not be as acceptable.

He suggested that women who attend temple regularly are women whose values he shared, and with whom he could have a successful and fruitful relationship. That he feels more comfortable interacting with young women at the temple is significant: he feels at home in his temple community rather than the wider Sri Lankan community itself. For this young man, the religious space and the romantic space overlap.

The Next Generation

Despite their status as young adults – i.e. free from parental requirements - and despite their decreased involvement in the temple, the continuation of a Buddhist identity was a vital part of these 1.5 and second generation's personal futures. They discussed the importance of passing on Buddhism to their children in particular. For example, Dinesh stressed the importance of his future children having Buddhist role models at the temple. Regarding laity, he said that "If my kids were to go there, they would see good examples. We wouldn't necessarily have to tell them how to be something, they would just see it. Everything would be implied." Ranil would take a more active approach to his potential children's Buddhist education: "Probably for sure, at first force them to go - no ifs, ands, or buts! At first let them have a good taste of what Buddhism is really - try to get them so they understand it enough...But then let 'em figure it out on their own." He was adamant that his children attend temple, regardless of their preferences. For Ranil, Buddhist education is the purview of monastics, not parents. One respondent, who attended Dharma Vijaya as a child, is a second generation adult with third generation children, and brings their children to Sunday school as they were once brought to Sunday school. They wrote:

As an adult, my main motivation in attending the temple is to expose my children to Buddhism and another facet of the Sri Lankan culture. When I attend with them, my favorite part is the meditation. As an adult, I am more interested in Buddhist philosophy than I am with the unique expression of Theravadan Buddhism by Sri Lankans, so I don't feel I need to go per se.

To this person, though the temple is a way for their children to connect with a Sri Lankan identity, they do not consider Buddhism as a necessary facet to their self-identification as a Sri Lankan. Despite this, in choosing to bring their children to the temple instead of directly

providing a Buddhist education, this person recognizes the importance of temples as spaces to cultural identity.

Piyumi foresees encounters for her potential children in the temple space that are supplemented by direct contact with Sri Lanka:

Going to Sri Lanka, too, I think is important. And seeing all of the relics and the historical references to connect the texts with actual places. Talking to [the] older generation, and potentially having these children build a relationship with the monks that they feel comfortable with I think is a really good thing.

For Piyumi, the early inclusion of Sri Lanka as a country into the children's lives is imperative to their understanding of themselves. Perhaps this is because she first traveled to Sri Lanka at fourteen, and for fourteen years only encountered Sri Lanka through family members, Southern California secular events, and Dharma Vijaya. Further, she wants to take her children to Dharma Vijaya to meet with first and second generation role models, like Dinesh, but she also sees the monks taking on an important role in her children's lives.

Thilakshi became frustrated and emotional when discussing how important it was for her to raise her children as active Buddhists, especially since she had to deal with the prejudice, insecurity, and shame that came with saying she was Buddhist:

As a child, actually, I was ashamed to say I was Buddhist...Everybody around me was Christian or Catholic, you know? And they'd always be like, "Do you believe in God?" and I would just lie all the time. I would just say I'm Christian so I wouldn't have to face – have to explain myself to them. I thought Buddhism was really weird when I was a child... It was really horrible...it would kill me inside, because I knew how much it meant to me and my family but, just to save myself...

But then, going to temple more, I think your pride overtakes any form of, I don't know, embarrassment that you might have... Now I have none of that shame... But I think [attending temple] is really important, you know, or else [my children will] just be in denial, or just wondering why they're not white or something. I just feel like they'd have such an identity complex.

Without a way to verbalize her religious beliefs, Thilakshi instead hid her religious identity, which took an enormous emotional toll. Therefore, she is certain she will take any future children she has to the temple, because, “I want my children to know that they’re Buddhist, so they don’t go through that. I don’t want them to be ashamed or afraid.” To Thilakshi, passing Buddhism to the next generation is wrapped in both a pride for the religion of her birth and in her Sri Lankan identity.

Anoma has also faced criticism for being Buddhist, but unlike Thilakshi, she discussed her Buddhist identity and her Sri Lankan identity in terms of actively fighting for representation. Her Sri Lankan identity is vital because she refuses that her complex identity be subsumed under an overarching American identity. In the same way, when her Buddhist identity is questioned, she actively steps up to reaffirm it:

I think Buddhism is the most awesome religion ever, it’s like number one! I’ve had multiple debates about this at school. They’re like, “Oh my god, I’m Christian. If you don’t accept Jesus as your savior, you’re going to die in hell!” And I’m like, “You’re stupid... I don’t need anyone to *die* for me.”

To Anoma, the future of Buddhism in her life is the continuation of these debates as they arise. She feels confident in doing so and in her Buddhist identity because of her surety that the Sarathchandra Center is analogous to Sri Lankan temple life.

These 1.5 and second generation young people find the temple a necessary part of their future and their potential children’s futures, not only to affirm a Buddhist identity, but also a Sri Lankan one. Unlike some of the survey respondents who separated Buddhism from Sri Lankan culture, all interviewees view their Buddhist and Sri Lankan identities as intertwined. However, the methods by which they affirm their identities diverge. Anoma, Ranil, and Sujatha focus on the traditions and services that the temple provides, while Piyumi, Dinesh, Thilakshi, and Upeksha focus on developing relationships and Buddhist knowledge. Their self-identifications

are all active expressions of identity, and they view their identities through resistance. Though they all identify differently as Sri Lankan, Sri Lankan American, or American, they all identify as Buddhist.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Central to this study is the issue of Buddhism's future in America - what is this future and who heralds it? As we have seen, though both the Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihāra and the Sarathchandra Buddhist Center temples take similar approaches to the propagation of Buddhism in America by catering to a noncoethnic community, they take divergent approaches to the 1.5 and second generation. Dharma Vijaya considers the 1.5 and second generation as this future, and reconstitutes Sri Lankan Buddhist religious practice to accommodate the younger generation's American identity. In contrast, the Sarathchandra Center's two separate approaches toward noncoethnics versus the 1.5 and second generation, encourages cultural preservation for coethnics and attempts to reinforce a Sri Lankan identity. The Sarathchandra Center's approach in some ways reflects Numrich's conception of parallel congregations – that is, coethnics and noncoethnics meet in the same temple space, but use that space differently. As a result, unlike Dharma Vijaya, where the lay non-Sri Lankan population is very visible, for some of the young people I spoke to informally at Sarathchandra Center, the presence of non-Sri Lankan members did not register. When I made an offhand mention about my research, one young woman said, "But it's a Sri Lankan temple." When I claimed that there were a good number of non-Sri Lankans who came regularly to meditations and events, she responded, "Oh, really?"

These 1.5 and second generation individuals, though they may self-identify in many ways, view their identity differently: 1) as way of positively bolstering their pride in being different, 2) as a positive tool for resistance against a white American mainstream, and 3) as a negative marker of being racialized as "Other." They have a sense of ownership and a cultural stake in their temple communities that noncoethnics may not have and are more finely tuned to the fluidity of identities. Sujatha, Anoma, and Ranil's comments suggest that it is not cultural

reconstitution they find important, but wholesale cultural preservation. That is, Sri Lankan Buddhist customs and traditions should not be translated and reinterpreted into an American context, but instead should be copied exactly, no matter how significant or insignificant the detail is. They mainly emphasize the role of the temple as a site of cultural preservation, and as a place where Sri Lanka could be found in an American environment.

In contrast, Piyumi, Dinesh, Upeksha, and Thilakshi's comments suggest they find cultural reconstitution of Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition at their temples. Ultimately, what lies at the heart of this difference in the second generation's views towards their own identity is a question of authenticity, and what is more reflective of a "real" Sri Lanka versus an adaptation that each individual claims as real. Though Dharma Vijaya is a place for Sri Lankan Americans of multiple generations to engage with their culture and religion, Bhante Piyananda and the monks purposefully foster more personal relationships with laity and the 1.5 and second generation in particular. As a result, Piyumi sees the benefit in attending temple, regardless of the supposed authenticity of the activities and relationships that exist in that space. She says,

It was a place that brought the consistency of the culture – whether it be true to its form, as far as our relationships [went]. And even that, the relationships of the monks and us, or how we learned about the religion, wasn't very much the Sri Lankan-in-Sri Lanka environment of how the kids there would learn it...But I don't think it makes it any less Sri Lankan.

In this way, Piyumi both realizes that her temple experience is not a reproduction of temple experiences and relationships in Sri Lanka itself, but also affirms that her relationship is still a valid representation of Sri Lankan culture. Further, she considers the temple space at Dharma Vijaya reflects the layered nature of her self-identification:

I guess in a way that is a really great quality of Dharma Vijaya because - it's just, it's tricky, and it's weird. And I'm thinking about all these things as we talk... and how I don't claim this Americanness but it's obviously in me. But I do

discredit it. I like things that are more blended and more loose and less conservative.

Regardless of which temple they attended, the second generation individuals primarily thought of their temples positively as places for building community, with room for improvement. They find their temple space comforting in a religious sense and as a way of connecting with other Sri Lankan Americans, and Sinhala Buddhist Americans in particular. Being ethnically Sinhala automatically puts them in a majority, and in a very privileged position - not only when they are in Sri Lanka, but when they are attending or participating in secular community events here in the U.S. However, these young people are in a very unique position as Sinhala people who are born and raised in the States: they know what it's like to be a minority. This seems quite obvious, but it is an important point to recognize. Though most of these first generation Sri Lankan Sinhala Americans are a minority here as immigrants, they still grew up in a culture that put specific value on their achievements and gave them privileges because of their ethnicity and religion. Adding the fact that Sri Lankan Americans have the fourth highest per capita income of any Asian American group at \$32,480, only 9% live below the poverty line, and only 1% receive cash public assistance, many first generation Sri Lankan Americans are “place-takers,” reproducing hierarchies that exist in America.⁶³ As such, first generation Sinhala Sri Lankan Americans were socially privileged as the majority in the homeland and are now economically privileged in the U.S. Therefore, this first generation may be not be able to recognize the 1.5 and second generation experience of constant microaggressions and racialization that come with being racial minorities in the U.S.

⁶³ 2007-2009 American Community Survey 3-year estimate, U.S. Census.

One survey respondent lamented this lack of acknowledgement about the unique issues 1.5 and second generation individuals face and different standards noncoethnic and the second generation were held to:

...sometimes I wish there would be a more explicit recognition of the collective experiences of second generation Sri Lankan Americans. Growing up in the US race is an overwhelmingly powerful factor for me, but I'm often grouped, as someone still learning about basics of Buddhism, under the same rubric as young white Americans who are simply "exploring" Buddhism, and who haven't had to suffer any of the burdens growing up with the Buddhist faith in a racialized context. At the same time, I'm occasionally critiqued for not knowing how to be "Sri Lankan Buddhist," while young whites are praised for just being at the temple. There are completely different sets of expectations and I just wish someone would recognize this.

Thus, this younger generation lives in an in-between space – many are similar to noncoethnics in their language inability and lack of understanding, but they grew up experiencing racism as Sri Lankan Americans. These individuals' struggles with both their Sri Lankan and Buddhist identities illustrate the importance of having coethnic authority figures who can understand these experiences. Their first generation parents, first generation clergy and laity, and noncoethnic authority figures cannot understand how these young people are bicultural and transnational subjects. Noncoethnics authorities nor clergy are sufficient in helping the 1.5 and second generation negotiate multilayered identities. Noncoethnics cannot speak to the experience of being Sinhala in America, while coethnic clergy cannot speak to the experience of growing up as 1.5 and second generation in America. Perhaps an alternative are coethnic 1.5 and second generation authority figures, who can speak to all of these multiple layered experiences. For example, at the Sarathchandra Center, there is Sonali, a current undergraduate in her early twenties. Even in high school, after she had aged out of *daham pāsala*, she taught the youngest class at the temple. The parents and the children enjoyed her teaching, and several parents

lamented losing her as a teacher once she went to college. At Dharma Vijaya, Upeksha synthesizes her knowledge of Buddhist teachings as lay minister with her knowledge of racial discrimination and her experiences being marked as Other. She gives her students practical advice and tools to deal with the microaggressions they face at school and beyond because she herself has faced similar struggles.

Irrespective of whether their Buddhist and Sri Lankan identifications overlap or not, all respondents and interviewees find the temple space a place where they can connect with other Sri Lankans. These spaces are dynamic and foster encounters between people of different ethnicities, races, denominations, and generations. They are richly complex communities with strategic visions of the propagation of Buddhism in America. 1.5 and second generation people, regardless of their engagement, explore their heritage with an eye towards their own futures as Sri Lankan Americans and as parents to the Sri Lankan American third generation. The future of Buddhism in America ultimately lies in the hands of this generation and how they choose to reconstitute or preserve Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition in America.

Future Research

Though it goes beyond the aims of this study, future research on connections on temples across the U.S. would be fruitful, especially considering political connections between diasporic temples and Sri Lanka. For example, Dharma Vijaya has a close relationship with the Sri Lankan government, as the current Minister of Defense (Gotabaya Rajapaksa) used to be a member of the temple's Board of Directors. Further, Bhante Piyananda is the current Advisor to the Sri Lankan President (Mahinda Rajapaksa) on International Religious Affairs. Other potential research examining 1.5 and second generation identity monoethnic Sri Lankan

Buddhist temples in the area or in states with less populous Sri Lankan Buddhist communities could be productive. All of the 1.5 and second generation survey respondents or interviewees in this study had traveled to Sri Lanka at least once in their lifetimes. An additional study could explore those in this generation who have never had the opportunity to visit Sri Lanka.

GLOSSARY

atavisi Buddha pūjā: Sinhala, ceremony honoring the 28 Buddhas

bana: Sinhala, preaching of a Buddhist sermon

Bhakthi gee: Sinhala, devotional songs

Bhante: Pāli, literally “Venerable;” term for a monk

Bhikkhu: Pāli, monk

Bhikkhuni: Pāli, nun

bodhi tree: a tree important in Buddhism, as the Buddha attained Enlightenment under such a tree

daham pāsala or daham pāsala: Sinhala, literally “dhamma school,” Buddhist religious school

dāna: Pāli, literally “giving,” the Buddhist act of charitable giving to monks

devas: Pāli and Sinhala, gods

dhamma: Pāli, Buddhist teaching

gāthā: Sanskrit/Prakrit, verses (in this context, specifically Pāli Buddhist chanting verses)

Jātakas: Pāli, stories of the Buddha’s past lives

Kathina: festival day held in October, in which laity give donations of money, robes, and items for temple upkeep (towels, sheets, bowls, etc.), after the rainy season, mostly practiced by Theravāda Buddhists

kovil: Tamil, Hindu temple

kudu: Sinhala, decorated large paper lantern usually assembled with multiple smaller lanterns

Pāli: language of the Buddhist canon

pansala: Sinhala, temple

pirith nool or pirith noola: Sinhala, the thread that is tied around a person’s wrist by a monk while chanting blessings

Poson: festival day celebrated in June by Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhists, marks the first time Buddhism was brought to Sri Lanka

pūjā: Pāli and Sinhala, religious ceremony in which flowers, incense, and food are offered

Sādhu: Pāli, monk

Sangha: Pāli, community of monks and nuns

Sinhala: language of the majority ethnicity in Sri Lanka

sāmanera: Pāli, novice monk

sil: Pāli, the taking of the eight or ten precepts

sutta or sutra: Pāli, discourses of the Buddha’s teaching organized by length, supposedly the words of the Buddha himself

upasampadā: Pāli, a monk who has received higher ordination

Wesak: festival day held in May that marks the birth, enlightenment, and passing of the Buddha

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