



Hindu Cultural and Welfare Centre (page 39 & 40)

Interviewee:	Anna Gautama
Religion:	Hindu
Activity:	Hindu Cultural and Welfare Centre Derby
District:	Derby City
Users per week:	300-500
Number of Volunteers:	Management Committee 20 volunteers
Funding from:	within the Hindu Community

Partners: Multi-faith Centre University and Open Centre in Normanton. However these have no direct involvement at the Pear Tree Hindu Temple

Hindu Art activities include **singing and dancing**. There are two classes, a traditional class in the Open Centre on Thursdays and a more modern class on Fridays.

"We have a dance group here who have performed a few times at the University and Multi-faith Centre ... they went to Germany (Osnabruck) last year and are going again at the end of May. People like them, we are trying to build up the links. ... They are a very good group, showing cultural diversity through art."

Yoga classes are held at the centre. A man attending the Friday lunch said that having started the yoga classes he was able to come off medication for high blood pressure.

"We practice religion in yoga, meditation, music and dance."

Festivals attract around 300 people and so the old temple is no longer big enough. There are therefore plans to build on the new site.

"The most important festival is Diwali ... switching the lights on from the Hindu Temple. Nice food and everything. People come in from the Council ... the priest will start the ceremony with the schloca (Prayers) and the mayor or whoever is the chief guest will come in with the priest and switch the lights on. ... We have a poor light system in Derby ... Leicester is beautiful ... we have been trying. We have got more funds this year, it has been extended- the area. When the lights are on the people feel very positive, they are in festive mood, but still it is very dim. We might have some more money next year ... we have to raise our voice about our needs."

Anna also expresses something of the importance of going to the temple for the elderly Hindu citizens:

"The temple is very important place in a Hindu's life; especially for elderly people ... they do not feel safe to walk to the temple. Every Hindu has a shrine at home we always do the prayers but visiting the temple is important it is like a social gathering as well as a cultural issue. We talk to each other, support each other; the temple is not only a religious place also a place of social gathering for Hindus. Without that they won't know each other ...sitting in their homes feeling lonely ... when you get old you need help"

Lunch is provided twice a week, on Tuesdays at the Temple and on Fridays at the centre. Both occasions attract about thirty people. On Tuesdays those who attend are mostly women, on Friday both men and women attend. A minibus collects people on Tuesdays but this is not available on Fridays.

The Centre is also now licensed for **weddings** and it is hoped that weddings will be held from next year. "Maybe next year we will start, at the moment there is not enough facilities ... we have the permission to start any time".

Hindi classes at the centre, the classes are primarily for children and about 20 attend. The value of the classes is that children can talk to elderly relatives and it helps the children when they visit India. "The children can communicate with their relatives" it is easy for people to loose their cultural language, "I know Hindi but I spend most of my time speaking in English."

Anna also provides help completing official forms and **signposting** to social services, social security, voluntary organisations etc.

Anna used to teach ESOL, (English Second Language) but funding has run out, there are other courses but they are not sufficient to meet the need.

Other Activities: campaigning and advocacy

Anna has also been involved in requesting better street lighting in the area.

"We have to raise the voice for our needs; this area is the most deprived area. People walking up and down the streets- they must be safe, we need more lights ... people are scared, especially elderly people: people have been robbed, attacked on the streets..."

We live here we know the need is there, the people outside they don't know, they have no experience."

Anna also speaks for the Hindu community on the Patient Practice Involvement Committee.

"When the patient comes to the hospital, it is not just the patient but the culture. ... they do not find it easy to be very demanding ... they are vegetarian- the food is a very important factor. ... Muslims have needs too - the need for a female or male doctor. ... They are coming to me to do something about it ... I give the information to the PPI (the need for a woman doctor) it will be taken care of."

Background

"We started about 35 or 40 years back ... we started in this old church. ... Slowly they built up some funds and bought this property on Normanton Road at that time it was quite cheap, a terraced house. First they bought one and then the other one and then they made it bigger ... now there is the big hall there. The property will be for sale once we start the new temple."

Funding is almost exclusively from within the community. There are some external funds available for classes and festive events. Funding for the new centre will again be largely by donations from within the community. Money from the sale of the old premises will be used and it is hoped that as building work on the new temple gets underway funding from communities outside Derby will support the project.

Anna is a member of the **Derby Forum of Faiths**. Anna also works as a Multicultural Officer at the **Open Centre**:

"I have a link with the Open Centre ... When the kids come to the Open Centre we do workshops on Weddings, Hindu Weddings, Sikh Weddings, Muslim Weddings and the cooking Hindu/Muslim ... and then we do a dance workshop. Also we take the kids to the places of worship, the Gurdwara Mosque and Temple. ... The Kids come from Derbyshire ... Some of the kids they have not experienced us, I went to do a workshop in Langley Mill and all these kids are peeping through the glass looking at us, 'Ah the Hindu people are here'"

"We have visitors from the hospitals and Clinics and also the Army Air Force and Police they have open days or awareness sessions to find out about Hindus."

"When I came to this country I was scared because I might say a wrong word, my conversation might not be correct ... It might offend another person ... we have the same feelings. In some cultures the men and women are not together but in our Hindu culture it has always been equal- men and women together. Every deity has a consort and Hindu women have been in education for centuries."

Motivation

When asked about any particular motto or text which inspired her Anna spoke of her love of the Hindu scriptures. Clearly her faith is a major motivation.

"The Hindu religion is not only a faith but a way of life. Religion reflects in culture and customs. Every day of our life we breath in our religion. If I stop I think I will stop living ... Strength is given by God ... I believe in Shiva, he gives me strength ... like love: the more you give the more you get."

Anna continues to be a dedicated worker in spite of a severe medical condition.

Anna is clearly proud of her cultural history going back over thousands of years, including effective medicine which has contributed to modern medicine, including antiseptic and insulin.

Anna recounted a profoundly moving story of escaping from an extremely dangerous situation in which others died; she attributed escape to guidance from Shiva.