

[Hindus Make a Home In the United Kingdom](#)

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FEATURE STORY

Hindus Make a Home In the United Kingdom

A million Hindus, now three and four generations deep, settle in as permanent and valued citizens within the homeland of their former colonial rulers

Scores of British school children in maroon uniforms, their blonde and brunet hair shining in the sunshine, swarm through a Hindu temple in Neasden; out in the West End, Andrew Lloyd Webber's new play, "Bombay Dreams," is drawing packed houses of Britons of every hue; and the very English House of Commons in the city of London is creating a special in-house curry restaurant so that members can get on with the business of governance and still get their spicy meal fix, too.

Welcome to the new multicultural Britain that seems to be undergoing a metamorphosis before one's very eyes, its skyline transformed with the silhouettes of temples, mosques and gurudwaras along with churches. Britain, long the colonizer, is now getting colonized by its former subjects who are bringing heat and color—and spirituality—to its shores. This is the England where Her Majesty the Queen, in her Golden Jubilee Year, has paid her respects at a Hindu temple, duly removing her shoes and proceeding in her stocking feet. Why, even the decorous Victoria and Albert Museum is displaying Bollywood film posters.

This was a Britain one just had to see, and the summer of 2002 was reputed to be a real Indian summer in England: Indian films, music, food and fashion were all major influences in the UK and, commissioned by Hinduism Today, this writer hopped a plane to London to ferret out the real story.

Lift-off: It started the moment I boarded the Virgin Atlantic flight at JFK: There were so many Indians on board, it seemed like a mass exodus. When it came to lunchtime, I was pleasantly surprised to notice that a vegetarian meal was routinely offered.

I opened the program guide and found there were several Indian films showing on flight, and among the TV programs was the highly popular "The Kumars at 42nd Street," a popular British sitcom. Landing at Heathrow was another eye-opener huge groups of Indians coming and going. Even among the airport personnel there were clusters of Indian women dressed in navy blue western uniforms but with flashing eyes and nose pins that recalled the mustard fields of the Punjab.

Yes, the color of Britain is changing, and brown seems to be a prominent hue. Of course, just like in New York City, my taxi driver turned out to be an Asian and proprietarily pointed out the Desi (Indian) reference points as we drove toward the city.

According to the UK Yearbook published by the Office of National Statistics, the Hindu community originates largely from India, although others have come from countries to which earlier generations had previously migrated, such as Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Malawi. More recently, large numbers have immigrated from Sri Lanka. The population directly of Indian origin numbers 400,000 to 550,000, though some put this figure at close to a million. Census figures to be announced at the end of this year should give a clearer picture.

Exploring temples: The very day I arrived, I descended into the London underground, the vast tube railway transport system that runs under the city, to explore. I journeyed to the Highgatehill Murugan Temple, the first Siva temple in London, and the temple visited by Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip— their first in the UK. It is also one of the oldest temples in London, initiated in 1965 by a devotee named Sabapathipillai who would get together with friends in humble homes for bhajanas [religious songs]. They decided to start a movement for a Hindu temple in Britain. In 1971 Pillai rented the Black Memorial Hall where about 200 people used to gather on Fridays to pray. This was the beginning of the Britannia Hindu Temple Trust, and the members used to pay dues of ^{us}\$3.20 a month.

In 1979, they took over a dilapidated synagogue, brought in the icon from India and a Hindu priest from Sri Lanka and created the first Murugan Temple. According to K. Nagarajah, Gurudeva Subramuniaswami, founder of Hinduism Today, visited it in 1979 and performed puja there. Gurudeva also helped guide the temple in its formative stages. At that time there were just two other temples the Wimbledon Ganapati Temple and the East Ham Murugan Temple.

"So you can imagine how it's all developed after that," says Om Prakash Sharma, President of the National Council of Hindu Temples, UK and a trustee of the World Congress of Faiths. "We now have about 150 temples in Britain, and about 70 of them are affiliated to the National Council. The largest is the Swaminarayan Temple in Neasden."

The Highgatehill Temple attracts many Hindus, especially the Tamil communities from India, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, South Africa and Malaysia. Few Tamils live in the area, which is a very affluent one, but drive in from the suburbs, some coming from as far as 45 miles.

According to Nagarajah, second-generation Hindus are attuned to their faith: "There is a revival in Hinduism at the moment because there are so many Tamil schools and cultural classes by various institutions so people will stay with their own culture and languages for the next generation." Looking to the future, he adds, "We have bought a few properties here, so that even without support from the public, the income generated from the properties will be enough to maintain the temple for 20 years. I don't know what will happen then."

Judging by the strong cultural and spiritual bonds that most Hindus maintain here with their religion and home country, he need not fear for the future. The temple scene is bustling, with more being built around the country. There is a Balaji temple being constructed near Birmingham, a \$10.6 million project, half a government grant. Another temple in Preston has also received a grant from the government. Explains Sharma, "The grant is not given for the faith or religion but rather for the community center," which is part of the temple.

Sharma is convinced that Hinduism is in the ascendancy and that the Hindu way of life, philosophy and yoga are all gaining momentum in the West. Asked if any of the temples in the UK were connected to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, he replied, "Temples are mainly for the worship of the Lord, not for politics. Some

of the temples are run by VHP. We will welcome anyone to our temples but we don't discuss much of politics. Mainly it's for the glory of the Lord."

Yet he admitted that the tensions in India are often mirrored so far from home. During the Ayodhya incident, 29 temples were firebombed and one temple was even razed to the ground by Muslim Britons. However, this time when Gujarat was inflamed, there were only minor incidents in Britain.

Indeed, mostly the many faiths live in peace. The UK report statistics show that there are about 1.5 million Muslims, 40 million Christians, 500,000 Sikhs and 330,000 Jews. You can see these groups living side-by-side in communities like

East Ham, where temples and mosques and Sikh gurudwaras stand shoulder to shoulder. You pass crowded markets with halal meat shops and women in burkhas and Sikh grandmothers headed to the gurudwara and Hindu mothers pushing their children in strollers.

Arriving at the East Ham station, I took a bus to the London Sri Murugan Temple, which is in Manor Park. The crowded bus negotiated its way through streets full of a bustling Asian population. It was like being back in India as a South Indian woman on the bus pointed out the temple, and an elderly Punjabi lady explained that she and her friend were headed for their daily visit to the gurudwara. Passing cars all seemed to have Asians at the wheel, and young Indian and Pakistanis chatted on the

street.

It is in this bustling, humble neighborhood that the London Sri Murugan Temple stands, currently housed in a former pub while a grand new temple takes shape on the ground of the former temple that has been demolished. This temple had its beginnings in 1975 and many devotees, especially Tamils, have flocked to it. The new temple of black granite in the grand traditions of Southern temple architecture is being built in three phases, at an estimated cost of \$5.6 million. It is in a residential area, so it took almost four years to get the building permissions. The first phase includes the construction of three principal shrines, dedicated to Lords Ganapati, Siva and Murugan.

The temple a bright maroon looked dilapidated from outside. Once inside, it emanated peace and calm, as music played and incense filled the air. I had arrived at the time when the temple is closed to the public, so the crowds that gather for evening arati had not yet come. However, the temple has a deep connection with Gurudeva Subramuniaswami, and the chief priest, R. Nagarantha Sivam, conducted a special puja for me, as a representative of Hinduism Today. It was wonderful to see the great esteem that Gurudeva is held in by the trustees of the temple.

Even as the construction dust flies, the devotees flock to the makeshift

temple which has made an oasis of calm, a sanctum, out of a pub. Here as the cymbals and drums make sweet music, hundreds of families gather to pray. Asha Darmassaalane, originally from South India, is one such devotee. Why is this temple important to her? "It is typical of temples back home, and so I come in every week. We are Lord Murugan worshipers and there are special pujas in the evenings and so it becomes an opportunity to share prasadam (blessed food) and also socialize with friends."

Darmassaalane is a physician and has three children. Her husband Bala, a materials manager with an American company, explains that there is a very

strong Tamil community amongst the 70% Asian population in East Ham. About ten miles away there is a bustling Ford manufacturing plant that attracted Indian plantation workers from Singapore about 20 years ago. Since then, the South Asian element has increased in this area and also monopolized the corner shops.

"There are three or four generations of Asians here, with a commitment to education, and they have built many temples. At this temple we have a chariot festival every year, and you can expect 8,000 people in August."

According to the head priest, parents

are encouraged to bring their children so that they can grow up comfortable in two worlds. He said, "We give the children sweets and tell them mythological tales. There are cultural classes every Sunday and over 200 students turn up to learn bharata natyam, singing and the vina. At the temple we observe all the events of life from birth to death with rituals, and also celebrate all the festivals."

Later I shared a delicious prasadam lunch of sambar, vegetables and rice with the president, S. Sampath Kumar, and other trustees of the temple as they related to me how the temple has grown over the years.

As Britain has been infiltrated by its former colonies, the immigrants are bringing their tastes and rhythms to the larger populace. There are about 1.2 to 1.3 million people of Indian origin in the UK, with about 450,000 in London, with large concentrations in towns like Bradford and Leicester. The Punjabis and the Gujaratis dominate the Indian population, with about 40 to 45 percent coming from each of these two communities.

The Punjabis came from India largely as industrial workers, while the Gujaratis came in large numbers from Kenya and Uganda in the early 70s, with entrepreneurial skill, capital and education. Today Indians are in

practically every field, with large numbers in the medical profession, and the services—railway, postal, and health care, and more recently, in financial services.

While the first generation has, understandably, a deeper connection to their homeland, the second and third generation has integrated well into British life. There are many who have never been to India but the music and the foods and of course, Bollywood—draws them. While for some the links to India are strong, for others the emotional attachment is kept through language, music and cinema.

Faith and Art: The fervor of overseas Hindus for the rituals of their religion is strong. An example of the devotion is seen at the Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden, which has made it into the Guinness Book of World Records as the largest traditional Hindu temple outside of India. Many people had told me how grand it was but I was still taken aback by its perfection when I saw it myself. Its carved white pinnacles and pristine marble pillars rise against London's skyline, seeming a bit unreal and dreamlike.

Over 2,820 tons of Bulgarian limestone and 2,000 tons of Italian

Carrara marble were shipped to India where they were carved by 1,500 craftsmen and reshipped to London. In fact, 26,300 carved pieces were reassembled over three years. Everything here is on a grand scale, and festivals like Deepavali and Annakut attract 50,000 people. During my visit, I was particularly impressed by the orderly crowds and the organized way in which everything is conducted at the temple. The parking lot was full of tour buses, many of them carrying young English students being given a view of the new multicultural England.

When I visited, there were scores of Hindu devotees. For Sundar Patel and his wife, a retired couple that earlier lived in Kenya and are now residents in the Kingsbury area of London, a regular visit to the temple is a must, especially to show it to visiting family and friends. In addition to the Hindus, there were at least a hundred English schoolchildren from a Catholic school, intently watching all the ceremonies and taking notes. Said their teacher, "This is our way of teaching them about different faiths." Indeed, the learning process for the mainstream has already begun, with so many Indians and Sri

Lankans in the form of teachers, friends and neighbors.

I entered Bharati Vidya Bhavan by a side door. It seemed like any other building, until I stepped into the main hall, when I realized it is a former church, still complete with pews. It was a strange feeling to see scores of Indian families sitting on the seats, chatting. This space is now used for performances, and on this day many people were there, waiting for various classes to begin. Indeed, one can see the vitality and energy in almost every corner of the Bhavan.

As I followed Nandakumara, the director, on a tour of the rooms, I heard the strains of the sitar and tabla and the jingle of ghungroos from the classes. Everywhere I saw young people getting in touch with their culture and their religion, as they learned languages and performed the classical dances. The Bhavan seemed to be a gathering spot for families with the cafeteria full of people enjoying samosas and idlis. All this in the heart of bustling London!

At the Bharati Vidya Bhavan scores of Britishers come to learn, along with Indians, music, language and

yoga. In fact, 90 percent of the students in the yoga classes are European, as are the teachers, who follow the Indian method of teaching yoga. What started out as a 10- by 10-foot rented room is today a dynamic 14,800 square-foot space in a converted church, with its own art gallery, classes and theater, with lectures on everything from the Bhagavad Gita to Ayurvedic medicine. Says Nandakumara, "When we started in 1972, the community was small, but it has now grown. Earlier they had very limited contact with the home country, but today they'll be able to get anything, thanks to the open policy of the government

wherein it welcomes, helps and encourages people to keep in touch with their culture. There are so many opportunities, so many government grants available that anyone who is doing genuine work will be recognized."

The Bhavan has 1,500 members. In 2001 there were 800 students enrolled in various classes in Indian languages, Carnatic music, Hindustani music, Kathak and Bharat Natyam, yoga and Gita and Vedic chanting. There are also outreach classes in Wembley, bringing Indian culture to where the majority of Asians live.

The Bhavan is thriving and is again remaking itself—this time with a \$1.7 million renovation and creation of a visual arts gallery. It has been allocated \$836,000 by the Millennium Commission, subject to raising the matching grants. The Arts Council has also promised \$240,000 in matching grants for other renovations.

The Nehru Center, India's cultural nucleus in London, has stood through all the change. Purchased by the Indian High Commission in 1947, it has gone through many uses and was even a marvelous canteen for Desi food when there

were no Indian restaurants in London. Noted actor and playwright Girish Karnad has been the director of Nehru Center for the past two years and has also had his plays performed in London, including his latest, "Bali" The Sacrifice."

Indeed, there has been a flowering of local British Indian talent including artists like dancer Shobana Jeysingh and Akram Singh and performers Talvin Singh and Nitin Sawhney. The theater group Tamasha has toured the country with its English stage adaptation of the Bollywood film "Hum Aap Ke Hain Kaun," while Tara Arts is

known for its innovative work.

Observes Karnad, "A whole new generation of artists is coming and making itself felt, and that's essentially because the arts council decided to encourage ethnic arts. Not so much traditional arts but what the local Indian generation is producing in terms of modern fusion. In that sense, if you see India as the source of this cultural activity, then really the modern interpretation of all that is happening here."

Fitting in: On my last day in London I attended Lord Swarj Paul's annual reception in the London Zoo, a gathering for parents and their children, in memory of his daughter Ambika who died of leukemia. All through her illness, the zoo had been her favorite place and after she passed away, he often used to visit it. When he heard that it was going to be closed down due to lack of funds, he donated \$1.6 million.

Ask him whether he considers himself British or Indian, and he says, " I am hundred percent British, and I am hundred percent Indian so I have no problem with

identity. Those who have, I feel sorry for them."

Indeed, the Indian immigrants in Britain seem to have embraced the British Asian label more than Indians in America have accepted their hyphenated identity. Lord Paul says of the Indians in the UK, "They are a tremendous asset to this country, and all three political parties recognize that. As more education comes, I think they will feel even more comfortable. They've done a marvelous job at assimilating themselves—it's a very successful community. The India craze is good—it's more

recognition of India, more recognition of Indian people and it's partly because of the recognition of the contribution of the Indians living here."

Parents do not want their children to forget and in many cases the second generation, a robust mix of Asian and British viewpoints, is finding its place in a continent far from home. They are going for arranged marriages as well as love unions and negotiating their identity [see next page]. Indeed, my brief ten days in Britain showed me many faces of Hinduism, of people living their own versions of

the religion. And such is the elasticity and philosophy of Hinduism that people can live many different lifestyles and still call themselves Hindu.

YOUTH

Mind if We Take Charge?

Hindu Youth UK embark on ambitious programs

BY LAVINA MELWANI, NEW YORK
<http://www.hindu-blog.com/2010/08/isk...a-lila-theme-park-in.html>

I met with a committed group of young Hindus, the organizers of the Get Connected 2002 Festival, in Wembley. These were by no means somber, religious conservatives, but fun-loving, vital young professionals whose goal is to put the energy and magic back into

religion for the younger generation.

"There is this confusion of identity it's the biggest issue facing us," says Bhavit Mehta, 24. "A lot of Indians are born here, and many are born in Africa. So how do we identify ourselves? People are very cynical. They question everything in this day and age. That's why at last year's event it was felt that there should be something that

catered completely to the youth."

I was told that in the UK there are hundreds of Hindu organizations, including many which are just informal groups. Every temple has its own youth group active in spreading their message and philosophy. There are groups which are spirituality-based like the Chinmaya Mission, Aurobindo Ashram, Vivekananda Society and the

Ramakrishna-Vedanta Center. There are groups that are temple-based such as the Saiva Temple and the Swaminarayan group.

Then there are groups which are community based the young Gujaratis, Sindhis, brahmins and Patels, Lohanas and Kashmiris. Other important players are the university-based groups such as the National Hindu Students Forum (NHSF), which

provides a network for all the Hindu groups in various universities.

"Last year we wanted to bring all these different groups together and make them aware of this larger network," explains Mehta. "The youth had never worked together. The goal was to get them working together at an early age so that in ten years time, when they are heading their organizations, they are very

good friends."

Asked if the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Sangh Parivar were active among the youth in the UK, Mehta said they were very active. NHSF was inspired by the VHP, while Shaka, another youth group, is connected to the UK Hindu Swayam Sangh, which is, in turn, connected to the RSS in India. He points out the VHP has a very different role in this country as compared to India:

"They're not the same, because the people running the VHP here are either of East African origin or are British-born, so there is that change in mentality. I think the role that they should play is a go-between, communicating what is happening in India to the Hindus in this country."

As individuals, the religious Hindu youth in the UK cover a wide spectrum. There are

many who are knowledge-based, having studied the Gita and the Upanishads. Others are devotion-based, and are into bhajanas (religious songs) and Hanuman chalisas (scriptural recitation). Still others perform yagnas, fire ceremonies. "But put them all together and they are still a very small minority. The majority of the Hindu youth maybe 75 percent don't take an interest in their faith or culture," says Mehta. "They

often mistake the faith and culture as one and that is the first problem. They look at India and think, 'Well, that's Hinduism'—and actually it's not. They often misunderstand the basic, simple concepts of Hinduism as freakish or irrelevant to them. That's what it boils down to how relevant are all these things to them today in their lifestyle? If it's seen as irrelevant, then they want nothing to do with it. That's a major problem."

The various members of Hindu Youth UK spoke with me about the role of Hinduism in their lives. Jitesh Patel, 22, is a graphic designer who was born and raised in London. He recalls racial bias growing up: "I used to see kids being terrorized and bullied. And those kind of kids just get lost." He had an experience during Navaratri when he had a darshan (vision) of Mataji (the Goddess). "That brought me closer to Hinduism, and I wanted to explore more. My

aim is to understand more about it and also to educate the youngsters of today, for they are the future of tomorrow."

Rina Soda was raised in Kenya where her family was involved in their local Hindu temple. "Religion and culture were strong in my family, but I always tended to question it. I didn't want to just follow things. I wanted answers." Now a manager in London,

she's been in the UK for 12 years and has felt the pressure in the workplace to conform to the mainstream. She says, "It didn't work, because if you try to fit in, you're not being yourself. But now from all the work and study I'm doing with Hinduism, I'm actually finding out who I am."

Sonali Kantaria, 25, was born in London and studied

in an English boarding school but did not lose her moorings: "I've been fortunate that my grandfather, Maruti Rambaba, is very religious. He is very devoted to Lord Hanuman. He has been given a title here as a saint and goes to the Kumbha Mela where he has his own camp. I even learned the Hanuman Chalisa [famous scripture on the exploits of Lord Hanuman]. But as a

youth, when you get too much of it, you tend to move away from it, though not intentionally. When I went to boarding school, I found I missed my religion. I went to church a few times, but then found a temple close by and started going there on Sundays. I was the only girl from my school going to a Hindu temple. I've always been proud of who I am and thought it was quite nice to be different."

Jaytal Morjaria is a buyer for Laura Ashley, but on the Get Connected team he's the coordinator of the design team. His goal was to make the design of their publications and events very funky and modern: "The kids we are targeting, their outlook is going to clubs, so we are trying to bring a club look, a High Street look, to Hinduism because I think it can be done. It's using the colors and graphics to turn

heads. As you walk in, you want to get a real experience of what's going on."

Monicka Patel, 23, born and raised in U.K., is in journalism. Since she started living on her own, she found she was drifting away from Hinduism, while her family remained involved. Getting involved with the Hindu Youth helped her to get a

footing and allowed her to combine her journalism skills with volunteerism. She says, "As you get older, everyone wants to get back to their roots."

Jayes Vora has worked for the last five years in sales companies and is now working for himself. He was born in the UK but has lived in an isolated community in Yorkshire. "I had always

received scrambled messages, and it never worked for me. I thought of myself as English and British. I see myself as an Indian and Hindu as well, and I think it's my chance to learn about things. When people preach to me, I tend to switch off. There's a message to be sent out to the wider world to the youth out there, and it has to be done in a way that they'll understand."

As Bhavit Mehta says, "We are trying as a group of organizations to reach the youth and show them and the non-Hindu community what Hinduism is and how relevant it is today.

Hinduism is relevant to the non-Hindus, too we can offer a lot to the host nation, to this country, as a spiritual ideal."

Will River Aire Be the

UK's Ganga?

Permission sought to
create funeral area for
ash immersion rites

Bradford's Hindu
cultural society

submitted a proposal in mid-2002 to the Bradford City Council to allow a small stretch of the River Aire at Apperley Bridge to be used for the scattering of ashes after a traditional Hindu funeral. A spokesman for the cultural society says,

"Most of our community still travel to India for the purpose. But using the River Aire would allow those who can't afford it to also scatter ashes." Jane Glaister, director of arts, heritage and leisure for Bradford says, "We have been approached

by the local Hindu and Sikh communities, and we are talking to the environmental agency." A spokesperson for the City Council said officials had "been receiving a number of calls from concerned residents of the area." Community relations

are strained in
Bradford, which last
year experienced riots
of Muslim youth.
According the river
relatively divine status
poses no special
theological difficulty
for Hindus and would
likely be done by
pouring Ganga water
in the Aire, as with a

sacred lake in
Mauritius some years
ago.

CULTURE

Brits Go Bollywood
Bananas

"Bombay Dreams" is cultural invasion reality

BY LAVINA
MELWANI, NEW
YORK

Is india colonizing
her colonizer? Not
at gunpoint, but by
the force of ideas,
by the seduction of
her spices, her
tantalizing web of
music, dance and
Bollywood cinema?
Looking at the
calendar of events

in London, it did indeed look like a genuine Indian summer, with not only film, art and music events but also major promotions in department stores, malls, bookstores and museums, as

well as on television
most of it revolving
around Bollywood,
India's distinctive
film industry.

Among the
entertainers at the
celebrations in

Buckingham Place
last year the Queen
invited a few Desis
actress Meera Syal
and the hilarious
Moti Roti group.
Even as England
lost the World Cup,
the film making big
news and big bucks
was Gurinder

Chadha's "Bend it Like Beckham," the story of a young British Asian girl's passion for soccer. The film has made millions of dollars, been on the top ten lists and has attracted audiences irrespective of age,

gender or race. The title, for those ignorant of the world's most popular sport, refers to the ability of a kicker to impart sidespin to the ball and thereby curve, or bend, its path, and to David

Beckham, one of
England's top
players, especially
adept at the
preceding.

The words of
London-based
writers, including Sir

V. S. Naipaul,
Salman Rushdie,
and Hanif Quereshi,
have long enthralled
British readers.

Joining their league
is British Indian
writer Hari Kunzru
whose debut novel,
The Impressionist,
has earned an

incredible advance
of ^{us}\$2.4 million.

The British seem
to have an
insatiable
fascination with all
things Indian.

While books by Indian authors are flying off the shelves, tandoori (brick oven) fare is reputed to have overtaken fish and chips as the national favorite. In fact, there are

today over 8,000
Indian restaurants
in the U.K. Music
created by British
Asians is vitalizing
the club scene
with its funky
sounds and Indian
dance and theater
is enriching the

arts. "Kabhi Khushi
Kabhi Gham"
became the first
Hindi film to reach
number three on
national cinema
charts.

And finally, gaudy,
bawdy, lovable,
larger-than-life
Bollywood is
center stage in an
amazing summer
of movies, music
and events.
Descending into
the netherworld of

the London
Underground, you
see posters of
"Bombay Dreams,"
right next to those
of "Les Miz,"
"Phantom of the
Opera" and "The
Lion King," and it
strikes you, the

strangeness of it
all.

As part of my trip
to London, I was
determined to see
"Bombay Dreams."
"Dreams" is

Andrew Lloyd
Webber's
production of A. R.
Rahman's musical
at the Apollo
Victoria Theater. It
was almost three
years in the
making, with a
reported budget of

\$7.2 million.

Among Webber's other productions are "Phantom of the Opera" and "Cats" the longest running stage musical ever.

Bollywood films aren't everyone's cup of tea, and neither was "Dreams." In a scathing review, The Times wrote, "Consider the writing talent that Lloyd-Webber

assembled for this
show: the film
director Shekhar
Kapur; the
veteran lyricist
Don Black; the
Goodness
Gracious Me
creator Meera
Syal. Then

consider the results. Scenes that lurch into each other like blind elephants. A plot that disintegrates into a ragbag of sitcom skits on Miss World,

women's lib and
the like. The
lamest ending in
West End history.
Trite lyrics.
Cardboard
characters.
Dialogue that
would test the
patience of

Mother Teresa."

The Daily Mail had a more generous view: "It's as subtle as a panto [a boisterous form of British

stagecraft for children], but then so is Bollywood, which this show joyfully echoes. Great fun, great costumes, and a refreshing change from every other West

End show." In reality, I personally found that though the story is a bit threadbare, the show is extremely enjoyable with all the grand excesses

associated with
Bollywood.

More, it was a
wonderful feeling
to see Indians
dominate a West
End show,

especially an
Andrew Lloyd
Weber show.
Desis have been
turning up in
droves—making
up half the
audience the
night I attended.
Likely few of them

had ever
ventured to the
West End theatre
district before.
And this may
actually make
more
India-related
shows viable as a
commercial

venture.

As the crowds
bombarded
"Bombay
Dreams," they
also headed to
the Bollywood

tamasha [an
exhibition or fair]
at Selfridges
department store,
its biggest and
most successful
promotion ever. In
a period of three
weeks, over 1.5
million people

visited the London and Manchester stores. Designer Nitin Desai, who's designed the sets of such films as "Lagaan" and "Devdas," had turned the place into a colorful

Bollywood
carnival, complete
with a movie
star's bedroom.

Selfridges' food
halls had been
transformed into

a little corner of India, with street foods, while the main restaurant was turned into an Indian dining experience by Taj chefs. In a nod to the dabbawallas [who deliver

home-cooked lunches to Mumbai workers], tiffin boxes with curry and rice and other meals were also introduced. There was a chaiwalla offering tea to the thirsty

visitors and, yes,
the clay pot of
mango kulfi
[Indian ice cream]
was available too.

Bollywood was
also the toast of

the elite world
with "Cinema
India: The Art of
Bollywood" – a
special exhibition
of film posters at
the prestigious
Victoria and
Albert Museum.
Amazingly, the

museum had
these in its
collection for over
50 years. They
tell the history of
a nation reflected
through its
popular culture.

After a glittering opening party at the V&A, I stepped out to the curb to see an unlikely sight— an Ambassador car in London! It's no ordinary vehicle, but a tribute to

Bollywood,
upholstered with
Bollywood
posters, with a
whiff of incense
and, yes, there's
film music, too.
Tobias is the
quirky British
owner of Karma

Kars with several
themed
Ambassador
taxis—Maharaja,
Sheesh Mahal,
Kama Sutra,
besides the
Bollywood car,
each available at
\$64/hour. "I lived

in India longer than most Indians!" brags Tobias, cool and very Desi in his white cotton kurta pajama. "Karma Kars is not a cab company" it's a philosophy" and

the philosophy is that the journey is more important than the arrival. So enjoy the journey in life and don't always think about the destination!" And certainly a good

number of
Britishers, native
and imports, were
making good use
of India to enjoy
their journey.

RELIGIOUS

TRENDS

Churches for Sale or Rent

Christians find
themselves with
a surplus

Hindus in India
are astounded
when they hear

that one or
another temple
in America or
England has
bought or rented
an unused
Christian church.
The Church of
England has so

many unused
facilities that
they have a web
site,

<http://england.anglican.org/rcsale/redchhome.html>,

to solicit

"successful and

sympathetic
conversions of
and uses for
redundant
church
buildings." Since
the 1960s, the
Church has put
to new use about

1,500 buildings,
and has a fairly
constant listing
of 20 to 25 more
available each
year.

While the site lists "places of worship for other Christian bodies" as the first "suitable new use," several have been turned into

Hindu temples.
They include the
Shri Sanatan
Mandir in
Leicester and the
Sanatan Deevya
Mandal in Bristol.
In the US, the
Ganesha Temple

in Flushing, New York, was begun in a church, later torn down to build a traditional temple. Such conversions of use have a

distinct
advantage to
Hindus because
religious services
are already an
"established use"
under zoning
regulations,
avoiding the

often very
lengthy process
of obtaining new
zoning
permission.
But—most of the
buildings
currently listed
on the Church of

England's site
have a distinct
disadvantage for
Hindus— they
are surrounded
by graveyards,
something put as
far from a
temple as

possible in India.