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## Kevelaer – A New Place for Tamil Pilgrimages in the Diaspora

### Summary

Kevelaer is one of the most important Marian pilgrimage sites in Germany, deriving its fame from a miraculous picture of the Madonna, known as *Consolatrix Afflictorum* ('Comforter of the Afflicted'). Since 1987, Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka have been meeting in Kevelaer once a year adopting the Kevelaer Madonna as their own Madhu Mata who lent herself to meet the needs of persons who have experienced anxiety and hardships in their homeland and a great deal of uncertainty as immigrants in the West. The focus of the contribution is on ritual aspects distinguishing the *Tamilenwallfahrt* from organized pilgrimages of other groups. Special attention is paid to the fact that not only Roman Catholics take part in the *Tamilenwallfahrt*, but a significant number of Tamil Hindus as well.

Keywords: Marian cults; appropriation of sacred space; Tamil diaspora; ritual performances

Kevelaer, eine der wichtigsten Marienwallfahrtsorte in Deutschland, ist berühmt für ein wundertätiges Gnadenbild, das die Madonna als *Consolatrix Afflictorum* (Trösterin der Betrübten) zeigt. Seit 1978 treffen sich hier einmal im Jahr tamilische Flüchtlinge aus Sri Lanka. Sie sehen in der Madonna von Kevelaer auch die in ihrem Heimatland hochverehrte Madhu Mata, von der es heißt, sie stehe allen bei, die Angst und Verfolgung erfahren haben. Der Beitrag befasst sich besonders mit den rituellen Aspekten, durch die sich die sogenannte Tamilenwallfahrt von der Wallfahrt anderer Pilgergruppen unterscheidet. Spezielles Augenmerk gilt der Tatsache, dass nicht nur Katholiken zu diesem Ereignis nach Kevelaer kommen, sondern auch eine große Zahl tamilischer Hindus.

Keywords: Wallfahrt; Marienverehrung; tamilische Diaspora; rituelle Performanz; sakraler Raum

Since 1988 Kevelaer, one of the most important Marian pilgrimage centres in Germany, second only to Altötting in Bavaria, has incorporated a new group of regular visitors in its yearly pilgrimage calendar: Tamil devotees from Sri Lanka living in Europe. The date determined for the so-called *Tamilenwallfahrt* (Tamil Pilgrimage) is the second Saturday in August. On this day up to 15 000 South Asian visitors congregate in the small town in the Western part of Germany near the Dutch border. The majority comes from nearby North-Rhine-Westphalian cities and towns, but there is also a significant number of visitors from other parts of Germany and from neighbouring countries like France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg.

The annual gathering of Tamils in Kevelaer will be described here. The focus will be on aspects distinguishing this event from pilgrimages of other groups. Special attention is paid to the fact that not only Roman Catholics take part in the Tamil Pilgrimage, but a significant number of Hindus as well. The first part provides basic information on the pilgrimage site of Kevelaer and on Tamils in Germany. It also includes a short description of the events taking place during the annual Tamil Pilgrimage. The second part deals with the importance of Mother Mary for Catholic and Hindu Tamils. The question is raised as to whether the devotional practices of Hindus in Kevelaer are to be understood as a form of convergence brought about in the diaspora. In search of an answer traditional forms of veneration in Sri Lanka are discussed.<sup>1</sup>

## 1 The Tamil Pilgrimage to Kevelaer

### 1.1 The pilgrimage site of Kevelaer

Kevelaer is a small city with about 29 000 inhabitants. It calls itself the largest pilgrimage town in Northwest Europe.<sup>2</sup> Its reputation as a pilgrimage site is based on events that took place in the seventeenth century, at the time of the Thirty Years War. They started with the appearance of a small copperplate print depicting the Mother of Christ as Our Lady of Luxembourg, which was soon connected with a number of miraculous happenings.<sup>3</sup> The print – 3 by 4½ inches – was a kind of pilgrimage pamphlet,

1 This contribution is based in part on an earlier description of the Tamil Pilgrimage to Kevelaer: Luchesi 2008b.  
2 Official Website of the city: <http://www.kevelaer.de> (visited on 31/07/2017); see also <http://www.wallfahrt-kevelaer.de/index.php> (visited on 31/07/2017).

3 They are retold in the religious pamphlets printed with ecclesiastical approbation in various languages which can be purchased in the churches of Kevelaer, and in pilgrimage guides like *Kevelaer. Stätte der Besinnung. Wegweiser und Information*, 2003. Useful information can also be found at <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/kevelaer> (visited on 31/07/2017) and in Pötz 1986.

collected in Luxembourg where Mary had been venerated since 1623 as *Consolatrix Afflictorum*, ‘Comforter of the Afflicted’. In 1642 it was placed in a simple chapel built by Hendrick Busman, who had heard a voice asking him to perform this task. Due to the growing number of pilgrims attracted by the miraculous picture this building was replaced in 1645 by a hexagonal chapel which from then on has housed the precious item together with jewellery donated by thankful believers over the years. The print shows the Madonna in royal pose with her infant son on her left arm. She is clad in precious clothes and a wide cape, a so-called protecting cloak (*Schutzmantel*), and wears a crown on her head. In her hands she holds sceptre and imperial orb. In the background on the left the city of Luxembourg can be seen, on the right a church or chapel towards which rows of people with standard-bearers in front are moving. The Latin inscription on the banner above the figure reads, “*Consolatrix Afflictorum ora pro nobis*” (‘Comforter of the Afflicted pray for us’), another text emphasizes that the picture is a “*Vera Effigies*” (‘true copy’) of the Luxembourg Madonna.<sup>4</sup>

This print still forms the centre of the religious events in present-day Kevelaer. The hexagonal Chapel of Grace (*Gnadenkapelle*) is situated in the middle of the main town square. An opening in the northern wall makes it possible to have a glimpse of it from the outside. A narrow ambulatory inside the Chapel allows a close view. On the southern side of the square lies the Chapel of the Candles (*Kerzenkapelle*), erected as early as 1643. Its name refers to the countless candles of different sizes which were and still are offered by individual believers as well as whole groups of pilgrims inside and outside the building. On the other side of the square rises the huge Basilica of the Blessed Virgin, constructed in the nineteenth century; here services for large numbers of pilgrims can be celebrated. Another important place nearby is the modern Forum Pax Christi, a large roofed-over audience hall.

## 1.2 Tamils in Germany

The Tamil visitors to Kevelaer are for the most part Tamils from Sri Lanka who have settled in Germany. The overwhelming number of Sri Lankan Tamils came as refugees from the early 1980s onwards, fleeing the escalating civil war in their homeland. To give exact numbers of Tamil refugees living in Germany is problematic, not least because a large number have attained German citizenship by now. A rough picture must do: the overall number of persons with Sri Lankan background amounts to about 60 000.<sup>5</sup> Approximately 90 % are Tamils; the remaining ones are probably Sinhalese persons. The

4 English translation given in the pamphlet mentioned in n. 3 (English version, p. 3): “True copy of the picture of the Mother of Jesus, Comforter of the afflicted, as it is well known through the many mira-

cles and venerated by many in the neighborhood of the city of Luxembourg. Anno 1640.”

5 Estimated numbers for 2003, cf. Baumann 2003, 41.

majority of Tamils are said to be Hindus – the estimations vary between 38 000 and 48 000. According to Baumann 15.8 % of the remaining persons have declared themselves to be Catholics, and 4.1 % Protestants of various denominations.<sup>6</sup> This means that 9500 persons at the most can belong to the Catholic section. Years ago this number came as a surprise to many Germans who thought that the majority of Tamils were Christians. Today the opposite seems the case: I have frequently met persons who took it for granted that Tamils are Hindus. The opening of a number of Hindu Tamil temples in several German towns in the course of the last twenty years and the media coverage of their public religious activities which have become regular have clearly influenced the public awareness in favour of the Hindu section.

The reference to the new Hindu temples brings to mind an important point in the history of Hindu Tamil immigrants in Germany – the fact that in the 1980s, when the first large waves of immigrants arrived, there were virtually no public religious institutions for Hindus. They had to be content with domestic shrines and makeshift places of worship. Within a short time, however, they created new opportunities to practise their faith by converting industrial buildings and private houses into prayer halls. They even started to construct new buildings, the first and most impressive one so far being the Sri Kamadchi Ampal Temple in Hamm-Uentrop, inaugurated in 2002.<sup>7</sup> In Hanover, a newly built temple was opened in 2009, and in Berlin-Britz the consecration of a new temple building in South Indian style took place in September 2013. The establishment of these prayer halls and temples has brought about the celebration of yearly temple festivals and other major religious events which in turn have called for special festival activities in the South Asian tradition.<sup>8</sup> The most important ones are public processions, which since the 1990s have been increasingly organized by a number of temples. Today more than 40 prayer halls and temples (*alayam*) run by Tamil Hindus from Sri Lanka can be found in Germany,<sup>9</sup> a quite remarkable fact if one looks at the comparatively few religious institutions of other Hindu groups.

The situation faced by the *Christian* Tamils when entering Germany was different. There was no difficulty in finding a parish and a church offering regular Christian services. Difficulties, however, arose with regard to the language used in the services and in pastoral care. A first step to change this situation was taken by the Catholic Church by establishing *Katholische Seelsorge für Tamilen* ('Catholic Offices for the Pastoral Care of Tamils') in Osnabrück. Their main task was to provide services by a Tamil speaking

6 Baumann 2003, 61, n. 25. See also Baumann and Salentin 2006, 307.

7 Luchesi 2003a; Luchesi 2003b.

8 Luchesi 2008a.

9 In 2003, 26 temples were listed (Baumann, Luchesi, and Wilke 2003, 447–448; see also map in Baumann 2003, 66). By 2011 information about 38 was collected (Wilke 2013, 374). Since then the process of opening new ones continued.

priest who routinely visited various German cities. The office was moved to Essen<sup>10</sup> and is presently run by Father Anthony Fernando Bennet.

Another important step was the idea of a collective visit to the Marian shrine in Kevelaer. It was devised by Tamil members of the Essen diocese and realized for the first time in August 1987 when 50 persons made the journey together. It was repeated year after year with steadily increasing numbers of participants. Gradually, people from other parts of Germany joined in, as well as visitors from neighbouring countries. In 2002 the newspapers reported the gathering of 15 000 Tamil visitors, a figure which has regularly been repeated in the press since then.<sup>11</sup> The annual event, which popularly became known as the *Tamilenwallfahrt* (Tamil Pilgrimage), is primarily organized by the Catholic Offices for the Pastoral Care of Tamils in Essen. One of the initiators of the pilgrimage and still a most active organizer is Mr Thuraisingham Camillus, *Pfarrgemeinderat* (parish councillor) of the Tamil parish in Essen, who came to Germany in 1985. Remembering the early years, he told a journalist from the regional newspaper: “In the beginning we were only 50 pilgrims. We had a priest from Osnabrück who by the second year no longer wanted to participate. He felt that for such a small number of people it wasn’t worth the effort.”<sup>12</sup> Asked why Kevelaer was chosen instead of other places of pilgrimage he pointed to the likeness between the image of the Madonna of Kevelaer and of the Madonna in a famous pilgrimage shrine in Sri Lanka, called Madhu: “When I realised this I took it as a sign. I told myself that this could not be a coincidence. And the way the Tamil pilgrimage to Kevelaer has developed indeed confirms that we chose the right place.”<sup>13</sup>

### 1.3 The annual Tamil Pilgrimage<sup>14</sup>

The term ‘Tamil pilgrimage’ may evoke the picture of groups *walking* towards Kevelaer from quite a distance or at least entering the inner part of the city together. The Tamil devotees, however, do not set out from their homes on foot or approach the sacred centre in groups led by a pilgrimage guide while singing devotional songs, as many pilgrimage

10 Tamilen Seelsorgeamt, Laurentiusberg 1, 45276 Essen.

11 With regard to the pilgrimage in 2011 see for instance <http://kirchensite.de/aktuelles/bistum-aktuell/bistum-aktuell-news/datum/2011/08/15/farbenfroh-fromm-und-politisch/> (visited on 31/07/2017). In 2012 the estimations were for the first time lower, “more than 10 000” <http://www.lokalkompass.de/kleve/kultur/jubilaums-wallfahrt-ueber-10000-tamilen-in-kevelaer-d197770.html> (visited on 31/07/2017).

12 “Anfangs waren wir nur 50 Pilger. Wir hatten einen Pfarrer aus Osnabrück, der wollte schon im zweiten Jahr nicht mehr mitkommen. Das lohne sich ja nicht für so wenige Pilger” (*Rheinische Post*, 8. August 2005).

13 “Als ich das bemerkt habe, war es für mich wie ein Zeichen. Ich habe mir gesagt: Das kann kein Zufall sein. Und die Entwicklung der Tamilen-Wallfahrt bestätigt ja auch, dass wir mit Kevelaer richtig liegen” (*Rheinische Post*, 8. August 2005).

14 The description is based on my own observations in 1999, 2001, 2005, 2011 and 2012.

groups from neighbouring towns and villages traditionally did and still do. The Tamils usually approach the centre with the various churches in small individual groups, mostly formed by family members.

Here most of them immediately line up to enter the Chapel of Grace. They clearly do not content themselves with seeing the miraculous image from a distance but wish to come as close to it as possible. For this they have to enter the building, and as only one person at a time is able to step right in front of the small depiction of the Madonna they may have to wait quite some time. Finally, when their turn comes, they are indeed only inches away from the picture which – surrounded by precious donations – is protected by a double sheet of glass. Many just fold their hands and gaze intently at the small print, others are not satisfied with the purely visual contact: they kiss the protecting glass or touch it with both palms, which they then bring to their breast or forehead. Small children are usually lifted up to be at eye level with the picture, and they are often touched by their mother with the hand she has placed on the glass in front of it. These forms of contact are acts of devotion which can be found all over the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka among devotees of all creeds.<sup>15</sup> On a busy day like this it is not possible to spend more than a few seconds in front of the picture; one has to move on. The way leads into the narrow interior of the Chapel, where one may pray for a moment and purchase a bundle of small consecrated candles to take home, and then out again. Some devotees may light one or two of these candles right away and put them on the supports provided on the outer wall of the Chapel of the Candles. Far more common, however, is the custom of purchasing larger-sized candles at the shops catering for the needs of pilgrims. Compared with other pilgrims Tamils buy and place an immense number of candles, especially really huge specimens. Dealers have prepared themselves for this event by putting up stalls in front of their regular shops. They know by now the characteristic custom of Tamil devotees to choose the length of a candle according to the height of the child in whose name they are going to offer it. As this is done not only for infant sons and daughters but also for older ones, candles of one meter length and more are in high demand. Dealers reported that plain candles of this sort are specifically produced for the Tamil customers on the day of the Tamil Pilgrimage.

Many of the visitors will then move to the Basilica to attend the High Mass at 10 a.m. which usually starts with a welcoming address to the assembled pilgrims of the day. There the Tamils are explicitly mentioned. Immediately after the mass they line up again to defile past the reverse side of the high altar where a depiction of the risen Christ can be seen. Many kneel before it and touch the feet of the picture before moving on. Other queues form in front of the desks with visitors' books or paper slips where people can

15 These acts can be observed among Hindus, Buddhists and Christians in South Asia alike. The importance of the visual perception of the sacred in

the Hindu context, known as *darśan*, is excellently described by Eck 1985.

note what seems urgent to them: thanks and wishes. Crowds also form around the tables where small lights can be lit, including those in front of St. Anthony. Inside the Chapel of Candles, however, situated on the other side of the central square, no individual lights can be lit. But people like to enter, to sit there for a while quietly and to pray. Here, too, the opportunity is given to write thanks or wishes on a piece of paper which can be slotted in a wooden box.

The main event, the special pilgrimage service for the Christian Tamil pilgrims, takes place in the large Forum Pax Christi, normally scheduled at a quarter to 11 a.m. The organization of the musical accompaniment lies in the hands of members of the *Tamilen Seelsorgeamt* Essen. They are also in charge of putting up and decorating a small statue of the Madonna with Child in front of the auditorium, which they have brought from Essen where it is kept in the office. It is said to represent the Madonna since long worshipped in Madhu in Sri Lanka. This representation, known as Madhu Mata, becomes another focus of veneration at the end of the service. The service starts with the ceremonial entry of the assembled clergy consisting of Tamil as well as German priests, sometimes also priests from neighbouring countries. They are accompanied by young persons and children who have recently taken their First Communion and who are dressed in their festive communion outfit. Welcoming words in German by a German speaker mark the beginning of an elaborate service in the Tamil language. Most of the assembled laypersons, filling the Forum up to the last seat with hundreds standing in the aisles, join in the singing. The Tamil texts are to be found in a leaflet sold at the entrance. I was told that during the time of the civil war in Sri Lanka the prayers always included the request for peace in the war-stricken homeland and the hope to being able to return to the motherland. Now, after the official end of the war, the emphasis lies on the request for a swift reconciliation of the different ethnic and religious groups and for the establishment of equal rights for all. The Jubilee Pilgrimage in 2012, celebrating the twenty-fifth gathering of Tamils in Kevelaer, had as its motto: "Tell the despondent: Have courage." (*Sagt den Verzagten: Habt Mut.*). Immediately after the end of the service people line up to greet and venerate the small Madhu Madonna which has been put up by the helpers from Essen. Most of them donate money for which a special box is set up near the figure, some offer incense sticks. All are eager to touch the statue, especially women ask for one of the flowers with which the image is decorated. Those having a mobile or a camera at hand try to get a good shot. It seems as if taking photos is a new and generally accepted type of establishing contact with the venerated image.

By now it is nearly lunchtime and before long the open space around the Chapel of Grace is filled with eating and chatting people. In former years the entire sacred square was turned into a sort of huge picnic spot – the food often being brought along in large vessels. Nowadays most of the hungry visitors get what they need from the market

temporarily installed on a lot behind the Basilica. Food stalls sell vegetarian food and soft drinks but also meat dishes, in most cases prepared in South Asian style. But it is not only food prepared on the spot which is sold here; all sorts of food to take home as well as other items can be found, as for instance: fresh and tinned vegetables, various spices, cooking utensils, saris and other types of clothes, cosmetics, Tamil videos and CDs and children's toys. All the goods are to the taste and liking of South Asians, and most of the traders are themselves of Sri Lankan or Indian origin.

Here at the latest, non-Tamil observers become aware that the large crowd which has meanwhile filled the city centre comprises not only Catholic pilgrims but Hindu visitors as well. Or why do statues and posters of the Hindu goddess Lakshmi or the elephant-headed Ganesha find interested customers? For whom are the various items usually used in Hindu *pujas*?<sup>16</sup> Indeed a significant percentage of the assembled Tamils in Kevelaer belong to the Hindu section of the Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka, a fact which was barely mentioned in former years but is meanwhile regularly emphasized by the local newspapers and by reports issued by the Catholic Church. The estimates regarding their numbers vary; Baumann<sup>17</sup> speaks of 20 to 30 % in 1998, later reports of 60 % and more. It is difficult to establish exact figures without a quantitative survey as the activities and the behaviour of the Hindus do not noticeably differ from those of the Christian visitors. Many of the Hindus have come to worship the Madonna in the same way as their Christian brethren: by praying to her in the Chapel of Grace, by gazing at the miraculous picture and touching it, by using the visitors' books to ask her favour and/or thank her. They are as keen as the Christians on buying consecrated candles and lighting larger ones right in the central square. Some of them visit the Basilica to put a small light in front of the statue of St. Anthony or on a tray in the centre of the church and to write down their wishes or thanks, and quite a number join the Tamil service in the Forum Pax Christi.

## 2 The importance of the Kevelaer Madonna for Christian and Hindu Tamils

### 2.1 The choice of Kevelaer as a place of pilgrimage for Tamil Catholics from Sri Lanka

The so-called Tamil Pilgrimage has not only become a major event in the religious life of Roman Catholic Tamils of Sri Lankan origin but also the largest annual gathering of

16 I remember being quite puzzled during my first visits when meeting an acquaintance from the Bremen Hindu temple and his family in Kevelaer.

17 Baumann 1998, 24.



pilgrims in Kevelaer<sup>18</sup> – a development that was not to be foreseen in the 1980s. That Mr Camillus and his wife – one of the very first Tamil visitors to Kevelaer – came to this place seemed pure coincidence. They had been invited by a parish in Oberhausen to join a bus pilgrimage to the popular place.<sup>19</sup> As asylum seekers they were actually not allowed to leave their place of residence but not knowing where they are going, they went along. Kevelaer with its Marian shrine and many churches left such an impression on them that Mr Camillus started to think of ways to gather Tamils for a joint pilgrimage to the Madonna under the leadership of a Tamil priest. As already mentioned, between 40 and 50 persons took part in the first group journey in 1988; the number grew to 150 the following year and soon – by word of mouth – two to three thousand came together. In the beginning most of the visitors seemed to have come from the region nearby, i.e. North-Rhine-Westphalia, the residential area of a large number of Tamil immigrants in Germany, but before long Tamils from other parts of Germany as well as from neighbouring countries joined. With the help of the church and town institutions in Kevelaer and the *Tamilen Seelsorgeamt* in Essen the annual gathering of Tamils in Kevelaer has developed into a well-organised institution.

That a Marian pilgrimage site was able to arouse the interest of Catholic Tamils is only natural. The Madonna, being central to Catholic theology and devotional practice, is venerated by Catholics of all kinds and origins. Tamil Catholics, too, are known to have been devotees of the Mother of Christ for centuries. A number of churches consecrated to Mary and several Marian pilgrimage shrines in Sri Lanka and the Tamil speaking South Indian regions testify to this devotion.<sup>20</sup> An important European Marian shrine within reach of the newly immigrated could not fail to attract devotees. Moreover, many of the Tamil visitors connect the Kevelaer Madonna with the one in Madhu back home. Mr Camillus has already been quoted; he explicitly pointed to the similarity between the two: “The Madonna in Kevelaer looks very much like the one in Mudhu (sic), our place of pilgrimage in Sri Lanka.”<sup>21</sup> Madhu is situated halfway between Mannar and Vavuniya in the North-western Tamil part of Sri Lanka, actually in the part that for many years was controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The Marian

18 “Das ist mit Abstand die größte Einzelwallfahrt des Jahres.” R. Killich from the Pilgrimage Office Kevelaer quoted in: <http://www1.wdr.de/themen/kultur/religion/hinduismus/tamilen100.html> (visited on 31/07/2017).

19 I thank Sandhya Marla-Küsters for sharing this and other pieces of information, which she has collected during her field research, with me. She interviewed Mr Camillus on November 27th, 2012.

20 For Talawila, Kudagama and Madhu in Sri Lanka see Stirrat 1982, for Velankanni and Villiyannur in Tamil Nadu Frenz 2004.

21 “Die Madonna in Kevelaer hat fast die gleichen Züge wie in Mudhu [sic], unserem Wallfahrtsort in Sri Lanka” (*Rheinische Post*, 8. August 2005). He is again quoted in “Kevelaer vereint Flüchtlinge”, *Ruhrwort Essen*, 4. August 2012: “Das Kevelaerer Wallfahrtsbild erinnert mich verblüffend an Madhu, unsere große Wallfahrt auf der Insel?”

Church in Madhu is dedicated to Our Lady of the Holy Rosary at Marudhamadhu, commonly known as Madhu Mata (Madhu Mother). She is represented by a statue which is clearly of the Luxembourg type, like the one in Kevelaer: she and the infant Jesus on her left arm are clad in bejewelled garments which cover most of the two bodies; both are crowned. The crowning was done officially in 1924 by a papal legate.

The likeness of the two Madonnas is not restricted to their outer appearances. In both cases the Mother of God is understood as a motherly helper and protector, and in both cases her representation is said to have miraculous powers. Like the Madonna in Kevelaer Madhu Mata receives ornaments as recognition of her help. The devotion of the Sri Lankan Madonna reaches back to the sixteenth century, to a church in Manati which housed a statue of ‘Our Lady of Good Health’. In 1670, during the time of Dutch rule in Sri Lanka, this statue was brought to the present site.<sup>22</sup> Several miraculous events were connected with the finding of the new place where the Madonna soon became renowned again for her healing capacities. Her special domain is said to be help in cases of snakebites. A former school teacher, a Catholic living now near Düren, whom I have asked about the place, told me that wild elephants come to Madhu in winter, “tigers abound” and there are “most deadly snakes but no one has been bitten”. People would “dig up the ground” and sprinkle the sand on their fields thus protecting their land and animals from poisonous snakes.

Before the outbreak of the civil war the place was annually visited by at least one million pilgrims. Peak days were around the 15th of August – the festival of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. The pilgrims came from the whole island comprising Tamil and Sinhalese Catholics alike. In addition considerable numbers of Hindus did the journey, and even Sinhalese Buddhists visited.<sup>23</sup> During the years of the civil war the shrine housed thousands of refugees.<sup>24</sup> In November 1999 the camp was shelled, killing a large number of people. Although the Catholic bishops called for the Madhu site to be a demilitarized zone with guaranteed security for those who had sought refuge there, the refugees had to flee further north, and the statue of the Madonna had finally to be moved, too. Since the – officially declared – end of the war in 2009 the statue is back in its hereditary place and pilgrims have started to arrive in great numbers again.

Considering the importance of the Madhu Madonna in Sri Lanka and the role this Marian shrine played during wartime it is not surprising that eventually a representation of Madhu Mata was put up in front of the Forum Pax Christi where she can be revered after the service. Displaying Our Lady of Madhu in this form in Kevelaer means that the

22 For the history see [madhuchurch.blogspot.de](http://madhuchurch.blogspot.de) (History of Madhu Church by Prathilal Fernando) and <https://www.catholicsandcultures.org/our-lady-of-madhu-shrine> (both visited on 20/08/2017).

23 <http://libref.ch/?p=51.html> (24.11.2005, “Religionen in Sri Lanka”, lecture given by Dr Oskar Flück), (visited on 20/08/2017).

24 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shrine\\_of\\_Our\\_Lady\\_of\\_Madhu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shrine_of_Our_Lady_of_Madhu) (visited on 31/07/2017).

place where she can be met has been moved from the distant Sri Lankan jungle area to an accessible diaspora city. Like the statue in Madhu, she can be looked at by the devotees, who may feel that their gaze is returned. As opposed to the print showing the Kevelaer Madonna this statue can also be directly touched. Most importantly, however, her presence in Kevelaer may give Tamils the feeling of a spiritual home away from home.<sup>25</sup>

Looking for further reasons for the strong appeal of the Kevelaer Madonna to Tamil devotees, it should be remembered that she is explicitly known as *Consolatrix Afflictorum*, the ‘Comforter of the Afflicted’. The Sri Lankan refugees are truly afflicted people, having experienced anxiety and many hardships in their homeland and a great deal of uncertainty as immigrants in Europe. Professor S.J. Emmanuel, the president of the International Tamil Forum and former General Curate of the Jaffna diocese, who lives in German exile too, has been quoted saying: “Many thousands come to the Mother of God, to get rid of their sorrows and distress.”<sup>26</sup> Her comfort and motherly concern is sought, but she is also approached as a helping force in very concrete matters. In the course of the years a number of Tamils told me that they had asked for her help and that their prayers were answered by her. Wishes often put forward were help in getting a job or – for the children – to succeed in school. Others were: to recover from sickness, to pass an exam, to find a good husband for a daughter or to get a German passport. The intercession books speak of the manifold wishes but also abound with thanks.

Apart from the individual wishes, there were always collective ones, the request for peace back home in Sri Lanka being the most prominent during the past years. They did not lose significance with the end of the civil war. There is hardly a Tamil in the West who has no relatives, neighbours or friends in Sri Lanka about whose safety and welfare he is still very concerned.

## 2.2 The importance of Mother Mary for Hindu Tamils and their participation in the Tamil Pilgrimage

In calling the Tamil refugees afflicted people, I of course think of all Tamils, be they Christians, Hindus or followers of other creeds or orientations. Looking at the considerable participation of Hindus in the Tamil Pilgrimage to Kevelaer one may be tempted to understand this phenomenon as a case of religious convergence between Catholic and Hindu Tamils brought about by the diasporic situation. This situation means for many refugees – irrespective of their religious affiliation – dramatically changed living

25 In 2011 one could also find a photo of Our Lady of Madhu on the reverse side of the leaflet with the religious songs which can be purchased before the

service – as a sort of counterpart to the coloured print of the Kevelaer Madonna on the front.

26 [www.kirchensite.de/popup\\_print.php?myELEMENT=97554](http://www.kirchensite.de/popup_print.php?myELEMENT=97554) (last visited on 20/07/2013).

conditions, often economic hardship, the loss of a sense of belonging combined with the constant worry about the wellbeing of the family members back home in Sri Lanka. Most of them were and are in need of consolation and encouragement. Instances of a religious convergence are obvious in Kevelaer – I have pointed out common features in the veneration of Mary in the descriptive first part. But it has to be asked whether these can be called *new* phenomena? In my opinion several beliefs and practices of Tamil Catholics and Hindus are traditionally not as clearly demarcated as one would sometimes assume in the West. Overlaps in the forms of religious practice are quite common. To substantiate this claim I will take a closer look at the significance of Mary and Marian pilgrimage sites for Hindus in Europe and South Asia.

Scholars of South Asian religions have long been aware of the fact that Mary, the Mother of Christ, is considered a divine female by many Hindus. Hindus worship a large number of goddesses. The great goddesses Parvati, Durga, Lakshmi, even the fearsome Kali and the frightening Sitala are referred to as *Ma*, *Mata*, *Amma* or *Tai*, all meaning ‘Mother’, and the various village goddesses of the South, too, are understood as life-giving, life-protecting and nourishing deities. To include Mary into the Hindu pantheon is unproblematic: the Mother of God becomes the Divine Mother.<sup>27</sup> Father Bennet and Mr Camillus, both official representatives of the *Tamilen Seelsorgeamt* Essen, recognize the veneration of Mary by the Hindus visitors as a genuine religious need, but distinguish their understanding of the Madonna from that of the Christian devotees.<sup>28</sup> According to them Hindus venerate the Madonna not as the Mother of Christ but as the wife of one of the Hindu gods, as for instance of god Murugan. Despite this difference “they do have a sort of faith in our Lady” (Father Bennet) as well as in St. Anthony.

Kevelaer is not the only Marian pilgrimage site in Europe where Hindu visitors can be met. Christopher McDowell was one of the first to describe the attraction of the Black Madonna at Einsiedeln in Switzerland for Tamil asylum seekers.<sup>29</sup> He pointed out that especially single male Hindus of lower castes used to come and to leave wishes and/or promises on pieces of paper near the statue of the Madonna. Damaris Lüthi contested McDowell’s view and stressed that Hindus of all castes and classes visit Einsiedeln and the Madonna in Mariastein near Basle.<sup>30</sup> “Both have been popular pilgrimage sites among Tamils since the 1980s.”<sup>31</sup> Tamils of all creeds and from different places in Switzerland have been reported to be going on a pilgrimage to Mariastein on 15th of August for a number of years, carrying along their own Madonna statue. Annette Wilke has studied intercession books of the Catholic St Joseph’s Church in Könitz near Basle which

27 Cf. Wilke 1996, 280.

28 Information and quotations from Sandhya Marla-Küsters, see note 19. She interviewed Father Bennet on October 10th, 2012, and Mr Camillus a month later on November 27th.

29 McDowell 1996.

30 Lüthi 2003, 302.

31 Lüthi 2008, 105.

include many requests by Christian and Hindu Tamils.<sup>32</sup> According to her there is only one difference discernible between them – the form of address. Christians use *mata* (Mother), whereas Hindus prefer *taye*, a Tamil word meaning ‘divine mother’ which is reserved for goddesses. But not only Marian pilgrimage shrines were visited by Hindu Tamils, churches with a statue of Mary were equally in demand. Lüthi observed that “the worship of Mata in the churches in the 1980s to a certain extent even served as a substitute before there were Hindu temples”<sup>33</sup> She also stresses in this context that the worship of Mary by Hindus has a long tradition in Sri Lanka and is not a phenomenon brought about by the exile situation.

Another Madonna deeply respected by many Hindu Tamils is the Madonna of Lourdes. Lourdes in France has become quite a popular destination for individual Hindus as well as whole groups. I first learned about Hindus visiting Lourdes in 1998 at the Hindu temple festival in Hamm-Uentrop from a woman who was performing ascetic practices to achieve the recovery of her sick husband. She planned to travel to Lourdes, too, to ask the additional help of the Madonna there. Group journeys have been organized by Hindu temple communities of certain cities – by the one in Bremen for instance in 2003 – or by special travel agents. They are comparatively inexpensive; a flyer distributed in Kevelaer in 2006 offered a five-day trip from and to Stuttgart for 100 Euros per person. Popular souvenirs from Lourdes are plastic bottles filled with water from the pilgrimage place, which is believed to be miraculous. Some Hindus place these bottles, sometimes along with printed pictures of the Lourdes Madonna, in their house shrines.<sup>34</sup> Sandhya Marla-Küsters reports the incident of a Hindu father performing the traditional Hindu ritual of the first haircut in Lourdes.<sup>35</sup> The interest in ‘The Lourdes,’ as the Madonna is called, is likewise not a recent diasporic phenomenon. Hindus already know Marian shrines consecrated to the Lourdes Madonna from their homelands. Tiwattee in Sri Lanka for instance is such a place, being “deliberately modelled after Lourdes”;<sup>36</sup> Kudagama with its shrine to Our Lady of Lourdes is another case in point. Most Catholic churches in South India are reported to have a grotto or even a chapel consecrated to the Lourdes Madonna.<sup>37</sup>

Hindus in South India and Sri Lanka not only know about Marian shrines, in many cases they set out to visit them, too, and venerate the Madonna. An outstanding example from Tamil Nadu in South India is the pilgrimage site of Velankanni, a fishing village on the East coast, about which Matthias Frenz has published a detailed study. On the basis of old reports he was able to prove that this pilgrimage place had since long attracted people from all classes and creeds. And like their predecessors, Catholic observers in

32 Wilke 1996.

33 Lüthi 2008, 105.

34 Personal communication S. Marla-Küsters.

35 Personal communication S. Marla-Küsters.

36 Stirrat 1982, 400.

37 Frenz 2004, 55.

modern times proudly point to the great attraction the Velankanni Madonna exerts on Protestants, Hindus, Muslims and followers of other creeds, which according to them proves the superiority of the Catholic creed.<sup>38</sup> Concerning Sri Lanka especially R.L. Stirrat has mentioned Hindus he met at the Marian pilgrimage sites of Talawila, Kudagama and Madhu in Sri Lanka.<sup>39</sup> I have already dealt with the importance of the shrine in Madhu above. All observers acquainted with the shrine emphasized the religious and ethnic diversity of the pilgrims who set out to reach this place and ask favours from the Madhu Madonna.<sup>40</sup> Catholics I met in Kevelaer reported the same. None of them had any reservation about the participation of Hindus in the activities of the different shrines.

### 2.3 Convergences between Catholics and Hindus – old and new

As already pointed out in the previous sections the veneration of Mary by Hindu Tamils has a long tradition in the South Asian culture. Catholic Christianity has deep roots in South India and Sri Lanka. At the same time certain Christian elements found their way into Hindu beliefs and practices; most notable seems to be the inclusion of Mary and several Christian Saints – like St. Anthony, St. George and St. Anna – into the Hindu pantheon. In the course of this development forms of worship have developed which apparently not only suited Hindus but could be used by followers of both creeds. Catholics often revered and still revere the Madonna in the same way Hindus venerate Mary and their other gods. Paul Younger has given a vivid description of the main festival of the South Indian Velankanni Madonna, calling attention to practices usually not connected with the Christian code of conduct, like the offering of hair at the shrine, the taking of a cleansing bath in the sea, the giving of food and animal offerings, the presentation of flower garlands which are touched to the feet of the image before being returned, falling into trances, and buying ‘holy oil’.<sup>41</sup> According to Frenz most of these practices are developed by the devotees of their own accord; they are more or less adapted by the clergy.<sup>42</sup> Others like rolling around the church or tying pieces of cloth around tree branches or the flagpole as tokens of individual wishes are silently tolerated. Also tolerated is the sale of baskets with offerings comprising candles – a characteristic element of the Christian veneration of Mary and saints – and a coconut which plays a central role in South Asian Hindu worship. Hindus use oil and camphor light offerings in their own institutions, so switching to candles in the Christian context does not seem

38 Frenz 2004, 126–127.

39 Stirrat 1978.

40 We should not forget that Tamil-speaking Catholics from the Northern parts are not the only people

adhering to the Catholic faith, there are Sinhalese-speaking people from all over the country as well.

41 Younger 2002.

42 Frenz 2004, 157–158.

problematic at all. The travelogue writer William Dalrymple has visited places in Kerala where the Hindu Goddess Bhagavati and Mary are considered to be sisters with equal power. He talked to people of both creeds who reported that they customarily visit both sisters; Christian devotees told him

that during the annual festival of Our Lady, the pilgrims would all take a ritual bath, shave their heads and eat only vegetarian food to purify themselves. They would join processions under torches, banners and coloured silk umbrellas of exactly the sort used by Hindus in their temple processions.<sup>43</sup>

Here, too, the powers of exorcism have been attributed to Christian churches.

It seems that the same “porousness of religious practice”<sup>44</sup> characterizes the Sri Lankan situation. It evolved in a long process that in the Sri Lankan case must be traced back to the sixteenth century, the period of the Portuguese colonization of part of the island. The first Christian missionary endeavours in the Kingdom of Jaffna in Northern Sri Lanka began in the 1540s, i.e. more than 450 years ago. The Catholic Christians were persecuted by both the Kings of Jaffna and later by the – Protestant – Dutch who defeated the Portuguese in 1658 and became the next colonial power.<sup>45</sup> It was during the time of the Dutch persecution that the Madhu Madonna was brought to the secret place in the wilderness. When the British took over in 1796 the persecution ceased, Catholic missionaries were allowed to enter the island again, but the number of Catholics remained comparatively small. Although a religious minority their standing in the post-colonial religious setting was quite high. Having been persecuted by one colonial government and only tolerated by the next they were not normally regarded as adhering to a religion backed by a colonial power. On the contrary, there are widespread narratives which firmly connect Catholic saints with Sri Lankan places.<sup>46</sup>

One of these places is, as mentioned before, the shrine in Madhu which according to all records has always attracted devotees of different creeds. It is undoubtedly the most popular. Stirrat wrote that Madhu and St. Anne at Talawila “are considered to be particularly powerful, the scenes of many miracles (*baskama*) and wonders (*pudumaya*)”<sup>47</sup> They are thought to be “particularly efficacious channels of grace (*devaraprasadaya*) and sources of blessing (*asirvada*).” Besides these two there are a number of churches dedicated to saints; some of them house “miraculous statues” which are thought to have special power. Among them are the St. Anthony churches at Kochchikade, Dalupotha and Kottapitiya, the St. Anne churches at Wattala, Weligampitiya and Palagature, and the St. Sebastian churches at Katuwapitiya and Velle Vidiya. According to Stirrat they

43 Dalrymple 2008.

44 Dalrymple 2008.

45 Cf. Jacobsen 2008, 118–119; Stirrat 1982, 387–388.

46 Cf. Jacobsen 2008, 119–120.

47 Stirrat 1982, 390.

attract many visitors, especially during the annual feasts. They come to these shrines to gain help in matters like “health, jobs, economic problems and family troubles.”<sup>48</sup>

Stirrat points to the festival days as the events which attract most visitors, among them Non-Catholics. It should be noted that Hindus do visit Catholic churches on other days, too. Lüthi reports that some of her Hindu informants in Switzerland told her that church visits were not something they started to do in Europe; they had already done so in Sri Lanka.<sup>49</sup> They may have gone to ask Mary or a saint for help or to seek their blessing. Apart from these motives there is another important reason for church visits: the joint celebration of life cycle rituals of Christian family members. It is a common experience of many people that family and kinship members may adhere to different creeds and celebrate these rituals according to their religious tradition. Mr Uthavan, a Hindu acquaintance, once explained to me: “Back home we always celebrated our festivals together. Some of our relatives are Christians. We take part in their festivals, and they come to take part in ours. Here in Germany we do the same.”

The above described circumstances in South Asia will have thrown light on a number of features and practices which at first sight seemed to have originated in the diaspora. Most importantly, Catholics and Hindus do have a common history of Marian worship. This explains why the participation of Hindus in the Tamil Pilgrimage at Kevelaer was expected and welcomed by their Catholic brethren right from the beginning. The way Hindus venerate the Madonna is much in tune with the practices both groups followed in their homeland: going to have a glimpse of the miraculous picture, touching it, lighting candles inside and outside the churches, and taking part in the Christian service. The last point does not apply to all Hindus; not all of them are present in the Forum Pax Christi. This is not due to any form of exclusion on the part of the Catholic side. The Forum is open for everybody, and for years clerical reports, too, speak of the Hindu participants at the Tamil Pilgrimage as something natural. As far as I know the only boundary drawn by the Catholic officials is that Hindus are not expected to attend Holy Communion. And normally Hindus do not request this.<sup>50</sup>

It is of interest in this context that not all Tamil persons of Sri Lankan origin may draw a hard and fast line between creeds or profess adherence to one religion only. In 2006 Martin Baumann and Kurt Salentin published the results of a quantitative statistical study undertaken among Sri Lankan Tamil Hindus in Germany to explore their religiousness and social incorporation into the host society.<sup>51</sup> One of the findings was that 8.1 % of the 874 persons they questioned consider themselves to be both Hindu and Roman Catholic. “The findings of our research underline the existence of double or even triple ‘membership’ and this needs to be taken into account.”<sup>52</sup> These “religious over-

48 Stirrat 1982, 390.

49 Lüthi 2008, 105.

50 Information acquired in several conversations.

51 Baumann and Salentin 2006.

52 Baumann and Salentin 2006, 307.



laps”, as the authors call this phenomenon, challenge assumptions of one-dimensional religious adherence. It remains to be seen what present and future research on this topic will bring to the fore.<sup>53</sup>

Having concentrated so far on the traditional convergences between Catholic and Hindu beliefs and practices it remains to attempt an evaluation of the present situation in Kevelaer. As referred to repeatedly, ‘overlaps’ in the forms of worship of the Madonna are clearly visible. I do not understand them as new phenomena brought about by the living conditions in the diaspora. They are phenomena developed in Sri Lanka and continued as known and accepted practices in the new surroundings. Tamils of both creeds use the annual opportunity to pray and to worship Mary and the saints in the style they are used to – a markedly Tamil style.

A new quality characterizing the pilgrimage event in Kevelaer seems to be the very high percentage of Non-Catholics attending the event. So far I have mainly emphasized the religious interest of Tamils visiting Kevelaer and taken notice of the social factors only in passing. The acquaintance cited above spoke of the mutual attendance of festivals among Catholics and Hindus, referring not only to religious festivals but also to ones within the family and the circle of relatives. Looking at the Tamil Pilgrimage from this perspective it can be said that it has developed into a large Tamil ‘family meeting’ or get-together of relatives, former neighbours and friends who are now dispersed over the whole of Germany and other parts of Europe. A participant was cited in WZ-Online calling the pilgrimage “a great reunion. One meets acquaintances and relatives from all over Europe.”<sup>54</sup> People look forward to getting in touch for a few hours and to seeing the growing children, they are eager to exchange news and to speak their own language or even local dialect. And naturally for young people it is an opportunity to see and to be seen, a convenient occasion to spot or find a Tamil partner. And there is the prospect that a Middle European city’s central area will be completely filled with one’s own people. For once other pilgrims and Western visitors are in the minority. The event takes on the characteristics of what is called a *Heimattreffen* in German – a meeting of persons with a shared ethnic and cultural background. In this connection the special market put up on the occasion of the Tamil Pilgrimage is of more than only secondary importance. The food is South Asian food, and most of the vendors offer goods which Tamil customers are fond of and which are not – or only with difficulty – available in other places. People visibly enjoy looking for things and exploring the goods on offer, pushing through the narrow passages between the stalls. As I learned in 2011 from two young

53 Important work was done by Sandhya Marla-Küsters who interviewed young Tamils thus being able to present interesting information on the religious orientation of the second generation (Marla-Küsters 2015).

54 The pilgrimage is “ein großes Wiedersehen. Man trifft Bekannte und Verwandte aus ganz Europa.” <http://www.wz-newsline.de/lokales/kreisviertelniederrhein/tamilen-pilgern-nach-kevelaer-1.736444>, (visited on 31/07/2017).

women packed with large shopping bags, some people come primarily for the fun of inexpensive shopping. No interest in the religious event, they said, an attitude that is also reported by Sandhya Marla-Küstters who has talked to a large number of young people.<sup>55</sup> But enjoying the market does not necessarily mean disinterest in the religious part of the day. The relaxed and boisterous atmosphere of the market place behind the cathedral complements the solemn mood in the various holy places. Victor and Edith Turner have described this “ludic component” as a well-known element present in nearly all pilgrimage contexts.<sup>56</sup>

I would finally like to return to the role of the Madhu Madonna in the context of the Kevelaer Pilgrimage. Right from the beginning the services in Kevelaer included prayers for peace in Sri Lanka; they are continued although the civil war is officially declared to have ended. The same activities are reported from Madhu in Sri Lanka. On August 15th, 2010 450 000 pilgrims took part in a High Mass celebrated in three languages: Sinhala, Tamil, and Latin.<sup>57</sup> At this and all following important occasions Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, the head of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka, called for reconciliation between the different ethnic and political groups and for the recognition of the rights of Tamils and Muslims, especially in North and East Sri Lanka. These appeals are in line with the efforts undertaken by the shrine officials for years – to work towards the peace and unity of Sri Lankan citizens.<sup>58</sup> These reports underline the impression that Our Lady of Madhu has acquired an importance that goes beyond the purely religious realm. She seems to have become an agent for unity and equality in a country torn apart by ethnic and religious diversity. In this capacity she may be understood as a national symbol or political icon meaningful for *all* Tamils and ideally for all Sri Lankans. The Madhu figure which can be seen during the service in the Forum Pax Christi may likewise be understood as a symbol reminding those present to strive for unity.

55 This attitude, too, is not new. Stirrat 1982, 408–409, writes that: “a sizeable proportion of those who arrive at Madhu and Talawila during the feast are not at all that interested in religion [...] of their own admission they are there for pleasure (*vinode*) rather than because of any great devotion”. Most of the “pleasure seekers” were young men who tried to entice their girlfriends, smoked and drank alcohol and even visited prostitutes.

56 V. Turner and E. Turner 1978, 37.

57 <http://www.katholisches.info/2010/08/17/450-000-pilger-feierten-maria-himmelfahrt-in-madhu-auf-sri-lanka> (visited on 31/07/2017).

58 It is worth noting that already back in 2001 the statue of Our Lady of Madhu had been taken to a tour through Sri Lanka to encourage the devotees to pray for peace and the end of the war.

### 3 Conclusion: Kevelaer – a new place of pilgrimage for Tamils in Europe

In the course of a quarter of a century the so-called Tamil Pilgrimage has turned into a well-established institution. For many years the number of participants has exceeded the number of all other ‘large’ pilgrimages, thus making it the largest pilgrimage by one single group (*Einzelwallfahrt*) to Kevelaer in the annual pilgrimage programme. It remains to be seen whether the number of visitors will continue to be so high in the coming years. In 2012 the estimations were already lower than in former years.<sup>59</sup> Young people belonging to the second generation of immigrants may have other needs and may choose other orientations. The opening of more and more Hindu temples and the grand annual festival at the Hindu temple in Hamm-Uentrop, with a huge South Asian market attached to it, may have an effect on the size of the Tamil pilgrimage.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless it is to be expected that Catholics and a considerable number of Hindus will still go on celebrating the special event which carries their name.

Kevelaer is famous for its Marian shrine housing the miraculous picture of the Madonna, known as the Comforter of the Afflicted. As all asylum seekers have to face the same political, social, economic and emotional problems, it is not surprising that she attracts not only Catholic pilgrims but also Hindus, who usually consider Mary to be a Mother Goddess. Both groups may ask for help and protection, or wish to thank her. Those attending the service in the Forum Pax Christi make use of the rare opportunity of a mass specifically organized for Tamils and celebrated in the Tamil language. Together with thousands of compatriots they are made aware that they are taking part in “the largest Marian pilgrimage outside their native country”.<sup>61</sup> Being so many and taking part in a service held in their own language clearly help to affirm their Tamil identity.

The ways Hindu Tamils venerate Mary in Kevelaer barely differ from those of the Catholics. What at the first glance may seem to be an adoption of Catholic religious practices brought about by the diaspora conditions is in fact the outcome of a long process of mutual influence back in Sri Lanka. Convergences have taken place on both sides: certain elements from Hinduism have entered Catholic practices and certain Catholic elements – although in smaller numbers – have found their way into Hindu worship. This resulted in forms of devotion typical for a great part of Tamil religiosity. Older Tamil pilgrims remember them from their earlier life, and the Pilgrimage to Kevelaer seems to be the apt occasion to apply them again, thus passing them on to the younger ones.

59 See estimation for 2012 in n. 9.

60 Catholics do visit the temple festival in Hamm-Uentrop, too, but in much smaller numbers than the Hindus who used to come to Kevelaer.

61 Statement by S.J. Emmanuel (“größte Marienwallfahrt außerhalb der Heimat”), see n. 24.

The veneration of Mary by Hindus, too, reaches back to the time before they sought asylum in Europe or elsewhere. A dominant focus of pilgrimage activities in Sri Lanka in which Hindus have taken part for a long time was and is Mother Madhu in her jungle shrine Madhu. Emphasizing her likeness to the Kevelaer Madonna, as Mr Camillus has done, has created a connection between the two pilgrimage places right from the beginning. The perceived resemblance evoked a feeling that the German place carried a special meaning for Tamils: it already seems more familiar than other places in the diaspora. The introduction of a separate Madhu statue about fifteen years ago must have intensified this feeling. Kevelaer became another “own place”.<sup>62</sup> It may well be that the inclusion of the Madhu Madonna into the religious programme of the Tamil Pilgrimage provided an additional incentive for Tamils formerly less motivated to join the event. By being able to introduce Madhu as another Marian form, Tamil Catholic space has been successfully claimed in Kevelaer.

The side effects of this annual event are not to be underestimated: it offers the opportunity to meet family members, former neighbours and friends who are now living dispersed all over Germany and Europe. Being able to encounter so many of one’s own people in one place at the same time raises no doubt the self-esteem of the participants and make them forget for a while the feeling of not belonging. The Asian market, too, fulfils an important function: with its familiar smells, colours and gustatory offers it is a most helpful means of keeping alive and confirming the cultural identity of all Tamils present.

62 Cf. n. 19. The same holds true for Mariastein in Switzerland when Tamils bring a Madhu Madonna along, and for Bergen and Mariaholm in Norway where Tamil Catholics celebrate the festival of the

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin with a procession including a statue of Our Lady of Madhu (Jacobsen 2008, 127–129).

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