

## **Testing the Costly Signaling Theory of Pilgrimage**

All over the world, people travel to places that are considered religiously or culturally significant. However, such pilgrimage behavior appears to be costly in terms of energy, resources and potential health risks. Considering the universality of pilgrimage behavior on the one hand and its costliness on the other hand, the project aims to understand the ultimate causes that underlie pilgrimage behavior. To this end, the project draws from the Costly Signaling Theory of Religion, which suggests that only the cooperative individuals should be willing to undertake costly activities in order to signal their commitment to the group, effectively addressing the free-rider problem. Arguably, pilgrimage behavior may be such a costly signal.

The EHBEA funds will allow me to test one of the conjunctions of the proposed hypotheses, which states that for the signals to work, signal receivers must interpret the signal properly. If pilgrimage is a signal of group commitment, pilgrims should be perceived as more trustworthy by their group members compared to non-pilgrims; and, moreover, pilgrims who use costlier way of traveling (walking) should be perceived as more trustworthy than those who travel by less costly means (bus). These predictions will be tested experimentally among population of Mauritian Hindus in the context of the Maha Shivaratri pilgrimage, utilizing an economic trust game and cost manipulation. The results of this project will shed light on pilgrimage behavior and contribute to the elaboration of the Costly Signaling Theory of Religion.