Nidān

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International Journal for the Study of Hinduism

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- **Nidān is an international Journal which publishes contributions in the field of studies in Hinduism**
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Criteria for Submission of Articles

Articles should relate to the study of any aspect of Hinduism. As such, the study of Hinduism is broadly conceived to include, not merely the traditionally recognized areas within the discipline, but includes contributions from scholars in other fields who seek to bring their particular worldviews and theories into dialogue with Hindu studies. Articles that explore issues of history, ecology, economics, politics, sociology, culture, education and psychology are welcomed.

Papers will be subject to evaluation by referees drawn from a pool of local and international scholars. Papers should be prefaced by an abstract of approximately 100 words, setting out the gist of the paper. The article itself should not exceed 6000 words.

Gender discrimination should be avoided, unless it is necessary for the sense intended. Notes should be rendered at the end of the paper and not as footnotes.

The author's full name, address, qualifications and present position must be supplied on a separate page. Each paper must be accompanied by a signed declaration to the effect that the article is the original work of the author.

Articles must be submitted on a computer diskette/computer CD using an IBM or Macintosh compatible word processing programme. Articles should be saved as a Word Document. In addition three printed double spaced copies of the paper must be supplied.

Note that the publication of articles cannot be guaranteed. Further, an article, which is accepted for publication, maybe held over for a publication in a subsequent issue of the journal.

South African Authors of the articles should arrange, through their institutions, to have page costs paid for.

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Editorial

Hindu Studies: Study of the "Past-present"

Nidan aspires to critically engage with, and celebrate contemporary Hindu Studies as a scholarly discipline in which broad questions are addressed across the Humanities and Social Sciences in rigorous scholarly exercise. By inviting scholars in the field to offer studies of diverse instances of textual as well as ethnographic work, by looking back historically and textually, as well as keeping an eye on the archive of lived actualities as they unfold for Hindu adherents in home as well as host countries and diasporic spaces, Nidan focuses the gaze on a wide range of current themes in Hinduism.

Nidan invites scholarship of the "past-present", a term coined by the famed post-colonial writer Homi Bhaba (1994) in his work *Location of Culture*, where he shows how histories and cultures constantly intrude on the present. Bhaba points out the need to recognise that, what tradition bequeaths is only a partial form of identification with cultural and religious, et.al. forms of heritage. He claims that restaging the past introduces other, cultural temporalities into the 'invention' of tradition (Bhaba 1990: 2). These 'other cultural temporalities' are often from within the repertoire of ones own historical and cultural trajectories, and sculpt out new expressions and enactments for the participants in the religion.

With the rise of Anthropology and other Social Sciences in the early to middle 20th century, the textual focus of the field is seen as being also broadened with the emergence of new and vital directions of scholarship. Hinduism is not just about static structures- there is a practiced lexicon that lends itself to ethnographic studies and empirical analyses of Hindu religious phenomena, and the actors within the religion. By inviting work that captures the multi-faceted phenomena of 'Hinduism' and the multiple subjectivities of the actors themselves, the Journal intends to create new communities of readership and stimulate new directions and dialogue among scholars across the spectrum of disciplinary approaches who are working in areas in Hinduism. Thus what is aimed at, is greater intellectual exchange and interdisciplinary scholarly studies about Hinduism through diverse perspectives of the Humanities and Social Sciences.

To this end the contributors in this issue are drawn across the fields of Sanskrit and Hindi Studies, Anthropology and Gender Studies. There are six female and one male scholar represented among the contributors, with several of the female scholars writing from articulated feminist stances. The articles themselves are nuanced works that work with hermeneutics of textual materials, as well as articles offering rich ethnographic data.

While there is no master narrative for the rich tapestry of beliefs, rituals and philosophies that go by the rubric of Hinduism as a religion, the 'notion', or as adherents would understand it, the ideal of moksha is integral to many of the philosophical systems as well as the theistic systems in Indian philosophies and the diverse strains of Hinduism. **Laxmi Samineni and Chenchulakshmi Kolla** in their paper entititled, *Mokṣa: The Goal Of Life according To The Teachings Of Satya Sai Baba* offer a discussion of the hermeneutical analysis of the notion of 'Moksha' as explained by Sri Satya Sai Baba and attempt to relate this to the wider hermeneutic within monotheistic Advaita Vedanta and Hinduism. One may well maintain that the scholar's hermeneutic task is to *complicate* existing conceptions of a tradition, by creating the awareness that what appears commonsensical from the insider perspective, is actually an artifact of time (Hawley 2004). Problematising the conceptual fluidity that exists in many contemporary Hindu movements in their promotion of the Gita's interpretation of 'freedom', **Pratap Kumar** offers a fine grained discussion of 'Freedom' as contained in the Bhagavad Gita, vis à vis the concepts of Buddhi and Sattva.

In the recent decades there has been an increasingly 'loud' beckoning for the gendering (both theoretically and methodologically) of religious scholarship. **Usha Shukla** in her work *Empowerment of Women in the Ramayana,* examines how Sita negotiates the questions of freedom, dignity and what would be contextualized in the contemporary context, as human and women's rights, and beckons our attention to what might be the lessons to be sketched for a new, gendered social contract between men and women. Studies such as these bring into our gaze that one of the main goals of hermeneutics is to recognise the variety of means by which a text is able to communicate. Another work that works with textual materials is that of **Elizabeth Pulane Motswapong** who draws a contemporary gaze to the discussions on woman and dowry. In her paper *A Super Gift or a Conduit,* she uses the heuristic mechanism of 'conduit' in explaining how the bride or kanya is positioned in the traditional Hindu marriage. She claims that the 'shift' in status of the daughter as a 'super gift' to a conduit facilitates the dowry custom and that this has significantly affected the status of women in contemporary Indian society, but reminds us, most importantly, that there are multiple (male and female) participants in the act of 'giving' and 'receiving' the dowry.

Maheshvari Naidu & Vivian Besem Ojong in their comparative study entitled *The 'Re-Production' Of 'Woman' and Mothering* bring an ethnographic eye to competing and conflicting constructions of motherhood and mothering mandates as they capture the layered experiences of women in an extensive archive of interviews. By listening to the ethno-narratives of the women, they bring to the surface examples of the material contexts of discursive power which operate on women. Continuing the ethnographic approach and work with women, **Vivian Besem Ojong & Janet Muthoni Muthuki** in their paper *Religious Conversion*

and the Renegotiation of Gender Identity, explore the ways in which aspects of Hindu identity and culture have developed in today's multi cultural world of competing cultural and religious ideologies.

The contributions in this issue can thus be seen as attempting to 'collaborate' to achieve an analytical, historical, and topical perspective upon Hindu studies, and so bring Hindu traditions into dialogue with contemporary trends in scholarship and contemporary society. In this manner, the Journal of Hindu Studies aims to contribute to advancing an understanding of a range of themes within the expansive width and ever widening interrogative threads of enquiry within the study of Hinduism.

Maheshvari Naidu & Usha Shukla
Editors 2010

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RELIGIOUS CONVERSION AND THE RENEGOTIATION OF GENDER IDENTITY AMONGST INDIAN WOMEN IN CHATSWORTH IN DURBAN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

This paper is an ethnographic account of how context specific operations of power manifest in the inter-related sites of gender, caste, ethnicity and religion to affect the ideals of Indian women after undergoing religious conversion from Hinduism to Christianity. The effects of conversion are not just confined to the religious sphere but also impact on the cultural and socio-economic aspects of life. Through the use of the grounded theory methods and life histories and in-depth interviews, we illuminate ways in which these women's experiences of religious conversion impact on their gender roles and relations at the household level and their participation in the public sphere and how these in turn affect the renegotiation of their gender identities. The interviews reveal how these converts in grappling with their new faith; untangle the intricate and intertwining web of culture and religion, which they explained was not previously required of them under Hindu religion

Key words: Religious conversion, gender identity, Indian women converts, empowerment

Introduction/background of paper

Religious conversions[1] have held a sustained interest amongst social sciences researchers. Some theoretical approaches to conversion attribute change to modernisation or state incorporation while other approaches draw on Weber's (1956) notions of an estrangement with an old way of life and the incorporation into a new social order. Critics of these approaches however note that they fail to take into account politics, economics and hierarchies of power (Van der Veer, 1996). Anthropologist and Historians have consequently responded by focusing on the political economy of conversion and the power relationships involved arguing that by converting to one of the world religions people are in effect converting to modernity. This approaches view modernity as a force within which communities are victimised and compelled to convert without exercising agency

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[1] Religious conversion refers to the adoption of new religious beliefs that are different from the convert's previous beliefs and involves a change from one's religious identity to another. Conversion therefore entails not only faith but may also present itself in ways such as the adoption into an identity groups. In this sense, conversion also touches on social, economic and hence political aspects of established society.

in their decision to convert. Comaroff and Comaroff (1997) advance that conversion is not a choice between domination and appropriation but is rather dialectic between the two.

Of the religions of the world, Christianity and Islam are major religions which emphasise the desirability of conversion. Hinduism which is the third largest religion in the world does not advocate conversion but holds that there is one universal truth (Brahman) and there are multiple paths including those followed by other religions to reach the truth. While Hinduism may appear to be a world religion the geographical spread of Hindus shows that more than 95% of all Hindu reside in India and approximately 98% reside in South Asia (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2010). Hindus in most countries outside South Asia are emigrants from India and other countries in the region. Next to the United States of America, South Africa has the largest immigrant Indian community in the world forming about three percent of South Africa's population.

In the last few centuries, Hinduism has suffered reverses as a result of conversions to other proselytising religions. The conversion of South African Indian Christians is rooted in the Indian history of conversion which is in turn rooted in the caste (jati) system. The caste system comprises of four class groupings placed in the social hierarchy as the mouth which is the priestly order (Brahmins), the arms who are the rulers(Rajanya, later known as Kshatriya), the thighs who are the land owners, merchants and bakers (Vaishya) and the feet who are the workers, artisans ad serfs (shudra)(Handbook, 1991). There also exists a fifth group known as the pariahs or untouchables. This group has no caste. These castes divide families according to the work done in the community and hence differences in the distribution of wealth amongst the caste communities.

The caste system is deeply rooted in Hindu religious system and is seen as divine order. In North India people are divided into the four castes whereas in South India there is a large group of pariahs or untouchables. Mass converts to Christianity from South India are mainly from the untouchable background. [The majority of Christian converts in India and South Africa come from the so called lower caste, outcaste and the untouchable in the Indian society. The Tamil and the Telugu from Southern India who came to South Africa as indentured labourers to provide labour in the farms were more susceptible to conversion (see Arun, 2007). While the caste system in India was in part based on occupation, in South Africa it was further compounded by racial classifications and the belief that white South Africans (Afrikaners) were the superior race during the apartheid era (Kendall, 2010)]

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the British rule in India brought about great social transformation. The depressed communities were longing for

emancipation and when the opportunity for religious conversion was offered, people from lower caste and untouchable backgrounds were quick to respond. Arun (2007) in his examination of religious conversion on cultural identity amongst South African Anglican Indian Christians advances that conversion to Christianity enabled depressed communities in India as a result of an oppressive caste system to construct renegotiate and redefine their identity. Conversion to Christianity provided them with an ideology, purpose and a new socio spiritual world view as it impacted on the converts socially and economically in terms of access to higher education and better work opportunities.

The converts then acquired a new religio- cultural language and a new religio cultural identity as evidenced in ecclesiology, music and dress among others. This is in concurrence with Wingate (1999:236) who advances that religious conversion is the formal act of identifying oneself with a religious faith which has set values, attitudes, beliefs and practices other than those previously adhered to. It is a conscious moving from one organised religion to another which involves a complete shift in allegiance to another and different faith. It may involve a new set of values and a completely new way of life.

The conversion to Christianity during the colonial era in India was however viewed by both the missionaries and the Indian nationalists as strengthening British hegemonic power. This view placed the western missionary at the centre of the conversion process while portraying the convert as acted upon and as passive. The converts were represented as either opportunist or innocent and impressionable. Mukherjee (2004) argues for a shift of focus from the missionary to the convert in order to illuminate many ways in which the converts grappled with their new faith, interpreting it and absorbing it while rejecting parts of it and refashioning it. Religious conversion can therefore not be treated as total acquiescence since there is a blurring between what the converts assimilates and what they challenge.

Parameters other than religion become crucial to understanding conversion because the causes and effects of conversion are not just confined to the religious sphere but they spill over to cultural, social, political and moral aspects of life. The religious duties of a Hindu are interwoven with those duties expected of him or her as a social being. Their religious conversion could therefore be evidenced in the changed culture to which the convert conceded and the refusal to maintain caste boundaries, taking of beef, free mingling of the sexes, cultural modes which were seen both as British and Christian (Mukherjee, 2004).

Further, much of the literature on the history of Christian missions in India produced by the missionaries makes the assumptions that conversion to Christianity achieved the emancipation of Indian Christian women. The desire for social reform and hatred for the caste ridden social system may have made

Christianity with its egalitarianism and liberation of women appear as a more modern religion representing the ideals of western education. Scriptural authority was cited to oppose social issues of caste, seclusion under the system of purdah, pollution theories, the infamous *sati* (burning of the Hindu widow) and widow remarriage, child marriages and temple prostitution. Christian missionaries considered it their obligation to overturn these Hindu gender injustices and improve the treatment of women.

Bauman (2008) in her examination of the Satnami caste of colonial Chhattisgarh (in central India) however advances that these transformations were not unidirectional but resulted in a fluid amalgam of values and practices. The Satnami Christians did not just assimilate the missionaries norms regarding femininity and domesticity but accepted them selectively as informed by upper caste Hindu's notions of "respectable" womanhood. The missionaries' Victorian era's notions of women's treatment and proper behavoiur were similar to those of upper- caste Hindu communities. For example the Victorian ideas of separate spheres which encouraged women's confinement to the domestic sphere corresponded well with the upper caste Hindu practice of confining women to the home.

The women from the Satnami community however worked outside their homes due to the labour intensive rice harvesting enterprise and the large presence of the dalit (lower caste) communities in the region. Though in becoming Christians the mobility and range of activities of the Satnami women were restricted, Christianity offered them a possibility to lay claim to certain customary markers of upper–caste status. The experiences of these women are significant in that they demonstrate that human agents in combating one form of oppression may at the same time be perpetuating another. In this context therefore, gender identity[2] reconstruction needs to be analysed in the context of the complex web of its intersection with other cultural constructs such as class (or caste), religion, ethnicity and race.

This paper aims to examine how context specific operations of power manifest in the inter-related sites of gender, caste and religion to affect the ideals of Indian Christian women at Chatsworth in Durban South Africa. We also examine ways in which Indian Christian women may have become empowered or become

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[2] Gender identity has to do with somebody's sense of being a woman or a man and is socially constructed rather than biologically determined. The key application of the concept of identity to gender was made by Stoller (1968) who advanced that gender identity was only one aspect of the person involving her or his involvement in gender relations. Gender identity touches on various aspects of a person such as their appearance/clothing, modes of speech and behavior, food, music and gender roles. However in order to understand gender identity one must acknowledge the interconnection with other forms of social identity such as nationality, race, social class, ethnicity and community among others.

restricted in their activities as a result of their conversion from Hinduism to Christianity.

Methodology/methods

Our motivation to write this paper is based on our experience as Christian African migrant women in South Africa interacting in close proximity with Indian women who have converted from Hinduism to Christianity. Before our coming to South Africa we had limited encounters with Indians who had converted to Christianity because in most of the other African countries, Hinduism is a minority religion whose adherents are Indians. Our perception of Indians was that Hinduism was both their culture and their religion. As a result of our encounters with these converts our curiosity was aroused as we sought to understand how they navigated and differentiated between Indian culture and Hindu religion. As we interacted with them in different spaces; the workplace and in Christian meetings, we increasingly became aware of the complexities of religious conversion as we observed how these women navigated the intricate and intertwining web of culture and religion.

These encounters drew our awareness to the epistemologically privileged position occupied by these women which we thought was worthy of academic engagement. Feminist standpoint epistemology gave us a platform to highlight and document these converts' experiences. This methodology attempts to give a voice to women and to correct the male-oriented perspective that has predominated in the development of social science (Neuman 1997). This standpoint gave us the flexibility to reflect on the women's experiences on their subjective terms. Highlighting and using these experiences was crucial for engaging religious conversion as a site for the interrogation of power dynamics in the inter-related areas of gender, caste, ethnicity and religion.

This paper therefore is based on an ethnographic study of the effects of religious conversion on the cultural and socio-economic lives of Indian women in Chatsworth. Through the use of the grounded theory methods, life histories[3] and in-depth interviews, we were able to illuminate ways in which these women's experiences of religious conversion impact on their gender roles and relations at the household level and their participation in the public sphere and how these in turn affect the renegotiation of their gender identities. Through the grounded theory method, we were able to collect and confront data from the onset of the research project which enabled us to construct the concepts relevant for the paper. As we interviewed one respondent to another, we learned how they

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[3] Life histories method allows the researcher to see the world from the social actor's point of view and can be used as a sensitising tool. This method helps the researcher develop an understanding of the meaning of concepts used by those she is studying (Haralambos and Holborn, 1997).

explained their experiences and asked ourselves what analytical sense we could make of their experiences. Since we were not familiar with Hinduism, we began by being open to what the converts had to say and how they explained their new found religion.

Through our interactions, we carefully observed their food preferences, dress codes and ways of communicating which led us to potential angles for understanding religious conversion in this context. Because we chose this method of enquiry, we had the added advantage of using explicit guidelines that showed us how we needed to proceed (Charmaz 2002: 3). During the course of the interviews, we realised that there were gaps in the stories narrated by the different converts such as: the relationship between conversion and the women's sense of empowerment and their negotiation of gender roles within the households. Through theoretical sampling (a key component of grounded theory methods), we were able to seek additional pertinent data to fill in these gaps and eventually developed our analytic and theoretical understanding of the complex nature of women's experiences as a result of religious conversion. We also utilised life histories method which enabled us to capture a way of life of families and communities. Listening to an individual tell their life story which brings into focus their family, their interaction with their community is a strategic tool for capturing continuity and change as well as the intricate web of relationships.

By the use of snowball[4] method of sampling, we were able to access informants who we may have otherwise been unable to access without personal recommendation from one of our key informants. Given our identity as Christian migrant women it may have proven difficult to have access to interview Indian women at Chatsworth as we most likely would have been viewed as outsiders. This sampling procedure then enabled us to   assemble a sample based on the strong recommendation of a mutual contact (See Seale, 1998)

Religion and culture as determinants of behaviour
Religion is a major determinant of personal choices and attitudes of people and influences believers to choose certain forms of behaviour and conduct other than others (Ojong, 2008). Hamilton (1995:97) asserts that for the most part, religion is not a matter of individual choice. He believes people practice a particular religion because all members of their society have been programmed to believe in that religion. Hofstede (1994) maintains that beliefs and practices are broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others. To have a value is to maintain an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct, or end- state of existence, is preferable to other alternatives (Ojong, 2007). Interconnected to a

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[4] In snowball sampling, the researcher identifies one or more key individuals and then asks them to provide her with names of people she knows who might be potential candidates for the research sample (Bernard, 1994).

people's beliefs is culture which consists of abstract values, beliefs and perceptions of the world that lie behind people's behaviour and that are reflected by their behaviour. Hofstede (1994) attributes culture to the environment in which a child grows up and states that this reinforces the dominant patterns of thinking, feeling and acting in other spheres. He also sees culture as a collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group of people from another. Culture can therefore be seen as a collective phenomenon which shapes people's social environment. Hall (1996) provides a simple explanation of culture as the pattern of taking- for-granted assumptions about the way a given set of people should think, act and feel as they go about their daily affairs.

This collective programming encompasses both the social and the cultural thereby influencing members of a family, a lineage, a village or a community. Religious conversion and belonging are therefore part of a process of socialisation through the pursuit of a collective identity (Doja, 2008). Belonging to a religion means belonging to a social group. Religious conversion exposes one to discontinuity as they move from one religious space to another. As in the case of the women in our study, conversion from Hinduism into Christianity led to alienation not only from family members but from their immediate communities. For example Sheila a forty six year old nurse told us that upon conversion her immediate family that is the father and the siblings were prepared to accommodate her as long as she did not talk about her new religion or try to convert them. Sheila got converted a result of her own mother's conversion.

The reason for my conversion was that my mother was very very sick and she was bedridden we thought she was going to die. I found out that at the eleventh hour my mother had a vision of Jesus. She had no knowledge of the bible because it was a Christian book. All she saw was a bright light and the statement "Come unto me all you who labour and are heavily laden and I will give you rest". My mother lived alone with the tenants since all of us were living on our own. The tenants took care of her and they are the ones who called me to tell me what had happened. They had gone to give her milk which is what Hindus do when someone is about to die. For some reason they believe that it is healthy and suitable especially when someone is about to die. Under such circumstances the Hindus call up the temple priest to perform some rituals such as lighting the candles and praying but we did not believe in that. When they came to perform these rituals for my mother, she would chase them away. We did not practice these rituals but we also did not want to look at the bible
When I received the call, I thought that they were telling me that my mother had passed away but when I spoke to my mother, she was telling me the good news that she had accepted Jesus and from that day she was no longer a Hindu. Since I was a practicing Hindu, I said to her, Are you sure, are you in your right

senses? She said, I was almost dead but since I saw Jesus I can see my life coming back. When I heard of my mothers' experience I decided that that was it I decided that this was the way for me and I decided to give my life to Jesus. My mother started going to church and I also started going to church. After six months my father who used to physically abuse my mother also converted to Christianity. After my father's conversion my two sisters and my brother also converted.

Sheila narrated how her immediate family's conversion exposed them to alienation from their extended family especially her father's brother who was like a second father to them. Her mothers' brother who before her conversion was very close to them refused to talk or even visit them for seven years. The neighbours also became unfriendly, hurled insults at them and refused to invite them for their social activities like birthday parties and weddings. This kind of alienation would make some people reconsider their decision to convert and it took great resolve on the part of Sheila and her family to hold onto their new found Christian faith. In the initial stages after conversion however Sheila would find herself reverting to some Hindu religious practices as shown in the following interview excerpt:

Even after conversion I still continued with some Hindu rituals. For example my child had been baptised but I still took my child for katare (evil eye) prayers to prevent evil from befalling him. You light lamps then you put food e.g. chicken and pray over it and then leave it. You do not come back and look because the evil eye might harm the child. When I went home after the katare prayers I realised that the child could not breathe. When my in- laws asked me if I knew what was wrong I told them that I did not. Then my mother in- law asked me," You went for katare prayers?" I said yes. Then they called the pastor to pray for the child and he said you cannot do this, you cannot go back. The prayed for the child and after the prayers he came back to normal. After that I said, "Ooh my God since I have seen what has happened then I will start going to church again.

This reverting to previous religious practices was illuminating in that it showed that conversion sometimes does not mean an immediate change but was a process of negotiation and re-negotiation. Shabnam a thirty five year old policewoman narrated how she continued with the Hindu practice of putting on the bottoo (a symbol on her forehead) and thali (a yellow string) to signify that she was a married woman despite her conversion. This continued until a fellow Christian pointed out to her that she would be better off without the mark. She then started using a wedding ring instead of the mark to show that she was a married woman. Upon further interrogation on what would then distinguish her as an Indian woman she mentioned that her Indian traditional dress (the sari), her preference for Indian Cuisine and of Indian Christian music would serve as markers of her Indian identity. She however made a departure from Hindu

religious rituals as she fore grounded Christianity as her faith. This kind of negotiation is representative of the delicate balancing act these women converts engage as they seek maintain their identity as Indian women while distancing themselves from the Hindu religion.

Contestations around religious conversion and gender identity
The women in our study by narrating their experience have in a way contributed to an understanding on feminist discourse on conversion through a critique of their reliance on male headship and control and by interpreting conversion from a woman's perspective. Through their experiences we were able to interrogate conversion from a feminist stand-point which allowed us to identify the new and unfamiliar religious/ public space these women have entered in their own society as a result of conversion. They do so by straddling and adjusting to life inside this new space without leaving the old physical space (their homes, community and residential area).

These women expressed that their conversion to Christianity offered them a sense of empowerment in that it gave them equal status with men. Longwe (1998) defines women's empowerment as collective action to overcome gender inequality. She believes that women's empowerment is the process by which women collectively come to recognise and address gender inequalities which stand in the way of their advancement in terms of equal access to resources and full participation in power structures and decision-making. Feminists have critiqued religion as a major 'reinforcer' of women's subordination (Brusco1986, Briggs 1987, Burdick 1990, Drogus 1991, Flora, 1975, Van den Eykel 1986). Recent literature is beginning to highlight ways in which religion can be empowering to women.
For example Esther, a thirty three year old convert who is a teacher had this to say:

Christianity empowers you to speak out. I am more motivated, I can speak out more. I think it is because I know God personally, I can speak out more. I used to be very shy, very reserved but as I got to know the God that I serve more intimately I changed. I never used to smile before but people now know me as ever smiling. I also used to stammer, my stammering was very bad but it somehow disappeared.

As we probed, we realised that the empowerment that these women were talking about was contradictory when applied in their real life experiences. This contradiction is exemplified by Sharon, a twenty-eight year old administrative assistant in the interview below:

In terms of self esteem, I now know who I am, I know my rights, I know what I can or cannot do. I know now that the husband is the head of the home. In

Hinduism, the husband is the father of the home and the woman is subjected to that. For me now, I know that the man is the head of the home and I consult him in whatever I do. It does not mean that I do not have my rights but even if my husband is an alcoholic, I should not just call him an alcoholic, he is still the head of the home. If he is an alcoholic, I can assume the position of doing things at home but he is still the head of the home.

Some other contradictions regarding the Christian requirement to submit to their husbands and the empowerment accorded by the same Christianity were obvious to women as they continued to reflect on their conversion:

I did not see a problem with that because if the bible says so that's it. The first man I was married to was a very violent man. He was very brutal both physically and verbally. I stayed with him for ten years. When I got born again, I realised that the closer I got to God, the more violent he became. One night I came home and he broke a vase on my head. I said to myself no no no... I cannot live with this anymore but I said I could not leave him because he had said that he would kill me. I decided to enroll in a certain college and took some modules in public administration. I would go to work, get some money , take a taxi and go to another area and go to campus and go back home in the evening spend time with my children then read till about 1:00 a.m. and then sleep. I would wake up at five the next day and prepare my children to go to school and then leave for work. I would then tell myself that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

The various experiences of the women led us in critiquing the various ways in which they construct their identity and conceptualise their empowerment. Scriptural notion of equality of all believers (both male and female) before Christ implies a public role for women in spreading the faith as well as in engagement in social and community services. Flora (1975: 418) notes that women can potentially utilise the legitimacy and respectability of religion to expand their extra- domestic activities. As a result women such as Sharon end up reconceptualising women's traditional gender roles by participating in the public sphere by pursuing further studies. This did not however mean that she and the other informants reassessed their domestic roles including submission to their husbands as the heads of their families. These findings brought us to awareness that religions are multifaceted and contradictory symbols which can be open to a range of interpretations.

A useful post-modern theory by Foucault became applicable because it enabled us to understand the different dynamics of these converts construction of their identities. Foucault's (1972) theory on power as exercised through discourses was applied to aid our understanding. He sees power as constantly moving systems of unequal force relations. On her part, Moya (1997) uses social

locations to explain why people's experiences are different. The above was crucial in explaining how the women have moved from one system of control to another. Interestingly though, these women are not aware that such oppressive systems are still functional in their lives.

Conclusion

One of the aims of this paper was to show how Indian women in Chatsworth experience and express their sense of belonging as a result of their conversion from Hinduism to Christianity. The findings of the study revealed the centrality of religious faith in these women's lives as opposed to the views of Comaroff and Comaroff (1997) who reduce religious conversion to material interests or imperialist manipulation The effects of religious conversion are far-reaching and challenging. Each of these converts is to some extent engaged in a complex tapestry of maintaining their identity as Indian women and embracing their new-found religious identity as Christians. Within the Christian religion, they are in a constant battle to maintain their empowerment accorded them by Christian religion and the need to remain submitted to their husbands which is not emphasised within the Hindu religion. They are also cautious about transporting aspects of the Hindu religion into their new found religion which is an inevitable consequence of religious conversion. This study revealed that it is an illusion to assume that individuals upon conversion will immediately break away from their religious beliefs and practices and adopt those of the new religion.

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EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN THE RAMAYANA: FOCUS ON SITA

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Abstract

The Ramayana[5] depicts and upholds the rights of men and women, especially of the latter in keeping with Manu's injunction (Manusmriti 3.56 - 3.59). Manu's Dharma Shastra or Smriti was widely diffused throughout the ancient world. However, ancient cultures adopted patriarchal patterns of male control and domination over women, relegating them to the position of chattels. The Ramayana in its various versions accords women the rights and powers enjoined by Manu, within the patriarchal system. But this egalitarian approach does not extend to Sita, wife of the protagonist of the Ramayana and the supreme exemplar of virtues as a woman and wife. She has to exert herself to acquire her rights, from accompanying Rama into exile to fending off Ravana. The greatest tests of her strength of character and self-empowerment come when she questions Rama's harsh words in Lanka (Valmiki, Yuddhakandam cxvi-5) and rejects life with him, after suffering banishment, and chooses to leave the world. There are thus binary views regarding women, as well as Sita herself (Chirkut 2006: 37), whereby Sita is hailed as a Goddess (Valmiki, Sundarakandam 16.14 and Tulasidasa, Balakanda 4) and subjected to calumny at the same time. This paper will examine how Sita negotiated questions of freedom, dignity and wider human rights and the lessons to be drawn for a new social contract between men and women. It will also explore what qualities truly describe Sita, Valmiki's great heroine. Is it the compliant or the defiant Sita, or both?

Key words: *Ramayana, Sita, women, gender, dharma*

Introduction

The Ramayana is said to be the glorious story of Sita, *sitayascaritam mahat* (Valmiki 1.1V. 7), related in Epic form with the prevailing sentiment of Karuna rasa (pathos). Valmiki used the Ramayana story to teach Vedic knowledge to Sita's sons Lava and Kusha. Whilst calling it Ramayana, he clarifies that it is largely Sita's story. Sita's life of austerities and melancholy was well known to her sons; yet Valmiki accorded her her due place in the story, whilst keeping the young boys' attention away from Rama. Valmiki, a liberated sage, supported Sita by allowing her to make her judicious decisions, and stood by her side at the court of Ayodhya. The juxtaposition of the two stories (of Rama and Sita) elucidates the problem: the goals of the one cannot be achieved without the cooperation of the other; but unfortunately it is the female, Sita, who must make

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[5] I have consciously opted to utilize standard anglicized spellings for Sanskrit/Hindi words in a bid to render the paper more 'open' to a wider contemporary audience of readers.

the sacrifice. Valmiki's Ramayana opens with the enquiry about the possible existence of a person with eighteen highly desirable attributes. Narada asserted that Rama of the Ikshavaku clan was the repository of such attributes; hence, the name Ramayana for the Epic. The presence of outstanding females in the Ramayana such as Sita and Mandodari makes the Ramayana the story of women too, be they ordinary or extraordinary. By calling it Sita's story as well as that of Rama, Valmiki emphasizes the significance of both characters.

Different narrators of the Ramayana story have treated the women of the Epic in their own ways, reflecting their worldview and priorities. Valmiki portrays Sita as the beloved and loyal consort of Rama, but also shows her being banished and finally giving up her life. Valmiki renders an impartial account of events; however, he portrayed nothing negative about Sita because there was nothing negative about her thoughts, words or deeds. The Valmiki Ramayana depicts man aspiring to become God—hence the enumeration of the qualities in the opening scene. Sita's sacrifices stand out as a warning to humanity to rein in tendencies of domination and oppression. Tulasidasa does not present this aspect in his Ramacaritmanasa. Tulasidasa's aim in his Ramacaritmanasa is to show Rama as the Supreme Lord, and all other characters as ancillary, although he worships Sita and Rama both as divinity pervading the universe. Tulasidasa did not relish indulging in description of moral lapses, or of any kind of aspersions against Sita who was *Jagajjanani*, Mother of the universe to him. This does not make Tulasidasa unsympathetic to the plight of oppressed women: in his era of sixteenth and seventeenth century India, the patriarchal system was considered to be most oppressive. He knew the problems, but left the solution to Rama-devotion. He captured the dilemma of Hindu women thus: "Why did the Creator create women in this world, to be dependent on others and not allowed to even dream of happiness" (Balakanda 101: 5)? The foregoing shows Valmiki's and Tulasidasa's relationship with Sita, and their recognition of the problems she as a woman underwent. Valmiki's depiction of Ahalya's transgression is graphic; Tulasidasa however, merely states that Gautama's wife, turned to stone by a curse, craved the dust of Rama's feet. This is further evidence of Tulasidasa's belief in the potency and efficacy of Rama's Name and the dust of His feet. Furthermore, not much is said about women who were humiliated by their husbands through their pursuit and solicitation of other women in their very presence. However, Tulasidasa faithfully echoes Valmiki in rebuking Vali for his transgression, invoking the death sentence for illicit attention towards a daughter, sister, daughter-in-law and brother's wife (Kishkindhakanda 8: 7). Neither of the dominant telling of the Ramayana exhibits antipathy or insensitivity towards the female.

In spite of the relegation of women in the Ramayana, the female characters set standards of personal conduct and dignity which surpassed the males. While being tender and loving wives they asserted their identity as women and injected

a sense of strength in society as the guardians of female rights.   Thus the Ramayana projects a powerful image of the affirmation and empowerment of women, especially through the words and deeds of Sita. Sita's vigorous rejection of Ravana's advances shows strength of character and self-empowerment. She did not allow Ravana to manipulate her or act contrary to her wishes. Her steadfastness, love and loyalty towards Rama were inspirational for the women of Lanka. The two authoritative tellings of Rama's Story—the ancient Valmiki Ramayana and seventeenth century Ramacaritmanasa of Tulasidasa acknowledge the dilemma of women's status in patriarchal societies and showed the way in accordance with their beliefs and exigencies of their time. Valmiki tried to elevate man to Godhead but Tulasidasa brought God to mankind - from the king in the palace to the peasant in his hut. As works of metaphysical and spiritual value, they transcend material conditions, but do not ignore or minimize them. They both decried the maltreatment of innocent women, and addressed the issues in their own ways, vindicating the character of the heroine. In the Ramayana the affirmation and empowerment of women proceeded with an unrelenting patriarchal authoritarianism in the background.

Conceptual and Theoretical Background

A brief account of the conceptual background, theoretical approach underlying this enquiry and methodology follows. The term empowerment means giving people the power and means to achieve their envisaged goals. In the context of human beings, men and women are empowered by nature to function and develop equally and independently. Ancient Hindu texts, such as the Vedas and Upanishads acknowledge the equality of males and females. Motwani (1958: 26) says: Manu, the Archetypal man propounded the Manu Dharma Shastra "for the guidance of beings endowed with the faculty of mind or reason." The Manu Dharma Shastra or Manusmriti emphasizes the proper attitudes of care towards women in 3.56-59 including respect, supply of their needs, courtesy, and proper provisions of adornment and pleasure. The Smriti also observes that the mutual satisfaction and collaboration of man and wife contribute to the blessings of the family (3.60), as well as the happiness of the family (3.62).   Discussing empowerment Babbie and Mouton (2008: 322) state that "It implies the enabling of participants (in Participation Action Research) to become 'protagonists' in the advancement of their society and in defence of their own class and interests." The goals of empowerment could be achieved in various ways including conscientisation, emancipation, learning and generating autonomy.   These approaches could be extrapolated to the developmental goals of general society.

Women's empowerment has been within the purview of intellectuals and reformers throughout history, but it is women themselves who apply energy towards realization of rights that are taken as birthright by men. The suffragette movement of the early twentieth century in UK, USA and Australia, to obtain the right for women to vote, is an example.   In the twentieth century many

international institutions and initiatives for promotion of women's rights and protection of women and children have been activated: the problems do not seem to cease. In contemporary democracies, e.g. South Africa, the Constitution and laws such as Black Economic Empowerment Act, Employment Equity Act and provisions under Criminal Law attempt to empower people of all races, genders and cultures. It is perplexing that, in view of all the initiatives to protect the interests of the "weak" or "vulnerable" sectors of society, there seems to be no end in view of the inhuman treatment of women and children in our present day society. From a situation wherein women were accorded proper treatment to one in which they have become the "other" they have changed too, realizing that they will have to take up the cudgels on their own behalf. The gradual disempowerment of women was the result of the male's strategy to subjugate women who were perceived as adversaries or competitors. Rambachan (2005: 36) explains this thus: "Men seek self-gratification by treating women as objects of possession and by exercising power and control over them."

Rambachan also believes that the problems encountered by Hindu women were due to the patriarchal and androcentric approach of seeing value and significance in women only in relation to men. This attitude towards women, viewed against the backdrop of scriptural authority postulating the equality of the genders, creates a paradox where, on the one hand, women are elevated to the status of goddess and, on the other, reviled and relegated to virtual servitude. The disempowerment of women is a regrettable indictment on a male-dominated society which willfully disregards the intrinsic value of a woman that is rooted in the very fact of her being (Rambachan 2005:26). This view of women, considered in the light of western attitudes towards them, causes great concern. Aristotle considered females to be females "by virtue of a certain lack of qualities" and St Thomas Aquinas considered her an "imperfect man" (Selden and Widdowson 1993: 203). The ancient view couched in Latin "*Tota mulier in utero*—woman is nothing but a womb"—(Ibid: 211) prevailed in the twentieth century.

Of issue here is how to reconcile the disparate views, or polarity of paradigms (Kumar, 1992: 12) in which one paradigm questions the rationality of tradition (Valmiki) and the other affirms the infallibility of tradition (Bhavabhuti) regarding women's rights. The problem with regard to the polarity of paradigms begins with the notion of "tradition." The original tradition dispensed by Manu enjoined solicitous care of women, (see Manusmriti 3.56-59), regardless of whether we consider Manusmriti 5.149 as being tutelary, feudal, oppressive, patronizing, possessive or simply patriarchal. What became "tradition" with effluxion of time is the patriarchal notion of complete domination. This makes the answer to the question of "What do we expect of Sita?" (as opposed to Freud's "What does woman want?") elusive, if not tangled. The polarity of paradigms, or binary views/opposition (Chirkut 2006: 37) unfolds thus: The Sita approved by tradition

would be loyal, faithful, chaste, obedient, submissive; never questioning. The Sita who transgressed tradition is the one who questions the unjust conduct of her husband, who refused to shed her dignity or compromise her freedom of choice. Yet she is regarded as a goddess, or at least ideal woman, except by the Indian feminists who aver that Sita represents the "dead weight of tradition" and "subordinates her individual will to the wishes of her husband" (Kishwar 2001: 304). The highest affirmation of Sita amongst Indian women is that "she is seen as a person whose sense of dharma is superior to and more awe inspiring than that of Ram" (Ibid). The conundrum presented by these opposing views is what makes the Ramayana (and Mahabharata) of such enduring interest. One cannot avoid the spiritual, esoteric or metaphysical domain for answers, exemplified by the following views of Rama devotee *par excellence* Shastri Pandurang Athavale:

- It was the king who abandoned the queen; not Ram who abandoned Sita
- Ram sacrificed his personal happiness for the national interest and Sita extended her full cooperation to Ram (Kishwar 2001: 294).
- Popular belief is also in support of the notion that Rama "banished only the shadow of Sita, while keeping the real Sita by his side all the time (Ibid).

This essay is not a feminist critique of the Ramayana: therefore it must be acknowledged that men also spoke out against Rama's treatment of Sita. Athavale (Kishwar 2002: 294) remarks on Rama's harsh words in Lanka after the death of Ravana: "We do not know for what purpose he was so harsh, or what he intended to convey to Sita by these words, but it is equally certain that they were terrible words…."

Whilst the two dominant or authoritative texts of Ramayana - the *Ur* text Valmiki's Ramayana and Tulasidasa's seventeenth century Ramacharitmanasa are analysed for their widespread appeal and spiritual significance as sacred texts, other versions have also been referred to, including modern variants. Both Valmiki and Tulasidasa maintained the lofty ideals and decorum of the Rama story with its transcendental, esoteric touch. The elusive answers cannot be found through entirely material, earth-bound propositions, since both sages of the Ramayana preface their epics with reference to practices of austerity and submission to the divine.

The paradox regarding women in Hinduism can be resolved only on a spiritual or metaphysical level where a higher call of duty or Dharma overrides the subjective perspective of women— such as, Rama's abandonment of Sita. In this regard the following is noteworthy. The call of higher duty is claimed with regard to the "banishment" of Sita. Swami Nityabodhananda (1990: 178) introduces another element which explains the weakness in a strong (female)

character by adducing the same argument in the context of Sita and the golden deer:

> The author of the epic draws the attention to the fact that the mission of Rama/Sita—that is, the destruction of Ravana, the demon king—could not have been fulfilled, if Sita did not have this weak point in her otherwise perfect character.

This view places a different perspective on both actions committed by Sita as well as those committed against her. The 'Concept of a Divine Plan'; and the assertions that Sita was privy to the 'Cosmic Plan' involving her, is also explored by Shukla (2009: 88) on the basis of claims by the poet Valmiki and Sri Sathya Sai Baba, author of the Rama Katha Rasa Vahini, to this effect. Vyas (2005:53) goes further and declares that people must see sacrifice (in the name of duty) especially by exalted characters as something glorious, not tainted. A *caveat* to such an approach, however, is that the world of reality is often incompatible with a metaphysical perspective, and one has to exercise caution in making assumptions and conclusions.

The subject matter of this essay embraces aspects of empowerment and gender justice. Hence the discourse on feminism or feminist theory is suitable for providing guidelines and parameters to this paper. The Hindu worldview, present in the Ramayana, allows for the practice of patriarchy. The battle for redress of women's issues is co-existent with patriarchy. The spiritually embedded ethos of Hindu life also produced notions such as "no differentiation into male and female souls" and hence no necessity for a struggle for equality. In practice, though, there soon emerged a tradition of women asserting themselves to a level of the male, e.g. Maitreyi and Gargi in the Vedic period. As mentioned earlier, woman was defined by the ancients in terms of man, or in terms of what she is NOT. The most degrading description of women was the western notion of *Tota mulier in utero*. This essay is bounded by notions of patriarchy which imply control over a wife, obedience by her and the requirement of a completely chaste life with her sexuality belonging to her husband alone (Richman 2001:17). Hence even in the case of Sita, the *agnipariksha* (trial by fire) was intended to confirm her own assertions of absolute loyalty to Rama:

> As I have not contemplated about anyone other than the scion of Raghu even in mind, so the Goddess Madhavi (earth goddess) may provide space to me to enter (Valmiki, Uttarakandam LXXXXVII: 13).

The feminist movement of the twentieth century developed out of a desire on the part of women to divest themselves of the disabilities, denigration and

oppressive exploitation by males. The first and second waves of feminist development up to the middle of the twentieth century focused on halting the patriarchal male domination of women and acceptance of their equal status in all relationships. Virginia Woolf campaigned against socially constructed gender identity which she claimed could be changed (Selden & Widdowson 1993: 207). In the second wave of feminism in Europe, the "omnipresence of patriarchy" and the "celebration of women's difference as central to the cultural politics of liberation" were the main themes (Selden & Widdowson 1993: 212-213). Many of the Ramayana's female characters have had to deal with issues emanating from the patriarchal attitude to women. Sita initiated a new approach to righteousness, dignity and unimpeachable non-cooperation with patriarchal demands both from Rama and from the society of her time. Hence the applicability of the feminist theory outlined above.

Texts and Methodology

This study is based largely on two authoritative texts of the Rama story—the Valmiki Ramayana and Tulasidasa's Ramacharitmanasa. Whilst Valmiki's Ramayana diffused the Rama ethos throughout the ancient world traversed by Hindus, particularly in South and South East Asia, it still constitutes a subject of serious study in India and western countries. The poet Valmiki's portrayal of Rama and Sita has evoked reverence, admiration, loyalty and aesthetic appreciation even in countries and cultures that are not, or not predominantly Hindu. The ethics, aesthetics and morals which pervade this story of duty, righteousness, compassion and sacrifice generate an ineffable, ineluctable feeling of elation and quietude in the sympathetic reader. Its various charming qualities have held a good part of humanity in thrall for many centuries. Tulasidasa's Ramacharitmanasa became an easily accessible telling of the Rama story, reinforced by the poet-saint's complete knowledge of the scriptures, as well as Epics and Puranas. It was written in Awadhi, a dialect of Hindi understood throughout northern India. The Ramacharitmanasa made hundreds of millions of Hindus Rama devotees, including those in the diaspora. Tulasidasa emphasized the auspicious aspects of the Rama story which were of benefit to humanity and were capable of bringing the readers and devotees to the 'Lotus Feet of Supreme Lord Rama'. The two authoritative versions of Ramayana complemented each other in certain respects. The other variants written in India and South and South East Asia contain gems which will shine brighter with the passage of time.

Textual study comprises the bulk of this undertaking. Babbie and Mouton (2008:31) write that Hermeneutics is the science of text interpretation." Selden and Widdowson (1993:54) state that "Hermeneutics was a term originally applied to the interpretation of sacred texts." Its modern equivalent preserves the same serious and reverent attitude towards the secular texts to which it tries to gain access. Hence the hermeneutical method, as described above, served as

a method for the study, interpretation and understanding of the sacred texts of the Ramayana of Valmiki and Tulasidasa written in Sanskrit and Awadhi respectively.

Sita and Women's Empowerment in Ramayana Versions
As stated above, woman enjoyed a high status in Hindu tradition; the Vedas and Upanishads in particular identified males and females with the divine. Shankaracharya's non-dualistic dictum *Brahma Satyam Jaganmithya, Jivo Brahmaiva Na Para* - Brahman is truth, the world is false; there is no difference between the individual soul and Brahman—was echoed in the Ramacharitmanasa of Tulasidasa as *Isvara Amsa Jiva Abinasi* the soul, being part of the Supreme is imperishable. (Uttarakanda 116 B 2) The jiva, or individual soul has no gender: thus, metaphysically, men and women have equal rights and powers. In attributing divinity to woman, Hinduism does not bestow upon her "the respect of the strong for the feelings of the weak, but the homage of the strong to the embodiment of superior strength" (Banerjee 1990: 17). The Manusmriti (Laws of Manu), however, introduced the notion of subservience after affirming that women are of paramount importance; such ambivalence in an authoritative text has been seriously inimical to the cause of women's rights. The Manusmriti affirms women thus: "Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased, but where they are not honoured, the sacred rites performed remain fruitless". (Manusmiriti 3. 56)

Then, in stark contrast to the above, the Manusmriti takes away their independence: "In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her Lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent". (Manusmiriti 5:149)

Indira Saikia Bora (2004:61) decries the fact that when the interests of man clash with those of the woman, the evidence of the Ramayana shows that the interest of the man was upheld. She questions this practice in a society which "places its women as a touchstone for evaluating its worth." Such deviation from the status accorded to women by scripture needs address and resolution. The notion of equality broadly embraced by Hinduism must become a powerful instrument to abolish abuse, exploitation and oppression in our own times.

It would be appropriate, therefore, to turn our attention now to the "empowerment" or rather the restoration of the "status quo" with regard to women in the Ramayana. Kumar (1992) presents a plausible explanation for the differences in the portrayal of Sita, often regarded as the central figure in the Ramayana, of Valmiki's original and subsequent variations including that of Tulasidasa. The so called polarity of paradigms is evident in the contrast between the Mahakavya (Epic) works (Ramayana, Mahabharata) with the Kavya versions such as Kalidasa (Raghuvamsam), Bhavabhuti (Uttara Ramcharita),

Kamban (Ramayana) and Tulasidasa (Ramacharitmanasa –also declared a Mahakavya by Hindi scholars). The Ramayana of Valmiki shows questioning of the traditions, whereas the Kavya tradition of Uttara Ramcharita of Bhavabhuti, for instance shows Sita subordinating herself to the authority of tradition unquestioningly (Kumar 1992: 12). This represents the regression of Hindu values, from the vast canvas of the epics to the more constricted world-view of the Kavya.

The extent to which disempowerment or subjugation of women is spreading in modern society is cause for alarm. Hindu society not only favours sons, but has actively engaged in female foeticide, infanticide and bride-burning—all for mere material reasons. Society at large reflects the same attitude towards the female.[6] King Janaka's loving and solicitous nurture of Sita contrasts starkly with this modern abomination. The Ramayana of Valmiki and the Ramacharitmanasa of Goswami Tulasidasa are not dry codes of conduct—they portray the trials and tribulations of humanity and its interaction with the divine. With the vast expanse of time between Valmiki's Ramayana and Tulasidasa's Ramacharitmanasa, social circumstances and priorities changed significantly. However, the underlying commitment to truth and virtue remains: one has to decode what the authors have encrypted in their stories to reveal what they believed to be the true status of women. Sita's role in the Mahakavya as well as the Kavya tellings of the Rama story must be thoroughly examined and evaluated in order to locate her as the representative woman of the Indian ethos, eschewing the patronizing servitude of instruments such as Manusmriti 5:149.

The discussion that follows will focus on Sita, the tragic central figure of the Ramayana who upheld her honour and dignity despite her trials and vicissitudes. Valmiki depicted Sita as the consort of Rama throughout the Ramayana, whereas Tulasidasa mentioned in Uttarakanda that Sita gave birth to two handsome sons, and did not mention her again. One has to find the answers in what Tulasidasa said and what he desisted from saying about Sita. This will clarify how Sita and other female characters of the Ramayana empowered themselves by claiming what was a birthright, and also how others assisted in their empowerment. For example, Tulasidasa was intolerant of anyone going against Rama; therefore he is likely not to portray a rebellious Sita whom he adored.

Valmiki's Rama is endowed with attributes which are not easily to be found in a single individual. Yet Rama of the Iksavaku Dynasty does exist, and is an eminent example for emulation (Valmiki 1.1. 1-18). Sita is also described as being of high birth, and both Valmiki and Tulasidasa invest her with divinity:

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[6] An illegal internet sale of children in China priced boys at 28 000 Yuan and girls at 13 000 Yuan (Babies for sale on the internet, *Daily News*, 20 October 2005: 4).

rajyam va trishu lokeshu sita va janakatmaja
trailokya rajyam sakalam sitaya napnuyat kalam
The sovereignty of the three worlds is but tinsel when compared to
the
Thre worlds of Sita, the daughter of Janaka. (Valmiki,
Sundarakandam 16-14)

This recognition of Sita's virtues and impeccable lineage comes late in Valmiki's Ramayana. However, Goswami Tulasidasa also calling Sita Janaka's daughter, portrays her with "greater reverential fervour" (Shukla 2004).—*janaka suta jagajjanani janaki….* Janaka's daughter Janaki, Mother of the world". (Tulasidasa, Balakanda 4)

Polarity of Paradigms: questioning and affirming tradition
Both poets locate Sita in a male-defined atmosphere—as daughter of Janaka and wife of Rama. But her divinity is not shaped or dependent on either. She can bestow, at least to Tulasidasa, the gift of pure intellect of her own will. Even the men against whom Sita is portrayed—Royal Sage Janaka and Maryada Purushottam Sri Rama, are beyond the limitations of the patriarchal androcentric world mentioned earlier. Valmiki's "Janakatmaja" and Tulasidasa's "Atishaya Priya Karunanidhana Ki" both seem to emphasize the blessed position of the father and husband of Sita for having a daughter and wife of her attributes.

Valmiki's Ramayana, though heroic in its exploits, is pervaded by the pathos (Karuna Rasa) and pain of separation generated by the death of the crane and the mourning of its female partner. Whilst the scene is said to have given rise to poetry through the convergence of Shoka (sorrow) and sloka (verse), (Shoka - Sloka Samikarana) it also sets the tone and theme for the Ramayana saga, especially the life of Sita. The Nishada (hunter) represents the people of sinful resolve, full of animosity (Papanischaya) and (Vairanilayo) (Valmiki Balakandam II.10) who cause grief to creatures of God who steadfastly tread the path of their own Dharma. Sita, being high-placed and adored by the people, becomes a natural target for such malignant characters. The emergence of Sita unscathed, proud and transcending censure and praise is indicative of her self-empowerment.

The hunter's act of separating the pair of cranes earned him eternal damnation— "*ma nishada pratishtham tvamagamah shasvati samah*—May you not have peace of mind for endless years". (Balakandam II -15)

The restlessness pronounced on the hunter characterizes the life of Sita and other Ramayana characters. The Ramayana is a saga steeped in pangs of separation caused by Kaikeyi, Ravana and finally Rama Himself. The most poignant pain of parting has always been depicted in Sita—her greatest

statement of this is her choice of returning to her mother Earth donning her pangs of separation like a precious garland, and not allowing it to be sullied by worldly distrust and persecution! In this context Sita is not the "tragic" heroine of the Ramayana, but the very soul or essence of its message— there can be no peace without respect for life and the right to live it. Rama may thus seem to have remained in the world after Sita's departure, enjoying his children and kingdom, but "Sita is the one who neither shares in the happiness of the kingdom nor in the reunion of her family". (Kumar, 2000:38) However, one can look at Sita from another perspective, not as the eternal loser (Kumar 2000:38), self-sustaining and obedient, but as the reactionary woman who triumphed by choosing to *lose* everything but preserved her dignity and selfhood. Sri Rama thus becomes the loser, who never knew peace for countless years (said to be eleven thousand years on earth). The conclusion becomes inescapable that pain becomes its own salve.

Sita's reaction to demands on her for proof of chastity was described thus in Valmiki - Rama's heart was torn "for fear of public scandal" when Sita was rescued from Ravana's fortress (Yuddhakandam CXV - 11). He tells her to "go wherever she likes," because "no more purpose of mine remains to be served by you" (Yuddhakandam CXV - 18). The harsh words of repudiation, mingled with references to Rama's honour and the stigma on his illustrious dynasty of taking back a woman "who dwelt in another's house" evoked the following response: "Why do you, like a common man, address to me, O hero, such unkind and unbecoming words ….as a common man would do to an ordinary woman?" (Yuddhakandam CXVI - 5)

Inspite of this most appropriate and dignified retort, Sita volunteers to enter the blazing fire created at her request, and comes out vindicated and unscathed. However, this fire-ordeal was as demeaning as it was vindicating. Agni himself attested to her purity—Sita's word about her own virtue was not sufficient: "The blessed lady, whose conduct has been excellent, has never been unfaithful to you, either by word or by mind, or again by conception (thought) or even by glance". (Yuddhakandam CXVIII - 6)

Rama's concerns about public scandal may have been allayed by all the attestations to Sita's virtue, but she had to be measured against men's standards, regardless of her own feelings, conduct and experiences.

Valmiki depicted the tradition of his time with regard to Sita's tribulations but he noted her challenges to the system. The fact that Sita voluntarily offered to prove her purity in the face of gratuitous insults and suspicions may be a sign of her attempt to maintain her dignity—but a second time she would not do so. Empowering herself by the choice of a noble mind and proud personality, she refused to demonstrate her innocence once again merely to remain Rama's wife,

for the same events of Lanka—to assuage public sentiment and protect the honour of Rama and the Iksavaku dynasty. Sita declined to affirm tradition as an infallible arbiter of mundane existence. This suggests that the world must construct other paradigms of virtue and dynastic glory instead of the thoughts and deeds of its women.

Addressing the grand assemblage of saints and sages and the citizens of Ayodhya, Valmiki says to Rama - "Sita will give you assurance (of her good conduct) before you, as you are afraid of public censure" (Valmiki Uttarakandam LXXXXVI: 17). The Gita Press English translation for the Sanskrit *lokapavadabhitasya* is "afraid of public censure". In the Lanka episode (Yuddhakandam CXVIII: 6 supra) and Yuddhakandam (CXVIII: 14) Sita's purity and Rama's fears, respectively, are discussed. In Yuddhakandam (CXVIII: 14) Rama explains to Agni: "The world would murmur against me saying that Rama, son of Dasaratha, was really foolish and that his mind was dominated by lust, if I actually accepted the daughter of Janaka without proving her chastity." Valmiki repeats the word *lokapavadabhitasya* (public censure) to Rama in Yuddhakandam LXXXXVI: 23 confirming the real reasons for Sita's trials. On the occasion that was referred to earlier by Valmiki in Uttarakandam, Sita was determined to abandon the glory of being queen and the pomp and splendour of Rama's empire. She proved her purity, but left this world and Sri Rama, who beseeched the earth to restore her to him. In this episode, Sita remained poised and strong in her own values with no words of censure to Sri Rama. In the fire-ordeal in Lanka, she emerged safely to rejoin Rama; in this descent into the netherworld (Patala), however, there was no desire to return or live on earth. Sita left this world, not as a helpless forlorn maiden rejected by society, but as a supremely confident woman, making her choice of the ultimate test—as if in contempt of the world of men and their notions of honour and glory—and contempt also for a society that would exact the same punishment again and again for something she was not even guilty of. Moreover, as indicated by Valmiki, Mother Earth vindicated her by accepting her in her arms. She proved her virtue but shunned the false arbiters of women's character. Valmiki's statement, too, rebuked Rama whilst he steadfastly guided and supported her in her choices. This positioning of the testimonies of Gods and men, for and against Sita, is like the reverse and obverse sides of a coin—they adhere to each other, becoming inseparably close yet incapable of confronting each other.

Conciliation and Triumph of Personal Empowerment
Goswami Tulasidasa also describes the glorious origins and character of Sita, but does not directly and explicitly challenge the tradition, as Valmiki did. Tulasidasa's desire to promote bhakti through the worship of Rama as Parabrahma, and Sita as the universal Mother, constrained him to maintain a decorous balance in his portrayal, showing a meek and compliant Sita, obedient to the dictates of Rama. She is not like Valmiki's Sita, challenging the fate that

she is being subjected to, and remonstrating with Rama for not conducting himself in accordance with their status. Sita's submission to the Agni Pariksha (fire-ordeal) may be viewed as an example of self-vindication or empowerment, since it was in her power to refuse. Nevertheless, she appeals to Lakshman to support Dharma, by creating the fire which she would enter. Rama's words that led to this decision are not repeated by Tulasidasa and he merely says:"*tehi karana karunanidhi kahe kachuka durbada/sunata jatudhani saba lagin karai bishada*—For this reason the merciful lord uttered some harsh words; and the rakshasis began to feel dejected on Sita's account". (Tulasidasa, Lankakanda 108)

The reason mentioned above was that Rama had earlier concealed Sita in the fire, in keeping with a Cosmic Plan, and now he wished to retrieve the *real* Sita from Agni. However, like Athavale above, Tulasidasa feels that his tone and words were harsh, and he did not wish to repeat them. He thus does not support the tradition with regard to Sita and the other virtuous women of the Ramayana. Moreover, the fact that he states that the Rakshasi women of Lanka were also disturbed at Rama's words directed to Sita makes his own sentiments very clear. Goswami Tulasidasa's aim was to establish ideals that would rescue humanity from degeneration in the Kali Yuga (iron-age). Hence, he curtailed the narrative where details of transgressions of otherwise worthy individuals are involved (e.g. the Ahalya episode). His allegiance to and adoration of both Sita and Rama, whom he saw pervading the whole universe, restrained his heart and pen—he could not repeat Rama's words which were unbefitting him, nor could he mention the suspicions about Sita, although they were entirely baseless. His use of the word "*durbada*" serves to convey Rama's sentiments as well as his own displeasure at the calumnies against Sita.

If Sita empowered herself through submission to the fire test in Lanka, then Tulasidasa was justified in describing it. However, subsequent pressures for her to demonstrate her innocence sound excessive and abusive to the reasonable mind. Tulasidasa therefore does not describe Sita's return to mother Earth, or the departure of Rama for his divine abode. In his view, Sita was the very embodiment of virtue and purity, and if she acquiesced in the matter of proving her virtue once, it was sufficient and final. Any further inquiries into her conduct would be mere vexatious pandering to men's whims and evil fancies. Valmiki's depiction of Sita asserting her dignity and status, and leaving forever this world which could have still been an attractive place for her, with her royal status, Rama as husband and her two dear sons points in the direction of Sita empowering herself and abandoning the morbid society which looked for victory through persecuting her, but were handed utter defeat. Whilst Sita may thus seem to be an "eternal loser" who was sacrificed at the altar of men's notions of honour and family glory, she indeed spurned these notions, and departed, filled with deep hurt, but even more—indignation!

The Ramayana has depicted human depravity in all its shapes; the worst being the notion of Sita as a transgressor of morals. Only saints and sages attested to her purity, reinforcing the view of women's empowerment in the spiritual or metaphysical realm. The very fact that simple country folk heaped calumny and scandal on Sita reveals the deep-seated insecurities of males and their desire to allay these by oppressing and demoralizing women irrespective of their qualities. Valmiki had the tender heart of a realized sage, and his compassionate nature exposed the predatory qualities of men—whether it is the Nishada killing the crane, causing grief to the female, or Bhadra relaying the people's sentiments about Sita. Valmiki stood by Sita as a loving father of a virtuous woman, and allowed her to confront her detractors in a fitting manner. Tulasidasa revered Sita as the Divine Mother, and dissociated himself from the negative connotations about her character. To him, Sita's empowerment was original and absolute; for she was daughter of Janaka, Mother of the universe and beloved of Rama.

Goswami Tulasidasa believed that his vision of Ramarajya, in which men and women lived in mutual love and caring, would dissolve all the ills of Kaliyuga. Hence, his dismissal of the transgressions of Ahalya in the words—"*gautama nari shrapa basa upala deha dhari dhira*—Gautama's consort, having assumed the form of a stone under a curse, waited patiently". (Tulasidasa, Balakanda 210)

Whereas Valmiki divulged Ahalya's transgression and penance, Goswami Tulasidasa is only interested in her redemption and empowerment through Rama's grace. Being an ascetic, Ahalya did penance to divest herself of the blemish of her indiscretion. Empowerment or redemption by the Supreme is available to all; it is in the world of mortals that struggles have to be waged to retain and regain the rights conferred by God on women as much as on men! Woman must be rescued from the system that oppresses her on earth and offers her bliss after death.

Sita, herself blameless, helped other women of the Ramayana to realize their rights as human beings. This refers especially to the women of Lanka, many of whom had held her in affection, and were indignant at Rama's harsh words to her. Her rejection of Ravana's importunities showed them it was possible and proper to say "No" to lascivious men. Women need empowerment in all races and cultures.

Sita always remained the dedicated beloved of Rama; her expressions of protest were aimed at the sector of society which looks for all means to degrade women. Lanka is the site where she was supposed to have lost her purity and innocence—yet Hanuman extols her virtues in Lanka in canto XVI of Sundarakanda of Valmiki's Ramayana and reports to Rama: "*ekaveni dhara*

deena tvai cintaparayana—Sita wears a single plait (as a sign of desolation), is forlorn and remains absorbed in your thoughts alone". (Sundarakandam LXV - 14) Thus this image created by a celibate devotee of Rama and Sita constitutes an enduring picture of Sita in human hearts, filled with innocence and pathos.

Sitayascaritam Mahat

Did Valmiki write his Ramayana as the glorious story of Sita (*sitayascaritam mahat*) to merely confirm the following picture of a domesticated Sita, subservient to the patriarchal system: "Sita, who is looked upon today as virtue incarnate and the ideal of Indian Womanhood, shines principally as the obedient wife, sweetly administering to the needs of her husband in weal and woe, and bowing down to his will without any question?" (Majumdar1982: 24). Or did Valmiki as well as Tulasidasa portray more than this? Certainly Sita had, in addition to her virtues, deep qualities of leadership, defiance of evil, and compassion, to make her story glorious.

Despite her own utter despondency Sita is mindful of other beings and their rights and feelings. Goswami Tulasidasa depicts the scene where Ravana, accompanied by Mandodari and his other queens and attendants, tries by means of cajolements and finally threats, to acquire Sita's acceptance of his marriage offers. This scene, set in a beautiful garden of the Golden Lanka, dominated by the supreme warrior Ravana, is a setting for an anticlimax. Neither Ravana's blandishments nor his power and glory succeed in securing Sita's attention. Ravana begs: "*eka bara biloku mama ora*—Look at me once". (Sundarkanda 8.3)

The mighty Ravana was reduced to dust by the scorching retort of Sita, in the presence of his queens. Ravana, on the other hand, did not concern himself with the despicable conduct he displayed, or the effect of that on his queens. By her mere steadfastness and feeling of self-worth, Sita upheld her own dignity as well as that of the women of Lanka. By denying Ravana a glance she empowered not only herself but also Mandodari and the other queens whose husband Ravana had propositioned another (married) woman in their very presence, offering to make them all handmaidens to Sita if she acquiesced! The hurt of Ravana's conduct towards his queens was mitigated to a certain extent by Sita's rejection of his attentions. She also became a model of womanly character and conjugal fidelity to the Rakshasis of Lanka.

The foregoing demonstrates that Sita led a pure, ascetic life in Lanka, inspiring the females of Lanka in the quest for moral and spiritual empowerment in the midst of a life of opulence and lasciviousness. Indeed, a far different environment from what was imagined by her detractors in Ayodhya, who did not commiserate with her travails in exile but rushed to judge her!

Women have the arduous task of empowering themselves and one another, to overcome the "glass ceilings" created by men, who have even resorted to demoralizing women by creating "glass cliffs" for them i.e. offering them high positions and then causing them to fail, to prove that women are less competent. The Ramayana, in the person of Sita, can serve as an example of transcendence and triumph for women; without divine intervention, and merely as a process of natural human rights. As Manu projected, and Rama experienced, there can be no peace or prosperity for men if they subjugate and brutalize women. Women need to be judged on their own standards, and not on those of men who fail to be even-handed towards their women. They must not be perpetually arraigned in the court of public opinion merely because of their gender.

It is an explicit message of the Ramayana that men and women are equal, and owe one another the duty of love and support in order to create a happy society. This is the message of Srimad Ramayana; it is the essence of Ramarajya, in which blessed state of existence women, as well as men, must be allowed to develop and blossom to full potential, and live with the qualities which God bestowed upon them. The vision of equal treatment is evoked in this context: Smith (2004: 17), discussing the "Wrath of Sita: Sankaradeva's Uttarakanda," describes Sita in Sankaradeva's treatment of the banishment as "justifiably enraged at the way she has been treated." Sankaradeva places greater weight on Sita's suffering than on Rama's dilemma. Smith believes that even Valmiki portrays Sita as a "passive victim," in contrast to Sankaradeva's woman of "flesh and blood." In the final analysis, Sita's dignified and measured responses in Valmiki deepen the sense of pathos and reinforce the notion of self-empowerment through deliberate choices. It is an eternal message of the Ramayana that those who heap accusations on the pure will be forever despised, just as Sita will for all time be the Divine Mother and woman *par excellence*.

Conclusion
This essay is brought to a conclusion with the phrase that introduced it: *sitayascaritam mahat* - the glorious story of Sita. In the transcendental sphere there is no difference between Rama and Sita: both are dear to all people who look up to a Divine Protector like Rama and His inseparable consort Sita. It is also true that while Rama is adored, admired and revered, he is not readily excused for subjecting Sita to the ordeals she faced. Many believe that his work for the maintenance of Dharma should not have been at Sita's expense. An old song comes to mind, in which Rama is being implored to act like a man, and not God! Sita as a mother and mother figure, and considered divine, can do no wrong, she should suffer no wrong either. The title of Madhu Kishwar's article on Sita, "Yes to Sita, No to Ram: The Continuing Hold of Sita on Popular Imagination in India" (2001: 285) captures the essence of the Hindus' attitude to Sita and Rama. To put in a simplistic way, one hopes that Sita and Rama (too) did not have to bear the burden of satisfying the whims and prejudices of

society, but were allowed to spend their lives together happily. But we do not have all the definitions of happiness, nor do we understand all the meanings of the concept "sacrifice." They also had to endure the vicissitudes of life like all mortals. I believe that Valmiki commemorated Rama's acts on earth by calling his Epic "Ramayana" and recognized the beautiful inner life of Sita, in addition to her normal personality, by also calling the Ramayana *sitayascaritam mahat*. In the final analysis, all sufferings, opposites and polarities dissolve in the pathos-enveloped, world-transcending Sita whom the world could not keep; but still adores. Women and men of the world must take heart from her lesson, and accept this truth; if you do not cherish one another you will be abandoned like Rama was.   Sita was abandoned for a few earth years, but Rama was abandoned for the balance of his earthly years.   This essay has outlined the paradoxes surrounding Sita in various Ramayana versions, the resolution of these by apologists, scholars and devotees, and the actions Sita took to maintain her dignity.   The tension between tradition and questioning, praise and pejoration, submission and revolt has been analysed.   It is shown that even modern scholars of East and West are on different sides of the debate.   The approach towards inter-gender relations must go beyond Manu, Valmiki and Tulasidasa, with no accommodations and concessions in a patriarchal paradigm. A concise covenant must be drawn up embodying equality of women and men. This is what Sita conveyed through her actions and sacrifices, and this is what makes the Ramayana and Sita glorious.

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MOKṢA: THE GOAL OF LIFE ACCORDING TO THE TEACHINGS OF SATYA SAI BABA

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Abstract

This paper deals with the unique interpretation that Satya Sai Baba offers to the notion of Mokṣa in Hinduism. The paper attempts to relate his interpretation with that of the Advaita Vedanta. Sri Satya Sai Baba has explained the derivation of mokṣa as an acronym formed by combining the first two letters of the words 'moha' (delusion) and 'kṣaya' (destruction/removal). Mokṣa, the ultimate of puruṣārthas is the attainment of the ever-existing, ever-stable, ever-pure ātma-tattva and getting rid of the ever-changing, ever-unreal, impure deha-tattva. So long as there is attachment, the world appears permanent. This should be removed, and this process of mohakṣaya (attrition of attachment) is mokṣa. Once this attachment goes, what remains is simply ānanda (bliss). To convert our lives, to some extent, in this manner is the path of Brahman.

The essay is divided into five sections: 1. Definition and nature of Mokṣa, 2. Kinds of Mokṣa 3. Obstacles, 4. Means for Mokṣa, and 5.Their complementary nature. In an effort to provide a close reading of Sai Baba's interpretation of the topic, the study is entirely relied upon his writings and comments. However, classical Hindu textual references are provided for his various comments where appropriate.

Key Words: Mokṣa, Karma, Bhakti, Jñāna, Jīvan-mukti, Videha-mukti.

MOKṢA: The Goal of Life

Definition and Nature

Mokṣa or *mukti*, both from the root *muc*, is the liberation from *saṁsāra* and the concomitant suffering involved in being subject to the cycle of repeated death and rebirth. Satya Sai Baba has explained the derivation as an acronym formed by combining the first two letters of the words *moha* (attachment) and *kṣaya* (attrition), *mo(h)a + kṣa(ya)*. *Mokṣa*, the ultimate of the *puruṣārthas* is liberation from all that binds soul/self. That is to say, the attainment of the ever-existing, ever-stable, ever-pure *ātma tattva* and getting rid of the ever-changing, ever-unreal, impure *deha tattva*.[7] The word is sparsely used in the *Vedas*, only once in

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[7] Sri Satya Sai Baba, *Praśnottara Vāhinī*. p.20.

the ten major *Upaniṣads*,[8] and once in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* [9], though the meaning is conveyed in many other phrases. It occurs more frequently in *Svetāsvatara* [10], *Tejobindu* (II.39-41), *Maitri* [11] and *Muktika Upaniṣads* (I.i.26-29).

A word allied to both is `*mumuṣku*', one who desires *mokṣa* or freedom. *Brahma Sūtras* refer to *mukti* by word. The *Bhagavad Gītā* uses both words quite frequently, besides many other phrases. *Mokṣa* is counted as the fourth and ultimate goal of human life, preceded by the foundation of *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* in this world. The epic, *Mahābhārata*, has one whole section devoted to '*Mokṣa-Dharma*' in *Śānti Parva*. *Śrimadbhāgavatam* has many touching stories related to *mokṣa*, one of the best-known being `*Gajendra-mokṣa*', the liberation of the King of Elephants by Vishnu.

At the *vyāvahārika* level of discussion, the word *mokṣa* naturally brings up its antonym—bondage *(bandha)*. Thus many of the phrases pointing to the meaning of *mokṣa* are couched in phrases such as, `freedom from bondage'. The bondage is also referred to as the knot of ignorance lodged in one's `heart'. At the *pāramārthika* level neither word holds valid.[12]

Scriptures and Sages have declared that the knowledge of the true nature of one's own self is the only key to understanding the mystery of existence, and this knowledge alone secures limitless and eternal happiness (*ānanda*), and ends the recurrent cycles of births and deaths. This knowledge itself is *mokṣa* or *mukti*. Other epithets for the liberated individual are: *jñāni*, *sthitaprajña*, *yogārūḍha*, *guṇātīta*.

As *Bhagavad Gītā* states, the understanding of bondage and freedom depend on the `*sātvika*' (pure) nature of the intellect.[13] The bondage refers to the ego's desires for actions (*karma*) that give pleasures and avoid pain to the body and mind, through contacts with objects (*viṣaya*). As objects are infinite, so desires also seem to be endless. The pleasures, however, are ephemeral, and alternate with the pain of either not getting them or of losing them once they are achieved. The thirst for their enjoyment can be overcome by the restraint of

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[8] yājñavalkya, iti hovāca. yad idaṁ sarvaṁ mṛtyunāptam, sarvaṁ mṛtyunābhipannam, kena yajamāno mṛtyor āptim atimucyata iti: hotrā ṛtvijā, agninā, vācā: vāg vai yājñasya hotā, tad yeyaṁ vāk. so'yam agniḥ, sa hotā, sā muktiḥ, sātimuktiḥ. (Brihadaranyaka Upaniṣad III.i.3.)
[9] Sarvagranthinam vipramokṣah. Chāndogya Upaniṣad VII.xxvi.2
[10] saṁsāra mokṣa sthiti bandha hetuh │(Svetāsvatara Upaniṣad VI.16)
[11] etaj jñānam ca mokṣam │(Maitri Upaniṣad VI.iii.8)
[12] na nirodho na cotpatti rna baddhi naca sādhakāḥ│
na mumukṣu rna vaimuktaḥ ityeṣa paramārdhata║(Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, Gouḍapāda Kārikās II.32.)
[13] pravṛttim ca nivṛttim ca│kāryakārye bhayābhaye│bandhaṃ mokṣaṃ ca│yā vetti buddhiḥ sā pārtha sāttvikī║(Bhagavad Gītā. XVIII.30.)

senses and the proper performance of one's duties and their results as sacrificial offerings (*yajña*) to the Supreme Spirit (Brahman).

Mokṣa or *mukti* has been described as '*sādyo*'- (immediate) in this life itself, and '*krama*'- (gradual) going through grades of expanding awareness of more and more subtle worlds (e.g. *mahā*, *jana*, *tapa*, *satya* or *brahma loka*). *jīvan-mukti* and *videha-mukti* are other terms one comes across, indicating the dissolution of one's ego while living in the present body, or happening after the body's death respectively.

Mokṣa is freedom from bondage. The desire for that (*mumukṣutva*) is the utmost desire that one should have to fulfill one's goal in life—that is to be absolutely happy with no limitations of what-so-ever. Hence, it is the highest *puruṣārtha* or highest human goal to be achieved. Therefore, freedom from limitations is *mokṣa*. Śaṅkara defines *mokṣa* as freedom from any body identification—*sthūla, sūkṣma, kāraṇa śarīra* which are by definition limited. Absolute limitless freedom (*anantatvam*) and infinite inexhaustible happiness (*ānandatvam*) are thus equated with *mokṣa*.

Since *mokṣa* involves limitlessness and infiniteness; it cannot be gained or given. In this respect Advaita Vedanta differs in comparison to other Vedāntic interpretations where *mokṣa* is given through the grace of God, and Lord Narayana alone has the capacity to give for those who deserve—"by complete surrender to me alone one can gain *mokṣa* or one can cross over the insurmountable delusion".[14] That which can be gained or given comes under the category of 'gaining something that I do not have' (*aprāptasya prāpta).* If *mokṣa* comes under that category, then it is not intrinsic with me as it is gained or given. Hence, there is a beginning for *mokṣa*. That which has a beginning must have an end—essentially that which is given or earned can be lost too. Therefore *mokṣa* becomes finite and not infinite since finite things alone can be given.

Hence, Advaita Vedānta says that *mokṣa* cannot be of the type *'aprāptasya prāpta'* but should be of the form *'prāptasya prāpta'* that is gaining something that I already have or that which is intrinsic with me. Happiness is not something that I gain, but something I have to realize. A quiet and contented mind is a happy mind. Mind free from the notions of limitations is the mind free from any longing to be free. That is the mind free from all limitations—limitations of place, time and qualities. It is said that mind alone is responsible for both bondage and freedom.[15] Identification with the finite is bondage and realization of one's own true Advaitic nature is freedom. Like all other knowledge, this knowledge has to take place in the mind alone. One cannot become free; one has to understand

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[14] Māmeva ye prapadyante māyāṃ etām taranti te (Bhagawad Gītā VII.14)
[15] manaiva manuṣyānāṃ kāraṇam bandha mokṣayoḥ
   bandhaya viṣayasaṅgo muktyai nirviṣayaṃ manaḥ *(*Amritabindu Upaniṣad.2.)

that one is free. One cannot become infinite one has to understand that one is infinite. That is *mokṣa*, as per Advaita.

In providing a contemporary interpretation of this ancient idea of liberation, Satya Sai Baba raises first some important questions: Why should this creature, man , endowed with extra sensitiveness to share sorrow and joy with others, be born in this changing world of time and space? Nothing that is born can escape death; nothing that is built can withstand disintegration. Why then has man been sent onto this stage of fleeting experiences? There is a purpose behind all the activities of the Divine. Man has to manifest the Divine in him and lead and guide all living beings in that adventure. He has to liberate himself by his efforts and liberate all life by his example. He must become free and secure in his own source. This is what is called *mokṣa*. He is liberated from littleness into vastness, from bondage to boundless bliss.[16]

According to Baba, the fulfillment of the life consists in the realization of the *ātman* (*ātma-sākṣātkāra*). To get this realization, one should be entirely free from impulses (*vāsanas*). Liberation (*mokṣa*) is, in the true sense of the term, liberation from the bondage of these impulses. These tendencies are of two types: beneficent and maleficent. The beneficent tendencies are saturated with holiness; the maleficent ones feed the mind and make it more and more uncontrollable and unsteady; they spread and strengthen the desire for objective pleasure. If the beneficent impulses (*subha vāsanas*) are encouraged and cultivated, they will not go on multiplying and binding the mind indefinitely; they become like fried seeds, which will not sprout. If we stick to the beneficent impulses, we can easily acquire knowledge of *Brahman* (*Brahma-Jñāna*).

These impulses are characterized by such activities as association with great souls (*mahātmas*), reverence for the great, conversation with them, following their advice, charity, fortitude, love, patience, truth, courage, continence, etc. These are the pure impulses. The impure tendencies lead one to such vices as craving to see things that cater to the lower desires like cinema pictures; eating dishes that are full of passion *Rājas*, like fish and flesh; drinking intoxicants that ruin one's personality by developing anger, delusion, greed, conceit, deceit, hatred, envy, etc.

Such impure tendencies are of three types: worldly impulses, scholarly or intellectual impulses, and physical or bodily impulses. The physical impulses make men desire a beautiful physique, a strong sturdy build, a glossy skin that will never be disfigured by wrinkles and round hard muscles. The scholarly impulses prompt one to crave being known as an unrivaled expert and to crave

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[16] Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Sathya Sai Speaks*. Vol.13, p.93.

the defeat of every competitor in the field. And lastly, the worldly impulses make one crave glory, power, personal authority, and pomp. All such desires can be grouped under this head. They are all impulses. They bind us to the wheel of birth and death (*saṁsāra*) and tie us down to this Earth.

The giant tree called *mind* has two seeds, impulse (*vāsana*) and breath (*prāṇa*). The seed becomes the tree, the tree yields the seed. The breath moves because of the impulses; the impulses operate because of the breath. If one of these is destroyed, so is the other. So, if the mind has to be free from their influence, ignorance (*ajñāna*) has to be transformed first. Ignorance does not exist alone; it has an offspring: selfishness (*ahaṁkāra*). That demon (*asura*) has two children, attachment or attraction (*rāga*) and impulse (*vāsana*); that is to say passion and craving.

Passion and craving are closely inter-related. Through attachment, one gets the feelings of my and mine, the feelings provoke desire, and desires breed worry. Therefore, to remove ego (*ahaṁkāra*), attachment and impulse have to be annihilated. That means ignorance has to be removed by removing the ego. Through meditation one can destroy ignorance and develop wisdom. The conquest of ignorance, ego, attachment, and impulse brings about liberation (*mokṣa*) for the individual.

The one who is a slave to impulses and tendencies (*vāsanas*) is devoid of wisdom (*jñāna*). As soon as impulses are uprooted, that person can earn back the divine nature that was lost by neglect. The impulses invade the realm of the heart; they cause endless trouble. They remind us of pleasures, agitating the memory of past experiences, and we start craving them again. The cravings make the senses and their leader the mind (*manas*), engage in brisk activities; there is no escape from this. The impulses operate so subtly and so powerfully. Just as the seed contains within itself the trunk, branches, twigs, leaves, flowers and fruits, so too, all this lie dormant in the impulses. The impulses are the cause of all the objective happiness. If they are absent, the mind is pellucid and pure. If they are present, all purity is ruined; they are obstacles in the path of truth, of *ātman*, and of immortality. A mind free from impulses is transmuted and is no longer mind. Nature (*prakṛti*) is the world of impulses (*vāsanas*). The mind is attracted towards nature and the external objects of the world by means of this tendency for attachment and starts contemplating on the objects and dwelling on their qualities because of these impulses.

Without impulses, the mind will not be affected at all by the objective world. The mind is like a piece of cloth; it takes on any colour with which it is dyed. Pure (*satvic*) impulses make it white, restless (*Rājasic*) ones change it into red, while ignorant (*tamasic*) ones give it a black colour. The mind is shaped by the type of impulses with which it is filled. One has to undertake meditation and

concentration in order to destroy these impulses. The mind is but a bundle of impulses.

Some aspirants say to themselves that in spite of many years of steady practice, they have yet to acquire success in meditation and concentration, according to Baba. The reason is easy to point out: they have not been able to uproot the impulses (*vāsanas*). Therefore, such practitioners must strive to conquer their innate tendencies. They must fortify themselves with greater faith, and act. The aspirant who is disturbed now and then by impure impulses must overcome them by will-power and spiritual exercises. The liberated soul (*jīvan mukta*) has burned out impulses, but the householder (*grihastha*) is cultivating them. There is no profit in simply controlling them; a cobra becomes harmless only when its fangs are plucked out; similarly, their roots must be burned. Then only can the aspirant attain *Brahman*.[17] Of course, even pure desires are a bond. But they are not hindrances, however many they may be. A thorn is removed by another and both are thrown out afterwards so also, when impure impulses (*vāsanas*) are overcome through the influence of pure impulses, one has to outgrow both.

This means that even the purest of impulses, the craving for liberation (*mokṣa*), has to disappear in time. Only then can one become That (*Brahman*). A shackle is a shackle, whether it is of iron or gold. One has to be free from both. That is to say, one should attain a stage when neither good nor bad will attract or repel. Anyone aiming at the realization of God should practice the diminishing of impulses, the curbing of the mind, and the understanding of the fundamental principle. One of these is not enough for liberation (*mokṣa*). In the liberated soul (*jīvan mukta*), impulses persist, but will not cause further births

The subtle body is the seat of ignorance. It is saturated with impulses and traditions and experiences. The *ātman* is free from all these. It is ever pure. It belongs to neither sex and has no mind, no senses and no form. Not only that; it has no breath (*prāṇa*), even. It cannot be said to be alive or dead. How can contemplation on such an *ātman* be anything other than pure? How can light and darkness co-exist? How can purity and impurity co-exist? Of all the workshops in the world, the workshop of the body is the most wonderful, because it is the tabernacle of the Lord[18]. In such a factory, the impulses are sublimated into vows, the impurities are weeded out, beneficent desires are shaped, and good imaginings are brought about.

Sai Baba says that the main aim is the uprooting of impulse, though this is a difficult task. He says that mountains can be swept away sooner than these

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[17] Even though conventional language cannot escape dualisms of subject-object polarities as if Brahman is an object of one's attainment, what is implied here is a realization of one's own true nature.

[18] This metaphor is drawn from the Christian tradition.

deep-rooted impulses (*vāsanas*). But with will-power and zest, supported by faith, they can be overcome in a short time. So we should not give up our determination and faith, whatever the loss, hardship, or obstacle. We must remember that the impulses overpower us and keep us down as their slave. Opium and brandy enslave us and hold us in their full grip only for some time, but impulses grip us for a whole life-time. The entire meaning and purpose of meditation is to attain freedom from these mighty and manifold impulses.

Baba says, "The ultimate step of self-realization depends upon the base of self-confidence. Without having and developing confidence in your own self, if all the time you are talking of some power being with someone else... when are you going to acquire any power and confidence in your own self?"[19]

Through Self-confidence, one can obtain at first Self-sacrifice and then Self-satisfaction. All this activity together expresses the state of Self-realization what depends on the base of Self-confidence - the awareness of the *ātmic* Self within everywhere whatever the same and can never be destroyed.

The God-realized person, the *jīvan mukta*, no longer has any identification what-so-ever with the body. He is one in whom only the divine vision is active. He pays no attention to the body, and it withers away and dries up. He does not bother about food or water. They do not even come to his mind. As a result, 21 days is the time that life can remain in the body under these circumstances. He loses all body identification and neither eats nor drinks except when forcefully fed. The 21 days may vary a little owing to the condition of the person. King Janaka retired to the forest and became a *jīvan mukta*. Life remained in his body only for 19 days.[20] The person with a divine vision is known as a Rāja yogi. He retains some body identification, and thus continues to live with the body. King Janaka reigned for many years as a Rāja yogi. *Jīvan mukti* is permanent God-realization[21]. It is merging with God. There can be a temporary God-realization for a few hours or a day or so in deep meditation or at various levels of *samādhi*, but that is not permanent. It is not merging. There is a piece of clear glass. From one side one can look through and see the object on the other side. If the clear glass is plated with a silver film on one side, it becomes a mirror in which one may see himself; and objects on the other side of the mirror are not seen. Likewise, through consciousness one may see the outside sensory world. Or, with his intelligence, he may look to and become aware of that which may be found within himself.

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[19] Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Sathya Sai Speaks*. Vol.13, p.16.
[20] *Heart2Heart Journals*. Vol.04, Aug 2006.Conversations with Sai-part. 23.
[21] The term God has a unique Judeo-Christian meaning for many readers in the West. However, Sai Baba uses the word in the Vedantic sense, that conjures up the notion of Brahman. Thus, the term God simultaneously connotes the term Brahman in his usage.

If one lives and keeps himself within the reality found within, with Godly thoughts, desires, and interests, if one keeps his life centered on the Godly side of consciousness, the consciousness becomes a mirror coated on its outer surface with the dust of the sensory world. On the pure inward surface of this mirror, on the pure mind and the pure heart, one may see the reality of himself reflected and this constitutes Self-realization. That is Rāja Yoga.

Man is encompassed by attachment to worldly desires, which produce delusions of various kinds related to the three attributes *(guṇas—sattva, rajas* and *tamas).* To attain liberation man has to rid himself of these desires. The mind is the cause of both bondage and liberation. It is only by controlling the mind that man can achieve liberation.[22]

Ignorance covers the reality, it has been called *āvaraṇa*. This *āvaraṇa* is of two kinds. One is called *asat,* related to untruth, and the other is called *abhāva* related to wrong ideas. The idea that sprouts from the feeling that the particular thing does not exist is represented by untruth or *asat*. If there is a feeling that one does not know whether that particular item exists or does not exist, it is referred to as *abhāva*. This type of *abhāva* is responsible for *saṁsāra*. *Vikṣepa* is the main path for liberation or *mokṣa*.

Manana and *nididhyāsana* are two other processes by which this ignorance of *asat* can be got rid of. *Manana* consists of thinking over or contemplation of what we listen to and *nididhyāsana* consists of digesting what we have taken in the form of the listening. This implies that we will not get the result just by listening. By this process, one can understand the nature of a particular aspect. *Vikṣepa* denotes recognition of these two and getting rid of them. In *āvaraṇa*, there is something that is being covered due to ignorance in us, and that is the aspect of *asat*. What arises out of untruth can be got rid of by listening to truth. The best way in which we can remove a doubt is to listen to people who know the truth. When such people come and tell us the existence of that truth, we can get rid of our ignorance. By listening to others, who know the reality, there is a possibility of our being able to get rid of this ignorance of *asat*.

By just listening, one can understand only to a limited extent the nature of the item. This implies that we will not get the result just by *śravaṇa* or listening. By using two other processes, (*manana* and *nididhyāsana)* that is, to contemplate and digest what we have listened to, *abhāva* can be got rid of. It is only after going through these three steps: *Śravaṇa*, *Manana* and *Nididhyāsana* that one can remove this ignorance of *asat*.[23]

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[22] Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Sathya Sai Speaks*. Vol. 27, p.70.
[23] Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Summer Showers*, 1977. p. 223.

Sai Baba says: Bondage is the delusion of your identification with the body. You must give up the false idea that you are the body and imbibe the truth that you are the *ātman*. Only then you achieve liberation (*mokṣa*). Detachment from body consciousness (*deha virakti*) will free you from the grief of bondage, and attachment to God *(daiva āsakti)* will give you the bliss of *mokṣa* and merger with God. You cannot get rid of body-consciousness *(deha bhrānti)* by giving up food and drink, reducing the body to a skeleton and inviting death but by asserting with faith that "I am not the body. The body, the senses, the mind, and the intellect are all my instruments (*upādhis*)." You must give up your body consciousness, just as you remove your soiled clothes.[24]

Sai Baba says: The word *mokṣa* does not represent something which is exhaustible and which you can purchase from a shop. *Mokṣa* is regarded as a limitless entity. So long as there is attachment in you, the world will appear permanent. On the lotus of your heart, this attachment always moves like mercury. This kind of mercurial lust which is continually moving from place to place should be removed, and this process of *mohakṣaya* (attrition of attachment) is *mokṣa*. Once this attachment goes, what remains is simply *ānanda*. To convert our lives, to some extent, in this manner is the path of Brahman.[25]

We commit many sins and do many meritorious deeds with this body and this mind. They bring about grief or joy; now, is this "I" the doer, the consumer of the grief or joy? He who does is the doer; doing is a modification. Doing is producing a modification, so the person appears as if he is modifying. But the "I" is modification less. He is the fixed; so he is not affected at all. Doer-ism is the quality of the *antaḥkaraṇa*. So, the "I" takes on the appearance of the doer and the gainer of the fruits of the deed.

If so, how can we know about the entry into this world and the exit from this world into another? It is the *antaḥkaraṇa*, the *liṅga deha* that moves from this world to another, from one birth to another, according to the accumulated merit. It is the limited *liṅga deha* that has the entries and exits. We, who are like the sky, omnipresent and unaffected, have no arrival into this world or departure to another. We are not of that nature.

Vijñāna is the means of gaining *mokṣa*. Some great men say that Yoga is the means. That is also true. There can be two roads to a place. Both are good and important. Both take us to the same goal. Only, we cannot travel on both at the same time. People can choose the road which suits their inner promptings and

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[24] Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Summer Showers*, 1990. p.17.
[25] Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Summer Showers*, 1974. p.116.

do the *sādhanas* of that path. Both release the *sādhakas* from bondage. Yoga gives *jñāna*. That *jñāna* confers *mokṣa* easily.

Yoga is like fire that is why the word "*yogāgni*" is used. It burns all sins away, so the *antaḥkaraṇa* is rendered pure. When that happens, *jñāna* is born there. The splendour of that *jñāna* dispels the darkness of ignorance and delusion; that is the Liberation. However learned a person is, however great his detachment, however deep his wisdom may be, unless he conquers his senses, he cannot qualify for *mokṣa*. Without Yoga, one cannot rid themselves of sin. Unless they clear themselves of sin, their *antaḥkaraṇa* does not become pure. Without a pure *antaḥkaraṇa*, *jñāna* cannot be acquired; and without *jñāna*, there can be no *mokṣa*. So, Yoga is the very foundation.[26]

An illustration to make it simpler, even for the unlearned: When a storm is blowing, can anyone light a lamp? So too, when the sensual desires are blowing strong, the *jñāna*-lamp cannot burn. It will be extinguished soon, even if it is lit. Yoga destroys all impulses and urges that are towards the sensual world. It puts down the mind and its agitations.

Jñāna is essential. Its function is to make us realize the *ātma svarūpa*, that is to say, our own reality. A person, who has no yoga, is like a lame man. A person, who has no *jñāna*, is like a blind man.[27] It is said that yoga destroys all blemishes, removes all faults. How does that happen? Can rice become eatable unless it is boiled over a fire? By yoga and other disciplines, the seat of intellect becomes soft. Yoga and *jñāna* are like oil and flame. The oil is yoga and *jñāna* is the illumining flame of the lamp.

It is said that purity of heart, purity of mind, and knowledge of the immanent and transcendent *(Paramātma)* are essential. Then, of what use is *sādhana* done through the body, composed of the Five Elements? Is it not enough if one acquires the *jñāna* of one's reality (*svasvarūpa*)? Simply because the rudder is essential, can we take it that the boat is unnecessary? How can we cross the river with the rudder alone? Believe that the Lord has conferred upon us the body as a boat to cross the sea of *saṁsāra*, and *citta* as the main thing in it. That is the first step in Vedanta. *Svasvarūpa jñāna* is the rudder really. But that alone is not sufficient. Physical habits and disciplines have also to be attended to. To attain the ethereal eternal stage, the disciplined body is important.

Sai Baba says: *Brahmavidya* does not make any distinction between male and female. *Brahmavidya* and *citta śuddhi* do not depend on sex at all. All who are ill have the right to the drug that cures. So too, all who have the illness of birth and

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[26] Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Praśnottara Vāhinī*. pp. 42-43.
[27] Sāmkhya system uses the metaphors of lame and the blind man in relation to Prakṛti and Puruṣa respectively.

death have the right to *brahmavidya*, the specific that will cure it. It may be that not all can afford to have access to that wonder drug; but you cannot argue that some have no right to it.[28]

A person following the *grihastha āśrama* also can attain liberation. He who earns money by lawful means, he who honours his guests, who serves and pleases his fellowmen, attains liberation along with those learned in the *śāstras* and those who are well established in the fundamental philosophy of the Spirit. No one can cross the ocean of birth and death because he is a *sanyāsi* or *brahmacāri*. High ancestry, attainments in asceticism, the status of a monk, profound scholarship—nothing will help, by itself. There must also be the faithful and steady pursuit of *svadharma*, the study of the scriptures, like the *Veda* or the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and a disciplined spiritual life of *japa* and *dhyāna*.

There are ten virtues which together comprise the basic *dharma* of the aspirants. They are compassion (*daya*), non-stealing (*asteya*), discrimination (*dhī*), spiritual knowledge (*vidya*), truth (*satya)*, control of senses (*indriyanigraha*), inner and outer cleanliness (*souca*), patience and fortitude (*kṣama*), steadfastness (*dhṛti*) and no anger (*akrodha*). All persons must cultivate these ten virtues irrespective of the *āśrama* to which they belong. They are enough to save us, wherever we are; and if one has not acquired them, his life is a waste, whatever is his *āśrama*. The daily routine of his life is the essential thing and it should reflect these ten qualities.

Lord Krishna told Arjuna: "The highest stage of liberation that is attained by *sāmkhya yogis* (those on path of knowledge)*, adepts at *jñāna* yoga, is also attained by those who are adepts at *niṣkāma karma yoga* (the path of renunciation of fruits of action*). Both yield the selfsame result. Know that this is the truth. There is no difference in this between the *grihastha* and the *sanyāsi*. What is needed is unremitting practice and sincere endeavour. This requires the renouncing of desire, the giving up of egoism and the sense of possession, even the discarding of active thinking and single-pointed contemplation of the *Brahma tattva*. For one who has achieved this, there is no grief, for there is no shade of ignorance. The wise man who has won this height can never be deluded by the false and the temporary. Even if at the last moment of his life one is able to realize this *jñāna*, he is certain to be liberated from the cycle of birth and death."[29]

The *ātman* is *sat*, *cit* and *ānanda*; these are its nature, if somehow it has to be indicated. This can be realized only by purifying the heart, mind and intellect of man. Persons, who have that purity, whatever their *varṇa* or *āśrama*, can attain *mokṣa*. When a person is beset by attachment to some and hatred towards

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[28] Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Praśnottara Vāhinī*. pp. 46-47.
[29] Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Praśnottara Vāhinī*. pp.56-57.

others even in the solitude of the jungle, he will meet only evil. Even if one is leading the *grihastha* life in the midst of the family, if he has achieved victory over the senses he is a real *tapasvi*. Engaged in *karma* that is not condemned, he is entitled to become a *jñāni*. For one who is unattached, the home is a hermitage. Then, even by means of progeny, of activity, of riches and of *yajña*, *yāga* and similar rituals, liberation can be achieved. What is wanted for liberation is just freedom from the impurity of attachment. Attachment is the bondage.[30]

Janaka, Asvapati, Dileepa—these are examples of persons who gained *mokṣa* as *grihasthas*. Whenever one gets detachment from objects, one can take *sannyāsa*. Unless such a chance is seized, man is bound to fall. Whatever may be the stage or *āśrama* we are in, when we get full renunciation, we can enter upon the *sannyāsa* stage from that very moment. There is no iron rule that we must live through the three earlier *āśramas* or stages. This too is the injunction of the *śruti*. The reason is: such a pure soul has undergone the training available in the other stages—the purification—in the crucible of life in previous births. His destructive tendencies have been rooted out and the progressive ones, the uplifting ones, have been developed in past births themselves.

The fact that a person has no inclination for the three *āśramas* and that he has no attachment or attraction towards them is a clear sign. If detachment has developed in the past birth, the inclination will be absent. Since the awareness that the *ātman* alone is real has dawned, the person is unattached to the three earlier stages of life. When renunciation has appeared, one can give up worldly life, even though the series have to be overstepped.

But the person who confers *sannyāsa* must examine fully and convince himself that the person on whom he is conferring it is devoid of sensual impulses and attachments. *Sannyāsa* should be given only to the one who has no agitation in the mind. The candidate too should examine himself and see whether his inner consciousness is free from the *guṇas*. If it is not so free, he will not only break the vows of *sannyāsa* and be outcast, but he may even break down under the burden and meet a calamitous end.[31]

There are three types of *sannyāsa*. They are *deha sannyāsa, mano sannyāsa* and *ātma sannyāsa*. *Deha sannyāsa* is *sannyāsa* in appearance, so far as the outer body is concerned. He wears the ochre robe, assumes the name, appears in the form, but, he has no awareness of the *ātman*. He wanders amidst all the objective desires clinging to external things. He is like ordinary men, for all intents and purposes.

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[30] Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Prasnottara Vāhinī . pp.58, 59.
[31] Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Praśnottara Vāhinī*. pp. 62-63.

In *mano sannyāsa*, he gives up all decisions and desires; He has the mind under strict control. He is not guided by impulses or agitations. He is ever calm and collected. In *ātma sannyāsa* he breaks through all thoughts about things that are unrelated to the *atman*, for he is ever immersed in the contemplation of the true reality, "*aham Brahmāsmi*." He is steady in the consciousness of his being *ātman*. His *ānanda* is continuous, *akhanda*. This is called *amrita sannyāsa*. The thickest darkness can be destroyed only by the light that emanates from the splendid solar orb; similarly, without the splendour of *ātma sannyāsa*, ignorance cannot be dispersed— the encasements that hide the heart cannot be shattered and the *ātman* cannot shine in its own glory.

Deha sannyāsa is attained by discrimination between the eternal and the temporary, the evanescent and the everlasting. *Mano sannyāsa* is reached by conquering the waywardness of speech, of the senses and of the mind. *Ātma sannyāsa* is won by filling oneself with the principles of *vedāntic* thought. When these educative influences become strong and we are well established in these virtues and attitudes, then we can get liberated as a result of the combined effect of these stages.

He who, like the bee sucks in silence and in great bliss the honey in the flower, who is intent on uninterruptedly tasting the nectar of *ātmic* bliss; who ignores this world as but a "scene," a *dṛṣya*; he indeed is the most fortunate. His life is the most worthwhile.[32]

Kinds of Mukti
Worship, with fixity of consciousness and purity of feeling and free of all extraneous thought, becomes itself *bhāvasamādhi*. As a result of this *bhāvasamādhi*, the Lord appears before the inner eye of the devotee, in the form which he has chosen for worship. The vision is not a matter of imagination; it is a 'face' experience. Without difference of location, he can abide in the presence of the Lord, in the self-same place. This is called *sālokyamukti*. Besides being always with the Lord, as in *sālokyamukti*, *bhaktas* realize all that they see as the glory of the Lord. The experience is referred to as *sāmīpyamukti*. Existing ever with the Lord, witnessing always the glory of the Lord, and becoming suffused with God-consciousness is *sārūpyamukti*. This is the final fruit of *bhakti śāstra*. But, at this stage, there is yet a trace of differential feeling, so the *advaita siddhānta* will not admit it as the highest. Simply because the *bhakta* has *sārūpya* or same *rūpa* as the Lord, we cannot take it that he has powers of creation, preservation and destruction, which the Lord possesses. It is only when all trace of difference disappears, and unity is attained that the highest stage is reached. This is what is called, *sāyujya*. This comes of divine grace, won by the essence of the *sādhana* of each; it cannot be claimed as the fruit of effort. The

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[32] Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Praśnottara Vāhinī*. pp. 64-65.

bhakta will aspire for this merging (*aikyam)*. He wishes to serve the Lord as he pleases and to experience the joy of the form which he has attributed to the Lord. But, the Lord out of His grace, gives him not only *sālokya, sāmīpya* and *sārūpya* but also, *sāyujya. Bhaktimārga* results also in the attainment of *brahmajñāna*. Even if the *bhakta* does not crave for it, the Lord Himself vouchsafes it to him. The *sāyujyamukti* is also referred to as *ekāntamukti*.[33]

Obstacles in the Path of MOKṢA

Even those who proceed along the path of spiritual progress towards the goal of *mokṣa* have big obstacles namely the past, the present and the future obstacles. Recollecting and remembering the past and getting affected by it is the obstacle from the past.

Obstacle from the present operates in four ways.

  i. Attending more to the peculiarities of textual criticism than the sense of the teaching, (*Viṣaya āsakti*).

  ii. Dullness of the intellect which prevents one from grasping the words of the elders and of the wise (*prajñamandyam*).

  iii. Crookedness (*kutarka*) and

  iv. Justifying one's own statement as correct, through an exaggerated conceit (*viprayayadurāgrāha*).

The future creates obstacles since we anticipate troubles and worry about them even before they come.[34] The *ariṣadvargas: kāma, krodha, lobha, moha, mada* and *mātsarya* are to be avoided. They are the obstacles in the path of one who seeks liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

There are certain other traits too called *ḍambha* and *darpa*. *Ḍambha* prompts people to do *yāga* and *yajña* (sacrifices)*,* to give away vast sums in charity, in order to win the applause of the world. *Darpa* is the pride that haunts man when he is rich and happy. The desire that others should get the grief, the misery and the worry, which one is suffering from is called *īrṣya*. This is different from *asūya. Asūya* means thinking always of doing evil to others; the preparedness to put up with any trouble in order to satisfy this desire to harm others. All these are called Inner Foes. So long as man is caught in this net of delusion spread by these Foes, the yearning for liberation will not dawn in his mind.[35]

Sai Baba mentions in his book *Jñāna Vāhinī* that there are four obstacles to be overcome in order to realize the *ātman*. They are *laya, Vikṣepa, kaṣaya* and *rasa asvādanam*.[36]

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[33] Charlene Leslie-Chaden, *A compendium of the teachings of Sri Sathya Sai Baba*. p.370.
[34] Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Praśnottara Vāhinī*. pp.30-31.
[35] Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Prasnottara Vāhinī* . pp.32-33.
[36] Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Jñāna Vāhinī* . p.3.

Sleep (*laya*)—when the mind withdraws from the external world, it enters into deep sleep or *suṣupti*, on account of the overpowering influence of *saṁsāra*. The *sādhaka* should arrest this tendency and attempt to fix the mind on to *ātmavicāra*, or the inquiry into the nature of the *ātman*. He must keep watch over the mind, so that he may keep awake. He must discover the circumstances that induce the drowsiness and remove them in time. He must start the process of *dhyāna*. The usual producer of drowsiness and sleep during *dhyāna* is indigestion. Overfeeding, exhaustion through too much of moving about, want of sufficient sleep at night, these too cause sleepiness and drowsiness. So it is advisable to sleep a little during noon, on those days when we wake up after a sleeplessness night, though generally all those who engage in *dhyāna* should avoid sleep during daytime. Practice the art of moderate eating. We can walk until we conquer drowsiness; but remember that we cannot plunge into *dhyāna*, immediately after we have warded off sleep.

Waywardness (*Vikṣepa*)—the mind seeks to run after external objects and so, constant effort is needed to turn it inwards, away from the attractions of sensory impressions. This has to be done through the rigorous exercise of the intellect, of inquiry. We must discriminate and get the conviction driven into that these are evanescent, temporary, transformable, liable to decay, and therefore, unreal (*mithya*). We must convince ourselves that what is sought after as pleasurable and avoided as painful are only the fleeting products of sensory contacts. We must train ourselves in this way to avoid the distractions of the external world and dive deep into *dhyāna*. *Vikṣepa* is the mental attitude, the urge to run back into the world from one's shelter. The removal of *Vikṣepa* alone will help the concentration of the mind in *dhyāna*.

Deep attachment (*kaṣaya*)- The mind is drawn with immense force by all the unconscious and subconscious impulses and instincts of passion and attachment towards the external world and its multitudinous attractions. It therefore experiences untold misery and might even get lost in its depths. This is the stage called *kaṣaya*.

The enjoyment of bliss (*rasa-āsvādanam*) - when *kaṣaya* and *vikṣepa* are overcome, one attains the *savikalpānanda*, the bliss of the highest subject-object contact. This stage is what is called *rasa-āsvādanam*. Even this is not the highest of the supreme bliss, which one does not attain or acquire, but simply becomes aware of. The *rasa*, or the sweetness of the subject-object *samādhi* is a temptation one has to avoid, for it is only the second best. It is enough joy to act as a handicap.

The joy is as great as that of a person who has just deposited a huge load he has been long carrying, or as that of a greedy person who has just killed a serpent guarding a vast treasure he wanted to grab. The killing of the serpent is *savikalpa samādhi*. The acquisition of the treasure, the *nirvikalpa samādhi*, is the highest stage.

Means for Attaining MOKṢA

Every person wants and desires that he should get *mokṣa*. We may say that liberation is synonymous with freedom. When we desire freedom, it implies that at the moment we are in some kind of bondage. Bondage is in our own family, in our own home, in which we are tied up and entangled. Sai Baba says, "Your own affection for your people is bondage. That is the chain which has bound you. This is what you may call affection with some kind of an attachment. When you are tied up with the chain, the chain of affection and attachment to the family, there are two ways by which you can free yourself from this chain. One way is to get the strength by which to break the chain. There is a second way and that is to make yourself tiny, smaller and smaller so that you can just slip and get out of the chain which is binding you."[37]

With the exception of these two alternatives, if we want to reach freedom and if we want to get out of the chain, there is no way of doing it. These two can be described as the devotional path *(bhaktimārga)*, and the path of knowledge *(jñānamārga)*. *Bhakti* means we recognize that there is a master that we have to put ourselves in a humble position and be subservient to the master. We also recognize that our conduct should be such that we please Him and get His grace. This is referred to as an attitude of behaviour that, by implication, proclaims, "I am your servant." When we are bound by a chain, within that chain if we can tell ourselves *dāsoham, dāsoham*, that means we are humble, we are developing humility, our ego is becoming less and less. It shrinks us so much as our humility grows that we can slip and get out of the chain.

The other path, which is the path of knowledge, is the way of getting out of the chain by telling ourselves *śivoham, śivoham*; I am Siva, I am Siva—that means we are expanding, becoming bigger, finally we become so big that we can break the chain and get out. So, to break the chain and free ourselves is the path of knowledge and the other is the path of devotion.

Hinduism speaks of many different means or paths to reach God. Of them, three are considered major paths: *karma-yoga*—the path of action, *bhakti yoga*—the path of devotion and *jñāna-yoga*—the path of knowledge. What is distinctive about Hinduism is the amount of attention it has devoted to identifying basic

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[37] Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Summer Showers*, 1972. p. 83.

spiritual personality types and the disciplines that are most likely to work for each. The result is a recognition pervading the entire religion, that there are multiple paths to Truth.

Karma Yoga

The *karma yogi* adopts the path of establishing union with God-head by elevating and sublimating acts. We meet in the world many who seem to have been born, just to accomplish one particular mission or project. Their intellect is not satisfied with mere imagination or planning. Their minds will be full of actual concrete achievements which they yearn to realize. Everyone in the world is seen engaged in some activity or other, all the time. Yet, very few know the significance and worth of *karma. Karma Yoga* teaches man the awareness of this significance and guides him along to achieve the maximum benefit out of the activity. Where, when and how *karma* has to be done, how spiritual urges can reinforce strength of mind in the performance of *karma*, and how *karma* is to be taken up so that spiritual development can result are learnt here.

In this context it may be pointed out that *karma yoga* involves too much physical strain. But, basically, it is the company that one keeps, decides the strain and the stress that the mind and the body of man are subjected to. "I like very much to engage myself only in this task"; "I sought only to do good to him, but, he ignored my desire and tried to injure me"; these are the usual causes for the strain and stress mentioned above. Such disappointment makes one lose interest in activity. It wants to do good and it seeks to do good to someone in some way, hoping to derive joy there from and distribute joy. When such joy does not arise, despair sets in. But, without getting attached, without being aware as to whom the *karma* helps or how, the lesson that *karma yoga* teaches is—do *karma*, as *karma*, for the sake of *karma*. The real nature of a *karma yogi* is to fill his hands with work. He feels that he is happy, while doing work. He does not think of results; he is not urged by any calculations. He gives, but never receives. He knows no grief, no disappointment; for he has not hoped for any benefit.

Bhakti Yoga

Bhakti Yoga is congenial for those who are emotionally oriented. It is the path for those capable of filling their hearts with Love. The urge is to have God as the Beloved. The activities here will be different, for they relate to incense-burning, gathering flowers for worship, building shrines and temples where one could install and adore symbols of Beauty, Wisdom and Power.

The great saints and sages; spiritual leaders and guides throughout the world have emerged just from this devotional and dedicatory stage of spiritual endeavour. Some tried to imagine God as formless, and described worship of God through various such acts as blasphemy, tried to suppress the *bhakti* cults and in the process, they slighted the reality and its power and majesty. The

belief that God cannot be symbolized in a form is an evidence of blindness; the charge that such worship is barren is a hollow charge. The history of the world is the witness to the efficacy of *bhakti*. It is not proper to ridicule these activities, ceremonials and rituals and the descriptions of the lives of *sādhakas* who adhered to them in order to earn union with divinity. Let those who yearn after the joys of worshipping the form do so; certainly, it will be a sin to shatter their faith and treat it as in fructuous.

The glory of the great heroes of the spirit, those who have scaled the highest peaks of realization, and those who attained spiritual fulfillment is exercising immense influence on the mind of mankind. It is as a result of a long line of such seers that the spiritual message of India has attracted the attention of all nations. If India has been able to earn the reverence of the world, the reason has to be sought in the precious treasure that they have earned and preserved. Here, love of God and fear of sin have been the chief pillars of life and the everlasting guides for living. India has won a name for being a holy land, a land steeped in renunciation and in spiritual *sādhanas* aimed at union with the Absolute, renowned for *tyāga* and *yoga*. The urges that this culture encouraged were all directed to the conquest of the vagaries of the mind.

The *Bhakti Yoga* teaches the path of Love without any expectations. Love all; love all as we love ourselves. No harm can come to us then. It will only spread joy and happiness to all. God is present in all beings as love. So Love is directed to and accepted by, not the individual but by God who is resident there. The seeker of God who relies on the path of devotion and dedication soon becomes aware of this fact.

Some love God as the mother, some others as the father, and some love God as their dearest friend. There are others who regard God as the most beloved, the only desired goal. They all endeavour to merge their Love with the Ocean of Love that God is. Wherever Love is evident, take it that it is God's own Love. God is the greatest Lover of mankind. Therefore, when any one decides to serve man whom He loves, God showers Grace in plenty. When the human heart melts at the suffering of others and expands as a result of that sympathy, believe that God is present there. That is the sign of the validity of the path of devotion, the *bhakti yoga*.

Jñāna Yoga
Jñāna Yoga is mostly devoted to the attainment of knowledge. This Universe or Cosmos that we cognize as outside ourselves can be explained by means of various theories of knowledge, but, none of them can be convincing to the uninitiated. The *jñāna yogi* weaves many such theories and hypotheses. He is not convinced of the reality of any material object in the Universe, or of any activity or even of anyone else who propounds any other explanation. He

believes that he should transcend the daily chores of life and not be bound by social or other obligations. In the vast Ocean of *sat*, all objects are but drops, in his view. They are all struggling to move from the circumference to the centre, from which they manifested through *māya*. The *jñāna yogi* too yearns to merge in the centre, the core of Reality, away from the tangle of apparent diversity. He exerts himself to become the Truth, not only to become aware of it. Of course, as soon as he is aware of it, he becomes it. He cannot tolerate the thought that he and Truth are separate and distinct.

The Divine is his only kith and kin. He knows none other. He does not entertain any other urge, any other attachment, any other desire. God is all in all. He cannot be affected by grief or joy, failure or success. He sees and experiences only one unbroken, unchallenged stream of bliss-consciousness. For the person who is firmly established in this state, the world and its ups and downs appear trivial and illusory. In order to stay in that consciousness, he has to counter the pulls of the senses and face the fascinations of the world without any agitation of mind.

The *jñāna yogi* is vigilant against the temptations held before him by his senses, and turning them aside; he approaches the Divine and seeks strength and solace there. He realizes that the power and energy that vitalize the tiniest of the tiny and the vastest of the vast is the same Divine Principle. His actions, thoughts, and words reveal this vision he has experienced. This is the Supra-vision (*Pāramārtha dṛṣṭi*). It sees all elements—the earth, fire, water, air and ether—as the Divine itself and all beings—man, beast, bird, and worm—as emanations from God and therefore fully Divine. http://askbaba.helloyou.ch/sathyasaivahini/sathya050.html.

One fact has to be noted here. If a person has this knowledge of the immanence of the Divine, and even of its transcendence, he cannot be honoured as a *jñāni*. For, the knowledge has to be digested through actual experience. This is the crucial test. It is not enough if the intellect nods approval and is able to prove that God-head is all. The belief must penetrate and prompt every moment of living and every act of the believer. *Jñāna* should not be merely a bundle of thoughts or a packet of neatly constructed principles. The faith must enliven and motivate every thought, word and deed. The self must be soaked in the nectar of the *Jñāna*. The intellect is a poor instrument. For, what the intellect approves as correct today is tomorrow rejected by the same intellect on second thoughts. Intellect cannot judge things finally and for all time. Therefore, seek for the experience. Once that is won, the *ātman* can be understood 'as all this'. That is the *jñāna yoga*.

The Paths for MOKṢA are Complimentary

According to Satya Sai Baba all these various means of realization are complimentary and not contradictory. If man lives properly as a human being it will be occasionally possible for him to turn towards the divine, but if man does not live as man, it will not be possible for him to even occasionally think of the divine. It is only when man makes an attempt to know who he is, can he understand the divine. Only then is there a chance for him to enter the *ātman* and enjoy bliss and happiness. It is in the context of this daily living that the great *ācāryas*, Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Madhva have given their philosophical expositions.

Śaṅkara established and expounded that whatever we see around us in the world is simply a manifestation of *Īśvara*. He has been proclaiming that whether in the aspect of the *Jīva* or in the aspect of the Lord or in the aspect of material creation, everything is one and the same and there is no second. In all the three aspects, *Jīva*, *Īśvara* and *Prakṛti* and all the things that we see around us, what is present is the *Paramātman* and appearances are an illusion. A coconut appears to us as one single fruit, yet it has three distinct parts, the fiber on the outside, the shell as a cover beneath it and the coconut inside. In the same manner, Śaṅkara regarded *Jīva*, *Īśvara* and *Prakṛti* as three aspects, though apparently different, in reality as one and the same and thus he preached *Advaita*. The world consists of several ideas; there are many things that we see, there are many desires on the material side and this was treated by Śaṅkara as analogous to the outer fiber of the coconut. He further compared the human body to the shell below the fiber of the coconut. He realized that the human body was made of destructible items like flesh and blood and so he compared it to the shell. But the *Paramātman* which has the form of a Lotus in each individual has been compared to the coconut. By comparing this triple aspect of *Jīva*, *Īśvara* and *Prakṛti* to these three constituents of the coconut, Śaṅkara preached the philosophy of *Advaita*. Because he was saying that everything in the world consists of only Brahman, the ordinary people were somewhat confused and they were not able to clearly grasp the basis of *Advaita*. In addition, he explained the *Mahāvākyas,* such as, '*Tattvamasĺ*, That art Thou, '*Aham Brahmāsmi*', I am Brahman, and in fact in all that he preached, in terms of all that one sees in this world is Brahman. There was some difficulty for ordinary people to comprehend what Śaṅkara was saying. People find it quite easy to utter the various words but they find it difficult to put what they say into practice. It is easy to mentally identify oneself with Brahman but to be able to really feel and practice that identity and to realize divinity in everyone is a difficult matter. By merely uttering such statements without understanding the true meaning, human nature is likely to deteriorate.

Realizing this, Rāmānuja with a view to arrest such deterioration, expounded what is called qualified *Advaita* or *Viśiṣṭa Advaita*. He gave it some distinctiveness, and by giving this distinctiveness, he was trying to explain *Jīva*

and Brahman as apparently separate entities, as in part and whole. While Śaṅkara explained and propounded that *Jīva* and Brahman were identical with each other, Rāmānuja introduced a specialty and he preached that *Jīva* and Brahman were close to each other and similar to each other, but were not really identical. In this context and in accordance with such teachings, men tried to go closer and closer to the Lord.

Later Madhvācārya propounded that *Jīva*, *Brahman* and *Prakṛti* were more distinct than what has been thought by earlier schools. He said that *Jīva* and *Īśvara* are to be regarded as distinct and separate from each other and that they cannot even be close to each other. Madhva opposed and contradicted the view of Śaṅkara according to which *Brahman* was truth and the world was false and asserted that *Brahman*, *Jīva* and *Prakṛti* were distinct and that each one of them was as real as the other two.

This means that Śaṅkara was propounding *sāyujya* or identity with the Lord while Rāmānuja was speaking in terms of *sāmīpya* or closeness to the Lord and Madhva was preaching in terms of *sālokya* or living in the domain of the Lord. In this way these three *Acāryas* have been telling us about the three paths for the realization of truth, namely the *jñāna yoga*, the *bhakti yoga* and the *karma yoga*. One should not think that these three paths are contradicting one another.

Satya Sai describes *Advaita Vedanta*, the philosophy of non-dualism, as the ultimate truth, but teaches a more integral approach, integrating other *yoga* paths such as *karma yoga* and *bhakti yoga* as well. Sai Baba uses each of His skills to educate the spiritually-ignorant on the need to acquire knowledge of the divine for enhancing their intellects, which He believes would produce wisdom, which in turn would lead to devotion. Of course, pure devotion results in nothing but pure joy and feeling of oneness with the Supreme Self. Baba is extremely successful in building strong bonds between individuals of different faiths and beliefs. His philosophy is to make everyone aware of their own inner divinity. He never imposes restrictions on what ought to be done.

According to Baba when one looks at the philosophies expounded by these *ācāryas* in a superficial manner they appear distinct and different from each other. But when examined in detail and in the context of the time at which they were propounded one can realize that they are not different in essence and in the basic content. The right attitude is to see the unity among these three aspects and not regard them as distinct and different from each other. We shall have to take the essence and the inner meaning of all these and appreciate the unity in them. Śaṅkara always taught pure and undiluted *Advaita* and even he, in the four centres he established, encouraged *upāsana* and this practice is continued even today. The people in charge there accept and participate in offerings to the Lord. By such offering and *pūja*, devotees have been attempting

to get the grace of the Lord, even in these centres of *Advaita*. Not only is there a meaning in performing such *upāsanas*, they want common people to do the same thing in their lives by looking at these good examples. This is the purpose of participating in *upāsana*.

There are two kinds of people—the *Jñānis* and ordinary people. The ordinary people can do the right thing by looking at and imitating the path followed by the *Jñānis*. It is only in the aspect of the body, mind and the daily life that these three philosophies—*Dvaita, Advaita* and *Viśiṣṭādvaita*—were being taught. From the point of view of the body, the path of *Karma* or work was taught. From the point of view of the mind, the path of *Bhakti* or devotion was taught. From the point of view of one's own daily life, the path of wisdom or *Jñāna* was taught and therefore in order to enable the person to practice these, Śaṅkara, Madhva and Rāmānuja taught the three paths which can be called the royal paths for humanity to attain salvation. One must recognize and see the common purpose in and the essence of these three approaches. It is not right to see only the differences and contradictions between each other.

If we follow the pure non-dualistic path taught by Śaṅkara and regard everything in the world as Brahman, then we have to ask ourselves what is it that we are able to see in the ordinary human life. Only when we take the other approaches, will we be able to understand the human aspects of divinity. It is only in a superficial view that these paths are different but from the point of view of the destination, these three are one and the same. It is necessary for us to accept the *upāsana* or the work aspect having this common goal in mind. While recognizing the importance of the *karma yoga* and involving ourselves in the necessary duties that we have to perform, we should also realize the importance of the *bhakti yoga* and know that we can reach the Lord by the path of devotion.

Baba says that without inner cleanliness, whatever work one might do, will become useless and it will not yield any results. What Śaṅkara taught was that we should have *bhakti* or devotion towards the Lord in view of the temporary and transient nature of the world. In this material world, some kinds of desires and diseases relating to the senses are natural and they appear in human beings. In order to cure these diseases it is necessary to take the appropriate medicine. One must recognize and see the common purpose and the essence of these three approaches. It is not right to see only the differences and contradictions between each other. It is only in a superficial view that these paths are different but from the point of view of the destination, these three are one and the same.

A piece of candy has sweetness, weight and shape; the three cannot be separated, one from the other. Each little part of it has sweetness, weight and shape. We do not find shape in one part, weight in another and sweetness in a

third. And when it is placed on the tongue taste is recognized, weight is lessened and shape is modified, all at the same time. Therefore, each individual deed must be full of the spirit of *seva*, of *prema* and of *jñāna*. In other words, each group of life's activities must be saturated with *karma*, *bhakti* and *jñāna*. Factually, the Supreme Personality of God-head is the original source of all self-realization. Consequently, the goal of all auspicious activities - *karma*, *bhakti* and *jñāna*—is the Supreme Personality of God-head.

Generally, people are working to get some desired result for sense gratification. Everyone is working to get some money, and money is used to satisfy the senses. But, out of many millions of such fruit oriented workers, one may become a *jñāni*. When man becomes frustrated by working hard and tasting all the results of *karma*, and when he is still not satisfied, then he comes to the platform of knowledge. Knowledge is characterized by inquiry - "Who am I? Why am I frustrated? Why am I confused? What is my real position?" That is the platform of knowledge. Out of many thousands of such persons who have attained to this platform of knowledge, one who has actually understood what is the position of the living entities is called liberated. And out of many thousands of such liberated persons, hardly one can understand who the Lord is.

Pure devotional activities are of one variety only. These devotional activities should be coordinated with our daily, active life. Coordinating such devotional activities with our daily activities is technically known as *karma yoga*. The same devotional activities when mixed with the culture of knowledge are technically called *jñāna yoga*. But when such devotional activities transcend the limits of all such work or mental knowledge, this state of affairs is called pure transcendental devotion, or *bhakti yoga*.

The liberation of the *bhakta*, therefore, which is called not just *mukti* but *vimukti*, surpasses the other kinds of liberation - *sāyujya*, *sārūpya*, *sālokya* and *sāmīpya*. A pure devotee always engages in pure service. Taking birth in the upper planetary system as a demigod is a chance to become a further purified devotee and go back home, back to God-head. Ultimately there is only one way to attain the true liberation known as *vimukti*, and that is by satisfying the Supreme Personality of God-head.

Baba says: Man's feelings and activities move along three paths namely *bhakti, karma* and *jñāna*. The first type does everything in a dedicatory spirit of worship, which promote purity and goodness. The second type does actions which are service-oriented, either towards the individual, or the society or the nation. They derive joy through such activity and realize their life-goals there from. They feel that activity is the purpose of living, its justification, its goal. The third type is moved by the spirit of inquiry into the basic principles governing life and nature, or as *Vedānta* states, into the *tattva. Tattva* is a word of two *syllables---tat* and

tva. Tattva means the highest and the fullest knowledge. The rays of the sun fall upon things, both clean and dirty; they illumine good things and bad. But they are not affected by them in the least. So too, the *'tat'* is unaffected by the consequences of *karma* or the ups and downs of life. It is the serene witness of the *viṣaya,* the observer of objective Nature. *Tat* is *ātman. Tvam* is the ever-changing, ever-affected, nature. *Tat* is *ātman. Tvam is an-ātman.* The rational type finds joy in analyzing and discovering the *ātman,* discarding the *anātman.* Surprisingly the term 'rational' has taken on contrary and crooked meanings. Its proper objective is the *ātmic* investigation for which man is endowed with the reasoning faculty.

These three types are actually three strands intertwined into one rope. They cannot be untwined. A house is built of brick, mortar and wood. So too, for the mansion called human life, *bhakti, karma* and *jñāna* are essential, just as heart, hand and head. For spiritual success one should possess the heart of Buddha, the hands of Emperor Janaka and the head of Śaṅkarācārya. The three together in one, form the Love of God.[38]

Sai Baba says that in order to reach this highest truth, one should not think that one is separate from God. One should always think "God is with me. He is inside me. He is around me. He is above me. All that there is, is God. I, myself, am God. I am the infinite. I am the eternal. I am not two. I am one, only one. There is no one else besides me. I and God are one and the same." That is called self-confidence; it is the confidence that we are *ātman*, the one Self. We develop self-confidence by thinking all the time "God is doing everything, without God we cannot be." When we realise that God is not outside and separate from us then we gain self-confidence. Then there is love, there is peace, there is truth, there is God. So, first there must be self-confidence and love of God. What are we thinking about now? We are thinking about the body, but the body is just a water bubble. The body is just a dress, only a dress.

Sai Baba, often declares that the vision of non-duality is the highest wisdom (*advaita darśanam jñānam*). The ancient seers, sages and *ṛṣis* of the Upaniṣadic times, like Yājñyavalkya, Aṣṭāvakra, Vaśiṣṭha, Gauḍapāda, etc., were all such men of highest wisdom. We use the term "*jñānī*", generally referring to a man of wisdom, in several ways, and with different connotations, which do not truly convey the grandeur and the glory of the exalted one, who has realized the state of Non-Dualism. For, it is only when one has the realization of the *ātman*, "the One without a Second" that one can be truly be termed a *jñāni* and a sage. It is quite difficult to express in words, this pure non-dualistic state, which is beyond words, nay, beyond sound itself. It is in the *nirvikalpa samādhi*, the highest level

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[38] Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Sathya Sai Speaks*. Vol.15, p.60.

of *samādhi* (state of divine merger), that such a one, reposes, and symbolizes, true "Love" as spoken about by Sai Baba.

Studying the mango is not the same as eating and enjoying it. Sri Ramana Maharishi, the great *jñāni* of modern times, asked every seeker who came to him, to probe into the "Who Am I?" principle. The process of negation, of "Not This-Not this" (*neti-neti*) principle, is the direct approach in *jñāna yoga*, and the individual discards all that is ephemeral, transient and changing, by realizing that he is not the body, the mind, the organs, etc., to arrive at the eternal Truth. Sai Baba puts this one basic question, in the form of 3 questions, for the benefit of the novice. He says "A *jñāni* is one who has found the answer to the 3 basic questions: "Where do I come from?, Who Am I? and Where do I go?"- The answer also is provided by Him for our benefit: "I come from the *ātman*! I am the *ātman*! and, I go back to the *ātman*!". "The *ātman*", He says -"is One", and therefore going and coming of the *ātman* does not arise! This is the Absolute Being or Existence, the non- dual state, not bound by time, space, cause and effect - The *sat cit ānanda (saccidānanda)*. This then is the Blissful state of a true *jñāni*. Sai Baba says, Love is God. This Love is none other than the *saccidānanda* nature of the *ātman*. The easiest way is to see God in all. Baba says "Brahman is *saccidānanda* while *māya* is *saccidānanda* plus Name and Form." The *Advaitist* rises above this limitation of Name and Form, to realize the pure *saccidānanda* aspect i.e. the Brahman. One way to overcome this limitation caused by Name and Form, is for the seeker, to try and visualize His chosen deity's name and form in all that he perceives, as all names and forms finally merge in the same lord, He being the Master of *māya* and hence, of all names and forms. This way the senses are purified, controlled and sublimated.

This individuality is the great *māya*, to which man clings consciously or unconsciously, while vending his way towards Truth through the process of self- purification. It is important to emphasize here that, the seeker, if not advanced or mature spiritually, will be afraid to lose his identity, and thus fail to plumb the very depths of his soul. For Example, observing the 'not-this', 'not-this' principle, of 'I am not the body', 'I am not the mind', etc. with the fearful thought and imagination of becoming 'void' or 'nothingness'. This basic fear of man towards dissolution of ego, is what makes him cling to duality and hence ignorance. Man is bound basically by eight types of pride and ego, says Sai Baba. The ego, on its part is therefore very tricky. Along with the connivance of the mind, they enact and play a thousand tricks, to keep themselves alive, and the individual succumbs to these tricks, in moments of weakness and inadvertence. For, the ego wants to keep itself alive. Death of the ego is nothing short of Liberation/Immortality. This is what is meant when He says: Love is selflessness.

Service as spiritual practice is a very powerful tool, but this should result in purification of the mind and the intellect, and the sense of doer-ship on the part of the *jīva* has to be erased. The one who serves; the one who is served and the act of serving—should become One, for complete fulfillment, or freedom from illusion. This way, the individual enters the final state of Consciousness or *samādhi* where there is perfect equanimity and perfect peace.

The individual seeker, therefore needs to question at every stage - "Who is it that enjoys?", "Who is it that suffers?", "Who is it that serves?" etc. This is the inner quest and the constant enquiry that has to be done perpetually and persistently by the seeker.

Sai Baba says the path of devotion is easier, though slower. This only shows what great treasures are in store for one who is not afraid—for this *ātman* cannot be realized by the weak but by the brave, is the true scriptural statement. It takes great courage on the part of the sincere seeker, a courage that comes only with positive qualities of deep devotion, faith, selfless action, surrender, self-introspection, and self-purification, to delve deep within, in order to arrive at the Truth. Sai Baba says, "The winds of Grace are ever flowing, but the boat sails need to be unfurled". One great quality of the man of wisdom therefore, is his state of utter fearlessness. Baba says "I bring you close to Me, so that your thoughts and mind are centered around Me, and your story becomes My Story! But My Story is to make you story-less!"

This is the glorious ideal of the state of oneness, the vision of the non-duality, which every individual has to someday or the other finally realize, through Divine Grace! Love cannot exist if there is a feeling of duality. *Ekātma Prema* (non-dual love) is true love. Give and take relationship does not reflect the true spirit of love. One should keep giving and giving, without expecting anything in return. That is true love. To retreat in times of difficulty is the sign of selfish love. *yathārtha prema* (true love) will reign supreme only when we give up *svārtha* (selfishness) and strive for *parārtha* (welfare of others). We should know the difference between *padārtha* (matter) and *yathārtha* (reality). Reality transcends matter. Verily all this is *Brahman* (*sarvaṃ khalvidaṃ Brahma*). We must consider everything as divine and treat the dualities of life such as pain and pleasure, loss and gain with equanimity. We should remain unaffected by happiness and sorrow, gain and loss, victory and defeat (*sukhadukhe samekṛtvā lābhālābhau jayājayau*)[39]. We must never be carried away by the vagaries of the mind. When we follow the mind, we see only matter, but not the reality. Mind is related to matter. We should not have anything to do with matter. When we associate

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[39] *Bhagavad Gītā* 2:38

ourselves with the mind, we can never visualize unity. We cannot develop true love and devotion unless we give up duality.

Baba says: Understand that the same principle of love exists in you and others. A true devotee is one who understands the principle of unity and acts accordingly. Non-dualism is true devotion. Share your love with others without any expectation. Love everybody only for the sake of love. When you extend your love to others', you can attain the state of non-dualism. The love that you experience at physical and worldly plane day in and day out is not true love at all! True love is that which is focused on one form, one path and one goal. It is a great mistake to divide love and divert it in different directions. Love is God. God is love. Live in love. Only then can you realize the principle of oneness and attain fulfillment in life. You may choose any name you like, but you should call Him with all love. Love is most sacred, sweet and non-dual. It is a great mistake to divide such love and associate it with multiplicity. Your love should remain steady in pleasure and pain. Love and devotion do not give any scope for differences. All differences are the making of your mind. Develop the feeling of oneness that you and I are one. Never think that you and I are different. That is the sign of true devotion.

The letter 'I' stands for oneness. 'You' (individual identity) will not exist when you develop purity and experience oneness with divinity. Hence, give up dualistic feeling. The principle of oneness has to be experienced through love. It cannot be explained in words. But you have not understood the true meaning of love. You are interpreting it in the physical and worldly sense. Consequently, your love is never steady. It keeps changing every now and then. Love should not be tainted with body attachment. Body is made up of matter. All that is related to matter will never give you peace and happiness. Hence, transcend the matter and see the reality. Develop *ekātma bhāva* (feeling of oneness). All are one, be alike to everyone. It is a big mistake to attribute worldly feelings to love. There is no scope for dualism in love.

Your names and forms are different but the principle of love is the same in all of you. That is why I address you as the "embodiments of love". Love is always one, it should not be divided. Consider God as one and love Him wholeheartedly. Such one-pointed love towards God can be termed as true devotion. Devotees like Jayadeva, Gauranga and Eknath developed such divine love and sanctified their lives. Likewise, Mira and Sakhubai had unwavering love and devotion towards God. They did not worship various names and forms. They followed one path. They installed one name and one form in their heart and contemplated on their chosen deity incessantly. Those who are dual-minded and change their path every now and then are bound to ruin their lives. Hence, never be dual-minded. Experience divinity with *ekātma bhāva*. You may choose any name you like

Rāma, Krishna, Īśvara, etc., and contemplate on the form. You will certainly reach the goal of life. Lead your life with your mind always focused on the goal.[40]

Sai Baba says that the three schools of Vedanta philosophy are integrated. One is a constituent of the other and one leads to the other. Take for example, sugarcane. You find juice in the sugarcane. Here, there is pulp and juice. This is the state of dualism. Now, you can extract juice separating the pulp from the sugarcane. The juice, though very important and the very essence drawn out of the sugarcane, does not stay long or cannot be preserved for long. This state of obtaining the juice, separating the pulp from the sugarcane is the state of qualified non-dualism. This juice is purified, refined and processed into sugar and sugar remains the same forever. This is the state of non-dualism. You can make use of sugar in any way you like.[41]

One should have a mental image of a form of God, fully developed, with one's mind poured into that form. When the image of God is seen outside, it is qualified dualism. When seen in the mind it is qualified monism. When the form is absorbed into the *ātman,* that is nothing but *Advaita* or non-dualism. The two preliminary steps are not separate stages; they are contained in *Advaita*, as buttermilk and butter are contained in milk. The image of God seen outside should be taken into the mind and then into the soul.[42]

The goal of life is to be liberated from the feeling that we are separate from God. We should have the conviction that 'God and I are one and the same' that 'this world is but an illusion and only God exists'. To develop this feeling or state of the mind, Baba emphasizes the need to intensify our Love for God. Worldly knowledge cannot help us reach this goal. According to him, all one needs to do is to:

> "Follow the Master,
> Face the Devil,
> Fight to the End
> and Finish the Game!"

Follow the Master*:* the Master is *dharma*. One must lead a righteous life, a life filled with Human Values. Face the Devil: One needs to avoid falling prey to the temptations that come our way when we try and earn money. Fight to the End: One must fight off *kāma* or desires. For desires and attachments ultimately bring

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[40]Sri Sathya Sai Baba, *Sathya Sai Speaks*. Vol.38, p.98.
[41] Heart2Heart Journals. *Satyopaniṣad* 14
[42] Heart2Heart Journals. Vol 4. *Conversations with Sai* –Part 17.

grief. Finish the Game: One must attain the feeling of Oneness with the Lord and Liberation from ignorance.

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FREEDOM IN THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ: AN ANALYSIS OF BUDDHI AND SATTVA CATEGORIES

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Abstract

In this paper, I attempt to clarify the idea of freedom in the Gītā using two important categories found both in the Gītā as well as in the Sāṃkhya philosophical system—Buddhi and Sattva. Much of the liberation idea that is often spoken of in the context of many modern Hindu movements is drawn from the Bhagavad Gītā. There is so much looseness to their ideas that it is necessary to explore what the Gītā actually means by its notion of freedom. Additionally, Gītā is often presented espousing one of three paths to liberation—knowledge, ritual action and devotion. But what actually does Gītā subscribe to is something that needs careful scholarly analysis. The purpose of this paper is to critically analyze the Gītā notion of liberation vis à vis its core concepts of Buddhi and Sattva.

Key words: Gita, Samkhya, Buddhi, Sattva, Karma, Yoga, Freedom, Liberation, Vedanta, Upanishad.

Introduction

The Bhagavad Gītā, of the many Hindu sacred texts, occupies a singularly significant place among both Hindus as well as among the Western intellectual community. The West came to know of the text first through the translation of it by Charles Wilkins in 1775 into English and thereafter scores of translations became available in many European languages. Exactly a hundred years later in 1885 Edwin Arnold rendered the text into poetic version and titled it 'the Song Celestial'. Incidentally it was this translation of the Gītā that Gandhi (Koppendrayer 2002) is said to have read and became influenced by its philosophical simplicity and beauty and used it as a daily guide. In the late nineteenth century the text became an important tool in the struggle for freedom deployed by many reformers and political commentators and activists, the most significant among them being Bal Gangadhar Tilak (Brown 1958) and Aurobindo Ghosh (1970). While Tilak produced a commentary (*Gītārahasya*) of political activism playing on its philosophy of Karma, Aurobindo produced a commentary on it with an emphasis on transcendentalism.[43] Many Western intellectuals such as Tolstoy, Robert Oppenheimer were deeply affected by the text. Oppenheimer is said to have become so deeply affected by its philosophy of Karma as detached action, that he is claimed to have defended his scientific activities in

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[43] For a substantial comment on the influence that Gītā had on various Indian intellectuals, see. Kosambi 1961.

producing the atomic bomb through what he believed as Gītā's philosophy to perform one's duty without regard to its effects. (Hijiya 2000)

The Gītā, of course, first has to be understood as part of its traditional place within the corpus of Hindu sacred texts. It stands as a part of the epic text known as the Mahābhārata. It is a philosophical dialogue between the warrior hero Arjuna and his mentor and friend, Krishna on the eve of the war between the feuding cousins, the Pandavas and the Kauravas in which the former were considered the heroes being led by Arjuna, and the latter led by Duryodhana were considered the villains. Whether or not the Gītā was originally part of the epic text has been debated in Western scholarship. Reviewing the translation of Nārāyanīya Parvan of the Mahābhārata by Anne-Marie Esnoul, Carlo Coppola makes reference to the idea that Nārāyanīya Parvan was a later interpolation into the Mahābhārata than the Gītā. (Coppola1981: 171) However, van Buitenen (1968) argued, in general agreement with the traditional Indian scholarly position that it does belong to the epic text as an organic whole. Be that as it may, for my purpose here it is a secondary issue. The key issue that needs to be clarified at this stage is that it belongs to the epic tradition and hence belongs to what is distinguished as Smṛti part of the sacred texts of the Hindus. The Hindu texts as we know are separated as Śruti, meaning those that are revealed and hence occupy higher position, and the Smṛti texts which are generally attributed to the human authorship. The key issue, therefore, is that the Gītā being part of the corpus of texts that are attributed to human agency in fact occupies the position of the Śruti texts. In traditional context, the Gītā is also called Gitopaniṣad, thereby alluding to its position being on a par with those of the Upaniṣadic texts which are placed in the category of Śruti. When and how this elevation of the Gītā to the position of Śruti occurred is hard to speculate. But certainly by the time of Śaṅkara (Ninth Century C.E.) we are able to say that it has already been elevated to this extraordinary status. van Buitenen (1965: 109) says, "[T]he very fact that Śaṅkara felt impelled to comment on the Gītā, a text far from congenial to his central doctrines, should sufficiently show in how high an esteem the Gītā was held as a quasi-philosophical, moralistic and religious discourse." Right at the beginning of his commentary on the Gītā in his introduction, Śaṅkara alludes to the fact that the text had been commented upon before him by a number of commentators. Arvind Sharma points out that Anugītā, perhaps composed around third century C.E., may have been the first commentary on the Gītā. (Sharma 1978: 262) It is therefore understandable that Śaṅkara reinforces its status by placing along side the two other corpus of texts that enjoyed the higher status, viz., Bādarāyaṇa's Brahma Sūtras and the Upaniṣads. Thus, together with the Brahma Sūtras and the Upaniṣadic texts, the Gītā is declared as part of the triad that needed to be commented upon if a traditional scholar wanted to engage in Vedānta philosophical debates and establish one's own position on it. Śaṅkara was probably following an established tradition in recognizing the Gītā as being on a par with the texts that are

classified under the Śruti category. However, he certainly must be credited for being the first known traditional scholar who commented on the three texts in an attempt to develop his particular view of Vedānta that has come to be identified as non-dual philosophy. Ever since Śaṅkara, every major and minor Vedānta scholar who came afterwards had to comment on the triad. Thus, it would be safe to say that the establishment of the triad for the proper understanding of the Vedānta philosophy was achieved first by Śaṅkara without a doubt. As per the Gītā, Śaṅkara's commentary is the only extant one before others, such as Rāmānuja, followed him, unless we accept Anugītā as its first known commentary, as Sharma (1978) argues.

What perhaps makes the Gītā specially suitable to be in such a distinguished position is that it takes the same content that is discussed in the Brahma Sūtras and the Upaniṣads about the nature of Self/Brahman, the individual and the world and presents it in a dialogical format with its own emphasis on the idea of Karma as action without attachment to the fruits of it. It is here, it makes a special connection with the Pūrva Mīmāṁsā philosophical tradition and hence with the old ritual tradition of the Vedas[44]. It is perhaps this fundamental reinterpretation of the ancient ritual tradition as action without attachment to the consequent fruits that might give the Gītā its unique place in the exposition of the Vedānta philosophy. Additionally, in its method unlike the Upaniṣadic texts that contain often several different dialogues between several different characters, the Gītā is a single and continuous dialogue from the beginning to the end. Nevertheless, much like the Upaniṣads it is also very open and amenable to different interpretations and hence carries the characteristics of the Śruti type texts. It is, therefore, not strange that both Śaṅkara and his rival commentators that came later could find appropriate passages in it to support their respective points of view.

Gītā in Relation to other Indian Systems

In order for us to understand the distinct way in which the Gītā develops its notion of freedom vis à vis Buddhi and Sattva, we need to understand the proximity between the Gītā and Sāṃkhya. Notwithstanding its openness to different interpretations, the Gītā is known to be a synthetic text that brings together different philosophical ideas in the form of easily readable verses, hence the name "Gītā" (technically the plural "Gītās" *Gītāmālā*). The philosophical tradition of Sāṃkhya is identified with what is known as the religion of renunciation (nivṛtti dharma) followed by the sages such as Śanaka, Sanandana et al., whereas the religion of works (pravṛtti dharma) is followed by sages such as Marīchi. The ultimate goal of the Upaniṣadic religion is the realization of Brahman. The Gītā, by its emphasis on Dharma, attempts to bring synthesis of these three philosophical traditions. Simply put, the Puruṣa of Sāṃkhya, the

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[44] Christopher Chappell had shown the relationship of Karman in the Gītā and the idea of sacrifice in the Vedas. (See Chappell 1986)

Kshātra of the Pūrva Mīmāṁsā, or what Śaṅkara calls "earthly Brahman" (referring to the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas and the sacrifices) and the Brahman of the Upaniṣadic texts are synthesized into one coherent whole. While there is wider scholarly consensus on the relationship between the Gītā and Sāṁkhya of an earlier version, points of contention might be in some details of the relationship between the two. One of the contentious points in on the relationship between the Gītā and Sāṁkhya may depend on which manuscript one is consulting. Schrader argued that Kashmiri recension of the Gītā contained the more ancient version of the text than the Vulgate text of the Gītā. (Schrader 1930) However, Edgerton (1932: 75) finds Schrader's findings less convincing, while van Buitenen argues that the Kashmiri recension is later than that of Bhaskaras. (van Buitenen 1965: 104f) Commenting on one of the two manuscripts lodged in the library of the Trinity College, Dublin, Denis Crofton was convinced that the philosophy of the Sāṃkhya of Kapila is the same as that of the Gītā. (Crofton 1867: 4) Mircea Eliade pointed out generally that the Gītā is an "an amalgamation of Sāṃkhya-Yoga and Vedānta". (Eliade 1954: 394) Among recent scholars, David White has pointed out well the synthetic project of the Gītā. He argues that the Gītā attempts to synthesize the "the Upaniṣadic Vedānta and the proto-Sāṃkhya". (White 1979: 501) The point that the Gītā author/s bring together three distinct philosophical traditions, viz., the Sāṃkhya, the Pūrva Mīmāṁsā and the Upaniṣadic ideas of Brahman, has also been made by, *inter alia*, Larson. (1975: 660)

White (1979) mainly takes into account the chapter nine of the Gītā in examining the synthetic project of the Gītā. I will return to White's comments later in the essay in dealing with the category of Buddhi. However, R.C. Zaehner (1969) thought that chapter thirteen of the Gītā was perhaps the best illustration of the synthesis between proto-Sāṃkhya and the Gītā, and of course White does take cognizance of it. (White 1979: 501) Much debate had occurred in the earlier scholarship on the Gītā that dealt with the question whether or not the text of the Gītā is to be viewed as a single whole or "patch work". However, it is useful to point out that Zaehner (1969) viewed Gītā as a unified text making use of different philosophical ideas from Sāṃkhya, Buddhism and the Upaniṣads in contrast to the view expressed by Richard Garbe and Rudolf Otto that the Gītā is, as Wendy O'Flaherty puts it, "patchwork of various strands of philosophies current in India between the fifth and second centuries B.C." (O'Flaherty (1971: 78) O'Flaherty agrees with Zaehner that it is not a patch work but rather a "jigsaw puzzle to be pieced together rather than as a tangle to be unraveled." (O'Flaherty (1971: 78)

Edgerton further points out that while the Gītā distinguishes between Sāṃkhya and Yoga as methods, in the Mahābhārata the teachings of Sāṃkhya and Yoga are considered same— "the same teaching (as to truth; śāstra) that is declared by Sāṃkhya is also the view (darśana) of Yoga." (Edgerton 1924: 21) The Gītā

spends a substantial part of its deliberations on the Sāṃkhya categories and concepts in an attempt to illuminate its own distinctive philosophical view. However, most scholars are of the view that the Sāṃkhya ideas that one finds in the Gītā are from an earlier form of Sāṃkhya and in the view of Edgerton what one finds in the Gītā regarding Sāṃkhya need not be thought of as a system, but rather simply "the opinion that man could gain salvation by knowing the supreme truth, however formulated." (Edgerton 1924: 6 and 14) In his view this usage of the term Sāṃkhya is consistent with the earlier usages in the early Upaniṣads and does not take seriously the reference to Sāṃkhya as Anvīkṣī (philosophy) in Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra. (Edgerton 1924: 17)

Buddhi and Sattva in Gītā and Sāṃkhya

Let us now consider the importance of Buddhi and Sattva for the notion of freedom in the Gītā. Edgerton suggested that early Sāṃkhya was not atheistic. (Edgerton 1924:7) In the same vein Robinson (1972) finds that the early Sāṃkhya that is present in the Katha Upaniṣad (K.U.) and the Bhagavad Gītā, which appears after it, is very similar. That is to say, unlike Buddhism which denied the existence of Self, the early Sāṃkhya separates the material and the ultimate Selves. He says, "[T]his formula follows the procedure of the yogin who first withdraws from material objects, then from the lower forms of mental activity, and finally from the higher forms of thought." (Robinson 1972: 300) And he further notes that this formula of the early Sāṃkhya is found in the Katha Upaniṣad. Referring to K. U. 1.3.10-11, he identifies this progression from the sense-powers (Indriya) to subtle objects (Artha) to thought-organ (Manas) to intellect/consciousness (Buddhi) and from Buddhi to the great soul (Mahān Ātma) and beyond the Mahān Ātma to the unmanifest (Avyakta), and then beyond the unmanifest to the spirit (Puruṣa). He says that the ultimate goal is to realize the "highest self" and in this process Buddhi is the "instrument for realization." This is according to the Katha Upaniṣad. (Robinson 1972: 300) He then finds the same structure in the Gītā, in that Buddhi is placed below Puruṣa and Prakṛti but above Manas. (Robinson 1972: 302) However, Robinson shows that although Buddhi in the K. U. is understood as the instrument of realization, it is also synonymous with the Buddhist notion of Vijñāna. (Robinoson 1972: 310) In both cases, it is understood as the "driver of the manas". (Robinson 1972: 300) Thus both in the early Upaniṣadic tradition as well as in the Gītā, Buddhi is not to be understood as consciousness, according to Robinson. While comparing the early Sāṃkhya and Buddhacarita, Stephen Kent points out that the Buddhacarita of Aśvaghoṣa describes the metaphysical system of sage Arāḍa which contains twenty-five principles. He then goes on to show that the system of Arāḍa, and the early Upaniṣads, especially the Katha and Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣads are "referred to as forms of "early Sāṃkhya," (Kent 1982: 259) The important point for our purpose is that Arāḍa distinguishes between the twenty-four tattvas and the tattva called Ātman. (Kent 1982: 260) Together the twenty-

four tattvas constitute what is known as the field (kṣetra) and the ātman is known as the knower. This dualism between the knower and the field is emphasized in the classical Sāṃkhya. (Kent 1982: 260) Furthermore, Kent also points out that although in some earlier Sāṃkhya systems Buddhi is referred to as consciousness (cetana) or intellect (Vijñāna), in the classical Sāṃkhya it comes to be devalued "as simply "ascertainment" or "determination" (adyavasāya)[45]." He suggests that this devaluation has to do with the transcendence of Puruṣa in the classical Sāṃkhya. (Kent 1982: 265) Explaining the difference between ātman and kṣetrajña in Arāḍa's Sāṃkhya system, Kent points out that the best way to understand the difference is to view the former in cosmic terms and the latter in individual person's sense. Furthermore, the ātman is understood as "unknowing" (ajña) and kṣetrajña as "knowing" (jña). In other words, kṣetrajña is the name given to the one who is the liberated ātman. (Kent 1982: 269) He then points out the significance of this for the classical notion of Puruṣa. He says, "[O]f significance for the later doctrine of the classical Puruṣa is that the difference between kṣetra and kṣetrajña explicitly foreshadows the classical dualism. Furthermore, the unknowing ātman and the knowing kṣetrajña are reflected in the classical doctrines of the deluded Puruṣa 'apparently' entangled in matter and the witnessing Puruṣa conscious of its separate nature from it." (Kent 1982: 270)

In the Sāṃkhya system—both early and classical, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas form the core categories that characterize the nature of Prakṛti. For Prakṛti to remain in equilibrium the three categories of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas must be in perfect balance. Neither of the three can remain in balance without the other. However, in the early Sāṃkhya system, at least found in the Buddhacarita of Aśvaghoṣa, the avyakta (unmanifest Prakṛti) is devoid of attributes (guṇas), whereas in the classical system the avyakta consists of the guṇas. (Kent 1982: 261) Emphasizing that in classical Sāṃkhya the Sattva, Rajas and Tamas guṇas are the functional energies of Prakṛti, Rao (1963: 69) argues, "[T]hey cannot be taken in isolation, for each involves the other, not only ontologically but also functionally, and any individual consideration of them is purely academic and not real." This is in stark contrast to the role of guṇas understood in the early Sāṃkhya, as per the presentation of Aśvaghoṣa. Kent, however, points out that Aśvaghoṣa in presenting the early Sāṃkhya system of Arāḍa associates the three roots of good[46] with Sattva and the three roots of evil (rāga—passion, dveṣa—hatred and moha—delusion) with the guṇas of Rajas and Tamas. In ultimate

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[45] Sāṃkhya Kārika 23
[46] Kent notes that Aśvaghṣoa does not mention what the three roots of good are. See Kent 1982: f.n. 35)

liberation terms, it means that the guṇas of Rajas and Tamas must be destroyed by the increase of Sattva. (Kent 1982: 262)

Thus the early Sāṃkhya implies a gradation of the three guṇas, whereas in the classical system the triad is not necessarily placed in hierarchical relation to one another notwithstanding their unique characteristics, and although it does speak of the predominance of one or the other (Kārika 54). It is the cumulative balance of the three that is fundamental to the equilibrium of Prakṛti, in the classical system. However, in the conception of the Gītā, Sattva emerges as a superior category to the other two. Thus in the Gītā 2:45 Krishna says to Arjuna "Vedas are about the three *guṇas*. O Arjuna, be free from the three *guṇas*. Be free from dualities and be permanently seated in the Sattva being free from both attachment and protection." (Translation mine). Unpacking this verse can perhaps provide us with some clue as to how the author/s of the Gītā text has come to incorporate the early Sāṃkhya ideas into their own philosophical scheme. Firstly, it is now clear that the Gītā and the early Upaniṣadic texts seem to draw from commonly known Sāṃkhya ideas of the time. The older tradition of the Vedas, viz., the ritual tradition, dealt with the more mundane aspects, hence their nature being described as "*traiguṇya*" in the verse above. Secondly, whereas in classical Sāṃkhya scheme the *triguṇa* complex is fundamental to the equilibrium of the Prakṛti, the Gītā sees Rajas and Tamas as an impediment and wants them to be overcome by Sattva. However, it selectively accepts the Sattva as a positive element in the progressive development of one's spirituality and hence the call for Arjuna to be "seated in the Sattva." By thus prioritizing Sattva, the Gītā by necessity creates a hierarchy between the three *guṇas*. This is a fundamental difference between the Gītā and the classical Sāṃkhya scheme.

The Gītā then provides a redefinition of Yoga in 2: 48—"Having abandoned attachment, perform actions with equilibrium (yogasthaḥ) and by becoming equal in success and failure. [Such] equilibrium is called Yoga." (Translation mine) In this redefinition, Yoga is seen in the context of the ritual tradition of the Vedic sacrificial system as something that enables individuals to perform their ritual actions with a sense of evenness about the results of ritual actions. In this, the meaning of the sacrifice itself is fundamentally changed. The sacrifice is now no longer for the personal achievement of material wealth and prosperity, but it is with the intention of relinquishing the fruits of those rituals. The text then goes on to the next level, viz., Buddhi—"Be far away from undesirable action by the attachment to Buddhi, O Danañjaya! Seek shelter in Buddhi, [for] the seekers of fruits are miserable." (2:49) Firstly, it must be noted that Gītā's philosophical framework must be understood against the background of the ritual system of the Vedas within which seeking after the fruits of ritual, viz., wealth is the

normative activity. It is not accidental that the author chooses to use the epithet "Danañjaya" (conqueror of wealth) to address Arjuna. From the point of view of Sāṃkhya, what is significant is that the author now takes the key concept of Sāṃkhya and places it within the broader Upaniṣadic philosophical framework. In classical Sāṃkhya, Buddhi (intellect) is where liberation of the individual must occur. The apprehension of objects takes place in Buddhi (Sāṃkhykārika 35), and because it is Buddhi which brings together the whole enjoyment of objects, it is therefore the very same Buddhi (intellect) that discriminates the difference between Puruṣa (Spirit) and Prakṛti (Nature) (Sāṃkhykārika: 37) and hence liberation truly must occur in the Buddhi[47]. It is not surprising therefore that the text of the Gītā suggests that one should take shelter in the Buddhi. Be "seated in the Sattva" (Gītā 2: 45) and "take shelter in Buddhi" (Gītā 2: 49) are significant instructions to Arjuna in the context of his freedom from the attachment to the fruits of action. Here, there seems to be no fundamental difference between the Gītā view of liberation and the classical Sāṃkhya view. Of course, this does not mean the nature of liberation is the same in both. It is the one who is attached to Buddhi (buddhiyuktaḥ) that overcomes both good and bad in this world. (Gītā 2: 50)

The Gītā's radical departure from the Vedic ritual tradition is underlined when it says that "[W]hen your Buddhi (intellect) overcomes the forest of illusion, then you become indifferent to that which is to be heard and that which has been heard." (Gītā 2: 52 Translation mine) It reinforces this stance in the next verse— "When your Buddhi (intellect) remains firm and unperturbed by what is heard (Śrutivipratipannāḥ)[48] fixed in trance (samādhi), then you will attain Yoga." (Gītā 2: 53 Translation mine) Moving away from the Vedic revelation that prioritized the ritual system on the one hand, and by drawing closely from the Sāṃkhya conceptualizations, the Gītā lays the foundation for a new doctrine of desireless action. The terms "yogasthaḥ" (Gītā 2:48), "buddhiyuktaḥ" (Gītā 2:51) and "sthitaprajñaḥ" (Gītā 2:55) must then be seen in relation to each other. The one who is seated in Yoga, attached to Buddhi is the one who overcomes all desires produced by the mind and is called the one who is seated in knowledge (sthitaprajñaḥ) (Gītā 2:55). By closely analyzing the relationship between the senses and the objects of senses and the mind, Gītā underlines the idea of the state of Brahman (Brahmasthtiḥ) at which stage one's delusion is completely overcome (Gītā 2:72).

Here it is worthwhile taking a look at David White's interpretation of Buddhi, especially in relation to liberation. White brings out an interesting interpretation

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[47] In the classical Sāṃkhya Buddhi is associated with the predominance of Sattva guṇa. (See Rao 1963: 68) In this regard, the early Sāṃkhya, the classical Sāṃkhya and the Gītā seem to be in accord.

[48] One could find this phrase with a double meaning as referring to Śruti in which case one could translate it as "unaffected by Śruti" (revelation).

of Buddhi from a Western point of view. He points out, first that "actions are accomplished entirely by the guṇas of prakṛti" (Gītā 3: 27); second, "there is nothing on earth or even among the deities in heaven, no being whatever, that could ever be free of these three guṇas originating from prakṛti" (Gītā 18: 40); third, "We must conclude, therefore, that the Bhagavad Gītā conceives of human action as completely caused, and there is no freedom of action whatever if by "freedom" we mean action that is not caused by other action." He then points out that the Gītā (2:45) also speaks of becoming free of the Guṇas. (White 1984: 295-96) In an attempt to overcome these mutually exclusive doctrines, White refers to the passage in Gītā 9:28—"be free from the bonds [bandhana] of that action which produces good and evil fruits". He explains this passage suggesting that "[L]iterally, then, in the view of the Gītā, human freedom consists of freedom from bondage to actions, not freedom from the causative operation of actions themselves." (White 1984: 296) He distinguishes two kinds of freedom—the highest freedom and instrumental freedom. Being free from dualities of human experience constitutes instrumental freedom. In other words, one does not overcome the pairs of opposites, such as pleasure and pain, but rather the Gītā calls for one to remain in equanimity—"Freedom from bondage to the dualities, therefore, means that human beings must continually practice a discipline which the Gītā defines as "evenness of mind"(samatva) in all circumstances of pleasure and pain, success and failure (11.48), for it is the Gītā's contention that such equanimity is the very foundation of human freedom in the midst of activities of all kinds." (White 1984: 298) From a Western perspective this freedom from dualities is what he calls, "attitudinal freedom" which in the Western discourse is not considered freedom in any serious sense. However, he argues that this attitudinal freedom is an important aspect as it fundamentally affects our mental activities and because they constitute the actions of the mind. He therefore argues, that "[F]reedom from the delusion of the guṇas and their dualities thus constitutes a very important kind of human freedom indeed, since in this view attitudes are perceived as significant elements of the causal complex resulting in other kinds of actions." (White 1984: 298) He further points out that this freedom, in the Gītā view, is possible because of the Sattva guṇa which is understood in the Gītā (Gītā 14: 6) as pure and having the nature of illumination. Referring to the idea of sāttvikī buddhiḥ (Gītā 18:30) White points out, "[I]t is therefore the sattvic, integrated buddhi or intellect that is capable of discerning and understanding the basic dualities, and it is this kind of discrimination which makes possible that evenness of mind which is the act of freedom from bondage to those dualities." (White 1984: 299) Thus, White interprets Gītā's view of Buddhi as the "highest function of human consciousness" that serves to develop the necessary evenness of mind that is essential for ultimate human freedom. (White 1984: 301)

From this close analysis it becomes clear that the the Gītā brings together the notions of Sāṃkhya-Yoga and the Upaniṣadic notion of Brahman. In this

synthesis, the notion of Buddhi in Sāṃkhya obtains the meaning of Prajña because of its association with the idea of Sattva. In other words, the Gītā sees Sattva as of superior nature to its counterparts, viz., Rajas and Tamas and encourages the aspirant of freedom to cultivate Sattva kind of Buddhi. The ultimate liberation of the individual is, therefore, no longer through an endless pursuit of ritual actions and their fruits, but rather by steady contemplation (samādhi).

In order to illuminate the meaning of freedom in the Gītā sense, it would be useful now to offer a brief comment on the relationship between Puruṣa and Prakṛti in the Gītā. It is not the distinguishing the subtle difference between Spirit (Puruṣa) and Nature (Prakṛti) as in the classical system of Sāṃkhya, but rather a radical synthesis of the two that is the final goal in the Gītā. While classical Sāṃkhya leaves the relationship between Puruṣa and Prakṛti in mystery by not clarifying why Prakṛti evolves itself into material universe, the Gītā unequivocally states in the following way—"Under my direction Prakṛti produces the moving and the non-moving. Because of it, O son of Kunti, this universe is operating." (Gītā 9:10 Translation mine) The primordial nature (Prakṛti) is now clearly brought under the supervision of Kṛṣṇa. Furthermore, the primordial nature is now considered the divine nature (daivīm prakṛtim) of Kṛiṣhṇa (Gītā 9:13). As the embodiment of the universe, Kṛiṣhṇa thus becomes the singular object of devotion of the great souls (mahātmān) (Gītā 9:14). However, such devotion is rooted in knowledge (jñāna). It thus returns to the idea of sacrifice but characterizes it as jñānayajña—"By offering the sacrifice of knowledge others worship me as one, as dual, as many and as the universal form." (Gītā 9:15 Translation mine) The text goes even further by identifying the very sacrifice and everything around it with Kṛṣṇa—"I am the ritual (Kratuḥ), I am the sacrifice (yajñaḥ), I am the oblation (svadhāḥ), I am the medicine (auṣadam), I am the chanting (mantra), I am the melted butter (ājyam), I am the fire (agni), I am the offering (hutam)." (Gītā 9:16 Translation mine) It is with this identification of Kṛṣṇa as the Ric-, Sāma- and Yajurveda (Gītā 9:17) that the authors of the text come full circle in bringing into its synthetic scheme what it has initially rejected, viz., the Vedic ritual system, but in doing so, it fundamentally transforms it.

Returning to the Gītā view of liberation vis a vis Buddhi and Sattva, three fundamental points need to be made—1) the Gītā sees Buddhi as the method (Buddhi Yoga) in achieving the ultimate freedom; 2) The Gītā sees Buddhi being intrinsically influenced by the Sattva guṇa which is considered pure and hence superior to the other two guṇas; 3) in the method of Buddhi (Buddhi Yoga), the state of sthitaprajña is a prelude to the state of Brahmastithiḥ. It is here the Gītā fundamentally differs from the classical Sāṃkhya but conjures up an earlier Sāṃkhya notion of liberation which is the realization of the ultimate Self (Puruṣa) as we noted above with reference to Katha Upaniṣad.

Conclusion

Given the substantial consensus that exists among scholars that Gītā belongs to a period when an earlier form of Sāṃkhya was common to both the early Upansiadic texts as well as the author/s of the Gītā, the two important ideas that Gītā must be credited with are the Buddhi and Sattva. There is some continuity between the Gītā and the classical Sāṃkhya, in the sense that both acknowledge the necessity of Buddhi being the chief instrument of liberation. However, in the Gītā, Sattva emerges as a superior category in line with the earlier Sāṃkhya view, and the aspirant of freedom needs to cultivate the Sattvic Buddhi in order to develop equanimity in the face of the polarities of pleasure and pain. Therefore, what Gītā presents is a Buddhi Yoga characterized by Sattva. This is different from the three paths identified in the Vedānta—path of knowledge, path of action and path of devotion.

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A SUPER GIFT OR A CONDUIT: THE PLACE OF THE DAUGHTER IN THE INDIAN MARRIAGE EXCHANGE

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Abstract

Marriage gifts form an integral part of modern marriage system, (in the form of dowry). The *kanyā* continues to be given away but her role is subsumed by the property she carries with her to the marital family. As a result she is reduced to a conduit. The shift in status of the daughter as a 'super gift' to a vehicle that facilitates dowry custom has closely and significantly affected the status of women in contemporary Indian society. This is practised by everyone regardless of class or religion. Dowry has spread all over India and its wider ramifications are visible in the spate of cases of bride-burning, suicides and harassment. This paper will discuss the position of the daughter in the exchange while taking into account the laws that have been laid down to protect women. Lastly the reaction generated by human rights activists in trying to address the problems of dowry will be discussed.

Key words: marriage, dowry, women, gender, gift.

Introduction

Dāna has always been regarded as symbolic. In modern India the notion of *dāna* has become instutionalised and very rigid. Furthermore, there is no denial that *dāna* in a way may have contributed to the shift in the meaning of dowry. There are a number of aspects involved here, for instance rendering love and affection as status quo especially to the bride's family. However, modern India fails to demonstrate why it was imperative for a bride to participate in the ritual of gift giving at the time of marriage. Sheel (1999:22) asks:

> What is so special about gift giving at the time of marriage, if the similar displays have been carried out with the performance of other *samskaras*, like birth death and other social occasions?

Dowry exchange is closely linked to the concept of *dāna. Dāna* is a Sanskrit word which means, "to give as a present, grant, bestow, to sacrifice, to give up, to remit or obligation" (Monier-Williams 2003:474)). *Dāna* can be said to be of two types namely material gift, *āmiṣadāna* and spiritual or *dharmadāna.* It must be emphasized that in Ancient India, whatever gifts the daughter carried her marital were regarded as secondary because she was designated as the most important *dāna.* Therefore, *kanyādāna* was designated as *dharmadāna* hence highly

regarded during the marriage negotiations. In modern India even though it appears that the act of giving could ruin the family of the bride, they have nonetheless been carried out because they, at the same time giving "imply more than enrichment. The gifts are to be propitious…" Michaels (2004:119).

In modern India *āmiṣadāna* tends to be the most important aspect of the exchange while the daughter is merely a vehicle to transport goods. It must be noted that there has always been a rationale behind presenting gifts of affection by the parents towards their children. However, gift giving has grown rigid and become associated with social status and family prestige leading to great social evil of dowry. During the negotiations it has become apparent that gifts are hardly ever given a mention. This does not mean that the concerned parties are not oblivious to that because takers assume givers will ultimately give, hence the reason for them as their first choice of future in-laws.

The Brides as Victims
The young bride becomes a device for extorting more and more dowry as and when the situation demands. Even, when it is not explicitly demanded it is implicit in the customs and traditions of the community. Depending on the specific situation, dowry involves an ongoing financial obligation on the part of a woman's family, involving periodic payments of cash and goods to her husband's family for many years after marriage. Dowry demands in Modern India have escalated thereby becoming more predatory.

The flow of gifts begins with the engagement ceremony and then, of course, follows the ostentatious ceremonies and display of the dowry given to the girl. Unidirectional flow of gifts and cash does not stop at the culmination of the wedding ceremony. Thus, there is a renewed flow of gifts, "when the woman goes back for the first time after marriage to her matrimonial house; when she comes back; when a child is born; when a child is named; when the baby's face is shown to maternal grandparents; when the baby first eats solid food; when his head is shaved off…." (Kumari 1989:43)

When a second child is born the whole unending cycle repeats itself with a renewed momentum. The quantum of these various token payments is an acknowledgement of status of the girl's matrimonial family. These are 'offered' as token of respect in public acknowledgement of her status. Non-compliance with the ritual would be viewed as a deliberate and unforgivable insult. (Kishwar 1990; Sharma 1993) The increase of payments is not primarily due to an increase in greed in society as a whole; after all those who have to give are also balanced by those who receive and are often the same family. Rather it is more to do with the sudden and swift increases in cash incomes of a small but substantial proportion of the population.

The Participants of Dowry

One way or the other everybody is a participant of dowry. It is the senior women who control over the things in the household, whereas men especially senior ones have immediate control over large reserves of cash. Dowry as a result is "not and will not be under the control of women, in whose name it is given although that does not mean that it will be controlled by other women". **(**Sharma 1984:62) In other words, the bride's dowry may bring herself respect in the household and indeed in the community, but this will not bring her economic power.

Despite its diverse and complex nature, dowry has been viewed as an empowerment tool for Indian women. This empowerment further implicates women, as having the rising awareness and objectives, in fuelling the practice by trying to give daughters a comfortable lifestyle. This desire to improve the life of the daughter has led me to conclude that women are as much perpetrators as they are victims of dowry. This institution according to Roy **(**1999:603) was "invented by women for women," because the resources that were given to women were substantially under their direct control.

Inspite of these inconsistencies women in modern India would rather have dowry given nonetheless. In giving dowry women hope to assert their position in the marital household as a bargaining tool with their husbands and in-laws. Due to cultural constrains encountered by these women, they become party to dowry exchange because they see themselves not as victims but as driving force of daughters and mothers whose interest lie in creating their individuality (Leslie 1991).

It is true these women may be striving to create their own identity and status in their new household because of the amount of dowry they brought. However, in practice it is not a daughter's portion since it is alienated from her. It is basically in the hands of the bridegroom's family. In order to substantiate this Sirohi (2003) quoted *Shashi* a new bride whose marriage gifts had been confiscated by *Subhash's* (groom's family) from day one. She states:

> The kitchen utensils were kept aside to be used for his sister's dowries, ditto for the saris. Only the refrigerator was being used by the family [sic]. Shashi had no control over her jewellery either—it had been taken away from her for "safekeeping" when she first arrived at her in-laws' house.
> (Sirohi 2003:67)

Many new brides share the plight of *Shashi.* It becomes a clear indication that dowry disempowers women. This is further intensified by the perception that a girl child is an economic burden resulting in the spiraling of daughter non-

preference. It is more or less a test of value for women because it comodifies and dispenses women regardless of caste, class or religion. When considering dowry in its present coercive extravagant form, it is highly unlikely it enhances a woman's status or strengthen her bargaining power.

In reality most women are excluded from ownership, control and decisions making on productive resources as well as socio-cultural and religious taboos. These sanctions further sustain the devaluation of women and underline their dependency and their inferior status. Dowry as female property is contingent upon a woman's marriage that draws from and reinforces their dependency. Although in theory dowry may be is seen as empowering in practice it is not a woman's right to demand or to determine the amount of dowry. In addition it is not always an equal share of the family property because the son always gets a larger proportion. Finally, it is not necessary under a woman's control let alone her possession for it is her marital family that is in control.

The Daughter as a Victim

Modern Indian gift giving is not necessarily marked by reciprocal character. It serves more as the chief means of acquiring social status especially in the Indian economy where "[g]ain or prestige comes through expenditure rather than through saving". **(**Herskovits 1989:164) It follows that in the context of prestige economy, gift exchange is also characterized by strong competitive spirit. The latter involves a lavish display of wealth through gift distribution before the marriage celebrations.

A daughter's change of status and her transfer from one family to another comes with tough cultural sanctions. The parents' advice to her is to adjust—the common line being it is nothing unusual or so unbearable. Many women have learnt to cope. This is because the "conjugal home as opposed to the natal house was a woman's final destination and permanent home, in which she had to adapt her very nature to fit in". (Oldenburg 2002:184) The parents' reluctance to take the girl back does not only stem from fear that she may become a lifelong liability. For the most part, it is because the family would be disgraced in the community. Women are heavily stigmatized[49]. As Neshla (1997:4) adds, "the inquisitive neighbours, the restless relatives and scandalous society that shatters her completely" exacerbate this.

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[49] Refer to Veena Oldenburg's narrative of her return from her abusive marital family to her natal home. The community sympathized with her not because she was abused, but because she was a young and single woman who should be under the protection of her husband. She was barely 19years old. The extended family remarked—"(poor thing), she is not even twenty one and her life is over! No decent boy from a status family will ever want to marry her now. She will be a life long burden for her parents!" (Oldenburg 2002:192)

Why not Dowry-less Weddings?

The fear of being considered as defective and being treated shabbily is the main reason that keeps some grooms' families from seeking dowryless weddings. Any family daring to defy the custom will be advised not to say that they do not want dowry or they will be treated with disrespect. Unfortunately, too many families, who may have agreed to dowryless weddings for their sons, have mostly negative experiences to narrate. In this case, there is interplay of the perception of honour and shame.

The bride's family treats the few families who defy the custom and go for dowryless weddings shabbily and insultingly because "a groom without a price tag is worthless". (Kishwar 1990:14) Therefore, the notion of manhood also comes into play here. The payment negotiation reflects this calculation in money terms accurately. The real potential earning capacity of the groom has come to occupy a far more important place in deciding marriage alliances rather than the traditional notion of social status or higher *gotra* status. Thus, *gotra* and *jati* boundaries have been replaced, especially among the urban-based communities, by the modern and far broader categories of caste. Higher dowries now go to grooms with higher earning capacity even if they are of a lower social or *gotra* status. A doctor for instance, will command a far higher dowry, even though he may be from a poor family or relatively lower ritual status, than someone who is a school teacher, no matter how high his *gotra* status is. Surrigde (1930) points out that:

> The very natural attempts to show off on these occasions and to pretend that their financial circumstances are better then those of their neighbours lead peasants to cripple themselves in an attempt to marry off their children successfully. A rich bride can always find a rich husband and vice versa and there is always hope that speculations in dowries may be profitable in the end.
> (Surrigde 1930:25)

Dowry may be widely spread in India. However, there are times when there is no exchange. These have been summarised as follows: when the two families are related; when there are religious objections to dowry. In cases when it is not a first marriage for either one or both parties; when the husband lives with wife's family, especially in cases where the wife has no brother.

The Law and Dowry: A Critique

In order to address the law on dowry, it is important to revisit the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961. The objective of this bill was to prohibit the practice of giving and taking dowry. It will be used as point of reference in order to compare

and contrast the extent to which dowry law has been implemented. The custom of dowry is prevalent among Indians and the legislation put measures in place through an Act that became applicable to all citizens of India. This was the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961.

The Act's definition of dowry is ambiguous (Umar 1998:273; Singh 1989:124; Nangia 1997:657). The act defines dowry as "any property or valuable security" that is given in "connection with marriage". The problem comes with the interpretation of the clause "in connection with marriage." The defendants always have the upper hand in court because they could claim that the gifts were exchanged as a token of appreciation and affection rather than in consideration of the marriage. This presents a strong defence and many culprits are not prosecuted, despite the incriminating evidence pointing at them. With such a defence, they are not liable to any charges. In addition to that, in many cases "dowry is not called dowry, but is given as a gift to a daughter when she marries" (Singh 1985:21).

Similarly, there is a problem with the voluntary gifts given before or after marriage because "it is difficult to ascertain whether these voluntary gifts include coerced or expected ones". (Nangia 1997:657) Families that insist on formal recording will not do well at the negotiation table. The bride is under immense pressure to adjust to or compromise with her new family. Any "maladjustment or even a prospect of divorce would stigmatise her and her immediate family in Indian society". (Nangia 1997:664) In addition, Fahn (1990) has points out that illiteracy of women in rural India as an impediment to reclaiming their dowries later in cases of divorce or abandonment.

Furthermore, the law also has decreed a ban on advertising for prospective partners. The law, since the Act of 1961, stipulates that it bans any:

   i.   Offers through any advertisement in any newspaper, periodical journal or through any other media, any share in his property or any money or both as a share in any business or other interest, as consideration for the marriage of his son or daughter.
   ii.   Printing or publishing or circulation of any advertisement

The ban on advertising has also failed because such adverts are the main method of contact for, and the arrangement of marriages in Modern India. Despite the ban on advertisements and penalties, which are laid down in law, families continue to use the media to search for wives and husbands for their

sons and daughters.[50] Hardly a day passes when one cannot read adverts, whether in newspapers or on internet websites.

The public and ceremonial display of dowry articles seems to be an acceptable norm in Northern India. These include valuable gold ornaments or jewellery. In some social groups, the bride adorns herself with all the ornaments given as dowry at the time of marriage. That is why, "it is not considered odd for the bridegroom's mother or other relatives to examine the ornaments and jewellery on the person of the bride and comment on it". (Kumari 1989:19; see also Chirmade, 1972) Oldenburg (2002:98) adds "not only would the bride's dowry be judged when the bride wore her clothes and her jewels in her new affine home but also the status of her family was up for re-evaluation at this sensitive juncture of the wedding."

Several days prior to the wedding, all the items given as *dahej* are spread out on cots in the courtyard of the bride's house. The barber's wife announces to all neighbours and women that they should "go to see the *dahej*". (Raheja 1950:140) These acts of public display and comment can be "overheard today as stage whispers of approval, envy, odious comparisons or taunts" (Oldenburg 2002:97). The display of gifts, in a way, places a bride's family under a lot of pressure since they have to display the best dowry to impress the whole community. In many families, which are not well off, that could only mean the keeping up of appearances. While more societies are laying stress on human relationships as the foundation for marriage, Indian society is sinking deeper into an institutionalised system of exploitation. This attitude establishes an entirely commercial relationship between the kinsfolk of the young couple. (Chirmade, 1972)

The Loopholes in the Law regarding Dowry
There seem to be contradictions with the law because, under section 198 of that enactment, "it was not a crime to give cash, articles, and ornaments as presents." It is stipulated that dowry must be returned to the bride one year after receipt of the same. If dowry was paid or received while the bride was a minor, she could file a criminal case within one year of the date of her attaining maturity. Although the Law was passed and penalties for breaking it were stipulated, it is worth noting that the police are not empowered to bring cases before the courts. In fact, there was no harmonisation of the provisions of the law with human conduct. Hence, the law left much to be desired. Its defects accentuated the seriousness of the problem and resulted in the Act becoming ineffective.

The court does not have powers to file complaints regarding dowry offences. The

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[50] Cf. www.shaadi.com

aggrieved woman, her father or relatives, must inform the court of the offence. Those who were ready and willing to give dowry would not usually choose to file a complaint and bring their case before the court. Moreover, the Act did not prohibit the giving or receiving of presents in kind to the parties to the marriage by the bride's parents or parents-in-law.

Penalties are prescribed for violation of the law up to a maximum fine Rs. 10,000 plus a minimum of six months' imprisonment. This law has proved to be ineffective. (Verghese, 1980; Krishnamurty, 1981; Paul, 1986) Fifteen years ago, a magistrate of the Delhi courts declared:

> Dowry has been a social evil in this country for several
> centuries … it is high time that this evil was fought on
> a social plane as well as by the state.
> (Verghese 1980:177)

In 1984, the Indian government promulgated additional measures, stipulating, "[T]he bride should keep a list given to her at the time of her marriage and, similarly, one for the bride groom". (Archar and Venakanna 1986:178) They are supposed to record a brief description of each gift, its approximate value, the name of the donor and the nature of his relationship to the bride or groom. It is to be signed by both husband and wife.

These measures were a response to the concerns of various pressure groups such as women's associations, reformers, legislators, intellectuals and the national press. Some wanted to abolish all forms of dowry while others felt that its present form has been corrupted. (Nangia, 1984, 1985) This custom may have had some social value at the time of its inception, but has degenerated into "an anachronistic and incongruous disease threatening the vital organs of the society". (Krishnamurthy 1981: 12)

Dowry in its present form is "the indicator of a great social injustice" (Hooja 1969:212) and "an anti social institution" (Srinivas 1984:29*).* Furthermore, society is seen "as a living organism and social problems as social ills, in this way dowry becomes a 'virus', a social disease". (Krishnamurthy 1981:8; Nair, 1978:9 & Nangia, 1984:38) It has not only been seen as a violation of egalitarian principles but as representing "an obvious obstacle to the aims of national reconstruction, hence the menace which is potentially disastrous" (Nangia 1984:111) and as posing a threat to the country's name and fame.

Women Cells and fight against dowry
With the problem of dowry reaching alarming proportions, in several metropolitan areas and cities in the country new measures have been put in place. Women's cells, as they are called in the west, women's action groups,

have been organised with names such as "Crimes Against Women Cell" in Delhi and all "Women Police Stations" have been set up. There are a number of problems faced by these cells. The task is overwhelming because:

> Delhi has a population of 14 million; the Crime Against Women Cell has one van to answer calls. It can take two hours to get to the other side of the city and they rely on co-operation from a police force that is riddled with corruption and inefficiency. The pattern is familiar: a woman is burnt to death in her kitchen; the police arrive; the family of the husband claim it is a "cooking stove" accident; the police are assisted towards this conclusion with a wad of rupees. By the time the Crimes Against Women Cell has weaved its way through the traffic jams and potholes of Delhi it is a done deal.[51]

The cells are designed to cope with violence against women. In some areas these cells originated as anti dowry cells and their activities remain confined mainly to the restoration of *strīdhana* and the provision of counselling in some cases.

Despite the growth of these cells, there seems to be a lack of what Mukherjee (1999: 230) calls "gender sensitisation for law-enforcement machinery." The problem of violence against women is usually treated as a marginal issue by the law enforcement 'machinery' in India, be it the police, prosecutors or the medico-legal fraternity, not to mention the judiciary. Unless the entire machinery of the law is sensitised to gender issues, particularly violence against women, the hard work done so far will prove futile.

Due to a very heavy workload and shortage of time, the work of these cell officers has not been effective. This has resulted in a large number of the complaints registered with cells, not being addressed.

> The aggrieved women were so disgusted and disillusioned with the lack of concern of the officers of the cell to find out about their welfare that they did not wish to go to the cell. (Saxena 1995:364)

In order to make women aware of their rights, and competent enough to fight for them, Legal Aid Cells were put in place. This was after the realization that women had been subjected to "deprivation, brutality and exploitation for such a

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[51] See " Fighting Indian Dowry Crime" by Adam Mynott
(*http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/correspondent/3259965* accessed 08/01/2004)

long time that they cannot stand on their feet" (Saxena 1995:365). As a way of tackling the problem, social workers were trained on the use of the law with respect to women's issues. This move made it possible for women, irrespective of their economical status, to get entitlement to free legal aid. Economically handicapped women were educated in relevant equal opportunities, issues and assisted in the fight for their rights.

Other factors have contributed to the reluctance of the police to investigate dowry cases. This is sometimes because of the prominence and influence of the families involved. Moreover, there is a traditional tendency for the police in most countries to consider family life in general and domestic disputes in particular, as outside their remit, especially in cases where the victim is a woman. In a way, police reluctance, as well as the family's dread of publicity, has enabled the groom's family not only retain the dead woman's dowry but also to arrange another marriage and collect another dowry. The police see their function as hampered because, in most cases, neighbours do not want to be witnesses as they think answering a court summons is too much trouble. Nor do they want to annoy the boy's family. Courts choose not to believe the dying declaration.

Social organisations, like *Saheli* in Delhi, for instance are engaged in solving the problem of crimes against women, and have listed several ways in which the function of the police could be improved. Young people should come together on an equal footing to shape their lives. Dowry continues to be given and taken and the scale cannot be ignored. This is a clear indication that the law has failed. It is highly unrealistic in nature; it is rigid and lacks social content.

With regard to marriage expenses, the question that arises is: How much is too much? The question of fixing a limit on marriage expenses and the value of presents to be exchanged is an unreasonable restriction in view of the most celebrated *saṁskāra* in Hindu life. It is viewed as making statement of expenditure of exchanged presents**.**

Anti dowry measures like the government's Dowry Prohibition Act, have failed to define dowry (as distinguished from gifts). It has been unable to implement its anti dowry rhetoric on any number of people who profess to be against dowry giving, yet continue the practice. Over the last decade there has been a confusing parallel between the simultaneous growth of the anti dowry campaign, and the increase and spread of the dowry practice.

Examining the women's real options now, they have none but to accept dowry. The few who do refuse dowry do not bring about any change in the overall situation. Dowry-seeking grooms find other brides who are willing to enter into a dowry marriage. There is no doubt that dowry, in its present form in India, is malicious, not because there is anything wrong with a woman's family giving her

marital assets at the time of her wedding. The problem surfaces because the possession of dowry does not enable a woman to have greater control over her life. Until a woman is perceived as the agent in control of her life, the significance of dowry in Indian social and familial structure may never change. Dowry, therefore, functions as part of a cultural system wherein the woman is devalued and looked on as a liability.

Marriage gifts, in their present form, serve as one method among many to harass the bride. It provides society with acceptable ways for many parents to abandon their daughters to the mercies of husbands and in-laws. (Kishwar, 1990) Until parents stop to convince themselves that they have done their duty by paying dowry and their daughter has no longer any rightful claim on them. Though there are options for them to divorce or dissolve the marriage, it is still shunned upon. Subsequently, married women are left with no other remedy to free themselves their husbands.

> The story of dowry is a tale of men and women
> striving against heavier and heavier odds to keep their
> respect in a relentlessly apathetic society where the
> price demand is higher in money, values and life.
> (Kumari 1989:20)

Kumari (1989:61) claims, "a girl dies and is reborn as a new person" when she enters into marriage. Despite all the setbacks, the quest for a matrimonial home and husband goes on. Marriage defines the woman's rightful place in society. She can have this privilege only after she marries and lives with her husband. Consequently, making a home for a woman is synonymous with the home her husband will provide for her. This is the general understanding of the man, the parents of the woman and, indeed, Indian society in general. Whatever the situation, the facts about Modern Indian dowry cannot be ignored. The custom, through the ages, has made an 180° turn; altering what was once a gift into a response to a demand.

The voluntary nature of the gifts bestowed on the couple, in particular on the bride, has become a demand. Dowry is multifaceted and can be given to the son in law as a bribe to keep the bride. If the bride is the goods, or the means used to exchange the goods, then it is crucial that parents marry off their daughter as soon as possible lest she become a burden to her family. By not paying adequate dowry from simple lack of money, the families know that their daughters might be killed, but they still give them away. (Granadson, 1989) Despite measures put in place in an attempt to stamp out dowry, the practice continues, and brides continue to lose their property.

Conclusion

So where do we place the daughter in Indian marriage. Is she a "super gift", a conduit or both? In Modern India the position of a daughter is subsumed by property that she brings with her to her marital home. Of course she still plays a major part because without her there can be no exchange. However, as shown above, her role is more of a conduit rather than a "super gift." Parents of the girl do want to settle her in family that guarantees her security not just at the beginning of the marriage but for her lifetime. This comes with a price, dowry. In order to guarantee her comfort in her marital home, parents have to impress. In addition to that the conjugal family also chooses a particular family on the assumption the bride's family has a capacity to give. And what are the end results? Giving away the daughter becomes equated with selling goods at the market where the highest bidder get the products. Let me conclude with Archana Lakhara's poem: "Marriage Market", *Manushi*, 56:27). It reads:

> We are commodities
> Furniture on sale
> Some elegant made of ebony
> Intricately carved
> Others, plain bare
> Not even polished, standing
> Waiting
> Endlessly
> Reluctantly
> Biding our time
> For the right bidder
> To be sold
> By the very hands, that carved us,
> to our customs at a bargain
> -our future
> To decorate someone else's house.

In brief, the tone of this poem is a melancholic. It is an outcry made by a daughter (bride to be) who likens herself to a piece of furniture that is put on display to be sold to the highest bidder (a Professional, IT, or Doctor). Some of these women are beautiful and mature while others are still young and not yet fully matured. The wait for the highest and right bidder seems to be the most painful and longest wait, and in most cases it seems to go forever. It is sad that it is the family "the very hands that carved us" that sell them to the customer where the future is simply to decorate someone else's house that of the marital house.

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THE 'RE-PRODUCTION' OF 'WOMAN' AND MOTHERING:
WOMEN IN HINDU AND CHRISTIAN RELIGIO-CULTURAL TRADITIONS

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Abstract

The paper attempts to probe the experiences of a small sample group of Christian and Hindu women by working through what is termed the "mothering mandate" and "roles of conformity". It attempts to problematise the issue of self and identity within the context of the woman's articulation of her religious persona inside the margins of the textual and societal role dictates of her particular religio-cultural complex. By listening to the ethno-narratives of the women, examples of the material contexts of discursive power which operate on women within particular religions, are brought to light.

Key words: mothering, mandate, role conformity, self, maternal guilt

Introduction

This paper is a study of the personal experiences of the subtle and systemic pressures experienced by Indian and African women within the Hindu and Christian religio-cultural traditions in terms of who they are, and *who they are told to be*, as women and mothers.

The paper attempts to problematise the issue of self and identity within the context of the woman's articulation of her religious persona inside the confines of the textual and societal role dictates of her particular religio-cultural complex, thereby drawing attention to the material contexts of discursive power that appear to operate with particular religious traditions as far as women are concerned. The paper probes the experiences of women labouring under what appears to be prescriptive mothering mandates, by listening to the ethno-narratives of the women themselves. It was Mupotsa (2007: xii) who pointed out that in feminist intellectual practice we "understand the personal as political" and to "value the meaning of ordinary social life" (and religious life one adds), as deeply contested political practice.

The paper recognises that no religious tradition is monolithic and that many women from both the traditions of Christianity and Hinduism have indeed rebelled, in varying degrees and various manner of expression, against parochial roles embedded in their respective religious texts, as well as against the mindsets of various categories of religious gate-keepers (religious leaders, their religious peer group/congregations and the men and women in their surrounding

families). However, what emerged from the narratives of the women is that this hard earned emancipation also hides the layers and degrees of guilt experienced by the women as they attempt to straddle the 'demands' or 'roles' and 'mandates' of their religion, alongside their own understandings and articulation of 'self' and 'mother'.

Sandra Harding maintained two decades ago that "while studying women is not new, studying women from the perspective of their own experiences *so that women can understand themselves and the world*, has virtually no history at all (Harding 1987: 8). Two decades later, that has fortunately changed to a measurable extent, and increasing, within gender studies and feminist studies, and the various social science disciplines, the 'standpoints' of women and their voices feature in the subtexts of social analysis and social theory building. This paper, and the theoretical and methodological orientation it pursues, hopes to contribute to the field of feminist religious studies, where *the women's voices are heard*. Many of the issues discussed shed light on realms of social life that might seem on the surface to be completely separate from power and power practices. These power practices however, are deeply embedded in mandates that are prescribed almost routinely for many women.

Contemporary scholarship on mothering and motherhood looks at the mothers' activities, understandings, *and experiences*. This shows a considerable broadening of much of the earlier work which focused on the quality of mothering, and its supposed effects on a child. The study of mothering both expanded dramatically over the course of the past decade and became more multidisciplinary (see Arendell 2000: 1192).

Theoretical Orientation, Methodology and a Note on Research(er) Reflexivity

It is felt that an ethnographic approach is especially well suited to handle the methodological challenges associated with distinguishing practices and hegemonic structures and pressures experienced by women. Valocchi points out that all of this requires sensitivity to the complicated and multilayered lived experiences and subjectivities of individuals, and to "the social settings within which these experiences and subjectivities take shape, and to the larger cultural, discursive, and institutional contexts of these lives where taxonomies given power". Ethnographic methods, with their emphasis on how individuals create meaning, seem best suited to this enterprise (Valocchi 2005).

The study is also positioned within an interpretivist paradigm where interpretivism is characterised as seeing the social world from a highly subjective viewpoint. It is far from dated to repeat what Burrell and Morgan (1979) maintained some decades ago, that interpretivism places the emphasis of explanation in the subjective consciousness of the social participants, instead of

the objective observer. All disciplines, anthropology included, operate within the tenants of a collection of subjective social science research practices or research perspectives. Studies within an interpretivist paradigm are found to empower the social actors, in other words the participants in the study, rather than us as researcher/s. This is important for ethnographic studies such as this one, which works with categories of African and Indian women who have chosen to share certain intimate and vulnerable experiences and views.

This particular research thus followed the orientation of the interpretivisim paradigm and was guided by feminist standpoint principles. Paradigms can be thought of as different sets of binoculars through with a researcher views and works within the field. Each paradigm is in turn grounded in a particular set of generally accepted approaches regarding ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Henning et al 2004). Standpoint theories themselves emerged out of critiques of so called universal objectivity, but more importantly as far as we are concerned, also out of an interest in using "material experience to build collective theoretical understandings" (McLaughlin 2003: 67) This is crucial because it underpins the importance of *experience* in constructing a standpoint, but **what** 'experience' actually entails adds and **whose** 'experience' accretes another layer to the discussion, and also renders the exercise more difficult. Women are not all the same, and as women we do not share the same material experiences.

This recognition of multiple realities and multiple subjectivities sensitized us to the fact that we needed to offer the *space* for the women to 'tell their story'. It also allowed us to recognise the importance of particular physical spaces and where the women might well be most comfortable when speaking to us. Thus most of the interviews were done at the homes of the women, endevouring to have the research participants be at ease and to allow for a greater degree of rapport as it was a space familiar to the participants, and as such more relaxed and intimate. LaRossa et al. (1981) note that the 'home ambience' fosters a 'perceptual conflation' of the researcher with that of a friend, and in turn opening the door for more intimate disclosures.

Since both researchers were female, the assumption is that the common gender garnered more detailed answers from the research participants (Padfield and Procter 1996). Stacey (1988) notes, that when a woman interviews another woman in her home, it is perhaps one of the more intimate ways to gain insights into her personal and private experiences. While there is of course common ground in our common gender, as two researchers we are in many ways both similarly and differently positioned. If there is one cardinal 'sin' not to be incurred within (the various strains) of feminist thinking, it is not to presume a universal category of women and to essentialise and reify a kind of sisterhood based on that (fallacious) assumption. Thus while we each looked and listened

individually to the narratives of women in religious traditions that *we* were each personally familiar with, we were cognizant that we are also differently positioned, relative to each other and relative to the women in the religio-cultural traditions that we explored. As both an anthropologist and a Christian Minister, one of us, was in some ways empathetically and religiously close to the Christian women spoken to. Likewise as anthropologist, with an upbringing in the (neo)Hindu faith, one of us was in some ways, on the religious 'inside' with several of the Hindu women so to speak. However, in many ways we were both on the 'outside' as our own intellectual understanding/s, and experiences as women within each religious structure, differed markedly.

The Women in the Study
A small group of ten women from the Christian religious-cultural tradition were interviewed. A further ten women from the Hindu faith were also interviewed. Harding (1991) notes that '*women*' with their experiences of multiple marginalities have an 'epistemic privilege' or experience-based insights. Our chosen methodological approaches as feminist anthropologists working through the standpoint epistemic, additionally, gave us the privilege of extracting rich information as we listened to narratives showing that social meanings are often embedded in texts and experiences.

The women from the Christian tradition were all pastors' wives with varied experiences to share, while the Hindu women were housewives and in some instances working women within nuclear families, who saw themselves as being Hindu and religious. The pastor's wives were necessarily linked through the husband's ministerial duties to a particular congregation and Church, as congregational 'head', while the Hindu women belonged to different religious or 'Service' (Neo-Hindu congregational) groups along with their husbands and family. Three of the women's husband's acted as either a ritual specialist (at the temple attended) or acted as congregational head of the religious group attended weekly. In the instances of the Hindu women, pseudonyms* are used as all the women preferred their identities kept confidential.

The Voices of the Pastors' Wives
The stories and the experiences of women married to pastors revealed that some of these women were unable to have children, while others were young women with children and the rest, older women with children. These narratives reveal that the women felt that they had been placed within (hegemonic) constructions of 'mother' and 'motherhood'. The narratives of the women revealed degrees of subtle, yet oppressive systemic social machinery in place and are seen as carrying moral subtexts

The questions probed to what extent the mandate of being, or needing to be a mother created challenges for the women and how it impacted on their sense of

self-esteem. Here Goffman's (1963) 'role identification' and Mathews' and Mathews' (1986) 'role adjustment' was used in attempting to understand how the women understood and psychologically adjusted to their roles as pastor's wives.

From the sample of Christian women, three of the women (pastor's wives) interviewed were "barren" (29 year Maria of 'Pray the Nations Church', Eva of 'Apostolic Faith Church' and Lungile of 'Faith Church'). Seven of the women had children of their own. Lungile (a 43 year old pastor's wife of Ngwelezane Faith church) had decided to give into excessive eating and as a result had become obese. She had become highly self conscious of her weight gain and finds it difficult to associate with other women. She claimed that her husband '*just wanted to embarrass her by accepting the calling*'. She shares that she tried on several occasions to prevent her husband from continuing as a pastor because of the expectations of the church. By 'expectations' it is clear that she is referring to the expectation of mothering children. She feels strongly that she is a disappointment because she is unable to bear children.

"*How can I promise people that God answers prayers when he could not answer my prayers and give me children?" Now I am supposed to be the mother of the church; what do I know about mothering? Calling other people's children makes me feel guilty because they are not mine. When you have biological children it is much easier to call other children yours, for as an African woman because you are a mother. Sometimes I look for the least excuse to avoid going to church or any church gathering. This calling of my husband is the most difficult thing for me to accept because I have been forced into something I do not want and no one understands my predicaments.*

Lungile shares that this has made her suffer social marginalization as she perceives her situation, and also as she suspects she is perceived by the members of her congregation. Some members of her congregation (a few of whom we managed to speak with during informal interviews) said that they thought that she did not like them. They believe that the church would be strengthened if she could be a strong support for her husband. None of them seemed to empathize with her but rather saw her as an obstacle to the work of God. They said they preferred to share their problems with the pastor and not her because she seems *not to be* interested in their affairs.

Esther, a 33 year old pastor's wife of 'Full Life Church' in Empangeni reiterated how her inability to bear children has made her a regular 'item' for ritualized prayer. "*Every pastor who visits our church lays his hands and prays for me. No one dares to ask why we are unable to bear children. All of them believe it is my problem and want to force me into becoming a mother. When we got married, my husband told me he developed mumps when he was fourteen years old,*

which I was later told causes sterility in men. No one questions his fatherhood in the church. People go to him for advice on issues relating to their children but will ignore me because I do not have experience in raising children. Every mother's day in our church, my husband has the habit of asking mothers to stand so that they can be prayed for. He forces me to stand on the basis that I am the mother of all the congregants. This embarrasses me because I can see the reaction of many people. Sometimes I stand but at other times the shame is just too much to bear.

Rose, a 27 year old mother of two believes she is too young to be the mother of the church. From what she shares it appears that her role as a pastor's wife makes it difficult for her to give her full attention to her own children and as a result suffers from guilt. "*I am unable to love my children fully because I have to share my love with everyone. Church members are too demanding, expecting me to attend to all their problems. I was never prepared for this. When our former pastor decided to immigrate to America and asked my husband to take over as pastor, I told him it was a bad idea. Two years now and I am barely coping. Many people have left the church (especially elderly women) because they say I am immature. They told me plainly that it was difficult for them to see me as their mother because I was young both spiritually and age wise. I find it difficult to call women who are much older than myself, as "my children". Most often when I have meetings with them instead of me giving them advice, I find myself at the other side of the coin, receiving advice. I have lost my self-esteem since becoming pastor's wife. I used to be confident about my self, my decisions but since I accepted this role, I have lost myself in the process. I now live to please and appease other people most of the time and believe my efforts are not even recognized. Everyone gossips and criticize me for my mistakes. I believe everyone goes easy with my husband and pray for him. They say he is young and need their support but do not say the same things about me. They say I have to be strong for him and be supportive. No one really cares how this is killing me on the inside. I have lost weight not because I am watching my size but because of too much stress. I am not coping. I wish there was a way out of this role. Must I be the mother of the church? I love my husband and do not want to divorce him. I can see that he loves the calling but it is too difficult for me. I need me back.*

Motherhood has come to be institutionalized and is made to be a particular kind of righteous practice in religious terms. Being a woman-mother, one is being made an actor in a social game of representation of which the roles are already distributed (Butler 1990, 1993). Bal (Essed et al 2009) remarked that roles have already been assigned but are '*pregnant*' with consequences. Women have no choice (or notable less of a choice within certain religious circles at least) but to be seen as mothers, or wanting to be mothers. This concept is generally associated with women worldwide since caring is construed as part of the world

of a woman (Tarlow 1996: 56). Women's gender identity comes to be reinforced by the idea of mothering (McMahon 1995), thus rendering mothering a primary identity for women. This links 'womanhood' and 'motherhood' by an invisible umbilical cord, maintained by society or parochial structures.

The role and mandate of motherhood has been understood through the essentialist lens rooted in socio-cultural and religious text. Essentialism assumes that women should be mothers and assigns roles for them to conform. This is opposed to existentialism, which sees women as free, rational beings, making choices according to their will. Essentialistic thinking see pastor's wives as nurturing, all embracing, self-sacrificing, and selfless and as wishing to find their fulfillment in the role of the 'mother'. It assumes that all pastor's wives will embrace and should embrace the motherhood mandate. Thus, a subtext in essentialist thinking is that all pastor's wives are mothers who should necessarily be attached to their "children".

Because all roles, such as that of motherhood, are socially scripted, their contents are pre-established by society (Dillon 2010) and this is independent of the feelings and emotions of the individuals playing the roles. It is taken-for-granted that women need to perform these roles to maintain the status-quo or moral order and by so doing, limits interpretive action only to the cognitive domain.

The issue at stake here in the lives of these women is not whether they have the ability to gestate, give birth and so on but the societal expectations and the demanding nature of such expectations. Mothering in this wider, congregational context, is even more intensive and demanding because some of the women have their own biological children. Likewise congregational mothering brings another set of demands for those who do not (cannot) have their own children. Notwithstanding, all the women are compelled to assume the role and mandate of mothering to their entire congregation. The motherhood mandate as coined by (Braverman 1989) and declared by (Hays, 1996) is exclusive, wholly child centered, emotionally involving, and time consuming. A mother is constructed and seen as one who is self-sacrificing and not subjected to her own needs, or catering to her own interests, desires, (Bassin et al 1994), except as a secondary issue, after those of her children's. While this may seem quite a dated quote and while much as changed for women and the way they live out their lives and their aspirations, for the pastors' wives, it seemed that not much had changed. The challenge is that the pastors' wives have to conform to the script of motherhood and 'pretend (as they put it) as though they did not have their own desires.

Pentecostal churches place special emphasis on traditional gender roles, especially motherhood (Flora 1975: 15). In Guatemala for example, women's magazines have been designed to help women fulfill their God-given destinies

(Martin 1990). Motherhood in this context does not focus exclusively and strictly in the biological sense. Upon assuming the position of 'pastors' wife', every woman, young or old, childless or with children, is expected to assume the role of 'mother' to all congregants while her husband becomes the 'father'. As a pastor's wife, she is expected to assume this position in the lives of all who belong to their congregation. She is expected to be the role model for all women and mothers in the church.

The recognized mandate for pastor's wives poses serious problems because it limits the treatment of these women as individuals; women who are neither named nor described but seen only in their role as mothers of the church or pastor's wives. Billington et al (1998) note that the construction of woman in relation to man serves the interest of man by providing women with a construction of what they are not. Thus, pastor's wives can be seen as the serviceable other. By finding themselves face to face with the identity of their husbands, these women end up learning the language and practice to become that which is expected of them to fulfill their husbands' destinies, and lose themselves in the process. Freire (1972) had demonstrated how in learning the language of the dominating culture, oppressed people lose their own voice and are imprisoned in a 'culture of silence'.

As the ethnography illustrates, these women have lost themselves in the process of learning to become pastor's wives and are frustrated because they are trapped in this culture of silence. The status quo does not provide room for them to renegotiate their sense of self, which is essential to their well-being. Whether and to what extent they engage in making sense of their lives, or not, in what Giddens (1984) calls discursive consciousness, or are aware of the activities and principles that underlie their lives orientated towards sustaining their husband's career; conceptualized by Giddens as practical consciousness will provide rich material for the direction of future and further research. It is clear however, from this small sample group of women that their role as pastor's wives comes with expected sets of behaviour, and responsibilities, which most often these women were not prepared for when they entered marriage.

All the women claimed that the expectations places enormous constraints on them and interfered with their own construction and understanding of self. When asked about their preparedness for their role in the church, 80% said they firstly, had no clue on how to be a pastor's wife and secondly on how to be a mother to all the congregants. Some, after having been married for 15 years said they still did not know how to be the mother of the church because the role seems to be elastic, changing and stretching, and placing ever more demands on them.

The ten pastor's wives interviewed shared that they did not plan to get married to pastors. They pointed out that they married and after a few years, their

husbands accepted the calling as pastors. Pume, a 40 year old and mother of two and a nurse in Richards Bay was born and raised in a Christian home at Esikhaweni. She said that when she met John, he was a teacher and after being married for five years, he woke up one morning and told her has a calling to be a pastor. *In 2004, he started the 'Fire of God Church and automatically I became the 'mother' of the church*. As a pastor's wife, she had to adjust to expectations that were beyond her expertise (or interest). She said at the time she was young and inexperienced and would have many sleepless nights worrying and praying guiltily to God not to ruin her husband's calling, and in so doing destroy the church. Pume said that since her husband started the church, no one ever remembers her name. She is the pastor's wife (Ma Mfundisi), which she says frustrates her because she is only identified with her husbands' occupation and people treat her as though she does not have an identity separate from him. These sentiments were shared by all the women. As pastor's wife, Pume reiterated, *I am expected to support him in the ministry and it is deemed vital to his success in ministry. I have friends who are married to medical doctors, lawyers, engineers, professors etc, but they do not need their wives to succeed in their jobs. This makes me feel like I am losing my identity which has been the most difficult thing for me.* As the interviewing and listening continued, it was apparent that their role as pastor's wives was made to be central to their identities. They all experienced a measure of role identification and likewise role adjustment as soon as their husbands become pastors.

The interviews revealed that most of the pastor's wives experienced loneliness and suffer from depression as a result of not having someone to share their experiences and challenges. Available literature on mothering suggests that it is in certain contexts also associated with depression, anxiety, lack of happiness and physiological malaise (Goldsteen and Ross, 1989, Lennon and Rosenfield, 1992; Ryff and Selzer, 1996). Everyone expects 'mothers' to be strong, caring, and supportive. However there is no support in the ministry that attempts to check on their general well-being of the wives as 'women'. All the women said that they need someone whom they can be open to and share their feelings without being prejudiced, someone who understood and could empathize with them. Elizabeth, a 33 year old wife of the pastor of 'New Pentecost Church in Empangeni said that *as pastor's wife, I am expected to minister to my husband and church members but there is no one to minister to me. Sometimes I wish I was not married to the pastor so that I could share my problems with him or not be the pastor's wife so that I could open up to him.* Cynthia, a 40 year old pastor's wife of three children said that people's expectations of her as pastor's wife and as mother of the church caused a lot of frustration for her, recalling how she is expected to be emotionally, spiritually and sometimes physically involved in people's lives. She said a lot of people have hurt her feelings but chose to take hurt to God in prayer instead of addressing the individuals concerned, as she did not wish to split the church.

This sense of loneliness or alienation from their own sense of self appears to create doubt in the women who begin to question their role performance as pastor's wives and as mothers of the church. 70% of the women said that people assume that as pastor's wife they are supposed to adhere to and support every initiate of their husband and also help the congregants to do the same. The women all said they are prepared nonetheless to conform to the role if they plan to stay married because non-conformity will result not only to the desolation of their marriage but will also have negative repercussions on their husbands' jobs and the work of God. The narratives revealed that the women appear to walk the tightrope of balancing between what we have referred to as the hegemonic 'mothering mandate' and conforming to the role of mothering.

The Voices of the Hindu Women
As we move to the narratives shared by the Hindu women we see again that it is in the fine grained, lived realities of women, where the microphysics of power and social control is discernable. Here too the women's 'stories' provide springboards for shedding light on the tensions experienced by the women as they attempt to conform to the expectations of either their spouses or the wider filial relations of the in-laws. As mentioned earlier, only women who were in nuclear family households were interviewed. This delimiting was vital in eliminating homes were there would be constant surveillance and scrutiny from one or more parents in-law. It was also the recognition that many contemporary young Hindu households have increasingly shifted towards nuclear family arrangements. Most importantly it was to gain insight into how 'free' the women heading their own households, might feel when it came to conforming or rejecting mothering stereotypes.

Lila* (not her real name*) who is twenty nine, confides that although she did not feel any undue pressure from her parents or wider pool of relatives *to marry*, she did feel the subtle and not so subtle pressure *to have children*, from both sides of her family, now that a few years had elapsed since the marriage. Lila* and her family were all Sai Baba devotees. Lila* was herself a follower of the Sai Movement prior to her marriage, and had met her prospective husband at a religious camp for Sai adherents. Lila* shares that her husband was beginning to give in to the pressures of his Hindu parents and interrogate her about '*when she would be ready*', and whether she was '*concerned with losing her figure*'. Lila* narrates that even though the couple, married now for four years, had jointly agreed to postpone having children indefinitely until they were both established in their professions (they were both in the hospitality industry), her husband was feeling that the time had arrived for a family. Lila* felt that the timing was far from opportune and indeed she was not even convinced that she wanted to have children. Recent accounts of childfree lifestyles show that the rise of feminism, broader access to reproductive choice, and women's wider

participation in the paid workforce are all key social change features. However, Lila* did not feel that this understanding could be communicated to the religious elders. She claimed though, that these sentiments did not make her any less of a Hindu. Lila* shares that she felt that her husband was slowly collapsing under the intimations of his parents and from the members of the local Sai congregation. She herself would be quizzed by the older women in the congregation as to why she was delaying having children. Lila* felt that she was being appraised and her body evaluated as fast approaching its sell by date, as she put it. She spoke about how the kindly old ladies or Sai congregants would remind her that the body of a pregnant woman was beautiful and blessed. Lila* spoke of being resentful of how she and her body were being perceived by others which was not in tune with her own sense of herself as a woman. She also claimed that she did not wish to *"lose sight of who she was and fall victim to religious or cultural mandates"*, but admitted that *"it was hard"*.

The fact that Lila* and her in-laws could *both* be practicing Hindus who thought of themselves as being religious God fearing people, and yet have divergent views of the expectations embedded in their religious faith (regarding the woman) is perhaps more easily explained in a polyvocal and multi stranded religion like Hinduism. For it is a complete fallacy in the context of Hinduism to expect any kind of doctrinal and cultural coherence. While revivalist thinkers of the nineteenth century, educated in the West, may have attempted to gather and cohere what they conceived as the 'essential' Hinduism, there is no master or hegemonic narrative for the religion. It is rather composed of a richly multiple ancestrage and different historically and ideologically rooted strands of Hinduism*s*, and most anthropologists of religion attempt for nuanced relativistic readings of certain aspects of the religion, fully aware of the internal relativism that exists inside the religion. There are times when a kind of strategic essentialism is practised that seeks to, for political reasons, prop up a nationalistic discourse. The popular reality however, is that, while contemporary Hindus are monotheists, the religious practices are still widely diverse, and even the main scriptural ritual and philosophical texts most commonly referred to, offer a diverse array of religious practices and interpretations.

While Lila*appeared to understand marriage as a sacred union of two individuals who chose to share their love and lives together, the elders in her and her husband's family, saw marriage as *both* sacred, as well as being a kind of cultural transaction that carried within its texts, the codicil for having children. Although Lila* was not overlying concerned about the effects of pregnancy on her figure, which seemed to be the assumption of the husband, she felt strongly that her "*body was hers alone"*. She shared that she felt entrapped by the cultural dictates and decorum that prevented her from *"telling off the overbearing Sai women and their needling prods about children"*. Her narrative also revealed that she especially resented being made to feel guilty for her

choices. Lila*, shared that she tried often to avoid certain women, allowing us to see that she was on some level imposing a kind of self alienation in an attempt to protect herself.

It is of course the female body, as opposed to the normative (or rather socially *normalized*) male body, that is discursively constructed in many cases as "pathological" (Mupotsa 2007: xi) in this instance as being pathological and as 'mother' according to the dominant paradigms of social practice amongst the more conservative minded Hindu elders. This kind of thinking appears to operate within subtle and discursive understandings of power and social control. Here, role mandates and role conformity are fashioned from the dominant signifying systems of gender taxonomies that inhere in particular understandings of a woman's worth in Hinduism, or *being a good Hindu wife* as Lila* puts it. It speaks to how we are meant to perform our *selves* and our female bodies in different social contexts; as single woman (ought *not to have* children) and as married woman (needing *to have* children) and about how we begin to construct the discourse of 'our culture', of good wives or adherents, and the 'deviants'. In the context of particular popular Hindu exegetics it seemed that the woman's 'body' is very much a social and religio-cultural 'phenomenon' that was meant to naturally lead to child bearing and motherhood. Many of the women interviewed shared that they routinely encountered the elder men and women in their "prayer groups" talk about the divine blessing of motherhood, describing it as "also a path to reach God".

Shiksha*, whose husband acted as congregational head of the local branch of the Sai group explains that although she felt herself to be a good wife, the fact that her husband was a kind of elder in the Service group placed an added burden on her. She was not yet thirty she said, in reference to her actual age of 28 years. Her husband was five years older, but according to her, looked and acted the part (of a much older) congregational head. Shiksha* shared that she did not wish to be the female counter to that and was sometimes uncomfortable when older women approached her for advice. Although there was no undue pressure to have children just because her husband was a leader in the prayer group, she was convinced that that would change once she "hit thirty" and they were still no children in sight. While congregational leaders in Hindu religious groups do not have formal ministerial or pastoral duties as such, they are nevertheless perceived as a religious elder in many instances. It was the unspoken expectations incumbent to this position Shiksha appeared to be referring to. What Shiksha appears to be voicing is the feeling that that women's motherhood decisions need to be informed by what Meyers (2001: 737) would refer to as 'a voluntaristic rhetoric'.

Saroj* who was 32 years old and married for about six years had found out from her gynecologist two years earlier that it was highly unlikely that she would fall

pregnant naturally. Although she declined sharing details of an understandably sensitive and traumatic issue, she was able to speak about the fact that her *"husband was very understanding of the matter"*. Her next comments and descriptions however, sounded like they could have come straight out of a serial scripted for Tamil television, broadcast from India itself. Although a strong woman with a teaching career and several teaching accolades, she lived in constant fear of her in-laws finding out her secret and what she saw as the inevitable shame that would follow. Although she was conversant with the various options of fertility procedures and adoption options for parenting, she was fearful of how she would be seen by her in laws for not being able to have children and fulfill the expectations and role of mother to their son's children. It appeared that she was more remorseful of this fact, than the fact that she was not able to fall pregnant. She herself, and it seemed her husband, were both comfortable and open to seeing a fertility specialist and even looking at adoption possibilities if it came to that.

Saroj* shared that the wives of her husband's brothers had had beautiful children that rendered them closer to her parents in-law and made her feel a little bit *"on the outs"* with them. It was clear that Saroj* felt a deeply engrained sense of guilt that she could not become a mother naturally. She also felt this most especially she said, when in the company of women who had children. From what she said she even experienced their kindness and sympathy with reciprocal guilt. It appeared as if it was a case of becoming a mother, or the 'other'. She explained that her parents-in-law and the aunts and uncles in her extended family all belonged to the Ramakrishna Centre. Although her own understanding of Hinduism and of the specific teachings of her *guru* or spiritual teacher, Sri Ramakrishna, did not put pressure on her to fulfill any dictates of the ideal woman and of the wife bearing children, she said she felt, *"as far as the older family members were concerned, the good wife was also the good mother"*.

Meena* was a slightly older wife, who at 38 years old, had already been married for twelve years. She had eagerly looked forward to having her own children. Her husband shared her passion for children and she described her three children aged 11, 9 and 6 in loving and glowing terms, typical of most mothers. Her narrative revealed that she willingly had put a potential career on hold as a lawyer and felt no regrets at having the children and had relished full time motherhood. Meena* went on to share however, that she now wished to be *"more than a mother"* and wished to return to her profession. As money was not particularly an issue she felt that she was being *"blocked from re-entering her life as career women by her husband and his parents"*. Meena* explained that, although both her husband as well as her in-laws were very loving and gentle people, they were both making her feel very guilty *"for thinking about her*

needs". Meena* claimed to fear their and others', social disapproval, as well as disapproval from her own children (for voicing her own needs).

The notion of guilt, or 'maternal guilt' (as it has come to be captured in the literature) was something that featured and was woven into much of the narratives of the women. Many women felt that they were letting their families down and others who were already mothers like 38 year old Meena* and 35 year old Justine*, had a deeply engrained sense of maternal guilt about wanting to have time to devote to their own careers and leave a portion of child rearing in the hands of others. Much of this guilt, the women were themselves, able to attribute to remarks and comments made by spouses or wider family members. From speaking to mothers from the Hindu tradition, it appeared that many were resentful of what they saw as the maternal investment expected of them, largely imposed by religio-cultural and family expectations. Of course maternal guilt and the expectation of maternal investment, is not confined to being entrenched only in the Hindu religion, or even only religious traditions as such. It is just as seamlessly embedded in the matrix of patriarchal societal structures and prevailing popular cultural notions of mothering, held by both men and women. The notion of motherhood as being constitutive of 'feminine gender identity', of women's social role, and as desirable and fulfilling *for all* women is deeply embedded in industrial urban, and rural societies (see Gillespie 2003: 122). However, as the Hindu women are themselves all too aware, there is also a rich complex of mythology of gods and goddesses that are rendered into stories of ideal wife, ideal mother and son on, complete with textual and linguistic references to wifely '*devotion*' and motherly '*devotion*…making the idea of motherhood and unconditional maternal investment divinely sanctioned almost, or at the very least open to being interpreted as such and reminds us that (the extent of) maternal guilt, is itself subject to cultural variation. Conditional motherhood (Rotkirch 2009: 96) on the other hand states conversely that emotionally, mothers are equipped both for providing for the offspring, and for denying constant or exclusive care and delegating some of those responsibilities to others.

Anna Rotkirch, a psychologist, goes on to describe guilt as an 'interpersonal moral emotion' that aims to repair or inhibit behavior that causes harm to others. She claims that it occurs in relationships in which the other's welfare is of interest to the actor, such as reciprocal relationships and kin relations. Guilt focuses on wrongful behavior and is connected to a concern for others and how they are affected by one's behavior" (Rotkirch 2009: 92)*.* However, in the context with the women, *there is no harm as such* where the women's guilt needs to act to inhibit (harmful) behaviour. Instead there were merely the needs of the others (husband, wider family and in some instances the children themselves), which the women's guilt helps to appease (by inhibiting her actions). The women however, in allowing themselves to experience the levels of

guilt that they claimed as experiencing, were further internalising what they felt the motherhood mandate and role conformity entailed. This is not to say that Hindu women have not chosen to enter the work force after having children, or even hesitated in delaying having children. The experiences related here are not meant to be read as a generic of *all* Hindu women. However, these narratives serve to reveal that these kinds of tensions do still persist and enact themselves out for some categories of Hindu women. Guilt appeared to arise from "diverging interest and negotiations" that existed between the women and their wider family and acquaintances. Compounded to that Rotkirch points out, were also the "cultural expectations of extensive and perpetual high-quality maternal investment" or the "motherhood myth" fostered and foisted by religious and societal structures (2009: 92). The *motherhood myth* is understood by many feminists as being a cultural tool for manipulating mothers into full time investment in their children. This myth depicts mothers as universally present, nurturing and kind. The motherhood myth thus denies the conditional nature of maternal strategies and works to induce guilt in real mothers who fail to meet its requirements. High-quality parenting is a cultural norm that postulates abundant face-to-face interaction and pedagogical activities with the child (Rotkirch 2009: 93)*. It appeared that this wide cultural myth resonates even more strongly within the Hindu tradition where much of the thinking of ideal wife and ideal mother appears, as mentioned, to be divinely sanctioned.

Conclusion

In listening to the women from both the Christian and Hindu religious traditions we see that, while speaking in different voices of their own particular experiences, the conversation is one that both groups of women are participants in. Both religious traditions appeared to carry prescriptive mandates on mothering and conforming to the role of mother, whether in the context of biological mother, or as congregational mother, thus forming borders and edges as to who they are meant to be as women and thereby denying the divergent constructions and specificities of who they *actually* feel themselves to be. Mothering mandates and the incumbent roles connive to position women with respect to a "fundamental social structure" and "moral situation", in other words, the family (Meyers 2001: 735), which in the case of the pastors' wives is the congregational family. These mandates are experienced by the women as muting other aspects of their 'self' as they feel compelled in varying measures, to enact the religio-cultural constructions of the traditions they find themselves in. However, despite cultural discourses that posit motherhood as the ultimate fulfillment for women and the cornerstone of the woman's identity, the narratives show that many Christian and Hindu women are uncomfortable with the normative mandates imposed by motherhood and its association with hegemonic notions of woman and self.

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