Nidān

International Journal for the

Study of Hinduism

Volume 17 December 2005

ISSN 1016-5320

- Nidān is an international Journal which publishes contributions in the field of studies in Hinduism
- Editors do not take responsibility for the views and opinions expressed in the articles published in Nidān.
- Articles published in Nidān have abstracts reflected in Ultriche's International Periodicals Directory, New Jersey, USA, in Periodica Islamica, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and in the Index to South African Periodicals

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Nidān

Editorial Note

This year is the second since we have made Nidān an international journal and we thank all those scholars who have enthusiastically received the journal. We intend publishing on a variety of themes related to Hinduism and its study. The journal is very conscious of the debates between the so called "insiders" and the "outsiders" to Hinduism and is keen to publish views from both sides of the study of Hinduism. It consciously avoids both sectarian as well as scholarly biases. Scholars are invited to express their views openly and candidly through the medium of the journal. While the journal does not compromise on the scholarly rigour and criticality, it also does not, however, wish to become insensitive to those who have particular doctrinal views. The journal is also concerned about the issue of vernacular Hinduism/s and Sanskrit forms of Hinduism and is keen to publish as much as possible on the vernacular traditions. In particular, vernacular traditions have been less focused thus far in scholarly literature and the editors, therefore, wish to encourage more vernacular and local Hindu traditions being studied and published. Additionally, the editors also wish to encourage scholarship in the area of global forms of Hinduism, especially in the face of the growing phenomenon of Hindu diaspora. Above all, the journal wants to emphasise the internal diversity that exists within what has come to be called Hinduism. By the same token, it also wants to bring together a variety of methodologies and theories to bear on the study of Hinduism. Social scientific methods are particularly encouraged in an effort to balance the traditional text based methodologies.

Sincerely

P. Pratap Kumar
Editor

The Philosophical-Theological Structure of the Bhagavadgītā
Deciphering the Structure of the Bhagavadgītā through Comparative Theology
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The *Bhagavad gītā* is a world classic, and is one of the triple foundations of the Indian philosophical school of Vedānta. However, despite its remarkable influence it is believed by many to lack a logical, coherent and consistent structure. This paper argues against this common view, and proposes to decipher the *Bhagavad gītā's* structure with the help of a theory of religion articulated within the realm of Comparative Theology. The paper first points to the Bg's nature as a syncretic text, reconciling *jñāna* and *karma*. It then points to a special feature of Indian philosophy, which is a hierarchical concept of reality, characterizing some schools, the Vedānta being among these. Keith Ward's term "Fiduciary Structure" is presented, and it is argued that Ward's Fiduciary Structure well fits the Bg's three metaphysical levels of *dharma*, *yoga* and *mokṣa*. Applying Ward's term to the Bg's three levels of reality, light is shed on the Bg's *jñāna* aspect. The paper next proceeds to decipher the Bg's *karma* aspect through applying Ward's term of "Self Transcendence". It articulates various ethical stages of performing action, and argues that these are stages on the path of "self transcendence" leading one from the lower level of reality to the higher level, or from the stage of *saṁsāra* to the state of Brahman. Thus is the Bg presented to have a unified and coherent philosophical theological structure.

The Philosophical-Theological Structure of the Bhagavadgītā

The Bhagavadgītā is a rich treatise containing numerous ideas fundamental to Hinduism. However, despite its rich collection of ideas, it is not very clear whether these ideas are organised in a coherent way. G.S. Khair articulates the problem thus:

My general impression after reading the Gītā for a number of years was that the poem is replete with edifying and effective ideas useful for life, scattered all over the book in every chapter. They are simple to understand and easy to remember. Here and there, we come across concise and powerful thoughts which appeal to a reader, irrespective of his religion, sect or denomination. This, to my mind, is the key to the tremendous popularity of the Gītā. It influences your life. From this point of view the Gītā is intelligible. But for a logical, related, consistent, systematic and coherent interpretation, the poem presents a number of difficulties. I guess there are very few people who are able to follow, from beginning to end, the logic and argument of the main themes of the book. In a number of places it is hard to understand the relation of a verse or a paragraph to the topic under discussion and to the theme of the poem as a whole.[1]

Khair bases his research on linguistic evidence, and argues that the Bg has been composed by three different authors. However, the Bhagavadgītā could also be seen as promoting syncretism, and as such, aspiring to reconcile a variety of doctrines and ideas. Writes B.K. Matilal:

In certain religious or philosophical texts that promote syncretism, such as the Bhagavadgītā, three principal ways of attaining the final goal of salvation are mentioned. They are *karmayoga* (the path of action), *jñāna yoga* (the path of knowledge), and *bhaktiyoga* (the path of devotion)... Sometimes a situation is recognized as *jñāna-karma-sammuccaya-vāda*, that is, it is claimed that *jñāna* and *karma* are like the two wings of a bird: it cannot fly with just one of them.[2]

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[1] Khair, *Quest For The Original Gītā*, p. 1.

[2] Matilal, "Jñāna", Encyclopedia of Religion, vol. 8, p. 95.

We follow Matilal in considering the Bg to represent a syncretism of *jñāna, karma* and *bhakti*[3]. However, we oppose Khair's view, and argue that seen from a theological-philosophical perspective, the Bg possesses a coherent and consistent theme, which could be logically followed from the beginning of the treatise to its end. This paper does not argue as to the number of the Bg's authors, nor as to the circumstances of its compilation, rather it aims at carefully deciphering the Bg's structure. In order to analyse the Bg's structure, we will apply a theory of religion by the philosopher of religion Keith Ward. Based upon Ward's ideas, we will argue that concept of reality underlying the Bg is divided into three layers, and that the ethical stages presented therein are similar to a ladder, where each stage leads to a higher one. This methodology highlights the Bg's *jñāna* and *karma* aspects; the *jñāna* aspect is represented through the three level metaphysical concept, whereas the *karma* aspect is represented through the ladder of different action grades. The three metaphysical levels and the ladder of ethical stages are complementary; the division of reality into these three layers highlights one's present condition in the lower level, and one's goal which is the higher level, whereas the ladder of action provides the practical means of gradually overcoming this gap step by step, by a process of self transformation.

The Fiduciary Structure and its application to Indian thought

The fiduciary is a term denoted by Ward, in which he aspires to encompass the main metaphysical or paradigmatic components of the phenomenon of religion, and include them all in one relatively simple model. As a general principle, religion aspires to overcome the huge divide between finite and the infinite. Thus the realm of the finite is defined as such along with a rationale of how it emerged, the realm of the infinite is also described, and the means of transformation from the finite to the infinite are given. This is described by Keith Ward:

> We can then see the structural configuration of a religion as the framework it gives for understanding human life as ordered to an objective goal of fulfilment. One begins with a statement of the human condition, with all its limitations. Some account is offered of how this

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[3] Although this paper will not engage with the topic of "Bhakti in the Bg".

condition came to be as it is. Then the goal of freedom from these limitations is specified, together with the means to attain that goal. Finally, an account of the nature of the ultimately Real is given, and a particular understanding of the mode of revelation which discloses this nature. These factors provide the main outlines of the structure of a religious form of life.[4]

Keith Ward names this structure a "Fiduciary Structure". The Fiduciary structure contains an entire religious system along with its major components in a structured outline. Applying this idea to the Bg, we can say that the human condition described in the Bg is the condition of bondage by the three *guṇas*. The goal is freedom from *saṁsāra*, and the means to attain that freedom are the various *yoga* systems, such as *karma yoga, jñāna yoga, aṣṭāṅga yoga* and *bhakti yoga*. The nature of the ultimately Real is Brahman, and that is traditionally taken in two different ways; as impersonal and personal. The mode of revelation is taken to be God in person revealing this knowledge. The only missing component is the account, of how this condition came to be, a point not referred to in the Bg.

Hierarchical reality in the Bhagavadgītā

The Bg is one of the triple foundations of Vedānta, and as such shares qualities characterising a Vedāntin text such as hierarchical grades of reality. Śaṅkara, who was a major exponent of Vedānta, accepted at least two levels of reality. In this regards writes Sue Hamilton:

Śaṅkara goes to some length, however, to establish that the appearance of plurality does have conventional reality even if it is not ultimately real. He introduces "two levels of reality" – conventional and absolute ....[5]

Hamilton points to the existence of two levels of reality in Śaṅkara's thought, and this certainly falls within the boundaries of the Vedānta

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[4]Ward, K., *Concepts of God*, p.43.

[5]Hamilton, S. *Indian Philosophy – A Very Short Introduction*, p. 126.

school. Shlomo Biderman sheds further light on the issue of hierarchical reality in Indian philosophy:

> In Indian philosophy one can find two principal metaphysical positions. For the sake of convenience I shall call one of them the realistic or direct position and the second one the hierarchical position. In short, I shall say that philosophers who believed in the direct-realistic position assumed that reality itself is unified, that is – does not contain divisions or layers and one should not submit it to different interpretations. Therefore reality is subject to direct human recognition. Philosophers taking the hierarchical position assumed that reality is not unified, but contains differing levels, or rather stages. There is a higher or superior reality, and a lower or inferior reality, and one must distinguish between absolute and relative reality.[6]

The two leveled reality concept, one being empirical and conventional and the other absolute, one being changing and other permanent, may correspond to Keith Ward's idea of "The Fiduciary Structure". Ward names the lower level "the human condition" and the higher level "the Real", or elsewhere "the finite" and "the infinite";[7] we may well associate the "conventional" concept of reality with the "human condition", and the "absolute" concept of reality with the "infinite". We may next treat these two levels using the corresponding Indian terminology as "Dharma" and "Mokṣa"; the level of dharma being representative of the human or worldly condition, while the level of *mokṣa* being representative of the real or absolute condition.

Mentioning *dharma*, its opposite term, *adharma*, ought to be referred to as well. Ordinarily, dharma and *adharma* are considered opposite terms. However, seen from the point of view of *mokṣa*, both *dharma* and *adharma* are entirely in a different category. In our terminology, both *dharma* and *adharma* represent the finite level, whereas *mokṣa* represents the infinite level. Simplifying our terms, the embodied state representing both *dharma* and *adharma* is the world of *saṁsāra*,

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[6]Biderman, S., *Indian Philosophy – The Foundations*, P. 61.

[7] See for example: Ward,, *Concepts of God*, p. 3.

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whereas the liberated state is of an entirely different nature called *mokṣa*. These two kinds of dichotomies – between *dharma* and *adharama*, and between *dharma* and *mokṣa*, can be understood in light of the fiduciary structure: the dichotomy between *dharma* and *adharma* may be taken to be horizontal, as both exist within the same realm. However, the dichotomy between both *dharma* and *adharma* and between *mokṣa*, may be taken to be vertical. This is so as both *dharma* and *adharma* are situated in the worldly or finite level, whereas *mokṣa* is situated in a completely different and higher level which is infinite and absolute.

Hierarchical reality and the Bhagavadgītā's structure

The structure of the Bhagavadgītā is constructed of the two levels – the finite and the infinite, or in Indian terms – *dharma* and *mokṣa*. Moreover, the text is even more complex as there is a third level, serving as an intermediate level thus helping to connect the two levels, which would otherwise be unrelated to each other due to an insurmountable gap separating the two. The first level represents *dharma*, and furthers proper human life. The second level represents yoga, and furthers attempts to escape the viscous state of *saṁsāra* while gradually seeking hold of the state of *mokṣa*, and the third level represents the state of *mokṣa* itself.

A question may arise, "What terms can be used in order to distinguish between these three levels?". We suggest that in order to distinguish the levels from each other, their underlying assumptions in terms of values and being may be examined[8]. Thus in the first level, that of *dharma*, the general rule in terms of value is to prosper. Here worldly happiness and prosperity are desired and are good. In terms of being, the individual is defined as a human being or any other living being such as an animal or vegetation or other.

In the second level, the value of worldly prosperity is rejected in favour of non-attachment to the world and indifference to both worldly happiness and worldly distress, along with yoking oneself to a higher reality, that of *mokṣa*. Here the value of being equal minded towards both happiness and distress, and seeking absorption in

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[8] Corresponding to the categories of ethics and ontology.

Brahman is superior. In terms of being, the individual person does not perceive of himself any longer a human (or other) being but as an eternal spirit soul bound by the laws of *saṁsāra*. Thus the subject is not any more a human being, rather an eternal spirit soul.

The third level is somewhat more complex, as traditionally there exist two different ideas as to the nature of the supreme; whereas Śaṅkara would consider the supreme to be impersonal, Rāmānuja would consider him to be a the supreme person. Thus in the personal version of the third level, in terms of values, the indifference and non-attachment of the second level are replaced by deep attachment to God and deep love expressed by loving feelings towards the divine. In the impersonal version of the third level, the ideal value is the experience of *brahmānānda* or the bliss of Brahman, and the realization of one's identity with Brahman. As far as being, the spirit soul of the second level becomes pure existence and one with Brahman in impersonal terms, whereas in personal terms, it becomes a pure servant and lover of a personal God.

The three levels represent internal mental states or attitudes. Thus, a man who sees the world from the point of view of the first level, is convinced that he is a man, and that his aim is to prosper. Similarly, he who sees the world from the point of view of the second storey is convinced that he is an embodied spiritual self, and that his aim is to get released from that condition. He who resides in the third storey sees God everywhere, and tries to serve and love him, or alternatively, he may realise his oneness with Brahman. We suggest the usage of a three storey house as a metaphor; each such storey or level contains unlimited existential opportunities and paths. Moreover, the residents of each floor have their own language, terms, and underlying assumptions which are different than those of the other storey's residents. In a sense, the Bg speaks in three different languages and constantly moves between the three storeys. Once recognising the storey or level from which the text is speaking, that section becomes intelligible and consistent with the rest of the treatise.

A textual reference exemplifying the Bg's shifting between the metaphysical levels

These ideas may require a textual reference, and we will present an example, where the text clearly shifts from one level to another. The example demonstrates how the text shifts from the first to the second level. Arjuna argues against the war from the position of the first level as follows:

> 41 When the family becomes overpowered by *adharma*, the family ladies become spoiled, O Kṛṣṇa. When the women become spoiled a mixture of classes arises. 42 Certainly, the mixture of classes leads both the clan destroyers and the family to hell. The family ancestors fall too, being deprived from the offerings of sanctified food and water due. 43 By the evil deeds of the family destroyers who bring about the mixture of classes, the eternal caste *dharma* and family *dharma* are abolished. 44 O Janārdana, we have heard that for those men, whose family *dharma* has obliterated, residence in hell is assured. 45 Alas, resolved are we on committing a great sin, as we are intent on killing our own people out of greed for royal pleasure. 46 It would have been better for me to be killed on the battlefield by Dhṛtarāstra's sons, weapons in their hands, while I am unarmed and unresisting.[9]

This passage may now be examined according to the two parameters previously mentioned - values and being. As far as values, it is clear that underlying Arjuna's speech is the desire to achieve worldly prosperity. One of his main points is that the war would cause the decline of *dharma* and the rise of *adharma*, and thus suffering would come upon all involved. As he believes that prosperity is good, he objects to the war. As far as being, Arjuna thinks of himself and the others as human beings. Kṛṣṇa, hofwever, doesn't answer him directly, but raises the conversation to the second level and says:

> 11 While speaking words of wisdom, you lament for that which is not to be grieved for. Wise are those who do not lament neither for the living nor for the dead. 12 Never was

[9] Bg Chapter 1, 41-46, my translation.

there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings, nor in the future shall any of us cease to exist. 13 As Childhood, youth and old age occur to the soul situated in this body, similarly follows the acquisition of another body. The wise is not illusioned in this matter. 14 Heat, cold, happiness and distress – all are produced by sensual perception alone, which is impermanently coming and going. You should desire to endure them, O Bhārata. 15 The wise person who is not disturbed by these, and thus remains equal in both happiness and distress, is fit for immortality, O bull among men.[10]

Here the values propounded are utterly different. Krṣna does not accept the idea that prosperity in the world is good, but calls for indifference and endurance of both worldly happiness and worldly distress. These are taken to be impermanent, and to be produced by sensual perception alone. As far as being, Krṣna does not refer to the individuals present as human beings, rather as spirit souls or selves. In a sense, Krṣna doesn't answer Arjuna's doubts in regards to fighting directly, but performs a kind of a "Copernical revolution" by changing the underlying assumptions of the conversation. Arjuna argues that killing his relatives is bad, an obvious first storey statement which assumes that people are subjected to death, and that death is to be avoided as far as possible for the sake of prosperous life. Krṣna doesn't answer Arjuna's arguments; rather he shifts the conversation to a different level altogether, and speaks out of different assumptions. Basically he's saying that death doesn't exist at all, which is a second storey assumption; therefore he doesn't see much logic in Arjuna's arguments. Also, Krṣna challenges Arjuna's idea that worldly prosperity and happiness is good and to be desired. He propounds the idea that indifference to both happiness and distress is good and to be desired. Thus Krṣna speaks here out of a second storey position.

The Bhagavad gītā as a transformative scripture

Having articulated the Bg's three metaphysical levels, we may now look into the question, "how does the Bg aspire to transform its readers, or lead them from the lowest level to the highest, i.e. from saṁsāra to mokṣa?". For this purpose, we may expand our theoretical

[10]Bg 2, 10-15, my translation.

method by looking into Keith Ward's second term called "Self Transcendence". This term refers to the transformation one undergoes in his progress from the finite realm to the infinite realm. According to Ward, religion can be seen as a transformation of the self in relation to the "Real". In this regards he writes:

> It is important to see that religion is not attempting to posit another object which we may one day come across. And it is not attempting to communicate a purely dispassionate or theoretical vision of how things are. Religion is primarily concerned with the transformation of the self, by appropriate to that which is most truly real. It is not so much an attempt to see the world differently, as to be in the world in a different manner. The vision is not primarily of another thing; but of oneself, as transfigured by the infinite.[11]

The occurrence of transformation in itself is not necessarily a religious phenomenon. A person may undergo various types of transformation which do not affect his religious position. The question may be raised, in what way is a religious transformation unique, and how does it differ from other kinds of transformation? In order to answer this question, the help of the fiduciary structure may be needed, as it defines the direction of progress made by the individual in a religious paradigm; progress is made when the individual moves from the finite realm, closer and closer to the realm of the infinite. Thus transformations can be evaluated, and the question may be raised: "does the transformation involve a progress towards the 'Real'?". When a lay man is transformed into a scholar, or right winged person is transformed into a left winged, the transformation does not necessary involve a change in one's distance from God, and therefore cannot be considered a religious transformation. However, a religious transformation must involve a change in one's distance from the infinite. A positive transformation in religious terms will imply that one comes closer to the infinite, whereas a negative transformation would imply that one comes closer to the finite, thus distancing himself further away from the "Real".

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[11]Ward, *Concepts of God*, p.153.

Does the transformational process correspond to the Indian notion of "path" or *mārga*? Ward points to the "iconic vision" as arousing this self journey characterised by a desire to come closer to the proximity of the "Real", and of "self transcendence" as the response to that vision:

> I have spoken of a basic attitude which I have termed the iconic vision: a vision of the temporal in the light of eternity. And I have spoken of the response of self transcendence, which sees the finite self as the vehicle of an unlimited and unique reality beyond it, conceived under the analogy of self or will.[12]

The analogy of the self as a vehicle is well taken, as the transformational process can be taken as an internal journey. In an external journey, one experiences a constant change of the external environment, whereas in an internal journey such as a religious transformation, one experiences the world in a different manner, as cited above. In other words, the more progress he makes, the different the world seems to him. The topic of self transcendence may be summarised by pointing at the two possible courses undertaken by an individual at any position in life; the horizontal and the vertical. The horizontal approach would move between self restraint and self gratification, and will not involve progress towards the "real". However, the vertical approach will aim to transcend the self in a transformational attempt of getting somewhat closer to the infinite. Thus writes Ward:

> It may be said that there are three basic ways of using each position in one's own life. It may be used as a way of repressing the self; or as a way of gratifying the self and its desires; or, finally, as a way of transcending the self in relation to self-existent value.[13]

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[12]Ibid. p. 165.

[13]Ibid. p.78.

We believe that Ward's term "Self Transcendence" well articulates the experience of spiritual progress underlying the Bhagavadgītā; this term well depicts the transformation one undergoes in his gradual progress from the lower level of dharma, characterized by the *ātman*'s being bound in *saṁsāra*, to the higher level of *mokṣa*, or complete the freedom from *saṁsāra* and attainment of Brahman.

The Bhagavadgītā's practical aspect of Self Transcendence

The Bhagavadgītā has not only a theoretical side, but a practical side as well. Regarding the position of the Bg as a practical scripture, writes Raghavachar:

> The Upaniṣads and the Brahma-Sūtras offer the interpreter not much scope for developing a philosophy of conduct and spiritual self culture. The Gītā is the work in particular in the realm of Vedānta that lays down the plan of life for realising the ultimate good. This practical emphasis is not so fully present in the other two texts. Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita, leaving out their respective interpretations of the Gītā, would be substantially impoverished and would lack the doctrine of the way of life.[14]

As a practical scripture, the Bg offers the means of crossing over the gap between the first level, the level of *dharma*, to the third level, the level of *mokṣa*. Mere following of *dharma* while avoiding *adharma* is not sufficient to attain the stage of *mokṣa*, but a different type of endeavour or path is needed. This process or enterprise is called by Van Buitenen "self realisation"[15] and is quite similar to the term "self transcendence" denoted by Ward. The question may now be raised, as to what means does the Bg offer the practitioner who desires to make progress in the process of self transcendence, or self realisation. In other words, if the gap between *dharma* and *mokṣa* is insurmountable, how is one expected to cross it, leaving behind the world of *saṁsāra*, and attaining the liberated realm of *mokṣa*? We have already seen that

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[14]Raghavachar, S.S., Rāmānuja on the Gītā, p.vii.

[15] Van Buitenen, "Dharma and Mokṣa", p. 37.

the term self transcendence requires transformation in response to the vision of the absolute. However, what practical means or system does the Bg offer the individual or the community who aspires to practice this transformative path?

A major question raised in the Bg, is whether one should choose the path of action, or alternatively, the contemplative path. This question is clearly raised twice, at the beginning of the third and fifth chapters, and is further discussed elsewhere[16]. The Bg clearly recommends the path of action, which is the means by which the performer is to be elevated all the way from the level of *dharma* to the state of *mokṣa*. This uplifting action is performed according to one's *dharma*, and continues to be carried out all along the way. Thus, Arjuna is encouraged all along the Bg to follow his dharma and fight. However, as the text progresses his motive for fighting is refined. And the external act of fighting becomes a representative of higher and higher inner states of consciousness. Thus, although externally one continues to carry out his prescribed duty, he undergoes an internal transformation through sublimation or purification of his motives for performing action. In this way a kind of ladder is formed, through which one rises higher and higher, from *dharma* to *mokṣa*, along the path of self transcendence or self realisation.

Textual references for the ladder of motives

In the lowest stage, one acts being motivated by simple utilitarianism[17]. In other words, he acts for the purpose of directly achieving something for himself. Underlying the following reference is the notion of "Simple Utilitarianism":

> Besides that, people will be speaking of your eternal infamy, and for one who has been honoured, dishonour is worse than death. The generals will assume that you have withdrawn from the battle out of fear. Thus, those

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[16] Bg 3: 1-3, 5: 1-2, 6:1.

[17] The term "Utilitarianism" is used in this paper in its simple rendering, and not as a philosophical school associated with thinkers such as Bentham or Mill.

> who have once esteemed you highly will think little of
> you. Your ill wishers will speak many unspeakable
> words, thus ridiculing your capacity. What could be more
> distressful than this? [18]

Here Kṛṣṇa attempts to convince Arjuna to take arms, based upon a
simple utilitarian argument. He assumes that Arjuna aspires to
accumulate gain such as fame, and argues that by withdrawing from
the battle, Arjuna will loose his fame. The next argument is also
utilitarian, but is somewhat higher in that it accepts scriptural
authority; it accepts the idea that warriors who die in battle attain
heaven. Thus it can be named, the stage of Religious Expediency or
alternatively, "Dharmic Utilitarianism". In other words, Arjuna is
advised to follow dharma in order to achieve some end in this life or
the next:

> Happy are the Ksatriyas to whom such a fighting
> opportunity comes by good luck, as it opens for them
> heaven's gates [19].

A stage still higher is following dharma for its own sake, or
performing one's duty for the sake of duty:

> Fight for the sake of fighting, regarding alike happiness
> and distress, gain and loss, victory and defeat. Thus you
> shall not incur sin [20].

The stage of "Performing One's Duty for the Sake of Duty",
represents a pure mode of action, free from a desire for its fruits, and
is one of the central teachings of the Bg. However, it is still within the
first storey as it doesn't include an awareness of the ultimate good
which is, according to the Bg, release from *saṃsāra*. Those who act
on this level reach the top of the first level, and can progress further

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[18] Bg 2.34-36.

[19] Bg 2.32.

[20] Bg 2.38.

into the next stage, which is already in the second level. The next stage rejects the value of the Vedas, which are considered to be engaged with worldly gains, in favour of a higher ideal – the attainment of Brahman.

> As much value as there is in a well, when there is a flood of water on all sides, similar is the value of all the Vedas for he who is a knower of Brahman[21].

This stage may be named "Action for the Sake of the Highest Good or Brahman". He who thus acts is situated in the second level which is characterised by various *yoga* processes. He may act now in karma *yoga*, disinterested from the fruits of his actions, and he may offer those fruits to the supreme. He may practice *jñāna yoga, aṣṭāṇga yoga* or *bhakti yoga*. However, all these *yoga* practices have the common goal of detaching oneself from worldly existence and attachments, and attaching oneself to the supreme. The "Stage of Yoga" is thus characterized by enlightenment and renunciation:

> The enlightened renounces both good and evil deeds here in this world. Therefore, perform *yoga* for the sake of *yoga*, as *yoga* is the skill in action[22].

Having perfected the stage of *yoga*, he finally elevates himself to the third level, that of *mokṣa*, and becomes absorbed in Brahman, either in an impersonal way, such as in Śaṅkara's system, or through love of God, such as in Rāmānuja's system. Thus the impersonal version, of "Becoming One with Brahman", following Śaṅkara:

> He whose happiness is within, whose pleasure is within, and his enlightenment is similarly within is actually a *yogi*. His whole being thus absorbed in brahman, he attains to extinction in brahman.[23]

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[21] See 2.46.

[22] See 2.50.

[23] Bg 5.24

However, the Bg has dominant devotional characteristics, and the loving relations to be exchanged with the personal deity, serve as a stimuli for elevation in the ladder of motives, as well as the highest achievement attainable for the personalistic devotee, following Rāmānuja's line. Thus the personal version:

> Always think of Me and become My devotee. Worship Me and pay homage unto Me. Yourself thus being yoked to Me and intent on Me as your highest goal, you shall come to Me [24].

The stages may be summarised as simple utilitarianism, dharmic utilitarianism, duty for its own sake, acting for the sake of the highest good or Brahman, the stage of *yoga*, and the state of *mokṣa* in it's personal or impersonal version. Thus a "ladder of motives" is formed, whereas the higher one's motive for action is, the higher he is situated in the Bhagavad gītā's metaphysical structure. In this way the Bhagavad gītā aspires to encompass the entire realm of existence, while encouraging all to ascend the ladder of motives, thus distancing oneself from *saṁsāra* and absorbing oneself in Brahman, either personally or impersonally. Following this structure, which syncretises theory or *jñāna* and action or *karma*, I believe that the Bhagavadgītā can make sense as a coherent theological-philosophical treatise, firmly tied together as a single and unified text.

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[24] Bg 9.34

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"If that lord should come to me, fall together"
Divining the Future of A Goddess: The Araiyar Cēvai as
commentary at the Śrīvilliputtūr Āṇṭāḷ Temple

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The genesis of the Araiyar Cēvai is intimately connected with the legend of the extraordinary recovery of the four thousand poems of the Āḻvārs.[1] It is a story so significant to the Śrīvaiṣṇava community that I will briefly recount it here. Nāthamuni (tenth century), the first preceptor of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas while in the temple town of Vīranārāyaṇa Puram, encountered a group of singers reciting a Tamil text he had never heard before. The text, a decad began with the words, "Ārā Amutē—O lord who is the nectar that does not sate."[2]

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[1] The *Kōyil Oḻuku* also records a story where Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār is credited with first starting the Adhyayana Utsavam (Festival of Recitation). In this latter version, Nāthamuni is thus simply re-instituting a practice that had fallen out of memory. Rao, Hari. ed. *Koil Oḻugu: The Chronicle of the Srirangam Temple with Historical Notes Koil Oḻugu: The Chronicle of the Srirangam Temple*. Madras: Rochouse and Sons, 1967. p. 8-9.

[2] This is *Tirvaymoli* 5.8.1. The section of verses dedicated to the sacred site of Tirukkuṭantai (modern Kumbakonam) is spoken in the voice of the *nāyikā* (Parāṅkuśa Nāyikā: The Nāyika of Parāṅkuśa). The verse is as follows:

O ambrosia that never sates,

you make this servant's body,
so much in love with you,
sway

wander like waters

The final verse of the decad spoke of this set of ten as part of a poem of a thousand verses composed by Śaṭakōpaṉ of Kurukūr who had found refuge at the feet of Kṛṣṇa.[3] The itinerant singers informed Nāthamuni that they knew nothing more of this poem, and that he may have better luck at Kurukūr where Maturakavi's (Nāthamuni's direct disciple) disciple, Parāṅkuśadāsaṉ lived. Nāthamuni journeyed to Kurukūr only to be told once again that the poem was lost. In its place, Dāsaṉ gave him Maturakavi's composition on Śaṭakōpaṉ, "Kaṇṇi Nuṇ Ciṟu Tāmpu[4]" and directed the *ācārya* to meditate on it. Sure enough, Śaṭakōpaṉ appeared and revealed to him not just the thousand verses of his composition but the entire canon of four thousand verses, which came to be known as the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham*. Nāthamuni

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of the sea,
melt, and dissolve.

O Tall One
in sacred Kuṭantai
where lush fields of paddy
move like yak tails
over the rich waters,

I saw you, my lord,
radiant and reclining
in a lovely posture.

Narayanan, Vasudha. trans. *The Vernacular Veda: Revelation, Recitation, & Ritual.*
Columbia, S.C.: University of South Columbia, 1994. p.163.

[3] An interesting side note on this *phala śruti* verse is that it promises to the reciters of the decad and the *Tiruvāymoḻi* the love of many "doe-eyed women." (*Tiruvāymoḻi* 5.8.11)

[4] The verse is as follows:
Here on a spinous leash of rope
The wonder-child my lord was held.
But more, the mouth is nectar-welled
When Kurugur Nambi's name is spelled.

Bharati, Srirama. trans. *The Sacred Book of Four Thousand.* Chennai: Sri Sadagopan
Tirunarayanswami Divya Prabandha Pathasala, 2000. p. 189.

returned to Śrīraṅgam, set the poems to music and established an
annual festival of recitation, Adhyayana Utsavam. So that the poems
would never be lost again, Nāthamuni codified the poems along the
Tamil aesthetic categories of *iyal*, *icai* and *nāṭakam* and taught them
to his nephews, Kilakattālvār and Melakattālvār. It is Kilakattālvār
and Melakattālvār's performance in front of the deity of Śrīraṅgam,
Aḷakiya Maṇavālaṉ that earns them, directly from the god, the title
Araiyar along with the conical hat and the cymbals distinctive of their
performance tradition. In addition they were granted special temple
privileges such as receiving blessed offerings (*prasāda*) first that
effectively placed them at the very pinnacle of temple and ritual
hierarchy. It is an honor passed down along with their exclusive
performative traditions and one that they recall with great pride.[5]

Nāthamuni's recovery of the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham* is a
defining moment in the Srivaisnava community's memory of its
history and development. It is a story of historic beginning and as with
most such narratives, contains an element of recollection[6]—here that
motif is not just exaggerated, but is actualized. The recovery of the
four thousand poems emphasizes their revelatory character
superlatively that they become curiously doubly revealed—first by
Viṣṇu to the Ālvārs (particularly Nammāḷvār) and then by Nammāḷvār
to Nāthamuni. And the Araiyar Cēvai is a direct descendent of this
double revelation. Paul Connerton's observation that "the work of
recollection operate[s] in many ways, explicitly and implicitly, and at
many different levels of experience" and argument for two distinct
areas of social activity where recollection is at work: commemorative
ceremonies and bodily practices seems particularly apt to our above
story and the inception of the Araiyar Cēvai.[7] The new beginning

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[5] Interview with Araiyar Srinivasarangachari, of Śrīvilliputtūr. This was a point
that the Śrīvilliputtūr Araiyars stressed to me repeatedly and explained to me on
numerous occasions during interviews conducted between 2002 and 2003.

[6] Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 1989. p. 6.

[7] Ibid. p. 7.

According to the *Kōyil Oḷuku*'s depiction of the events leading to the
establishment of the Araiyar Cēvai, it is also doubly recovered. The first Araiyar

(Nāthamuni's recovery of the poems) climaxes with establishing a commemorative ritual (Araiyar Cēvai) as well as a shift in bodily practice by the performers of the ritual (Araiyars). The conical hat and the cymbals [fig. 1], the Araiyar's instruments of performance distinguish them from those lay men who simply recite the text (*adhyāpakas*). This shift is equally marked in name as well—what is first called Adhyayana Utsavam (Festival of Recitation) becomes with the investiture of the new name by the god, the Araiyar Cēvai (Service of the Araiyars).[8] The Araiyar Cēvai becomes a means to imply continuity with the community's mythic past where the Araiyar becomes its "ceremonially embodied form."[9] In doing so, their performance tradition intersects with what might appear two divergent fields. The first, is the concept of the *muttamil* (literally, three Tamils), a means of distinguishing this specialized service and the second is the Araiyar Cēvai's exegetical function, which can be understood as derivative of the first.

The word Araiyar itself encapsulates the notion of the Araiyar Cēvai as epitomizing the *muttamil* formulation. The first meaning derives from the Tamil root, *arai* to say, and therefore means, reciters—those who recite the text. The second meaning, related to the Tamil word *aracan*, king refers to the Araiyars as the kings of the *Divya Prabandham*. Wearing the traditional conical crown-like hat during performance, it is this latter meaning that the Araiyars most commonly evoke.[10] *Muttamil* is a phrase in currency by the sixth

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Cēvai is established by Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār in Śrīraṅgam —this is simply recitative in character. Subsequently, the poems are lost, and then recovered and Nāthamuni re-establishes the gestural-performative tradition. The double recovery is marked by a shift in bodily practice, moving from recitation to gestural interpretation.

[8] Vasudha Narayanan's work on the multiple lives of the *Tiruvāymoḻi* distinguishes between *ādhyapakas* (reciters) and Araiyars (specialized ritual performers).

[9] Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. p. 43.

[10] The Śrīvaiṣṇava performance tradition of Araiyar Cēvai has a Śaiva counterpart in the Ōtuvārs (singers). The Ōtuvārs sing the songs of the *Tirumuṛai* (with special attention to the *Mūvar Tēvāram*) in Tamil Paṇ (melodic modes), though these modes have been lost over time and have merged with Classical Karṇāṭak style singing. In their emphasis on singing, the Ōtuvārs are similar to

century used to define the language of Tamil as comprising word (*iyal*), music (*icai*) and drama (*nāṭakam*). As Saskia Kersenboom succinctly puts it "The natural consequences of this definition implies that the Tamil language assumes its full scope only in expressions cast in *three* medial forms."[11] Just so, the four thousand poems of the Āḻvārs assume their full scope only when all three Tamils are synthesized. It must be remembered that the Śrīvaiṣṇavas see the Tamil and Sanskrit texts as equal and twin sources for their tradition (*ubhaya vedānta*). So it is only logical that they would adapt the ideal form for Tamil (*muttamiḻ*) to conceptualize the Araiyar Cēvai, in turn positing it as *the* definitive explication of the mysteries of Āḻvār poetry.

However, Araiyar Cēvai is also conceived as *alaukika*, not of this world, and the Araiyars ingeniously cast the *muttamiḻ* categories of *iyal*, *icai* and *nāṭakam* into their Sanskrit counterparts as *devagāna* (divine music), *abhinaya rūpa* (the embodiment of emotive action) and *vyākhyāna rūpa* (the embodiment of commentary).[12] It is clear

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how the Araiyars recited the text during the "original" *Adhyayana Utsavam* established by Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār in Śrīraṅgam. Nāthamuni introduces the gestural interpretation. But the greatest difference between the two performance traditions is in their relationship to the text. In order to bring out nuances of meaning and even new shades of meaning, the Ōtuvār rearranges, splits, re-imagines the text. The Araiyar on the other hand, demonstrates a great fidelity to the text and claims to reproduce it faithfully time and again in order to bring out the complexity of meaning in the text. For a detailed discussion on Ōtuvār performance of *Tēvāram* see, Peterson, Indira. *Poems to Śiva: The Hymns of the Tamil Saints*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989.

[11] Kersenboom, Saskia. *Word, Sound, Image: The Life of the Tamil Text*. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1995. p. xvi.

[12] Interview by Hari Krishnan of Srinivasa Rangachari Araiyar, Śrīvilliputtūr December 1995. The same ideas reiterated in interview I conducted with the same Araiyar in Śrīvilliputtūr, March and August 2002 and December 2003.

Venkataraman. C. in his book *Araiyar Cēvai* also makes a mention of this of this reformulation, but only mentions the one Sanskrit counterpart, that of *devagāna*. p. 6. He does use the word *abhinaya* to describe the gestural interpretation and the Tamil word *urai* for commentary. To stress the divine origins and divine purpose, and its inherent superiority, he cites a story of a competition between a Devadāsī and an Araiyar in a court of an unnamed king to determine whose music is

from this reformulation that any full-bodied re-presentation of the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham* through the Araiyar Cēvai requires *vyākhyāna* (commentary). At first blush it might appear that dry exegesis has no place in the aesthetic categories of music, drama and poetry that constitute Tamil language (and the Araiyar Cēvai). But the Śrīvaiṣṇava exegetical method is (ideally) a process of enjoyment and a means of transmitting that enjoyment to the audience be they readers or listeners. The word employed here to describe the process is of course, *anubhava* and the commentarial text is *anubhava grantha* (text of enjoyment). The commentator (and the commentary) is a conduit between Ālvār and audience, simultaneously transmitting the mystic's enjoyment of god and the commentators' enjoyment of the mystic's enjoyment of god. In his *vyākhyāna rūpa*, the Araiyar becomes the conduit through which this enjoyment is transmitted and aptly, the Araiyar Cēvai becomes an *anubhava grantha*.[13] But if one acts as a conduit, or perhaps a receptacle of past records of mystical savoring, then room for spontaneous improvisation is drastically reduced. The Araiyar Cēvai is not judged on its ability to extemporize but rather on its ability to reproduce this past memory with utmost fidelity. Commentary is not spontaneously produced by the Araiyar during performance—only re-produced.[14] In doing so the Araiyar reiterates

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superior. Of course, the Araiyar (here identified with Nāthamuni) and his *devagāna* are declared the winner. Venkataraman, S. *Araiyar Cēvai.* Madras: Tamil Puttakālayam, 1985. pp. 7-9.

Araiyar Srinivasarangachari, who added a twist to it, narrated the same story to me on numerous occasions. In his version, the king declared the Devadāsī's music superior and then Viṣṇu was forced to intervene and overturn the king's misguided verdict.

[13] Furthermore, the Araiyar Cēvai often referred to as *dṛṣti kāvya* makes commentary visible and through that process makes not just theological insights of past *ācārya*s palpable, but also the experience of the Ālvārs themselves. Venkataraman, C. *Araiyar Cēvai.* p. 9.

[14] There are many examples that are cited that claim to show the allowance for change in Araiyar Cēvai. Ibid. p. 11.

When one examines these instances closely, it cannot escape our notice that in all such stories the agents suggesting the changes are prominent figures such as Rāmānuja and Empār. There perhaps can be no clearer indication that the Araiyar

and directs a very specific and established mode of experiencing the poems and remembering the past, while also affirming that the poems of the Āḻvārs are revealed (and the commentaries inspired) and therefore can abide no alterations of any kind.[15]

Embodying Muttamiḻ: Araiyar Performance

The Araiyar Cēvai survives today only in three temples in Tamil Nadu—Śrīraṅgam, Śrīvilliputtūr and Āḻvār Tirunakari, all of which, in the state's southern region are now controlled by Teṅkalai priests.[16]

Cēvai has a very specific exegetical function and works to disseminate the dominant theological interpretation. The Araiyar Cēvai therefore works very successfully as a memorized reproduction of the words of a select few past commentators such as Periyavāccāṉ Piḷḷai, Nampi Piḷḷai's *Īṭu* or a text such as *Tampirāṉ Paṭi*. The Araiyar quite literally embodies commentary.

[15] Despite their claims of an unbroken and unchanged performance tradition, change has affected the Araiyar Cēvai and even the Araiyars acknowledge this when responding to questions regarding the variations in performance at the three sites. They equally assert that their tradition is the most authentic and original. Hari Krishnan Interviews with Araiyars of Śrīvilliputtūr, Srirangam and Āḻvār Tirunagari, December 1995-96.

The Araiyar Cēvai is not the only performative tradition of the Śrīvaiṣṇava. Kaiśiki Nāṭakam, performed now only at the Tirukuṟuṅkuṭi temple is yet another performance tradition where a section of the *Kaiśiki Purāṇam* is enacted. The performers are all non-Brahmins, who serve the temple in some ritual capacity and Devadāsīs. The performance barely survives at the Tirukuṟuṅkuṭi temple now, and has undergone drastic changes in the past ten to fifteen years. There is no comprehensive and critical study on the Kaiśiki Nāṭakam. For a basic introduction to form, see Welbdon, Guy. "The Caṇḍāla's Song." *Religious Festivals in South India and Śrī Lanka. Religious Festivals in South India and Śrī Lanka*. eds. Guy Welbdon and Glenn Yocum. New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1982. pp. 77-100.

[16] There is one inscription that I have found about an Araiyar in the Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple, Kancipuram dated to 1246 C.E. Venkataraman, C. p. 20. The Araiyars and the Araiyar Cēvai do have a fairly long and well-documented history testified to in inscriptions recorded in the Śrīraṅgam temple, in the commentaries (specifically *Tampirāṉ Paṭi* and the *Īṭu*)[16], the fifteenth century *Śrīraṅgam Kōyil Oḷuku* (Temple chronicles) and oral stories passed down within the Araiyar families. The information about the Araiyars in these documents either give us names of specific Araiyars such as Piḷḷai Tirunaṟaiyūr Araiyar or Piḷḷai Aḷakiya Maṇavāḷa Araiyar, or anecdotes involving Araiyar performances. The Araiyar Cēvai appears to have flourished in many Śrīvaiṣṇava temples though it is

These three Araiyar traditions share many performative elements, but as expected also significantly diverge in others. Śrīraṅgam's Araiyar Cēvai with the largest entourage of Araiyars is the most elaborate of the three. Both Śrīvilliputtūr and Āḻvār Tirunagari have only one family of practicing Araiyars still serving at their temples.[17] Śrīraṅgam's Araiyars appear not to have a daily service schedule (*nitya kaiṅkarya*) and many of the performances during particular festival times (*utsava kaiṅkarya*) depart radically from the other two traditions. For instance, during the Adhyayana Utsavam celebrated annually in December, the Śrīraṅgam Araiyars stage extravagant enactments of mythic episodes such as the Killing of Kaṃsa (*Kaṃsa Vadam*). Furthermore, in order to accommodate the challenges of competing performance genres such as newly emergent Bharatanāṭyam, the gestural vocabulary, the costumes, and even the use of sacred space at Śrīraṅgam have been reimagined, resulting in an Araiyar Cevai that departs from the minimalist and sparse

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possible it was primarily practiced in Southern Tamil Nadu. Names of Araiyars such as Tirukuṟuṅkuṭi Araiyar, Tirukkaṇṇappuratta Araiyar, Tirunakari Araiyar that appearing in commentaries, indicate a preponderance for temples of the Southern Tamil Nadu.

Paul Younger has argued that the Araiyar Cēvai (Adhyayana Utsavam) in Śrīraṅgam incorporates the "historical consciousness of the Teṅkalai school" in the religious meaning generated for a popular festival. Younger, Paul. "Singing the Tamil Hymnbook: The Adhyayanōtsava Festival in Śrīraṅkam." *Playing Host to Deity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. pp. 80-94.

It is altogether possible that Younger's assertion here is on the mark. But as I have noted, there is much fluidity between the Teṅkalai position and the Vaṭakalai one when it comes to actual practice. Much of the theological distinctions don't carry over into the consciousness of lay devotees and to some extent, to the priests as well.

[17] The Araiyar Cēvai in Āḻvār Tirunagari and Śrīvilliputtūr are often considered together, with Śrīraṅgam's tradition being thought of as completely different. Śrīvilliputtūr's Araiyar Cēvai is supposed to have developed as an offshoot of Āḻvār Tirunakari's. But there are many differences between the two traditions and in many regards, Śrīvilliputtūr's Araiyar Cēvai is singular.

performance style of the Araiyar Cēvais preserved at Āḻvār Tirunagari and Śrīvilliputtūr.[18]

The Araiyar's gestural interpretation (*abhinaya*) in all three surviving traditions is performed in discrete gestural units—that is to say, each *mudra* (hand gesture) is held for the duration of the recitation of its corresponding word, the hand is then dropped to the side, until the Araiyar takes up the next gesture, as he begins intoning its corresponding word.[19] As a result, one gesture does not flow or ease into the next, as is the case in contemporary Bharatanāṭyam, forming a neat linear narrative and therefore demands focus on both the hand and the word. In this regard, the Araiyar Cēvai parallels dance performed by surviving Devadāsīs.[20] Emotion is conveyed through the use of gesture and through the intonation of the verse.[21] However,

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[18] In the last few years Śrīrangam's Araiyar Cēvai has drastically altered. Performances now take place under bright overhead lights with elaborate props, costumes and the influence of modern Bharatanāṭyam in their use of gesture is apparent everywhere. In the last decade, contemporary Bharatanāṭyam has appropriated certain aspects of Araiyar Cēvai performance. For example, Anita Ratnam incorporates "Araiyar Cēvai" mudras in her representation of songs from the *Divya Prabandham*. In *The Vernacular Veda*, Vasudha Narayanan discusses Srirama Bharati's reimagining of himself and of Araiyar Cēvai. Finally, in recent years Usha Narayanan is attempting to restructure Araiyar Cevai as "Śṛṅga Nṛtyam" for the concert stage. I have just begun a research project on the interaction between contemporary Bharatanāṭyam and Araiyar Cēvai.

[19] Despite the radical alterations to form at Śrīrangam, one can still observe the underlying performative principles of Araiyar Cēvai. Much as in Śrīvilliputtūr and Āḻvār Tirunakari, the focus still remains on discrete aural and gestural units.

[20] These similarities come to light when we watch video footage of Devadāsī performance or in interviews about the mode of performance as presented by surviving Devadāsīs. I had the opportunity to observe these moments through watching some of Devesh Soneji's field-work footage on the Devadāsīs of coastal Andra Pradesh.

[21] For a wonderful account of the method of Araiyar Performance see, Colas, Gerard. "Variations Sur La Pâmoison Dévote: Á propos d'un poème de Vēdāntadēśika et du théâtre des *araiyar*." *Images de corps dans le monde l' Hindu*. Ed. Michel Angot et al. Paris: CNRS, 2002. ed. Michel Angot. pp. 275-314.

unlike Devadāsī dance there does not appear to have been a "secular" courtly context for the Araiyar Cēvai, though this performance tradition certainly bears the imprint of its close interaction with Devadāsī performance. Given the deep stigma attached to Devadāsīs in the contemporary period, the Araiyars choose to distance themselves from their performance partners of old. Furthermore, each site's Araiyars claim to represent the authentic and unchanged transmission of the performative commentary from Nāthamuni on, despite their agreement in the centrality of the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham*, the special place reserved for Nammālvār's *Tiruvāymoḻi*, and that their service is performed solely for Viṣṇu's enjoyment. Yet, one does observe considerable difference in how the Araiyar Cēvai is constituted, applied, and understood at each of these three temples.

Arguably, the most dramatic differences in the Araiyar's commentarial art are witnessed when the locus of performance shifts. Here, locus is not just the *site* of performance, but also the divine figure that occupies the center of the sacred site. In this paper, I propose that the dynamic of the Araiyar's performative transaction is radically altered when the recipient of the divine performance is not Viṣṇu but Āṇṭāḷ, who is both his consort and his devotee. What kinds of changes are affected in Āṇṭāḷ's temple in Śrīvilliputtūr where the same Adhyayana Utsavam is celebrated with appropriate pomp and splendor? Here too Āṇṭāḷ enjoys the recitation as Viṣṇu's consort but she also steps out of her role as the goddess to become the questing devotee that she depicts with such depth and color in her *Tiruppāvai*. At certain crucial moments, such as the *muttukkuṟi* (divination with pearls), she is the sole recipient of this special service. While in the Festival of Recitation at Ālvār Tirunakari and Śrīraṅgam (as is the case in all Śrīvaiṣṇava temples) it is Nammālvār's *Tiruvāymoḻi* that is lavished attention, in Śrīvilliputtūr the *Tiruppāvai* is equally exalted and the Araiyar Cēvai is the instrument of this exaltation.[22] Given the

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[22] Antal's *Tiruppāvai* forms the centerpiece of the elaborate eight-day Mārkaḻi Nīrātta Utsavam celebrated for Āṇṭāḷ in Śrīvilliputtūr. This festival is held in addition to the annual Adhyayana Utsavam and is held solely for Āṇṭāḷ's pleasure and benefit. During the eight days of this festival, Āṇṭāḷ's *Tiruppāvai* is showered with the care and attention lavished on Nammālvār's *Tiruvāymoḻi*. Like, the *Tiruvāymoḻi*, the *Tiruppāvai* is recited and commented on over the eight-day

restriction of form and space, here I trace one strand from the multiple implications of the shift in the locus of performance and draw attention to the *muttukkuri's* (Divination with Pearls) exegetical functions. I posit that the Śrīvilliputtūr Araiyar Cevai as embodied in the *muttukkuri* acts as a commentary and directs a specific understanding of Āntāl, the tenth century Śrīvaisnava poetess/goddess at her temple shrine there.

What is the Muttukkuri? A Brief Discussion of its History and Development

> Scholars and gods alike
> bow before you
> generous bridegroom
> Of Tirumāliruñcōlai
>
> If I should remain forever
> In that place where he reclines
> To press and caress his holy feet
> Fall together, O *kūtal*.
> *Nācciyār Tirumoli* 4.1[23]

The Araiyar performs the *muttukkuri* or divination with pearls as part of the Adhyayana Utsavam (Festival of Recitation) celebrated in the three temples that maintain a surviving Araiyar Cēvai, namely Śrīrangam, Ālvār Tirunakari and Śrīvilliputtūr. The *muttukkuri* features the character of the wandering fortuneteller (*kuratti/ kattuvīcci*) who is summoned by the lovelorn heroine's mother to divine the cause of her daughter's illness. The *muttukkuri* selectively uses the poems of the *Nālayira Divya Prabandham* that employ the motif of the generic heroine and the soothsayer; Tirumankai Ālvār's *Tirunetuntāntakam* provides the majority of the text for the Araiyar's gestural elaboration. In addition, the *muttukkuri's* narrative is embellished through the use of an anonymous commentary known

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period. I have discussed the Mārkali Nīrātta Utsavam and the *Tiruppāvai's* place in it elsewhere.

[23] All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

simply as *Tampirāṉ Paṭi* (The Commentary according to the Master), which provides details and dialogue not in the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham*.[24] The Araiyars of Ālvār Tirunakari date the *Tampirāṉ Paṭi* to the period of Nāthamuni (tenth century) and the author of the text claims to have been a servant of Nāthamuni.[25] The section of this commentary pertaining to the *muttukkuṟi* is composed for Tirumaṅkai Ālvār's *Tiruneṭuntāṇṭakam* and introduces verses from the poems of various Ālvārs (including verses from Āṇṭāḷ's *Nācciyār Tirumoḷi*) to draw out the story of the lovesick heroine, her anxious mother and the wise soothsayer. It is entirely possible that the *muttukkuṟi* as an enactment of the above commentary was a later elaboration of the Araiyar Cēvai and developed alongside similar genres such as the Kuṟam in the seventeenth century.

The figure of the wandering fortuneteller is certainly not novel—she appears, sporting names such as *kuṟatti*, *kaṭṭuvīcci* and *akavaṉmakaḷ* in the Caṅkam *akam* poems in a similar capacity.[26] The *kaṭṭuvīcci* is of particular interest to us for she gets possessed by the god (Murukaṉ) and predicts the future by reading *kalaṅku* (molucca beans) or rice in a winnowing fan.[27] As its name suggests, it is the *kaṭṭuvīcci* embodiment

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[24] Venkataraman, C. *Araiyar Cēvai*. p. 43.

The enactment of Viṣṇu's descent as Narasimha performed in Śrīraṅgam and Ālvār Tirunagari is also taken from the *Tampirāṉ Paṭi*. Ibid.

[25] Ibid. pp. 74-76.

[26] Each of these are different soothsayers are different. The *kaṭṭuvīcci* or diviner, the character in the *muttukkuṟi* in the Sangam poems is a female diviner who gets possessed and divines the future by reading *kalaṅku* (molucca beans) or paddy in a winnowing fan. Peterson, Indira. "The Drama of the Kuṟavañci Fortuneteller: Land, Landscape, and Social Relations in an Eighteenth-century Tamil Genre." MS. p. 73. For further information on the composite figure of the *kuṟatti* as a diviner in later literature such as the Kuṟavañci, see Peterson, Indira. "The Evolution of the "Kuṟavañci Dance Drama in Tamil Nadu: Negotiating the 'Folk' and the 'Classical' in the Bharata Nāṭyam Canon." *South Asia Research*. Vol. 18. No. 1, 1998, and Muilwijk, M. *The Divine Kuṟa Tribe: Kuṟavañci and other Prabandhams*. Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1996.

[27] Ibid. p. 73.

of the fortuneteller that the *muttukkuṛi* (divination with pearls) evokes. Yet we must remember that the soothsayer did not always occupy such an exalted position. In the *akam* poems, another fortune-teller of sorts, the *vēlaṉ* (another priest of Murukaṉ) is often called to divine the reason for our young heroine's disease, only to misdiagnose her love-sickness as possession by the god (usually Murukaṉ). For example, *Aiṅkuṛunūṛu* 241 in the voice of the heroine speaks of the incompetent *vēlaṉ* (holder of the spear):

> My friend! When my mother, on account of my "illness", arranges for the *vēlaṉ* to come, will that *vēlaṉ* be able to find out about my affair with the lord of the fragrant country, when he is in the frenzy of his dance of possession?[28]

Here the heroine expresses both her fear that her secret love will be revealed and a frustration that the *vēlaṉ's* misdiagnosis (that the girl is possessed by the god) will do nothing to alleviate her suffering but will instead press upon her hopeless cures. In the poetics of bhakti the possession by the god (either Śiva or Viṣṇu) *is* love-sickness. A.K. Ramanujan in noting the transformation of the idiom of possession in the hands of the bhakti poet writes, "in the classical poem on Murukaṉ...the god and the possession are described, framed as 'objects' seen from the onlooker's point of view; it is happening *out there* to a shaman. In the...bhakti poems it happens to the speaker, the subject."[29] In fact in these bhakti poems the onlookers witnessing the possession (the mother, the friend) *know* full well the cause of the girl's frenzy (*veṛi*) and often express no surprise when they are informed the reason for the heroine's strange behavior. Here is an en excellent example of just such an instance:

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[28] Hardy, Friedhelm. *Viraha Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India.*
Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983. p. 138. The *vēlaṉ* also divines using the *kalaṅku* (molucca beans).

[29] Ramanujan makes this observation with regard to the *Tirumurukāṛṛuppaṭai*, a poem that he sees heralding the beginning of bhakti poetics. Ramanujan, A.K. "Afterword." *Hymns for the Drowning.* New York: Penguin Books, 1993. p. 119.

My girl, who's just learning to speak says,

> "I'm beyond all learning.
> I'm all the learning you learn."
> "I'm the cause of all learning,
>   I end all learning,
> I'm the essence of all learning,"
>   Says she.
> Does my girl talk this way
>   because our lord of learning
>   has come and taken her over?
> How can I tell you,
>   O learned men!
>   _Tiruvāymoḷi_ 5.6.2[30]

Similar to Periyāḷvār's lack of surprise upon discovering Āṇṭāḷ's divine destiny, here too the mother expresses more wonder at her daughter's state than concern. It is this relationship between the mother and daughter (and the soothsayer) that the _muttukkuṟi_ showcases.

The poem that forms the _muttukkuṟi's_ backbone is Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār's _Tiruneṭuntāṇṭakam_. The poem begins with ten verses in praise of Viṣṇu in his grand _avatāra_ forms only to shift gears in the eleventh verse introducing the voice of the mother recounting her daughter's terrible state. The _Tiruneṭuntāṇṭakam_ does not figure the character of the fortuneteller, though she makes a protracted appearance in Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār's _Ciṟiya Tirumaṭal_:

> I lost my dark gem-hue
> And lost my bangles...
> My sweet parrot-tongued mother
> Smeared red Kumkum powder over me,
> And worshipped Sasta with a red Kuriñji garland,--
> A thing shed had never done before.
> Even that did not cure my heart's sickness,
>   ...

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[30] Ramanujan, A.K. _Hymns for the Drowning._ p.71

> Seeing this, some old wives
> Who knew past customs
> Advised:
> "Show her to a soothsaying gypsy,
> She will find out who possessed her."[31]

In Tirumaṅkai's poem we see both the failure of the prayer to Śāsta to cure the girl and the fortuneteller divines the true cause of the girl's suffering as a possession by the "one with a thousand names." However, such vivid descriptions of the diviner in the *Ciriya Tirumaṭal* do not play a pre-eminent role in the *muttukkuṛi*. Rather, the commentary (*Tampirāṉ Paṭi*) constructs her, while the characters of the heroine and the mother are wrought by liberally interspersing words, phrases, and lines from a diverse group of texts such as the *Tiruvāymoḷi, Periya Tirumaṭal, Ciriya Tirumaṭal, Periya Tirumoḷi* and *Nācciyār Tirumoḷi*.[32] Even the very brief list above suggests that the *muttukkuṛi* is molded primarily on the compositions of Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār, who aside from Nammāḻvār composed poems in the guise of the pining heroine.[33]

The soothsayer of the later genres (*prabandhams*) such as the Kuṛavañci is equally a composite construct, melded from various types of fortunetellers and methods of fortune telling.[34] The Kuṛavañcis of the eighteenth century juxtaposed two kinds of love-stories: the first half is devoted to the love of the heroine for her hero (king or god) and the second half concerns the affections of the fortuneteller and her beloved who goes by the name Ciṅkaṉ.[35] Indira

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[31] Bharati, Srirama, trans. *The Sacred Book of Four Thousand.* p. 721

[32] Venkatraman, C. 112.

For example, verses selected from the *Tiruvāymoḷi* are 4.6.1 and 10.10.1-4

[33] Nammāḻvār's heroine is called the Parāṅkuśa Nāyikā and that of Tirumaṅkai is the Parkalan Nāyikā.

[34] Peterson, Indira. "The Drama of the Kuṛavañci Fortuneteller." p.73.

Peterson in discussing the later Kuṟavañci argues convincingly that the eighteenth century genres articulate new kinds of social relations that at least partly respond to "major social, political, and economic changes that had been set into motion in the Tamil region.[36] The Kuṟavañci a kind of *prabandham*, sought to portray diverse linguistic and social communities, moving between "a more conventional concern with particular sacred places, settled landscapes, and social groups, and a new interest in marginal identities and migrant populations."[37] In the Kuṟavañci, the elite world represented by the heroine and her entourage comes into contact with the itinerant "folk" world embodied by the *kuratti*, the soothsayer from the hills. It is of course particularly relevant that this soothsayer comes from the hills which in the Tamil poetic schema of *tiṇai* (landscapes) is the place of secret and often forbidden union.[38] It is this *kuratti*, marginal, wandering and fluid who normalizes the secret love of the heroine by predicting that her union with the hero (either god or king) is inevitable.

The fortuneteller's divination first appears as a brief episode in a seventeenth century minor genre called Kalampakam ("mixed poem") and develops its own genre also in the same period, a genre all its own, called the Kuṟam.[39] It is only the Kuṟavañci in the eighteenth century that elaborates the story of the divination to tell the fortuneteller's love story as well. The *muttukkuṟi* in its chief concern for the act of divination and result of the said divination is the Araiyar Cēvai's counterpart to the Kuṟam. But the *muttukkuṟi* in its performative elements is equally a complement to the Kuṟavañci that was performed for entertainment in temple precincts by groups of

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[35] Peterson, Indira. "The Lady in Love and the Fortune-teller from the Hills: Discourses of Gender, Class, and Desire in Kuṟavañci Dance-dramas of 18th century South India." MS. p. 4.

[36] Peterson, Indira "The Drama of the Kuṟavañci Fortuneteller." p. 62.

[37] Ibid. p. 64.

[38] Ibid. p. 72.

[39] Peterson, p 72-73

Devadāsīs.[40] While the Devadāsī performances of Kuṟavañci though still part of the elite matrix were accessible to a larger lay audience, the Araiyar Cēvai, including the *muttukkuṟi* is an elite practice performed for an exclusive audience, fully cognizant of its commentarial maneuvers and flourishes.[41]

On the most immediate level, the *muttukkuṟi* is a divination—the phrase literally means, a divination with/by pearls. It elaborates and enacts a common literary situation involving a pining heroine, her mother and the fortuneteller. Here it would seem Āṇṭāḷ is engaged in an attempt to discern the fate of her love—in this first case, she is an actor in the play. But at other times, such as the one performed in Paṅkuṉi (March-April) to celebrate Āṇṭāḷ's marriage to Viṣṇu, the divination is performed for Āṇṭāḷ's enjoyment. Āṇṭāḷ then shifts between being both an actor in the play and the audience for the same play with the Araiyar acting as the agent. In contradistinction, the *muttukkuṟi's* complements in Śrīraṅgam and Āḻvār Tirunakari undertaken during the *pakalppatu* period are exclusively for the enjoyment of Viṣṇu, his consorts, his Āḻvārs (except Āṇṭāḷ) and *ācāryas*.[42] In Āṇṭāḷ's town, she is the sole audience (and to some extent, the sole actor) for the *muttukkuṟi*—her beloved husband does not accompany her, neither do the other Āḻvārs or *ācāryas*. On the one hand, the *muttukkuṟi* is equally an enactment of Āṇṭāḷ's path to union, fraught with the disappointments of unrequited love and on the other hand, as we will soon see, it is a recollection undertaken from the vantage of a desire fully realized. In every way, it is made clear that the Śrīvilliputtūr *muttukkuṟi* is solely for Āṇṭāḷ and her enjoyment. Her primacy in Śrīvilliputtūr for the observance of the *muttukkuṟi* is brought into sharper focus when we consider those that occur at

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[40] Like the performances of *bhāmā kalāpam* many of these Kuṟavañci performances were intended to raise money for the temple concerned by attracting the donations of pilgrims. Davesh Soneji phone communication, 2004.

[41] Juxtaposing these two performance traditions and genres (Kuṟavañci/ Kuṟam and *muttukkuṟi*) perhaps will bring us to a productive way of understanding its role at the Āṇṭāḷ temple in Śrīvilliputtūr.

[42] Narayanan,Vasudha. "Recreating Heaven on Earth." *The Vernacular Veda*. pp.115-135.

Śrīraṅgam and Āḻvār Tirunakari. There as a woman she is excluded from the god's devoted entourage, while here in Śrīvilliputtūr she is present alone (as a single goddess/devotee) to enjoy the divination performed exclusively for her pleasure. Conceived in this way, Āṇṭāḷ is the principal figure and the divination functions to further assert her singularity as the local goddess and benevolent sovereign, with Śrīvilliputtūr her local kingdom and its people her faithful and devoted servants. Yet the *muttukuṟi* also works to efface what is distinctive about Āṇṭāḷ's identity, what makes her special by collapsing her figure with the generic persona of the girl in love (*nāyikā/talaivi*). I will focus now on the *muttukkuṟi* as it is performed in Mārkaḻi at Śrīvilliputtūr to unpack the opposing representations of Āṇṭāḷ—as the goddess who rules, and the faceless and to a great extent, nameless heroine in love (*talaivi*).

Āṇṭāḷ's Questions; The Araiyar's Answers

The *muttukkuṟi* begins with a great deal of solemnity—a priest places a blessed garland on the Araiyar's shoulders, and wraps a sanctified cloth (*parivaṭṭam*) around the conical hat. The Araiyar bows to Āṇṭāḷ to seek her permission to commence the performance and then stands a few feet away, facing her, his body position clearly indicating the primary audience for the performance. The Araiyar beats his cymbals and begins with a recitation of the eleventh verse ("Paṭṭutukkum") from Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār's *Tiruneṭuntāṇṭakam* followed by the recitation of a commentary for the verse (Fig. 1).[43] The verse sets up the heroine's plight spoken through the words of her mother:

> O Ladies! My fawn-eyed girl has her hair decked with flowers, and bees humming on it. She drapes herself in silk the swoons. No more does she desire her dolls. With tears welling in her swollen eyes, she seldom goes to sleep. Even for a moment, she does not sit on my lap to be fed. "Where is my lord of Tiruvarangam", she asks. "Who has done this to her?", I asked a soothsayer. "It is the ocean hued lord", she answered. Now who can save my daughter?[44] (*Tiruneṭuntāṇṭakam* 11)

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[43] Venkataraman, C. *Araiyar Cēvai*. p 92-93

The verse in essence provides in a nutshell the entire narrative arc of the *muttukkuri*.

The mother delineates the daughter's sickness in characteristic ways: her little girl has suddenly grown up and doesn't need her dolls anymore. She cannot sleep; she weeps; she does not eat (Fig. 2, Fig 3). The girl is possessed, the mother knows it and the soothsayer confirms it: but it is not an answer that the mother appears to relish. The divination of the *muttukkuri* then is not *what* ails the girl, but *how* one cures the ailment—as the mother puts it, "now who can save my daughter?"

The rest of the *muttukkuri* takes up each of the major components of the *Tirunetuntāntakam* verse and elaborates on it. The first section is an elaborate gestural interpretation of the verse as spoken by the mother with an emphasis on the phrase *pattutukkum ival*—this girl who wraps herself in silk. The elaborate rendition (*abhinaya*) is interspersed with recitations of an anonymous commentary (*Tampirān Pati*) that introduces the action of the rest of the poem—her cry for the lord of Tiruvaraṅkam, her lack of sleep, and the *kattuvīcci*, fortuneteller. The central focus of the *muttukkuri* is not the heroine, but the character of the wandering fortuneteller (*kuratti/ kattuvīcci*) who is summoned by the lovelorn heroine's mother to divine the cause of her daughter's illness. After a lengthy sequence that introduces her character, the fortuneteller settles down to read the girl's fortune and predicts that her desire for the ocean-hued lord will be fulfilled. The Araiyar as the *kuratti* sits down on the floor facing Āntāl and pours the tiny seed pearls on to a wide plate covered with a black cloth (Fig. 4). He then flattens the pearls making a circle out of them. As he proceeds to divine our heroine's fortune by making finger-size indentations in the pearls, drawing a circle as he goes along (Fig. 5). The divination is accompanied by a recitation of two verses aptly derived from the fourth section of Āntāl's *Nācciyār Tirumoli*— in this section, Antal in the persona of a *gopī* girl, plays a game to divine her future with Kṛṣṇa.

> Scholars and gods alike
> Bow before you

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[44] Bharati, Srirama. p. 429.

Generous bridegroom,
Lord of Tirumāliruñcōlai
If I should remain forever
In that place where he reclines
To press and caress his holy feet
Come together, O *kūṭal*.

My lord of wooded Veṅkaṭam
Master of Kaṇṇapuram
Revels there, merry and blithe:
My lord of so many forms
Came as a dwarf upon this earth
If he should hasten to clasp my hand
Pull me into embrace and make us one
Fall together, O *kūṭal*.[45]

As he says the last lines of the verse (*kutitu kūṭale*: Fall together, *kūṭal*) he connects each of the lines to a central dot inside the circle at the end of which it would appear like a wheel (Fig. 6). The procedure is repeated twice, the first to signify Āṇṭāḷ's divination and the next as the fortuneteller's. The *kūṭal* described above is a simple divination technique often performed by girls in love. It involved drawing a circle with one's eyes closed; if the two ends of the circle came together it signified union.[46] Another description of the *kūṭal* involves drawing concentric circles—an even number of circles predicted union while an odd number promised unrequited love.[47] The manner of the *muttukkuṛi* follows neither pattern. Instead what we witness is the creation of a wheel-like symbol that resonates on several levels. On the most immediate level it assures that the divination has been a success and the heroine's (Āṇṭāḷ) desire will be fulfilled. On yet another level the disk obliquely invokes Viṣṇu and suggests that the girl's union with him is imminent. Finally of course, the wheel of the divination is the wheel of life, out of which the heroine, because of her union with god is soon to be liberated.

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[45] *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi* 4.1, 4.2

[46] Peterson, Indira. "Lady in Love." p. 17

[47] *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi vyākhyānam.* ed. Krishnaswami Ayyankar. p. 184-185

The divination is a success and Āṇṭāḷ and her mother are told that she will win the "lord, dark as a thundercloud" who is none other than the handsome bridegroom of Śrīraṅgam.[48] At the conclusion of the *muttukkuṛi* Āṇṭāḷ is taken on a short procession as the Araiyar recites select verses from the *Nācciyār Tirumoḷi* (Fig. 7). These include the eleventh section (Return of the Conch Bangles), the eighth section (Cloud Messengers) and the first verse of the seventh section (Song to the Conch). Āṇṭāḷ is then returned to the *mahā maṇṭapa* of the Āṇṭāḷ temple, and thus ends the *muttukkuṛi*. It is only at this last point that the *muttukkuṛi* at Śrīvilliputtūr is tailored to reflect Āṇṭāḷ's unique experience.

In Śrīraṅgam and Āḷvār Tirunagari the heroine is a nameless entity, though she is a conglomeration of the female personae of the male poets, Tirumaṅkai and Nammāḷvār who imagined themselves as such. So complete is their transformation that they and their heroines are identified as Parakāla Nāyikā (Parakālaṉ's Heroine) and Parāṅkuśa Nāyikā (Parāṅkuśa's Heroine). In the case of Śrīvilliputtūr of course, the heroine is neither the Parāṅkuśa nor Parakāla Nāyikā —she is Āṇṭāḷ, though the central text is Tirumaṅkai's *Tiruneṭuntānṭtakam*. But Āṇṭāḷ has been subsumed into the figure of the generic female voice (*talaivi*) that is created through observing particular poetic conventions and strategies. The construction of the female persona by poets such as Nammāḷvār and Tirumaṅkai is a sophisticated enterprise and the conventions of *akam* poetry are transformed in subtle and complex ways to reflect a new poetic paradigm. Āṇṭāḷ too constructs such female personae, such as the *gopī* girl. However, what makes each of these *talaivis* unique is erased and all of the heroines are collapsed into the body of a composite pining *nāyikā*. [49]

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[48] Venkataraman, C. p 96

[49] There is yet to be work done on the differences between each of these *nāyikās*. For an excellent study of the poetics of bhakti, see Cutler, Norman. *Songs of Experience: The Poetics of Tamil Devotion.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.As an interesting side-note, I would like to draw attention to Periyavāccā- Piḷëai's commentary to *Nācciyār Tirumoḷi* 11.5 where Āṇṭāḷ is compared to the Parakāla Nāyikā (Tirumaṅkai's heroine). He quotes a line from *Periya Tirumoḷi* 9.4.2 where the effects of desire on the heroine are described.

Here we are of course concerned specifically with Āṇṭāḷ's transformation into the generic heroine, which becomes immediately apparent with the appearance of the ubiquitous mother rather than the father figure of the Āṇṭāḷ hagiographies; Periyāḻvār has been replaced by the persona of the mother.[50] The intimate relationship shared by Periyāḻvār and Āṇṭāḷ honored in her poetry has been erased, as have therefore all of the crucial acts of devotion that Āṇṭāḷ performed. Āṇṭāḷ's extraordinary expressions of her single-minded love for Viṣṇu

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Nācciyār Tirumoḻi vyākhyānam. ed. Krishnaswami Ayyankar. Trichy: Srinivasa Press, p.609. I give in full both Tirumaïkai's verse and ĀṇṭāḷÆs poem 11.5

My lord came as a dwarf--
deceptively stretched out his hand,
meekly pleading for alms
and thus measured the worlds.
My lord stretched upon the serpent,
reclines in Tiruvaraṅkam,
that sacred city
where only the virtuous live.
He has deprived me of my bangles.
He has stolen my smallest wealth.

Tirumaṅkai's verse is as follows:

O Birds of the brackish waters! Infatuated by the bachelor king who came in the yore and measured the Earth in three strides, I lost my rouge to him. Go tell this to the lord in Pullani who appeared as a swan and delivered the Vēdas. Bharati, Srirama. trans. *The Sacred Book of Four Thousand.* p. 374.

The reason for the comparison obviously is the allusion in both poems to Viṣṇu's descent as Vāmana, the dwarf who through trickery subdued the king Mahābali.

[50] In the hagiographies and in oral narratives, it is Antal's father Periyalvar, another great devotee of Viṣṇu, who discovers his daughter's secret love. This love manifests, in Antal donning the garland meant for Viṣṇu, before it is offered to him. Once Periyalvar realizes that Antal means to marry no mortal man, he despairs. The hagiographies beautifully paint the anxiety of a father who feels powerless to soothe the suffering of his child. I have discussed Antal's hagiographic traditions in depth in my dissertation, *Antal and Her Magic Mirror,* UC Berkeley, 2004. Āṇṭāḷ does mention mothers in her *Nācciyār Tirumoḻi.* For example in section eleven of the poem, she calls out to a group of mothers, as *ammaṉē* (11.1) or as *eḷil uṭaiya ammaṉaimīr* (lovely mothers)!

that so vexed her hagiographers has simply been replaced and contoured by male inventions of the experience of female desire. The *muttukkuṟi* depicts a woman's world—the mother, the daughter and the female fortune-teller, performed by a Brahmin male. The Araiyar assumes all the roles and switches between them. The imagining/imaging of female desire is twice differed: Tirumaṅkai's Parakāla Nāyikā is reinterpreted through the gestural lens of the Araiyar (who is reproducing generations of hereditary exegesis). The only female presence during the *muttukkuṟi*, no longer in evidence, was that of the temple Devadāsīs who danced a "folk-dance"[51] around the seated Araiyar prior to his beginning the actual divination. Unlike other South Asian performative traditions, such as the *bhāmā kalāpam* the Araiyar in the *muttukkuṟi*, is not a female impersonator. Here, the Araiyar makes no attempt to become a woman or "fool" his audience into believing that he has become one.[52] The gestures are stylized and not invoked to generate a particular understanding of the female body. The space between each character is carefully preserved and demarcated. Through out the performance (except perhaps to a lesser degree during the actual divination), the Araiyar retains his identity as a performer, marked as special and different by his dress. Paradoxically, however, there is certainly a sense that the Araiyar has become each of these characters internally, though there is no external evidence of the fact. In fact, in the *muttukkuṟi*, unlike the daily song-like recitation outside the temple gateway during the Mārkaḷi festival, there is nothing overtly to signal that the Araiyar has taken the god/goddess into his body (Fig. 8). In each of the three parts to the principal part of the drama, the Araiyar moves between his identity as a ritual performer, the character he plays and then reverts back to his "original self." All the characters of the *muttukkuṟi* are women and their voices are culled from a number of sources, including the Āḷvār poems and the *Tampirāṉ Paṭi* commentary. The Araiyar's representation of the female character is bracketed by two kinds of discourse on the female person: the first is the construction according to Tirumaṅkai, Nammāḻvār or Periyāḻvār in the poem and the next is

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[51] This was the *kummi* performed to the *Divya Prabandham* verses that they sang.

[52] For a discussion of female impersonation with regard to *bhāmā kalāpam* see, Soneji, Davesh. *Performing Satyabhāmā: Text, Context, Memory and Mimesis in Telugu-speaking South India*. Ph.D. diss. McGill University, 2004.

the exegetical explanation of the same, through a prose commentary. Both speak specifically to what it means to be girl in love with an inaccessible god and in this regard create the normalized conventional *talaivi* (heroine) of Āḻvār bhakti poetry.[53]

In other instances at her temple in Śrīvilliputtūr, Āṇṭāḷ disappears into the guises and disguises of various gods and goddesses, but in a fascinating reversal in the *muttukkuṟi* we see her subsumed into the trope of the conventional lovelorn heroine of bhakti poetry. In direct contrast to the position of the Śrīvaiṣṇava hagiographies such as the *Guruparamparaprabhāvams* that celebrate Āṇṭāḷ's unique experience as a woman and exalt it as superior to that of the other Āḻvārs, here we witness that very same experience equated and subsumed into that of other Āḻvār poets. However, there is a space within the *muttukkuṟi*, to recover the autonomous Āṇṭāḷ so beloved to the locals of Śrīvilliputtūr. When she wanders outside the sanctum precincts, a benevolent queen surveying all that she rules, Āṇṭāḷ, playfully assumes the guises of the god. On one day she is Kṛṣṇa, on another day a crafty Viṣṇu, brandishing a whip, and on yet another day, she is the supreme and remote lord, conch and disc held aloft in her hands. Just so, in the *muttukkuṟi* performed for her (and by her), we can easily understand Āṇṭāḷ as expanding immeasurably to accommodate the bodies of not just Viṣṇu but all of his devotees, of whom, the exemplars are the other Āḻvārs. No doubt, if I were to pose this question to *her* devotees in Śrīvilliputtūr, this would be their response: valorizing, elevating and celebrating their local goddess as one who encompasses all things. It is she, who has taken all things into her belly for keeps.[54]

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[54] This is a reference to *Tiruvāymoḻi* 8.7.9 translated by A.K.Ramanujan. The last line of the poem is as follows: "and I/by his leave/have taken him entire/and I have him in my belly/for keeps." *Hymns for the Drowning*. p. 67.

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Araiyar Informants in Śrīvilliputtūr (Fieldwork conducted between 2002-2004)

Araiyar Balamukundan
Araiyar Srinivasarangachari
Araiyar Vatapatrasayi

Appendix

Fig. 1: Araiyar Srinivasarangachari wearing the conical hat and holding the cymbals (*tāḷam*)

Fig. 2: *Muttukkuṟi* performed by Araiyar
Srinivasarangachari. Here he gestures: "this
girl"

Fig. 3: *Muttukkuṟi* **performed by Araiyar Srinivasarangachari.**
Here her gestures "this girl who weeps"

Fig. 4: The Divination

Fig. 5: Drawing the circle of divination

Fig. 6: Antal's Future

Fig. 7: The Final Recitations

Fig. 8: Araiyar Vatapatrasayi singing Mālē
Maṇivaṇṇā in front of the rājagōpuram of the
Perumāḷ temple in Mārkaḷi.

Women as cultural ambassadors in the Montreal Hindu Diaspora

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A Diaspora group is one, though moving out from its motherland for different reasons, decides to make the host country its permanent place of residence over a period of time. Dispersion from one's homeland can happen among other reasons, due to dissatisfaction with the socio-economic, political or cultural conditions in the homeland. In modern times people have also fled from their lands of birth due to political strife, "the creation of a new nation state on the territory previously occupied by another" as has been the experience of Palestinians since the formation of Israel"[1], and due to a number of other causes. Just as the conditions for leaving one's homeland is important so are the reasons for "arrival and settling down" in the places one has arrived at. Thus, the concept of diaspora as Avtar Brah mentions "places the discourse of home and dispersion in creative tension" [2]. While diaspora movements are subject to certain conditions mentioned above, a different set of factors operate when the diaspora group decides to convert its 'diaspora location' into a home.

Thus, the change from a location to a settling down in the place one has immigrated to as a home depends, to a large extent, to the degree there is security and comfort in the host country or to the extent one feels 'at home' in the new location. A couple of points that are essential for feeling 'at home' in new surroundings is, firstly, to have at least a sufficient number of an identical group of people who have common interests, and, secondly, to have a consensus of at least some markers of identity for the group. After the initial birth pangs of locating in a new place are got over, and a group which can identify itself as a homogeneous unit either due to religion, region, culture or other factors comes together as a group, many questions as to how best to maintain its identity in a foreign land start surfacing and sooner or later they find expression in some common goals. This can differ

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[1] Avtar Brah, "Diaspora, border and transnational identities" in Cartographies of Diaspora, p. 182.

[2] ibid. pp. 192-93

from country to country as well as the time at which the migration of the group took place, as also the kind of skills that the emigrant population had. Thus, the experiences of the early indentured labour groups that settled down in South Africa or Trinidad can lead to different ways of expression of identity than the later skilled, educated and professional groups that emigrated to the States and Canada, for instance. But what we find consistently happening in the case of Hindus in all the countries they migrated to is the decision to build temples as one of the strategies of negotiating identities. This paper deals with such a group in Montreal, Canada, and also speculates as to the factors that contributed to enable the men to become temple builders and the women to become cultural ambassadors here.

It is generally agreed by social scientists that "religion is a salient factor for the retention of cultural identity...and that women are the primary conservators and transmitters of the South Asian family's religious heritage" [3]. But when it came to building temples, which are important religious symbols for the community, it was the men who took the initiative in conceiving and taking all necessary steps to realize the goal. There must be some compelling reasons why this was so and this paper tries to examine that.

The groups that came to Canada, beginning in the 1960s extending up to the late 70s, were highly skilled and professional people "largely urban middle class in background...encouraged to immigrate to Canada in response to a perceived need for independent, trained immigrants" [5]. A large number of them were from the middle class and thus, as in every community, they were the most concerned about their cultural and religious values and felt a need to recreate the kind of atmosphere they had left behind, in order to nurture those values. We should also note that this group must have been mostly young, born during the colonial period but which went to school and college during the struggle for and after independence; and therefore would have been exposed to all the rhetoric of India's ancient values and the great Vedic spiritual heritage. Almost all the freedom fighters, starting from Mahatma Gandhi, never tired of using India's ancient values to inspire the masses in the fight for freedom. It is, therefore, but natural

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[3] Pearson in "Hindu Diaspora: Global Perspectives", p. 427

[5] Coward and Botting in Hindu Diaspora: Global Perspectives, p. 37

for them to have a heightened sense of what it is to be an Indian and they carried that pride with them when they immigrated to foreign lands. As they were also welcomed in the host country, this group also had a fair amount of self esteem and self confidence, unlike groups that had earlier migrated as unskilled labour. This was also a group that was economically well off. They were either in the Universities, teaching or working for higher degrees, or they were doctors and engineers and such skilled workers. But as the saying goes 'Man does not live by bread alone' and economic prosperity alone does not bring about mental peace and comfort.

I had occasion to talk to Mr. Ashwini Gupta, one such professional Hindu who had come in the early 70s to Montreal when he was thirty years old. There were many like him and they would meet, he said, at different family homes in turn, to celebrate festivals like Deepavali, Krishna Janmastami, Ramanavami, Holi etc. Hinduism does not, in general, emphasize congregational worship in a temple as does Christianity or Sikhism. In India, where the Hindus are in a majority, there was also no felt need to emphasize one's identity through going to a temple. Temple going in India was more to satisfy one's spiritual and religious yearnings rather than to make a statement of one's religious identity. However, a temple is an identity marker for a Hindu as witness to the famous Tamil saying exhorting a Hindu not to live in a place where there is no temple.[6] Thus, while regular temple-going on fixed days like a Sunday for instance, need not identify who a Hindu is, as a cultural identity marker the temple looms large in the horizon of a Hindu. One could say that, in general, every Hindu would positively visit a temple on many occasions in his/her life time. Thus, there is no gainsaying the importance of temple-going in a Hindu's life. When this important cultural symbol is missing in an alien setting, there is a sense of ennui and ways to overcome that are striven for. Immigrants like Ashwini Gupta sought to fulfil this need of going to a temple, particularly on festive occasions, by visiting the Hare Krishna temple in Montreal which was already in existence in Montreal in the 1960s.

Living in an alien land, Hindus also were exposed to the religious practices of other communities and must have observed the strength of

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[6] koil illa uril irukka vendam, i.e. do not live in a place that has no temple.

weekly congregational gatherings in churches and synagogues that contributed to the preservation of identity of a diaspora group in a foreign land. The strength in gathering as a group in a temple was thus brought into sharp focus for the Hindus as well. Religion is not just the ritual of worshipping for a Hindu but also defines his holistic approach to religion and spirituality, which includes all cultural values. As Ashwini Gupta added, when children started being born to these immigrant families, their anxiety to preserve some Indian values prompted them to start seriously thinking of building temples where they thought their children could learn the values of the Hindu way of living. Ashwini Gupta went further when he said that they were also concerned about the marriage of their children growing up in a multi-cultural, multi-religious milieu and were keen for them to learn their religious background. The group was convinced that in the absence of the support of an extended family, as in India, where religious and cultural values were part of the growing up process, the temple could fulfil that task in the new land, at least partially, in a formal setting, where they could listen to the priest's lectures on the age old Hindu values and also visually witness the rituals performed by the priest. Initially they gathered in available spaces like school buildings which were turned into sacred worship places on the weekly days and festival days of worship; then they started renting space for the purpose while all the time accumulating funds to build a temple of their own.

Men as Temple-Buiders

The initiative for the temple building enterprise was primarily taken by the men. The reasons for this could be many. Traditionally it was the rulers in India who commissioned and built temples in the lands they ruled. Even though there were exceptions, all the main tasks from planning to executing the finishing touches of building temples was a male activity. Today, one finds wealthy business men like Birla taking on the same role. Secondly, the Hindus who came in the 60s and 70s were largely middleclass and so were inclined to respect this traditional role of the male in temple activity. They would have witnessed all the religious ceremonies generally performed by males as the *yajamana*, back home. Thus, finding the lack of a ritualistic ambience in the frequently changing localities of rented spaces as also the absence of suitable, religious, sacred spaces in the houses they

were living in could have prompted them to take the decision of having a permanent temple in which they could express themselves in a proper religious sense.

Thirdly, the wives of most of these migrants were not career women and were content to play a passive role in major decision making. Moreover, in general, it was the men who had decided to move out of their homeland for various reasons and the wives had just followed them. Thus, the men were the primary decision makers and it was natural that in this case of temple-building as well, they took the decision. They also had access to funds for undertaking such a huge activity.

Fourthly, there was also the task of contacting the right people back home for executing the various jobs connected with temple-building as it had to conform to certain ritualistic norms. A paramount patriarchal attitude that governed all temple activity in India also made it easier for men to be in contact with them. The need to register temples as charitable institutions and write the charter and bye-laws also fell naturally to the lot of men. Of course, there could be any number of other reasons as well like increase in social status as leaders of the Hindu community, a status that will allow them to speak for the Hindu community on issues that the Government might want to consult in a multi-cultural milieu and so on and so forth. For all the above reasons and more, we find that even today, temple building activity in Montreal is associated primarily with men.

Once the temple is built there are a number of functions that are primarily fulfilled by women, which are as true here as in India. A temple, also being a cultural centre, many activities like music and dance classes, yoga classes, teaching of languages etc., take place within it, in which women generally play a main role. But the decision to undertake temple building is usually a man's domain. What is true of Montreal is true of other parts of North America as well.

I have studied the history of two important temples in Montreal, one of which is the oldest which started in 1972, initially called the Hindu Mission and now renamed as Sri Sanatan Dharma Mandir. The other is the Hindu Mandir which is a modern one having come into

existence in 1995. A comparison of these two temples brings out in sharp focus some of the observations made earlier.

Sri Sanatan Dharma Mandir (SSDM)

SSDM reflects the fledgling beginnings of a community that is trying hard to come together and seek identity in its religious and cultural heritage. As a group, the members of the group were still settling down and were not in a position to raise huge funds to raise a temple. They, (all men) first met in an individual's home, which was an apartment building of Mr. Awasthi in the Park Extension area, which was temporarily converted into the sacred space of a temple for a limited time and made a beginning in 1972. They then moved on to renting available spaces for their meetings and this was usually on Sundays, a clear concession to the changed circumstances. They could get registered with the department of Financial Institutions in Quebec in 1974, just two years after forming their association. But the status of a charitable institution recognized by the Federal Government of Canada for tax purposes only came in 1974. They eventually bought a property that was on sale in 1988 and since then the temple is housed in that building. But it is important to note that no temple was built anew but continued to exist in this building. The main reason for this could be the lack of huge funds for this fledgling community to buy land in order to raise a completely new temple. However, they got an authentic priest from India in 1987, imported icons (murtis) made of marble from India and the temple, generally, serves the needs of the Hindu religious community in Montreal. Though the men did not literally build a new temple, as it is housed in a building not originally built as a temple, to all intents and purposes they recreated the ambience of a temple and thus fulfilled the need of a place of worship for the Hindu community in Montreal. In order to make the place look more like a temple their latest plans are to add a *gopuram* and modify the entrance to the temple.

Hindu Mandir

In contrast to the SSDM, the other temple, the Hindu Mandir, which began construction in 1995 was started on 107,000 sq.ft of land purchased at a cost of $600,000 (Canadian dollars). It is a statement on the improved financial status of the community which had proved

itself within two to three decades and had the confidence to borrow huge money from banks to finance the project. The officers who took the initiative for this huge enterprise were again all men. Even though by the 90s, there were a number of career women, the traditional role of men as builders of temples is still very much in evidence here as well. There are two more temples in Montreal, the Durgaiamman temple and the Murugan temple, which also purchased land and built the temples by borrowing funds from banks. In all these instances, the main conceivers of building a temple are again men, even though women would help out by raising funds etc.

Coming back to the Hindu Mandir, the advantage of possessing land to build manifests itself in many ways. Thus, in this case, there was an attempt to recreate as faithfully as possible an authentic Hindu temple built according to the *Silpasastras* (sacred manuals on temple architecture etc). Accordingly, all the rules of such a construction like *bhoomipoojan* (worshipping the sacred space chosen), laying the foundation in accordance with the *sastras*, *pranapratistha* or infusing life into the *murtis* all brought from India, following the rules of *vastu sastra* regarding directions which the *murtis* would face and so on, were followed during the construction of the temple. Priests, well versed in the *sastras*, were involved at every stage of the building and it was completed in 1998 and was formally opened in June 1998. Once the temple was commissioned a number of cultural activities, where women play the main roles, have also come into play. We could thus say, using a modern parlance, that men provide the hardware of the temples while women provide the software.

Women as Cultural Ambassadors

Let us turn to the second part of the paper i.e. women as cultural ambassadors in Montreal. Many scholars of diaspora and sociological studies have emphasized the preserving and nurturing nature of women. It is the women who, in large measure, carry the traditions of religious ritual practices to the places they move into and eventually make their own homes. [6] It is again the women who have taken the lead for the preservation of their culture in alien lands. Especially in the case of Hinduism where the borders dividing religion and culture

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[6] Hole in Hindu Diaspora, pp. 443-66

are not sharply drawn, and where dance, music and the other arts are all part of a holistic religious approach, women play a vital role.

When we turn our attention to the Hindu families who migrated to Montreal in the 60s and 70s, the women were mainly accompanying their husbands as pointed out earlier. As they were generally from middle class families, most of them had a good grounding in the arts and were also fairly well educated. They carried with them their middle class values, one of them being a strong attachment to their religious and cultural values. For the most part, these highly talented women were left to fend for themselves in a foreign land during the long hours their spouses were spending outside the homes, either studying for a higher degree or proving their worth in whatever jobs they were doing. Thus, these talented women found time hanging heavily on their hands. They were also isolated from their extended families in India and could not get the comfort of their company as they would have had if they were in India. Added to that was the spectacle of a number of children being brought up without any grounding in the rich arts of India to which they themselves were privy.

I have had the privilege of knowing two such marvellous women, Priyamvada Sankar, who belongs to the famous Tanjore school of dance and a direct disciple of Sangita Kalanidhi Balasaraswati, the legendary Bharatanatyam dancer, and Champak Seshadiri, who was trained by her equally famous musician father, Sangeeta Vidwan Namakkal Sesha Iyengar. I spoke to both of them for the purposes of this paper and came to know that they are pioneers in the field of imparting their respective arts to the students in Montreal in the 60s. Their motivation for doing this was primarily a desire to share their knowledge and talent with a desire to preserve a rich cultural heritage which, they were afraid, would be lost to the children growing up in an alien atmosphere. The conflict between the cultures of the host country and the country left behind was brought to focus sharply in their minds and their training and temperament could not allow them to remain silent witnesses to this loss.

Champak started with two or three students, all the while and even today giving of her music free of any monetary compensation. Her

answer to me was that she was doing this for a sense of satisfaction in being able to hand down this knowledge to others. She particularly is proud of being able to establish the tradition of celebrating the Thiagaraja Music Festival in Montreal, replicating in small measure the hallowed tradition of honouring one of the famous Karnatic musicians, Thiagaraja. This festival is an annual event in Thiruvayur in South India to this day, where hundreds of musicians gather on the anniversary of Thiagaraja and sing his famous five *krithis* (songs) as a tribute to the great contribution he made to Karnatic music. The pioneering efforts of Champak have borne fruit in ample measure, as, today, there are quite a number of her own students coaching others in turn. Thus, Champak, because of her determination and grit, eventually succeeded in creating a group of singers who now carry on the tradition themselves.

The story repeats itself in the case of Priyamvada as well. The same motivation to share and preserve a rich cultural heritage is what motivated her to start teaching dance in Montreal in 1968. She was already well known by then, having had the advantage of performing Bharatanatyam in many parts of North America, especially in Universities where her father the great Sanskritist, Prof. V. Raghavan, was a frequent visitor. Raghavan was himself a great musicologist and his knowledge of dance was profound. Priyamvada fondly talks about her father as being her first mentor who taught her Sanskrit, Indian culture and the *Natyasastra* (earliest Sanskrit text on the arts). It was his inspiration, she says, that enabled her to continue in this art even so far away from home. Thus she started her Priyamvada Sankar School of Bharata Natyam with six or seven students, at least four of whom were non-Indians. Her school celebrated its golden jubilee in 1994 and has enabled a large number of Canadians, both Indian and non-Indian, to appreciate the rich dance heritage of India. Unlike music which can be taught even in a small place with minimum equipment, dance needs much more paraphernalia and it is the dedication and single mindedness of purpose that eventually found its own rewards.

Today there are a number of women who teach music and dance to Canadians who belong to different ethnic and religious groups. They play a significant role in inter-cultural exchange thus furthering

understanding of other cultures in a multi-cultural country like Canada. It is still the domain of women, at least in Montreal. This is brought to sharp focus if we reflect that in India, the transmission of the arts is not confined to women alone. In fact males play a large role in the dissemination of the arts in India. Thus, one could conclude by pointing to the factors that have helped in the women becoming cultural ambassadors as:

1. The type of people who migrated did not initially include traditionally trained male artists. Thus the first teachers who laid the foundation were women.

2. The men who migrated along with their spouses were too busy consolidating their economic position in a new land and that the women had a lot of time on their hands.

3. Montreal was fortunate to have amongst the early migrants women who had talents of the highest order, who were proud of their heritage and who also had a strong desire to share and preserve this cultural heritage.

4. I would also add that psychologically, this engagement with what they liked best to do, helped these women to gradually adjust to a new place, far away from home.

I have used the phrase cultural ambassadors to characterize these pioneering women deliberately. They have brought the music and dance of India to the attention of those who probably would never have been exposed to them otherwise. By teaching the art to any one who is interested and not just to the Indians alone they have again opened the doors for better understanding amongst people from all walks of life and are thus true cultural ambassadors.

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How was Hinduism Studied?: Reviewing Old Scholarship
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This essay is essentially review of some of the important literature on Hinduism. I have selected some from the early orientalists and some from the more recent studies. As we continually press on with new studies and approaches in the study of Hinduism it helps to take stock of the past to see how the previous scholars engaged with the subject. To do so, I have chosen a simple methodology of first closely examining some selected scholars from the early Indological and Orientalists traditions (I refer to them as classical approaches), and then examine the writings of some contemporary scholars.

Some Classical Approaches to the Study of Hinduism

Here I have randomly selected a few of the older books on Hinduism and see what scholars have included in it and what they have excluded. Perhaps, what is excluded has to be derived from its absence in the light of today's debate between Brahmanical and non-Brahmanical traditions.

Abbe J.A. Dubois (1770-1848), a French missionary to the Pondicherry Mission, who paid great attention to the Brahmanical customs and practices with a view to convert more of the higher caste Hindus, is said to have lamented his failure to convert the higher castes.

> For my part I cannot boast of my successes in this sacred career during the period that I have laboured to promote the interests of the Christian religion. The restraints and privations under which I have lived, by conforming myself to the usages of the country; embracing, in many respects, the prejudices of the natives; living like them, and becoming all but a Hindu myself; in short, by being made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some—all these have proved of no avail to me to make

proselytes. During the long period I have lived in India in the capacity of a missionary, in all between two and three hundred converts of both sexes. Of this number two-thirds were Pariahs or beggars; and the rest were composed of Sudras, vagrants, and outcasts of several tribes, who, being without resource, turned Christians in order to form connexions. Chiefly for the purpose of marriage, or with some other interested views. (Dubois 1936: xxvi-xxvii)

He seems to have fashioned his career as a missionary in line with the life of Roberto de' Nobili (17th century) and aligned himself with the lives of the Brahmanical elite, even though his missionary work was mostly successful around the lower caste non-Brahmanical groups. By the time he went to India, the first Sanskrit grammar book was published in Rome in 1790 by Paolino de S. Bartolommeo, and William Jones (1746-1794) by this time was already a well-established Sanskrit scholar. Inspired by these Brahmanical intellectual traditions revealed by the works of Sanskrit scholars before him, he goes on to compile, what became an important source of information for colonial bureaucracy in India. According to his own preface, his information on the book is drawn from

[t]he books which are held in highest estimation amongst the people of India and partly form such scattered records as fell by chance into my hands and contained facts upon which I could thoroughly rely. But in regard to the majority of the materials which I now offer to the public I am chiefly dependent on my own researches, having lived in close and familiar intercourse with persons of every caste and condition of life. (Dubois 1936: 8).

He, however, warns that his research was confined to the "provinces south of the Kistna [Krishna) River" and warns against generalisations that would apply to the areas "north of that river and Hindustan proper". (Dubois 1936: 10-11). As far as his discussion on caste is concerned, he displays the variety of its formations and the sources from which such divisions might have been derived. He attributes the caste origination theories to "an article of belief universally received by Indian antiquity." (Dubois 1936: 45, f.n. 1). His discussions on

rituals and religious customs and practices seem to depend heavily on the Brahmanical sources. Thus, the parts II and III of the book that deal with Brahmanical life and Religion respectively profile the Sanskrit based sources. His notion of Hinduism that comes out more clearly in the III part of the book is really a crystallisation of ideas from the Puranas and epics and to a great extent from the vernacular renderings of these sources. Even though he indicates that his work covered the areas south of the Krishna River, his knowledge of various Hindu ideas and practices seem to be predominantly applicable to the Tamil country.

J. Muir's work on *Original Sanskrit Texts* (1870) mainly dealt with Vedic religion and the various Vedic gods. He, towards the later part of the book, also deals with how within the Indian tradition the idea of one abstract deity emerged. In this, he refers to Yaska, the author of Nirukta, who says, "owing to the greatness of the deity, the one Soul is celebrated as if it were many. The different gods are separate members of the one Soul." (J. Muir 1870: 350). However, later on in the text, he dispenses as unreliable the suggestion made by M. Pietet that prior to the Aryans developing a polytheistic form of religion with many gods, whose characteristics are drawn from nature, there existed a "primitive form of monotheism" in the early stages of the Aryan culture. He says,

> [I]t may be quite true that the complicated polytheism which we find in the hymns of the Rig-Veda, or even the narrower system which we may suppose to have existed as the separation of the Indian and Iranian tribes, could only have been the slowly-developed product of many centuries; but this does not prove that a simpler form of nature-worship, embracing a plurality of gods, might not have existed among the ancestors of these tribes from the beginning of their history. I can see no reason for the conclusion that monotheism must necessarily have been the starting-point of the system. (J. Muir 1870: 414).

Thus, Muir was unconvinced of any form of monotheism in the early history of Aryans.

Monier Monier-Williams in his book *Religious Thought and Life in India* (first published in 1883) clearly distinguishes three "phases of Indian religious thought—Vedism, Brahmanism, and Hinduism." (Monier Williams 1974: iii). Speaking of the distinction between Brahmanism and Hinduism he says,

> [T]he chief point, then, which characterizes Hinduism and distinguishes it from Brahmanism is that it subordinates the purely spiritual Brahman (nom. Brahma) with its first manifestation Brahma, to the personal deities Siva and Vishnu or to some form of these deities; while it admits of numerous sects, each sect exalting its own god to the place of the Supreme. Yet we must guard against the idea that Hinduism has superseded Brahmanism, or that they are mutually antagonistic. The latter system is pantheistic, whereas Hinduism is theistic; but in India forms of pantheism and theism, and polytheism are ever interwoven with each other. (Monier Williams 1974: 54).

Having divided Brahmanism into three—ritualistic, philosophical, and mythological Brahmanism, he finds Sankara as the "chief representative, and so to speak, the very incarnation of strict Brahmanism". (Monier Williams 1974: 55). He also points out that Sankara was said to have established the six sects known as Saivas, Vaishnavas, Saktas, Ganapatyas, Sauras (worshippers of sun) and Pasupatas. Of the six, the Saiva and Vaishnava sects, which, having superseded Buddhism, have become "the chief constituencies of modern Hinduism." ((Monier Williams 1974: 59). What is very interesting is that he considers both Saiva and Vaishnava sects as unorthodox. He draws this conclusion on the basis that Buddhism, Saivism and Vaishnavism were at one stage interchangeable. (Monier Williams 1974: 58). He suggests that the Buddha has two distinct characteristics.

> In his fist and earliest character he was the typical ascetic (Sramana), the great teacher of the power to be gained by self-suppression and by conquest of the passions. In his second, he was the great friend of the common people who advocated universal brotherhood, universal equality, and

> universal compassion for all forms of life. In both these
> characters the personal god Siva and the incarnated Vishnu
> were his counterparts, and ultimately superseded him. Siva
> was the Buddha in his ascetical character. Vishnu was the
> Buddha in his character of a beneficent and unselfish lover
> and friend of the human race. (Monier Williams 1974: 59).

In the footnote he cites the claim that "the great Vaishnava temple of
Jagannath in Orissa was originally dedicated to some Buddhist tooth-
relic." (Monier Williams 1974: 59, f.n.1). Although he promised in
this book that he would develop this theory further in another chapter,
I have not yet come across such chapter by Monier Williams.

In his earlier book (*Indian Wisdom or Examples of the Religious,
Philosophical, and Ethical Doctrines of the Hindus* 1875), Monier
Williams admitted that Hinduism and Brahmanism are names that are
not recognised by the natives. (Monier Williams 1875: xxvii). He
describes the religion as follows—

> Starting from the Veda, it ends by appearing to embrace
> something from all religions, and to present phases suited to
> all minds. It has its spiritual and its material aspect, its
> esoteric and exoteric, its subjective and objective, its pure
> and its impure. It is at once vaguely pantheistic, severely
> monotheistic, grossly polytheistic, and coldly atheistic.
> (Monier Williams 1875: xxvii).

Unlike most Indologists of his time, Monier Williams was openly
clear about his project, viz., to convince people of other faiths of the
finality that "our religion as the only system adapted to the
requirements of the whole human race...." Monier Williams 1875:
xlv). He was under no illusion that Brahmanism, Buddhism and Islam
that existed in India were false and that if any common ground exists
it must be "looked for more in Brahmanism than in Buddhism and
even than in Islam." (Monier Williams 1875: xxxvi-xxxvii).

Unlike the *quasi* Christian and *quasi* theological agenda that Monier-
Williams brought to bear on his approach to the various Indian
religions, Edward Hopkins provided a more historical approach to

what he called *Religions of India* (1977, first published in 1885 and again in 1894). Under this title he essentially covered religions of the Vedas and right across the spectrum including the tribal religions of India. He separates the religion of the Rig Veda from that of Atharva Veda, Brahmanism, Jaina and Buddhist religions, and then he treats Hinduism in two phases—Early Hinduism (which includes mainly the religious ideas from the epic texts) and Hinduism (which includes the main two rival sectarian religions viz., Vaishnavism and Shaivism). And he separates the religious development of the Puranas where the meeting of the sectarian theology culminates in a sort of Hindu trinitarian idea of God. Having said that, it must also be pointed out that Hopkins does not see these traditions from Vedic to the later Hindu development as discontinuous, but rather continuous Brahmanical attempts to incorporate and expand the tradition. According to Hopkins,

> In Vishnu, as a development of the Vedic Vishnu; in Shiva, as affiliated to Rudra; in Brahma, as the Brahmanic third to these sectarian developments, the trinity has a real if remote connection with the triune fire of Rig Veda, a two thirds connection, filled out with the addition of the later Brahmanic head of the gods.

> To ignore the fact that Vishnu and Rudra-Shiva developed inside the Brahmanic circle and increased in glory before the rise of sectaries, and to asseverate, as have some, that the two chief characters of the later trinity are an unmeaning revival of decadent gods, whose names are used craftily to veil the modernness of Krishnaism and Shivaism—this is to miscalculate the waxing dignity of these gods in earlier Brahmanic literature. To say with Burnouf that the Vishnu of the Veda is not at all the Vishnu of the mythologists, is a statement far too sweeping. The Vishnu of the Veda is not only the same god with the Vishnu of the next era, but in that next era he has become greatly magnified. (Hopkins 1977: 458).

He, however, notes that Krishnaism was brahmanised much later than Shivaism. (Hopkins 1977: 458). In his overall treatment of the religio-philosophical development of the Indian (Hindu) tradition/s, Hopkins

makes *two* fundamentally important observations. In the context of the discussion in the historical development of thought from Vedic religion and Brahmanical ritualism to Upanishadic philosophy, he observes that while most of the Vedic religion found in the collection of hymns was developed in the Western region, viz., Punjab, the Brahmanical ritualism emerged in the middle district around south of present Delhi. The east (the land of the Kurus and Panchalas) was where the serious esoteric Upanishadic thought was developing which in a way set the tone for the subsequent so called heresies to emerge, viz., in the form of Jainism and Buddhism. He says, "[t]he storm reached a head in Buddhism, but its premonitory signs appear in the Upanishads, and its first outbreak preceded the advent of Gautama." (Hopkins 1977: 280). He also notes that "[t]he most unexpected characters appear in the role of instructors of priests, namely, women, kings, and members of the third caste, whose deeper wisdom is promulgated oftentimes as something quite new, and sometimes is whispered in secret." (Hopkins 1977: 243). This certainly is contrary to how Brahmanical ritual teachings were imparted according to Manu, whose law book reflects the Brahmanical opinion and for whom the land of the Brahamanical ritual was the Kuru plains. Hopkins does call our attention to Manu's dictum about this when he recounts "[t]he lowest caste, outcasts, women and diseased persons are not allowed to hear the holy texts or take part in ceremonies." (Hopkins 1977: 264, also see 263). Thus, he quite rightly indicates the rise of the Upanishadic thought from not only outside the geographical area of the Brahmanical ritualism, but also from outside the traditional social world of the Brahmin priestly class. The second important observation that Hopkins makes is that the epic literature that gave rise to the early forms of Visnu and Shiva religions[1] (Hopkins 1977: 348) was based on the ancient legends of Eastern India and "should be separated as a growth of Hinduism from the literature of pure Brahmanism". (Hopkins 1977: 24). Hopkins says,

> [w]hile the great heresies that we have been describing were agitating the eastern part of India, the old home of Brahmanism in the West remained true, in name if not in fact, to the ancient faith. But in reality changes ·almost as

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[1] Hopkins also sees some Buddhist elements at least in the case of the epic text the Ramayana. (See Hopkins 1977: 349).

> great as those of the formal heresies were taking place at the core of Brahmanism itself, which, no longer able to be the religion of a few clans, was now engaged in the gigantic task of remodelling and assimilating the indigenous beliefs and religious practices of its new environment. This was not a conscious act on the part of Brahmanism. At first it was undertaken almost unwittingly, and it was accomplished later not without repugnance. But to perform this task was the condition of continued existence. Brahmanism had to expand, or shrink, wither, and die.

> For a thousand years almost the only source of information in regard to this new growth is contained in the epic poetry of the time, with the help of a few additional facts from the law, and some sidelight from inscriptions. It is here that Vishnuism and Shivaism are found as fully developed sectarian beliefs, accepted by Brahmanism with more or less distrust, and in more or less fullness of faith. (Hopkins 1977: 348).

Having made such important observations as to the historical significance of what was happening in the eastern part vis à vis in the course of the development of what later became known as Vishnuism and Shivaism and their continued importance of present Hinduism, Hopkins does not go far enough to unpack what sources might have actually triggered the very Upanishadic ideas in the east and coming from the unlikely sections of the society, namely, the princes, Vaishyas and women. In fact, he does point out even some of the Brahmana texts such as the Satapatha Brahmana, at least the later sections of the text, have been composed in the east. (Hopkins 1977: 281). He also in passing observes the ascetic practices among the Brahmanas themselves, and notes that in the Brahmanas the pre-Buddhistic monk was known as Bhikshu (beggar or Sannyasin), the Buddhist priesthood was referred to as Sramana or ascetic monk. (Hopkins 1977: 258). I think that unpacking this Sramana tradition, which might have predated the so called heretic traditions, perhaps will throw greater light on many aspects of Tantra, Agama and even the Goddess worship, all of which seem to this day fairly strong in the east and became integral to later Hindu religion.

Between 1906 and 1907 Maurice Bloomfield gave a series of lectures at various American universities and subsequently published under the 'American Lectures on the History of Religions' series by its editors, John Peters, C.H. Toy and Morris Jastrow in 1908. In these lectures, Bloomfield emphasises the view that Vedic Religion belonged to a distant past that is not recoverable easily. (Bloomfield 1908: 22). It belongs to a "hieratic or priestly religion" with its immediate purpose being economic aspect and "thoroughly utilitarian and practical". (Bloomfield 1908: 60-61). While he considers the religion of the Vedas being based on nature myths, the later "higher religious motives" found in the Upanishads are in fact continuation of the Vedic ideas. "The Upanishads and theosophy are part of the Veda; neither Hindu believer nor Western critic has ever doubted that. Now the thought of the Upanishads has its forerunners in all parts of Vedic literature clear (sic) back to the Rig-Veda; in the Atharva-Veda it even shows signs of at least temporary going to seed." (Bloomfield 1908: 209-10). Thus, in Bloomfield's estimation, although he separates the religion of the Vedas from that of the later Hinduism, he, nonetheless, sees the origins of the Upanishadic thought, which he considers as Hinduism proper, in the Vedic ideas. While he describes the Vedic religion as Hieratic/Ritualistic and hence life affirming, he considers the later Upanishadic thought as pessimistic. He, however, does not raise questions as to how this fundamental shift in religious attitude has occurred. He rather sees some continuity between these two types of thought.

In 1911, J.N. Farquhar published his book called *A Primer of Hinduism*. In his preface he highlights the importance of studying Hinduism historically and not in piecemeal. (Farquhar 1911: v-vi). So, he divides his approach into several periods from "Prehistoric period to Bhakti period" covering ten chapters and then in Part 2 of the book he deals with what he calls "Hinduism as a System". In this section, he includes both the contemporary Hindu practices and also what he calls the "Religion of the Lower Classes", mainly referring to the Hinduised tribes and castes. In his estimation, the early Vedic ideas of gods, the Upanishadic ideas of Brahman, the epic and Purana ideas have together provided the formative elements of Hinduism.

(Farquhar 1911: 158-166). He provides, nonetheless quite aptly, the on-the-ground situation of Hinduism when he says,

> Although Hinduism has many gods, many theologies and many sacred books, a man may remain an orthodox Hindu without believing in any god or any theology, and without knowing or acknowledging a single sacred book. He must give some sort of practical recognition to some god or gods in the domestic ceremonies and family festivals, but the divinities thus reverenced vary all over India; there is no uniformity. Nor are there any theological conceptions which he need hold: an orthodox Hindu may be an atheist, an agnostic, or a Christian in his conception of the world. The sacred books of Hinduism are not read in the services of the temples, nor is the ordinary Hindu expected to study them. They are for the priest and the philosopher. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata, however, are very largely read in the homes of the people. (Farquhar 1911: 150).

In a way this sounds close to what a social scientist colleague of mine said of the contemporary scenario of Hinduism in India, viz., that the modern Hindu has hardly any time for any of the traditional rituals and festivals to perform regularly, let alone for serious study of Hindu religious texts. I am not quite sure if the assertion of Farquhar about the Ramayana and the Mahabharata being read in Hindu homes even in his time is based on a serious empirical study. It might be more accurate to say that most people might know the stories of these epics, but the claim that they are "largely read in the homes" might be a dubious one.[2]

Louis Renou, a professor of Sanskrit and Indian Literature at Sorbonne gave a series of lectures at the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London in 1951. These lectures

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[2] Even today's India there seems to be no evidence to it, in spite of a sizeable educated population. It might be informative to take a look at what Madhu Kishwar observes in her book on Religion at the Service of Nationalism (1998). "Among my students and in my own neighbourhood I have asked some of the most enthusiastic supporters of the Ram Mandir campaign which version of the Ramayana they had read; I drew blank. All these educated young people are familiar with nothing other than Ramanand Sagar's TV serial Ramayan." (Kishwar 1998: 110).

were subsequently published in 1953 under the title *The Religions of Ancient India*. His choice of plural noun for religion becomes clear when he deals with the following religions as distinct ones—first he deals with what he calls Vedism in two parts. Part 1 deals with the gods in the Vedic texts and the ritual cult. This part, according to him, has no connection to the "great epics, the earliest non-Vedic texts", Buddhism and Jainism. He suggests that the early Vedic texts and their tradition of ritual belong to a distinct conceptual system, which in the Upanishads was "reduced to the comprehensive equation *atman/brahman*, which appeared to the new *kavis* as a resumé of the whole of Vedic thought." (Renou 1953: 18). This reductionism, according to him, was due to the tendency of the Indian mind "constantly seeking hidden correspondences between things which belong to entirely distinct conceptual systems." (Renou 1953: 18).

As a second part of the Vedism section, Renou, in the main, deals with the Brahmana and the Upanishadic texts and concludes that

> [w]e are quite uninformed about some aspects of Vedism. Of religious feeling and community life in the Vedic period, we can know virtually nothing. The schools, as we call them, are known to us only by their recensions. We are constantly having to make inferences about religious phenomena from philological evidence. (Renou 1953: 44).

It is in the sections three, four, and five that he deals with Hinduism in three parts as it were. He provides a clue as to how he proceeded with this division in the following—

> The long succession of religious developments which followed Vedism cannot be easily grouped. It is sometimes proposed to divide them into an older period, which would be designated as 'brahmanism', during which the main trend is towards uniformity rather than sectarianism, and a later period, when sects abound, which would be that of Hinduism proper. (Renou 1953: 46).

In Renou's view, the influence of Vedism/Brahmanism on Hinduism is not a large one. The core of Hinduism, according to him, is really

informed by the epics and the Puranas and fleshed out by the philosophical ideas from the Upanishads. He identifies this as the Smarta or orthodox tradition which is largely based on the Smriti texts. The sectarian Hinduism is a further development based on the vernacular sects such as Virasiavas, Manbhavs and Dattatreyas in the north and Tengalais and Vadagalais in the south.

R.C. Zaehner's introduction to his book *Hinduism*, first published in 1962 is revealing. He compares Hinduism to both Hellenism and Judaism and quickly distinguishes it from Judaism saying while it is based on the idea of

> [s]ubmission to One God, who is personal, transcendent, and holy who reveals himself in history and acts in history, Hinduism is quite free from any dogmatic affirmations concerning the nature of God, and the core of religion is never felt to depend on the existence or non-existence of God, or on whether there is one God or many;.... (Zaehner 1980: 1).

Zahener's starting point is the idea of *sanatana dharma*, a concept that he finds being derived from the Hindu texts (Sanskritic) themselves and which referred to both law and religion. (Zaehner 1980: 2). He, then, in the rest of the book introduces the reader to the variety of ideas drawn from Vedic (Rigveda et al.) texts all the way to the epic, ending with some reference to the modern leaders of India such as Gandhi, Dayananda Saraswati, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Aurobindo and including S. Radhakrishnan. Of Gandhi, in particular around whom he structures the last chapter entitled "Yudhishthira Returns", he says,

> Gandhi may have been and indeed was influenced by all kinds of non-Hindu ideas, but he was deeply rooted in, and drew his strength from, the *sanatana dharma* of his native land, not the *dharma* of the law-books and Brahmans, but the *dharma* that rests on *ahimsa*, truth, renunciation, passionlessness, and an equal love for all God's creatures, the *dharma* of Yudhishthira, the King of Righteousness and Truth. (Zaehner 1980: 174).

By distinguishing Gandhi's view of *dharma* between that which is derived from the law books and the Brahmans and the *dharma* of Yudhishthira, an epic characterisation and by locating Gandhi's life as a staunch Hindu in the epic character of Yudhishthira, Zaehner seems to hint that the early twentieth century Hinduism has not so much to do with the ancient Brahmanical tradition, but rather structured and drawn primarily from the later epic traditions. He, however, points out that Gandhi at the same time (that is, while basing his *dharma* on the epic texts and the Gita) had no difficulty in finding the essence of Hinduism in the Upanishadic texts, such as the Isa Upanishad—"All this that we see in this great universe is permeated by God. Renounce it and enjoy it. Do not covet anybody's wealth or possession." (Zaehner 1980: 180). Implicitly then, Zaehner's model of Hinduism is that it is mainly derived from the epics and selectively from the Upanishadic texts. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the sources for the construction of Hinduism, both in his own hands and in the way he thought the Hindus themselves did, was from the Sanskritic sources of "*sanatana dharma*", a concept we know in spite of its presence in the various Sanskrit *dharma* texts, was invented and powerfully deployed to distinguish between the Arya Samaj Hinduism and the so called Sanatana Dharma Hinduism, an idea that has already divided the Hindu society in the north Indian context by the late 19th century. To bridge the gap between such divisions among Hindus, of course, became necessary in the context of the British Empire and the Indian struggle for freedom. Hindu nationalists, such as Madhan Mohun Malvia, defined Hindu in the broadest possible terms that included everyone, except Muslims and Christians. He defined Hindu as follows—

> The Hindu means any person male or female professing to be a Hindu or following any religion of Indian origin including Sanatanists, Arya Samajists, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Brahmos etc. (Gupta 2000: 142).[3]

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[3] Of course, as Gupta points out, the Sikhs had rejected such definitions, not withstanding the fact that this is the definition that was used in the post independent Indian constitution in dealing with the status of the scheduled castes. That is, those scheduled castes that belonged to Hindu or any of the religions originated in India could maintain their status as depressed classes and be eligible for reservations in various categories, those scheduled castes, who converted to either Islam or Christianity could not enjoy the same benefits as those religions came from outside India and that by converting to those religions one no longer belonged to the caste rules of the Hindu society.

Having done this broad survey of how Hinduism has been represented by classical Indologists and Orientalists, let me now turn to some contemporary scholars of Hinduism.

Contemporary Scholarly Representations

In making a selection from a plethora of modern texts on Hinduism, I have included in my consideration those that are written by both Indian and Western scholars. I have also looked at those that have been written from "Teach Yourself" and "an Idiot's Guide to Hinduism" type of books to very generalist writers, such as former journalists. I have not selected these in any chronological sense but rather on the basis of a loose garden-variety types. Unlike the classical approaches, in the hands of the contemporary writers there is a predominance of treating Hinduism as a whole.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri, for instance, right at the beginning of his treatment of Hinduism says, "[D]espite its all-too-obvious inconsistencies, Hinduism is one whole." (Chaudhuri 1979: 1). In his critique of Western approach to presenting Hinduism, he identifies three elements in it—1. "Vedanta to the intellectually debilitated" 2. "Yoga to the physically degenerate" and 3. "Tantra to the erotomaniac". He calls this "deliberate misrepresentation of Hinduism". He further goes on to say, "[T]here is also another Western notion about Hinduism which must be dealt with. It is the idea that the profoundest part of Hinduism is an esoteric religious experience. This is wrong." (Chaudhuri 1979: 9). He then proceeds to analyse the methodology used in the study of Hinduism by Western scholars as well as some Indian scholars. His critique focuses mainly on the historical approach taken both by Western scholars and due to their influence by Indian apologetics in the 19th century. He argues that this historical attitude made it difficult for these Indian scholars to see "all their religious texts, doctrines, and practices as an integral whole." Furthermore, they had uncritically accepted the idea, which was foreign to Hinduism, viz., "that monotheism and polytheism were mutually exclusive, and also its corollary that polytheism was a

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This certainly explains why B.R. Ambedkar chose to convert to Buddhism as he could leave caste Hinduism but retain his caste status and be eligible for reservations.

corruption of religion." (Chaudhuri 1979: 28). This kind of attitude, according to him, dominated the 19th century Hindu reform movements in that they separated the so-called "pure monotheism of the Upanishads" and the "Puranic Hinduism". It is this skewed sense of Hinduism that came to be accepted by the educated Indian elite due to over reliance on the Western historical view of Hinduism. (Chaudhuri 1979: 29). He points out that the Western scholars divided the Hindu history into three periods—Vedic, ancient and modern. While scholarly attention was given to the first two periods, the last stage was left to the Christian missionaries and British administrators. This view of constructing the history of Hinduism is entirely based on the texts. (Chaudhuri 1979: 29). He then points out that such reliance on the textual sources to construct the history of Hinduism is to ignore a completely different view of the texts by Hindus. He suggests that in Hinduism, the texts "may or may not be the basis of practice or even faith." (Chaudhuri 1979: 29). He then cites the place of Rig Veda and the Bhagavadgita as examples to make his point. He says that even though the Rig Veda is held in high esteem by Hindus as their revealed scripture, there is no evidence of its use in the Hindu practice. He points out that in fact as early as the Mahabharata text and the Harivamsa text, the recitation of the Vedas by Brahmins was compared to the croaking of frogs. Similarly, the Gita too, though read by many modern Hindus, "its specific doctrines have no place in the practice of Vaishnavism as it has been ever since it became a popular cult." (Chaudhuri 1979: 30).

He says that the unreliable chronology based on texts and the comparative method used to construct a taxonomy of religious notions is misleading. He argues that "[I]n the case of Hinduism such a procedure would be more unsound still because in Hinduism very crude practices have always remained current side by side with what might be described as the highest type of religious experience." (Chaudhuri 1979: 34). He pays a good deal of his attention to the unreliability of using linguistic methods to determine chronology on the basis of the difference in linguistic styles. If linguistic style and grammar was to be used as a basis, then all but the Vedas and their ancillary texts were in classical Sanskrit. And according to him, classical Sanskrit cannot be earlier than 4th century A.D. This would mean even all of the Upanishads except two (he does not mention

which two) would have to be after the 4th century. He, therefore, concludes as follows—

> It would follow from this that they [the Hindu texts] cannot be drawn upon to write a history of Hinduism or even to describe its practices before the time of their redaction in their extant form. It would be risky to trace the evolution of Hindu beliefs and practices with their help even over the succeeding centuries because of their exact chronological relationship cannot be determined. (Chaudhuri 1979: 40, parenthesis mine).

He, in fact, recommends that the "dependence on the texts for writing history of Hinduism has to be given up." (Chaudhuri 1979: 40-41). Instead, he turns to the following sources—1.inscriptions, 2. art objects, 3. religious buildings, 4. accounts of foreign travellers and 5. works of secular Sanskrit literature. And these are the sources that he follows in the rest of the book cited here. His purpose seems to be to describe Hinduism rather than to construct it historically. It is in this descriptive sense he seems to see Hinduism as one continuous whole.

Interestingly, his idea of continuity reverberates in the words of Jan Gonda in his book *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*. He says,

> Those authors[4] who enlarged on the great and undeniable differences between Vedism and Hinduism, emphasising that the former was polytheistic and the latter comprised some practically monotheistic religions... overlooked that there are on the other hand many points in which important culture traits of the latter great period do not appear to have considerably departed from what was characteristic of the earlier centuries. Too often they failed to draw attention to a great variety of elements which though chronologically Vedic and incorporated in the corpora of Vedic literature precluded phenomena or institutions which are generally regarded as typically 'Hinduist' and disregarded what

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[4] He refers to scholars such as Monier-Williams, Hopkins, and von Glasenapp.

notwithstanding   considerable   differences   points   to
unmistakable continuity. (Gonda 1985: 16-17).

Contrary to Chaudhuri's view, A.L. Herman, a recent author,
constructs Hinduism historically starting from the Harappan
civilisation to the Gita and to the modern interpreters such as, Gandhi,
Maharshi and Bhaktivedanta. His book on Hinduism reflects a
chronological continuity from the Indus Valley to the present.
According to Herman, the three phases of Hinduism, viz., pre-Vedic
tradition, the Vedic tradition and the Upanishadic tradition were
synthesised in the Bhagavad Gita. (Herman 1991: xiv). And the three
modern interpreters, Gandhi, Maharshi and Bhaktivedanta represent
three different strands of that synthesis. He shows that the three phases
that he had identified—pre-Vedic (Indus), Vedic and the
Upanishadic—represented   three   traditions,   viz.,   Bhaktism
(corresponds to Indus Valley), Brahminism (Vedic) and Brahmanism
(Upanishadic) respectively. And these three traditions, according to
Herman, became realised in the lives of Bhaktivedanta (Bhaktism),
Gandhi (Brahminism) and Maharshi (Brahmanism). (Herman 1991:
146-48). This experiment of Herman is probably the most convoluted
opposite of what Chaudhuri had suggested.

The other extreme example is found in the 'Teach Yourself' series.
This is a joint effort of an Indian and a Western writer. It moves away
from a chronological and historical treatment to a thematic approach
to the study of Hinduism. It presents various topics—temple images,
mythologies, and so on right up to topics such as pilgrimages, paths to
salvation and ethics. The format seems to combine both pedagogical
goals and the objective of providing an understanding of Hinduism to
an outsider. (Kantikar and Cole 1995).

A more recent attempt on Hinduism was made by Arvind Sharma in
his book, the *Classical Hindu Thought: An Introduction.* (2000). In his
preface to this book, Sharma outlines his project. He intends to
present, what he calls, the conceptual framework of Hinduism. He
further clarifies that as the essentials of classical Hinduism. (Sharma
2000: viii). And these essentials are, what he calls, the "doctrinal
dimension of classical Hinduism" using Ninian Smart's classification

of six dimensions.[5] (Sharma 2000: vii). He identifies four periods in the development of Hinduism—Vedic and pre-Vedic Hinduism (3000-800 BCE), Classical Hinduism (800 BCE – 1000 CE), Medieval Hinduism (1000 – 1800 CE), and Modern Hinduism (1800-). (Sharma 2000: xxiv). He first introduces, what he calls, classical concepts (Vedanta concepts) ahistorically (synchronically). In the second chapter, he then provides an historical (diachronic) view of these concepts. In what he calls the traditional view, he identifies the development of the idea of a single god (Isvara) in the Rig Veda (1500 BCE) itself. In the earliest Upanishads (Brihadaranyaka, 800 BCE), he says, "we find an unequivocal and unmistakable assertion of monotheism". (Sharma 2000: 36). These two concepts, Isvara (god) and Brahman develop into the Trinitarian (trimurti) idea of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, which emerges in the period between 500 BCE and 200 BCE in the 'Verse' Upanishads. (Sharma 2000: 37). Thus, Sharma seems to suggest a direct continuity from the Vedic times to the classical Hinduism. In the rest of the book, it is this format that he fleshes out by dealing with the concepts in some detail. Towards the end, he concludes, "the continuity of Indian culture rests upon and goes back to the Vedas. Moreover, all the major systems of Indian philosophy are either rooted in the Vedas or have been profoundly influenced by them. All codes of law claim to be based on or profess to impart the teaching of the Vedas." (Sharma 2000: 207). As he admits at the beginning of the book, it began as a presentation to an audience at the Smithsonian Institute. As such, he seems to have presented to an audience that may not necessarily be Hindu, but certainly presents a traditional viewpoint.

In her treatment of Hinduism, Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty provides a sample of textual sources beginning from the Vedas to the Tantras in the Sanskrit language and also presents some vernacular sources from Hindi, Bengali, Tamil and Telugu. Although gives dates for these sources, she does not provide any historical view of a continuous tradition. Unlike Sharma's book, she does not follow Ninian Smart's dimensional view. She, however, attempts to present what she calls "the different forms rather than the different contents of Hinduism." (O'Flaherty 1988: x). Stressing the pluralistic nature of Hinduism, she

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[5] Ninian Smart. *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs.* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983).

speaks of three types of Hinduism, mainstream Hinduism (based on dharma texts), devotional Hinduism, and Tantra Hinduism. According O'Flaherty, the mainstream Hinduism of the dharma texts provides the established rules of how Hindus live, the devotional and Tantra Hinduisms provide alternative rules and views of the same central themes. (O'Flaherty 1988: xi).

Gavin Flood's book on Hinduism combines both thematic and historical approaches. Right at the beginning he admits that it is problematic to read Hinduism into the past. (Flood 1996: 3). Unlike the doctrinal approach of Sharma, Flood takes the view that allows for internal differences and at the same time some kind of commonalities which are not essential, but relational. He says,

> There are clearly some kinds of practices, texts and beliefs which are central to the concept of being a 'Hindu', and there are others which are on the edges of Hinduism. I take the view that while 'Hinduism' is not a category in the classical sense of an essence defined by certain properties, there are nevertheless prototypical forms of Hindu practice and belief. (Flood 1996: 7).

What is different and, perhaps, refreshing is that Flood locates the study of Hinduism, like the broader study of religion, in human experience rather than positing an essentialist view of Hinduism. He, then, naturally locates that discourse in the methodologically pluralistic disciplines of human sciences. (Flood 1996: 10). In other words, he provides a strongly sociological view of Hinduism, which lays emphasis not so much on Hindu beliefs, but rather on what they do. He says,

> This sociological characterization of Hinduism is very compelling. A Hindu is someone born within an Indian social group, a caste, who adheres to its rules with regard to purity and marriage, and who performs its prescribed rituals which usually focus on one of the many Hindu deities such as Siva or Vishnu. (Flood 1996: 12).

This definition, however, does not include the other group of people that he himself identified earlier in his description, viz., those "Westerners from Europe and America who would claim to follow Hinduism or religions deriving from it and Hindu ideas, such as karma, yoga and vegetarianism". (Flood 1996: 6). Nor does it take into account the diverse practices of Village Hinduism. It is still centred around Brahmanical order of society. Chronologically he follows pretty much the conventional periods from Indus, vedic, epic and puranic, medieval and modern. While following the historical approach, he focuses on the enduring concepts and ideas from various periods rather than looking for a rigid, immutable and frozen moments. In other words, the enduring concepts are not as if they have continued into the future unchanged. He rather shows that their endurance had to do with how these concepts have been reworked in the wake of new encounters and traditions. For instance, drawing from the important scholarships of Johannes Bronkhorst and Patrick Olivelle to the understanding of the Sramana tradition, Flood rightly identifies the contribution that that tradition made to the development of the Aranyaka and the Upanishadic ideas of renunciation. (Flood 1996: 76ff). This is certainly in line with what Hopkins suggested back in 1895. The uniqueness of Flood's book is that he, on the one hand, accounts for virtually all the intellectual traditions of South Asia in creating what has come to be called Hinduism, but on the other hand avoids the tendency to essentialise the past.

There is not much of evidence that I could find for the argument that the Orientalists constructed Hinduism as we study today. Rather, there is much diversity in their approaches and conclusions and nearly all of them that I have surveyed emphasised the variegatedness rather than the monolithic nature of Hiduism. In the contemporary approaches, with the exception of Sharma, and other popular Hinduism texts, much of western scholarship tended also to present variegatedness and not the essential Hinduism that can be traced back to Vedas. Elsewhere in a forthcoming article I have argued that such essentialising agenda needs to be seen in the context of the Indian nationalist agenda of the past as well as the Hindutva agenda of the present.

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A Comment on Semantic Historical Method vs. Ideological Approach to the Study Hinduism

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This brief comment is meant to highlight some of the methodological and theoretical problems that we face in using methods in exclusivity, and also how different results could be obtained with different methods. Most earlier studies on Hindu texts were based on linguistic methods and semantic histories. Contemporary Indologists tend to continue in this approach assuming that there is somehow some historical continuity within texts and between texts. The fact that a text appears in history earlier than another text is one thing, but its connection to other texts that appear later is another thing. Tracing the meaning of a word in various texts through a semantic historical approach assumes that the earlier dated texts have some connection to the later dated texts. Such an assumption overlooks the possibility that a word used by a later author in a certain sense has very little to do with the sense in which an earlier author has used the same word, unless a historical connection is made between the texts. In most Indian texts, such historical connections between texts are not easy to find. This is a fundamental problem lies in excessively relying on semantic histories. Often historians and Sanskritists fall into this trap by excessively relying on semantic history of words. For instance, Olivelle's treatment of the Āśrama System in which he prefers, through a hermeneutical method, tracing the Śramaṇa notion to the idea of śrama in the Brāhmaṇa ritualistic context, is a case in point. He seems to ignore the need to distinguish semantic histories from value/ideology systems. A word in its many contexts and texts and in popular usage may have the same meaning or a unique meaning. But the word in a particular value system can refer to an entirely different ideology. So, for instance, conflating the meaning of the word, śrama and the value or ideology it represents in the Śramaṇa system can be, therefore, misleading. In this context Patrick Olivelle's comment is

interesting. He says, "Those who interpret Śramaṇa to indicate a class of ascetics to which the seers belong are assigning to this term a meaning derived from other, and possibly later, contexts. The meaning of this term, moreover, should not be simply assumed to be the same as in these later ascetical contexts. We need to search for its meaning within the context of the Vedic use of the related terms śram and śrama. Śramaṇa in that context obviously means a person who is in the habit of performing śrama. Far from separating these seers from the Vedic ritual tradition, therefore, Śramaṇa places them right at the centre of that tradition. Those who see them as non- Brāhmanical, anti-Brāhmanical, or even non-Āryan precursors of later sectarian ascetics are drawing conclusions that far outstrip the available evidence." (Olivelle 1993: 14).

One broader implication of what Olivelle is saying has to do with how we understand the beginnings of the Āraṇyaka and Upaniṣadic texts in relation to the Brāhamaṇa ritual texts. My assumption here is that based on his argument about the Śramaṇa tradition, Olivelle would naturally place the Upaniṣadic texts within the ideological world of the Brāhamaṇa texts. He in fact does say that quite clearly "The Upaniṣads, on the one hand, are portions of a large body of sacred texts known as the Veda and are thus an integral part of the fundamental scriptures of most people we have come to call 'Hindu'; it is in this manner that the Upaniṣads have been transmitted through the centuries, and we should, therefore, consider their position within the broader Vedic corpus. They are, on the other hand, documents composed and edited by individuals at given moments in history and in specific geographical locations; we need to therefore look at the history of their composition." (Olivelle 1996: xxix-xxx). In spite of pointing to the "specific geographical locations" as an important aspect to be considered in understanding the Upaniṣads, he seems to locate the construction of these texts within the Brāhmaṇa ritual world. This would mean that the Upaniṣadic texts were indeed meant to have been written as following the Brāhmaṇa ritual ideology by Brāhmanical writers and hence called Vedānta (coming after the Vedas—anta=at the end of...). But the word 'anta' in Vedānta can also refer to the broader sense of "meaning", "intention", etc and not necessarily in the chronological sense of "at the end of". Here it might be worth noting

that in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (2:4:10) Yājñavalkya, while explaining the meaning of self to his wife Maitreyī, mentions a list of sources, and what is interesting is the order in which he lists—"the Ṛgveda, Yajurveda, Sāmaveda, Atharvāṅgirasa, itihāsa, purāṇas, vidyas, upaniṣads, ślokas, sūtras" and so on. Either this list is a random one and no particular order might have been intended by Yājñavalkya , or could it be that at the time when the Upaniṣads were still being composed they did not yet occupy the place of Śruti, let alone being written with the intention of placing them after the Brāhmaṇa ritual texts. Here what is also worth noting is that the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad is usually considered one of the older texts of this genre and Yājñavalkya is one of the key actors / speakers in this text and by the time of this actor there was a genre of texts already known as Upaniṣads, as seen in the above verse. This could mean that even if one assumes that they could have been written by some Brāhmanical writers who "sympathized with the skeptics and the exponents of new doctrines" as indicated by Winternitz (1996: 215), the ideology that informed those texts could have come from outside the old ritual ideology of the Brāhmaṇas. Both Hopkins and Winternitz have located the origins of the Upaniṣadic texts outside the ideological context of the Brāhmaṇa ritualists. (Hopkins 1977:243ff; Winternitz 1996: 210ff). Oldenberg described these texts as containing the "oldest Vedic form of the Sāṃkhya-doctrine." (Oldenberg 1991: 1). However, his overall impression of the chonological relationship between the Upaniṣads, the Sāṃkhya and the Buddhist ideas is that the later Upaniṣads reflect the Sāṃkhya and the Buddhist ideas and not the older ones. In other words, both the older form of Sāṃkhya and the older form of Buddhist ideas belong to a much later period than the texts such as Bṛhadāraṇyaka and the Chāndogya Upaniṣads. Nevertheless, he does agree that there was a geographical separation between the Brāhmaṇa thinkers of the north-west (at the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna) and the Buddhist thinkers in the east. He does also note that a good number of Brāhmaṇas moved to the east thus coming in to contact with the Buddhist thinkers. He says, "Obviously, many of these Brāhmaṇas must have prepared a ground also for the speculations of the Upaniṣads besides claiming places of abode for their castes, Vedas and sacrifices" (Oldenberg 1991: 186). In his essay on early Sanskritization and its

historical development, Witzel cautions us to the fact that we should not lump the Saṃhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, Upaniṣads and Sūtras as though they are homogenous groups and appeared in that chronological order. He calls attention to the "internal chronology of the texts to establish historical levels" within texts. This would enable us to see how these texts were formulated over different periods "which are distinct in language, habitat, and in their social, religious and political features" (Witzel 1996: 3).

If we locate the ideology of the Upaniṣadic texts outside the older Brāhmaṇa ritual (pravṛtti ideology), then it is reasonable to locate it within the nivṛtti ideology of the Śramaṇa in the eastern parts, viz., Videha and Magadha regions. The implication of viewing the Upaniṣadic ideas quite independent of the Brāhmaṇa ritual ideology is far reaching for our understanding of Hinduism. That is, the Śramaṇa-influenced nivṛtti ideology of the Upaniṣads, the Purāṇas and the epics are to be treated as the core of Hinduism. This would mean that the so-called "essentials of Hinduism" which are drawn from the Upaniṣadic texts would have to be from the reworked Śramaṇa nivṛtti ideology. Furthermore, if the Śramaṇa ideology is at the core of the Upaniṣadic texts, how strong or tenuous really, then, is their connection to the Veda/Brāhmaṇa ideology. In other words, in what sense really the so-called "essentials" of Hinduism is traceable to the Veda/Brāhmaṇa texts remains a moot question. Why is it that the Brāhmaṇa ritual interpreters, viz., the Pūrvamīmāṃsā scholars did not take the trouble to interpret their texts in the light of the Upaniṣads but only the Vedānta interpreters engaged in that task? The complexity of the situation for Hinduism is further compounded by the fact that there is no serious evidence to show that either the Āgama texts or the Tantra texts, which have impacted on the Hindu doctrines and rituals, have any substantive connection to the Veda/Brāhmaṇa texts. The Vaikhānasa writers trace their Vedic orthopraxy by linking themselves to some Vedic Rishis, the Pāñcarātra writers trace their doctrines to Viṣṇu directly! Although the Āgama texts reflect a pravṛtti ideology in so far as they deal with the material rituals in temples and Brahmin homes, their relationship with the Brāhmaṇa rituals is hardly recognizable. The question of the origins of the Upaniṣads and
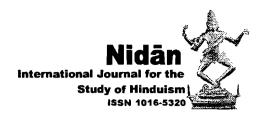
their ideological world needs further sustained inquiry. What have come down to us as Upaniṣadic texts are in fact narratives of the ideas that the Upaniṣadic teachers were engaging in. If we understand by the term "Upaniṣad" some sort of private teaching that was given to the disciple by the teacher, then the texts that we have are seemingly not that private even when these were composed. For instance, if we examine the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, which I referred to earlier, what we have in that are the following—narrative of ideas related to Self and Brahman in the first section, then Gārgya surrendering himself as student to Ajātaśatru, the king of Benares, conversation between Yājñavalkya and his wife, Maitreyī, a public debate between Yājñavalkya and his challengers in the court of the emperor of Videha, etc. All of these are not in any sense meant to be private sessions as indicated in the term, 'Upaniṣad'. What this could mean is that the actual secret teaching that was in fact given to the disciple by the teacher was never published for public and what we have in the form of Upaniṣadic texts are public narratives that did not seem to have the status of the secret teaching. These are seemingly the narratives composed by writers/authors/editors, redactors and so on who might have thought it fit to pass them on for public consumption and not for secret purposes. The fact that the author of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad through the mouth of Yājñavalkya speaks of the various texts starting from the Ṛg Veda and mentions the Upaniṣads after he has listed several other genre of texts (itihāsaḥ purāṇaṃ vidyā upaniṣadaḥ ...) perhaps gives us a clue that the so called Upaniṣads did not enjoy the status of Śruti and that the formation of the Śruti was a much longer historical process and only perhaps much later that these texts that are called Upaniṣads have been conferred that status. More over, each individual Upaniṣad does not seem to have been written as though it is a single text with a continuity in the overall narrative. For instance, again in Chapter 2, section 4 Yājñavalkya approaches his first wife, Maitreyī, and says that he wants renounce this world and that he wants to settle matters between her and also his other wife, Kātyāyanī. Then in the next chapter we have a list of teachers through whom the teachings were passed down and then Yājñavalkya's encounter with his challengers in the emperor's court. If the previous chapter is leading to the next chapter, it is odd that in the previous one Yājñavalkya expressed

his intention to renounce and then in the next chapter he decides to carry away all the cows and the gold that was on them. So, these chapters are not necessarily following upon each other reflecting a single plot and a single narrative. Presumably they are collected and put together by a later redactor. All of this leans towards the possibility that both the ideas contained in the Upaniṣads as well as the initial formation of these texts, albeit by Brahamanical authors, occurred in a different ideological and social context that was not the same as the Vedic ideology. It is more likely that the Brahmanical authors appropriated these ideas and integrated them into the Vedic ritual context.

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Nidān

International Journal for the Study of Hinduism

Nidān

Volume 17 December 2005

International Journal for the Study of Hinduism

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Printed at the University of KwaZulu-Natal