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The Contemporary Role of the Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidas among South African Hindus

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In the 148 years since the Indian community settled in South Africa, the *Ramcharitmanas* has played a significant role among Hindi speaking Hindus in shaping both their religious life and their social identity. The text has promoted familiarity with the Hindi language, Hindu religious beliefs, practices and culture in a country predominantly Christian by charting a route to maintaining Hindu religious and social identity. The text in this case is not limited to its written form but more important is its transmission in the oral tradition. Many Hindi speakers in the initial period relied on the memorized text. Only later the more standard written texts became available. This paper explores the extent to which the text of the *Tulsi Ramayan* directly impacted on the survival of Hindi language and culture.

The Hindi-speaking Hindus who came to South Africa as indentured labourers since 1860 brought with them the sacred *Ramayana* of Tulsidas, the *Ramcharitmanas*, epitomizing the story of God as well as their history, culture, philosophy and principles of *Dharma*. "It therefore served as scripture as well as a textbook for moral education and language learning" (Shukla 2002:200). Almost a century and a half later, the *Ramcharitmanas* continues to influence the religious, cultural and social life of Hindi-speakers in South Africa. The spread of neo-Hindu religious movements such as the Ramakrishna Mission, the Divine Life Society, the Sai Organization and Chinmaya Mission has brought Hindus across the linguistic divide into the fold of Rama devotion. Indeed, the Hindi (*Awadhi*) text of the Ramcharitmanas has been adopted by many of the religious organizations, temples and community ventures despite linguistic affiliations.

A brief discussion of the *Ramayana, Ramcharitmanas* and *Rama* would help to explain the Hindi speaking Hindu's preoccupation with these. To Rambachan (2002:10), the meaning of Rama has never been static, but has

been developing since the first poet Valmiki recorded the life of *Rama*. *Tulsidas*, according to Rambachan, inherits from Valmiki as well as from the Adhyatma Ramayana which emphasizes the nature of Rama as Brahman. Tulsidas adds his own special ingredient of love to the personality of *Rama*. Rambachan reiterates the Ramayana's ever growing appeal to mankind: "The *Ramayana* is a living text and tradition, continuously nourished by the insights and experiences of Hindu communities throughout the ages" (2002:11).

The *Ramcharitmanas's* and *Rama's* hold over the hearts and souls of the North Indian Hindus (facilitated, of course, by the language medium of the *Ramcharitmanas*), can be explained by the appeal of the character of Rama to the human psyche. In an era when Brahmanical interpretations of ritual and cosmology still held sway, Tulsidas boldly endeavoured to introduce a new perspective to religious beliefs and practices. Thomas Blom Hansen (2006:12) states that the "enormously popular narratives of the Ramayana and the *Mahabharata* circulated for centuries, but their reach was neither uniform, nor comprehensive." Blom does state that by the end of the 19th century these were circulated across the subcontinent. Tulsidas, through his Hindi version of the life and acts of Rama, had begun to spread the message of Divine Love from the end of the 16th century. Rambachan (2002:10) asserts that Tulsidas's was a "bold and revolutionary step," breaking down language barriers and making the story of *Rama* accessible to those not learned in Sanskrit, the time honoured liturgical language.

The religious role of the *Ramcharitmanas* lies in its capacity to teach righteous living, social harmony, spiritual upliftment and compassion for life. Tulsidas himself continually emphasizes the graciousness of *Rama* and the joys of living an ethical and moral life. The exaltation of earthly life through the divine presence of *Rama* on earth is lucidly described in Uttarkand where Ramrajya is described as follows:

> *ramaraja baithe trailoka, harshit bhaye gaye saba soka*
>
> The Divine Rule of Rama was established in all three worlds, where beings were filled with joy, all sorrow having vanished (Uttarkand 19 G 7).

The allure, charm and authenticity of *Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas* were demonstrated and proclaimed soon after the completion of the work. The

so-called deviation from Brahmanical tradition making the story of Rama accessible to the masses through the Hindi language was regarded as an act of heresy and apostasy. Nothing short of divine intervention would have made it possible not only for *Tulsidas* to escape the wrath of the orthodox Brahmins, but also to make the *Ramcharitmanas* as popular as it is today. These divine interventions did occur, as recorded by contemporary personalities, and the *Vishwanatha* (Lord Siva) temple in Varanasi was the venue where the *Ramcharitmanas* was validated and accorded primacy amongst scriptures including the *Vedas* (Tulsidas 1999:15). The *Ramcharitmanas*, therefore, is deemed to subsume all religious, moral, spiritual and cultural knowledge and values necessary for humankind in the present Kali era.

In the *Ramcharitmanas* itself (Balkand 46) the question is asked of Yajnavalkya by Bharadwaj whether *Rama* is that same Personality whom Lord Siva meditates on. The answer was, of course, that it is the same *Rama*, Prince of Ayodhya, who rescued his wife Sita from Ravana and killed him in battle. Another valuable attestation to the authenticity of the Ramcharitmanas was given by Tulsidas's contemporary, Sufi Saint and Akbar's courtier Rahim (Shukla 2002:35)

> *ramacaritamanasa bimala santana jivana prana*
>
> *hinduana ko bedasama jamanahi pragata kurana*
>
> The *Ramcharitmanas* is the very life blood of the holy sages:
> It is akin to the *Vedas* for the Hindu, and is like the Quran to the Muslim.

Tulsidas completed and presented his *Ramcharitmanas* to the world in 1576 in Varanasi. For a period of approximately 280 years the people of India, particularly in the north, absorbed the Ramcharitmanas for its spirituality as much as its secular values. In this period, other versions of the Ramayana, in regional languages, also flourished, but the *Ramcharitmanas*, perhaps because of the Hindi language in which it was composed, attracted the largest number of devotees. It had become, over this period, part of both the "collective consciousness" and of the "eternal journey of the soul" (Mishra 1980:101).

This magnum opus of Tulsidas was not meant for any specific time or space: it represented the descent (*Avatara*) of the Divine for the protection

and establishment of Dharma, and not for a limited purpose or exigency (Ananthanarayan 1983: 11). The *Ramcharitmanas* is universally valid and relevant; the Hindi people who went to Mauritius (1834), Guyana (1838), Trinidad (1845), South Africa (1860), Suriname (1873) and Fiji (1879) were in large part missionaries for the Ramcharitmanas. The Valmiki Ramayana went to South-East Asia in ancient times and influenced the cultures of many countries. In the present era the Ramayana exerts its spiritual appeal in India and the Hindi Diaspora, while its cultural attraction for South –East Asia persists. The West has a predominantly academic or intellectual interest in the Ramayana (Vyas 2005:3).

The Valmiki Ramayana and the Sanskrit tradition also gave prominence to the Divine attributes to Rama. The very name 'Rama' is Sanskrit in origin. Scholars give the etymology of 'Rama' thus: ramante sarva jananama cittam sa ramah- that which resides in every sentient being is Rama. The epic personality of Rama makes him loom large in the minds of people, owing to his excellent qualities and actions. The following sloka of Valmiki illustrates this:

> *mulam hyesah manusyanam dharma saro mahadyutih*
>
> *puspam phalam ca patram ca sakhascasyetare janah*
>
> Sri Rama, whose strength is virtue, and who is possessed of extraordinary lustre is the root of the tree of humanity, while other men are flowers and fruits, leaves and branches (Ayodhyakand 33, 5).

Rejecting criticism from reformist movements, Swami Vivekananda supported *Bhakti* in the preparatory stage of spiritual development based on epics and other sources: "And indeed the mythological and symbolical parts of all religions are natural growths which early environ the aspiring soul and help it Godward." (Vivekananda 1972: 250). This dictum provided tremendous encouragement to the Bhakti Movement in the modern period.

The Hindi speaking indentured immigrants in South Africa were largely non-literate (Sitaram 1987:116), even if they carried copies of the *Ramayana* or other scripture with them. They had already experienced, as part of their "collective consciousness," thousands of years of spirituality practised by their ancestors, saints and sages; and almost three centuries of life-changing exposure to Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas*. The poverty which

they were victims of, and which brought them to the shores of South Africa, was of the material variety. Faith in God, practice of virtues and the ethic of hard work were never in short supply.

The Hindi indentured labourers exhibited reverence for their holy books – *Ramcharitmanas, Bhagavadgita* and *Mahabharata*, because they represented divinity in the form of spiritual knowledge, the essence of which was in their hearts and souls. The books symbolized the virtues of their deities, particularly Rama. They had learnt about the *Ramayana* and Rama through the oral tradition, since only a few could actually read. However, the realization that they should be able to read, in order to study the Ramcharitmanas for themselves gave the impetus for language learning.

The Hindi speaking Hindus also revered their language to a great extent. For almost a hundred years since settling in South Africa, many families lived by the rule that only Hindi would be spoken within the home. This explains the mystic bond between the Indians and their languages described by Devi Bughwan (1970) which exalted the language to a status approaching the sacred. The *Ramcharitmanas* had catapulted Hindi into prominence and dominance in India, and the mutual relation between them persists. The provenance of both *Ramcharitmanas* and Hindi is the soil of India. In South Africa they developed a symbiotic relationship: Hindi had enabled the *Ramcharitmanas* to reach the masses in India, while in South Africa the *Ramcharitmanas* helped to reverse language shift of Hindi. At a time when indentured Indians had already emigrated to most of the colonies, writers like Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850 – 1885) began to promote (Standard) Hindi as a force for national integration, particularly after the 1857 War of Independence (otherwise known as the Indian Mutiny). Brajbhasha was the language of literature in this period, but even those who wrote in Brajbhasha joined the call for promoting an 'own' language. Note Bhartendu's call:

> *nija bhasha unnati ahai, saba unnati ko mula*
>
> *binu nija bhasha gyanke, mitai na ur ko sula*
>
> The progress of one's own language is the root of all progress; without knowledge of one's language, the pangs of the heart cannot be still.

In South Africa *Ramcharitmanas* and Hindi both struggled to overcome obstacles in an alien environment. Their common interests went beyond the needs of the Hindi speaking immigrants, to include mutual assistance for their survival. Cooperation or collaboration between the religious and the linguistic aspects of the Hindi speaking Hindu's lives was essential and also easily facilitated. The symbiotic relationship between Hindi and the Ramcharitmanas in South Africa was succinctly noted by Shukla (1996:19):

> Religion and culture have played an important role in the maintenance and promotion of Hindi ... The Hindi version of the *Ramayana*, the *Ramcharitmanas*, is scripture to the majority of the Hindi-speakers ... In the early days it (Ramcharitmanas) had served as a text book for Hindi instruction when suitable material was unavailable. Today this position is reversed. Many people learn Hindi simply to read the *Ramcharitmanas*."

The foregoing demonstrates that the Hindi language has changed its role and domain, in keeping with sociolinguistic theory of language when a language is transplanted. In the case of Hindi, the inexorable death of the language will not occur, if it continues to be studied and read within the religio-cultural context. According to sociolinguistic theory there is a reciprocal relationship between language and culture (including religion) Sitaram (1996:1) describes it as follows:

> The paradigm shift from language loss to language maintenance evinced by Fishman provides the guiding principle for South African Hindus. This state of sanguinity has been achieved through tremendous social, economic and political struggle: the Indian South Africans are at crossroads which can be safely negotiated through constitutional and political means.

The *Ramcharitmanas* representing religion also had to contend against subtle pressures in favour of a religion followed by the rulers, in South Africa as much as India. With regard to language, it had been widely believed that if language dies, so will culture (*Bhasha gayi to sanskriti gayi*). Religio-cultural theory also postulates an important relationship between religion and culture. Hulmes (1989:3) maintains that throughout much of human history, religion has been a great central unifying force of culture. It has been the guardian of

tradition, preserver of moral law and teacher of wisdom. With regard to Hinduism, too, religion and culture have a similar relationship, as the history of the indentured Indians illustrates.

The first batch of North Indian indentured immigrants arrived in Durban on 26 November 1860 on the Belvedere which had departed from Calcutta on 4 October 1860. Of the 312 'active' (live) immigrants who landed, there were 40 Muslims (Henning 1993:37 et seq.). It is assumed that the rest were Hindus and that most of the immigrants understood some form of Hindi. By the end of the indenture system, a total of 152 184 Indians were brought into Natal in South Africa, approximately 40% of whom were Hindi speaking.

A spirit of tenacity and indomitability vis-à-vis religion, language and culture in the indentured Indians of all language and religious groups enabled them and their offspring to survive the challenges, adversities and vicissitudes of a foreign land, emerging today as well informed, properly guided persons of Indian origin within a larger South African democratic society. The language, religion and culture which the Hindis, as well as the other groups brought, was the authentic product of the motherland, India, but it took root in South Africa, sometimes with some interesting adaptations. It has been noted that the government and estate owners did not evince willingness to provide the immigrants education. The regard for their language and culture was even less than that for them as human beings. The Indian labourers were merely means of production; their masters had no interest in their religio-cultural needs (Sitaram 1996:2). In this regard Henning declares that "The state was, however, very reluctant to provide such facilities, and as a result during the 1870s and 1880s educational development was left to private enterprise and initiative."(1993:159). Henning further states that missionaries of the Methodist, Anglican and Roman Catholic churches were most active in providing educational needs.

Earnest dialogue did take place between missionaries and other European activists and educated Indians, including Christians, with regard to the perceived needs of the indentured labourers and their children. These discussions also provided an insight into contemporary views on the religio-cultural make-up of Hindi-speaking and other labourers. With regard to the missionaries' perceived desire to gain converts, J H Done, an Indian Christian school master questioned whether the Indians could "be coerced into a new faith in a day and a night." (Henning 1993:157). Furthermore, Done had faith in the moral tradition of Indians and said that the "unadulterated Hindu

philosophy would serve as well, would be readily embraced by all Hindu Indians." The above was said in the context of compulsory Christian religious education in the mission schools. Until 1927 the growth of illiteracy in the indentured Indian community continued because of meagre government support from the 1870s, and Indian opposition to Christian schools. The 'uplift' clause of the Cape Town Conference1926-27, proposed by Srinivasa Sastri, forced the state to finally assume responsibility for the education of Indian children (Henning 1993:167).

Indian language teaching suffered for a number of reasons. Tamil, Telugu, Hindi and Gujarati were offered, generally after normal school hours. The shortage of qualified language teachers was a serious setback. Life for the indentured Hindi speaking labourers did not cease, however, in the absence of proper facilities. Indeed, the *Ramcharitmanas* was an important pillar of strength for them throughout their existence, and proved its unfailing ability to give succour and solace in times of trial and turmoil.

Reading and recitation of the *Ramcharitmanas* continued from the early days of indenture. The oral tradition which developed in India with regard to the Ramayana was rooted in various sources, not all in consonance with Tulsidas's presentation of social and gender issues. Indeed, women who practised Ramayana recitations / singing in *Awadhi* or *Bhojpuri* also had a caste-based hierarchy. Usha Nilsson (2001:137) records "Beyond the *Ramcaritamanas* lies a differently magical world where women unfold the story of Rama and Sita according to their social location and worldview, creating sites of resistance." In early 20th century India, as in South Africa of the late 19th century, "basic education for high-caste girls in Hindi speaking areas included learning enough Hindi to read Tulsidas and write letters to family members." (Nilsson 2001:140).

The wheel has turned full circle in South Africa where people are learning Hindi to be able to read and recite the *Ramcharitmanas*. Learning in the early days was carried out in homes where somebody had some knowledge, using the *Ramcharitmanas* as a text book, which helped increase literacy (Shukla 2002:113). The availability of Hindi lessons and *Ramayana* discourses led eventually to the establishment of *Ramayana Sabhas* (societies), temples and schools. Thirst for education was such that parents who toiled in mines and cane fields sent their offspring to receive elementary education from a priest or other educated person (Rambiritch 1960:67). The learning of Hindi thus gave support to *Ramayana* study as well. The mutual dependency of

language and culture in this period has been highlighted by Maharaj (1992:180) in her research on Hindi and Culture. According to her, in the initial period of indenture language protected culture, whereas in present times people learn language to understand culture.

The Cape Town Agreement of 1927, it must be noted, did not make provision for Indian language teaching at schools. The onus of language maintenance thus lay within the community. The official situation was that in the colonial period there was no Indian language or religious education. The apartheid dispensation made provision from 1977 for Indian language teaching in state schools at secondary level, and at primary level from 1984. These concessions were made after the apartheid regime realized and acknowledged that the Indians were a permanent part of South Africa's demographics after 1960.

The valiant efforts by the Hindi people at language maintenance by means of pathashalas (classes held after normal school) and individual teaching were given a tremendous boost by the establishment of the Hindi Shiksha Sangh of South Africa (Hindi Education Society) in 1948. The brainchild of a great visionary and teacher from India, Nardev Vedalankar, the Sangh has increasingly exerted a profound and far reaching influence on Hindi language teaching and culture in South Africa. In 1998 the Hindi Shkisha Sangh also started the first and only Hindi radio station, Hindvani, which gives full exposure to *Ramcharitmanas*, as well as events, rituals and practices associated with Rama.

Ramayana study benefited the teaching of Hindi; there was no separate *Ramayana* tuition, but Hindi teaching always borrowed from and incorporated the *Ramayana*. Furthermore, *Ramayana* recitals were carried out not only during *Ramanavami* but throughout the year by the various Ramayana Sabhas that evolved since early times e.g. Shree Ramayana Sabha, Overport, Durban (1911); Sri Luxmi Narayan Mandir, Mobeni, Durban (1916); Sri Gopallal Temple, Verulam, (1888), Durban Hindu Temple (1896), as well as Ramayana Mandalis (groups) which developed in different parts of the Greater Durban area from the 1990s. The Hindi eistoddfods organized annually by the Hindi Shiksha Sangh also included passages from the Ramcharitmanas for recital. Sketches depicting *Ramayana* scenes were also popular.

A very important period for Indians in South Africa was the interlude during which the University of Durban-Westville (1961 – 2003), now merged with the former University of Natal to form the University of KwaZulu-Natal, provided courses in Indian Laguages and Hindu Studies. Hindi and *Ramayana* were both beneficiaries of this attempt by the apartheid rulers to give the Indian South Africans tertiary education and keep them content if not loyal to their ideology. In the Department of Indian Languages degrees were offered up to Doctoral level in Hindi, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit. *Ramayana* studies based on different linguistic versions were offered in all these languages. The *Ramcharitmanas* featured from the first year up to a full paper in Honours. Scores of students acquired Honours Degrees, at least 6 Masters Degrees, and 3 Doctorates, two of which were on the Ramcharitmanas, were awarded. The academics from this Department wrote and published papers on *Ramcharitmanas*, attended conferences and published books as well. The International Ramayana Conference, which holds its annual conferences in various countries of the world, organized its 18th Conference in Durban, South Africa in September 2002, with the collaboration of two academics teaching Hindi in the former Department of Indian Languages. The offering of religious courses in the Department of Hindu Studies since 1981 included studies of and exegeses of scriptures, including the *Ramcharitmanas*.

To turn to the mystic or esoteric dimensions of Rama, the concept of *Ramajayam* deserves our notice. The worship of Rama as *Parabrahman* by devotees worldwide contributes to the expansion of the ethos, potency and efficacy of Rama in time, space and causation (Pillay 2003:145). The ceaseless engagement with *Ramayana* in South Africa, especially by Hindi-speakers, in all circumstances and vicissitudes, and their ever increasing glorification of Rama, is an illustration of this expansion or *Ramajayam*, wherein the universe becomes beautiful and charged with the attributes of Rama.

The *Ramcharitmanas* and Rama devotion created a special and unique identity amongst Hindi speakers and the increasing numbers of devotees from other societies and cultures. The Hindi language and the disciplines related to and emanating from *Ramcharitmanas* create their own bond amongst devotees. In this sense, there has been a process of homogenization of cultural and religious practices and belief systems, described by Kumar (2007:96) particularly as a result of the adoption of the *Ramcharitmanas* as scripture by neo-Hindu movements such as the Ramakrishna Mission,

Chinmaya Mission and Divine Life Society. The glory of Rama is spreading across language, race and culture, eradicating whatever traces that may have persisted of the caste system, creating a new social order of devotees of Rama. The orthodox Hindu tradition had already deprived those who left the shores of India of any caste privileges – the exigencies of life on board the ships which transported them to the colonies made the Hindi-speaking and other Hindus compare themselves with Rama who went into exile and who ate the fruit which was already tasted and thus "polluted" by Sabari. Caste made no sense to those people whose God did not observe it.

The *Ramcharitmanas* continued to support and enrich the otherwise barren lives of the early immigrants who always looked forward to glorifying their "Ramayan" and Rama. When they were able to build temples, the Hindi-speaking Hindus began to institutionalize the *Ramcharitmanas* which became a regular source of Divine communion. *Satsangs* were held regularly, as they are today. Tulsidas had written the following extolling the benefits of congregational prayer

> *binu satsang bibeka na hoi, Rama kripa binu sulabh na soi*
>
> Wisdom cannot be acquired without the company of saintly persons and this
>
> cannot be found without the grace of Rama (Balkanda 2,7).

The worship of Hanuman, loyal devotee, door keeper and servant of Rama, as depicted in *Ramcharitmanas*, and eulogized by Tulsidas in Hanuman Chalisa, is growing exponentially. This adds to the enormous following of Rama devotees and magnifies the Rama ethos throughout the world. Addresses by spiritual luminaries of the organizations mentioned earlier, and discourses by Ramayana exponents such as Morari Bapu, Ramesh Ozha and Kirit Maharaj are attended by vast crowds.

The Ramayana Mandalis or groups created greater cohesion and contact between Rama devotees (Shukla 2007:54). Members of Mandalis are from all types of occupations – they meet as equals in the love of Rama. Their regular *Ramayana* recitals, discussions and discourses, as well as monthly *akhanda* (non-stop) recitals of *Sundarakand*, and recently, *Kishkindhakand* and *Aranyakand*, are attended by large numbers of devotees. The satsangs of various temples, *Ramayana* groups and the Ramayana Mandalis are on-going. The *Ramcharitmanas* is the source for all this activity.

In addition to this regular engagement with *Ramcharitmanas* and Rama, the *Ramanavami* or birth celebrations accompanied by nine days of Ramayana recital and Deepavali have become part of the religious calendar of all Hindus. The *Ramcharitmanas* has achieved much - its devotees are enjoying the bliss of communion with Rama, Avatara and God.

Some of the research questions in Shukla's thesis (Published as '*Ramacaritamanasa* in South Africa' in 2002) illuminate the status of Rama in the lives of the Hindis. One respondent said "The *Lilas* (pastimes) of the Lord purify the body and mind. They take you into a world free from the materialism of the modern world. The Lord's *Lilas* give direction to living in accordance with the injunctions of the scriptures." (Shukla 2002 : 169). Further questions elicited responses about innermost feelings towards Rama – "One and only God"; "the voice I hear within"; "My All"; "essence of the *Vedas*"; "*Maryada Purushottam*" (Supreme personality upholding Decorum); "Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the universe." The last response gives attributes of the Hindu Trinity to Rama. Such sentiments held in many families and individuals are transmitted to succeeding generations; ensuring a firm foundation for Rama devotion and *Ramajayam.*

Although great reliance was placed on the oral tradition for the propagation of the *Ramcharitmanas*, Singaravelou (1987:117) notes that "for transplanted people, intellectual culture and traditions need a written support for surviving." The *Ramcharitmanas* did come in written form, as did the *Bhagavadgita* and *Mahabharata.* The lack of facilities may have made the printed text scarce, but it existed. Missionaries who came to South Africa from the beginning of the 20th century, like Prof. Bhai Parmanand and Swami Shankaranand, familiarized the Hindi speaking Hindus with the available editions of Ramayana and these were acquired as people traveled to India or books were imported. Later generations benefited from a series of Ramcharitmanas publications, beginning with the professionally created products of Gita Press, Gorakhpur, and in recent times Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, and Richa Prakashan, Delhi.

The ever increasing demand for *Ramcharitmanas* has led to the production of helpful editions, with original text and Hindi translation, or original text and Roman transliteration and English translation. The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa printed and distributed 10000 copies of the Gita Press edition with English translation in 1986. This gave further impetus to *Ramabhakti.* Ramanand Sagar's serialized Ramayan in literary Hindi was another mighty

agent of advocacy of Rama consciousness worldwide, including South Africa. The mystic bond between the devotee and the object of devotion Rama issues from the metaphysical relationship, as stated by Tulsidas:

> *isvara amsa jiva avinasi, cetana amala sahaja sukharasi*
>
> The individual soul is part of God, and is indestructible. It is conscious, pure and source of joy (Uttarakanda 116)

This simple assertion could reveal the entire mystique of the *Ramcharitmanas* and Rama. It links all living beings to God, who is the only source of bliss. In this description of the relationship and, indeed, in this relationship there is no space for any differences of gender, race, caste, creed, language, colour, financial status or social standing. Tulsidas has taken the revolutionary step of bringing all beings together as equals before God – and this has provided sustenance to the Rama devotees for hundreds of years. Tulsidas sees the world as Sita and Rama and makes obeisance to all beings as such.

The *Ramcharitmanas* has been scripture, friend, philosopher and guide to the Hindi speaking South Africans. Whilst carrying out their rituals and Samskaras (rites of passage) according to prescribed texts, they revert to Ramcharitmanas to feel whole and empowered by a touch of the Divine. The Divine socialization through the Ramayana Satsangs creates bonds of love and equality giving them an identity unique to Rama devotees (in gestures, greetings, and even use of language). The Hindi language has received a boost from Ramayana satsangs. Shukla's research has shown that Hindi speakers are devoted to the *Bhagavadgita (Mahabharata)* and *Ramayana*, but the higher percentage in respect of the Ramayana is due to the simpler structure of plot and language (2002:56). In depth study of Ramcharitmanas by the various *Ramayana* devotees, denominations and sabhas continues to expose the spiritual loftiness as well as the social-cultural values of the *Ramcharitmanas*.

Rama devotees believe that the grace of Rama and the values embedded in the *Ramcharitmanas* would lead humanity to ultimate beatitude as Tulsidas said:

> *mangala karani kali mala harani, tulsi katha Raghunatha ki*
>
> Tulsidas's tale of the Lord of the Raghus brings faith, blessings and wipes away the impurities of the Kali age (Balakanda 9, Chanda 1).

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The Mobile Global Subject: Mobility and Transnationalising Hinduism

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary global condition is one of heightened movement that positions us in various contexts, in varying degree, as mobile, global subjects; as migrants, as tourists, and as transnational workers. While transnationalism, migrancy, diaspora and mobilities have become buzz words in the social sciences with an explosion of work in the fields of transnational and diaspora studies, and the several issues of transnational and diasporic identities and nation-state, migrant labour, remittances etc., there has been substantially less work done in the field of transnationalised religion. And while the religious identities of the various diasporic communities has received ethnographic and theoretical scrutiny, this has been less the case for itinerant transnationals seen to commute across increasingly porous borders, weaving back and forth between geographic and cultural spaces for the purposes of work.

This paper seeks to narrow the gaze on the transnationalised lives of migrant Hindu workers in their attempt to articulate their sense of being Hindu in a transnational context. The first part of the paper argues that the Hindu transnationals are to be understood within a wider discourse of commoditized labour, and against a paradigm of mobilities. The paper shows that the Hindu transnational workers are to be understood as commodities positioned in global consumption in a world where labour is increasingly mobile and flexible. By referring to a particular ethnographic illustration the second part of the paper unveils that this flexibility comes with a price for individuals who wish to continue articulating their religious Hindu identity in a new transnational space. The paper shows that, placed as they are as a kind of global commodity or service product as salon workers, their flexible and mobile context as migrant labourers, forces them to make their religion equally portable and flexible.

Introduction: The Global Mobile Condition and that thing called Religion

The contemporary global condition is no longer inertial but rather one of heightened movement. John Urry (among others, Cresswell, Kauffman, Feathorstone et al.) has over two scholarly decades written extensively on what culminates in his rather eloquent and erudite unfolding of a new paradigm in the social sciences based on 'mobilities'. There is also, in the tenor of general scholarship, much enthusiastic talk about the 'mobility turn' in the social sciences, and of borders made porous by mass communication and the various patterns of migration. Urry unfolds in his seminal work '*Mobilities*' (2007), the many contexts and nuances of mobility as being crucial and key to comprehending the multiple aspects of (post)modernity. The gaze in this paper however, is drawn narrowly on individualized mobility which is very quickly becoming the most important social trend of the developed world[1] as Wellman in his (appropriately) flattering review of Urry's book puts it.

In the case of migrancy, either as diasporic migrant or itinerant, studies (Levitt 2004; Bastos and Bastos; Peach 2006) unveil that people with transnationalised lives, tend to simultaneously inhabit what can be construed of as multiple spaces that reveal their experiences of heightened connectivity as well as often times, heightened dislocation. The global (mobile) condition is thus, amongst the many other things it connotes, also one of heightened vulnerability for many people, given the horrors of genocidal ethnic cleansing, racist or terrorist attacks as well as other more subtle vulnerabilities experienced by migrants as they attempt to articulate their religious and cultural identities in a transnational space to which they have no claim as citizens, and where they are in turn forced to make their religion flexible. These working migrants are seen as straddling two geographic and cultural spaces in their movement back and forth between the 'sending society' or homeland, in this instance Gujarat India, and place of employment as salon workers in the 'receiving' suburb of Reservoir Hills, South Africa. The paper explores the migrants attempt to engage culturally in the new transnational spaces and explores how Hinduism comes to be flexibly practiced within this mobility.

As pointed out, the literature reveals that the transnational practices of migrant families, other than remittances and economic activities, remain under-investigated. Some work has been done on the transnational dimension of religious belief systems, but the micro-politics of religion has been in most part ignored, and Gardner and Grillo (2002: 179) note

that there has been little discussion of transnational religious practices or rituals at the level of households and families, especially the comparison of local practices to that performed by migrants back in their countries of origin. Household-level analyses of the performances of and meanings of the transnational ritual space offer valuable insights to understanding the meaning of the relationship between place and culture among migrants in a transnational world, and in so doing, are able to illuminate contemporary processes of globalization (Gardner and Grillo 2002: 179). Culled from the work of Hannerz, Friedmann and Werbner on cosmopolitanism and transnationalism Leonard (2007: 52) spells out that transnationals are people who, while moving, build encapsulated cultural worlds around themselves, most typically worlds circumscribed by religious or family ties, while cosmopolitans on the other hand are people who familiarize themselves with other cultures and know how to move easily between cultures. Leonard (ibid) likens these respectively to more and less successful processes of translation that do not or do narrowly emphasize, one's own religion, as a core element of identity in the diaspora, or in this instance, the transnational migrant space.

Transnationalism designates a relatively recent shift in migration patterns. Where previously migration was understood as directed movement with a point of departure and a point of arrival for the transnationals, in contemporary terms it is seen as an ongoing movement between two or more social and religio-cultural spaces, thus re-spatialising how migrant labour can be bartered.

This movement, facilitated by inter-continental jet travel, various technologies of virtual contact such as Facebook, E-mail and Chatrooms etc. are claimed as shortening the scale of distances travelled and acts as an example of what van der Veer refers to as the "death of distance" (2004: 4). Conceptually, death of distance can perhaps be seen as sharing kinship with notions of 'global village', 'global economy' and 'global culture' within the larger matrix of the multiple processes of globalisation that bring the various corners of the world (in some respects anyway) in closer encounters with each other. While the definition(s) of globalisation lend themselves to an array of discourses, that lie outside our immediate discussion, Scholte's (2000: 3) unpacking of the term, as referring to a "supraterritoriality" is one that can be comfortably, it is felt, embraced in the context of transnationalism. Such supraterritoriality is a reference to the spawning and spread of social spaces in which distance, borders, locations even, have become relatively irrelevant in a world that is fast becoming a 'single place'. (Van Ree: 2003), Not least within this single space or place, is the articulation of enormous dislocations of

contemporary labour that has at once become highly flexible and highly mobile.

In the past, migrants were expected to most likely set down roots in the countries of reception. In contemporary times however, they are more likely to retain significant and ongoing ties with their countries of origin (Gardner and Grillo 2002 181). What perhaps the concept of 'death of distance' does not account for is that, in this new world that has become a 'single-space', are still vast distances or cartographic space in as far as issues of religious expression and cultural identities may be concerned.

For transnationals travel with much more than merely their flexible and mobile skills and labour, they travel with their luggage of dreams and aspirations for a more comfortable life for themselves, and often their families back home, and most importantly, they travel too with their complex of religio-cultural traditions. At the time of boarding their flights much more than their skills in various fields are 'checked in' at the departure counters for travel abroad.

There is however, in the transnational space of Reservoir Hills, and as revealed in the responses of the migrants, an absence of a 'homing' desire to return to the homeland of India, because, simply put, they *are able to do so*. Equally, there is an absence of the 'imaginary' of Motherland India, since *they are from the Motherland* and not part of a diasporic community that has never seen India. In the absence of both the 'homing' as well as the 'imaginary' it is one suggests, a vision of a better life that is for the labour migrants, one of the most important elements that catalyse their migration. That vision, although economic, is, as Van der Veer (2004: 15) claims, and as evidenced by the Hindu migrants, also to a substantial extent, culturally embedded within a larger matrix of a religio-cultural identity or 'Self', which seeks articulation. The movement of the migrant labourers can be seen as revealing their lived realities as mobile subjects. This context of mobility in turn spawns a kind of flexi-Hindu as the workers move between transnational spaces.

Making that Salon Appointment and Getting that Hair Cut: Ethnographic Windows

It is perhaps a safe assumption that Arjun Appadurai would not mind a borrowing of his elegantly phrased understanding of anthropology, which speaks of anthropology as the archive of lived actualities (1990: 11). This description of *what anthropology is*, captures emblematically the way I feel, where a visit for the long overdue haircut for the school-going son,

and a eagerly awaited trip to the favourite sushi restaurant, for the same son one adds, reveals an archive of actualities that lend themselves to the anthropological gaze. For increasingly, perhaps, understandably so in the case of the sushi bar, and now perhaps, surprisingly so for its increasing frequency, at tailors and salons and similar small businesses situated in various Indian suburbs, we are met with staff that are from other cultural spaces of the globe. Such transnational scatterings of individualized migrant labour are to be found in many other economic nook and crannies of the, in a sense, 'respatialized' country, with foreign faces offering otherwise routine services. These offer interesting foci of study as they carve up space in a unique way that now commands scholarly scrutiny in as much as did previously, colonial arrangements of global space. This is not so much a case of the *'Empire striking back'* or Said's *'Orientalism' stepping into the Occident*, in as much as it is perhaps, a powerful illustration of individualized mobility and grassroots globalisation. This grassroots globalisation is attractive to the anthropological eye as it proffers opportunities to capture ethnographically, the migrant's experiences of rupture and continuity as Hindus within the web of interactions and lived experiences from which they inscribe their social and cultural experiences.

The paper seeks to understand certain features of the transnational face of Hinduism through ethnographic snapshots allowed by the participants, three salon workers from the state of Gujarat India. The transnational participants Kamal (28), Rakesh (26) and Tushar (22) are all three from Surat in the state of Gujarat, who have been here for between a year and two and half years. The migrants are referred to as 'Gujarati' in the sense of being *from* Gujarat, and the local Hindus, as Gujarati-speaking. All three are able to converse in English, although Tushar, as the only one to have attempted college is most comfortable in this tongue. While Kamal struggles and is successful in his bid to be understood, Rakesh also struggles and is spectacularly unsuccessful and relies more on Tushar to translate in both directions. All, are most at ease in their native language of Gujarati, and use this language almost exclusively, except when faced with or forced with having to talk to a client (or interviewer like me) in English. Bidwas (2004: 271) points out that, social scientists at times fail to study certain migrant communities closely, because "the isolated and often numerically small foreign enclaves are, if not worthy, at least less ethnographically important or theoretically interesting." This was certainly a consideration for me, not so much the logistical difficulty of the participants being remotely placed, as they were, relatively speaking, close to my own domestic space, but that the context presented a fairly small number of participants. However, as the methodological approach

was longer and more sustained ethnographic contact, rather than directed toward quantitative analyses that worked with once off interactions with the participants, the three transnational individuals presented a vital ethnographic window to tease out and examine elements of a transnationalised Hinduism.

The study extended over a ten month period with the initial visits coinciding with 'functional' visits for a haircut for the sons. The invariably and inevitable but fortuitous (for me anyway) long queues provided rich opportunities for participant observation, if but stretches of tedium for those awaiting their turns at the scissor. Later interactions[1] were scheduled interviews, themselves structured flexibly as conversations, given both the participants' long work hours, and the fact that English was not their native language. Given the language difficulties and a certain level of (cultural perhaps) shyness by, more so in the case of Kamal and Rakesh, and less so in the case of Tushar, that had to be penetrated with time, the 'conversations' moved slowly until a certain degree of rapport had been established. Many issues emerged in the 'conversations as interviews' that lie outside the inscribed parameters of this paper. These issues dealt with the fears that accreted around the legalities of the extended stay of the migrants, their 'socialisation' into the country, caste and marriage, their feelings about black South Africans etc. Much of the religio-cultural engagement or the attempt at that engagement in the global cities of the world is often reactive to the enormous dislocations of modern flexible capital and labour. The Hindu transnationals, I argue, can be seen to emerge as constructed commodities within this dislocation.

Understanding Hindu Transnationals as 'Commodities'

The three workers have become positioned as 'commodities' placed into a labour market that, while being small-scale and individual, is nevertheless no less global. While working as what one might refer to as the traditional barber, these transnationals are able to turn out the most recent trends in male hair styles. These three Hindu transnationals are additionally able to offer us glimpses into their transnational lives as Hindus outside of their motherland India.

The migrant Hindu transnationals circulate as, what can be construed as valuable 'products' or commodities. Commodities themselves are understood as objects of economic value (Urry, 2007: 3) Simmel cited by

[1] I would also like to acknowledge two student research assistants who spent two days doing participant observation with the three participants at the salon and shared important insights with me.

Urry (2007: 5) contends that value is never an inherent property of objects, but rather a judgement made *about* objects by others. These transnationals can be likened to the now famously recognizable Indian Head Massage, which can also be understood as a mobile product that has been porously made to cross borders, and in so doing, become positioned in global consumption. Indian Head Massage is said to have originated and alleged as practised for thousands of years in India as '*Champissage*' or '*Champi*' (Thiagarajan, 2005). A more muscular form, different from the early massage used by only the females, was practised by the barbers in India as part of the (male) haircut routine. The massage was generally thought in India, to have therapeutic benefits within Ayurveda and the system of *chakras* or energy centres which dealt with the understanding and healing of the body and mind, or rather what was construed in Indian healing as the body/mind complex. Narendra Mehta is credited as responsible for introducing the western world to the (reconstituted) Indian Head Massage. It is alleged that he travelled in the 1970's to England to study and was surprised and disappointed when the *Champissage* was left out of his visit to the barbers. The story continues that in 1978 he returned to India to study the different techniques of *Champissage* as they varied from place to place and from family to family. He is said to have then put together his own massage and brought it to England as a holistic therapy, which could be used effectively to treat the whole person. The 'new' therapy of Indian Head Massage is said to have been introduced at the 1981 'Mind, Body and Spirit' exhibition in Olympia, England.

The Indian Head Massage was thus taken across physical borders, eventually emerged in, and is now, through its transnational movement recognised in various parts of the world as a popular form of massage therapy re-contextualized outside of its land of origin, India. Indian Head Massage is thus now popular throughout the world, while the more traditional version as handed down generationally is routinely practiced by most, if not all barbers in India (and Pakistan) on their male clients. Similarly, the Indian and Hindu transnationals, as many interviews with the salon clients revealed, have become recognised and popularly identified with meticulous 'workmanship', methodical techniques and rather circuitously, *with performing the head massage itself.* It is for these abilities that the Reservoir Hills clients seek out the three transnational workers. All the clients interviewed echoed their praise of the workers' skill and meticulous approach, and lauded the invariable culmination of the haircut with the eagerly anticipated head massage. In as much as the head massage is a commodity or product sought by the clients, so too had the migrant workers become a (transnational) product who had come to be constructed as a valued commodity. However, within this construction

where the migrants had become the subjects of a particular process of signification, were also, the 'lived' lives of the Hindu transnationals.

Transnationalising Hinduism: Commodities with a (Religious) Life

Kelly puts it perfectly when he states that,

People travel internationally and live temporarily in other countries for leisure and work-related activities that may have nothing to do with religion, and yet insofar as they are religious people, their religious beliefs and practices are sometimes involved (2003: 239).

This sums up the position of the three Hindu transnationals acting as our ethnographic windows. They did not claim to be overtly religious. Nor did their behaviour indicate this. They were not part of, nor had they become part of, in South Africa, any large Neo-Hindu congregation, or Sanatan Hindu group. But in as much as they *were Hindus*, their religious beliefs and practices were involved. It was their articulation of their Hindu beliefs and practices as simply their (Hindu) way of life that provided vital ethnographic glimpses.

While I did not attempt to marshal the discussion during the conversations and interviews solely in the direction of religious issues, and allowed a sharing of what can be construed as important to the participants, analysing the 'conversations' afterwards allowed a teasing out of vital elements of (transnationalised) Hinduism around issues of individual prayer, temple going, observation of household rituals and festivals, and language.

The Hindu migrants communicate that they spoke in Gujarati to the employer. My own observations revealed that although they spoke in English to the clients, they would still speak across the customers to each other, in Gujarati. It was apparent the migrants were most comfortable with the clients who spoke to them in Gujarati or even Hindi, and less communicative with those who spoke only English. With the former they spoke as if they were all good friends. There was also after the playing of the obligatory DVD for the employer, a nonstop playing till end of business at 7 pm, of Bollywood movies or audio DVDs that they claimed as being "good to watch and listen to". Of course Bollywood has indisputably travelled well hitching a ride with the processes of globalisation, and the music of Bollywood is documented as playing a leading role in an "aural imaginary" (Karim, 2003: 9) of the homeland. The literature shows that in diasporic communities, music plays an important role in the formation of cultural meanings and identities. It is

also well known that Bollywood movies are popular throughout the Indian diaspora; the South African Indian diaspora included, and are claimed as evoking the imaginary of India in the Indian diasporic consciousness. To the transnationals in the salon, their obvious and open relish of the sights and sounds of a, if not *real* India, but an India in *'reel'* appeared to nevertheless serve as a palpable reminder of homeland.

Participant observation proved illuminating as in all encounters with the three workers, they were seen to dutifully touch the ground four times before entering the salon at the start of business in the morning, thrice to the chest and once to the head. They shared that that this was for "work to go well" and out of respect for the shop, saying that they did this in India as well. They continued that "the same is also done when entering the temple". Tushar claimed that "everyday, I touch the ground before I enter, then I light incense sticks and put on a religious DVD".

All of this may appear more in the realm of 'natural' than 'transnational', until we realize that the religious DVD he is referring to is an Islamic DVD as he works for a Muslim employer, himself a transnational, but from Pakistan. They confess that they have to follow this routine of putting on the same Islamic religious DVD everyday from 8 am to 11am or 12 noon, because of the "boss being Muslim". It is only thereafter that they may play any other DVD in Hindi. Marking out of a space as one's own involves the fusion of that place with one's own rhythms and the claim is that (re)territorialisation occurs through sounds and movements (Karim, 2003:9). The manner in which the migrants entered the salon and began their workday, and the playing of their (numerous) favourite Hindi movies can be understood as part of the process of infusing a medley of both sacred and secular movements and sounds to facilitate a re-territorialisation.

As the business was owned by a Muslim, there was understandably no Hindu shrine in the salon, instead several Islamic frames on the walls. All three workers who had worked in a similar field in their homeland, communicated that back in India, they would have, or indeed had worked in Hindu owned salons and would start their day 'routinely' (as opposed to religiously) with a quick prayer at the shrine inevitably installed in the business space. Many writers emphasize translation as a process, one that looks to societies evolving over time. To capture faithfully people migrating, Leonard, (2007: 52) points out that one needs to know the markings of their places of origin and the peculiar allegiances associated with their homelands. These markings, she asserts would be remembered, rejected or reinvented to suit the destinations of the migrants, saying they

would be, in other words, translated, pointing out that the receiving society would help *determine* the translations, or as in this instance at the salon, *necessitate*, the translations.

At a 'one on one' interview with Tushar he reveals that the three workers, who are all related as cousins and have come to the job literally through their nodal networking and associative ties with each other, live together, having rented living space from the employer's friend, and have a central Hindu lamp for domestic worship at their rented home. All three had apparently each brought their own Hindu worship lamps from India. They had given two lamps away to other friends, who were likewise from Gujarat, as they felt that these friends needed to also have a lamp at home. Tushar communicates that they all now pray at the one lamp. Tushar confides that his parents sent him from India with a lamp so that he would continue to pray. He added, almost in intuitive anticipation of my question, that had the parents not sent a lamp with him, he would have purchased one here. When asked as to what he prays for, he shares that he "prays for good business and for keeping well". It seemed that all three comfortably took turns to 'wash', 'shine' and 'apply kum-kum' to the lamp, all acts performed fastidiously in the households of Hindus, echoing Karim's studies of diasporic mediascapes that show that migrant communities endeavour to make homes, even if only temporarily, in milieus that "are away from the home(land)" (Karim, 2003: 9).

It is this in-between space (Bhaba, 2000) that mentally bridges the homeland and the new location. Karim asserts that diasporic reality is affected through the transformation of existence and that hybrid transnations have their being in the existential location of the milieu and not on physical territory (Karim, 2003: 9).

In the new troping of home and the world much appears to depend on the resonances of religious and cultural practices. The workers tell me that they pray three times daily, at home in the morning, in the shop (presumably with the makeshift 'virtual' shrine of burning incense) and again at the home lamp in the evening. Tushar mentioned that he also reads the *Hanuman Chalisa* at home and when he has time at the shop. All three observed the *Katha* and *Jundha*, at their (migrant) Gujarati family homes. They point out that in India they attended *Jundha* or the flag ritual at the temple and *Katha* as a household ritual.

In the new troping of home and the world much appears to also depend too on the *(dis)sonances* of religious and cultural practices. This further illustrated their flexibility, some of which was forced by circumstances,

as in the less frequent visits to the temple, some of which they bent and flexed by choice. For although the migrants were still influenced by the cultural conditioning and taboo on pork and beef, they did feel comfortable experimenting with and consuming meat and chicken (alcohol even) although their family's religious orientation meant that they were vegetarians back home. Most of the meals locally appeared to be traditional Indian dishes, and the obligatory *roti*, or Indian flat bread which they prepared themselves. Breakfast, taken at the salon because of the relatively early (for a salon) opening hours, seems also more in keeping with the traditional Indian *tiffin*.

Tushar informs me that he did not perform the *Pitra Paksh* or ritual to the ancestors here, meaning South Africa, and elaborated that it was over a protracted nine days (in the local context of daily work at the salon), and also because they he had no time due to the long hours that he worked. He points out that he would perform it in India as his immediate kin, who were "around" him did so. Kamal said that he did not observe *Pitra Paksh* because his "family is not here." He had thought it futile to even observe the obligatory fast for *Pitra Paksh* claiming that it was useless here (in South Africa) as they are "not going to do the *actual* prayer". He stated that his parents were aware that he did not fast for *Pitra Paksh*, and were not too happy about this. He said that when he does pray he did not place the sacred ash on the forehead as he would have done back home as he (as opposed to the employer) did not "want that kind of appearance for the business, and the clients". He added almost coyly that he also did not think the clients would quite, "like it".

The conversations as interviews made less opaque their ethnographic experiences of rupture and continuity. When asked as to why they did not visit the temple often here as they did in India (Kamal and Tushar had mentioned that in India they visited the temple everyday on their way to school and even upon completion of studies, quite routinely, still visited daily). His response was that in India, every street had in the very least, about two temples, making temple-going "near and convenient". "Here in South Africa" they pointed out that the temple was "too far" and the long working hours compounded the situation.

They shared that they visited the temple during the festival of Diwali, but, only at night because during the day "they are working" and the "boss, being Muslim does not give time off for Diwali". The transnationals appeared to perceive a kind of religious alterity or *difference* (which they were not able to fully articulate) in the kind of Hinduism practiced by the local Hindus. While commenting that their interactions were relatively

limited, and while in no way posturing religious superiority, all three commented that festivals like "Diwali and such is not the same in South Africa" because aside from the parents and family not being with them, in India, Diwali was celebrated over 5 days. Everyday of these 5 days, huge celebrations are said to be held. In their homes lamps are lit, similarly to South African homes, and rangoli (colours) used to decorate the house, perhaps not so common in the local context. Appadurai (1990: 12) talks about *situated difference* or difference in relation to something (in terms of migrant) local, embodied and significant. While this difference or alterity deserves more sustained examination than the inscribed parameters of this paper, suffice it to say that it was a point of awareness, although not one of discernable tension for the three migrants. It did not serve to prevent them visiting the local temple.

Kamal and Tushar narrate that every Sunday they visit the Sapta Mandir or Temple, further up the same road that the salon is on. Rakesh quips that *he* goes to the temple just during prayers and festivals, adding that there is no time to go regularly. He spells out that in India he would go every day, and says "it was easy then because they had transport to go to the temple". This particular temple seems to have been pointed out to them by a Gujarati-speaking client and was patronised by the predominantly Gujarati-speaking community in the suburb. However the migrants did not appear to have a special relationship with either the (Gujarati-speaking) priest or the local Gujarati-speaking congregation here.

It emerged that the migrants did not feel comfortable enough to socialise or interact much with the local people. They claimed that from what they could tell however the "fasting is different, prayers are different and celebrations of festivals e.g. Diwali is differently celebrated", adding that "in India extra things were done, which are not done here". Kamal shared that notwithstanding, the temple reminded him of home.

All three claimed that in South Africa, they "have a social family" (of Gujarati friends and relatives), but in India they "have a biological family". They appear to have created their own networks of mainly Gujarati family and friends, or joined existing ones. At first Tushar had lived with his aunt to get 'on his feet' then later moved out to live with Kamal and Rakesh and they have their own migrant Hindu and Muslim friends in and around the area that they socialise with, in the little free time they were afforded.

As Van der Veer (2004: 5) shows, migrant communities at the end of the 20th century, are indeed differently placed from those at the end of the 19th century, because the wonders of the telephone, internet, television and high speed planes bring them not only more proximate to home, but also more proximate to members of the (migrant) community in other places. It is true that the cultural distance with the traditions of 'home' can therefore not be conceptualised in the same ways as before (ibid) but, notwithstanding their calling long distance every third day to talk to family, we witness an enactment of connectivity with other migrants and simultaneous dislocation from those at home. And although there is a sense of a 'death of distance' with the internet having reached the most unheard of corners, it is still not accessible to all, for the three migrants share that it is easier to phone home as they have to make the long way into central town for internet facilities.

Conclusion

The Hindu transnationals as mobile, global subjects can be seen to have shaped a particular way of inhabiting a transnational space. Instead of forming singular migrant communities that attempt to keep in touch with home, these migrants have slipped into networks with a multiplicity of nodes. They have not joined a religious congregation or international religious network like the VPH so prominent in the USA, especially for its efforts in globalising Hinduism. Nor did they seek out a community through which to assert their Hindu identity, rather they have become part of networks with a multiplicity of nodes that allow them to both socialise, and enunciate their 'being Hindu' amongst other Gujarati family and friends as they share communal religious festival time like Diwali and ritual space at times like the *Katha*. The new 'space of flows' that occur in global networks can be seen to allow social relations to be disembedded from their (original) locations and to be carried out at long distance (Karim, 2003: 6), or in this instance, re-spatialised with other Gujarati transnationals. Social network theory unveils how *nodes* or the actors in the networks and *ties* or relationships between the actors function within various networks. Critical concepts of 'degree' and 'cohesion' allow a further unpacking of *how* the migrant participants are connected, and to *whom*, with the concept of cohesion being vital in our understanding that other transnational Gujarati relatives (however immediate or distant) connect the migrants cohesively and directly through household rituals like the *katha*. Although as suggested, it is best to understand the migrants within a discussion of 'commodities', the nodal networks and ties assist in extending their lives beyond commoditized labour(ers). In their self-styled counter narrative the

migrants are aware of their dislocation, but attempt to live as fully as possible through the multiple nodes of connectivity available to them, thus excavating potential marginality as mobile subjects who may otherwise have lived completely outside the Hindu diaspora in South Africa.

As much as they miss their family (which they voice), and as much as they are aware of having to "do Hinduism" differently here, (which they also voice), and as well as sharing that they would not live here permanently, attachment to the homeland, is rather interestingly, no less ambivalent. The migrants claim to enjoy being here and appear to discernibly enjoy their freedom(s), again, through their new networks. These freedoms they asserted would not be available to them in the home space of Gujarat. It is revealing too that although they appeared to relish the networks enjoyed locally, in their once or twice yearly visits home however, they revert to observing all dietary taboos, and fully and willingly, eagerly even, participating in all household rituals and social festivals. As they shed, literally their facial piercings and tint back the (original) hue into their hair, by now devoid of the ubiquitous gel, they *appear,* as porously as their transnational movements, to slide from one enunciatory religious position in Hinduism, of circumstance imposed flexibility, to another of more familial orthodoxy and observance, relocating their (flexibly articulated) Hinduism out of the transnational space back into the (more orthodox space of) homeland.

Looking through the ethnographic windows they have allowed, one sees that they have to a large extent, succeeded in making (flexible) sense of their religio-cultural landscape and their shifting mobile world. They have also rendered more permeable the otherwise (in their narrative) inflexible and orthodox landscape through their mobility. Through a networking of an equally, mobile (as themselves) and woven together social and religious life, what Urry (2007: 274) refers to as "interspatial" religious and social, they have re-territorialised the local space into meaningful space, or 'home' of sorts. Urry (ibid: 280) points out that it is the person that becomes the "portal" in the network, and in so doing avoids frictions of religio-cultural distance. This is certainly valid for the Hindu migrants who are seen to have managed translating, in both sacred and secular terms, transnational space into a kind of flexible and mobile 'home' space.

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[1] Barry Wellman's (Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto), review of John Urry's book.

Nondualism, Radical Change and the Illusory Self

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ABSTRACT

This chapter offers nondualism as a perspective for transformation and critiques the notion that conceptual systems of thought can ever be vehicles for radical change in the most profound understanding of the term; where this change would be a transformation of the perception of ontological status leading to the felt nondual realisation that 'I am the world', with its consequent social enactments necessarily being of a different order to the divisiveness currently experienced in our personal lives and social institutions. This recognition is in effect a dismantling of the illusion of a separate self that has to navigate a fearful path, always in opposition to the 'other' who has to be vanquished or subdued in some way (which is really the *modus operandi* of all our current conflicts, be they personal, social or ecological). The author draws on theoretical and empirical levels of evidence to delineate the terrain of radical transformation, where the latter is situated in both third-person observation and first-person self-study. In doing so, the study accounts for the paralysis of purely conceptual models to effect change, as well as unmasking the many transformation projects that is still about an improved self rather than being true processes of change. Modern exemplars of nondual teachings – such as J Krishnamurti, Douglas Harding and others – will be referred to, as well as eminent scholars in the field such as Ken Wilber and David Loy.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will argue that we cannot approach the complexities of our societies and the challenges to live radically transformed lives – where such a transformation is a deeply enacted recognition that the world of self and other is a false dichotomy – without giving rigorous consideration to a perspective known as nonduality; a perspective that encompasses both theoretical and experiential dimensions and for these reasons is referred to here as 'nondualism', so as to distinguish it from purely scholarly studies such as David Loy's *Nonduality*[1], to which this research is much indebted. Loy's *The Great Awakening*[2] is also a seminal work for its construction of a Buddhist social theory, and needs to be read

alongside this exploration, which will nevertheless summarise key ideas from this work while venturing into territory not covered by Loy, or perhaps only hinted at.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS OF NONDUALISM[3]

This section focuses on sketching the features of the main concepts of nondualism, so that we have a sense of what it is as opposed to a dualistic world-view. Of importance are the categories of nondual perception, nondual action, and nondual thinking, both as theoretical assumptions and as expressions of the experiential dimension of nondualism. It is emphasised here that the philosophy is inextricably linked to the experiential dimension, and that without the latter, the former is purely speculative. As Loy writes:

> ... from the 'perspective' of nonduality – that is, having experienced nondually – one can understand the delusive nature of dualistic experience and how that delusion arises, but not vice versa.[4] (1997, p. 8)

Loy presents insights about the different categories of nondualities. The first category is 'the negation of dualistic thinking'[5] which bifurcates the world into conceptual opposites such as good and bad which are then regarded as absolutes.

The second category is 'the nonplurarity of the world' where this is an outcome of the first category where we experience the world 'as a collection of discrete objects (one of them being *me*)'.[6]

Loy's third category is 'the nondifference of subject and object'[7] which is the recognition that the observer and observed is a conceptual structure of thought and not the reality of *what is*.

It is useful at this point in the discussion to note that all three categories, while they are on the one hand philosophical tenets, they are also, on the other hand, dependent on a sense of experience even as verbal descriptions. But a closer look at this experiential dimension will occur later in this section.

For the purposes of this argument it is adequate to state that at the heart of nondualism is its insistence that the dualistic division of the world into subject and object, into discrete objects, is our primary human error. It is only *apparent* that there are absolute objects and absolute subjects in the world. Dualistic experience, which appears to be the common-sense, intuitive, sense of things, cannot conceive of experience without the subject-object dichotomy.

This basic error of human perception is, within the nondual view, the root cause of all human suffering. The world is treated as the *other* by a subjective self that regards itself as an autonomous *me* that can only

survive by subjugating the *other,* through various acts of control, both obvious and subtle. So, the individual's sense of isolation in a conceived hostile world becomes the seed of all kinds of divisions within this dualistic conception; good/bad, love/hate, life/death, health/illness, us/them. This is not to deny polarities like light/dark, negative/positive, strong/weak, etc., and naturally occurring physical dualities between object and 'observing object'. This latter term needs amplification within the context of nondualism, because it immediately offends our natural inclination through social and linguistic convention to regard the observer as the 'observing subject'. Nondual teacher Ramesh Balsekar, in answer to a question replies:

> The human being ... experiences this basic duality of the observed object and the observing object. But along with the basic split of duality, the human being functions in dualism, which is the mental split between the 'me' and the other. It is in the mind that the separation between 'me' and the other arises. That is where the separation from duality to dualism occurs ... Duality is an essential mechanism in phenomenality.[8]

This is the crux of the nondual position – that there is no observing *subject.* The body-mind that we take to be *me,* the natural subject of objective experience, is really another *object* that is deluded into subjectivity by the naturally occurring duality. Thus duality is not denied and is seen as the necessary play of life – the interplay of polarities, of the Chinese *yin* and *yang* – but it is the mental 'dualism' that is negated. Krishnamurti extends this perception into the social context when he says:

> The division between the individual and society does not really exist at all. When one tries to carve out a life of one's own, the individual is not different from the community in which he lives. For the individual, the human being, has constructed the community, society.
>
> ... The 'you' is the world ... [9]

From the above discussion, we can see that one central perception underpins nondualism – the mental error of subject-object dualism – out of which many kinds of insights and descriptions about the self and world arise; descriptions and insights that pertain to our ontological status, society, and issues of values.

Those who have broken through the illusion of dualism as an actual, experiential fact, all say that the nondual vision, while far-reaching in its implications for human perception, action, and thinking, is simplicity itself, and that there is really no complex philosophy other than the

simple recognition that dualism is our primary error. If any complex philosophy does exist, it is because language, being dualistic, fails to convey the simplicity of the nondual perspective, and also because this perspective is very often taken on board by dualistic thinkers who create complex theories about that which they have only partially glimpsed, if at all. Hence, the necessity to recognise that the journey into the nondual perspective is more meaningful within the locus of its experiential dimension. It is here that we have a better sense of what appears to be counterintuitive. English nondual teacher and philosopher Harding says emphatically:

> This is not a matter of argument, or of philosophical acumen, or of working oneself up into a state, but of simple sight – of LOOK-WHO'S-HERE instead of IMAGINE-WHO'S-HERE ... If I fail to see what I am (and especially what I am not) it's because I'm too busily imaginative, too adult and knowing, too credulous, too intimidated by society and language, too frightened of the obvious to accept the situation exactly as I find it at this moment.[10]

The above quotation anticipates the following section on the experiential dimension, where philosophical description is only valid through a description of an experiential mode of Being.

THE EXPERIENTIAL DIMENSION OF NONDUALISM

For the purposes of this study, it is the question of ontological status that concerns us most; that is, 'What is my Being?' Every school of nondualism finally places great emphasis on awakening to our true nature, out of which, it is asserted, intelligence, creativity, and right relationship to the world spring. But a more complete presentation of nondual ontology can occur only within a discussion of perception, action, and thinking, because these acts traditionally define how we experience ourselves and the world. Loy's[11] terms – nondual perception, nondual action, and nondual thinking – are also located within experiential modes that finally are the foundation on which this study rests.

NONDUAL PERCEPTION

Nondual perception collapses the habitual distinction between the perceiver and the perceived. Krishnamurti's comment emphasises the outcome of attaining to this nondual perception:

> So to bring about a radical transformation in society and oneself, the observer must undergo a tremendous change – that is, to realise that the observer and the observed are one.[12]

NONDUAL ACTION

Nondual action arises 'when the mind, based on experience, is not guiding action: when thought, based on experience, is not shaping action.'[13]

NONDUAL THINKING

Krishnamurti again provides another perspective on nondual thought:

> So the thinker and the thought are one; without thought there is no thinker. And when there is no thinker and only thought, then there is an awareness of thinking without thought, and thought comes to an end.[14,15]

NONDUALISM AND ONTOLOGY

In terms of our ontological status, the negation of an 'observing subject' raises the question 'Who am I?' The answer to this lies not in any verbal description, but in actual *apperception*, not because this is an obtuse way of avoiding any meaningful confrontation with the most crucial of human questions, but because it is precisely that nondualism postulates the dissolution of the subject-object matrix, that any description of who we really are is bound to be fraught with logical difficulties; because a description, a concept, immediately becomes an object related to by a pseudo-subject.

We see then that this central perception of the falseness of subject-object duality has meaning only within an experiential framework. That is, it is simply conceptual and without value unless we follow the injunction to experience the nondual. And the various Eastern spiritual systems (and some Western) have prescribed different methods of meditation and self-inquiry to awaken from the dream of separation. While various forms of meditation have become increasingly popular in the West, the much perceived esoteric nature of these practices, combined with a scientific rational mind-set that is inherently sceptical, makes the endeavour of the nondual rather hopeless. It is for this reason that Krishnamurti and Harding have been selected for this study. Both bring refreshing, new perspectives to the problem of unpacking the nondual to a culture that is firmly embedded in the world-view of subject-object duality; a culture which points to the exponential growth of its science

and technology, plus apparent common-sense experience, to validate the reality of the dualistic perspective.

THE THINKING MODE AND THE SEEING MODE

Both Krishnamurti and Harding, through diverse discourses utterly lacking in traditional philosophical and esoteric terminology, lead the individual to the edge of the nondual perspective, by shifting one's consciousness from the thinking mode to the seeing mode. This is the crux of the experiential dimension of the nondual; that there is – quite natural to all of us, and not limited to the fortunate few – a different mode of being that is normally overlooked because of the dominance of the thinking mode. It is the thinking mode that creates the idea of a 'me' separate from existence, and out of this duality all other subject-object problems arise that eventually creates the turmoil of life. The seeing mode is conscious awareness that can observe the body-mind and all its operations, but is itself beyond all objectification. Traditional nondual systems also call this the 'witnessing consciousness', but I prefer to use the term 'seeing mode' because the word 'see' is so apt to the teachings of both Krishnamurti and Harding.

Logic and an appeal to observation of the facts at hand are the distinguishing characteristics of both Krishnamurti's and Harding's teachings. This immediately draws upon a different kind of audience, one that is accustomed to the rationality of scientific materialism.[16] What is of importance here is that Krishnamurti's insistence on being choicelessly aware is a directive to shift into the seeing mode

Harding's 'seeing', while experientially leading to the same end as Krishnamurti's 'choiceless awareness', has one important difference as a technique; it directs the observer to consciously *see who is doing the seeing,* and situates this within the context of experimenting with the senses rather than mere intellectual understanding. Harding, like Krishnamurti, does not make claims for instant transformations into the seeing mode with his 'seeing experiments'; it is a matter of dedicated inner application.

It is useful at this juncture to summarise the essential similarities and differences of approach between Krishnamurti's and Harding's experiential teachings

Krishnamurti's 'choiceless awareness' is an experiential technique to attain to the nondual perspective, which is to see there is no separation between the self and the world. As such there is just the *what is*, with the 'self' and 'other' being concepts born of thought). Krishnamurti's teachings are characterised by his incisive psychological descriptions of the human state and the causes of our conflict. His language is free of

esoteric concepts and his method is dialogic in bringing his audience to an apperception of the nondual perspective.

Harding is more concerned with establishing the view that dualistic perception is not common-sense, even though scholars like Loy, with an intellectual and experiential bias toward the nondual, see this as counterintuitive to common-sense. Harding takes a very empirical approach in his exercises in order to bring about an insight into the continuum of the outer world and the inner awareness. He appeals to common-sense and the scientific spirit and is impatient with descriptions of the ordinary human condition, which he claims are aberrations and not ordinary at all, and was more interested in giving his workshop participants a direct route to seeing who we really are. In a description of a 'Model Workshop', Harding says this is his aim:

> Enlightenment as to What/Who one is as 1st person singular, present tense. Not a psychological investigation into one's ever-changing thoughts and feelings, but direct seeing into their background – one's True Nature ...[17]

In some respects, Harding is both refuting Krishnamurti's dialogic exercise, and emphasising the 'choiceless awareness' that Krishnamurti finally wanted his listeners to attain after seeing the futility of dualistic thought through deep analysis. This study attests to the value of both approaches because they complement each other, and are deficient as ontological tools without the strengths of the other.

To sum up this section, the nondual perspective is a re*vision* of our ordinary way of experiencing ourselves and the world. Through an analysis of the experiential dimensions of the teachings of Krishnamurti and Harding, this study is attempting to show that this revision of experiencing can take place only with a shift from thinking to seeing, where this 'seeing' is the awareness that is the background to our thinking, and which dissolves the sense of so-called 'normal' subject-object dualisms.

NONDUALISM AS CRITICAL THEORY

The previous sections establish the philosophical concepts of nondualism, as well as the experiential dimension that these concepts simultaneously point to and arise from. This section looks at these concepts as they have manifested as critical theories, because it is being argued that nondualism, as a valid theoretical perspective for radical change, displays through different critical contexts evidence of a sound epistemological base.

'Critical theory', as defined here, conforms to common dictionary definitions of 'critical' being 'characterised by careful and exact evaluation and judgement'[18], and 'theory' as being 'systematically

organised knowledge applicable in a relatively wide variety of circumstances'.[19]

This section looks at the critical theories that arise out of: the teachings of Krishnamurti, especially in relation to structuralism in Western thought; the mathematical discipline of fuzzy logic; Wilber's integral theory; and Harding's science of the 1st person. Each critical theory provides different kinds of tools for interrogating knowledge and experience, and when these are used in conjunction with one another, they provide an overall theoretical perspective for nondualism. It is noteworthy that these critical theories emanate either from nondual transformative teachings (Krishnamurti and Harding), or from the intellectual efforts of self-declared practitioners of nondual spiritual disciplines (Kosko and Wilber), who are nevertheless firmly grounded in the methodologies of their Western disciplines.

Krishnamurti was not an academic scholar and always maintained that he was speaking from direct experience. This is an important point when discussing the value of the experiential dimension of nondualism in the teachings of Krishnamurti. Similarly, fuzzy logic in its mathematical context will be out of place here. So in effect the complete theory is truncated to arrive at the conceptual tools. Nevertheless, the term 'critical theory' is retained, because it will be argued that the great contribution of each theory is that it also functions as a meta-theory, that is, theory about theory. The section on Wilber shows how this naturally arises.

The section on Krishnamurti compares similarities of perspective with structuralism. This is important because Marxism, philosophically, is an off-shoot of structuralism, and by showing where structuralism and Marxism are deficient as critical theories, primarily because they arise from a dualistic world-view, it can be argued that nondualism provides the next development of these theories as they relate to radical change.

The value of fuzzy logic is in its deconstruction of the dualistic world-view through concepts that have their roots in mathematics. This is important for this study in that we see nondualism emerging as an integral view of life.

Wilber's integral theory is a wide-ranging intellectual endeavour that spans many disciplines to show that the bipolar, antagonistic positions created by the array of religious, philosophical, scientific, and cultural ideologies, can all be accommodated within a theory that sees everything as having a place within certain 'structures of consciousness', a critical tool originally developed by Swiss cultural philosopher, Jean Gebser, and refined by Wilber in his many theoretical examinations of consciousness. The value of this critical tool, besides extending the nondual perspective as a critical application, is to show that the nondual is conceptually consistent as theory.

The last critical perspective is Harding's science of the 1st person. This is being examined last, because while certain concepts are given that can be used as critical tools, these not only link up in different ways with the concepts in fuzzy logic and Wilber's integral theory, but are inherently a part of the experiential dimension of Harding's work; that is, his 'seeing exercises'. The critical tools of fuzzy logic and integral theory are firmly located within the conceptual realm; that is, theoretical discourse, and can be accepted from within that order. Harding's perspective, however, equally straddles both *theoria* and *praxis*, and while the former has conceptual substance of its own, it is the implied conflation of the two that has meaning for the experiential dimension of nondualism in effecting a radical transformation of consciousness.

THE TEACHINGS OF J. KRISHNAMURTI AND STRUCTURALISM

The material for this section was originally published in *Language and Style*[20], but has been abridged here for the purposes of this exploration.

This study proposes to explore how the basic tenets of structuralism, which arose with the disciplined reassessment of the way man orders his world (and the conclusions that resulted from that), bear a strong relation to the teachings of Krishnamurti. These teachings offer a basic understanding of human activities but, unlike structuralism, go further in their delineation of human problems because they provide a compelling argument for their resolution.

Structuralism as a discipline works largely within the framework of linguistics and anthropology, where the latter concerns itself (in structural terms, that is) with the way prehistoric man thought about his world and with how this thinking led to the development of 'structures'. Structuralism, then, cannot be dissociated from psychology since the examination deals with the processes of thinking and perception. Similarly, because structuralism as an intellectual discipline is a response to certain philosophical notions about man and his world, it is also a philosophical discipline. In fact, structuralism covers all the intellectual disciplines because, fundamentally, it examines the way man's activities have arisen.

Terence Hawkes says that Giambattista Vice, in a book called *The New Science* published in 1725, perceives that:

> ... man constructs the myths, the social institutions, virtually the whole world as he perceives it, and in so doing he constructs himself. This making process involves the continual creation of recognizable and repeated forms which we can now term a process of structuring. Vice sees this process as an inherent, permanent and definitive human characteristic whose

> operation, particularly in respect of the creation of social institutions, is incessant and, because of its repetitive nature, predictable in its outcome.
>
> Once 'structured' by man, the 'world of nations' proves itself to be a potent agency for continuous structuring: its customs and rites act as a forceful brainwashing mechanism whereby human beings are habituated to and made to acquiesce in a man-made world which they nevertheless perceive as artless and 'natural'.[21]

This quotation contains the gist of structuralism, and it can be seen how Marxism, for instance, is a logical extension of this world-view, with its insistence on the transformation of social structures to affect both a conflict-free society and a conflict-free individual. The logic is plain: structures (at least some of them) condition the human being either positively or negatively, and to effect the required conditioning, particular structures have to be changed. Up to a point these ideas relate directly to the teachings of Krishnamurti, but where the structuralists stop, Krishnamurti continues.

Krishnamurti is in agreement with the existentialists and the Marxists who say that there is no 'given' human essence, no predetermined 'human nature' because 'particular forms of humanity are determined by particular social relations and systems of human institutions'.[22]

Structuralists see structure-making as a permanent human characteristic, while Krishnamurti sees this process as the result of conflict and fear in the individual, which arises out of a false sense of duality. This duality arises when the 'me,' the 'self', is created through faulty perception. The individual's faulty perception creates the 'self', the psychological entity who experiences a false duality where the individual is separate from the world. This duality causes fear, which results in the individual's creating structures to overcome this fear. A process of conditioning is then established that is too forceful to make the individual see the trap she is in, and so she is cut off from the primary ontological state of Being.

Krishnamurti's teachings and structuralism are fundamentally ways of 'thinking about the world which [are] predominantly concerned with the perception and description of structures.' Both modes of thinking state 'that the world is made up of relationships rather than things'.[23]

Structuralists and Krishnamurti are travelling the same road, but where the former insist that humans can change by understanding and changing a particular structure, Krishnamurti talks of being aware of the structure-making process totally from moment to moment in daily life, so

that it is transcended to experience Reality. This Reality is the state of experiencing without the experiencer, which is the psychological 'me,' the ego, the self-constructed structure.

This discussion of structuralism emphasises the limitations of a dialectical materialist approach, showing that while, as a structuralist methodology, it is effective in revealing ever deeper layers of structures – both personal and collective – which shape conscious and unconscious meaning, it can only reveal what is beyond itself through total negation. This process is actually captured in the dictionary meaning of the term. The *Reader's Digest Universal Dictionary*[24] defines 'dialectical materialism' as:

> The Marxist interpretation of reality, viewing matter as the primary subject of change and all change as the product of a constant conflict between opposites arising from the internal contradictions inherent in all things, these contradictions being resolved at higher levels and fresh contradictions arising.

Wilber skilfully unpacks the limitations of dialectical materialism, tacitly pointing out the limitations of all conceptual systems, including nondualism, if it remains purely speculative theory:

> It is not: the body alone is real and the mind is a reflection of that only reality. It is not: mind and body are two different aspects of the total organism. It is not: mind emerges from hierarchical brain structure. In fact, it is not even: noumenon and phenomena are not-two and nondual.
>
> Those are all mere intellectual symbols that purport to give the answer, but the real answer does not lie in sensibilia or intelligibilia, it lies in transcendelia, and that domain only discloses itself after the meditative [seeing mode] exemplar is engaged, whereupon every single one of those intellectual answers is seen to be utterly inadequate and totally off the mark ...[25]

FUZZY LOGIC

Fuzzy logic provides very simple conceptual tools that deconstruct dualistic thinking very elegantly, in the same way that the mathematical sciences symbolise the physical world and create our complex computer technology. With simple zeros and ones, great complexity is deconstructed, and other kinds of complexity are created.

I am indebted to Bart Kosko's book *Fuzzy Thinking*[26] for opening up this arcane world. Very simply put, Fuzzy Logic is about multivalence as opposed to bivalence.

The Chinese have a saying: A mind that thinks in terms of right and wrong is a corrupt mind. (This view is not confined to Easterners and can also be found in the teachings of Western mystics and in the genius of Shakespeare – Hamlet reflects that 'there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so'.) We have to ask the question why it is that the bivalent mode, which has its rightful place in the scheme of things, should dominate so exclusively, especially in Western culture (although it is by no means absent in non-Western cultures)?

Bart Kosko gives an elegant answer. Bivalence trades accuracy for precision, and precision is not only important in technology, it also makes the real world easier to deal with. What is meant by the terms 'accuracy' and 'precision'? You have an apple and I have an apple. That makes two apples, or so it appears. For the purposes of simple precision, to state that there are two apples is correct. But it is not accurate of the real world, because no two apples are exactly the same. There will be slight or major differences of weight, shape, colour, texture, taste, etc. So in saying that there are two apples we are being mathematically precise in terms of quantifying the number of objects belonging to the same set. But we are also being extremely inaccurate by suggesting that the apples are identical. By understanding this very important distinction, we begin to see how we are constantly seduced into seeing the world in bivalent terms; we see the description of the tree and not the tree itself. Perhaps this is the price that had to be paid initially for the development of all our symbolic processes.

KEN WILBER'S INTEGRAL THEORY

If Krishnamurti's critical theory provides a psycho-social model that disproves the dualism of the individual and the world, and if fuzzy logic provides razor-sharp concepts to show how this dualism is maintained conceptually, then Wilber's contribution to this study, besides re-affirming the perceptions of the other critical theories in his own way, is his argument that all our human endeavours have got to start embracing the nondual perspective.

Wilber's intellectual efforts are immense in developing an integral theory that has its roots in what is commonly known as the 'perennial philosophy' and first applied to transpersonal psychology, but which now encompasses everything from philosophy to eco-feminism to literary studies. What is being attempted here, for the construction of a theoretical perspective, is the extraction of a core theory that can be applied to bring home conceptually the insight of nondualism; that is, life is not a division into discrete objects, but a seamless continuum.

What distinguishes his method is his meta-critical approach where his theory 'transcends and includes'[27] other theories, in a way that is

perfectly consistent with his model of the spectrum of consciousness, which is the first essential feature of Wilber's theory. Wilber has acknowledged his debt to philosopher Jean Gebser's 'structures of consciousness' which sees human development in terms of different stages – archaic, magical, mythical, mental-rational, integral.[28] To this schema Wilber has added the 'transpersonal stages', the first of which is 'vision-logic'. This concept is important for the links it has with Krishnamurti and Harding, and will be discussed later.

But unlike dualistic hierarchies that are essentially separate categories, and to which the postmodern mind has reacted in extreme ways by trying to collapse all hierarchies because they are seen as essentially bad, Wilber's theory avoids an either/or dualistic situation, but instead provides an inclusive concept that he acknowledges originally came from Arthur Koestler.[29]

In reflecting on the extreme position of postmodernism to regard everything as socially constructed, and that no holarchies exist, Wilber comments:

> If the constructivist stance is taken too far, it defeats itself. It says all worldviews are arbitrary, all truth is relative and merely culture-bound, there are no universal truths. It is claiming everybody's truth is relative *except mine*, because mine is absolutely and universally true ... This is the massive contradiction hidden in all extreme multicultural postmodern movements. And *their* absolute truth ends up being very ideological, very power-hungry, very elitist in the worst sense.[30]

Wilber comments that 'this extreme constructivism is really just a postmodern form of nihilism'[31] and shows that conceptual confusion arises from collapsing categories of experience.

This insight is an important conceptual tool in that it helps locate some problems that have arisen in the worst interpretations of nondualism through woolly thinking – that of the New Age spiritual movement, which often makes claims like: all illness is the result of psychological problems, or all modern science is intrinsically bad. A good analogy would be to say that because theoretical physics shows that all matter is ultimately pure energy, one *can* knock one's head against a wall without getting hurt. This is the worst scenario of collapsing categories, particularly because extreme reactions to divisions in the postmodern mind have created another kind of dualism: division is bad and non-division is good.

Wilber's term 'vision-logic' communicates the sense of the seeing mode discussed earlier, but also includes intellectual discrimination. It is

of the same order as Krishnamurti's 'choiceless awareness', and Harding's 'seeing'. Vision-logic, as given in Wilber's schema, is part of what he calls the 'eye of spirit' or 'contemplation' which, like the 'eye of flesh' and the 'eye of mind', produces a '*spectrum of different modes of knowing*'.[32] Wilber relates empiricism to the physical, rationalism to the mental, and mysticism to the contemplative. Given his holarchical view that a higher holon includes but transcends a lower holon, Wilber argues that as the mental-rational includes but transcends the physical, so the contemplative nondual will include but transcend the mental-rational.

Wilber also makes another important point about the way we interpret experience. Seeing that there are different modes of knowing within different collective and individual domains of experience, we begin to realise that interpretation is context-bound.

In some ways this might appear to agree with postmodern deconstruction, but Wilber is at pains to point out that where the postmodernists see fictions, the nondualist sees 'nested truths'.[33] This leads to the very next point in Wilber's schema, and that is a way out of the existential terror of the modern mind. And the way out is to engage in the 'eye of spirit', the experiential dimension of nondualism, which conceptually is the next holarchy that includes and transcends the mental-rational sphere, the 'eye of mind'.

The importance of Wilber's theory for this nondual perspective is that he brings to it practical insights. Given that the mental-rational mind, in its transcendence of the prerational, is wary of anything that suggests a regression, a schema that suggests mysticism is bound to attract a great deal of scepticism. But the mysticism that Wilber is referring to is not the prerational altered states of consciousness that are so beguiling to the unwary spiritual seeker, but is the nondual experience that Krishnamurti and Harding refer to: the experience of no separation, the converse of which is the root cause of all our conflicts. Wilber thus poses the question for the sceptic. How valid is this type of knowledge? His answer is:

> *Eye to Eye* suggests that all valid knowledge (in any level and any quadrant) has the following strands:
>
> *Instrumental injunction.* This is always of the form, 'If you want to *know* this, *do*, this.'
>
> *Intuitive apprehension.* This is an immediate experience of the domain disclosed by the injunction: that is, a direct experience or data-apprehension (even if the data is mediated, at the moment of experience it is immediately apprehended). In other words, this is the direct apprehension of the data brought forth by the particular injunction, whether that data be sensory experience, mental experience, or spiritual experience.

> *Communal confirmation* (or rejection). This is the checking of the results – the data, the evidence – with others who have *adequately completed* the injunctive and apprehensive strands.[34]

At this point Wilber shares precisely the same vision of the nondual as outlined earlier. That is, for the concepts to be truly understood there has to be an engagement with the experiential dimension. This will be reiterated in the section on Harding, and it is necessary to repeat it, given the impotency of thought to engage in anything but the conceptual.

DOUGLAS HARDING'S SCIENCE OF THE 1ST PERSON

While it is not the intention to engage in a comparative study of Harding and Wilber, it is useful to note how their intellectual efforts, within the tradition of Western thought, have given rise to complex concepts that confirm the nondual perspective, which both maintain is simplicity itself once experienced. (One of the many paradoxes of the nondual perspective is that in order to prove it intellectually, one has to be complex. This is a danger that Harding was alert to after writing his dense philosophical work, *The Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth*,[35] and which led to his almost childish exercises to bring about the experiential dimension of nondualism.)

No doubt if Harding had been aware of the term 'holarchy' he would have used it, because he is making the same point as Wilber when he says that life is 'a nest of regional manifestations, the first of which contains the second, the second the third, and so on ...'[36] Out of this view, Harding developed the science of the 1st person, which is the title of one of his books, and which is being used here as a term for his critical theory that also encompasses the experiential dimension. This term is being used because it captures Harding's scientific, empirical methodology. This is crucial to the unfolding of the nondual perspective in this study because it needs finally to be seen that nondualism does not exclude but 'includes and transcends'.

The methodology of the science of the 1st person is observation, and this is central to the experiential exercises that Harding and others have devised. In the service of the 'eye of spirit', Harding utilises both the 'eye of the flesh' and the 'eye of mind'. His insight, which was arguably stated before the post-postmodernist conclusion, was that the meaning of things changes when the context changes. This is stating in Wilber's words what Harding similarly observed in the physical world. Richard Lang in an essay on Harding makes this point:

> ... the appearance of things, including himself, depended on the range of the observer. For example, this page is a page only at half a metre, more or less. At a very close range it is fibres, and closer still it is molecules, atoms, electrons ... In other words it has layers, like an onion. You and I are the same. Within a certain range we are clearly human, but not on closer inspection. And further away? We appear as a city perhaps, then a country, then the Earth, the Solar System, the Galaxy...[37]

Where Harding differed from conventional scientific observation was that he included in his investigation the observer that was doing the observing and this leads to one important observation in terms of critical theory: that Harding's translation of his nondual insights into experiential exercises *is* his theory ... theory cannot be separated from practice.

The view of ourselves nondually is to experience ourselves not as objects but as the noumenal Awareness, the true 1st Person. The science of the 3rd person is the science of observed objects, but the science of the 1st person is the science of the observer. In the following excerpt, Harding elaborates on the differences:

> This science requires its practitioner to do exactly what SCIENCE-3 forbids – to put himself back in the picture and take his subjectivity seriously. Here is a procedure so revolutionary, its subject-matter so unique, its results so remarkable, that they constitute an altogether novel kind of science ... As the 1st Person is to the 3rd so are their respective sciences to each other: in every particular, SCIENCE-1 is the polar opposite of SCIENCE-3. Yet it contradicts nothing, undoes nothing. Instead it carries to its proper conclusion the immense work already done. In no sense is it anti-scientific; rather it is ultra-scientific or meta-scientific. And its procedure is simply this: by turning his attention through 180° and viewing himself as he is to himself, SCIENTIST-1 is at last in a position to remove the basic anomalies of SCIENCE-3, *and simultaneously to solve his own basic problems, the problems of life.*[38]

The distinguishing principle of Harding's exercises is the shifting from thinking to seeing. When he asks participants in a workshop to 'see who you are', he is not asking for the employment of imagination or memory – any kind of thinking – but the act of seeing. This is seeing into the Void, our *no thingness.*

Harding insisted that Science-1 is verifiable by the ordinary methods of Science-3, provided the injunction to carry out the seeing is done,

where it cannot be theorised about, but only perceived. These are not esoteric mind exercises, but simple sense-based practices that move from concepts to nondual percepts by an objectivity that transcends modern scientific method: an objectivity of simultaneously seeing the observed and seeing who is doing the observing. Harding draws special attention to the inherent dualisms in language that keep alive the fiction of a subjective 'me' in an alien world of discrete objects. The subject that I *think* myself to be, is, in *seeing,* another object seen to be arising from the ground of Awareness.

Essentially then, Harding offers a simple, verifiable observation – that there are two ways of seeing; the outward way which is the way of conventional experience, including that of the scientific method, and the two-way, outward-inward way; where the latter is just the act of observing without the identification with thought and the resultant sense of separation that thought creates.

We must note how critical theory within the nondual paradigm refuses to be just intellectual abstraction, or even, in the best sense of the term, an intellectual grid – a way of seeing to apply to the world and experience to make greater sense of things. It is always pointing to its experiential dimension so that concepts can be transformed into percepts. If there is a core perception, it is that theory, to be truly critical, must take the leap into the seeing mode where seeing includes but transcends thinking. This radical re-orientation of perception heals our intrinsic sense of separation, and is the transformative agent in all our endeavours.

NEUROSCIENCE, CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE TOTALITY OF BEING

A materialist world-view and its concomitant expression in social theories that espouse dialectical materialism or other variations of this paradigm, seems to be supported by science and its discoveries. At one level of investigation matter appears to be made up of discrete objects and, like the discrete individuals of human society, they can be controlled, manipulated and reconfigured for whatever purposes that are projected by those in power. Social engineering of various forms thus dominates our political landscape, and neither capitalism nor socialism, as broad, generalized categories of socio-political expression, are really different in their dualistic approaches to the world. Their differences are ideological, based on different conceptions of the common good, but the heart of divisive thinking remains. And the various religious systems with their structures of belief are in the same epistemological place, notwithstanding that the symbols of this epistemology may appear to be of a different order; the social systems appear to be located in the here-and-now, while the religious systems are located in the other-worldly, but

intersecting and shaping each other in some contexts, or being defined by an antagonistic reactivity to each other in other social and intellectual domains. All these expressions, and the intellectual systems that arise to account for them or modify them, create a dense illusion of impenetrable differences, but this is not really so. Like the binary zeros and ones that can create great mathematical complexity, the basic structure of illusory self and other creates our amazingly complex, but ultimately lonely and fearful, individual and social lives.

However, the same science that supported our self-delusion of being a separate, discrete object now shows, in its study of the brain, that the narrative of the self is wired into the way the left brain works out of a biological imperative to ensure survival by controlling its environment through measurement. This functional need for measurement has also resulted in the construction of the illusory narrator, the imaginary doer that believes itself to be the agent of action, when in fact it is only creating a narrative of agency after the fact.[39]

This evidence would seem to support a materialist position, especially the image of the human being as a machine. This would then justify those political actions where human beings and natural resources are things to be exploited, and certainly negates any assertion of a spiritual essence, however conceived, by the various religious systems.

This, however, is the problem that Wilber's integral theory alerts us to: that this perspective appears to have validity when observed without the interior recognition of where this observation is located. Accepting the findings of neuroscience and cognitive psychology, the observer, bluntly put, is a product of a material process. The question is, what is the nature of the Awareness that we can experientially validate as being prior to the consciousness produced by thought? Before we approach this question, let us bear in mind the characteristics of thought and awareness. Explorer of consciousness and author Steven Harrison notes that thought is characterised by 'me' and awareness by 'us'.[40] This is a remarkable distinction given the imperatives of a biology that at first glance appears to be concerned only with a self-centred survival. In fact, whatever the nature of awareness, which we will come to later, science, is also providing evidence that we are hard-wired for empathy, compassion and community.[41] This natural, inclination, it would seem, is being subverted by thought, and only a disidentification with thought (the thinking mode) and an identification with awareness (the seeing mode) is the radical answer to our quest for a radical change, as suggested by Krishnamurti, Harding and others, where the delusion that there is a real self separate from other real selves ends, and in this ending the psychological and social outcomes of greed and ill will also end.[42]

At this point I would like to introduce the concept of memes into the exploration, but more as metaphor than in a strict theoretical sense. Simply put, memes are the equivalent of genes; replicators of information (that is, all our human stories) that compete selfishly for survival. But while genes replicate in the structures of DNA, memes replicate through human interactions. In this way stories of all kinds – religious, political, social, etc – compete for survival using the human being as its carrier. Now this turns the common perception of things on its head; the perception being that human beings are in charge and that we can make informed choices about the things that matter in our lives. No wonder the meme theory is regarded as 'highly controversial and has been criticised by biologists, sociologists, anthropologists and philosophers'.[43] One could speculate, and with good reason, that the very reaction to such a theory is part of the survival instinct of memes.

Meme theory also points to the illusion of self. Psychologist and memeticist Susan Blackmore writes:

> Another possibility is that this illusion self is actually harmful to us, although it benefits the memes. On this view the self is a powerful memeplex (the selfplex) that propagates and protects the memes, but in the process gives rise to the illusion of free will, and to selfishness, fear, disappointment, greed and many other human failings. Perhaps without it we might be happier and kinder people... [44]

Given our exploration thus far, we see that the theory of memes, like most perspectives of human action, is really not new. The Buddha, more than 2,500 years ago, said that the life of bondage was predicated upon the vast stream of co-dependent conditioning to which all humans were subject, while Krishnamurti reduced this movement of bondage to thought. The theory of memes simply elaborates on the technical details, but essentially the human being is far from a free agent but is manipulated by thought, which turns out to be our stories of identities, protected by a meta identity, the self.

It is noteworthy that Blackmore ends her detailed, technical exploration of consciousness with these words when she asks what might happen if 'psychologists, philosophers and neuroscientists' saw 'nonduality directly for themselves':

> ... might they then understand exactly what happened in their own brains when all the illusions fell away and the distinction between first and third person was gone? This way the direct experience of nonduality might be integrated into a neuroscience that only knows, intellectually, that dualism must be false.[45]

In fact, Blackmore's question has been answered by the experience of Dr Jill Bolte Taylor[46], a neuroscientist who suffered a stroke, and who, in the process, was able to observe two totally different worlds: the world of separation created by the left brain, and the world of non-separation that is intrinsic to the right brain. And this raises the question, who did the seeing? This will be pointedly addressed in the last section, which deals with the author's personal narrative, but in a sense it is also being covered but what follows in this discussion on awareness and totality.

Let us now go back to why awareness is characterised by the quality of 'us'. And that is because awareness, nondually, is the totality of Being, that intrinsic sense of existing, of 'am-ness' which no one can refute, nor which anyone can adequately describe because it is not a product or object of thought; thought can only speculate about it through logical inference. Furthermore, it is the totality, because it is the ground in which thought appears. And as both brain science and postmodernist exploration have shown, reality is a construction; what has not been explored is this apperception that this reality occurs as time; but time is a chimera produced by thought. There is, in fact, no time, because only *what is* exists as the ever present *now*; hence Being, the fact of existing now, must be that which is outside time. And if there is no time, there is no space, so Being is the totality of existence.[47] The individual, then, is simultaneously the part and the Whole. Standing as awareness, we cannot fail to see the delusion of separation, and therefore there is the ending of greed and ill will, because I am the world.

Within this conception of awareness as the ground of existence, it is therefore not surprising the Otto Scharmer's research on the U-process[48], which is essentially about the transformative, generative field of potential, essentially deals with processes of community when members of a co-creating group are willing to suspend their mental models of the past (that is, the habitual movements of thought that are centred on illusory identity) and move into *presence* (that is, non-phenomenal awareness) before creating the change context for *emergence* (the arising of the new). But presence has been preceded by *seeing* and *sensing*, both acts initiating a movement away from self-centred thinking. Scharmer quotes eminent cognitive psychologist, Eleanor Rosch:

> There is this awareness and this little spark that is positive – and completely independent of all of the things that we think are so important. This is the way things happen, and in the light of that, action becomes action *from* that. And lacking that, or being ignorant of it, we just make terrible messes – as individuals, as nations, and as cultures.[49]

A MAGIC TRICK OF TRANSFORMATION: A 'PERSONAL' NARRATIVE

This section is somewhat paradoxical, given the insights of nondualism that the separate self is a fiction. And yet, it concludes with what appears to be a personal narrative.

From an empirical perspective, it is necessary to provide data from one's own experimentation with the experiential dimension of nondualism, for without this evidence we return to the purely speculative, which finally has no meaning in the exercise of radical change.

As an amateur magician and mentalist, I am sometimes asked to do impromptu acts. On one such occasion a mentalism routine did not go as expected, which resulted in much hilarity for both myself and my small teenage audience, and then... I disappeared.

That is, the phenomenal self called Kriben was utterly absent. And so was the phenomenal world. What was present was a timeless Presence that was one's very own incontrovertible Identity. It was a Presence that was present to Itself.

Then, as normal consciousness returned, the phenomenal self was slowly reconstituted along with the physical world; and to sense perception this was very similar to a computer image taking shape pixel by pixel.

What was significant was the feeling of being born back into *unreality*, into a world of false separation.

From the viewpoint of those watching the event, they witnessed me laughing and then suddenly slumping into the chair behind me. For the next few minutes they were at a loss as to what was happening, but from the feel of the physical body afterwards, I would speculate that the laughing fit cut off oxygen to the brain causing me to pass out (a peculiar condition that also occurs when there is incessant coughing). Whatever the precise medical description, like Jill Bolte Taylor, something occurred to the brain that caused it to shut down temporarily, and while there was a loss of ordinary consciousness, the awareness that is prior to thought came to the foreground, *experiencing itself without the filter of thought.*

This 'experience' answered a thirty-year-old question. Who awakens, who sees? And the answer is: *the seeing itself sees*, this being the noumenal awareness that is ever-present existence. When this is apperceived, it is very difficult to be seduced by the stories of self and other; the delusion that gives rise to greed and ill will.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to provide a theoretical perspective of nondualism, showing that such discourse has no meaning without engaging in a deep consideration of its experiential dimensions; after all, proponents of nondualism as a theory of radical transformation are explicit that intellectual appreciation is at best only a conceptual platform leading to experiential practice, which finally validates theory. This validation occurs in the existential collapse of the concepts of theory and practice.

It has also been shown that nondualism is eminently suited to scientific inquiry. Susan Blackmore writes that 'Zen [50] is said to require "great doubt", great determination, and the more perplexity the better.'[51] But a cautionary note. Perplexity can also serve to maintain the illusory self while it attempts to undo the perplexity. This can be a never-ending endeavour where the project of radical change is forever postponed. And this will then take us back to the mindset of time and the future, and a re-enactment of our utopian ideals be they social or religious or both, where the psychological mechanism is to command and control. And to date these have had disastrous consequences for human society and the natural world. However, understanding the nondual perspective in all its conceptual nuances also points to necessary acts of community that we can all engage in now, because there *is only now*; and these act of community are essentially acts of communion because there are no actual divisions, only conceptual ones. We need to unmask the illusory self's last hiding place – the conceptual quest for transformation – and in so doing we become radically changed expressions of a life that is without boundaries.

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[1] Loy, David (1997) *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy.* New Jersey: Humanities Press.

[2] Loy, David R. (2003) *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory.* Boston: Wisdom Publications.

[3] This and the next section are adapted from the author's published thesis *Nondualism and Educational Drama Theatre: A Perspective for Transformative Training (2007).*

[4] Loy, *Nonduality*, 8.

[5] Loy, *Nonduality*, 18.

[6] Loy, *Nonduality*, 21, emphasis in original.

[7] Loy, *Nonduality*, 25.

[8] Balsekar, Ramesh (1992) *Consciousness Speaks.* Redondo Beach, CA: Advaita Press, 112-113.

[9] Krishnamurti, J (1970) *Talks with American Students.* Boston & Shaftesbury: Shambhala, 8-9.

[10] Harding, Douglas E (1986) *On Having No Head: Zen and the rediscovery of the obvious*. London: Arkana, 9.
[11] Loy, *Nonduality*.
[12] Krishnamurti, *Talks*, 97.
[13] Krishnamurti, J (1986) *The First and Last Freedom*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 54.
[14] Krishnamurti, J (1992) *Choiceless Awareness: A Selection of Passages for The Study Of The Teachings of J. Krishnamurti*. Ojai, CA: Krishnamurti Foundation of America, 61.
14. A common misunderstanding with Krishnamurti's teachings is that he is denying the thinking process. This confusion is cleared up in the later discussion in this chapter on the seeing mode and the thinking mode.
[16] Krishnamurti has often been accused of being a materialist by audiences steeped in traditional religious discourse.
[17] Harding, Douglas E (1995) "Model Workshop" in *Share It*. Spring (Issue 9), 53.
[18] *Reader's Digest Universal Dictionary*
(1986), London: Reader's Digest Association, 373
[19] *Reader's Digest Universal Dictionary*, 1566.
[20] Pillay, Kriben (1988) "Structuralism and the Teachings of J. Krishnamurti", in *Language and Style* 21(Summer), 327-31.
[21] Hawkes, Terence (1977) *Structuralism and Semiotics*. London: Methuen, 14.
[22] Hawkes, *Structuralism*, 15.
[23] Hawkes, *Structuralism*, 17.
[24] *Reader's Digest Universal Dictionary*, 430.
[25] Wilber, Ken (1977) *The Spectrum of Consciousness*. Wheaton, Ill: The Theosophical Publishing House, 92, emphases in original.
[26] Kosko, Bart (1994) *Fuzzy Thinking: The New Science of Fuzzy Logic*. London: HarperCollins.
[27] Wilber, Ken (1996) *A Brief History of Everything*. Boston & Shaftesbury: Shambhala, 67.
[28] Feuerstein, *Structures*, 20.
[29] Wilber, *The Eye of Spirit*, 42.
[30] Wilber, *A Brief History of Everything*, 62-63, emphases in original.
[31] Wilber, *A Brief History of Everything*, 63
[32] Wilber, *The Eye of Spirit*, 84, emphasis in original.
[33] Wilber, *The Eye of Spirit*, 113.
[34] Wilber, *The Eye of Spirit*, 85.
[35] Harding, Douglas E (1979) *The Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth*. Gainesville: University of Florida.
[36] Harding, *The Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth*, 33.
[37] Lang, Richard (1997) "Seeing Who You Are – The Headless Way", in *The Headless Way* 17 (Autumn), 19-24.
[38] Harding, Douglas E (1997) *The Science of the 1st Person: Its Principles, Practice and Potential*. . London: Head Exchange Press, 8, my emphasis.
[39] Gazzaniga, Michael S (1998) *The Mind's Past*. Berkeley, California: UC Press.
[40] Harrison, Steven (2002) *The Questions to Life's Answers*. Boulder: Sentient Publications, 90.
[41] Goleman, Daniel (2006) *Social Intelligence*. London: Hutchinson.
[42] Loy, *The Great Awakening*.

[43] Blackmore, Susan (2003) *Consciousness: An Introduction* London Hodder & Stoughton., 163
[44] Blackmore, *Consciousness,* 165.
[45] Blackmore, *Consciousness,* 414.
[46] Taylor, Jill Bolte (2006) *My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey.* New York: Viking.
[47] Peter Dziuban provides very elegant proofs for the primacy of a timeless consciousness in his book *Consciousness is All* (Blue Dolphin Publishing, 2007).
[48] Scharmer, C. Otto (2007) *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges.* Cambridge, MA.: SoL.
[49] Scharmer, *Theory U,* 168, emphasis in original.
[50] Zen is traditionally regarded as the most austere form nondual Buddhism, and is characterised by the practice of unwavering seeing into one's real nature.
[51] Blackmore, *Consciousness,* 414.

Gender in the Bhagavad Gita

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Women have long been excluded from public sectors of society such as religion, war, and politics. In ancient India, the dharma of women completely surrounded their undying devotion to their husbands and their ability to bear children. However, the Mahabharata and the Bhagavad Gita, women took on roles and opportunities that were contrary to the traditional feminine roles that had been established in the past. The women of the Mahabharata often displayed strong and daring characteristics, showing their influence on matters both in the public and private realms of society. This strong female presence is reaffirmed in the Bhagavad Gita in which the teaching include women and members of lower castes, often portraying views that are transcendent of gender and many other empirical conditions. The transcendent views that serve as the foundation for all of the Gita's teachings remain consistent on the issue of gender. In the Bhagavad Gita and the Mahabharata, women are regarded as beings both capable of influencing events in the empirical world as well as attaining liberation in the transcendental world of Brahman.

Women in the Mahabharata

The Mahabharata is an Indian epic that is said to be representative of all experiences and aspects of human life. Although, the epic appears patriarchal in its message because of its abundance of male heroes and characters, the Mahabharata is an ancient text that contains many "energetic women and female powers." (Fitzgerald 70) Many of the themes in the Mahabharata revolve around man's quest to attain a women or some type of feminized entity, such as the earth. During the time that the Mahabharata was created, Manu set up a system or code by which men were supposed to regard and treat their wives. The duty or dharma of men was "raksana", which was the duty to protect women and preserve the desirability of women. (Fitzgerald 71) Raksana further established women's position in society as beings who need the protection and existence of men in order to be complete and untainted. Although the Mahabharata does display men fighting for and defending their women, the epic also depicts women who

fend for themselves and even defeat other men. When men are unable to protect their women, the women of the Mahabharata have agency and power. One example of feminized entity displaying her power is that of Sri, the goddess of the Earth. In the final fight between Arjuna and Karna, the Earth, who is a Goddess, takes hold of the Karna's chariot wheel and doesn't allow it to move. Krishna explains that the chariot will not move because Sri is upset about the abuse these men have inflicted upon her. Sri has a huge influence on this fight because she is strips Karna of his ability to ride away from Arjuna. Instances in which women show strength in this Epic are frequent and diverse, which moves away from the passive and helpless femininity that raksana reinforces and moves toward and femininity that is charged with agency and power.

Also, the Mahabharata places less stringent ideals of gender on the characters compared to other ancients texts. The protagonists in the Mahabharata were represented through their matronyms as well as their patronyms. Even within the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna refers to Arjuna as the son of Kunti as well as the son of Pritha. The traditional characteristics that assign gender which label women as passive, sexual, uncontrollable, and emotional and label men as active, rational, and powerful were completely dichotomous in the Mahabharata. Women are often portrayed with agency and wisdom in this epic, just as men were portrayed as uncontrolled and unrighteous on several occasions. Because the Mahabharata has such large implications on Indian life and ideology at the time, the gender relations in this Epic are very important. The Mahabharata is known to convey messages and experiences that touch upon every part of human existence. Therefore, if the gender relations in this Epic are not as dichotomous and patriarchal as many other texts of the time tended to be, then the authors of the Mahabharata were making major statements about gender in Indian society. Instead of falling into the same scheme in which women are blatantly and consistently inferior to men, the Mahabharata as well as the Bhagavad Gita are able to move away from raksana and include women in their teachings.

Samkhya Scheme

The Bhagavad Gita's teachings attempt to incorporate both the *Samkhya* and *Vedanta* religious perspectives. The *Samkhya* scheme is that serves as a common motif throughout the Gita, as an alternative way of explaining the universe and the nature of Brahman. The *Samkhya* scheme involves two figures by the names of Purusha and Prakriti. These two figures

have been gendered throughout history, which has made the labeling of Purusha as male and Prakriti as female permanent. Purusha, the male figure, is representative of the spirit and Prakriti, the female figure, is representative of nature. Although the Mahabharata and the Bhagavad Gita has made some steps toward a definition of feminine capabilities and characteristics, this gendered relationship between Purusha and Prakriti reinforces many of the gendered prescriptions that lower the status of women. The fact that the female figure is representative of nature is a common theme in human society, a theme in which women are often set parallel to nature, which is almost always in opposition to rationality, humanity and stability. "Women are the edge of a razor, poison, snake, and fire all rolled into one. At the time of creation the original Manu allocated to women the habit of lying, sitting around and indiscriminant love of ornaments, anger, meanness, treachery, and bad conduct." (Chakravarti 581) The unpredictable and irrational characteristics that are attached to the ideas of nature re often attached to femininity as well. The patriarchal and dichotomous nature of human thought and society has reinforced this idea of femininity as hat which is opposed to the rational, stable, and powerful idea of masculinity.

Within the traditional *Samkhya* scheme, Purusha remains aloof throughout Prakriti's manifestation, which allows Purusha to remain untainted, stable and rational throughout Prakriti's evolution. However, Prakriti meets Purusha and becomes deluded, this delusion eventually leads to a manifestation that invokes all physical, sensory, and material elements on Earth. This relationship can be applied both on a cosmic and individual level, and serves as tool by which man can understand his existence on Earth and his Atman. However, this relationship is representative of how gender is reinforced and created within the Mahabharata and the Bhagavad Gita on an ideological level. Prakriti is essentially responsible for the deluded and material nature of human experience, which must be overcome through understanding of Purusha and Brahman (both on an individual level and on a cosmic level). The illustration of gender that is conveyed through this relationship between Prakriti and Purusha supports notions of gender which portray femininity as something that must be tamed, trained and possible even overcome.

Bringing the gender representations of Purusha and Prakriti to an empirical level allows one to examine the similarities between this relationship and the relationship between men and women in ancient India. At the time that Samkhya prevalent, women were supposed to have selfless devotion to their

husbands and in turn, men were supposed to perform raksana by protecting their wives. Just as Prakriti was supposed to overcome her delusion and individuals were supposed to perform Yoga in order to attain a righteous perspective on life, women were supposed to devote themselves to their husbands and train themselves to attain a correct perspective, which is centered on the men in their lives. The positive connotation that is attached to Prakriti's eventual devolution is also attached to women's devolution. Women are supposed to attain a perspective that puts their men at the forefront of their existence, essentially taming and training themselves to follow the righteous path of womanhood; while at the same time Purusha's perfected male state reinforces the ideas of masculinity being naturally superior to feminine nature. Although the Mahabharata and the Bhagavad Gita use the *Samkhya* scheme in their teachings, both texts are able to establish an idea of gender that is less concrete and traditional compared to the gendered implications of Prakriti and Purusha.

Devotion to Husband

The dharma of women has always been to care for and devote oneself to her husband. However, one conflict that arises when examining this dharma is the inherent nature that is assigned to women. The *strisvabhava*, or innate nature, of women is sexual, usually degrading them to mere sexual beings. Contrary to the inherent sexual nature of women, the dharma of women is "fidelity to the husband." (Chakravarti 582) Therefore, men had to uphold their duty by protecting their wives from outside forces as well as their own nature. Women also needed to work to train themselves to subdue their "innate sexual nature" in order to fulfill their dharma. (Chakravarti 582)

Unlike men, in order for women to follow a righteous path they needed to completely devote themselves to their husbands and in turn they would receive a place in heaven alongside their husband. As taught in the Bhagavad Gita, in order for one to follow a righteous path toward Brahman he must completely devote himself to Brahman, while fulfilling his dharma by performing unattached acts. The difficulty in women reading the Bhagavad Gita is that their devotion is supposed to remain in the empirical world with their husbands, not with the cosmic powers. According to Manusmrti, women did not attain righteousness by performing sacrifices but through "faithful devotion to their husbands." (Mittal and Thursby 235) If this is the case, one is left to wonder how the Bhagavad Gita applies to

women. How can one reach a transcendental state, when their dharma, which envelops their entire life, is rooted in devotion to another empirical being.

In the traditional scheme, men were to go through the different stages in life and eventually reach the path of renunciation. Renunciation in the traditional sense, meant to abandon their wives, family, and the entire empirical world, in order to perfect their Yoga and reach a transcendental state. The Bhagavad Gita calls for a different approach, in which renunciation does not literally mean to abandon all action and responsibility, rather it refers to a mental renunciation. The teachings of Gita reveal a path toward liberation that does not require the abandonment of one's wife, rather it requires the abandonment of attachment to the physical world. Thus, the Gita has created a righteous path that even women can follow. Women can continue to act and exit for their husbands and children, while mentally renouncing the fruits of action. However, this task might be especially difficult for women because their devotion needs to lie with their husbands. Krishna explains in the Bhagavad Gita that those who worship the gods and the deities will go to them, but those who worship and devote themselves to him will go to him. Women's dharma requires of them to be consumed in the empirical world because they must devote themselves to men, which must make it difficult to reconcile the devotion that they should have to their husbands with the devotion they should have toward Brahman.

Arjuna's Dilemma

The Bhagavad Gita begins with Arjuna's hesitance toward fighting a battle in which he will kill his own kinsmen. The battle that he must partake in will destroy the family, which Arjuna feels is unethical and immoral. "When the family is destroyed the ancient laws of family duty cease; when law ceases, lawlessness overwhelms the family; when lawlessness overwhelms the women of the family, they become corrupted; when women are corrupted, the intermixture of castes is the inevitable result." (Mitchell 44)This verse represents the weight that Indian men put on the women of the family. Women were capable of completely changing society if they were to become corrupt, by first corrupting the family and ultimately corrupting caste distinctions. The idea of men being conscious of the effects their actions might have on women is a frequent phenomena. Although women have always been viewed as inferior to men, they have the power to completely change the public sphere through their conduct within the private sphere.

Even the act of performing raksana, is revolved around containing women's ability to corrupt society and carrying out the male agenda. The purpose of a man performing raksana is in fact to protect his own dharma. "If a she violates her wifely dharma by being unfaithful to her husband, she will endanger the purity of her offspring and the entire family." (Mittal and Thursby 235) The idea of women being responsible for the upkeep or downfall of men is a common theme in ancient Indian texts. Men must act in accordance with the needs of their women, because if women are ultimately in charge of the family and subsequently, the race. Throughout history women's citizenship and responsibility within the public sphere was to take care of their husband and their children in order to support the development of a strong and virtuous race. Therefore, the protection and safeguarding of women had much more to do with the agenda of men, than with the righteousness of women.

Brahman and Gender

The attributes and nature of Brahman that is depicted in the Bhagavad Gita does not always remain strictly masculine. Although the higher Brahman is without attributes because he is transcendent of the nature and characteristics that can be understood through language in the human world, when his nature is described it is not assigned to one strict gender category. "Great Brahman is my womb; I put the embryo in it. Thence arises the production of all beings. Brahman is the great womb; I am the seedgiving father of the forms which arise in all wombs." (Cited in Brodbeck and Black 148) This vere from the Bhagavad Gita blatantly assigns feminine characteristics to Brahman. Child bearing, which is the most sacred and important aspect of female existence, assigns distinct feminine attributes to Brahman's nature and capabilities. The fact that Brahman normally remains gender neutral throughout most of the Gita, and when he is gendered he can be assigned feminine attributes as well and masculine ones, makes a major statement about gender in the Gita's teachings.

The womb analogy that is placed on Brahman's nature, in conjunction with the Gita's explicit incorporation of women as an acceptable audience for its teachings, shows that the Gita has transcended many of the gender barriers that are often encountered in other religious texts. "For those who take refuge in Me, O Partha, though they be of sinful birth- women, vaisyas, sudras- even they attain the Supreme goal." (Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 9 Verse 32) This verse explicitly includes women as appropriate followers of

Krishna's teachings, conveying that gender and caste are irrelevant as long as one follows the path of devotion, knowledge and renunciation. Brahman's transcendental nature deems gender irrelevant, which allows for women to follow the same path toward righteousness as men.

Conclusion

The Mahabharata and the Bhagavad Gita convey depictions of gender that move away from strict patriarchal conventions towards more women inclusive ideologies. The string and influential women that are portrayed in the epic, along with the women inclusive teaching that the Bhagavad Gita presents show a shift from the traditional gender ideas of Manu and the Samkhya scheme. Although the dharma and strisvabhava of women were not altered through the Gita or the epic, the opportunities and perception of women did change. Through the Bhagavad Gita's teachings women were able to follow a path toward liberation that was not dependent on their husbands; rather it was dependent on their own ability to establish their mind and their atman in Brahman. Also, through the Mahabharata's portrayal of strong female characters, the perception of women was slightly altered as well. Although women's main duty and position is in the private sphere, in which they tend to their husbands and children, the women of the Mahabharata convey an influence that women have on the public arenas of rule and war. The Bhagavad Gita is able to present a path toward righteousness that allows women to fulfill their motherly and womanly duties , while still be able to take part in religious sector of society.

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Gita and Kahlil Gibran: A Universal Guru

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The works and life of Kahlil Gibran demonstrate a synthesis of Western and Eastern Philosophy. Gibran's diverse background that spanned the cultures and languages of Syria and the United States enabled him to create works that transcended hemispheres. The wisdom of the Bhagavad Gita and the New Testament are effortlessly woven together within his writings to create universally applicable works.

Gibran was born in the region of Bsharri in Lebanon, an area wracked with religious tensions between Maronite Christians and Muslims. Later in life Gibran would support efforts at reconciling the two religious groups for he was a man who could see the benefit in all religions. He grew up in poverty and was educated by village Christian priests who taught him the Bible and the Arabic and Syriac languages. Gibran became linked to the wanderings of Christ at an early age when he dislocated his shoulder falling off a cliff and was strapped to a cross for forty days. This symbolic event stuck with him all his life and perhaps aided him in writing *Jesus the Son of Man.*

Gibran's mother moved her family to Boston when his father was sent to prison for tax evasion. In the United States Gibran learned English at a school for immigrants but went back to Lebanon to learn Arabic and finish his education. Even at an early age Gibran had been exposed to the teaching philosophies of the West and Eastern Europe and excelled at his studies. The experiential knowledge of death and loss came to Gibran when his beloved mother and sister died from illness. Gibran learned of suffering and pain and continued to write books and articles in Arabic.

Gibran sought to further his education as an artist by studying in Paris, but the rigid structure of the art school did not mesh with his free-flowing, cyclical nature and he moved to New York. Mary Haskell, Gibran's mentor, editor and financer, urged him not to translate his Arabic works but to write directly in English. Many of Gibran's most influential and accredited works were written in English and their success, besides his innate brilliance, was due to the fact that no meaning was lost in translation. (Saadi, A Biography of Gibran).

Gibran's *Jesus, Son of Man* exemplifies his ability to synthesize Eastern and Western approaches to religion in respect to the *Bhagavad Gita* and The New Testament. Although there seems to be no direct evidence that Gibran read the *Gita*, his works are overflowing with symbolism and ideas central to that holy text. *Jesus, Son of Man* tells the story of Jesus' life from the mouths of the people who saw and knew him. The varying responses and emphasis on his divine yet human nature transform Jesus the Christ into Jesus the teacher.

Gibran's characters could be describing Krishna or his pure yogi as well as Jesus. The work is split up into multitudes of monologues from different people's perspectives. Anna the Mother of Mary describes the birth and childhood of Jesus. She marvels that "He would climb the trees of my orchard to get the fruits, but never to eat them Himself." (*Jesus, Son of Man*) Anna's description of the young Christ's selfless actions fits perfectly with Krishna's assertion that "A selfless man who has renounced the fruit of his action attains peace." (5.12) Gibran artfully combines Krishna's teachings to Arjuna with Jesus' teachings and creates a perfect blend of East and West that is accessible to all.

Gibran's language depicts Jesus as a yogi who lived for the simple and pure. One character describes Jesus by saying "He loved a pomegranate or a cup of wine given to Him in kindness; it mattered not whether it was offered by a stranger in the inn or by a rich host." Similarly Krishna tells Arjuna that "Whosoever offers Me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water- that I accept the pious offering of the pure of heart." (9:26) Simple yet sincerely devoted offering is best loved by Jesus and Krishna. Gibran portrays the devotion of a yogi in the life of Christ, which reveals the parallel qualities between Christianity and Hinduism.

Gibran's Jesus invokes detachment to the physical world in his disciples just as Krishna requires detachment stemming from devotion. David one of Jesus' followers only comprehends Christ's parable of the man who was robbed of one cloak and let the robber take the other when he himself was robbed. That experience gave him knowledge for he could not comprehend the lord's teachings without living them. And he said "As I sat recording His words no man could have stopped me even were he to have carried away all my possessions. For though I would guard my possessions and also my person, I know there lies the greater treasure." (*Jesus, Son of Man*) Through such an experience David detached himself from the physical world by focusing on Jesus as the greatest treasure. Krishna urges Arjuna to detach the senses from their objects so like

David they will not be bound to the physical world and be able to focus upon the Ultimate Reality.

Gibran's portrayal of Jesus seems to coincide with Ramanuja's interpretation of the Gita. Both philosophers see the importance of recognizing the unity yet individuality in the relationship between God and Self. One of Jesus' female followers commented, "His body was single and each part seemed to love every other part." (*Jesus, Son of Man*). Her description of his love in physical form manifests the love that Krishna desires the yogi to have for himself in relation to the World and Brahman. The body or World is singular for all things are connected within Christian and Hindu thinking but the body is comprised of different parts. And the body would not exist without its constituent elements. The woman has been enlightenment by knowing Jesus and can see the unity of the universe in his caring comportment.

The essence of qualified nondualism manifests in the words of *Jesus, Son of Man*. Jesus transcends and encompasses the physical world in which he dwells by being a man and a god in one. One character relates "He was among us yet not one with us." (*Jesus, Son of Man*) The description of physical reality leads to an understanding of Reality for in a nondualist sense Jesus was among the people in flesh so he was one with them. Yet the quote says even though he was among them he was separate due to his divine nature.

John the Son of Zebedee describes the qualified nondualist nature of Jesus with resounding clarity. His words weave together Jesus as the Son of Man with Jesus the Son of God so that we may gain enlightened understanding. "And Jesus, the Man of Nazareth, was the host and the mouthpiece of the Christ, who walked with us in the sun and who called us His friends." (*Jesus, Son of Man*) These words could easily fit any Hindu description of Krishna who was said to be the manifest Prakriti of Purusha to use the Samkhya scheme. Both Jesus and Krishna were sons of man who served as the "mouthpiece" of higher Brahman.

Jesus, Son of Man begins to turn more to the east as Gibran brings whispering of reincarnation into his work. Gibran identifies with the cyclical nature of time more than the Western notion of linear time with its specific beginning and end. John asserts 'Many times the Christ has come to the world, and He has walked many lands." (*Jesus, Son of Man*) Gibran's choice to have one of Jesus' followers say that Christ has come to this world in many forms is an essential one for here the text takes a turn from the West/East middle road. Christianity does not believe in

reincarnation and maintains that Jesus came once to die for our sins and will return again on Judgment Day in true linear fashion. The text seems to hint that if all the other doctrines found in the *Gita* and New Testament go hand in hand then why must this beautiful friendship be dispelled over incomprehensible Time? The assertion that Jesus was the hope-bringers and prophets Prometheus, Orpheus, Mithra the King, and Zoroaster adds more credibility to Christianity than negates it for then Christ was the universal saviour.

Gibran continues to reveal the fluctuating nature of Time and Reality in his works *The Prophet* and *The Garden of the Prophet*. The wheel of samsara revolves in Gibran's words and spins into Eternity. The Prophet relates "For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one." (*The Prophet*) Krishna uses this assertion to convince Arjuna to slaughter his family for their Atmans constantly exist and cannot be destroyed just as the rivers and sea always continue to ebb and flow. In his garden the Prophet says that "A thousand times shall my mother and my father be buried here, and a thousand times shall the wind bury the seed; and a thousand years hence shall you and I and these flowers come together in this Garden even as now." (*The Garden of the Prophet*) Gibran's cross-cultural roots allow him to illustrate an Eastern concept of Time in a westerly accessible sense.

Gibran comprehends and encompasses the Eastern concept of Time and goes on to illustrate the nature of Brahman and Atman. Krishna says that all things and Atmans in the World are like beads that are suspended by the thread of Brahman. *The Garden of the Prophet* demonstrates the structural dependency of the world as the Prophet says "Mannus, my friend, all there is lives always upon all there is; and all there is lives in the faith, shoreless, upon the bounty of the Most High." (*The Garden of the Prophet*) Once again Gibran's works demonstrate the qualified nondualism of Ramanuja. All that is exists solely because everything else exists upon the support of "the Most High." Therefore even though all things are connected and nondualist they are not one, but instead comprised of myriad parts.

The Garden of the Prophet further illustrates the relationship between Brahman and Atman through metaphor. Such metaphors are the only viable way to demonstrate such cosmic and allusive philosophies for without roots in our physical earth all principles are meaningless phantoms that cannot be bound by language. The Prophet tells those who doubt their significance "The image of the morning sun in a dewdrop is

not less than the sun. The reflection of life in your soul is not less than life.

The dewdrop mirrors the light because it is one with light, and you reflect life because you and life are one." (*The Garden of the Prophet*) The text shows that Brahman and Atman though different things are paradoxically the same for they reflect and encompass the light of life.

Perhaps the ease with which Gibran knowingly or unknowingly illustrates Western and Eastern religious and philosophical concepts can be attributed to the preservation of his poetry from lack of translation. David White addressed the problems of becoming lost in translation in his essay *Translation and Oriental Philosophy: An Introductory Study*. In this essay he asserts that scholarly translations lead a reader "to meet with a dull awkwardness well calculated to convince him that the 'wisdom of the Orient' has been much exaggerated." (247, White) The reader plods through the text and looses the intrinsic understanding that can only be conjured by pure poetry. Mary Haskell was very wise to instruct Gibran to write original works in English for Western readers can now appreciate diverse philosophical ideas on their own terms.

The poetic power of Gibran's descriptions when compared to the Gita's translated statements manifests in a comparison of Om. Krishna describes himself as "the knowable, the purifier, and the syllable Om." (9:17, *Gita*) The Gita's contemporaries certainly knew what Om was so no further fabrication was necessary, but Westerners probably cannot comprehend the fathomless significance of this monosyllable from just a statement. *The Garden of the Prophet* reveals the intrinsically all-encompassing nature of Om when the Prophet says "Its rhythm may be another rhythm, but I say unto you that if you sound the depths of your soul and scale the heights of space, you shall hear one melody, and in that melody the stone and the star sing, the one with the other, in perfect unison." (The Garden of the Prophet) Gibran doesn't need to use the name Om to describe this phenomenon, for he revealed in Jesus, Son of Man that the name is not important rather the knowledge of unity and identity is what remains true.

Creativity is the water that nurtures a thought into a manifested idea and Gibran's creative and synthesizing abilities flow like the sea. In his article *In the Nick of Time: Thoreau's "Present" Experiment as a Colloquy of East and West*, Alan D. Hodder asserts that "creativity is a function of consciousness; the deeper the mind, the fuller the creation." (249, Hodder) Hodder's article delves into Thoreau's ability to synthesize eastern and western ideals so his point on the importance of creativity is a

poignant one. Creative expression allows universal gurus like Thoreau and Gibran to reveal their conscious and enlightened understanding of life.

A transcontinental upbringing combined with a depthless consciousness enabled Kahlil Gibran to construct works that bridged the gaps in understanding between the East and West. The self-aware guru wrote "And between your knowledge and your understanding there is a secret path which you must needs discover ere you become one with man, and therefore one with yourself." In *Gita* speak Buddhi must be cut away like the cleaving of the asvattha tree to reach higher Prakriti and Purusha. Only by discovering that there is a Self in the self can man be freed from samsara or the constraints of the physical world and gain the consciousness that the Light of the world is held in a dewdrop.

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Stairway to Heaven

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The Bhagavad Gita uses the dialogue between Krishna and his disciple to build a foundation of virtues and a path of righteousness. Much like the Old and New Testaments do for Judeo-Christian thought, the Bhagavad Gita lays the groundwork for much of Hindu theology. Coming from a Western background, the Christian influence is unavoidable and must be taken into account, especially in reference to a path to heaven. It is a rare occasion that a person can truly separate personal goals from the analysis of a text. Often when comparing religions, one either chooses to focus only on the similarities with the mindset that there is only one God with many names, or instead focuses only on the differences with the goal of proving superiority. The Gita runs parallel to many of the themes in Christianity, yet at the same time preaching the exact opposite. The focus of this paper will be on the ascent to heaven and the different paths taken by Christians and those who follow the teachings of Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita.

There are five key parts that must be addressed when discussing the after-life of a religion. First, one must try and understand the end goal, or what exactly the after-life looks like for different populations, and what one tries to work towards. In order to get to heaven, one must confront both sins as well as virtues, the classic struggle between good versus evil and what each entails. Fusing those two concepts together one must ask what the perfect man would act like on a day-to-day basis. Finally, one of the main themes of Christianity, and therefore a concept often discussed in the Western study of religions is the concept of altruism and how the religion does or does not promote it. These ideas lead to a basic understanding of the lessons of a religion, if one sees it as simply a means to an end. Often religions are described using the analogy of a wheel, and its spokes. Each religion is like the spokes of a wheel, one who deeply practices the religion will end up often with a very similar understanding or view on life, arguably reaching the same end, though from a distance the methods to reach that point can vary dramatically, and can appear very different at a superficial understanding.

No religion can avoid the inevitable question of what comes after this life. Often this idea can lead to influence the rest of the religion as it describes

the end that people are ideally working towards. The heaven in the Bhagavad Gita is a place very similar to that of Christianity in many ways; though on the outside it can appear to be an entirely different understanding. The Bhagavad Gita promises a sort of heaven, at times referred to as nirvana, for those who have transcended the mortal world. In this heaven, those who are enlightened live as one with the gods, as the general understanding is that nirvana is simply realizing that each person is simply a part in the greater whole of Brahman. Much of the concept of this eternal bliss is derived from a sense of complete freedom.

The enlightened man is free from the constraints of good and evil, pleasure and pain. This freedom is not a numbing, as it may seem, but rather because "the pleasures that are born of sense-experience are nothing but sources of frustration, since they all have a beginning and an end. The truly wise man takes no delight in such pleasures" (Bhagavad Gita 5:18). One can only find eternal bliss when he renounces corporal pleasures and pains. This may seem as a rejection of any good aspect of life, but it is simply an admittance of the impermanence of mortal and sense-driven pleasures. These two aspects of life: "pleasure and pain are representative of all the dualities or apparent dichotomies (*dvandvas*, 'pairs [of opposites]') to which the ordinary, undisciplined human being tends to respond with either desire (*raga)* or aversion (*dvesa*)" (White 48). These desires and aversions lead only to eventual frustration and dissatisfaction and so attachment to their source must be relinquished. This may seem like a very large leap of faith, but the simple fact that sense-pleasures will forever be a point of conflict and malcontent. This is so important that: "evenness of mind in response to both pleasure and pain is often declared by the Bhagavad Gita to be a crucial test of one's actual attainment of the highest human perfection" (White 48). It is pleasure and pain that limit humans from attaining a higher state of being. The fleeting nature of both pleasure and pain breeds a perpetual dissatisfaction that in turn creates conflict. One can only reach a state of bliss, when one has reached a point of pure contentment and detachment from all that is a part of this mortal world.

The notion of complete detachment certainly impacts the way that heaven is seen, and helps to define what deliverance means. Piper describes the end goal for both Hinduism and Christianity stating that: "for the Hindu, deliverance from rebirth, for the Christian, forgiveness from sin and guilt In each case the remnant that is left behind resembles the chrysalis which a butterfly abandons as he sails forth into heavenly sunshine and wide spaces" (Piper 182). The point of this statement is to prove that the differences are present and noticeable, yet the greater concept is the same.

The Bhagavad Gita sees this transcendence to be a clearing of vision and the ability to achieve perfection in this life and after. For Christians, there is a clear focus on the idea of good vs evil, and it is God that can grant the ability to be free of the sin inherent in human existence. Both traditions offer the idea of immortality, as a religion arguably must in order to provide the comfort often needed in religion.

Religion, like science, exists to try and explain those inevitable questions that each person comes to ask within their lives. Each person will struggle at some point in life, and no person will be exempt from that feeling of an injustice. Religion must address the concept of good vs bad, the origins of sin, and how justice is found. While there is certainly a path that will lead towards transcendence and one that will not, there is not the same emphasis placed on the duality of good and evil. Coming from a Western background it becomes natural to categorize the world and morals into those two opposites, though in the Bhagavad Gita the distinction remains very subtle. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the codes of conduct taught by the Bhagavad Gita in reference to the actions of its followers. Good vs evil may be a simplified way to see the world, but it can provide a quick way to sort out virtues and vices.

In the Bhagavad Gita, sin is clearly spelled out, yet at the same time it need not apply to everyone as it does in Christianity. There are demons and there are gods, but the boundaries are very fluid and people can work their way through. Demons can become humans and even gods, and likewise gods can become humans and demons. A person is not inherently one way or another, though it may take multiple life times to work ones way out of bad karma. In fact, transcendence and understanding of Brahman acts in a very similar way to the idea of God's mercy in the Christian tradition. Transcendence can be best described as ultimate freedom, and "this freedom is also conceived somewhat more specifically as total liberation from all sin and evil" (White 46). It is not that one who has transcended can commit atrocious acts, because by definition once one has realized this higher existence, he or she could not possibly have the will to commit sin as actions no longer affect his or her state of being. Krishna describes this phenomenon as though sin were water rolling off the petals of a lotus flower. Gardner states directly that: "such a person is beyond good and evil" (Gardner 176). Enlightenment is as all encompassing and acts to clear the slate in the same way that the Christian God can forgive all sins. This offers followers the necessary means to account for the inevitable flawed nature of humans and the prospect of sin being unavoidable.

Along with sin, the concept of good must also be addressed, as it proves vital to the pursuit of transcendence or heaven. In Christianity, love is seen as the ultimate and purest form of that which is good. Love for God is the means to salvation. In the Bhagavad Gita, good is seen as something that comes naturally once one understands the connection each person and object shares with Brahman and thus forms a sort of love for all of existence. In Christianity love inevitably leads to good deeds, the Bhagavad Gita teaches that once one transcends he or she will act in a way that is purely good stemming from that unity with God, and it must be noted that 'The basic and abiding condition of this unity is love" (White 182). For both the Bhagavad Gita as well as in the Bible, love is described as the greatest unifying force, and through unity one can achieve something better, be it enlightenment or heaven.

The concept of that which is good may be clear, though it's manifestation in day-to-day life may be slightly harder to find. Arjuna, himself, asks Krishna what this ideal wise and good man would act like. Krishna describes this enlightened man as one who is not envious but is a kind friend to all living entities, who does not think himself a proprietor and is free from false ego, who is equal in both happiness and distress, who is tolerant, always satisfied, self-controlled, and engaged in devotional service with determination, his mind and intelligence fixed on Me—such a devotee of Mine is very dear to Me" (Bhagavad Gita 12:13-4). This list spells out the ways to transcend earth and escape the cycle of reincarnation. Even though transcendence is the highest form of detachment, one still is responsible to be a "kind friend to all living entities". The path to transcendence is marked by humility, moderation, and self-restraint, not unlike the path for Christians. Once again, Krishna emphasizes the importance of love and devotion as the ultimate bond when he says: "such a devotee of Mine is very dear to Me". This implies that love creates a bond, unifying the mortal world as well as one's connection with God. Not only must the devotee love Krishna, but also God will in turn love him.

The perfect man is one who has found the perfect form of devotion, a mix of knowledge and action performed with intentions only of devotion. The Bhagavad Gita spells out this idea in yet another way, noting that "the Supreme Personality of Godhead said: Those who fix their minds on My personal form and are always engaged in worshiping Me with great and transcendental faith are considered by Me to be most perfect." (Bhagavad Gita 12.2). One achieves perfection through complete worship, and all else will come naturally. This could be a passage from the bible, for the message is so similar. The New Testament even declares: "seek ye first

the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:33 as quoted in Piper, 182) In Christianity, by accepting God's love and in turn loving God and all else will fall into place or prove to be inconsequential. In the Bible, there is a famous quote advising each person to "be ye therefore perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect (Mt. 5:48). Perfection here means completeness or fullness of God-like qualities" (Piper 182). That quality that one must possess is none other than love for all living creatures.

In Christianity, perfection is a concept to strive towards, always with the aim to act as God would and be as God is. In the Bhagavad Gita, the idea is very similar, perfection takes the illusion out of ones vision and he or she can see that they are a part of God, forever and always inseparable. This idea of perfection may seem an impossible goal, as it is in the Christian tradition, but the concept is actually quite simple. Really it must only be understood that "one's duties must be an act of worship. Thus one attains perfection even though performance may not itself be perfect" (Shideler 314). Since each action is performed with only love and devotion to God, it cannot be anything but perfect, no matter the results of said action. There is a very forgiving nature that runs a similar course to a story of Jesus and one of his apostles. He chooses to favor this apostle, not because he has done the best or acted properly, but because he truly desires nothing but to devote himself to Jesus. It is not the man who succeeds that is rewarded, but rather the man who tries with only love and devotion in his heart, and that shapes the perfect man.

Often religions provide a moral code, and set of standards for society to follow. One key aspect is the idea of altruism, or a description of what must be done for others in order to achieve salvation themselves. This is especially true for Christianity, as Jesus' time on Earth is often seen as solely a trip to redeem of the Bhagavad Gita only at face value, and come away with the notion that altruism means nothing, which is certainly not the case, nor is it true that altruism alone can lead to heaven, as is sometimes promoted in Christian thought. Gardner states that: "in the Upanishads, unlike Christianity, social morality has no ultimate significance, for it is concerned with the realm of the unreal" (Gardner 175). This view, while true to some degree, is vastly over-simplified. Christians are held to no higher moral standards than those who follow Krishna's teachings in the Bhagavad Gita, rather it could be argued that the Bhagavad Gita teaches a much purer form of altruism The reality lies somewhere in between, as always with the Bhagavad Gita, it is a matter of finding the middle path.

It is true that one must be detached from the results of all actions, and that no person can be taught so the path to enlightenment is not to be shared, but the very nature of transcendence leads naturally to helping others. This is proved by Krishna's own life and manner of existence. It should be noted that detachment does not create a self-absorbed or selfish man, "nor does this nonattachment to the results of his own personal action mean that the perfected man is socially irresponsible, for as we have seen, he 'delights in the welfare of all creatures' (V. 25; see also XII. 4)... the man who has attained the highest human good will act as Krishna himself acts, making it plain that though he himself has nothing to gain from his action, he always continues to act for the good of all mankind" (White 52). When one understands reality and transcends this world, it becomes clear that all is a part of Brahman, so because love and devotion is the ultimate form of worship, that love spreads to the entire world. Unlike Christianity, where all good deeds stem from some degree of self-interest, the detachment from any action's results leads to a pure form of selflessness.

Religions serve many crucial roles and are inseparable from any culture, as there is no culture without some sort of religion tied to it. Religion answers those questions in life that will always be asked, it provides a path to follow and a reason to do so. The five aspects focused in this paper deal with the ever-present question of the after-life, and how one is supposed to live in order to reach the supreme goal. Heaven in the Bhagavad Gita is a place of pure bliss, free from the inherent struggle tied to the impermanence of sense-driven happiness. Sin certainly exists and individuals are held accountable for such, but it exists only in so far as one allows it. Once one has transcended this mortal world, sin is left behind and good comes naturally.

The Bhagavad Gita and Christianity have similar ideas of what is good, and the aspects that relate good to heaven, but the concepts themselves are reversed. In Christianity, one is good so that he or she may attain heaven. In the Bhagavad Gita, one attains enlightenment and then is in a position to naturally and purely perform good actions. Upon request by Arjuna, Krishna describes how this perfect wise man would act; setting a goal for behavior in much the same way as Jesus sets a golden standard for how one should strive to be. This wise man would act without any thought or attachment to the results. He has reached an ultimate state of freedom; being free from the dichotomy of good and evil, pleasure and pain. This enlightened state cannot lead to anything but the purest form of altruism. While it may seem that the Bhagavad Gita preaches a live-and-let-die mentality that is in fact simply because to best help others, one

must first truly understand and see reality for what it is. One must let go of all attachments to the world, and to results, and in doing so one can finally be freed from the bonds of perpetually selfish behavior. These five aspects are only a few pieces in the larger picture, though they provide some foundation for the rest of the theology described in the Bhagavad Gita.

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Comparing Hesse's Siddhartha and the Bhagavad Gita

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While much of the literature I know to have come out of India has had bestowed upon it the moniker "postcolonial," Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*[1]—published in 1922—surely then stands in the category of "colonial literature," especially as it was written by a Westerner. Notwithstanding its timeless feel, its formal storytelling structure, nor its categorization as a *Bildungsroman*, *Siddhartha* is very much at home in India and well versed in Indian scriptures. It is my intention to compare what we learned throughout this Block concerning the *Bhagavad Gita's*[2] contents to the message of Hesse's *Siddhartha*.

Establishing himself as a writer in 1919 with the publication of his first literary success *Demian*, Hermann Hesse's intimate ties with India and the East—his grandparents and parents were Protestant missionaries there—appear in all of his works. In 1911 Hesse made a journey to India. In 1920, while he was composing *Siddhartha*, he noted:

> My engagement with India, already twenty years old and very much lived, appears recently to have reached a new point of development. Heretofore my readings, searchings, and empathies have stood apart from the philosophical, the purely spiritual, the Vedantic and Buddhist realm of India; the Upanishads, the teachings of Buddha and the Bhagavad Gita stand as the middle point in this world. Most recently I have acquainted myself intimately with the actual religious India of the Gods, Vishnu and Indra, Brahma and Krishna. (200—201)[3]

During the period when he was actually occupied with writing *Siddhartha*, from 1919 to 1922, he turned to Indian philosophy on what

[1] Hermann Hesse. *Siddhartha*. Translated by Sherab Chodzin Kohn. Introduction by Paul W. Morris. Boston: Shambala, 2002.
[2] *The Bhagavad Gita* or *The Song of the Lord*. Translated by Swami Nikhilananda. New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekanada Center, 1944.
[3] Hermann Hesse. *Aus einem Tagebuch des Jahres* 1920. Zürich: *Corona*, 1932. Translation mine, and thus disjointed.

appears to be a daily basis. If nothing else, there occur many obvious references to Indian philosophy and the *Bhagavad Gita* in this novella. His utilization of leitmotifs, parallel narratives, and the repetition of phrases and single words (especially threefold repetitions) in an almost liturgical manner is constantly reminiscent of religious texts, be it the Bible, Vedantic texts, or the Gita itself. Additionally, Hesse used Hindu terms and names according to their traditional meanings: *OM, Samsara, Nirvana, Maya, and Krishna.* While it is certain that the *Gita* is not the exclusive philosophy upon which he constructed *Siddhartha*, Hesse's keen interest in India surely spurs on our interest in comparing his text to the *Gita*.

Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* is a short novel whose namesake, a Brahmin's son, leaves the tutelage of his father in search of his own path towards Enlightenment. Short, simple, and lyrical, the sentences that compose *Siddhartha* read like a parable. The novel supposedly takes place in ancient India around the time of the Buddha (sixth century BCE). It begins as the protagonist and a companion leave their village to join ascetics who follow the teachings of a Buddha named Gotama. Siddhartha refuses to remain a pupil there, however, deeming his path one not solely of learning. He goes through a series of lifestyles and vocations, as well as realizations as he attempts to reach Enlightenment throughout the tale.

At this first important junction—the time when Siddhartha denounces the importance of Gotama's teaching to his success—Hesse establishes what will be primary in his own philosophy. It is not through scholarship and mind-dependent methods, nor is it through immersing oneself in the carnal pleasures of the sensual world and the accompanying pain of samsara that will lead to Enlightenment; it is rather the totality of these experiences that allow Siddhartha to arrive at understanding. *Experience* is most important. Experience is the accumulation of all conscious events lived by an individual in life. It connotes participation, listening and learning, trial and error, perhaps even knowledge. Hesse shows experience as the best way—the only way—to approach understanding of reality and attain Enlightenment.

Thus, the individual events are meaningless when considered by themselves: Siddhartha's stay with the samanas, his immersion in the world of a courtesan and a businessman do not lead to nirvana, yet they cannot be considered detractions, for every action that is undertaken and every event that occurs guides him towards achieving understanding. The sum of these events is his life's experience.

Inconsistent with the teachings of the *Gita*, Siddhartha starts as a high caste Brahmin's son; travels as a starved and naked mystic; then gains power and property, monetary wealth, passion, fancy foods and clothes, and fathers a child; and later denounces all of this for the life of a poor ferryman before he becomes enlightened. Krishna tells Arjuna he *must* fight for he has been cast as a warrior and no other role is appropriate according to his birth. Siddhartha seems to ignore his noble birth; however, he learns quickly what it means to live the life of wine and gardens and sex. As *Siddhartha* spans a lifetime, and really concerns itself with journey and not just philosophic ideas, we easily can see how these points would necessarily depart. Siddhartha has no help from Krishna along the way—at least directly. Siddhartha must live as he feels fit, must transgress accordingly in order to find happiness. In doing so, he lives many lives, many which might seem unfit for the son of a Brahmin.

Explaining how this is somewhat difficult because Siddhartha's main learning is that words and ideas are actually meaningless. "Wisdom," he says near the end of the novella, "is not expressible. Wisdom, when a wise man tries to express it, always sounds like foolishness" (148). Because the path is not known (cf. *Gita* chapter five verse fourteen: "Neither agency nor objects does the Supreme Spirit create for the world, nor does It bring about union with the fruit of action. It is Nature that does this." Krishna tells Arjuna of a disconnect between God and how the world works, which is implicit in Siddhartha's comment.) Siddhartha continues, trying to tell how the path to enlightenment can never been thought through or explained in words:

> "Listen well, friend, listen well! The sinner that I am and you are is indeed a sinner, but in time he will again be Brahma, in time he will attain nirvana, be a Buddha. But see here, this "in time" is an illusion, only a metaphor. The sinner is not on the path to Buddhahood, he is caught up in the process, even though our intellect knows no other way of representing things. No, the future Buddha is present here and now within the sinner, his future entirely there already. You must venerate the developing, potential, hidden buddha in him, in yourself, in everyone. The world, my friend, is not imperfect or confined at a point somewhere along a gradual pathway towards perfection. No, it is perfect at every moment. Every sin already contains grace within it. . . I have experienced in my own mind and body that I was very much in need of sin; I needed sensual pleasure, striving for possessions, vanity, and extreme

> debasement and despair in order to learn to give up resisting, in order to learn to love the world, in order to stop comparing it to some imagined world that I wished for, some form of perfection I had thought up, and let it be as it is and love it and be glad to be part of it." (149—151)

The listener muses after a handful more pages of a similar tune: "(But secretly he thought to himself: This Siddhartha is a strange man, the ideas he expresses are strange, his teaching is so much foolishness)" (155). And therein appears Hesse's book-long struggle with language. The means to the end (Enlightenment) must be different for all. All Hesse is doing in *Siddhartha* is providing a theoretical example of how one fictitious character achieved Brahman.

In *Siddhartha* an indefatigable search for truth is crucial for achieving a harmonious relationship with the world. The search itself, each person's individual path is both unique and, concurrently, surprisingly similar. There seem to be numerous but fairly consistent vices which many people struggle with on their own in this story. It is as if without knowing attachment one cannot know detachment. In Hesse's story, teaching is full of shortcomings and learning must come from first-hand experience. Therefore, Siddhartha acts with the guna rajas during much of his middle age. Krishna says, in the eighteenth and final chapter of the *Gita*: "But the action that is performed with much effort by one who seeks to gratify his desires or who is prompted by a feeling of 'I'—that action is declared to be of the nature of rajas" (195—196). He continues three verses later, after enumerating traits of tamas and sattva: "The doer who is passionately attached to action and desirous of its fruit, who is greedy, violent, and impure, and who is moved by joy and sorrow—he is declared to be of the nature of rajas" (196).

I want to establish some themes which reoccur in *Siddhartha*, starting with the ego with which Siddhartha struggles almost his whole life, with a perspective coming from having just read the Bhagavad Gita. Some of these themes will have been directly discussed in the *Gita*, while others I will comment on in the spirit of karma-yoga and Krishna.

Egoism is not exactly the same as attachment, but they are akin, bedfellows perhaps. It is the ego and the love which the ego insights, which is Siddhartha's final trial before he becomes Brahman. During his stay with the courtesan, the most beautiful women he's ever seen, the women he's asked to teach him all she knows concerning love (a subject he claims to know nothing about), she first kisses him with "a bright red

mouth like a fig newly broken open," (56) and then, on their last night together, the night before Siddhartha leaves the city and all of his worldly possessions behind "But after a time she became aware that, from her last time together with Siddhartha, she was pregnant" (90). His son, also named Siddhartha, appears nine years later to haunt Siddhartha's ego. He is now a patient, kind, and wise ferryman when his son and his son's mother arrive to cross the river. The woman dies from a snakebite, so Siddhartha is left to care for and rear the child. This child had thus far only ever known the city life of privilege, and he was not about to live in destitute poverty with his sagacious father and too little to eat. Forlorn, Siddhartha will not let his son go; he loves him too much. Siddhartha's patience, calmness, solemnity only aggravate the boy. Eventually he escapes from his father, just as Siddhartha did to begin the story.

While Siddhartha needed to live in the city, wealthy and confident in the manners of wine, gambling, and sex, he needed to live such a life to learn the ways of *love*. And indeed he learns what love is. This is an elementary step on his path towards Enlightenment; and this knowledge of love cripples him, his Ego raging as his son refuses to love him back.

Siddhartha does find solace though. His vocation as ferryman locates him on a river's edge. The river, in this story, is the manifestation of Brahman. It is to Siddhartha what Krishna is to Arjuna. The river is Siddhartha's final teacher. The river has many voices, never stagnates, never is the same but always seems to be so. The river does not speak a language of words or ideas. Siddhartha spends much time sitting and listening to the river. He posits questions in his mind, meditates on the riverbank, and awaits answers. The river usually laughs at the silliness of Siddhartha's questions. (Happiness, smiling, and laughter occur in *Siddhartha* only in individuals who already know Brahman.) But when the protagonist sits long enough, listens closely enough he hears one sound: OM.

> And when Siddhartha listened attentively to the thousandfold song of the river, when he did not fasten on the suffering or laughing, when he did not attach his mind to any one voice and become involved in it with his ego—when he listened to all of them, the whole, when he perceived the unity, then the great song of a thousand voices formed one single word: OM, perfection.

Simultaneity is the next theme, which connects the idea of OM with the idea of the river and the idea of Krishna. Everything in the world is

Krishna. ("I am the rod of those that chastise and the statesmanship of those that conquer. Of secret things I am silence, and of the wise I am the wisdom" (122—123).) Whereas the river is never ending, just like time, and as one thinks about a river—how the water is always flowing downhill, always different water filling the place of water gone—it becomes clear that there is not difference in the water. This analogy which Hesse employs is very good. His rivet represents all that the *Gita* says. The river is Siddhartha's *Gita*. The river is the path to Enlightenment; it is the teacher.

The *Gita* appears often to repeat itself. But the message of the *Gita* can also be understood in different manners. Its words often appear simple, like the slow meandering river, but the substance of the *Gita* and that message is all pervasive, simultaneous, and omniscient. Just like the river. That the message of the *Gita* and *Siddhartha* both concentrates on meditating, breathings, loving, OM, explaining the inexplicable, and desire the road to Enlightenment, I must believe that Hermann Hesse was indeed very much in touch with Indian philosophy while composing his novella, and the text with which his work was most intimate was probably the *Bhagavad Gita*.

The final point I want to illuminate is more related to the structure of the words on the page. I said earlier that the repetition of phrases and single words (especially threefold repetitions) in a seemingly liturgical style in *Siddhartha* is reminiscent of the *Gita*. The only skill set Siddhartha possesses when he denounces the ascetics and decides to have a go at the material world, he says are that he can *think*, *fast*, and *wait*. Three monosyllabic words, which seem so simple and worthless—but Siddhartha proves that with these capabilities he can garner more riches then he might ever need. The way that Siddhartha reiterates these three abilities sounds very much like Krishna's tone of voice in the *Gita*. Krishna often lumps words or ideas together, perhaps to make them easier to remember. This is the same with Siddhartha. He seems to live the life of words warily, and when he does speak, his words are few, well chosen, and wise. Siddhartha loses patience while living lavishly in the city, and because of his wealth, loses the ability to fast. This is when he knows that he needs a lifestyle shift. Those three skills were of his childhood. He lost them, or lost the need for them as he grew to explore what the rest of the world held for him. His time by the river, however, taught him three new virtues. "He sat absorbed and waited. This he had learned by the river—to wait, have patience, listen." To wait, to have patience, to listen—these are the skills of Siddhartha, the old man whose has learned from the river. This is what Siddhartha has learned, and from this learning he has

attained Brahman. Just as Arjuna listens assiduously and respectfully to Krishna, even though he does not always understand, so too Siddhartha listens in order to learn.

The *Bhagavad Gita* is a spiritual guide to Hindu beliefs. It is the most widely read Hindu text because of its beauty in its simplicity. *Siddhartha* is an equally beautiful book, whose genre is other than the *Gita's*, but the message is exactly the same. Following the path of right action, apprehending Self as Reality through true knowledge, and attaining love and devotion for Brahman by perfect wisdom, Siddhartha finally found the freedom, peace, and union with the Sacred Spirit that he had been seeking throughout his life. His progress in this search is described almost exactly by the *Gita* itself: "Four types of virtuous men worship me, O Arjuna: the man in distress, the man seeking knowledge, the man seeking enjoyment, and O best of the Bharatas, the man endowed with wisdom" (86).

The Bhagavad Gita and Ayn Rand's Objectivism

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The Bhagavad Gita is one of the most important texts in the Hindu tradition, and has taught millions of people a life-changing philosophy for millennia. Situated within the massive Mahabharata, the Gita teaches a uniquely Eastern philosophy of detachment from the fruits of one's actions. The first English translations of Hindu texts such as the Gita appeared between 1785 and 1789[1], and since then many Westerners have read it and struggled with its teachings. It presents a very unique message that seems to clash in particular with such Western principles as self-determinism, free will and individuality. In particular, Ayn Rand has developed a philosophy that champions these Western virtues, and as such is at great odds with the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. The principles of Ayn Rand's Objectivism, although never specifically mentioning the Bhagavad Gita or Hinduism in general, condemn its conception of the self, its goal of transcendence, and the caste structure that it supports. The massive contrasts created by comparing these two viewpoints sheds light on the inherent difficulties of this Eastern teaching gaining much ground with a broad Western audience.

In the final, eighteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna elaborates to Arjuna "how one who has reached perfection realizes Brahman, which is the supreme consummation of knowledge[2]". Among the many characteristics the man of pure understanding must have, Krishna states that: "forsaking conceit and power, pride and lust, wrath and possessions, tranquil in heart, and free from ego- he becomes worthy of becoming one with Brahman.[3]" This text supports an eradication of selfishness and ego, which corresponds with the broad theme of renunciation found throughout the Gita. At first blush, the broad majority of Westerners would likely agree in general with these principles, as egotism and pride are generally considered to be vices,

[1] Rice, James P. "In the Wake of Orientalism." *Comparative Literature Studies* 37.2 (2000): 223-238. 16 Dec. 2008 <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/comparative_literature_studies/v037/37.2rice.html>.

[2] *The Bhagavad Gita*. Trans. Nikhilananda. New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1944. (To be referred simply as BG, followed by the chapter and verse number)

[3] Gita, 18:53

but there is also something to be said for the self-sufficiency and development of individualism that comes with an attachment to the ego.

Philosopher and novelist Ayn Rand has been highly influential in shaping the way Americans think. Although her views are certainly far from the mainstream, a study by the Library of Congress found that her masterpiece, The Fountainhead, was the second most influential book for Americans, following only the Bible[4]. This book, which outlined what would later become known as Objectivist philosophy, expresses the importance of individuality and liberty that appeals to many core American values. Ayn Rand, and the principles found within her Objectivist philosophy, would take great issue with the Gita's condemnations of ego and pride. In an outline of her philosophical ethics, Rand writes that "the basic social principle of the Objectivist ethics is that just as life is an end in itself, so every living human being is an end in himself, not the means to the ends or the welfare of others-and, therefore, that man must live for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself. To live for his own sake means that *the achievement of his own happiness is man's highest moral purpose."*[5] This fundamental difference in the understanding of the self and the moral responsibility of the individual shows the underlying conflict between the Gita's teaching and Objectivist principles. Although Ayn Rand never specifically mentions the Bhagavad Gita or Hinduism by name, it is easy to see that the two philosophies fundamentally disagree. Understanding Objectivism as an extreme projection of the capitalistic ideals that shape American life, it will become clear that many obstacles stand in the way of these two teachings having any sort of synthesis.

Each tradition's conception of the self and ego, then, is the main point of contradiction here. Krishna declares in Chapter Twelve, verse thirteen of the Gita that one must be "free from the feelings of 'I' and 'mine' ...dear to Me is the one who is thus devoted to Me." Elsewhere, this same principle is expounded: "that man who lives completely free from desires, without longing, devoid of the senses of 'I' and 'mine', attains peace.[6]" From Ayn Rand's above statement, it is easy to see how she would disagree with the

[4] Fein, Esther B. "Book Notes." *The New York Times* 20 Nov. 1991. 18 Dec. 2008 <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?sec=health&res=9D0CE7D61339F933A15752C1A967958260>.

[5] Rand, Ayn. "The Objectivist Ethics." *The Virtue of Selfishness.* By Ayn Rand. New York: Signet, 1961. 30.

[6] Gita 2:71

heart of this issue. Further, she would take issue with the specific rhetoric used by the Gita, instead focusing on the importance of having a sense of 'I' and 'mine'. Her novella, Anthem, deals almost entirely with this subject.

Set in a future world where individualism is essentially outlawed, along with the terms 'I' and 'mine', Anthem tells the story of a man who rises against a repressive society. Throughout the story, although it is written in the first person, the terms 'I' and 'mine' are never used. Instead, the main character always uses the term 'we' and 'ours', as he was taught to by his society. The climax of the story, and the heart of Rand's message appears when the main character finally uses the term 'I' and realizes the potential lying within him: "Many words have been granted me, and some are wise, and some are false, but only three are holy: 'I will it!'...I am a man. This miracle of me is mine to own and keep, and mine to guard, and mine to use, and mine to kneel before.[7]" Again, even the very rhetoric that the Gita warns against is praised and encouraged by Objectivism, showing just how far apart these philosophies are.

With a message that advocates such extreme individualism and selfishness, it is not surprising that Objectivism tends to revile religion in general. However, this extends beyond its condemnation of self-sacrifice and subservience to a higher power, and enters into a discussion about the nature of reality. In an article entitled "Mental Health Versus Mysticism", Objectivist Nathaniel Branden writes that "there is only one reality- the reality knowable to reason...the sole result of the mystic projection of "another" reality, is that it incapacitates man psychologically for this one[8]." This idea firmly rejects the Gita's principle of a higher state of being and awareness, dismissing it not only as an incorrect belief, but as a harmful one at that. By concentrating on another reality, man does not prepare himself for the challenges he will face in his current reality, which is inherently problematic to the Objectivist when the whole of one's life should be spent bettering oneself and tapping into one's full potential.

The Objectivist view takes a very 'pragmatic' view of the world and the self. The achievement of one's passions and happiness should be the highest priority in life, and time spent dilly-dallying on reality's finer details is most likely not going to further those goals. Branden writes: "It was not by

[7] Rand, Ayn. *Anthem*. Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1988.

[8] Branden, Nathaniel. "Mental Health versus Msyticism and Self-Sacrifice." *The Virtue of Selfishness*. By Ayn Rand. New York: Signet, 1961. 40-48.

contemplating the transcendental ...that man lifted himself from the cave and transformed the material world to make a human existence possible on earth." Navel gazing and philosophizing are generally subservient to the practical matters of life. It can be easily pointed out, of course, that both Ayn Rand and Nathaniel Branden spent a great deal of time 'contemplating the objective', which would seem to have the same negative side effects as 'contemplating the transcendental'. Any hypocrisy aside, Objectivism strongly rejects Krishna's call to Arjuna to "therefore, become a yogi[9]". Time spent on meditation is time wasted, and transcendence from reality simply means that Arjuna would not be able to fulfill his desires.

All religious/philosophical methodology aside, Ayn Rand would ultimately disagree with the goal of the Gita's teachings; that is, transcending this world and becoming one with Brahman. Part of this goal would be the transcendence of such worldly deceptions as pain and pleasure: "that calm man who remains unchanged in pain and pleasure, whom these cannot disturb, alone is able, O greatest of men, to attain immortality[10]." Again coming from the notion that what is good for a man should always be accepted as a practical good, Objectivism states that pain and pleasure are evolutionary tools that prompt us towards or away from certain actions. "Just as the pleasure-pain mechanism of man's body works as a barometer of health or injury, so the pleasure-pain mechanism of his consciousness works on the same principle, acting as a barometer of what is for him and what is against him, what is beneficial to his life or inimical[11]". From the Objectivist viewpoint, an ultimate calm that places a man above indications of pain or pleasure, specifically in such a way that he would remain unchanged, would be ultimately destructive. He would have no clear way to act or function within day-to-day life and therefore would be incapable of attaining his own happiness, which Objectivism would almost regard as a sin (although, of course, it would stray from any religious imagery). A man's intellect and instincts are absolutely necessary to determine the right (pleasurable) way to live, so any relegation of consciousness would be inherently detrimental.

In her highly influential novel The Fountainhead, Ayn Rand presents a story of an uncompromising architect (Howard Roark, her version of the perfect

[9] Gita 6:46
[10] Gita 2:15
[11] Branden, Nathaniel. "The Psychology of Pleasure." *The Virtue of Selfishness.* By Ayn Rand. New York: Signet, 1961. 71-78.

man), and his struggle to overcome the roadblocks society has put in his way. In a momentous part of the tale, Roark's enemy is explaining how society is able to control and destroy the individual through the corruption of one's desires. "You must tell people that they'll achieve a superior kind of happiness by giving up everything that makes them happy. You don't have to be too clear about it. Use big, vague words. 'Universal Harmony'- 'Eternal Spirit'- 'Divine Purpose'- 'Nirvana'- 'Paradise'- 'Racial Supremacy'- 'The Dictatorship of the Proletariat'. Internal corruption...that's the oldest one of all. The farce has been going on for centuries and men still fall for it[12]". The Gita could easily be included, then, in this monumental 'farce' that has plagued mankind.

Just as Objectivism uses harsh words to condemn philosophies such as the one presented in the Gita, this Hindu text strongly attacks the way of life presented by the Objectivist philosophy. The way of life that creates a sense of attachment to ones actions eventually leads to some very bad things. "When a man dwells on objects, he feels an attachment for them. Attachment gives rise to desire, and desire breeds anger. From anger comes delusion; from delusion, the failure of memory; from the failure of memory, the ruin of discrimination; and from the ruin of discrimination, the man perishes.[13]" Furthermore, the soul of the attached man would be caught up in the "Great Fear[14]" caused by the unending wheel of birth and death. Objectivism suggests that the teachings of the Gita are a 'plague', while the Gita would say that Objectivism causes man untold misery. Clearly there are huge differences in both the methodology and goals of these two ways of life.

A common point of contention among Western readers with the Bhagavad Gita has been its support of the Hindu caste system. The American tradition generally advocates social mobility and self-determinism, and it is therefore not surprising to see Ayn Rand attacking any sort of social hierarchy that is not derived solely from a man's own actions. Rand condemns any "system of castes determined by a man's birth" as nothing less than an "internal subcategory of racism[15]". In the Gita, Krishna insists on the importance of Arjuna fulfilling his dharmic duty and acting in accordance with his caste.

[12] Ayn Rand. *For The New Intellectual: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand.* New York: Signet, 1961.
[13] Gita 2:62
[14] Gita 2:40
[15] Ayn Rand. "Racism." *The Virtue of Selfishness.* By Ayn Rand. New York: Signet, 1961. 147-157.

Krishna tells Arjuna that if he refuses to fulfill his dharma as a kshatriya (warrior), he will be "renouncing [his] own dharma and honor, [and would] certainly incur sin.[16]" Arjuna himself says that "inevitably the men whose family dharmas are destroyed dwell in hell.[17]" Objectivism would, of course, stress the overwhelming importance of the individual as opposed to a duty to one's caste. "Just as there is no such thing as a collective or racial mind, there is no such thing as a collective or racial achievement. There are only individual minds and individual achievements- and a culture is not the anonymous product of undifferentiated masses, but the sum of the intellectual achievements of individual men"[18]. This is quite a strong argument against grouping the actions and duties of men into certain separate groups of society. A man should hold "the achievement of his own happiness" as his highest purpose, with little thought for people born into his same societal group.

Clearly, both philosophies are at great odds with each other. The principles of Objectivism plainly condemn the Gita's conception of the self, its goal of transcendence and the caste structure that it supports. Although not officially widely practiced, Objectivism and the writings of Ayn Rand have had a great deal of influence on the American people, gaining sympathy for its relentless advocacy of free will, individualism and self-determinism. The predominance of these principles that stand at the core of Western society may in part explain why the Bhagavad Gita has not been, and perhaps cannot be widely accepted by an American audience.

[16] Gita 2:33
[17] Gita 1:44
[18] Ayn Rand. "Racism." *The Virtue of Selfishness.* By Ayn Rand. New York: Signet, 1961. 147-157.

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Hindu and Taoist Thoughts and Actions

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To those unaccustomed to Eastern religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, or Taoism, many ideas and doctrines suggested by these faiths tend to seem inaccessible or merely not understandable. Westerners looking inward at these religions tend to shrug at the thought of disinterested actions, a separation of the self and the Self, or higher *atman*, or the idea of performing action without decisiveness or in accord with nature. How, then, can we explain some of these ideas, which are necessary in attaining knowledge of a higher self, as suggested in the Bhagavad-Gita? I will, in this paper, explain some of the more difficult aspects of Hinduism, namely those having to do with actions, in terms of another religion, namely Taoism, which holds similar doctrines concerning actions, in an attempt to further explain the Bhagavad-Gita's view on actions in an accessible manner.

Firstly, Krishna, throughout the Gita, praises both renunciation of action, and the practice of discipline, or yoga. Arjuna, however, in the fifth teaching, asks Krishna which of these two ways is the better. In one sense, the renunciation of action acts to separate the Atman from the physical world and lead one toward the ultimate goal of enlightenment. Krishna admits, however, that it is impossible for one to live without action whatsoever, thus it seems inconvenient to base the path to enlightenment on the effort to renounce all actions.

One, if he wishes to live to the point of enlightenment, must of course eat, sleep, and occasionally fight battles. He must not only participate in these basic actions, but must, according to some schools of thought (including the Buddhist one,) participate in these actions not too much, and not too little. The middle path through these actions is considered the best. The Buddha found that he could never achieve *Nirvana* living his rich, luxurious life-style, nor could he escape the cycle of *Samsara* living as an ascetic and nearly starving himself.

The discipline or *yoga* for which one must strive is not in the renunciation of certain physical necessities. Rather, as according to Krishna, it is in the separation of the Self from the action of eating, fighting, drinking. This discipline is the detachment from the fruits of the action. One eats because he must eat to live. He acts thus according solely to the laws of nature or *prakrti*. But how might the Westerner or outsider address this seemingly paradoxical suggestion? What would a modern person look like, who has renounced attachment to the outcomes of his actions? How can one be disinterested totally in sensory objects? How can one continue to live, function, act the same as previously, only without action?

Taoism states a similarly paradoxical-seeming doctrine about actions. The Taoist concept of *Wu-Wei*, meaning "action without action," or "without decisive action" means that, according to Taoists, one should strive to digress from the way of living in which many people think too much into their actions. Rather they should live according to laws of nature, and not decisively. This "acting in accord with nature" is slightly substituted in the Gita with the concept of acting according to one's own Dharma, but the ultimate goal of detachment is still reached. The Gita stresses the intellect as one of the most important aspects of the self in terms of a path to enlightenment, while Taoism shies away from the stress of intellect and thinking too much into actions (as it is seen as excessively *yong,* or masculine, and would disrupt the balance with *yin.*)

In order to explain more fully the concept of Wu-wei, Slingerland uses the conceptual metaphoric terms "subject," and "Self," where the former is the usual "I" in a sentence, and the latter is the metaphoric inner-self. The "I" or "subject" is the one exerting force on the inner "Self" in this case. For example, Slingerland would say, "I had to force myself to do it." (28)

> Generally, control of the object Self by the subject self is desirable, but even in English we sometimes speak of noncontrol of the Self in a positive sense, as when a person who—perhaps after much effort and no progress in learning how to dance—at last succeeds and explains, "I was finally able to *let* myself *go*." (Slingerland 28)

He further explains that this is a true metaphor of Wu-wei; it is effortlessness, or a lack of force by the subject self on the object inner-Self. This effortlessness can be explained in one of two general ways: firstly, as Slingerland explains, it can be defined and discussed with the "following"

mentality, in which one surrenders control to the nature of the inner Self. It is the metaphor in which one flows down a river effortlessly. The second is explained in the sense of being "at ease," in which one practicing Wu-wei is relaxed, at ease, still, or wandering and rambling. (29)

So why have we strayed away from the natural Wu-wei? Why is everything forced, and seemingly unnatural in this sense? As stated before, there is, according to Lao-tze, ostensibly the author of the Tao-te-ching, or the book of Tao virtues, an unbalance between the natural existence of yin and yong. Yin and yong make of the natural laws of Earth and heaven and which control the whole universe, as well as everything, living and nonliving, on Earth. Hoff explains as follows:

> According to Lao-tze, the more man interfered with the natural balance produced and governed by the universe sic laws, the further away the harmony retreated into the distance. The more forcing, the more trouble. Whether heavy or light, wet or dry, fast or slow, everything has its own nature already within it, which could not be violated without causing difficulties. When abstract and arbitrary rules were imposed from the outside, struggle was inevitable. Only then did life become sour. (4)

The concept of the Taoist yin and yong relate quite closely to the Hindu concepts of *prakrti,* and *purusha. Prakrti,* like yin, is often considered to be female. It is somewhat passive, and having to do with nature. *Prakrti,* literally meaning pre-nature, could be considered the matter of which the universe is made. It defines the laws of nature in a sense similar to that of Taoist thought, where *purusha* would be the masculine yong, or self, in the Taoist sense.

This comparison is somewhat skewed, however, by some schools of Hindu thought. For example, the *Samkhya* philosophy takes *purusha* to be the true Self, which should be separated from or contrasted by the sensory perceptions of the body, represented by *prakrti.* This concept holds the Self to be transcending the material world of *prakrti* to reach a higher being, Brahman, whereas, the Taoist thought would take the idea of following the laws of the natural world to be transcendent over human nature. Both of these faiths act to separate actions from their emotional would-be human counterparts. They both work to keep actions in the natural world, while Hinduism, especially according to Sankara, works to separate the natural,

action performing self, from the Self, or the Atman, which, through this separation, can be realized as Brahman, the highest being.

The Hindu concept of Brahman can be compared also to the Tao, or the "way," which is equally nebulous and difficult to attain or even to explain, for Krishna, in the Bhagavad-Gita, describes Brahman as "eternal and supreme...its inner self is called inherent being; its creative force, known as action, is the source of creatures' existence. Its inner being is perishable existence..." (79) And the Tao is explained by Lao-tze thus:

> The Tao that can be talked about is not the true Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal Name. Everything in the universe comes from Nothing. Nothing, the nameless is the beginning; while Heaven, the mother is the creator of all things. (Kwok 43)

Both descriptions are rather ambiguous, as surely entities as great as Brahman or the eternal Tao cannot be explained directly or literally. Their descriptions are more a means to gain understanding of them rather than to directly understand what they are. However, though the Bhagavad-Gita describes Brahman an all-encompassing God or being or even as man's ultimate goal, and the Tao as a way of balancing one's life—regaining an equilibrium between yin and yong, both philosophies (or religions,) despite their obvious differences seem to strive towards the same goal, and moreover, by the same means:

The Tao Te Ching states: "Follow the Nothingness of the Tao, and you can be like it, not needing anything, seeing the wonder and the root of everything." (43) If we substitute the "Tao" with "Krishna," we begin to see some similarities. Krishna, in the Bhagavad-Gita, says to Arjuna of one who has realized his teaching: "Invoking the infinite spirit as the one eternal syllable OM, remembering me as he abandons his body, he reaches the infinite way." (81)

By following the Tao or Krishna, which are similarly eternal, infinite, transcendent of man, one can be like them (Tao or Krishna,) and realize the ultimate wonder, or infinite way. Chuang-Tzu, a Taoist philosopher said, according to Creel:

> Follow the natural course. No matter whether crooked or straight, look at all things in the light of the great power of nature that resides within you. Look around you!

> Attune yourself to the rhythm of the seasons. What difference whether it is called "right" or "wrong"? Hold fast to the unfettered wholeness that is yours, carry out your own idea, bend only with the Tao. (Creel 4)

This writing is strikingly similar to Krishna's response to Arjuna's microcosmic dilemma described in the Bhagavad-Gita: Should he fight and kill his own kin in battle as is his duty, or should he refuse to fight against his own blood? Krishna's answer is that it does not really matter; Krishna has, in a sense already killed those who will die, and that there is not real "right" or "wrong" in Arjuna's action, only the necessity for the action and the obedience of his duty.

Thus we see a few integral similarities between the ideas and concepts of Taoism, and of Hinduism, which can help us gain further understanding of each religion individually. We see a divide between a male and female, and between a force of nature and that of man, whose balance affects some all-encompassing force: the Tao, or Brahman. The followers of both bodies of thought must strive to be like this force, and in doing so, may finally gain eternal likeness to it. By examining both faiths, we can more clearly see the reason for the practice, and the purposed gain: the Taoist needs nothing, and sees the root and wonder of everything; the Hindu reaches the infinite way.

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Interpretations of the Gita: Killing Innocent Thousands vs. Freeing a Country

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The relation of sciences to humanities may be stated roughly to be one of means to ends. In our enthusiasm for the means we should not overlook the ends. The concepts of right and wrong do not belong to the sphere of science; yet it is, on the study of the ideas centering round these concepts, that human action and happiness ultimately depend. A balanced culture should bring the two great halves into harmony. The Bhagavad Gita is a valuable aid for the understanding of the supreme ends of life.[1]

The Bhagavad Gita did indeed become a valuable aid for two individuals who played prominent roles on the world's stage. J. Robert Oppenheimer used the Gita's teaching of acting selflessly but effectively in the world to fuel the philosophy that allowed him to reconcile his creation of the atomic bomb and his decision to direct Los Alamos. Contrarily, Mahatma Gandhi used the Gita's teachings to derive his philosophy of ahimsa, or non-violence, teasing out an ethical sense to apply to the context of the national movement. A closer look at both men's lives and thought reveals Oppenheimer's philosophy to hang entirely upon the sphere of science, as he separated himself from the humanitarian ends of his actions, simply focusing on the scientific means. In another vein, Gandhi finds his means to be the practice of ahimsa within the context of a national movement, focusing heavily upon how he fulfills his dharma within the mentality of working for the greater good. Unlike Oppenheimer, Ghandi assumes the ends, as well as the means, to be in his personal interest.

These two opposing interpretations of the Gita provide an interesting commentary both upon the danger of an ambiguous authoritative text and upon the importance of the appropriateness of one's translation of such a timeless text into one's current society. Gandhi provided his country with a mentality that succeeded to achieve its independence, whereas Oppenheimer's misguided actions led his country to commit an atrocity that did not necessarily honor its best interest or the best interest of the world at large.

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[1] S. Radhakrishnan. *The Bhagavad Gita*. (New York: Harpers and Brothers Publishers, 1948), 5.

Oppenheimer distilled his philosophy of the Gita into three words: duty, fate, and faith. Thus, he derived the mindset that his dharma constituted his scientific duty. In traditional Hindu ideology, dharma was not determined only by social class, but also by age and by family relationships. Robert Oppenheimer similarly believed his duty to be defined by his place in society; however, he subjugated social class and family relationships to his profession, training and expertise, believing these identities to be the primary determinants of his dharma. He believed that being a nuclear physicist would determine the actions that he takes as well as those he must not commit.'[2]

Oppenheimer knew that the Manhattan Project would potentially release the danger of nuclear weaponry; however he believed that scientists had the obligation to serve on the project. In November of 1945, he told his workers at Los Alamos that: "If you are scientists, you cannot stop such a thing...If you are a scientist you believe...that it is good to turn over to mankind at large the greatest possible power to control the world and to deal with it according to its lights and values."[3] Oppenheimer displayed the inclination to blindly take potential to its extreme, for the sake of opportunity, rather than heeding moderation and displaying foresight. He believed it to be the duty of the scientist to build the bomb and the duty of the statesman to decide whether or how to use the instrument. He found justification for this conception in his own interpretation of the Gita and thus allowed himself to focus solely upon his work and not its consequences.

Oppenheimer's reasoning finds further explanation by James A. Hijiya: "He was acutely aware of the fascist atrocities that might be stopped by an American atomic bomb...Looking beyond the current conflict, he hoped that the atomic bomb's frightful power would deter future wards and force nations to cooperate instead of fight."[4] This type of rationale exemplifies a key flaw in Oppenheimer's thought process. Without considering this statement from the perspective of history, he throws himself into the narrow belief that science can somehow stop the repetition of history. In his series, *The Wisdom of History*, J. Rufus Fears explains that science and technology do not make us immune to the laws of history. Along with the lust for power, religion and spirituality will continue to be the most profound motivators in human history. Great

[2] James A. Hijiya. *The "Gita" of J. Robert Oppenheimer*. (American Philosophical Society: Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, Vol 144, No 2, June 2000), 136-37.
[3] Hijiya, 137.
[4] Hijiya, 138.

nations, such as Ancient Greece and Rome, will rise and fall because of human decisions made by individual leaders, not because of an advancement of technology. In a way, Oppenheimer's ability to create the bomb and direct its use made him such a leader, though he chose to think of himself merely as an instrument of the government rather than considering his actions from the viewpoint of the common good. In creating the bomb, he partook in the decision to drop it, but he did so without considering anything other than his conception of his personal dharma. Fears points out that we tend to believe the lessons of the past to simply not apply in our advanced age of instant communication, but that this does not hold to be the case, as can be seen in the same misguided belief in 1914. If we create the weapons, they will be used for better or worse.

Klaus Klostermaier further illuminates the subject, stating that dharma is "group-centered and group-oriented." He points out that, "the individual conscience has a role, but it is circumscribed within the consensus formed by good and learned people through the ages. Condemned are those who place their own reasoning above the authority of tradition.[5] In his interpretation of the Gita, Oppenheimer focuses in on one concept, that of dharma, and applies it to his lifestyle in a way not originally intended by tradition. The Gita is a timeless text which does allow for such interpretation, however to be certain of one's correctness, it proves necessary to study the issue from different perspectives. Oppenheimer not only fails to view dharma from a deeper Hindu perspective, but also fails to study history at a length sufficient to understand the danger of his invention. Had he taken a deeper look at dharma as it was portrayed throughout the Vedas, he would have understood that it could not simply be applied to one sector of life but rather constitutes a vital piece of a larger social network, one concentrated and controlled by the Supreme.

The story of Mahatma Gandhi provides a completely different interpretation of the Gita and its concept of dharma, providing a clear alternative to Oppenheimer's theory. An attorney-at-law, Gandhi began his work by confronting racial discrimination in South Africa. He brought his family to South Africa, and for two decades worked for its native Indians, encouraging cleanliness, self-respect, and self-purification as the basis for demanding rights. He unified his thought and action through *Satyagraha*, or truth force, a distinctive form of non-violent resistance which later became his tool for gaining Indian independence from Britain. He campaigned on behalf of workers, women, untouchables, and India's

[5] Hijiya, 133

general economic independence, in the spirit of the Gita's teaching, to have "equal regard for well-wishers, friends, and foes" alike. Gandhi's objective for India became full independence and freedom from foreign domination, as well as the exposure of the exploitation of India under foreign rule.

Gandhi warned against the modern civilization that Oppenheimer promoted, believing a man to be distinguished from other living beings by the way he used his consciousness to come to a certain understanding, judgment and conclusion about his identity and the kind of relationship he had, or should have, with the external world. He believed: "Man must choose either of the two courses, the upward or the downward, but as he has the brute in him he will more easily choose the downward course than the upward, especially when the downward course is presented to him in a beautiful garb." He believed modern civilization to do just this, presenting to man all of the allurement of material comfort and technological advancement, tempting him to remain at the level of the brute.[6]

Gandhi affirms the greatness of man to lie in his ability to harmonize what he has achieved, his dharma, with his quest to the ultimate.[7] He believed that to detach from the fruits of one's actions was not to abandon them. In this vein, his thought appears similar to Oppenheimer's; however, his thought departs in two significant ways. First, Gandhi believed that since contemplated action could go awry and unintended consequences could follow, we need to constantly remain alert, a caution Oppenheimer fails to heed. Second, Gandhi holds an opposing view of dharma.[8]

While Oppenheimer believed his dharma to be determined by his profession, Gandhi found dharma to be based on the truth connotated by the Sanskrit verb, Satya. Satya, meaning truth, is derived from sat, the verb "to be," denoting existence, thus implying a connection between truth and existence. The most fundamental truth then is existence itself. Something truthful therefore is something that is life-affirming. Gandhi thus believed respect for truth to lead to an attitude of "good will towards all life." His ultimate philosophy of ahimsa, or prevailing non-violence,

[6] Roy Ramashray. *Self and Society: A Study in Gandhian Thought.* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1985), 43-47)

[7] Margaret Chatterjee. Gandhi's Religious thought. (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 166.

[8] Chatterjee, 170

thus sprung from such a thought process.[9] Gandhi proclaims, "Our heart and mind must be fixed upon one thing only — truth and ahimsa.[10]

Non-violence and selflessness encompass the basis of Gandhi's conception of dharma. His dharma: "extend[ed] to a response to the needs of another so far as his limited capacities could satisfy it.[11] It was thus in the definition of selflessness that Gandhi and Oppenheimer came to a basic disagreement. Oppenheimer's selflessness was based on the deliverance of the potentialities of his genius to society regardless of the outcome, whereas Gandhi's selflessness was to help others to the greatest extent of his ability and to only act for the eventual betterment of the world at large. They differed in the roles they foresaw for themselves, or in the truths they assigned as their dharma. Oppenheimer focused fully upon the act of creation, while Gandhi not only focused upon his actions as sacrificial, but also included working for the supreme ends of humanity as a sacrificial act.

Gandhi believed: "the dharmas of pity, truth and preservation of high character [to constitute] internal purity, while spinning and wearing khadi were the outer.[12] Therein lies another key difference between Gandhi's thought and that of Oppenheimer. Oppenheimer focused purely upon his outer dharma, the dharma determined by his profession, and allowed this to dictate his inner sense of dharma. Oppenheimer came to peace with his actions; however this seemed to constitute more of an afterthought, rather than an initial peace and purity of heart which then guided his actions. Dissimilarly, Gandhi believed there to be two dharmas, the inner and outer, and that the inner truth should guide outer actions. One's outer sense of dharma, or one's social place and actions, should be guided from the inner dharma, that spark of divinity or truth which resides within each being.

Gandhi believed the Mahabharata and the Gita to each be allegorical, teaching ahimsa since renunciation was impossible without observance of non-violence. The battlefield thus became a metaphor for the constant war within man between the tendencies of the ego and the intuition of the supreme. The Kurukshetra battlefield becomes the soul, the Pandu clan Pure Intelligence, and the Kuru descendents the tendencies related to sense and earthly desires. Arjuna then represents the individual soul and

[9] Mark Juergensmeyer. *Gandhi's Way.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 22-23.
[10] Chatterjee, 22
[11] Chatterjee, 21
[12] Chatterjee, 22

Sri Krishna the supreme soul dwelling in every heart. Thus, the warrior who listens to the advice of the supreme God speaking from within and who vanquishes the many facets of his own ego will ultimately triumph and attain the Highest good. For Gandhi, then, the battle in the Gita has less to do with being applied literally to current wars and becomes more of a didactic allegory.

While Oppenheimer saw the Kurukshetra war as an application to a war against fascism and communism, Gandhi viewed the Gita as merely giving guidelines, from which one could tease out a creative and effective application. As he believed anāsakti, the spirit of renunciation or selflessness, to be as the basis of karma, he would never choose to wage a violent war; however he sometimes recognized its necessity.[13] Thus, another key point which Oppenheimer missed—Appropriateness of one's choices. Gandhi believed that in many instances the truthful, life-affirming choices were obvious to all, but that when the truthful choice was not clear, moderation and appropriateness were necessary tools. Gandhi says: "The Gita regards each person as possessing truth and untruth together: the field of battle is in our own body.[14] He taught that we must wage our fights creatively and effectively, making the effort to fight positively rather than negatively. He furthered this thought by pronouncing: "Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute,[15] consciously separating man's soul from the ego, identifying the soul with ahimsa and the brute with violence.

One finds appropriateness in action by reconciling such actions with both tradition and with one's society, as well as by attempting to choose the best of one's options. One's actions must not only find personal appropriateness, but rather must also be appropriately derived through tradition and to a certain extent agree to socially permitted discourse. Appropriateness becomes how one's belief reconciles with the socially accepted norm. Oppenheimer's idea that his dharma arose from his profession certainly did not agree with the traditional Hindu definition of dharma, as being determined by one's age, family, and society. Oppenheimer simply ignored two categories. Oppenheimer also ignored the inner dharma of one's spark of divinity, which surely would have driven him to more peaceful ends rather than annihilating thousands of innocent people. In the Gita, Krishna claims, "cleanliness, uprightness,

[13] Chatterjee, 36
[14] Chatterjee, 16
[15] Harold Coward. *Indian Critiques of Gandhi.* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 43.

continence, and non-violence" to be the austerities of the body.[16] Oppenheimer clearly ignored both the laws of non-violence and self-restraint (continence) that Krishna preaches. As each man does, he chose to interpret the Gita according to his own personality, selecting passages that suited his needs. However, in doing so, Oppenheimer overlooked important Hindu ideology, attempting to give the Gita's teachings a very Western and personalized bent. Gandhi's interpretations prove to be more in tune with both the needs of his country and with the Hindu tradition.

Gandhi provided a basic stance for gauging truth in an attitude applicable to a wide range of circumstances. He called this attitude of non-violence: "not just harmlessness but a positive state" that allows those who adopt it to disentangle life affirming traits from destructive ones. In some cases, the truthful, life-affirming choice becomes obvious to all. The choice between giving one's money to the poor and buying some useless extravagances reflects such a decision. In other cases, the right choice is not so apparent: for example, when the purchase of something that may seem extravagant, such as a new car, may lead to greater opportunities for social service. Either choice then entails a combination of truth and deception. In such a case, moderation is necessary: purchasing a second-hand vehicle for less money, for instance. "By transcending the need to choose between the original options, we've moved closer to the Truth.[17] Thus Gandhi displays a foresight, sense of moderation, and conception of the larger picture that Oppenheimer lacks. Had Oppenheimer used Gandhi's reasoning, deciding between creating a bomb that could stop future wars or not creating a bomb that could kill innocent millions, he may at the very least have decided to create such a monster with more caution for its uses, perhaps not needing to experiment so heavily upon a city.

Ultimately, Oppenheimer emphasized the "what" and "why" of his duty, but missed the "how" reasoning. He derived his duty to be dictated by his profession, justified this reasoning from the "Gita," but paid little attention to "how" he lived out his dharma, ignoring the fact that an individual can affect his world greatly for better or worse. Oppenheimer assumed himself to be an instrument, with little control or responsibility; however in reality he had no Krishna guiding him. His real guide, according to the Gita, would be the intuition that constitutes his inner divinity and truth; however Oppenheimer acted from an outer sense of

[16] Swami Nikhilananda. *The Bhagavad Gita.* (New York: Ramakrishna- Vivekananda, 1987)
183-184.
[17] Chaterjee, 23.

dharma, mistaking this for an inner truth. He remembered to be a scientist, with the duties and genius of a scientist, but forgot that he should also be characterized by the virtues of a scientist. Gandhi, contrarily, derived his path of ahimsa from paying attention to "how" he lived out his dharma. He not only paid attention to "what" his dharma was, i.e. helping his country, or "why" he should do so, but rather "how" he could do so in a life-affirming manner. This becomes one of the main ideological differences separating the two men.

Gandhi once said, "The characterization of a person has an important bearing on how humanity itself is defined.[18] He believed the heart and its actions to be a microcosm of the universe. Through his acts of cleanliness, ahimsa, and uprightness, Gandhi hoped to create an India that reflected these principles. Contrarily, Oppenheimer said, "that when the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan was already "essentially defeated" and that nuclear weapons were instruments "of aggression, of surprise, and of terror.[19] Thus, he even recognized his own creations to be ones of "terror" and heartlessness. Were his actions to be seen as a metaphor for what he wished his world to become, he would be creating an America that instigated "tenor" and had little compassion for its enemies. Thus, the fights of Oppenheimer and Gandhi exemplify the power that individuals can have in their worlds, Oppenheimer enabling the destruction of Hiroshima and Gandhi freeing a country, as well as the responsibility to one's society that must be taken. Most acutely, however, these two men demonstrate both the danger and promise, respectively, of an open-ended authoritative text.

[18] Ramashray, 40-44
[19] Hijiya, 127.

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Listening to the Silence of the Bhagavad Gita: The actions and actionlessness of the Self-aware

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Be intent on action,
not on the fruits of action;
avoid attraction to the fruits
and attachment to inaction!

Perform actions, firm in
discipline,
relinquishing attachment;
be impartial to failure and
success—
this equanimity is called
discipline.
(Bhagavad Gita, II, 47-48)

Introduction

The *Bhagavad Gita,* one of the most revered religious texts of India, has led readers and listeners along a religious and spiritual journey since its construction. The journey travels along the path to becoming Self-aware, when one becomes one with Brahman which is the ultimate goal. The text of the *Bhagavad Gita* is the instruction manual for achieving this desired end. It is written as the story of Sri Krishna guiding Arjuna through decisions that must be made on the battlefield against Arjuna's kin and gurus. Sri Krishna's instructions not only befuddle Arjuna, but also the reader of the *Gita.*

During our Fourth Block course on the *Bhagavad Gita* with Professor Penumala, our class struggled much in the beginning of the course with understanding precisely how one, once Self-realized, is to act in this reality. With the initial introduction to being detached to actions and detached from this world in order to become Self-aware (Nikam, 1953, Bhagavad Gita, II, 48), we as a class questioned how it is possible to still exist in this world if so un-attached. It was at this point in class that we all began to question the

seriousness or applicability of this famous text. In my personal class notes, I had asked, "How have people in our reality followed the *Gita* when, what it proposes as the path to enlightenment is so inconceivable?" As we progressed with the *Bhagavad Gita*, we learned through Sri Krishna's instructions that to reach the ultimate end, action is indeed necessary. It is action, a natural result of Prakriti, that allows one to exist in this world and be enlightened (Bhagavad Gita, III, 5-7). Sri Krishna specified that it is most efficacious to do so through karmayoga (Van Buitenen, 1968). The reader of the *Gita* begins to understand that karmayoga is action performed with devotion, and such acts must be those of one's own dharma.

It is on the issue of actions and dharma that this paper is centered. Stemming from the questions that were raised in class and in my own mind, I write with the intention of exploring how Self-awareness is reached through acting and following one's dharma both in the *Gita* itself and in reality.

Sinful Acts that are Dharma

At the beginning of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna throws down his arrow as he is overwhelmed with grief. He cannot bring himself to kill his kin, gurus and friends. A reader of the *Gita* may take pity on Arjuna, since killing any person is considered sinful or immoral. One learns, however, that in the context of following one's dharma, it is not sinful. The *Gita* opens the door to a plethora of actions that can occur as one strives for Self-awareness.

> Even if you are the most sinful of
> sinners,
> Yet by the raft of Knowledge alone
> will you be borne over all sin.
> (Bhagavad Gita, IV, 36)

As long has your own dharma is followed, not another's, it is pure action.

> Better is one's own dharma
> though imperfectly performed
> than the dharma of another well
> performed.
> Better is death in the doing of one's
> own dharma:
> the dharma of another is fraught with
> peril.

(Bhagavad Gita, III, 35)

From here, students of the *Gita* can justify the acts of war. Arjuna's dharma is to kill his kin on the battlefield. Similarly, in our reality, it can be interpreted that perhaps it is one's dharma to perform in war.

> "The Gita reminds us that a war is
> never fought for material gains or
> political power, but for upholding
> dharma, the moral order that sustains
> individual and social lives at once.
> The Bharata war, then, was not won
> by the Pandavas but by dharma; their
> sole credit was that they helped
> sustain it against such heavy odds in a
> manner that best befitted the
> descendants of Bharata"
> (Chandran, 2007, p. 54).

It is this affirmation of war acts justified by the *Gita* as following one's dharma that allows one in this reality, or world, to seek Self-awareness and possibly attain it.

T.S. Eliot is known for his allusions to the *Bhagavad Gita*, and in his poem, "To the Indians," he alludes to the *Gita's* philosophy of performing one's dharma in the context of war:

> A man's destination is not his destiny,
> Every country is home to one man
> And exile to another. Where a man
> dies bravely
> At one with his destiny, that soil is
> his.
> Let his village remember.
> (Eliot 11–15, CP 231)

. . . *action*

> None the less fruitful if neither you
> nor we
> Know, until the judgment after death,

> What is the fruit of action.
> (Eliot 19–22, CP 231)

Here Eliot is addressing the trust and devotion a soldier has for his/her ruler and land, and has in the concluding lines of the poem, "aligned dharmic philosophy with the exigencies of imperialist politics" (Chandran, 2007, p. 61). T.S. Eliot is an example of how the *Gita's* philosophy can be molded to fit something as vastly different as imperialist politics.

The Right Mind for Action

As one reads into the *Gita*, how to follow one's dharma without being overwhelmed by the actions and the results of one's actions, a necessary state of mind is understood. Nikhilananda comments on Verse 38 of Chapter Two of the *Bhagavad Gita*, "It is desire for and attachment to the result of an action that create bondage; but when an action is performed without any such desire, it leads to freedom of the soul" (Nikhilananda, 1944, p. 83). Detachment from his actions on the battlefield is what will allow Arjuna to follow his dharma. Detachment is a state of the mind, and with this realization the student of the *Gita* moves from karmayoga into jnanayoga, knowledge of the atman through restraining one's senses with his/her mind (Bhagavad Gita, III, 7).

This idea of a clear mind and controlled intellect follows the 'Vedic approach to natural law of the *Bhagavad-Gita*.' The Vedic approach "emphasizes the full development of a universal aspect of human nature—consciousness—to promote right action. A healthy person with a developed intellect, clear mind, balanced emotions and full perception is best placed to fulfill his or her society's highest ideals of ethical and lawful conduct" (King, 2003, p. 399). This is a concept we as a class more fully understood on our last day of class (December, 15, 2008) when Professor Penumala explained how our minds, physically, reflect our actions. For example, upon scanning the brain of a chain smoker or alcoholic, more holes are apparent than would be in the scan of a person not afflicted by such addictions, which can explain an addict's lapses into anger.

Now the student of the *Gita* understands that actions of devotion involve following only one's own dharma and these actions must be committed in the right state of the mind, detached and free from the senses.

Acts following Virtue Ethics or Duty Ethics?

As it becomes difficult for the student of the *Gita* to decipher what is right action and right mind, one can question the overall ethics of the *Gita*. Is the *Gita* indeed virtuous, or is it only promoting a commitment to duty? After learning how acts that may seem likes sins are not sinful if committed in an act of following one's dharma, a student can consider the ethics of the *Gita* to be cold and heartless. In the last chapters of the *Gita*, however, the student is subject to the virtue ethics of the *Gita*:

> The Lord said: Fearlessness, purity of heart,
> Steadfastness in knowledge and yoga;
> Charity, self-control, and sacrifice;
> Study of the scriptures, austerity, and uprightness;
>
> Non-violence, truth and freedom from anger;
> Renunciation, tranquility, and aversion to slander;
> Compassion to beings and freedom from covetousness;
> Gentleness, modesty, and absence of fickleness;
>
> Courage, forgiveness, and fortitude;
> Purity, and freedom from malice and overweening pride –
> These belong to him who is born with divine treasures.
> (Bhagavad Gita, XVI, 1-3)

What makes it difficult to differentiate between virtue and duty ethics within the *Gita* is how "in Hindu ethics the term "dharma" is used for both "duty" and "virtue" (Gupta, 2006, p. 394). It is this fact that allows the student to understand why Krishna instructs Arjuna in ways that are both virtuous and

pursuing duty. These two teachings of dharma that Arjuna learns can be divided as subjective and objective dharmas, with "the subjective dharma concerned with inner purification, purification of the mind, inner discipline"...and "the objective dharma concerned with duties, including universal or common duties and those duties that depend on a person's particular position in society and stage of life" (Gupta, 2006, p. 394). It is this division of dharma that can lead to drastically different interpretation on how one should act when striving for Self-awareness.

Attaining Self-awareness in This World

There is an innumerable amount of students of the *Gita*, and I attempt to explore the actions of several characters and people as a means to understand the varying approaches there are in interpreting how one, attaining Self-awareness in this world, should act. I begin with Herman Hesse's character Siddhartha. It is well documented that Herman Hesse's book, *Siddhartha*, was heavily influenced by the *Bhagavad Gita* (Timpe, 1970). Hesse "invites his readers to identify their quests for an integral inner life with that endless struggle for self-realization in which the successive characters of his works are engaged" (Timpe, 1970, p. 346).

> "He sought knowledge, not after he had learned right action, but as he was learning it. With action and desire for knowledge he began his career. Throughout, the action was sustained and refined, although it became progressively less dominant as he approached his goal. In order to act without attachment and to discover the Self, he threw off the bondage of relatives ... he acted, but not always truly. Because he had not yet discovered the nature of true action, he acted in accordance with the dictates of his ego and his senses; he acted without sacrifice ... His first main action was egoistic. How could he presume to destroy the Self, or to discover it by worldly means? ... He learned to despise the activities of life,

> it is true, but it was not understanding of life that led to this attitude; rather, it was egoistic pride in belonging to the elite group of the purposely impoverished. His "sacrifice" was meaningless. He renounced nothing but the material, he remained the motivating agent, he acted only for the fruits of his own actions. He performed the rite, as he had obscurely known he should, but he failed because he did not understand its meaning" (Timpe, 1970, p. 353).

Siddhartha was trying desperately to attain enlightenment, or Self-awareness, while still existing in this world. He understood that detachment was necessary to perform one's dharma and that the performing one's dharma is necessary for attaining Self-awareness. Through much trial and error, he learned that the path of the dharma of others, was the wrong path. And so it is through Herman Hesse's character of Siddhartha that readers of the *Gita* learn of another student, outside of Arjuna, that has sought and attained Self-awareness in this world.

Now I explore an example of a 20th century student of the *Gita* performing actions in this world in pursuit of Self-awareness. J. Robert Oppenheimer, the mastermind behind the atomic bomb, was a devout student of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Oppenheimer is a disconcerting example of a student performing actions following one's dharma. As a scientist constructing the atomic bomb, he was fully aware of the destruction it would cause. Knowing the horrific consequences that designing such weaponry could have did not affect Oppenheimer, as "he believed that scientists, as scientists, had an obligation to serve on the project" (Hijiya, 2000, p. 137) and he was quoted saying, "If you are a scientist, you cannot stop such a thing.... If you are a scientist you believe ... that it is good to turn over to mankind at large the greatest possible power to control the world and to deal with it according to its lights and values" (Hijiya, 2000, p. 137). It is readily apparent that Oppenheimer was following his dharma specifically as a scientist, for he had often pronounced how "it was the duty of the scientist to build the bomb, but it was the duty of the statesman to decide whether or how to use it" (Hijiya, 2000, p. 137). Oppenheimer is an example of how a

student of the *Gita* may take to heart how even if an act may be sinful, as long as one is following one's dharma, it is okay to commit. Oppenheimer chose to ignore the subjective dharma the *Gita* teaches. He chose the ethics of duty over the ethics of virtue.

My final example of a student of the *Gita* to help understand the actions of those pursuing Self-awareness in this world is Gandhi. It is alleged that Gandhi accepted karmayoga as the essence of the *Gita* (Brown, 1985). He believed sacrifice, an act of devotion, to be a necessary element of one's life, that liberation from the cycle of birth and death is attainable through physical action, and that violence of any kind is not to be considered an act of devotion or duty (Brown, 1985). When Sri Krishna instructs Arjuna to perform violence, is the point in the Gita where Gandhi did not follow the teachings or philosophy of the *Gita.* Gandhi chose to follow the virtue ethics of the *Gita*, and never excused a sinful act of violence as a means of following one's dharma.

Conclusion

This paper is the product of my own confusion as I attempted to interpret how the *Bhagavad Gita* guides one to act in *this* world as a means of attaining Self-awareness. As expected, this ancient religious text can be interpreted in numerous ways by the students that read it. The results of the varying interpretations can be as drastically different as those of J. Robert Oppenheimer's and Mahatma Gandhi's. Interpretations are founded on the distinction of subjective and objective dharma. Whether one follows the virtue ethics or duty ethics of the *Gita* is another means of interpretation. If the student is willing to commit violent or sinful acts if they believe it to be their dharma, is another determining path in following the *Gita's* philosophy. Thus, no list of preferred actions exists within the *Bhagavad Gita* for a student of the *Gita* as they pursue Self-awareness because it is solely up to the student to construct the list.

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

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