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The Pseudo-Secularization of Hindutva and its Campaign for Uniform Civil Codes

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The continuing presence of the Muslim in India, in spite of the partition is a symbol of the 'failure' of the Indian nation. That presence is a sign of a lingering disease, a psychotic split to be precise, in the discourse of Indian nationalism between the "secular" and the "properly Hindu". This sense of failure is what Partha Chatterjee calls an unresolved contradiction between the (post)colonial nation's (European) enlightenment project and its nativist consciousness of difference. That difference is inscribed in the discourse of communalism which was introduced during the Raj and used by the colonial state, then by the Muslim League; and the major Indian nationalist factions carried it into independent India to put limits, if not brakes, on the dominance of secularism. The paradox is that there has been *at least* two senses of secularism operative within the Indian nationalist discourses: and both have been seen as the *cause célèbre* or the failure of the Indian nation, while both claim to represent the *'true nation'*. More pertinent though, it is the hermeneutics, including an intervention in moral governance and juridical processes, that puts the respective claims into practice in real politik. And this is my concern here.

Nationalism , or the ferment built around the desire for a nation-state that breaks away from the chaotic patterns of traditional governance or domination by outside forces, is a modern creation; as is communalism, that divides people into monolithic religious communities - 'Hindu', 'Muslim'; 'majority', 'minority' -- both owe their emergence in India to orientalism and colonialism.

[van der Veer, p. 19: The British did not invent the communities, rather their classification – on a par with the discourse of caste following the census of 1872 – and use in political representation] Secularism, in the Enlightenment sense of the separation of religion and state is another of modernity's export.

Nationalism of any kind is usually desirous of a homogenous nation, reclaims nativism, chants to the demands of its populace or manipulates its desires, seeks to empower different segments of society (usually the youth), demands loyalty and allegiance to a single cause, and condemns those at the margins of difference as basically irrational and immoral. A fledgling Hindu nationalism, apprehensive of its own marginalization under both the colonial state and, later, the secular nationalist's stigma of Hindu communalism, would place itself in the interstices of the variant political nuances, claiming that both have reached their limits and are therefore 'pseudo' (*banawati*), meaning, 'pretend only', and hence hide a failure.

Put it another way, Hindu nationalism turns the coat or dhoti of secularism inside out, and points to the obfuscation over the precise interpretation of what this entails in the Indian context – and this is nowhere more apparent than in the pervasive polemic of 'pseudo-secularism' that Sangh Parivar and in particular Bharatiya Janata Party leadership have all too readily utilized in criticizing the nation's serious lapse in not being able to deal with its 'other'. But this polemic is made possible to a large extent by the inherent ambiguity in the very concept of 'secularism' and, more significantly, its apparent failure in the Indian context. This claim is not original to the Hindu right or the ideologues of a strident Hindutva.

The version of secularism that has failed, as scholars such as Ashis Nandy, T N Madan, Mushirul Hasan, and Pratap Banu Mehta have argued, is one that seeks to distance religion and collective religious aspirations from the political structuration and legal processes of a society in a multicultural and pluralist environment. This was an impossible project for India. As Mushiral Hasan observes: 'Delinking of state and religion remains a distant dream; secularization of state and society an ideal.' (1994, 'Minority Identity and Its Discontents', *South Asian Bulletin,* Vol XIV No 2, p. 26). But secularism, in the nuances taken on board by the Constitution makers and markers, adverts to a healthy diversity and harmony of all religions, *ceteris paribus*. What the term 'pseudo-secularism' undergirds then is a convoluted attack on both nuances; and to an extent *rightly* so. The former nuance – a legacy of the Enlightenment - is being seriously undermined in world politics; and it was never true of pre-British India and much of the Christian and Islamic principles of governance.

The Indian society is basically religious, historically and continuing into the vanishing present. The latter nuance is shown to be rather weak in the face of real challenges, short-changing of religious rights, etc., in the state's agenda for tighter political control and an uneven economic liberalization. In the climate of communalization, any group in control or through certain manipulative machination could engender a situation of insufferable compromises to the religious freedom, rites and rights of another group, while at the same time placing the onus of the Constitutionally-nuanced project of secularization on the doormat of the weak-kneed state which for its part abrogates the executive responsibility of reining in harmony and culture of toleration. As I will demonstrate, this is precisely the argument used in the show of force with which the charge of 'pseudo-secularization' is meted out by the ideologues of Hindutva. They are the ones on the loosing end, the slippery slope of the secularizing promise, it's their religious freedom that has been severely compromised, and so on. Appeasing the minority communities is communalism abetted by Nehruvian 'pseudo-secularism'.

The idea of secularism that prescribes a complete separation of church/religion and state had much appeal in the elite fragments of the nationalist freedom movement, for which Nehru has been accorded most credit. The Constituent Assembly on the other hand was all too cognizant of the diversity of the highly politicized religious communities, and so its recommended draft Constitution reflected a series of accommodations and compromises on the design of the secular state and the normative order. It reasoned that a state can in principle be secular but its disposition towards the society made up of divergent religious community could be one of (principle #1) toleration, regulatory neutrality and reformative justice (principle #2) (see Dhawan, p. 311). And a corollary to this would be a careful calibration of an active rather than a passive principle (#3) of 'religious freedom' which covers a range of liberties, including the right to beliefs, rituals, religious institutions, and non-discrimination on grounds of religion, race, and gender. Nevertheless, on substantive issues, such as for example the extant and manner of religious reform, social welfare, caste justice, gender issues, education, the Constitution chose to remain silent or 'neutral' and at best relegated these to either the perfunctory articles under the Fundamental Rights or to the unenforceable Directive Principles. Still, with Indira Gandhi's addition to the Preamble, ironically, of the very hitherto absent place-marker (with the term) 'secular', there could be no argument, in principle, that the nation was ready to make a firm commitment to an inclusive and mutually tolerable co-existence of

different faith-traditions, thereby affording respect to the Articles in the *Adhikarapatra* that enshrine and protect the right of each religious community to profess, propagate its own faith and, by being free to establish places of worship, educational institutions and self-sufficient procedural means, realize its own values and aspirations.

It is here that the Hindutva Parivar and political cohorts have focused their attention in isolating a single group as the cause of this failure, and are grieved that even as the majority populace its own religious rites/rights, representation, preferences and needs are not being honoured by the secular state, nor respected by the minority community (or that there is some kind of collusion between the two, as in the heydays of the Congress rule, the Communist interlude, hybrids in the South, and so on.

Even more than the political shifts, or stagnation, or back-firing, one platform on the national scenario that is likely to sustain and feed the continuance and re-growth of the Hindutva ideology is the silent symptom in the nation's alleged pseudo-secularism, namely, Uniform Civil Code, or its absence. The question of common civil law covering all citizens doubtless occupies centre-stage in any discussion of community identity or gender justice (Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon 2005, p. 7), but it takes a more saffron shade under the *diya* (lamp) of Hindu nationalism. Hence you had Anglo-Muhammandan Law and Anglo-Hindu Law; and Christian and Parsis retained their own Personal Laws.

A brief note first on the genealogy of Personal Law [PL] more broadly. Personal Law in India constitutes a legacy from the British Raj (since Warren Hastings actually) when a hybrid system of Law based on an egregious bifurcation of extant mores, customs and textual into the 'public' and 'private' was instituted. Public codes governed fairly uniformly the criminal and certain civil codes, in commerce, public safety and security and services and welfare, and so on. Laws applicable to the private sphere of morality, which largely govern what is nowadays called Family Law, but inclusive of property rights within family, were brought under Personal Law. Personal Law would then govern marriage, fiduciary partnerships, divorce, maintenance, inheritance, succession, and adoption. The jurisdiction of Personal Law remained strictly within the community's own continuing customary, scriptural, communal and traditional legal practices. The legislature and civil courts would thread on this institution with utmost care and caution, and their jurisdiction was restricted to only those matters or disputes that were brought under the communities' provisions, dispensation or exemption within Personal Law (property

distribution in an extended family upon death of the father or husband), or litigated under the Criminal or Penal Code where there is a real threat to the life and livelihood of an individual within a family dispute (e.g. enforced vagrancy following a divorce or denial of coparcenary entitlement). Hence there was the Anglo-Hindu Law for Hindus,

Along with the Penal Codes of the previous two centuries this system has survived with some modifications into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and it has been a source of much anguish, strife, and debate in post-independent India. Personal law of Hindus have been largely codified, i.e. traditional laws are reconfigured in the light of secular humanitarian standards via the so-called Hindu Code Bill (1955-57). Thus the Hindu Marriage Act,1955, reins in prohibition against the practice of bigamy. Hindu Succession Act, gave widows right to absolute maintenance, and daughters the right to inherit. Family courts had also been set up. While the Hindu Code eased the pressures on divorce and marital difficulties, property rights and inheritance among Hindus, it created other barriers and difficulties -- Ambedkar resigned from Parliament in his disillusionment -- for it did not override the proclivities of caste, patriarchy and race under *Mitakshara* law. For example, under Hindu law, sons can claim an independent share in the ancestral property, but the daughter's share is based on the share received by the father. Hence a father can effectively disinherit a daughter by renouncing his share of the ancestral property, but the son will continue to have a share in his own right. Additionally, married daughters, even those facing marital harassment, have no residential rights in the ancestral home[1] remained ambivalent over issues such as the inheritance rights of tribal women, copacenary rights in matrilineal communities, widow re-marriage among certain caste Hindus and so on, not to mention being unable to weed out the practice of *sati*, dowry, bride harassment, child marriage, and continuing bigamous practices among Hindu men, and a few other anomalous remnants from the medieval times. And just who counts and does not count as 'legal Hindu' is also a matter of some debate: should the Code apply unequivocally to Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, and tribals (such as of Nagaland, without exemptions as an after-thought?) Careful case studies have shown that Hindus, particularly in rural area, remain largely ignorant of the Hindu Code Bill or the Special Acts and continue to follow localized legal traditions, such as Mitakshara, Deobarg and so on. The State for its part also fosters patriarchal relations in negotiating political power and global capitalism (Basu, 1. 180). Hence the tension between

[1] I got this from Carol S. Coonrad, 'Chronic Hunger and the Status of Women in India', www.thp.org/reports/indiawom.htm.

'tradition' versus 'modernity' cuts both ways, and it does not augur for a movement toward sanguine common code. And it was the Hindu nationalists and secularists who foiled many opportunities to effect comprehensive gender equity on the grounds of preserving patriarchy (Parashar 1002, Basu in Larson p. 164)

Nevertheless, in the eyes of the Hindu nationalists, Hindu Personal Law is far ahead for its time, it is much secularized and this reformative feat has been achieved indeed at almost a 'civilizational' cost, implying – and here is the rub – the minority religious communities continue to enjoy the glories of their own archaic and unsecularized PL, and the secularist vote bankers support in particular the Muslims and Christian through a forged hermeneutic of the Fundamental Rights, ignoring the mandate of the Constituent Assembly (Article 44 under the Directive Principle) of the State to move the society towards "uniform civil code". It must be emphasized however, that this non-juridical directive does not say the State should univocally legislate or enact the UCC in the fashion of Justinian Roman Law or the Napoleanic Code, but through gradual reform and initiatives undertaken by the communities concerned. As we see with Hindu Code Bill, this is a step in that direction, but codification, and specially under a universalist strain – that is, locating a common denominator in terms of justice and equity, across all religious communities,-- may simply be consolidatory rather than reformative "on the ground". (Dhawan p. 317)

These are then just some of the quiddities, quandaries and challenges that any intelligent observer should be aware of, and Gary Larson has brought together some of these in an anthology on *Religion and Personal Law in Secular India,* with a succinct introduction.

Returning to the Hindutva imagined charge sheet, the claim is that PL of Muslims and Christians and Parsee is a system alien to the majoritarian ethos and the larger trajectory of nation-building: *a unified nation with a common code.* And why should the Hindus alone have to bare the burden of the regulatory and reformative agenda under the watchful eyes of the secular state, bent on secularization every aspect of Hindu faith and life, while the Muslim is exempted and is a willing claimant to the Constitutional license to continue with their own religiously sanctioned social practices, customs, and laws?

Indeed, this sort of qualm had reared its head quite a few times, in the Maha Sabha assembly, in the writings of Savarkar and Golwalker, with the passing of the Muslim Sharia't Act in 1937. It had exacerbated the debate in the Constitutional Assembly on a three-way divide, between those who, like Ambedkar, desired a uniformity of codes across all communities – religious,

caste, non-castes – those like Nehru who while they desired uniformity of codes thought India was not developed enough to adopt such a fully-secular judicial system, and in any event it is better to reform Hindu PL and worry about the minorities later; and those among the Hindu nationalists, such as Munshi, who favoured its continuation in self interest but feared its consequences and implicit abetting of communalism. What could tame the flagrant communal Muslim?

I wish to dwell a little on the last ambivalence by going back to the genesis of the Hindutva discourse and highlighting for background effect the kinds of attitude that prevailed and were fostered, seeded and festered, that demonstrates a long-standing proclivity that in some ways has informed and directed the debate over distinctive Personal Laws in India. And I will call this political voice 'The Sangh'[2] (comprising at the helm RSS the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), a breakaway from the Hindu Sabha, was founded in Nagpur, Maharashtra, in 1925. Its ideologues are V D Savarkar (who gave the term 'Hindutva'), K B Hedgevar , Balasaheb Deoras, and M S Golwalker, succeeded by Rajendra Singh, who launched Sangh Parivar ('family organisations' or network of Hindu rightist groups), to which were inducted Jan Sangh (now deunct), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Kar Sevaks, Bajrang Dal, Shiva Sena and a splintering of various saffron shades. One of its main activities from inception has been to impart para-military training and ideological indoctrination (Bacchetta, 204, p. 6). It founded two political parties: Jan Sangh (now defunct) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and has representations in the other major parties (NDA), with infiltrations into Communists and Muslim factions, ADMK, and other parties in the South.

From its inception the infiltrative, and in some ways both volatile and clandestine, the Sangh Parivar has maintained – as if it has the mandate to speak

[2] The Sangh defines its goal in spiritual terms, namely, to 'unify' Hindus, and 'build' their character – essential Hindu 'self' (swayam) in order to 'resurrect' (by helping as a sevak) the Hindu nation (Rashtriya) Rajya, in the form of Ram Rajya, the State, is added later more by the political groups, like BJP). (See, Golwalker's *We, Our Nationhood Defined,* 1939; (Ibid, p6, p. 102). Parallel to this male dominated Sangh is the Rahstra Sevika Samiti, founded in Wardha in 1936, by Hedgevar and Lakshmibai Kelkar, predominantly to uplift the status of Hindu women. The absence of any reference to Muslims in the early literature of Sangh and Samiti (apart from Sarvakar's decisive exclusion of Muslims for their supposed inallegiance to the *pitrabhumi*, fatherland), is also their way of erasing of the Muslim identity, since it has no right to be right ascendants or heirs (i.e. the future carriers of the genes of the Hindu race -- which smacks of Nazi Aryanism). Or it returns in the form of the *Muslim problem*. Let us explore this trope a little.

for all Hindus - that Hindu men and Hindu women, their rights and dignities, their families and their space, have to be protected. Protected from whom? Who is the other, the threat? Amongst the others are mainly Muslim women and Muslim men respectively, and the state, for reasons gone over earlier.. The presumption is that the Hindu family is an intact unit, governed by moral norms, *dharma* (and as a Unified Hindu Family they can have dual tax accounts and exemptions); while the Muslim family is a loose entity, where women's honour is not respected and men practice polygamy, talaq (unilateral divorce), prostitution, sex slave trade, and they attempt to lure Hindu women into their havelis or harams as well. The masjid stands as a symbol of Muslim male sexual aggression (ibid p. 29). The Muslim women are also promiscuous and they desire Hindu men. (Kelkar 1988, chp 1,); or they are inversions of Hindu women. One solution to this delinquent presence is to absorb (some say, re-absorb) the Muslim into the 'naturally universal' Hindu ethnicity, or one among the *varna-vyavastha*, caste orders: Allah is merely one God among the myriad pantheon of Hindu gods. This inclusiveness may be sanguine and genuine, but it de-historicizes the Muslim, and denies difference. What comes to mark Hindu nationalism, particularly post-independent, is not the concept of 'difference' but of the designated Other; without the other there may not be much to build Hindu nationalism upon. Much of the contemporary discourse then on the construction of Hindu male and female identity, and of Hindu dharma and Hindutva ideology at large, is bricked on the antithesis of the "muslimness' "musalmani", "miyan" [Modhi's favoured trope] i.e. the essentialised and disturbing Muslim embodiment, rhizome.

When this imaginary is transposed on to the Personal Law debate, some interesting representations and re-constructions and contradictions follow. Since Muslim women are oppressed by Muslim male, particularly in the practices of polygamy, talaq, relinquishing of maintenance, retaining the mehr or asking for excessive dowry after marriage, allowing child or under-aged marriage under the unregulated *nikah* practice, their emancipation is desirable. And so it supported the amendment to the Indian Penal Code (Section 95) which would outlaw polygamy (even though the practice is as rife among Hindu men). (Ibid 107-108). Yet, curiously, it expresses sympathy with the 'victimised" Muslim men on a par with the powerlessness of all male, Hindu men included, by women and their sexual prowess: all men must unite and resist the women whose domain of action is rightly domestic affairs. But Muslim women encourage polygamy and polyandry among men.

The Sangh's most explicit and vociferous stance on Muslim PL that

propelled a campaign for UCC, surfaced in the aftermath of the famous 1985 Shah Bano case. Here a 75 year Muslim woman's petition for increasing the amount of maintenance from her ex-husband was upheld and judged in her favor under the Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (Cr Pr.C) - that prevents vagrancy due to destitution, desertion or divorce. The husband's argument was that the claim is in violation of MPL provisions as inscribed in Islamic law, he provided evidence from statements made by the MPLB (Muslim Personal Law Board). In the landmark judgment Justice Chandrachud pronounced, presumably, *obiter dicta,* that the judgement was consistent with Qur'anic injunction [he cited two verses from the Qur'an] in respect of the right of a woman to be properly maintained by their divorcing husband. [The verses were provided by Danial Latifi, the lawyer who represented Shah Bano along with Sona Khan.] The bench also remarked on the desirability of moving towards common code.

There was a nation-wide uproar. While progressive Muslims declared it was consistent with the Qur'an; the conservative Muslim orthodoxy was up in arms for this beaconed the death forever of MPL; feminists and progressives, communists and hard-core secularists, welcomed this as a step in the direction of women's rights (Bocchetta p. 122). And they unwittingly banded together with Hindu nationalists to attack the principle of communal personal law itself, calling instead for uniform civil code, which the Muslim community remained opposed to. The ulema issued a fatwa against the Apex Court's judgement, and the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi panicked. Opposing the judicial verdict became the cornerstone of its policy of appeasing Muslim clerics who, he believed, controlled the minority votes for ever. He did not listen to the most rational Muslim voice in his own Parliament in support of the judgement, and instead responded by hurriedly passing the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill, to "specify the rights of Muslim divorced women at the time of divorce" that effectively barred the Muslim women from access to the Cr Cpr Cd for redress after divorce; she has to bring her case and grievances under MPL, unless her marriage was under secular civil code. A non-converted Hindu woman married to a Muslim man in a nikah ceremony and divorced would face the same constraints.

The Hindu nationalists were incensed at the retrogressive intervention by the state on what was a judicial pronouncement to circumvent MPL. As Baccetta notes: 'Although they took the same position as progressives and feminists their underlying motives differ(ed) sharply. The progressives and feminists sought to defend women's rights, and they favoured the enactment of a secular uniform

civil code. The RSS's motive was to divide Muslims along gender lines, and to use Muslim women to denigrate Muslim men.' (p. 123) And so they played the card of majority-minority relations and identity politics.

The rhetoric itself had its high moments and seeming promises: The "unfortunate slaves" and "sacrificial goats" that Muslim women are, victimized by their "backward" male counterparts, placed behind the purdah, and subjected to repudiation, talaq, vagrancy, polygamy, and child marriage, must be saved and their rights protected from any religious law. (*Organiser*, various cited in ibid p 124). RSS's *Organiser* pointed out that Muslim women 'can't inherit', 'can't divorce,', 'can't get maintenance', and cannot benefit from the Hindu Marriage and Divorce Act. There has to be real empowerment, education, employment and enlightenment for Muslim women. One such means – perhaps the only concrete solution offered – was the common civil code, an all-in-one panacea for such historical injustices.

To that end, Murli Mahonar Joshi when he was at the helm of the BJP, commissioned, and possibly since he is a scholar of the classics himself penned, a model of common civil code. In spirit it was a re-write of an earlier such template issued by the Law Commission of India Planning Board shortly after the Shah Bano judgment, though it would be uniformly Hindu rather than secular civil code.

But is there really a commitment to women's right across the communal groups, 'community-ships'? In the Hindu Code Bill debates of the 1940s and 1950s, the Hindu nationalists (RSS in particular) opposed granting of unilateral rights to women, and it was even opposed to the Hindu Marriage and Divorce Act on the grounds that it compromised the Hindu identity and racial purity. It opposed the Hindu Law of Succession which allowed women to inherit, for it signifies a return to the 'matriarchal family'. While on the one hand it maintained that the State had no right to intervene in family affairs – a patriarchal proclivity it shares with the AIMPLB and the mullas, and therein the elitist collusion – when the call came from women's groups, such as Saheli and National Federation of Indian Women (c.1986), and the Muslim Women's Forum, on the coat-tails of the Shah Bano case, it was the male right that staked the claim over women who were Muslims, and gave both an opportunity to divide Muslims in terms of gender, and show support as it were to the weaker sex, so they could stand up to Muslim men. In effect, this was no defence of women's rights. (ibid p.125). In the pamphlet it issued: *The Shah Bano Case; Nation Speaks Out* (1986), - had no articles by women, and each (male) excerpted author denounced Muslim fundamentalism; there was really no

discussion of women's rights across the communal boundaries.

Finally, the Sangh Parivar, and its political wings such as the BJP, has shown, little to no sensitivity to the feelings of the Muslims on this matter, nor have they canvassed the variety of positions, views, opinions that might, and does, prevail in the Muslim community on the issue of PL. Like its own hierarchical self-reference, its seeks out the voice of orthodoxy in the Muslim community and engages in a tug-of-war with just that entity, notably, the burly Imams and muftis of Jamiya al-Ulama, and Shahabuddin of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), and Jama Masjid's Shahi Imam, Sayed Ahmed Bukhari . It serves their purpose to show how stubborn, tradition-bound, archaic and recalcitrant the Muslims are, resistant to any kind of progress, reform, and unification with the juridical and legal processes of the nation – in tatters partly for that reason. This has been true in the deliberations and imbroglio over Ayodhya. And indeed the two issues are linked. There is no conversation or dialogue for instance with stalwarts of Muslim reformists who have followed the tradition of Jamaluddin Afghani, Mohammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, Syed Ahmad and Abul Kalam Azad, Zakir Hussein; instead the monologues take place with perceived adversaries of the unified juridical cause for the calculated outcome, and those discredited with some association with Muwdudi, Deobandhis, and plain 'mulla-culture', or 'miya populism' as Modhites refer to them: 'All Muslims are not terrorist; but all terrorists are Muslims!" howls the loud-speaker in a public gathering in Ahmedabad, drowning the call to prayer from the Mosque the other side of the maidaan. And even the modernist-secularist voices among the Muslim intelligentsia are not heeded to -, such as Maulana Wahiduddin, Imtiaz Ahmad, Zarina Bhatty, Syeda Hameed, Sona Khan, Tahir Mahmood, Aiyid Hamid, Anwar Ali Khan, Rehana Sultana, Seema Mustafa, Ali Asgar Engineer, each of whom have been pained to address the shortcomings of the MPL as inherited from the Raj days and are too aware of the injustices, gender inequity and other disparities that bedevil the effective and just execution of MPL. There are prominent Muslims who belong to the BJP ranks, such as Muktar Abbas Naqvi and Hysna Subhan, who express the same concerns. As noted earlier, its was a Muslim Parliamentarian and a close confident of Rajiv Gandhi who defended the supreme Court verdict based on Cr Pr Code rather than on M P L and thus was opposed to the Bill introduced by Rajiv Gandhi's government. It may be a procedural matter, it may be legislative matter, it may even be a Constitutional matter; but the resolutions cannot be forthcoming without cool-headed dialogue and initiatives for reform, amendments and reparations from within the community (that is another part of

the story, in which I am involved as a scholar-activist, time does not allow us to go into here). A number of alternative strategies are being explored by Muslim Women's groups and a network of social workers, Muslim women advocates, and intellectuals at regular "Meets", and seminars. With a little bit of encouragement and rethinking among the clerics also, in one instance, the conservative Ahl-i-Hadith school in June 1993 declared that it was un-Islamic to pronounce *talaq* thrice in one sitting (Hasan, p.31; after the Allahabad High decision). Islamic jurisprudence is not static, and a number of modernizing Muslim countries have shown this to be the case.

Even so, in actual reality, triple talaq is really not that common, as the husbands are aware of the social constraints and stigma associated with it. Muslim women also have a right to divorce their husbands in a practice known as *khul',* although they loose claim to maintenance, and sometimes husbands push them to do declare *khul'.* And contrary to common belief that early marriage is the usual practice among Indian Muslims, data from sample collected by Sylvia Vatuk in Chennai Family court litigants show a mean age at first marriage of 21 years. So they keep to the legal age of 18. Again, divorce figures do not show high degree to which it exists in Western societies: 3-in-5. Husbands readily return the mehr (dower) pledged at the time of signing the *nikahnamah* for fear of social opprobrium but also to evade maintenance beyond the *iddat* period. There are, as scholar-lawyers like Tahor Mahmood point out, minimal criteria for family welfare enshrined in the Hadith and in certain jurists schools. Succession, inheritance, re-marriage of widows, participatory role of qazis and mutawallis in mosques, who are approached first to resolve marital and family conflicts, have very firm foundations in respect for the rights and dignity of the individual. Not all of the practices and aspects of Islamic law are beyond criticism or rebuke. But who should and should not tread on these sacred grounds?

It has been the MPLB's reaction that any form of interference in the PL would undermine 'a separate Islamic identity' that more than any other signs of an inter-community dialogic progress provides fuel, masala, for the political spectrum of the Hindutva to grease their palms for another public onslaught. Hindu leaders of all shades remain oblivious to declarations such as these coming out of "Muslim Intelligentsia Meet", initiated by Imtiaz Ahmad (professor of sociology from JNU): that the *millat* can retain links to the cherished religio-cultural traditions without spurning ideas of change, progress and social transformation. Islam is not, after all, "necessarily anti-feminist, a religion of harsh punishments, militancy or *jihad.* It is up to Muslims to interpret

Islam anew and put it within Indian framework" (Hasan, p.38) And it is not a matter that needs to be overstated, but noted that Indian Muslim stands apart in many ways from Islam, Islamic culture and politics elsewhere. In the past it has demonstrated much more progressive elements within the Islamic scholasticism and social reform movement than elsewhere, with its close links also to Sufi and Chistii and Jamia Islamia schools. According to Sona Khan, the woman advocate who represented Shah Bano, and who is called out to mediate in difficult cases concerning Islamic law in distant parts of the globe (e.g. the prescribed stoning of the Nigerian woman alleged offender), and in drafting the Constitution of Afghanistan, if only the *mullas* stop falling into the hands of Hindu nationalists, old-fashioned secularist, neo-traditionalists, and the state apparatchiks, with the help of their Hindu friends, secular modernists and others with a stake in genuine nation-building (even along Gandhian lines), Indian Muslims can and must move forward to set a decent standard, an example of a balanced society, between tradition and modernity, and between the ideals of secularism and multiculturalism. But who listens to such a sane, rational and at once Muslim voice from within?

Of course, in this regard education or literacy has been the sacred plank that is endorsed by all sides of the spectrum - secularists, nationalists, Gandhians, Christian NGOs, the orthodoxy, progressive Muslims, and the alike. Even though the decline of "Urdu" and the rescinded support for its continuation and expansion in regional areas goes unnoticed at the national level. Similarly, today, Narendra Modhi has schemes for teaching Muslim women family planning, while his campaign speeches are studded with anti-Muslim sentiments and hundreds of Hindus (youths that BJP and Kar Sevaks empower or arm with trisul and lathi and kerosene bombs) who committed such violent atrocities against Gujarati Muslims, raped their women and children and set them on fire, have not been bought to account for their legal crimes. His state-wide seva jatra that won him the election despite the post-Godhra atrocities, underscored in rather loud terms this one single message: '*Yeh saale Miyan, mane Musalman behtar kabi nahi badelsake; yadi wo Pakstan chale jawe, wanda hamara Hindu Ishwaro aur dharm ko palen... is ke bigaar aur koyi azaadi ya rashtriya ki ekta ka rashta hoonhi nahi sake.*' [I have cobbled these together from comments recorded in 'Final Solution' that is applicable here.]

In the 1990s the political wing of the Sangh, the BJP, took up the enactment of UCC, along with Ayodhya and Article 370, as one of the three agendas for the national cause: indeed the "ideological mascot" of Hindutva in achieving Ram Rajya, in the words of L K Advani. Political and media analysts

who have followed the shifting emphasis on the issue of the UCC vis-à-vis Ayodhya and other issues, have noted that during election times the issue is given preeminent importance – as if the unity of the nation hangs on this single pending uniformity – while the issue of Ayodhya is kept alive by the cultural and religious wings of the Sangh (VHP, et al). There is a clever division of labour here, and an attunement to the right song that will capture the votes bank: since the minority allegiance in this respect counts for little (and mostly captured by the Congress in any case), it is more important and expedient to placate the majority community.

By 1998 curiously, L K Advani made not even a passing reference to the demand for a uniform civil code. At the National Executive meeting held in New Delhi in April, he had talked of a "new BJP" to address the demands of governance. He later clarified that the call for a "new BJP" did not mean jettisoning the BJP's stand on core issues such as Ayodhya, Article 370 and uniform civil code. The party leaders then interpreted the statement as meaning that the party would not press these issues, at least until it had the requisite majority in the Lok Sabha.

As late or as recent as 2004 the BJP remains committed to the enactment of a uniform civil code but it has slightly altered its rationale: it views it "primarily as an instrument to promote gender justice". But "social and political consensus has to be evolved before its enactment". Overall, there is absolutely no change in the BJP's stand on the minorities, claims the *Frontline*. But the further anomaly that has gone unquestioned in the Parivar stance, and especially the mechanizations of BJP politics, is the precise template for and contents of the prescribed UCC, the manner in and means by which it is to be promulgated (if not imposed *ab extra)*, and their position on the rights of religious communities : balanced against rights and equality of citizens, equal respect and religious liberty of all religious communities, and civic equality of minorities, protected under the more compelling Fundamental Rights in the Constitution, Articles 14,15,29-30 respectively.

But it is palpably clear that the Hindu nationalists are responding in part to the Muslims allowing 'themselves to be used as vote-banks by the established parties, who evade the imperative of Hindu populism by playing up the issue of minority rights', and trumping the juridical avenues opened up to them post-Shah Bano judgment and the now mollified Muslim Women's Act. Muslims fall in-between the wedge of two strands of nationalism: secularist and Hindutva; in that regard, the protagonists of the latter continue to charge the nation with perpetrating the pseudo-secularist agenda, when in fact it is the Muslim who

have been caught up in the agenda from both ends. Muslim cannot be part of the cultural nationalism as the definition of Hindutva does not permit it, how can then the political machinery bend backwards to accommodate their inclusion in the Ram Rajya nationalism?

My claim here is that keeping the issue in this obscure terms and juxtaposing it to the polemics of pseudo-secularism, is a deliberate strategy to gain support of the majority community and to forge alliances with conservative parties, especially in the North and the South. While ameliorating its stance on a range of social and economic issues, but holding steadfast to the deafening call for UCC – even though when in power, the BJP did little or nothing to reform Personal Laws or enact legislations towards UCC. Meanwhile, the judiciary largely in its own wisdom since the Shah Bano judgment, remains opposed to any such move, in the interest of preserving democratic liberties. In their own way, judgment after judgment across the country the Muslim Women's Act is interpreted in give wider meaning and in more liberal terms than might have been the original intend, without disregarding, indeed informed by the Cr Pr Code and other civil liberties that are afforded to the disadvantaged in the Articles of the Fundamental Rights in the Constitution. This has been so in cases brought by divorced Muslim women to High Courts in Kerala, Bombay, and Calcutta. Thus, as Rajeev Dhawan, notes, 'if personal laws are discriminatory to women, they would have to be tested against the doctrine of equality, and then struck down if found to be discriminatory and unreasonable' (p. 316) In terms of the three principles of secularism I began with both the state and society have to develop a consensus for social change; it may cautiously empower the society to do so; neither is there scope for unlimited religious freedom, nor should the state exceed its neutrality in matters of religion, or discriminate against a religion, or favour one over another. The principles of secularism (the 'third' especially of regulatory reform), 'was certainly not devised to arm political Hindu fundamentalists to chastise Muslims for not making their law "gender just", or vice versa.' (ibid). If, again as Dhawan notes, the "uniform civil code" was once a serious constitutional objective, it has now been trivialized into becoming a tragic farce. Politics has taken over. Hindu politicians, who are not really concerned about personal law reform, use the idea of the uniform civil code to chastise Muslims for not emulating the Hindu example'. (p 317).

While the Parivar as a whole, and RSS in particular, are aware that they must ameliorate and go steady on their path to power, -- especially after the blood shed in Gujarat - it will however not compromise on the principle of

Hindutva. It will nevertheless tolerate the BJP moderating its stance in the public space by toning down the anti-Muslim attitude, effectively giving the appearance of distancing itself from the Hindutva sacred plank, and tending more toward pragmatic, liberal-bourgeois policies, as though coming to power is an end-in-itself, or for the greater good of the nation with its myriad fragments. Learning from its excesses in the April 2004 national elections, its claw-back in regional and state elections in the Hindu belt in recent months is indicative of this paying-off move – which, though, is tantamount to putting suede on hard leather.

And we are too close to Godhra and its aftermath in Gujarat, the communal violence perpetrated by Modhi's *seva jatra,* the increasing rise and rise of the RRS and VHP, the popularity of Bajrang Dal in the northern, Hindi belt, and Shiv Sena to the West under the watchful eyes of Baba Bal Thackeray, and the continuing commitment post-Babsri Masjid to construct the fanciful Ram temple in Ayodhya... and so on, to as much as pronounce the advent of a post-Hindutva era.] There is an unstated suspicion among Muslim intellectuals that Babri Masjid – and all the strife and carnage that has followed under the various 'charge of saffron lathi brigade'-- was in effect the Sangh's revenge on Rajiv Gandhi's reinstatement of MPL with the Women's Protection Act.

A post-Hindutva yuga would only arrive when the Muslim ceases to be the symbol of he failure of the Indian nation, and the pseudo-secularization that underpins the call for UCC is set aside; not the secular project as such, which awaits integration in the nation's agenda, but with the inclusive voice of Indian qua *Indian* Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains and Parsee – as indeed of women and other marginalized, minority, and disadvantaged groups or communities. Jai Hind aur Salaam ale'iukam!

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The Cultural Identity of Working Hindu Married Women in the South African Diaspora in the Context of Goddess Worship during Navaratri

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Abstract
South Africa is blessed with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Hindus being the minority in the South African Diaspora, have to face many challenges and problems to preserve their identity in terms of religion, culture and tradition. Hindu women are traditionally perceived as mothers, educators and nurturers to maintain the Hindu value system in their families. This paper demonstrates how working Hindu married women in the Stanger area of KwaZulu-Natal make use of Hindu festivals such as Navaratri to keep alive the Hindu value system, the religion, culture and tradition of their ancestors, despite pressures from the drive to westernize and globalize that comes from the rest of South African society.

Introduction

The diverse South African population has its own distinctive identity with its own set of beliefs, customs and traditions. To reconcile cultural identity is a quest that

especially women have to strive for. My attention in this paper is focused on the awareness of Hindu married women in an enclave situation and how they represent themselves during the Hindu festival of *Navaratri*[1] to maintain their cultural identity. Cultural identity in this sense encompasses religion, culture and tradition. My close interaction with the working Hindu married women in the Stanger area on the North coast of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa provides the basis for the insight and understanding of the maintenance of their cultural identity through the celebration of festivals such as Navaratri. The data collected during the interviews is representative of the greater population of South African Hindu married women. The data collected was used to draw conclusions, linking the festival of Navaratri with the role of South African Hindu married women. My preliminary interviews revealed that working Hindu married women perceive themselves in a variety of contexts such as dress, language, food, religion and culture. This is so because they are strongly influenced by their traditional value system, with which they identify consciously and unconsciously.

In an academic study of this nature, a clear understanding of some of the concepts involved is essential. According to Prabhakaran (1994); Vedalankar (1972) and Zaehner (1962), a person who is a Hindu, follows the Hindu religion that is Hinduism. It is very difficult to precisely define what Hinduism is. But scholars agree that Hinduism is the way of life of a Hindu (Hulmes, 1989; Kumar, 2000; Metha, 1972; Vedalankar, 1979; Zaehner, 1962). A Hindu is one who believes in God and is able to understand, discover and worship God through the medium of festivals, ceremonies and rituals. The legends and myths associated with the above possess high moral significance and form the basis of Hinduism.

The assumption is that the identity of Hindu women could have evolved over the years. Barot et al. (1999) points out the fluidity of culture when he argues that the contemporary world is a dynamic one in which a large range of complex forces combine to shape the particular identities of individuals. Hence tradition and culture have undergone transformation due to the above forces (Kuppusami, 1983). This argument echoes the assumption that working Hindu married women's cultural identity could have changed over the years. It is to this end that this paper purports to investigate the evolving nature of working Hindu married women's identity and the factors that may have contributed to the manner in which they perceive themselves. The study revealed, among others, influences such as multiculturalism, multilingualism, education, globalisation, contacts at work, media and the general social milieu that could have impacted and is still

[1] Navaratri is the festival of 9 nights dedicated to the Mother Goddess in her different forms as Durga, Lakshmi and Sarasvati.

impacting on the cultural identity of Hindu married women and how these women define themselves in the face of such influences. My hypothesis is that although Hindu women maybe western in their outlook, many select religio-cultural festivals to identify themselves culturally. Western in this context means that the British, coming from the West (Western Europe) introduced their way of life that included among others their education, dress, customs, practices, ideas and interests.

Many writers (Duley and Edwards, 1986; Mohanlal, 1998; Mukhopadhayay, 1995; Sweetman, 1995) claim that Hindu religion and culture are intertwined, interdependent and inseparable. Mukhopadhayay (1995) further explains that assumptions about culture and gender are rooted in religious concerns and focus on cultural practices especially during religio-cultural festivals, which reinforce the power of men by appealing to tradition. Thus this study further explores how power relations in patriarchal Hinduism is exercised during religio-culrural festivals and provide explanations for the changing identities of Hindu married women.

Legends and festivals are the flesh and blood in the anatomy of the culture of any nation. There are many festivals in the Hindu calendar and Navaratri is one of the very important annual festivals. It usually falls in the Hindu month of *Asvina* (September/October). Navaratri is a term of Sanskrit derivation, developed by combining two words, *"Nava,"* meaning nine and *"rathri"*, denoting night. Navaratri literally means the festival of nine nights.

Many Hindus view God as Father while others may see God in a myriad of ways. Among these the Motherhood of God appears to be the most charming and the sweetest. The mother-child relationship is an unparalleled bond of affection. However, Hinduism stresses the motherhood of God. The relationship with one's mother is the dearest and closest of all relationships. Hence, it is most appropriate to look upon God as Mother. Worship of the Divine Mother therefore becomes easy and spontaneous (Kuppusami, 1983). The festival of Navaratri is observed over nine days, worshipping the Mother Goddesses in this appealing form,

Navaratri is observed in honour of the consorts of the *Trimurthi*[2], when the Universal Mother is worshipped in three ways – as *Durga*[3] or *Kali*[4], she is the

[2] Trimurthi is the threefold Deity – Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Shiva the Destroyer.

[3] A Hindu Goddess, the slayer of demons.

[4] A Hindu Goddess with fierce and destructive characteristics also regarded as the benevolent Mother.

consort of *Shiva*[5] who is the destroyer; as *Lakshmi*[6], she is the consort of Vishnu who is the preserver; as *Sarasvati*[7] she is the consort of *Brahma*[8] who is the Creator. In the context as the consorts of the Trimurthi, the Divine Mother is noted for her submission to the male principle, acting as an essential undercurrent of creation. She is gentle, erudite and wise, a perfect wife and mother – the ideal Hindu female. Yet as Durga or Kali she is strong and independent. Although the different Goddesses are the manifestations of one and the same energy, these different forms are conceived in order to elucidate and emphasize the different functions they have to discharge.

The Coming of Indians to South Africa

Many of the colonial era Hindu immigrants, who arrived 145 years ago, were illiterate in the western sense and coming from small villages, brought with them to the South African Diaspora, in their memories knowledge of their religio-cultural practices relating to festivals that prevailed in their villages. The indentured Indians were a highly heterogeneous population. The majority of them were either Hindi[9] speaking Hindus from the Northern Provinces of India who emigrated through the port of Calcutta or they were Tamil[10] and Telugu[11] speaking Hindus from the Southern Provinces who came by way of Chennai (Chirkut, 1993). From 1875 onwards, a second stream of immigrants, the 'Passenger Indians' or traders followed the indentured labourers. The passenger Indians were predominantly Gujarati[12] speaking Hindus and Urdu[13] speaking Muslims mainly from Bombay and Surat in Western India.

Navaratri: Legends, Traditions and Rituals

According to Krishna (2003) when the early food gathers and grazers in India settled down to produce food, they praised the earth as the Mother Goddess of

[5] Shiva is one of the great Deities of Hinduism, part of the Trimurthi.
[6] The Hindu Goddess of health, wealth and prosperity.
[7] The Hindu Goddess of knowledge and learning.
[8] Brahma, a Hindu God, unlike Vishnu and Shiva, He is seldom worshipped. He is the Creator aspect of the Trimurthi.
[9] One of the 4 main languages brought to South Africa by the indentured labourers from North India.
[10] Tamil is one of the languages spoken by South Indians.
[11] One of the 4 main languages brought to South Africa by the South Indian Hindus.
[12] Gujarati is one of the languages spoken by Hindus who came from Western India.
[13] Urdu is related to Hindi but with many Persian words. Mainly spoken by Muslims.

fertility. As the people built settlements, they needed protection from evil spirits, disease and pestilence. So they worshipped Durga whose name means fortress and who protected them. Krishna (2003) further explains that as people required continuing prosperity, they worshipped Lakshmi, Goddess of prosperity and health. With settlements came learning and literature, represented by Sarasvati. Thus the indigenous culture combined with the *Vedic*[14] culture became the contemporary Hindu religion (Krishna, 2003:46). What is important is that everything essential for survival was feminine and identified with the Goddesses.

According to Marchant (1996), tradition has it in myths and sacred writings that demons and monsters were causing great hardships to the pious and polite minded sages of yore. They appealed to the Divine Mother for help. The Mother undertook the war to protect the sages but the war could not be easily determined. Thus, the war was prolonged for nine days and only at dusk on the tenth day, the demons were overpowered and the sages re-established in their proper places. Thus it can be argued that this festival marked the culmination of the struggle of righteousness in victory. The demons were nothing but the personification of evil.

Navaratri is celebrated all over India and in the Hindu Diaspora in different ways but the basic aim of the celebration is the worship of *Shakti*[15] (power and strength), meaning the Divine Mother in Her aspect as power. It is Mother Shakti that works through all of us. The nine days of Navaratri are equally distributed among the three manifestations (Durga or Kali, Lakshmi and Sarasvati) and the tenth day, *Vijaya Dasami*, meaning victory is taken as the day of victory when evil was overpowered and banished by the Supreme Mother for the welfare and the continuous prosperity of the world (Maharaj, 1994).

The first three nights are dedicated to the worship of Shakti, the multi-faceted Goddess, the consort of Shiva and also known as Durga or Kali. To understand the inner significance of the festival, it is necessary to know what Shakti is. According to Kuppusami (1982), Shakti is the power of God and therefore there is no difference between God and his power. Sivananda (1987) explains that truly all beings in the universe are Shakti worshippers whether they are aware of it or not. For there is no one who does not love and long for power in some form or other such as wealth, strength and energy.

Vedalankar (1979) explains that one of the legends associated with the origin of Navaratri is that it commemorates the victory of Goddess Durga over a demon called *Mahishasura*. The Gods invoked the Goddess and asked for help.

[14] The ancient Hindu religion which evolved around 600 BCE – 400 BCE.

[15] Shakti literally means energy. A name for the Goddess (as consort or supreme being), which can be used generically.

The Goddess, astride a tiger fought the demon and cut off his head. As Kali or Durga, the Divine Mother is the destroyer of evil qualities, vices and defects. Kali or Durga is the creative power or energy of the Spirit. She creates, preserves and destroys the entire universe from the spiritual point of view. She destroys all our evil qualities in order to create in us divine qualities. In pictures of Mother Kali, we often see Her with one foot on the breast of the sleeping Lord Shiva. Sivananda (1987) says that the scriptures tell us that this means that Shiva, the Supreme Being, who remains static or motionless, while His manifestation is represented by Mother Kali who is ever dynamic. Thus Mother Kali is shown dancing on the body of Lord Shiva.

The second three days of Navaratri are spent in the worship of Mother Lakshmi, the bestower of wealth and prosperity. The spiritual seeker however, is interested mainly in spiritual wealth; meaning divine qualities like love, compassion, good health, generosity and calmness which are really priceless and cannot be exhausted.

On the last three days, devotees pray to Mother Saraswathi, the bestower of divine knowledge. On the ninth day, Saraswathi *puja*[16] is performed when all learning equipment such as books, pens, writing material and musical instruments are placed on the altar for Mother Sarasvati's blessings. Gifts are also given to *Gurus* (teachers) as mark of respect. A child beginning his first lesson of the alphabet begins it on this day. This marks the conclusion of Navaratri.

Finally, the tenth day or Vijaya Dasami, meaning victory, is celebrated in honour of *Devi*[17]. Devi is representative of all things, and her aspects are many. The many manifestations of Goddess worship in Hindu tradition have combined in the worship of Devi. As Shakti, she is the progenitress of the universe. She is all pervasive and powerful. She is addressed as the primordial energy, animating all things (Kuppusami, 1983). As *Parvati*[18], she is the dutiful partner of Shiva, enjoying domestic felicity. As, *Kumari*[19] she is the virgin and most pure. As *Lalitha*[20], she is the resplendent beauty. As Durga, she is the war Goddess perpetually at war with evil. In accordance with the Hindu predilection for bringing together seemingly contradictory aspects of life such as the protective and destructive forms, the terrible and the tender facets, we see the Mother of the

[16] Puja is worship to a Deity and/or its visible image in an atmosphere of devotion.
[17] Devi is the name for the Goddess; often used in a generic sense.
[18] Parvati is a Hindu Goddess; the consort of Shiva.
[19] Name for Hindu Goddess.
[20] Name for Hindu Goddess.

Universe as Kali. As Kali, she devours time and is the destroyer of evil. So the Mother Goddess has an aspect to suit every human exigency.

Hindus make a special effort during Navaratri to show their deep gratitude to the Divine Mother for the skills they possess (especially in India). The potter shows his love by making special images, the painter by drawing pictures of the Divine Mother and the musician through his musical instruments. Although outwardly, worship of the Mother is a celebration of triumph, to the spiritual seeker, there is deep inner meaning. On the tenth day or Vijaya Dasami, the devotee celebrates the triumph of having moved from the ignorant state to the enlightened state. This day marks the triumph of spirit over matter and victory of divine qualities over evil qualities.

Navaratri celebrations in North Western India (Gujarat) are famous in that the evenings are dedicated to the fascinating *garbha*[21] dance. Both males and females dance around earthen lamps while singing devotional songs accompanied by rhythmic hand clapping. Navaratri is a period of fasting in South India. It is known as Dusshera, also known as Vijaya Dasami which is celebrated on the tenth day of Navaratri. Dolls called *Bommai Kolu* are decorated and placed on the altar representing the Goddesses (www.hindu.com, 2004). The celebration of Navaratri takes place with great devotion in temples and shrines when sacred hymns are sung and talks are delivered on the Goddesses. It is common for Hindus to read and recite from the scriptures as well. Gifts of clothes, coconut, sweetmeats and fruit are offered to the Mother Goddesses.

Maharaj (1994) maintains that our disbeliefs as well as our vices retard our spiritual progress and it is for this reason that we have to prostrate before the Mother and pray to her incessantly to give us insight and strength to see through the evils that dominate us and shun them. Perhaps, it is for this reason that it has been emphasised that we invoke the blessings of Shakti. Just as a mother cannot bear to see her child suffering from misery and hastens to its rescue when it cries helplessly for assistance, similarly, the Divine Mother promptly rescues her devotees from distress. The surest and the easiest method of pleasing the Divine Mother is the cultivation of the idea that every woman without distinction of caste, creed or religion is but Shakti herself and should be worshipped like the Mother (Maharaj, 1994).

[21] The dance performed during Navaratri festival by Gujarati men and women.

The Role of Hindu Married Women in the Celebration of Navaratri Festival

The study revealed that the role of Hindu married women as mothers is very important in the preservation and survival of the Hindu value system. From an early age, Hindu women are involved in various religio-cultural activities and the celebration of Navaratri is no exception. They are given a solid foundation in domestic rituals by their mothers and grandmothers who prepare them for wifehood and motherhood, a role in which a woman's identity finds completion (Metha, 1970). Thus it can be said that Hindu women have been exposed to the teachings of their mothers and foremothers who have deeply internalized traditional customs and rituals with particular reference to the festival of Navaratri.

The mother interacts with the children and imparts to them the culture, tradition and customs of the family unit and society (Singh, 2004). Hence, Hindu women are expected to carry out most of the devotions in the home and the Navaratri festival is no exception. It is the women in the home who are involved in preparing for religio-cultural events, although some men do assist in the preparations. The burdens of motherhood are most of the time heavy for working women. They have little time to relax because of the multiplicity of their roles. Despite their daily chores, many of the interviewees agreed that they achieved fulfilment and joy in preparing for Navaratri. They also indicated that the practice of rituals and traditions during festivals such as Navaratri are gender related. Hindu women's role as "cultural custodians" is strengthened during Navaratri and they see it as a component of their cultural identity.

In many Hindu families, roles and responsibilities are gender-based. Because of this, many of the women in the study believe that their forebears institutionalised gender roles and they see their expression in Navaratri as a way of maintaining their cultural identity. Maintaining the traditional norms in the home, accords Hindu women respect and honour from their husbands and families (Singh, 2004). Hindu women experience a form of patriarchy where the traditional ideology operates powerfully in the home, which is the private sphere (Bhopal, 1997). Patriarchy is exhibited by the internalised ideology of gender roles, consisting in the dominance of men and subordination of women. This ideology plays a strong influence in the continuation of the contentions of traditions such as the glory of respect and status of wifehood and motherhood that many of the women in the study view as central to their cultural identity. The majority of the interviewees come from homes where patriarchy is institutionalised and male domination internalised. Indigenous knowledge, related

to religio-cultural functions are also associated with patriarchy and identified reasons for gender roles. However, the research revealed that some working Hindu married women, through empowerment and advancement in education are breaking away from the clutches of patriarchy and bringing about modifications in cultural practices for the observance of Navaratri. Another reason cited by many of the interviewees for modifications in cultural practices is the absence of the joint family system. This notion can best be summed up in the words of Metha (1970:70).

> The greatest preserver of tradition, custom and cultural practices was the joint family system. It is impossible to transmit the feeling of symbols and tradition where the joint family sentiment is absent.

An examination of the interviewee's narrations revealed that they perceived the construction of gender identity as a means of maintaining their cultural identity. The women in the study also revealed that cultural identification was not a gender role expectation of Hindu men. The general perception is that the construction of masculinity in Hinduism allows men not to and they are not expected to assist in preparations for festivals and ceremonies. Traditionally it was and still is the case that preparations for Navaratri festivals are seen as the role for females.

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This section presents data from in-depth interviews with working Hindu married women in the Stanger area of KwaZulu-Natal that has a predominantly Indian population. This investigation is also guided by qualitative research methodology. Weedon (1987) argues that poststructuralist theory provides a suitable framework to understand and analyse the impact of culture on the cultural identity of women. This could also apply to Hindu married women. Poststructuralist theory also offers mechanisms of gender, gender roles and power relations in culture such as when observing the Navaratri festival, and its impact on the cultural identity of Hindu women.

Twenty-four working Hindu married women, in the age range of twenty five to sixty years in the research made up a purposeful sample as they were specifically selected for inclusion in the study. Through their narratives they provided detailed reflections of their beliefs and the significance of the myths and rituals associated with Navaratri in relation to their Hindu identity.

Data was collected through in-depth/face to face interviews and non-verbal communication, focus group discussions and participant observation. Data

gathered through in-depth interviews can be representative of the greater population of Hindu women in the South African diaspora so that conclusions can be drawn from that population (Rudestam and Newton, 1992). The interviews, which consisted of open-ended questions, were conducted in English. The interviews took approximately one to one and half hours, were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy. Analysis and interpretations were done to the major themes and patterns in the study.

Navaratri: Women's Festival - Discussion of Findings

The celebration of the yearly cycles of Hindu festivals such as Navaratri is convincing proof of the dynamism of Hinduism in the South African Diaspora. Many Hindus of the different linguistic groups (Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and Gujarati), in the Stanger area, where the research was undertaken, observe the festival together, irrespective of its regional variants, rituals and beliefs. For many Hindu women, the arrival of the lunar months of *Asvina* (September/October) evokes the pleasure of Navaratri, an annual nine-night (ten day) festival as its name implies.

The determination and efforts involved in the festival as indicated by the interviewees, and from other knowledgeable sources, commences with the worship of Durga for three days, invoking her Shakti (power and energy) for the removal of the obstacles in our spiritual path. Krishna (2003:47) argues that Shakti is a symbol of womanpower, the primeval feminine force, the power and energy underlying the cosmos. She further explains that unfortunately this has not always translated itself into respect for womanhood. The next three days are devoted to the worship of Lakshmi and the last three days are dedicated to Sarasvati.

My concern in this study is with the festival's manifestation and its role in influencing women's cultural identity, as Navaratri is essentially a women's festival. This is because women play a more active role in the festivities. Moreover, the Deities worshipped are females. What emerges from the discussions with the interviewees is that while large-scale events associated with the festival may take place in temples, it also has a significant domestic component for all Hindus (particularly women).

Interviewee A explains:

> The fasting, the rituals and the nine days of prayer to the Divine Mother, gives me a lot of confidence as I pray for my family. I recall the days when we never went to temples for Navaratri, but presently I look forward to going to the temple on the days I can. I offer special

> prayers for the nine days to the Mother Goddesses as well. The music, the singing, the whole atmosphere in the temple is one of peace and harmony that is good to relieve the tension of work and a relief from the everyday mundane activities. Interacting with the people at the temple makes me conscious and aware of my Hindu identity.

The above passage indicates, like all the interviewees, that the festival is of interest not only because it has moved to the temple but also because it is in itself a vehicle for Hindu women to preserve their cultural identity. Presently, the festival incorporates improvisation on earlier practice, such as celebrating at temples. Rayaprol (2000) demonstrates that festivals like Navaratri in the diaspora, where several domestic rituals were traditionally performed at home in the presence of the extended family are now performed at temples. Many of the interviewees observe a strict fast for the nine days, which in some instances means abstaining from meat dishes, whereas in some cases it includes abstaining from eating any solid food or liquids and eating a vegetarian meal in the evenings for the nine days.

The general pattern pertaining to Navaratri prayers in many families in the study includes the cleaning of the home and decorating the shrine in a simple fashion, arrangement of the *murtis* or images of the Goddesses and the other Deities and adorning them with flower garlands. Women perform daily acts of worship to the Goddesses, lighting the lamp, offering *arti*[22] and praying for peace and prosperity.

There are many interesting variations noticed in the way Navaratri prayer is performed at home level. The study revealed that many Hindi speaking women choose one of the nine days (usually over a weekend) to perform special prayers to the Goddesses by offering *keer*[23], *halwa*[24], *puri* (deep fried bread), fruit, coconut, *betel leaves*[25] and *betel nuts*[26]. This prayer at home level is performed as a family and may involve close relatives and friends. It is the lady of the house who performs all the rituals. This concurs with Kumar's (2000) research that with regard to domestic rituals, men are significantly less inclined to participate than women. The woman places nine sets of the halwa, puri, keer and other puja items

[22] Ceremonial waving of a lamp or camphor before an image of a Deity in the context of worship.

[23] Keer is rice pudding.

[24] Pudding made of flour, sugar and ghee.

[25] Leaves of betel pepper, which Hindus offer with other offerings to Deities.

[26] The areca nuts, eaten with betel leaves and lime. Indians offer betel nuts together with betel leaves and other offerings to Deities.

on a large banana leaf, lights the camphor and prays to the Goddesses also offering Them the various preparations. An additional set of offerings is for *Deeh* (commonly referred to as *Deeh Baba*) who is believed to be the gatekeeper and the guardian Deity of the village (Sitaram, 2005). This set of offering is distributed to the males. When the prayer is over, the sets of halwa and puri on the banana leaf are distributed to the married women present. The significance of distributing the sets of halwa and puri to married women demonstrates the gendered aspects of Navaratri being a women's festival. The rest of the sanctified food is then distributed as *prasadam*[27] to those present. This variant of Navaratri prayer is exclusively a Hindi speaking cultural trait, but women from all the Hindu linguistic groups participate in the Navaratri prayers at the local temple. Gifts of clothing and jewellery are also offered to appease the Goddesses.

The South Indian (Tamil and Telugu speaking) interviewees informed that they performed the Navaratri prayers at their shrine, offering sweetmeats, fruit, milk and other puja commodities to the Goddesses. Speaking with the Tamil and Telugu interviewees, one does not get a clear picture of the events and characters in the myths involving the origins of the festival. There are some conflicting views about certain details. For instance, the interviewees were not familiar with the display of Kolus (dolls) representing the goddesses with certain themes. Many of the South Indian interviewees were also not familiar with *Dussera festival*, also known as Vijaya Dasami which is celebrated on the tenth day of Navaratri. This signifies the victory of *Lord Rama*[28] over the demon *Ravana* (who had abducted *Sita*[29], Lord Rama's wife) by the burning of the effigy of *Ravana* (Ganeri, 1997; Mamdani, 1998; Marchant, 1996). Although these variations of events and themes do not always fit in the South African context, Navaratri reveals an interesting perception of women in the worship of Shakti in the South African context. Not all the original individual myths are preserved in the South African Hindu community.

Although all Hindus in the Stanger area celebrate Navaratri together at the local temple, the Gujarati celebration of Navaratri acquires an added zest, because it is associated with the *garbha* dance. I attended celebrations at more than one venue in Durban (where there is a large Gujarati community) and my observations on this festival coincided with the narratives of the Gujarati interviewees and documentary sources. The origins of Navaratri, in the Gujarati context, are also associated with the Divine Mother in her different manifestations for the nine

[27] Consecrated food, which has been offered to the Deity.
[28] Lord Rama is believed to be the 7th incarnation of Vishnu. Hero of the Ramayana.
[29] Lord Rama's wife. Heroine of the Ramayana.

nights. Both men and women perform *Havan*[30] for the nine nights. The Goddess Durga (Shakti) is the focal point of interest and the *garbha* dance is performed with great enthusiasm, around an earthen pot. The pot has holes around its sides and contains a burning wick, the light of which is visible through the holes (www.hindu.com, 2004). The concept of the *garbha* is the symbol of Shakti and is also associated with fertility. Clapping or tapping the feet keeps time. The *garbha* is an event in which both men and women participate and the rhythm is achieved by the clash of the sticks carried by the dancers.

Hindus celebrate the nine-night (ten day) period of Navaratri in diverse and colourful ways, while the basic form of the festival persists, which is to celebrate the glory of Shakti. Kumar (2000) explains that Goddess worship in general is a Pan-Hindu phenomenon and exists in India among Hindus of all linguistic groups in rural and urban areas and also in the Hindu diaspora. Its origins are traced all the way back to the Indus Valley Civilisation (2500, BCE).

The prayers at the local temple start about six o'clock in the evening and end at about ten o'clock at night. Of the twenty-four interviewees, ten stated that they definitely went to the temple on the ninth night of Navaratri. Eight others tried to attend only if and when they could find the time. The final six did not go to the temple at all during the festival. They instead offered their prayers at home. On the ninth evening, many Hindus in the Stanger area, including many of the interviewees, congregate at the temple and offer their prayers to the Goddesses of Navaratri, who they believe remove violence and evil. Hancock (2004) points out that there is this school of thought that suggests that the worship is our endeavour to come face to face with the turmoil and conflicts within each of us. For this we seek the grace of the Mother Goddess.

Ladies and girls come out in glowing colours in their *saris*[31], *salwaar kameej*[32] and other accessories, to participate in the Navaratri festival at the temple. *Rangoli*[33], at the entrance of the temple, livens the atmosphere of the festival. As the evening light fades and the sounds of devotional singing, music and the jingle of the brass bells of the temple are heard, the lamps are lit. Offerings of *halwa* and *puri* also take place at the local temple where I was a

[30] Havan involves fire offerings of samagree, grains, ghee and petals to the Deity.

[31] A length of cotton or silk draped around the body and worn as a main garment by Indian women.

[32] Long loose dress known as kameej, which is worn over salwars, which are pyjama like trousers.

[33] These are traditional designs made at the entrance of homes and temples on auspicious occasions.

participant observer. The women hold out their trays of sweetmeats, fruit, coconut and milk. in their outstretched hands and rotate them in front of the images of the Goddesses and pray for the welfare of their families. *Arti* is offered in praise of the female Deities, accompanied by music. The scene is visually compelling and the smell of broken coconut, camphor and incense fills the air, as does the fragrance from the fresh flower garlands that adorn the *murtis*.

There is a high degree of communal harmony amongst the Hindus in the Stanger area when celebrating festivals like Navaratri. The temple is the centre for religio-cultural activities. Navaratri has now become more congregational in the Stanger area, and facilitates the participation of women in both private and public spheres. South African Hindus with particular reference to Stanger, have predominantly associated the Navaratri festival with Shakti i.e. Durga, Lakshmi and Sarasvati, the manifestations of the power of the Goddess. My assertion is that the women's participation and the status that the Navaratri festival confers on wives and mothers create a vehicle for Hindu women to express their cultural heritage and identity.

The study also explores the self-consciousness associated with the festival in terms of a gendered perspective against the background of Hinduism as a patriarchal society. Numerous studies (Bhadouria, 1995; Kumar, 2000; Metha, 1970; Singh, 2004; Vedalankar, 1960) claim that during the Vedic period (about 200 BCE), Hindu women occupied a very important position in the family and society and were equal to men in many aspects. Although Hinduism was dominated by the patriarchal system, women were honoured as central figures. This is reflected in the following quotes:

> Their husbands, brothers, fathers and brothers-in-law should nurture women with tenderness. Where the women are honoured, there the Gods are pleased. But where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards. (www.attributetohinduism.com, 2004: cited in Manusmriti, Sloka, 55).

Similarly, Bhadouria (1995:3) claims that:

> The extent to which women in their form as mothers were regarded and revered is clear from the over- whelming number of figures discovered from the early pre-historic sites in the Indus Valley.

The sentiments in the above quotations reflect the ideals of the Hindu religion in relation to the role of women. It reflects the Hindu woman as a Goddess,

deserving worship. But the above quotations are binary views and reflect a negative image of Hindu women. This portrays the subordination and repression of women in a male dominated patriarchal society. Ironically, later during the post-Vedic period women were denied the right to be educated and thereafter the condition of women declined (Singh, 2004). They were subjected to certain disciplinary laws such as the laws of Manu:

> The wife should ever treat her husband as God, though he may be characterless, sensual and devoid of good qualities. (Manusmriti, 55:54, cited in Mohanlal, 1998).
>
> The wife should follow the word of her husband. This is the highest duty. (Yajnavalkya, 1-18, cited in Mohanlal, 1998).

It is only when a woman displays devotion and loyalty to the husband in the most adverse conditions, will she be bestowed with honour and status in the Hindu community. Thus Manu's laws deprived women of their power and dignity. The *Manusmriti* forms the basis of this patriarchal ideology of how women are viewed in Hindu culture. This also shows how the laws of Manu play a prominent role in the continued subordination of Hindu women by their male counter part. This underlines or displays the ambivalent position of Hindu women where the Hindu texts deify the same woman and simultaneously deny them gender equality. Although many traditional societies are part and parcel of the modern technological worldviews, the laws of Manu are still alive to some extent in the sub-conscious minds of many Hindus. Bannerjee's (1979) research reveals that we cannot see much strength in what Manu had written on women and that it cannot be universally accepted for all times and that Manu's influence upon Hindu society persists till this day, no matter where Hindus have settled in the diaspora. This dichotomy of theory and practice in Manu and his adherents creates the dilemma for women and all enlightened people.

Shah (1995) states that Hindu religion has not created conditions in which women can become aware of themselves. She says that on the contrary, religion and culture have actively promoted her subordination. Furthermore, it has undermined her ability to rise collectively against injustice by creating discord and disunity within her ranks.

The construction of cultural identity and understanding of the paradoxy of idealisation and oppression of Hindu women are hinged on the recognition that cultural identity is perceived in both social and cultural forms. In addition, due to complexities surrounding the constructions of identity in the patriarchal domestic

sphere, the interviewees were given the opportunity to describe how the Navaratri festival, based on religio-cultural practices shaped their perceptions and status. However, despite the discrimination that women suffer, Hindu women have their honoured place in the home. Perhaps Hindu women need to be reminded of their power. Indian literature, including Hindu epics such as the *Ramanaya*[34] show women asserting themselves – *Keikeyi*[35] negatively and Sita positively. Domination can only continue as long as the dominated allow it. But there must be a balance of interests. Femicracy (female domination) is just as potentially harmful as male domination or patriarchy.
Interviewee B reports:

> During Navaratri, we pray to the Divine Mother for Shakti (power and energy) in the form of Durga, Lakshmi and Sarasvati. Just like how, I had faith in my own mother to take care of me, similarly I have faith in the Divine Mother to take care of my family and myself. In this way, we women identify ourselves with Mother Shakti who enhances our confidence to take care of and guide our children along the right path. The nine days of Navaratri create awareness for Hindu women of the power of the Goddesses. Likewise, Hindus need to become aware of the Shakti (power) of Hindu females as wives and mothers because Hindu culture does not have equal standards for men and women.

Holding the same view of female identification with God, Interviewee C explains:

> Navaratri is a festival that I look forward to. Worshipping the Mother Goddesses gives me confidence and makes me feel important as a wife and mother. In Hindu society, women may be consulted on many issues in the home, but men take the final decisions in most cases. In many aspects, the women are to be obedient and follow the wishes of their husbands. During Navaratri, all Hindus (men and women) worship God as the Divine Mother whom we women identify with. But on the other hand, in many cases, we are not treated equally with men.

The Hindu religion is one of the world's religions that includes the worship of God in the female form. The above accounts and those of the many interviewees, help to understand how the festival articulates with forms of cultural consciousness of women, showing how the female aspect of God can be

[34] The Hindu epic in which the central figure is Lord Rama, the 7th incarnation of Vishnu.
[35] Lord Rama's stepmother.

beneficial to female identification. The narratives reflect and perhaps help to understand that it is through these various attributes of the Goddesses that the patterns of behaviour have evolved into the character of Hindu women. The Goddess had to be docile, tolerant and non-threatening. Thus Parvati, Lakshmi and Sarasvati were recommended as role models for Hindu women. It is in the name of the Divine Mother that Hindu women unconsciously reflect on their most basic social obligations. Hancock (2004) says Hindu women keep the peace, raise children and promote gentleness and maintain cultural memories.

Oral accounts and documentary sources suggest that Navaratri reinforces the strength of Hinduism, particularly for women. Sivananda (1987) asserts that the power behind creation is Shakti in its three aspects: Durga, Lakshmi and Sarasvati. We have to invoke this Shakti in the Goddess who is believed to guide and help us to gain victory over evil. One's own mother is the combination of all that the Divine Mother provides us with, such as energy, wealth and intelligence. She constantly desires our advancement in life. Likewise, the mother represents all three Goddesses that we worship during the Navaratri festival. She nourishes the child, provides the necessities for its growth, teaches the child what it should know and what to avoid and leads her/him onto the path of righteousness.

Navaratri: Changes in Religio-Cultural Practices

From the time of the first generation of Hindu immigrants to the present, the celebration of Navaratri has continued in some form or the other. Nevertheless, many changes have taken place, both in nature and in ritual practice. The narratives of the Hindi interviewees indicate that in the past, the emphasis was not basically on the worship of the Divine Mother only. The symbolic distinctions as explained by Interviewee D (Hindi) is as follows:

> My grandparents and parents referred to Navaratri as Navarathan. I remember in my parental home, one convenient day out of the nine days was set aside for the worship of all the Gods including Hanuman and the Divine Mother. No Navaratri celebrations were held in temples in those days.

The narratives of the Gujarati interviewees suggested that much emphasis was placed on the basic idea of the Divine Mother in her manifestation as Goddess Durga over the nine-day period. On the ninth day, the majority of the Gujaratis in Stanger (as in the past) met at one of the member's homes, where the concluding prayer was held together with the performance of the *garbha* dance.

There was a gap in the sequence of the traditions and rituals as to how the Tamils and Telugus celebrated Navaratri in the past. The interviewees explained that Lakshmi and Sarasvati were worshipped on the day allocated according to South Indian festivals in the Hindu calendar and not during Navaratri. The majority of the South Indian interviewees informed that in the South African context, the fine distinctions of how they celebrated Navaratri in the past have become irrelevant. It is through the broadening scope of the religio-cultural organizations, the Neo-Hinduistic Movements and through their education that they have come to understand the significance and worship patterns of Navaratri. However, Navaratri is the time for Hindu women to take stock of their lives, to realize their potential and emulate their role model – Shakti. Unless this is done, the message of Navaratri is lost.

Conclusion

In the Shakta tradition of Hinduism, all power is Shakti, which is female, fundamental and feminine and infuses life. The Deities for knowledge, power and wealth are not males but females. Each of the three principal Gods of the Trimurti: Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Shiva the destroyer, cannot proceed with their work without Shakti. The Divine Mother, who is believed to be Shakti, is the supreme power of God and assumes many forms. Lord Brahma, without the grace of his consort Sarasvati cannot perform His duty as creator. Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth is an essential companion of Lord Vishnu. Shiva as destroyer needs enormous power and energy and this is what Durga provides him with. Here we see male Deities complemented by their female counterparts. Hence in Hindu ritualistic worship of God, both male and female are seen as equal, but not in the reality of Hindu society.

Whilst Hindu Goddesses are associated with knowledge, wealth and power, in Hindu society, a woman's power is largely confined to the domestic sphere. Despite the ambivalent position and status of Hindu women, the Goddesses are vital to understand how Hindu women are viewed in society. But Hindu women need to extend this power or Shakti to other aspects of life. For example, Durga's exhibition of female fury in the slaying of the demon Mahishasura reflects the

potential of the female to break free of the male domination. Feminist poststructuralism offers an analysis of how the imbalance between male and female can be challenged and transformed. It is these qualities of independence and defiance that Durga or Kali represent as a female, but at the same time glorify the devoted wife such as Parvati. Durga/Shakti is neither a demon nor an object to be feared. She annihilates the demons that haunt us before they can endanger the world (Krishna, 2003). She is the perfect female, powerful and active, giving women what society has denied her: respect, strength, intellect and knowledge. Like the Goddesses, Hindu women are also custodians of culture in their homes and society, but who simultaneously transmit the ideology of independence and capability.

The findings of the study revealed that the characteristics of Durga, Lakshmi and Sarasvati have left their impact on the lives of Hindu women. The poststructuralist perspective helps to understand the impact of the significance of Navaratri and how Hindu women uplift their status to identify themselves with God female. Feminist poststructuralism helps to theorise the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of Hindu women and how they shape their socio-cultural lives. Moreover, Mohanlal (1998) maintains that identification of Hindu women with the Goddesses and their elevation to supremacy at ritual times gives them respite from patriarchal structures. This is an important feature of women's psychological well being as well (Sokoya, 2003). Whilst identifying with the Goddesses motivates Hindu women, it also supports their trust in their own power and in the power of other women. Perhaps a realization of their own innate power makes them silently acquiesce in the male domination, just to keep the peace. As discussed in previous studies (Prabhakaran, 1994; Mohanlal, 1998; Singh, 2004) Hindu women identify themselves by worshipping the Goddesses, but their research did not include the perceptions of Hindu women from a gendered perspective and details of the Navaratri festival in relation to the ambivalent position of Hindu women. The new findings will contribute to knowledge on Hindu women and identity in relation to festivals such as Navaratri.

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Theorising Identity: Social Science and Theological Intersections

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Abstract

The question "Who am I" has permeated much psychological and social research on the construction of identity and has been studied from many perspectives – i.e. psychoanalytical, philosophical, phenomenological, sociological, socio-linguistic, anthropological, and educational. The literature review reveals that there is a pattern of decreasing reductionistic analysis of identity, where binaries of race, culture or language are regarded as more fluid, multiple and transient, rather than mutually exclusive. Furthermore, there is a negation of the monopoly of any single discipline's view of self and identity, and a blurring of disciplines. Thus a predominant, postmodernistic view surfacing in current research rejects the notion of a core identity and regards identities as essentially mutable, interactive and metamorphic.

The Vedic theological perspective concurs that our identifications of the body and mind are illusory and are indeed external, pliable, fragmented and transient, but establishes a core notion of identity as spirit, which may be considered by some as essentialist. While

essentialist views have been criticized by the postmodernists as positivist and often reinforcing oppression, the Vedic view considers a core notion of identity of self as an immaterial existent being, ultimately liberated from political and oppressive social designations.

This article draws from a larger study of identity and traces significant themes as they have emerged historically and as they influence ideas of identity found in the social science literature. It further explores spiritual perspectives of identity found in the ISKCON[1] literatures and examines similarities and ambivalences in identity construction between social science and theology.

Introduction

The understanding of this simple word "I" is central to some of the most intense, as well as most obfuscate discussion. Where does my sense of self come from? Is it a product of my society, education or culture? Is it inherent as part of my psyche? What is it really? The question "Who am I" continues to permeate the current psychological and social research on the construction of identity and has been studied from many perspectives – psychoanalytical, philosophical, phenomenological, sociological, socio-linguistic, anthropological, educational, and theological (King, 1996). Several identity construct theories, viz. social identity theories (Erikson, 1968), collective identity theories: race and identity (Gould, 2000; Erasmus, 2001; Hofmeyr, undated), culture and identity, language and identity formation (Murji and Hebert, 1999), feminism and identity, and religious identity (Hood, 1998) have been posited by researchers.

The literature review reveals that there is a pattern of decreasing reductionistic analysis of identity, where binaries of race, culture or language are regarded as more fluid, multiple and transient, rather than mutually exclusive. The trend is towards challenging sets of value that are exclusionary, which indicates that it is part of the "ongoing social construction of cultural identities which makes them never completed, but always in process" (Erasmus, 2001). Furthermore, there is a negation of the monopoly of any single discipline's view of self and identity, and certainly, a blurring of disciplines. A predominant, postmodernistic view surfacing in current research is that cultures, and hence identities, are essentially mutable, interactive and metamorphic. According to this view categories of race, language, culture and religion may be historically,

[1] An acronym for the Interntional Society for Krishna Consciousness, commonly known as the "Hare Krishna Movement".

geographically or even politically constructed and can therefore change as contexts change (Beck, 1992; Rosenau, 1992; Bendle, 2002; Giddens, 2002).[2]

This article begins with a discussion of the context that introduces ISKCON, its historical development, references to its founder A C Bhaktivedanta Swami and a selected review of the research dynamic in this organization. Secondly, in the social scientific theorizing about identity, this article explores the essentialist and constructionist paradigms as two frameworks of how identity gets defined and theories postured. Thereafter several definitions and theories of identity construction are offered, from Erikson's (1968) psychoanalytic posturing of identity, Mead's symbolic interactionism, theories of identity constructions within the collective contexts of race, language, culture and religion, (Hood, 1998; Murji and Hebert, 1999; Gould, 2000; Erasmus, 2001; and Hofmeyr, undated) as well as postmodern theoretical constructs of multiplicity, fluidity and self-reflexivity. This view regards identity as external, pliable, malleable and a product of discourse or of self-reflexivity (Beck[3], 1992; Segal, 1997; Bendle, 2002; Giddens, 2002). Thirdly, an analysis of the Vedic[4] theological perspectives on identity, as presented in ISKCON's teachings is undertaken. The theological basis upon which the ISKCON understands identity, the nature and characteristics of the self, and its representations within society, consists of several ancient scriptures, especially the *Bhagavad-gita As It Is, Srimad Bhagavatam,* and a compilations of essays, interviews, lectures and other texts by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami[5] and some of his prominent disciples.

Finally, it is argued that the Vedic theological perspective concurs that our identifications of the body and mind are illusory and are indeed external, pliable, fragmented and transient, but establishes a core notion of identity as spirit, which may be considered by some as essentialist in social science theorising. While essentialist views have been criticized by the postmodernists as positivist and often reinforcing oppression, the Vedic view considers a core notion of identity of self as an immaterial existent being, ultimately liberated from political and oppressive social designations.

[2] Rosenau, cited in Segal, 1997, and Beck cited in Adams (2003).

[3] Cited in Adams (2003)

[4] the word "Vedic" or "Vedas" is in reference to how ISKCON understands and uses the word.

[5] A.C. Bhakivedanta Swami, who passed away in 1977, is a spiritual master in the lineage of the Gaudiya Vaisnava Sampradaya (disciplic sucession). He was the founder of ISKCON.

A Brief History of ISKCON

The history of The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is well documented by several researchers (Judah, 1974; Gelberg, 1982; Shinn, 1987; Hopkins, Rochford, 1985; Ravindra Swarup das, 1993; Brooks, 1995; King, 2001; Ketola, 2002). The official biography of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami by Satsvarupa das Gosvami (1993) is perhaps the most comprehensive historical and internal look at the life of the founder and the early development of ISKCON, while several other anecdotal accounts may be also found by Tamal Krishna Gosvami (1984); Bhurijana das, (1996); Hari Sauri das, (1992); Giriraj Swami, (2000) and Partha Sarathi das (2001). Biographical details of the founder and its history, its beliefs and teachings, practices of worship of the institution, codes of behaviour and certain procedures indicate consistency with the ancient Vaisnava culture and heritage, specifically the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* tradition in the line of Caitanya Mahaprabhu.[6]

After a period of struggle Bhaktivedanta Swami successfully founded and registered the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in New York City in 1966, and in the decade that followed established 108 temples in major cities around the world. By 1977 ISKCON, or the *Hare Krishna Movement* as it became popularly known, had spread to six continents and Bhaktivedanta Swami had circled the globe fourteen times – writing, translating, lecturing and personally administrating this organisation and training his disciples.

While several researchers have documented the establishment of ISKCON in the West, its crises and controversies, as well as described ISKCON as a new religious movement (Brown, 2000) or examined societal attitudes to ISKCON as a "sect" or "cult" (Merudevi, 2001), ISKCON is seen to emerge as an organisation of "consolidation and growing maturity" (King, 2001:146), and one which has become increasingly institutionalized. King describes how ISKCON has since grown into an international federation of approximately 300 centres and temples, 40 farming communities, and 80 restaurants. Each temple, although financially and legally autonomous, is accountable to a local

[6] Born on February 18, 1486, Nimai (as he was called then) was an outstanding scholar at ten years old, and after a short married life took *sannyasa* (renounced order) at twenty four years. It was his deep philosophical expositions that gave rise to the *Gaudiya Vaisnava Sampradaya* – the disciplic line of *Vaisnavism* following Caitanya Mahaprabhu, called *Gaudiya*, from "Gauda"which is another name for Bengal from where he came, from which ISKCON derives. The "C" is pronounced as "Ch".

Governing Body Commissioner, who is part of the main Governing Body Commission, the final spiritual and managing authority in ISKCON.

That ISKCON was able to attract so many people internationally within a short space of time was also observed by Hopkins (1999). In his article *Why should ISKCON study its own History,* he described the assembling of evidence of the growth of ISKCON from 1965 to present as a complex matter – since ISKCON did not grow slowly but "exploded across the country and around the world" (1999: 69), the speed of which did not allow much careful documentation of the unfolding of events. Except for a general picture of the events between 1965 and 1967 ascertained from the biography of Bhaktivedanta Swami (endearingly called Srila Prabhupada) by his followers and through the diaries of a few disciples, there is no overall history of "ISKCON's institutional development during Prabhupada's lifetime" (Hopkins, 1999: 69. Brooks (1995) also regarded the establishment of ISKCON as a unique social and anthropological phenomenon and viewed ISKCON as a bona-fide branch of the *Gaudiya Vaisnava Sampradaya,* whose influence has rapidly spread to every corner of the globe, comparable to the spread of Christianity and Buddhism.

Thus, ISKCON's establishment within a period of late modernity had important implications for its rapid spread throughout the western world, and I propose, its corresponding influence on social and religious identity.

Exploring Identity Theories

An interrogation of the available social science literature on identity theorizing reveals that identity research falls into two opposing categories - constructionist on one hand, and essentialist on the other.[7] Attempts to concretize or operationalize a definition of "identity" often produce definitions that are indistinct and varied. Bendle (2002: 1) maintains that identity has been deployed in diverse ways in analytical studies, and there exists a crisis in the conceptualization of identity as well as accounts of identity that are "inconsistent, under-theorized and incapable of bearing the analytical load required."

Tamimi (undated: 1)[8] defines identity as a, "oneness: that which endures as a self-regulating unity throughout change." Castells (2000: 6) describes identity as "the construction of meaning, the meaning of actions by social actors on the basis of social attributes,' in other words identity is not constructed in

[7] Generally constructionist is regarded as leading to progressive social outcomes, while essentialist is regarded as traditional, positivist and often seen as reinforcing oppression

[8] http://www.islamic-studies.org/tamim.htm

isolation. Gover and Gavelek (undated)[9] define identity as the idea "that we are a part of something beyond our selves" (e.g. South African, a parent, a lecturer) "while at the same time separable from it" (i.e. a unique individual marked by his or her proper name). They characterize identity as consisting of both *person* and the *self*. The *person* is that which is socially defined, that which is capacitated for public action, and the *self* – the origin of one's perception which is constant, neither the *person* nor *self* exist in isolation. Giddens (2002:53) defines self-identity as that which is "reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his own biography". Thus identity may be seen as the "core" of the person, which can be described as deeply rooted, or the idea of a core may be rejected altogether in acceptance of a more malleable, inherently segmented identity, which is produced by discourse (Bendle, 2002). A reading of the literature suggests that the concepts "self" and "identity" seem to be used interchangeably, although the concept "person" may be used more in reference to the public, external and socially defined sense of self, while "self" is the individual's private experience of himself (Jenkins, 1996).

Bendle (2002:5) provides the following summary of how identity is analysed in the social science literature:

- In terms of similarity and differences involving social, racial, ethnic or gender categories,
- In contextual terms that vary with one's social situation, providing a multifaceted experience,
- In cultural categories reflecting contemporary conceptions of identity,
- In terms of one's subjective sense of self, possibly based on notions of an 'inner life',
- In terms of the social performance of self-hood,
- In terms of 'narratives of the self', understood as stories one tells oneself about who one is, and
- In psychoanalytic terms, where identity and the self are felt to be constrained by the unconscious structures of the mind.

[9] Gover, Mark, R and Gavelek, J (undated): Persons and selves: The dialectics of identity. http://www.ot.creighton.edu/.../gover%.20&%20Gavalek_Persons%20&%20selves_The%20Dialectics%20%20Identity.pdf

The theories of identity construction reviewed in this article generally fall into one of more of the above categories. Hood, Jr. (1998) places the approaches to identity research and theorizing into two groups: *intrapersonal psychological approach,* with its problems of operationalization and measurement, and typically investigated by clinical procedures; and the *interpersonal sociological approach,* operationalized and investigated by conventional, empirical methodologies of the social sciences. The first six categories listed by Bendle above, may be classified as interpersonal and the last one as intrapersonal, or more constructionist in nature.

Erikson's (1968) classic theory of *Ego Identity* falls into the intrapersonal psychological approach. He regarded identity formation as a central psychoanalytic concept, and is characterized by how an individual defines one's sense of self. According to this theory ego identity is largely unconsciously determined. If the intricacy of understanding "Who am I?" is what characterizes identity, then identity formation is the process of integrating distinct segments of the self into a unique being, especially in adolescence, where the individual is identifying with different groups and exploring different roles. For optimal psychological health a stable identity is necessary, while the failure to achieve ego identity will result in identity confusion. Erikson's main contribution was his original proposition that personality development is marked by a series of stages universal to humanity, which he called the *Epigentic Principle* (1968: 92-93), stages which unfold according to a "ground plan",[10] characterized by crisis in each stage arising from physiological development and social demands. Crisis is not regarded as a catastrophe but a "turning point" (1968: 96). If the crisis is handled satisfactorily, healthy ego development occurs, e.g. trust, autonomy. If the crisis is handled incorrectly then personality dysfunction occurs, e.g. shame, doubt, guilt (Hjelle and Ziegler, 1981). It was thus Erikson's theory of "identity crisis" that gave impetus to the preponderance of identity studies in psychology, sociology, and other social sciences (Gleason, 1983; Tatum, 2000). However, although he acknowledged that identity formation is continuous over the lifespan of the individual, Erikson's emphasis on identity construction as an unconscious process cannot simply be imported

[10] According to Erikson, just as a fetus develops according to critical time of ascendance to form a functioning whole, and just as the baby when leaving the womb develops according to a prescribed sequence of "locomotor, sensory and social capacities" similarly personality development follows a set of predetermined "inner" laws (1968: 92-93).

from psychoanalysis or psychology to sociological analysis of identity unproblematically, since it is extremely central to sociological analysis and therefore needs "adequate critical analysis and theorization" (Bendle, 2002: 3).

In contrast to the *intrapersonally* oriented psychological approach, the second group (sociological research framework), posits identity formation as mainly influenced by *interpersonal* processes. The early conceptual platform was to be set by theorists like G.H. Mead, whose research in 1934 had significant influence on viewing the personal self as embedded in social contexts, which gave way to a class of theorists called symbolic interactionists (Harter, 1977). Symbolic interactionists stressed that a concept of self does not initially exist at birth, but develops only in the process of social relations (Adams, 2003). The attitudes of significant others was regarded as having the main impact on the formation of one's personal self. The self is seen to develop only in the context of social and cultural contexts. Mead stated that our ability to be reflexive and the nature of that reflexivity is determined by the cultural influences around us. Thus a significant contribution of Mead was to give meaning to self-experience within a particular cultural context, as well as be able to make a case for reflexivity being reducible to interaction. Although the theory recognizes the social origins of selfhood, it does not scrutinize complex modern social organisation, nor does it examine the consequence of social conflict upon the formation of social identity (Adams, 2003).

As a post symbolic interactionist, Jenkins (1996), basing his arguments on the work of Mead (1934), Goffman (1969) and Barth (1981), proposes a model of *internal-external dialectic of identification*, where he argues for a unitary model of selfhood. Jenkins argues that the "mind" is an inherently social phenomenon, echoing Mead's ideas that mind and selfhood are features of "embodied individuals", i.e. the human body is "simultaneously a referent of individual continuity, an index of collective similarity and difference, and a canvas upon which identification can play" (Jenkins, 1996: 21). Although many authors may regard the mind as automatically synonymous with the self, Jenkins argues, they are not the same. Furthermore, Jenkins contends that since individuals consciously pursue goals, they *want* to be seen in a particular manner to develop successful social identities. In other words, there is a definite self-conscious, decision-making aspect to human behaviour – the internal-external dialectic between how they see themselves and how they are seen by others. Jenkins sees the "self" as parallel to identity, defining it as an "individuals reflexive sense of her or his own particular identity, constituted *vis-à-vis* others in terms of similarity and difference, without which we would not

know who we are and hence would not be able to act" (1996: 29-30). A further concept directly relevant to my research is Jenkins discussion of an *institutional* identity. With specific reference to organisations, he mentions that since organisations are groups, they will have certain established norms of practice, activities and social classification, which will bestow particular socially identities upon its members. Jenkins thus emphasizes the social and political allocation of individuals to particular identities.

Postmodernism and Identity Construction

According to Segal (1997) postmodernists fall into two groups: the sceptics and the affirmatives, the former having a more pessimistic view of the post modern age, and the latter, optimistic. While certain differences exist, both denounce the appeal to *Reason*,[11] and argue that each situation is different and calls for special understanding as meanings vary from culture to culture. Postmodernists reject *Reason* because it is contradictory to concepts of emotion, introspection, intuition, autonomy, creativity, and imagination. They also view positivism as a form of imperialism – tools of colonial imposition, used to legitimize oppression (Rosenau, 1992)[12]. Classification of individuals is regarded as a bureaucratic device used in government and social control. Social identities are thus regarded as being developed, and allocated within power relations (Jenkins, 1996), a point further elucidated by Harro (2000) in examining diversity and social justice in the USA. He states that we are all born into a particular set of social identities as well as influenced by powerful socializing forces, all of which predispose us to "the unequal roles in the dynamic system of oppression" (2000: 15). His theory of the *Cycle of Socialization* describes how our socialization begins from birth as individuals without choice who are merely shaped into particular identities by already existing structures of history, traditions, beliefs, prejudices, stereotypes and other mechanics. Parents and other significant caregivers shape our self-concepts and self-perceptions, and norms. Some of us are fortunate to be born into "agent" groups, i.e. those that have more social power, privilege and opportunities, while others are born into "target" groups – those that are subordinate, "disenfranchised, exploited and victimized" by various types of prejudice, e.g. on the basis of race, religion, gender, ethnicity, or economic status. These shape our sense of the world especially as we operate later in our lives in the larger external world. Other

[11] the view that the same rules apply in all cases
[12] cited in Segal, 1997

powerful social, religious and cultural agents influence our sense of self are religious institutions, schools, television, legal and other government agencies to name a few. Thus postmodernists vehemently reject such forms of classification regarding them as products of government and social control with its concomitant rewards and punishments that perpetuate the status quo. Postmodernist views therefore reject the notion of a core identity altogether and describe identity as something more external, pliable, malleable – identity is seen as a product of discourse and is intrinsically "fragmented, multiple and transient" (Bendle, 2002:5). This is in opposition to the essentialist view which regards identity as the core of personhood with which an individual is endowed.

Giddens (2002) theorizes that the rigid boundaries of tradition and culture pose barriers to one's self understanding, and reflexive self awareness provides the individual in post traditional settings more freedom to construct self-identity. The primary determinants of behaviour then are how individuals receive and process information from the environment, how they develop this *individualization*. According to Beck (1992),[13] "individualization of life situations and processes thus means that biographies become *self-reflexive*, socially prescribed biography is transformed into biography that is self produced and continues to be produced". The self is seen to determine the nature of its own identity through exerting conscious choices, not bound by fixed and culturally determined positions, but increasing autonomy and control.

Hoyle (undated) provides an interesting synopsis of what social and behavioural scientists understand about the self:

- The self is reflexive – it can become the object of its own attention,
- How one understands the world is filtered through how one understands oneself,
- Although generally stable after adolescence, different aspects of the self may predominate at different times, creating an impression of fluidity, and
- The public self that is influenced by different personal and social motives, may not be congruent with the self of which we are privately conscious.

Hoyle further lists the following as domains still unclear to researchers:

[13] quoted in Adams (2003: 223)

- That the exact location of the self in the body is not known – the exact areas of the brain where "self-relevant thought and emotion" have not yet been identified,
- the degree to which the self is extant at birth,
- how profoundly culture influences the self, and
- that certain aspects of self can only be inferred and may not be fully describable, or observable.

Although the interrogation of available literature on identity theorizing produces varied and sometimes indistinct definitions of identity, viz. that the self is a product of inner psychological processes, or produced in the course of social interaction, or that which is more fluid and reflexively produced, what has emerged from the literature review is that researchers at least accept the concept of self as extant. Baars (1996: 1) considers the sense of self as "conceptually coherent and well-supported by hard evidence". While the dynamics of the *self* and the *person* are interwoven, the self may be considered to exist as a separate entity, what Baars (1996: 7) calls "the self as observer" of conscious experiences. This knower is regarded as the "I", which has access to "perception, thought, memory and, body control". Baars regards the self as a structure that remains largely constant across many different life circumstances. In this regard, Bendle's (2002) comments that the plasticity ascribed to the self by postmodernists ignores the idea of a core to personality, and his question as to what sustains a continuity of self in a changing world, becomes increasingly significant. Relevant discussion about the stability and constancy of the self, its nature and how it is influenced by extraneous factors are discussed in the Vedic literature.

The Self and Identity: Vedic Theological Perspectives[14]

An important point prior to discussing the theological perspectives on identity found in the main ISKCON literatures, is to elucidate what ISKCON regards as "Vedic" literature. Satsvarupa dasa Gosvami (1977) explains that Vedic literature is that which comes from the *Vedas*. Although some scholars maintain that only the original four *Vedas – Rg, Atharva, Yajur* and *Sama,* are genuine

[14] The term "Veda" is used in a broad sense in relation to what ISKCON considers as the Vedic literature.

Vedic literatures, Satsvarupa cites Madhvacarya[15] who describes the *Rg, Yajur, Sama, Atharva Vedas*, as well as *Mahabharata* (which includes the *Bhagavad-gita*), *Pancaratra*, the original *Ramayana*, and the *Puranas* (supplements to Vedic literature) as all Vedic literature. According to Satsvarupa das Gosvami (1977, 1-2) to be accepted as Vedic, a literature must maintain the same purpose as the original Vedic texts:

> The Vedic scriptures (*sastras*) comprise a harmonious whole with a harmonious conclusion (*siddhanta*). Consequently, we accept as a bona fide Vedic writing any work that expands on the Vedic *siddhanta* without changing its meaning, even if the work is not one of the original scriptures. In fact, the Vedic tradition necessitates further authoritative works that convey the Vedic message according to time and place.[16] However to be genuine, these extensions of Vedic literature must strictly conform to the doctrines of the *Vedas*, the *Puranas*, and the *Vedanta-sutra*.

The Nature of "I"

Questions of identity are central to the deliberations contained in the Vedic literature. Satsvarupa dasa Gosvami (1977)[17] explains that the main purpose of such literature is to disseminate knowledge about self-realization, which when practiced will lead to liberation from suffering (*moksha*). It emphasizes the view that, notwithstanding its apparent pleasures, material life produces suffering due to birth, old age, disease and death. Three categories of suffering are described, viz. *adhyatmika*, the existence of miseries that our own bodies experience; *adhibhautika*, those caused by other living entities; and *adhidaivika*,

[15] Madhvacarya (AD 1239-1319) whose coments on Vedanta Sutra (2.1.6) frame this discussion, is one of the principal teachers of the Vaisnava tradition following Ramanujacarya.

[16] In this regard, Rosen (1991) describes A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, whose spiritual lineage follows in the disciplic succession of Caitanya Mahaprabhu (A.D. 1486-1534) as one of India's greatest scholars, philosophers, prophets and cultural ambassadors. Rosen further cites the 1976 *Encyclopaedia Brittanica Book of the Year* which states that Bhaktivedanta Swami "astonished academic and literary communities worldwide by writing and publishing fifty-two books on ancient Vedic Culture...in the period from October 1968 to November 1975". Other positive reviews and comments are given by Hopkins (1983), Judah (1983) and Spreadbury, Kalia, Lacombe, Bhatt and Long (all cited in *The Science of Self Realization*, 1968, xix, xxiii), which acknowledge the validity and credibility of Bhaktivedanta Swami's input.

[17] One of many senior disciples of Bhaktivedanta Swami, who would be regarded as continuing in the lineage of the disciplic sucession.

those produced by forces of nature and the temporary nature of the world. Satsvarupa Goswami (1977) further explains that, we develop a mistaken identity as we come under the influence of illusion (*maya*). We then identify with a temporary body as our real identity, or we consider the temporary world to be the sum total of our existence. This of course begs the question, just who is the "we" or "I" being described here? Bhaktivedanta Swami (1966: 30-31) expounds:

> The first thing is to understand that you are a spirit soul. And because you are a spirit soul, you are changing your body. This is the *ABC* of spiritual understanding...that the body is your covering (your shirt and coat) and that within this body you are living.

This resonates with what Baars (1996: 7) regards as about the self as an independent observer or knower of experiences, which displays constancy across variegated life circumstances, as well as with Bendle's (2002) comments that the plasticity ascribed to the self by postmodernists disregards any notion of a core to personality, bringing into question as to what sustains a continuity of self in a changing world.

Tamal Krishna Gosvami (1998) reiterates the declaration that our real nature is spirit, each entity an infinitesimal part of the Supreme, qualitatively the same but quantitatively different. He explains that the body/soul distinction can be understood when we use the words "I, or my". We are able to comprehend that our true person is separate from our physical being, e.g. when we say "My body", not "I body" or "I mind" or "I intelligence". Baars (1996) calls this the "subjective sense of self". He explains that every "statement of personal experience in English refers to a personal pronoun, an "*I*", as in 'I saw a cat'. In other words "you are the perceiver, the actor and narrator of your experience". Thus we can discriminate between the physical body and what seems to be a proprietor of that. Although identities become embedded in one's mind, that ascription does not in itself constitute one's true identity.

Related to this is Beck's[18] assertion that categories of race, language, culture and religion may be historically, geographically or even politically constructed, and since such contexts can change, one's identity is not fixed or bound by these positions. Harro (2000) describes how we are born into a particular set of social identities and influenced by powerful socializing forces from birth, viz. the already existing structures of history, traditions, beliefs,

[18] cited in Adams, 2003

prejudices, stereotypes – in which parents and other significant caregivers are powerful agents in determining our self concepts and self-perceptions. Giddens (2002) also theorizes that one's self understanding is obstructed by what he regards as inflexible restrictions posed by tradition and culture. It is only by reflexive self awareness that the individual in post traditional settings can develop *individualization*, where the *self* determines its own identity through exerting conscious choices characterized by increasing autonomy and control. As far as the postulations by Beck, Harro and Giddens above are concerned, there seems to be a confluence with the Vedic conception that one's identification as part of a particular tradition, culture, community, nation, or society is limited, external and can pose a barrier to one's self understanding. The Vedic concept however, does not accept that unlimited self-reflexivity can produce a real understanding of self, and is more inclined towards Bendle's (2002) viewpoint that such a stance has produced a crisis of identity in society, manifest as greater feelings of alienation and insecurity. Mansfield (2000: 2) also contends that while the tendency in postmodern society is greater self emphasis as a point of reference, it has simultaneously produced more insecurity, fragility, isolation and vulnerability of the self due to ambivalence produced by conflicting signals from our education and entertainment industries, world events like wars, and greater addiction to narcotics and fads. Thus the identity derived from unlimited self-reflexivity may also be illusory and produced from the tendency of the post modern individual for immediate gratification and greater hedonism, what Satsvarupa Gosvami (1977) says the Vedic texts refer to as *maya*, or our mistaken identity.

Bhaktivedanta Swami (1966)[19] in an elaborate discussion on identity and designation mentions:

> Liberation means nothing more, the conception of getting free from these designations which we have acquired from the association of material nature... I call myself a man, or animal, or I have got some name, given by my parents. Or because I am born in some particular country I designate myself to belong to that country, and because I accept some particular faith, so I designate myself to that faith. In so many ways we are now designated. This designation should be given up. When designations are given up, then we are free, pure soul...

Tamal Krishna Gosvami (1998) further describes the soul as the true self, the origin of consciousness, and origin of thinking and feeling. What then is

[19] *Bhagavad-gita* lectures 4.6-8 in Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003)

consciousness? Singh (2004: 13) regards consciousness as life energy and the essential characteristic of the soul which is spiritual. He states that the "ontological nature of consciousness is non-physical". This concept of the soul or self as an immaterial existent being is not foreign to the realms of philosophy and science. From Plato's dualism, and Aristotle's materialism (Eliasmith, 2004), to Descarte's 1642 postulations on mind and body, and Kant to James on consciousness (Baars, 1996) one realizes that there has been, and still is, much debate and confusion about the nature of the mind and consciousness in philosophy, psychology and in the cognitive and neurosciences (Long, 1969; Velmans, 1996; Baars, 1996; Sutherland, 1998; Cromby, 2003; Kazlev, 2004). What exactly is consciousness? How is it related to the brain? Is it simply a product of mechanistic or physical laws, or is it associated with a separate entity associated with the brain? These are questions central to the historicity of the mind/body issue.

The Mind/Body Issue and Consciousness

According to Velmans (1996), consciousness in the social science context may be described as follows:

- an "awareness" – encompassing all that which we are conscious or aware of. This includes experiences we commonly have, like thoughts, feelings, images, dreams, body experiences, etc, and the three-dimensional world externally. This is also called "phenomenal awareness";
- the "mind". A comparison which is limited because mind may be regarded as a psychological state which may or not be "conscious";
- "self-consciousness" – to be conscious of oneself in a reflexive manner, and
- a state of wakefulness, which however is not necessarily the same as a sense of "awareness".

The description given by Velmans is congruent with the explanation in the Vedic model, that consciousness is "the awareness of thoughts and sensations that we directly perceive and know that we perceive. Since other persons are similar to us, it is natural to suppose that they are similarly conscious" (Sadaputa das, 1980).

In early Western thought, consciousness or mind was regarded as non-physical and distinct from the brain. The current philosophical understanding of mind/brain dualism is identified with seventeenth century French philosopher

Rene Descartes (Drutakarma, 1997) whose utterance, "I think therefore I am" popularized the idea of reality as a dichotomy of matter (substance extended in space) and spirit (mind existing outside space) which gave impetus to some of the most vociferous discussion on mind/body dualism (now called Cartesian dualism, after Descartes). He attempted to formulate his discussions in such a way as to reconcile the dominant Christian worldview and rise of mechanistic science (Cromby, 2003). His explanations that mind and matter can and do affect each other (known as *interactionism*) however, proved problematic for advocates of the Cartesian model, who were unable to counter strong criticism from physicists who claimed that a nonmaterial substance could not influence a material body without violating the physical laws of conservation and momentum (Drutakarma, Bhutatma and Sadaputa, 2003). Other attempts at dualistic models that fitted with the emerging scientific paradigm followed. *Epiphenomenalism,* associated with Thomas Huxley, asserts that matter gives rise to a nonphysical consciousness without a corresponding influence on matter. *Monism* maintains that the mind and the brain are the same, an offshoot of this being *panpsychism* that describes matter as innately possessing consciousness.[20] Several other explanations may be grouped into the following categories: *materialism or physicalism,* the view that mental events exist ultimately as physical events (that is reduced to simply the firing of neurons in the brain); and *phenomenalism or subjective idealism,* the view that physical events are reduced to mental events ultimately (that is, it all happens in our mind).[21]

Several difficulties with mechanistic explanations of consciousness have been posed by notable philosophers and researchers themselves. Although the eminent Karl Popper (1977) holds the view of mind as emergent from matter, he strongly argues for the nonphysical nature of the mind, yet he finds himself in an ambivalent position: "From an evolutionary point of view, I regard the self-conscious mind as an emergent product of the brain...Now I want to emphasize how little is said by saying that the mind is an emergent product of the brain. It has practically no explanatory value, and it hardly amounts to more than putting a question mark in a certain place in human evolution".[22] His view assumes that conscious awareness exists, directly experienced by the conscious self and

[20] In *Origins: Higher Dimensions in Science* (2003). Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA

[21] In Fingelkurts, A and Fingelkurts, A . (2005): Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind-body_problem

[22] Popper, Karl, R and Eccles, J.C (1977) cited in Origins: Higher Dimensions in Science (2003). Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003). [CD ROM]. The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA.

inexplicable by laws governing matter. In the 1990s a major shift occurred in the neurosciences due to the influence of Nobel-laureates Francis Chick and David Chalmers.[23] Consciousness and its relation to brain function became a more respectable topic for investigation – a trend aptly captured by Baars (1996) when he referred to subjectivity as a "resurrection of the observing self". The majority of scientists however, continue to insist that all mental phenomena are products of the physical brain and nothing more, i.e. the reductionistic view of mechanistic science, and the search continues in the neurosciences for the NCC – a neural correlate to consciousness (Fingelkurts and Fingelkurts, 2005). While it is accepted that there may be physical and neurophysiological causes and correlates of a given experience within the brain, theorists still disagree about the nature and location of consciousness and its effects. Velmans (1996) motivates for a move away from both dualist and reductionistic models towards a more "reflexive" model – that we do experience the phenomenal world to be an external reality, but to research what we actually experience and how it comes to be that way, needs a more ecological and unified understanding of consciousness,[24] a view which may be to some extent congruent with the Vedic model of consciousness. Thus the Vedic model is consistent with current theorizing in the sciences that there are physical and neurological correlates of consciousness, but also proposes a non-physical aspect, which is examined in the next section.

The Gaudiya Vaisnava Model of Identity

According to Sivarama Swami (1998), three basic concepts of transcendence surround the nature of the Absolute Truth, viz. the personal, impersonal and the void. Several variations exist within each category, and even the Vedas are cited by different schools to establish their own understanding. Since the views of the nature of the Absolute as well as the views of identity differ, it follows that the attitudes, practices, activities and understanding of the practitioner will be influenced by the particular viewpoint, as well as the definition of his or her goal. Thus for the devotee in the ISKCON tradition, his or her view of reality and identity will be framed by the understanding of the Absolute Truth as

[23] Chalmers explanation of "Global Workspace theory"

[24] For a more detailed explanation, which is beyond the scope of this discussion, see Velmans, M (1996): An Introduction to the Science of Consciousness *in* The Science of Consciousness: Psychological, Neuropsychological and Clinical Research. Velmans, M (ed). Routledge: London. http://cogprints.org/395/00/Definingconsciousness.html

described by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami in the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* tradition. Given that the concept of the Absolute Truth is central to any spiritual practice, a brief description of each of these categories is necessary to understand the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* concept of the Absolute Truth in which the ISKCON tradition follows.

Sivarama Swami (1998) explains that in the impersonal category one ultimately seeks to eradicate all appearances as temporary in favour of realizing non-duality with Brahman. In this regard Satsvarupa das Gosvami (1977) also states that Sankara alludes to the *jiva's* qualitative oneness with the Supreme Brahman in the Sanskrit phrase *tat tvam asi* ('you are that also") and therefore *moksha* for *advaita vedantists* actually means that the *jiva* (*atma*) realizes it is one with Brahman. Even the Buddhists ultimately accept *nirvana* as an ultimate position of voidity over transient personalized manifestations. The *Gaudiya Vaisnavas* however, maintain that while the *jiva* is spirit, it is not identical in all ways with the Supreme, arguing that if the *atma* were actually the same as the Supreme it could never fall into the illusion of material identity. Vaisnavas therefore refer to Sankarites as *mayavadis*, referring to their conclusion that *maya* (illusion) covers the potency of the Supreme, which Vaisnavas deem as impossible. Thus the personal category accepts the concept of the *jiva* as a servant of the Supreme, both existing independently, perfection being the attainment of loving devotional service to the Supreme in an eternal transcendental realm full of variety.

Sadaputa das (1980) proposes that the material body exists in two categories: the gross and the subtle. The *subtle* body is made up of mind, intelligence, and the apparent self. The *gross* body is made up of the five physical elements – solid matter, liquids, radiant energy, gases, and ethereal substances. However, there exists another element, non-physical in nature, an individual *atma* or a soul, which is "a quantum of consciousness". Consciousness is due to the *atma*, but the content of the *atma*'s consciousness is due to its connections with the particular body it occupies. The *atma* is considered to be atomic, yet individual, eternally sentient and independent of the physical body. The body is considered to be like a machine, a *yantra*. The *atma* is the actual conscious self of the living being, and the body is simply an insentient vehicle. It is only when the *atma* is embodied that its natural senses connect with the physical information-processing systems of the body, and consequently we perceive the world through the bodily senses.

Drutakarma, Bhutatma and Sadaputa (2003) quote several medical and clinical cases of NDEs (near death experiences), spontaneous past life memory

recall in children and hypnotic regression studies (notably by Steveson 1966, 1974; Sabom, 1982)[25] as evidence for the existence of the non-physical, conscious entity. Sadaputa (1980) proposes that an understanding of the *atma* as innately conscious, and possessing "the sensory faculties and intelligence needed to interpret abstract properties of complex brain states", opens up further avenues of study and exploration. Thus he presents the non-mechanistic Vedic paradigm of *sanatana dharma*[26] which regards the "conscious personality as fundamental and irreducible". It is possible to experience this level of consciousness directly. Sadaputa das (1980) explains that:

> The direct reciprocal exchange between the *atma* and Krishna defines the ultimate function and meaning of conscious personality, just as the interaction of an electron with an electric field might be said to define the ultimate meaning of electric charge. *Sanatana-dharma* teaches that the actual nature of consciousness can be understood by the *atma* only on this level of conscious activity.

To accept the question of identity as beyond material designation then begs the question of individuality. Tamal Krsna Gosvami (1998) elaborates that unlike the *advaita vedantists* who maintain that at liberation the *atma* becomes "consumed by the One Supreme Self' i.e. *Brahman,*[27] Vaisnavas maintain that the *atma* remains distinctly individual even after liberation. He argues that to consider *atma* and *Brahman* to be undifferentiated disregards the individuality and personality of the soul, and thwarts a state of ultimate bliss in service to God. He asserts that the process of *bhakti yoga* or devotional service is the means by which to attain that ultimate bliss and unstultified consciousness.

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[25] Stevenson, I (1966): Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation. William Byrd Press: Richmond; Stevenson, I (1974): Xenoglossy: A Review and Report of a Case. Wright Publishers: Bristol; Sabom, M A (1982): Recollections of Death: A Medical Investigation. Harper and Row: New York. All cited in *Origins*, 1984

[26] *Sanatan dharma* explains that the body is a like a machine, but the essence of conscious personality is to be found in an entity that interacts with this machine but is separate from it. By using the opportunity of the natural sensory faculties of the *atma* a higher state of activity can be achieved, in relation to a supreme sentient being, God or Krishna. Since both the *atma* and Krishna are by nature sentient and personal, this relationship involves the full use of all the faculties of perception, thought, feeling, and action in a reciprocation of love.

[27] what *Advaita vedantists* call the cosmic or universal energy which they regard as the ultimate destination of the soul, and what Vaisnavas refer to as the all pervading energy of the Supreme Lord considered to be but a partial realization of the Supreme Absolute Truth.

Gaudiya Vaisnavas believe that as spirit souls we once were with *Krishna*,[28] but we made a wilful decision to give up that relationship, a costly miscalculation that resulted in us plunging into the material atmosphere, where we became imprisoned in material existence since time immemorial. Bhaktivedanta Swami explains that "regarding when and why such propensities overcame the pure living entities, it can only be explained that the *jivas* have infinitesimal independence and that due to misuse of this independence some of the living entities have become implicated in the conditions of cosmic creation and are therefore called *nitya-baddhas*, or eternally conditioned souls".[29] Yet that imprisonment is not permanent, and when those acts that pollute our consciousness are removed we can be liberated. Bhaktivedanta Swami (1972) elaborates:

> False ego means accepting this body as oneself. When one understands that he is not his body and is spirit soul, he comes to his real ego. Ego is there. False ego is condemned, but not real ego. In the Vedic literature *(Brhad-aranyaka Upanisad* 1.4.10) it is said, aham brahmasmi: I am Brahman, I am spirit. This "I am," the sense of self, also exists in the liberated stage of self-realization. This sense of "I am" is ego, but when the sense of "I am" is applied to this false body it is false ego. When the sense of self is applied to reality, that is real ego. There are some philosophers who say we should give up our ego, but we cannot give up our ego, because ego means identity. We ought, of course, to give up the false identification with the body.[30]

Satsvarupa (1977) regards that those unfamiliar with the Vedic conception of the soul, identity and destiny may view the Vedas as defeatist or pessimistic or even essentialist. For this reason, Albert Schweitzer (cited in Satsvarupa, 1977) referred to the Vedic philosophy as "world-and-life negation".

Conclusion

This article posited the question "Who am I" as a fundamental question in current psychological and social research on the construction of identity and that which has been studied from many perspectives – psychoanalytical,

[28] in our original identities as unadulterated, fully cognizant, spiritual *atmas* in the ultimate spiritual abode.

[29] *Srimad Bhagavatam*: (2003). Canto 3. Chapter 5, Verse 51. Purport.

[30] *Bhagavad-gita* As It Is. Ch. 13. 8-12, purport

philosophical, educational, phenomenological, sociological, socio-linguistic, anthropological, and theological.

In attempting to present an overall view of the various identity construction theories and perspectives, it was found that there is:

- A pattern of decreasing reductionistic analysis, where binaries of race, culture or language regarded as are more fluid, multiple and transient, rather than mutually exclusive. This trend towards challenging sets of value that are exclusionary, indicates that it is part of the "ongoing social construction of cultural identities which makes them never completed, but always in process" (Erasumus, 2001).
- a negation of the monopoly of any single discipline's view of self and identity as more of a multidisciplinary approach is being forged; which has resulted in a blurring of disciplines;
- A predominant view that cultures, and hence identities, are essentially mutable, interactive and metamorphic.

The *Gaudiya Vaisnava* viewpoint, while acknowledging the existence of the *constructed* self, as well as the unrestrained, extended *reflexive* self of postmodernity, regards both categories as ultimately erroneous since both types of "selves" are based on identification that is transitory and material. Further a distinction is drawn between the *conditioned self*, i.e. that "self" as socially constructed, or reflexively determined, and the *individual* or *possessor* of the self, called *atma*.

The Vedic theological perspective further concurs that our identifications of the body and mind are illusory and are indeed external, pliable, fragmented and transient, but establishes a core notion of identity as spirit, which may be considered in the context of social science as essentialist. While essentialist views have been criticized by the postmodernists as positivist and often reinforcing oppression, the Vedic view considers a core notion of identity of self as an immaterial existent being, ultimately liberated from political and oppressive social designations.

Religious Giving in South Africa: A Hindu Perspective

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Introduction

For Hindus, charity is primordial in the sense that it features in an integral way in their religious literature and culture, and could be seen as normative (considered proper conduct), relativistic (having different giving capacities from the elite to the most humble giver), individualistic and subjective (acts of giving assumes a human face for both the giver and receiver).Thus the notion of giving is essentially romantic (Sen, 1993:36), especially at the individual level. According to Everrat and Solanki (2004) religion plays a very important role in influencing the decision to give. Voluntarism amongst Hindus is a self-initiated act which is largely driven by a sense of socio-religious commitment. Giving is thus understood as a universal phenomenon which includes all possible situations and counting all plausible reasons for giving.

This report begins with a brief introduction about Hindus in South Africa and touches on concerns raised at selected major Hindu conferences over the last two decades. The issue of giving as a way of life for Hindus as identified in scripture is presented in the second section. It is argued that in general, giving patterns reflect a bilateral relationship between service rendition and karma in which different degrees of reward can be accrued through the act of giving. The third section of this report presents an assessment of Hindu giving in South Africa based on the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. Hindu giving is an individualistic and

subjective experience and giving is seen as a social contract, done compassionately and providing contentment at an individual level.
Hindu giving patterns are contextualised within welfare (especially poverty alleviation initiatives and feeding programmes), culture and knowledge-empowerment (through planned cultural activities and the distribution of religious books) and development and service orientations (the building of schools and homes for indigent families). It is argued that Hindus display an extremely sophisticated articulation and understanding of social giving.

There are two challenges in writing this report. Firstly, Hindu organisations have been reluctant to divulge details of their financial status and secondly, there is no form of assessment of mandatory or systematic individual giving in Hinduism.

Hindus in South Africa

In 1995, there were 527 352 Hindus in South Africa of the one million Indians in the country (2001 Census). Hindus accounted for a very large percentage of Indians who came to South Africa in 1860 as indentured labourers, who were subsequently followed by passenger or trader Indians. Despite over 130 years of oppression, international sanctions and isolation from the Indian motherland, Hindus flourished by nurturing and maintaining their religious and cultural heritage – a proud record of its self-help approach in building the community. The recognition of this development was expressed at a World Hindu Conference in 1995 held in South Africa.[1] Largely for historical reasons, the overwhelming majority of Hindus are located in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (Table 1).

At South Africa's first post-apartheid national convention on Hindu unity convened on September 6, 2003, in Durban, ideas around charity and the lack of structure in respect of organised giving was raised. The two day conference was organised by the South African Hindu Maha Sabha[2] and attended by 370 delegates from 108 Hindi, Tamil, Gujerati and Telugu linguistic and community groups from across the country.

At this conference, Trikamjee (2003) emphasized that when poor Hindus are in trouble, financially or socially, the Hindu community itself should have some kind of support structure in place that can help to solve

1 World Hindu Conference: Vision for the 21st century, Durban South Africa, July 1995.

2 The South African Hindu Maha Sabha, the national voice of the Hindus in the country was formed in 1912. Being primarily a religious body, the South African Hindu Maha Sabha initially devoted much of its attention to the religious needs of Hindus in the country.

their problems. This was lacking and the poor continue to be exploited by missionaries from other faiths.[3] As a result of this, many Hindu organisations reacted by advancing a greater degree of activism against religious conversions. The Arya Samaj, the Divine Life Society, the Ramakrishna Mission, Sai Baba Samitis and ISKCON are among some of these organisations.

Table 1: Hindu Population in South Africa by Province

Province	Number	%
Eastern Cape	5275	1.00
Free State	466	0.08
Gauteng	67421	11.64
KwaZulu-Natal	443987	84.19
Limpopo	1043	0.20
Mpumalanga	2220	0.42
Northern Cape	345	0.07
North West	1267	0.24
Western Cape	5328	1.01
TOTAL	527 352	99.09

(Adapted from Statistics South Africa, 2001)

In 1983, Dr T Naidoo (religious scholar) noted that Hindu organisations do not offer a comprehensive structure of social and ministerial support for Hindus, particularly in times of difficulty.[4] A national survey conducted by Strategy and Tactics (2003) revealed that the majority of Hindus participated actively in religion. More specifically, 42% visited a place of worship at least once a week, and 38% at least once a month (Table 2).

3 South Africa's first national convention on Hindu unity (Sept 6, 2003) by SA Hindu Maha Sabha - The chairperson, Trikamjee (2003),in his address, made reference to the tide of conversion of Hindus to other faiths.

4 http:/www.hinduismtoday.com/archives/1983/01.shtml

Table 2: Frequency of Visits to Place of Worship by Hindus

Frequency	Number	%
Every Day	6	2.84
2-3 Times a week	24	11.37
Once a week	58	27.49
2-3 Times a Month	17	8.06
Once a Month	64	30.33
Hardly/Seldom	40	18.96
Never	2	0.95

(Adapted from Statistics South Africa, 2001)

That Hindus give has not gone unnoticed. According to the State President of South Africa, there are many lessons that one can learn from the Hindu religion. One of the most important of these lessons is the principle of hospitality and charity, which is an important hallmark of Vedic culture.[5] Durban's Deputy Mayor, Logie Naidoo, noted that most religions, including Hinduism, propagate that service to mankind is service to God.[6] Given our divided history, religious organisations have an important role to play in the reconstruction and development of our country, especially in the welfare and civil society sectors.

[5] President Thabo Mbeki, opening address at the opening of the Hindu Convention, September 2003, http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbheki/2003/tm0906.html

6 In response to survey showing that Indians are the most generous givers, Sunday Times, Tuesday, 21 December 2004. http://www.hinduismtoday.com/archives/2004/1-3/38_africa.shtml

Hindus are seen to have a divine duty to unite the good and noble teachings of voluntarism of their faith with the campaigns that they are conducting.[7] State President Thabo Mbeki (2003) cited the idea of Hindus contributing to peace in the country by referring to the following quotation from the Rig Veda: "Through our actions together, all the people of South Africa will be able to live up to the wise words from the *Rig Veda*: come together, talk together, let our minds be in harmony, common be our prayer, common be our end, common be our purpose, common be our deliberations, common be our desires, united be our hearts, united be our intentions, perfect be the union among us (*Rig Veda,* 10:191:2).[8]

Dr Rambilaas explains that Hinduism is a religion of humanism and of love and gratitude. It gives due respect to each and every creature. The aspects of nature like earth, sky, mountains, rivers; and living being like animals, plants; and wealth are seen as connected to God. Even the plant kingdom has a prominent place in the Hindu way of worship –"be as selfless as the sun, the rivers and the natural elements that sustain all of humanity ... let these elements teach us acts of charity".[9]

Research Methodology

The focus of the study was to examine the nature of giving in the Hindu community with the aim of identifying and reviewing the different literature on Giving in general and Hinduism in particular; to examine the different patterns of giving at an individual and collective/ organisational level within identifiable geographical contexts that best represent Hindus in South Africa, and to analyse how Hindu religious organisations spend their resources.

Given the complex interpretations and profound understandings of Hindu social giving, two categories of social giving (individual and organisational) were identified. A purely qualitative approach was employed using in-depth individual and focus-group interviews. Qualitative information was selectively matched with the national survey on Hindu givers compiled by Strategy and Tactics.[10]

7 http:/www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbheki/2003/tm0906.html

8 cited in http:/www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbheki/2003/tm0906.html

9 Interview with Dr Rambilass, Vedic scholar refering to the veneration of the elements, 3 March 2004.

10 Strategy and Tactics consultancy was commissioned by the project partners comprising The Southern African Grant Makers Association, National Development Agency and the Centre for Civil Society at the University of KwaZulu-Natal to design, implement and analyse a national sample survey of individual-level giving behavior. A data base

It was believed that the most representative and valid sample could only be drawn from a fully recognised organisation and its affiliates. The research sample for data collection at the organisational level was identified through the database of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha which is a national Hindu body to whom other organisations are affliliated. The sample was drawn from affiliates from the different provinces where the highest concentration of Hindus live, viz. KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng (Table 1).

Interviews were conducted with representatives from ISKCON, SA Tamil Federation, Divine life Society of SA, Ramakrishna Society of SA, and Aryan Benevolent Home (ABH). Focus group interviews were also held with the smaller organisations in the different provinces, all of whom were affiliates of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha. A brief description of the major organisations is presented as appendix 1 to develop a context for organisational giving.

In addition to the above, various key stakeholders in the Hindu religious and welfare sector, as listed below, were interviewed:

- Student groups, e.g. Hindu Students Associations of UKZN: Westville campus and Howard College
- Hindu Philanthropist, Mr Ranjith Ramnarain (Sentinel Holdings)
- Gender groups, e.g. all men, all women groups, mixed groups
- Informal community social workers
- Local community Hindu priests (20 priests interviewed at a priests' convention in July 2004)
- Old Age groups – members of old age groups in the community
- Academics at the University of KwaZulu Natal (Prof A Singh and Prof Sitaram)
- Welfarist and academic – Dr A Desai, Durban
- Welfarist – D Bundhoo, Pietermaritzburg

Secondary data analysis in the form of annual reports and perusal of financial statements of selected organisations, census data, and profiles through the Internet of selected organisations was undertaken. Several visits and observations were undertaken at selected sites to inform the main focus of the report.

comprising a national stratified sample of 211 Hindus (203 KwaZulu Natal, 7 Gauteng and 1 from Western Cape) from an over sample was used in this study to compare findings. Unless otherwise indicated, all tables in this report were extracted from the above survey.

Religious Giving: A Way of Life for Hindus?

The Vedantic literature is suffused with hierarchies of giving, ways of giving and links giving with spiritual evolution in a profound way. Among the guidelines contained in the statements of the Vedas, there is extraordinary emphasis on how a human being should consider him/herself extremely fortunate in having opportunities to extend help to the society, how charity yields bliss in the material and cosmic world, and how it purifies the heart. In the light of this, an extensive review of literature on Hindu giving is undertaken through documentary analysis of the seminal religious texts in the next section.

This section of the report responds to the issue of how the historical, religious and cultural literature on charity influences giving patterns in the Hindu community. Individual and religious philanthropy have always been interrelated (Sen, 1993:2). In examining the notion why and how Hindus give, selected Hindu scriptures, epics and metaphors are used to understand that the act of giving presents itself in an ubiquitous way in Hindu culture and life.

Hindu religious discourse suggests that Hindus are not born with birth-rights, but with birth-duties. Important terms are defined and regulations concerning every aspect of private and public life have been formulated and enforced. In the endeavour to redeem throughout life, duties are required towards *devata* (divine powers), *rsis* (sages), *pitrs* (ancestors), *manusya* (fellow-humans) and *bhutas* (fellow creatures other than humans). The first is done by means of regular worship, the second through the reading and studying of sacred scriptures, and the third through commemorations and rituals. The fourth and fifth duties require charity in the form of food giving and shelter offering, and recognising in prayer one's gratitude to all those who make one's life and well-being possible. The Hindu way of life thus de-emphasised the need to exclusively accumulate personal possessions over and above things required for personal use. Within the joint family all resources were shared according to a well-established system. While it did not amount to an absolute egalitarianism it prevented members from becoming destitute and homeless.[11] Generally Hindu religious literature subscribes to the notion that one owes so much to so many different agencies at all levels of existence which would make one inclined to share generously everything that is needed to sustain life.[12]

11 Interview with D Bundhoo, philanthropist and Vedic scholar, 23 July 2004.

12 Interview with Dr Rambilaas, Vedic scholar and 3 March 2004

Several older texts refer to *dana* (charity) juxtaposing hundreds of quotes from older writings and arranging them systematically and defining the concept, setting its parameters, and clarifying ambigious situations.[13] *Dana* was defined as a "cessation of ownership over a thing and creating the ownership of another over that thing which occurs when the other accepts the thing, either mentally, verbally or physically" (cited in Klostermaier, 2000). Six *angas* (elements, constituent parts) of *dana* are enumerated: the donor, the recipient, the charitable attitude, the gift (acquired in a legitimate way) of *dana*, a proper time and a proper place.

As far as the *donor* is concerned, an exploration of the *Bhagavad-gita as It Is* reveals that ways in which giving happens is critical, especially for the householder:

> Charity is meant for the householders. The householders should earn a livelihood by an honourable means and spend fifty percent of their income to propagate Krishna consciousness all over the world. Thus a householder should give in charity to institutional societies that are engaged in that way. Charity should be given to the right receiver. There are different kinds of charity ... charity in the modes of goodness, passion and ignorance ... Charity in the modes of passion and ignorance is not recommended, because it is simply a waste of money.[14]

With regard to *recipients*, the *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* refers to *Danaih* – charity which is given to a suitable party, such as those who are engaged in the transcendental loving service of the Lord – the *brahmanas* and the *Vaisnavas* (Srila Prabhupada, 2003). In respect of the relationship between the giver and the donor, the *Bhagavad-gita* makes reference to *Sarvabhute hite rata* which means that Hindus should be constantly engaged in the welfare of all living beings.[15] It also exhorts people to work for their own salvation and the welfare of the world - *Atmano mokshartham jagad hitaya ca - there is no better good than doing good to someone and there is no greater evil than causing pain to someone else.* Similar sentiments are expressed in the *Tulasi Ramayan - Parahita sarisa dharma nahi bhai*

13Texts like Hemadri's Danakhanda or Mitramisra 's Danaprakasa are exclusively devoted to the subject of charity,

14 Bhagavad Gita as it Is 16:3, purport by Srila Prabhupada (2003:743) Interview with Smita Krishna Dasa, 3 August 2004.

15 Interview with Professor Sitaram, scholar in Sanskrit, UKZN, 11 October 2004.

Parpida sama nahi adhama - for my own salvation and the good of the world.[16]

The third element is the *attitude* of the giver. In Chapter 17 of the *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, the different modes of giving are described as *tamas, rajas* and *sattva.*[17] Charity that is given as a matter of duty, desiring nothing in return to a deserving candidate at the right place and time, is called *sattvikam* (17:20). Charity that is given unwillingly, or to get something in return is called *rajasam* charity (17:21). Charity that is given at a wrong place and time, to unworthy persons, without paying respect or with contempt, is said to be *tamasam* charity (17:22).

Religious leaders have exhorted: *Watch, watch, and watch for every opportunity of rendering service to humanity. Service alone can purify the heart.* (Sivananda, cited in *Divine Life,* 2004). This is a passionate invocation to Hindus to seize or create opportunities to render service, as it is a prerequisite for higher spiritual evolution. A prominent saint in the Hindu tradition, Ramakrishna, cleaned the bedpan of another just to illustrate the spirit of service. The notion of menial work rendered in the service to others is said to rid people of high-mindedness and eradicate the ego that operates counter to the notion of rendering service.[18] It would appear that the more menial the service, the greater the value of the reward. Many people believe that not all the penance, pilgrimage, scripture reading or chanting can facilitate transcending the material world but by service to humanity: "Service to humanity is service to God".[19]

The remaining elements concern the giving of *gifts* – which includes the type, the proper place and time of giving. Gifts made out of compassion alone are not *dana* in the scriptural sense: giving has to be done out of a sense of duty to qualify as legal "charity". Gifts of food and clothing were considered to be a universal duty. Various categories of gifts can be identified from the giving of cows to knowledge/wisdom (*vidya*) which is considered superior to all other gifts (*Yajnavalkyasrti* 1, 121 cited in

16 Interview with and translations by Bharat Ramkissoon, Sanskrit scholar, Honours student, UKZN, 3 October 2004

17 Material nature consists of three modes: ignorance, passion and goodness, or countless permutations of these.

18 Interview with Ramakrishna devotee, 25 March 2004.

19 focus group interview with women, 23 October 2004.

Klostermaier, 2000). With reference to the concept of *krishna karma* [20] (11:55), Srila Prabhupada (2003: 607) explains the following:

> If a businessman is in possession of thousands of rands and thousands of dollars, and if he offers all of this to Krishna, he can do it. Instead of constructing a big building for his sense gratification, he can construct a nice temple for Krishna, and he can install the Deity of Krishna and arrange for the Deity's service, as is outlined in the authorised books of devotional service.

A further reference to the actual act of giving by the same author in the same text (17:28) exhorts Hindus to give with devotion. The giving form is almost always altruistic and resonates with injunctions from *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* (17:25/ 17:28): *Anything done as sacrifice, charity or penance without faith in the Supreme, O son of Pritha, is impermanent. It is called asat and is useless both in this life and the next.*

The above demonstrates that voluntarism has long been an integral part of Hindu society, dating back to at least 1 500 BC when it was mentioned in the *Rig Veda*. Indeed this tradition in India, the home of Hinduism plays an important role in social and economic development. It is known that volunteer campaigns help in the fields of education, medicine, cultural promotion and during times of crisis such as droughts, floods, epidemics and foreign invasions. Through these contributions the disadvantaged and the poor are taken care of by social mechanisms outside the state – through the family structure, social groups, guilds, and individual religious philanthropy (Sen, 1993).

It is clear from this brief exploration of selected religious texts, the relationship between individual philanthropy and religion is well explained by the mandates regarding charity laid down by Hinduism. Although it is argued that systematic or planned payroll giving is not evident among Hindu givers, an important issue like *dana* could not be left to improvisation and co-incidence.

Defining the notion of giving and establishing patterns of giving in Hindu philosophy is a difficult task because no single theme or pattern can characterise ways in which this gets interpreted. While there is great diversity and eclectism, the basic principles governing giving and charity were accepted fairly unanimously. Hence this brief review used social, cultural, religious and philanthropic approaches as analytical tools to define

20 Krishna karma refers to engaging in the service of God without fruitive action without expecting results in return.

operational ideas of Hindu giving. Such ideas of giving are useful to understand its present role within the Hindu community in South Africa.

Hindu Giving in South Africa

It is clear that there is no robust Hindu community effort that organises giving in any particular way. With the exception of a few individuals, there is no systematic payroll giving evident. Professor Anand Singh[21] believes that although there are no systematic structures of giving, Hindus respond directly to the societal needs as and when these emerge. A similar trend was reflected in the Strategy and Tactics Survey (2003) in which more than 57% of the Hindu sample indicated support for immediate causes compared to less than 20% for long term causes.

From discussions with priests and community leaders it was found that because giving takes several forms, organised monetary giving did not feature strongly. Payroll givers were also reluctant to disclose amounts and the idea that giving should be "spontaneous as getting up in the morning".[22] Table 3 reflects the monthly Hindu household income generated from the Strategy and Tactics Survey (2003) report.

Table 3: Monthly Hindu Household Income

Income	Percent
Up to R199	5.21
R600-R799	1.42
R1000-R1499	2.37
R1500-R2999	0.95
R3000-R6999	12.80
R7000-R8999	16.59
R9000-R13999	14.69
R14000+	5.69
Refused to answer	37.44
Do not know	2.84

21 Professor of Anthropology at UKZN and member of Ramakrishna Mission of South Africa

22 Interview with focus group men, 5 July 2004.

A large section of the respondents (79%) were unwilling to disclose earning amounts and refused to respond to this question. Social giving is seen as selfless and a part of *brahmanical* principle: "But we cannot force a person into giving – Hinduism does not propagate coercion in charity. It is not Hindu not to give".[23]

It is for this reason that relatively little is known about quantitative patterns of individual giving among Hindus. However, the data reveals several themes in giving amongst the Hindu community. Social giving is considered a *silent duty*, an act that should not be boasted about - *What the right hand gives, the left hand should not know.* The idea of publicly declaring ones giving is seen to be boastful and renders the act of giving useless. Ranjith Ramnarain sees his giving attempts as "not putting a price to social responsibility and sees giving as a form of enablement".[24]

In the next section several themes arising out of the data are generated to explore how social giving among Hindus is understood, managed and operationalised. In understanding this, the idea of charity is considered relativistic, involving different giving capacities and types. In many ways the concept of charity assumes a human face and is seen as subjective.

Relativistic and Subjective Giving Patterns

Social Giving amongst Hindus is a way of life. It is ingrained in Hindus to always give. Hindus have taken bank overdrafts and taken loans to build institutions like schools and temples for their communities.[25] It is not always clearly understood in terms of Vedantic injunctions or philosophy, but perceived as something that one had to do in one's life time.

According to Bala Naidoo[26] the *Tirukkural (11:103)* is clear about the idea of giving at an individual level: "He is no friend who does not give to a friend, to a comrade who comes imploring for food; let him leave such a man – and rather seek a stranger who brings him comfort".[27] In the Strategy and Tactics Survey (2003), it was found that a large section of the Hindus

24 Interview with Alankar R Maharaj, UKZN Hindu Students' Association, 24 June 2004

25 Interview with Ranjith Ramnarain, businessman - philanthropist, 7 September 2004

26 Interview with Dr D Moodley from S A Hindu Maha Sabha,, 8 September 2004

27 Interview with Bala Naidoo, Chairman of KwaZulu Natal South African Tamil Federation, 25 November 2004.

28 Cited in http://www.beliefnet.com/features/charity_chaart2.html

respond to charity not necessarily for religious reasons, rather because they see the need to intervene where there is some form of suffering. More than 84% of the respondents believe that they give because it makes them feel better and 75% do so in order to make the country a better place. An extremely small section of the community support charity because they have more than they need (10%). For many Hindus it is considered a family tradition to give. Others have learned to do so through their own experience of poverty and hardships and many Hindus give because they believe that this is a kind of social responsiveness to the needs of the immediate and larger communities.

Thus, social giving is considered a *social contract* in which no household should have more than what is deemed necessary in comparison to another. This derives from a sense of social solidarity referred to as *samajic sangathan.* Some Hindu leaders interviewed believed that the notion of *Ramrajya*[28] was associated with ideas of an ideal community in which the ruler and the ruled were seen as one, and a community in which poverty and suffering were non-existent. Closely linked to the idea of a social contract, is *shrama dhaan* (labour, time, shelter). In this type of giving, there is a sentiment of giving *(serva bhav)* that gives the individual and organisational giver spaces to be altruistic in a very meaningful way. Shelter giving is a practice of giving by an individual in the Shallcross area.[29] He would provide shelter for workers coming through from rural areas of KwaZulu Natal as well as refugees. At an organisational level, shelter is provided to the destitute. This may include accommodating families whose homes have been destroyed by fire, e.g. ABH would provide shelter, clothing and food to any family rendered destitute. Similar services are provided to abandoned babies as well as basic healthcare and nursing facilities.[30]

29 The voluntary movement in India received the maximum impetus and incentive from Gandhi, who believed that voluntary action was the only path to India's development. Gandhi's concept of development included all aspects of life: social, political, economic, cultural, and spiritual. His notion of rural development was constructing self-supporting, self-governing, and self-reliant village communities where everyone's needs were satisfied and everyone lived in harmony and cooperation. The major shift in the organisation of voluntary work was through Gandhi's voluntarism. It emphasised empowerment and transformation of the society and acquired a political context of Ramrajya (Interview with Dasarath Bundhoo, philanthropist and community welfarist, Pietermaritzburg, 23 July 2004).

30 Retired principal and philanthropist

31 Interview with PRO of ABH speaking about the most recent provision of services, 9 October 2004.

Social empowerment happens when members of the community provide informal skills training to enable the unemployed to generate some form of income. The teaching of specific skills like woodwork is linked to enablement. This may also include the free loan of equipment to labourers.[31] The Divine Life Society of South Africa also built centres to promote self-help initiatives and skills. It established sewing centres in Tongaat, Chatsworth and Merebank – 46 sewing machines in operation with 70 African women graduating in sewing in 2004.[32]

Another common practice among several community individuals was the rendering of administrative service, e.g. completion of forms for identity document application, tax returns and other applications for the community. Here lies a readiness to provide assistance to especially older people in the community to facilitate easier grant withdrawals, understanding new policy and legislation in terms of pensions and disability grants.[33]

There are other incidental but specific activities performed by individuals like providing counselling to people. This would include relationship problems, advising prostitutes in the Chatsworth area, and the tutoring of matric pupils in the area. There would also appear to be some form of invisible support structure, especially in respect of abused women and children.[34]

The giving of time is extremely popular and takes the form of the upkeep of religious sites and the buildings and hospice duties. One respondent indicated that as a priest, it was incumbent of him to spent time on Values Education at Westville prison. Hospice duties which included reading and attending to the frail and dying was also undertaken by several Hindu priests who believed that they were credentialed to attend to the last rites of dying patients.[35] In the Strategy and Tactics survey (2003), 95,5% of the sample indicated that they do give regular time to the temple either in the form of labour or caring for the sick or disabled and aged.

32 Interview with anonymous philanthropist Chatsworth, 3 October 2004.

33 See webste for more information on services rendered by the Divine Life Society SA.

34 Interviews with receivers of this service – old age organisations in Chatsworth and Shallcross, 24 November 2004.

35 ibid

36 Interview with Hindu priests, 25 July 2004, Westville campus, UKZN.

Material giving takes the form of food, blankets and other material objects. This constituted an important form of giving and was done on an ongoing basis, especially when there is a call for immediate relief work within the community.

The notion of a social contract with the community more specifically includes the following themes: giving is contentment *(santoshum paramum); g*iving means compassion for all *(pranidaya),* and financial giving. Many individuals believed that by giving they felt contentment which they saw as the highest form of wealth *(santoshum paramum).* Part of this belief generates from being God-fearing, that "you will be punished in other ways if you don't give ....for example, if you don't give charity then your car would break down and this may cost a lot of money ...so the money gets taken away from you anyway...".[36] The women believe that opportunities for giving present themselves all the time. They referred to a ritual in which "forced begging of flour" from seven different homes in order to conduct a specific prayer. This act, they believed, humbled them as well as gave them opportunities to give with purity. The ancient story of *Visnu* as *Daridranarayan*, God appearing in the guise of a beggar, is frequently employed to instil respect for the less fortunate and elicit active charity towards them, which would be rewarded both in this world and the next (Klostermaier 2000).

The Hindu women's roles go beyond the issues of voluntary work to include a broader conceptualisation of care-giving *(pranidaya).* Women see themselves responsible for the protection, preservation and continuity of the community, galvanising support for special functions, crisis and events. The following excerpts are ways in which women organise themselves to network with the giving process:

> Helping our neighbours like there is a neighbour that you can talk to and they will give you some advice...
> If you are going to buy groceries they can offer the car to go ...
> Emotional support
> If you know that some people are poor you organise somethings and give them...
> When there are funerals we cook and give them to the bereaved family and they don't have to worry about it...[37]

37 Focus group interview with men, 28 November 2004.

38 ibid

Although this may be typical of many traditional families, it is evident from the above that the idea of the women as "community-maker" assumes a central role in the identity of Hindu women givers. Women understand giving in a more organic way, as *pranidaya* suggesting compassion for all forms of life – "not even a dog must go hungry". At an individual level it is believed that "the fiery scourge called hunger never touches the man who shares his daily meal with others".[38] Interviews with women indicated that giving transcends the real world and giving to departed souls during identified periods is seen as a pure act of altruism. Although they are unable to understand the details of this act of prayer, it is done as a selfless act and surrender to the departed souls.[39]

In the Strategy and Tactics survey (2003), it is clear that Hindus respond to emergencies generously. Almost 62% of the Hindu sample that responded gave to emergencies regularly. The following citation supports the idea of giving in an emergency situation:

> We have been brought up in a very different type of environment from other religious groups – in an environment where love flourishes in abundance. If a funeral takes place, the entire neighbourhood rallies around contributing food and money – this is not an unusual phenomena. Ubuntu is a term that people have just introduced. We have been practising that for years irrespective of race or culture... if you were the neighbour things got done, e.g. ...6 people burnt to death in Kwa Mashu – we negotiated the funeral arrangements – provided the family with food and utensils – this is done on a needs/crisis basis".[40]

Most people interviewed gave financially. There were two ways in which money giving took place: direct giving – finances were given directly to the individual in need. Indirect giving occurred when householders would give to an organization and allowed it to decide how the money is spent. Most householders interviewed considered this to be a suitable way of giving. It was obvious that the credibility of the organisation was important to them. A systematic collection strategy was used by the organization to collect the money and the householders had no concerns about how their monies were

39 Interview with cultural philanthropist, Mrs Mothilal, Shallcross, 8 September 2004.

40 Interview with Bharat Ramkissoon, Sanskrit scholar, Honours student, UKZN, 3 October 2004.

41 Interview with Bala Naidoo, president South African Tamil Federation, KwaZulu Natal, 25 November 2004

utilised. The Divine Life Society would appear to be the biggest recipient of such contributions in KwaZulu-Natal, and its giving gets managed and operationalised in a very professional way. Subsidiary giving occurs incidentally, and is usually dictated by immediate or urgent needs, largely confined to giving family support.

An extremely powerful injunction through Hindu scripture supported by the data is that "you give within your means" and is referred to as *shakti dhaan.* This allows for the smallest giver to participate in the act of giving, and in whatever form. In the interviews people clearly indicated that giving happened when they were scheduled to travel out of home.[41] Charity during pilgrimage is thus a common practice done to secure safety of travel.[42] Organisational giving during happy occasions (birthdays, weddings, specific religious days) is also commonplace.[43] One example of occasion-giving for most Hindus is *Diwali.*[44] Another is when there is some prediction of ill-luck[45] that could befall individuals. Although the latter was not significant, it did feature when asked "when do they give".[46]

The information from the various interviews suggests that Hindus consider themselves to be generous, noble, charitable and hospitable. Since self-realisation is the goal of life for most Hindus, the practise of giving is inextricably woven into their daily lives as a sure and simple way to achieving absolute bliss. There is an enduring sense that giving would in fact bring them closer to God. This is also evident in the Strategy and Tactics

42 In the Sri Ramacharitamanasa Balakanda (doha 211, chaupai 1-2), when Rama and Lakshmana accompany Sage Vishwamitra to the Ganga, gifts of various kinds are offered to Brahmanas (Ayodhyakunda, doha 794, chaupai 80). While Rama is on his way to the forest (14 years exile) he gives the brahmanas and beggars whatever they want and sustenance for one year.

43 Interviews with focus group women – Johannesburg, 7 February 2004.

44 Interviews with representatives from Divine Life Society, ISKCON, Aryan Benevolent Home, 4 June 2004.

45 This act of giving because of ill omen is mentioned in the Ayodhyakanda doha 156, chaupai 4, when Bharat is at his maternal grandfather' s house and experiences nightmares about home, and because he sees evil omens, he prays and gives food and gifts to brahmans

46 Interview with Bharat Ramkissoon on identifying scriptural notions of giving in the Ramcharitmanas, 3 October 2004. See also article by Romila Ramkissoon, (2003) The Philosophy of service in the Ramayan, Glimpses of the Ramayan: An ancient saga with modern relevance and Eternal wisdom, editor, Dharam Ramkissoon.

Survey (2003) which revealed that almost 67% of the Hindu sample believed that giving brings them closer to God.

There is a bilateral relationship between service rendition and *karma*. Some priests emphasised the idea that the moment you give, you become a receiver. In most interviews with priests, it was clear that with giving came the assurance of transcendental receiving. Both giving and receiving get collapsed into an integral notion through which Hindus are able to redeem themselves from past *karmic* actions towards realisation of God. This would appear to be the understanding of most people interviewed – this intertwining of giving to divination.[47] The next section focuses on organisational Hindu giving.

Organisational Giving

This section on organisational Hindu giving responds to key issues in the study, viz. contexts that make the giving process possible, the strategies employed, and an understanding of how resources get mobilised. It also discusses the different giving activities, how resources get targeted, the selection of the beneficiaries and it briefly alludes to the relationship between the giving groups and the recipient.

The organisations selected in this study have all demonstrated clear roles, responsibilities and contributions in their pursuit of service rendition (*Niskhaam Karma*)[48] Over the years one can easily detect a shift in the specialised spiritual mission to a paradigm that is driven by social vocation in the form of poverty alleviation and issues of development.

The distinct patterns of Hindu giving that have emerged over the years in South Africa are organised into themes. The terms *welfare-orientations, cultural-orientation* and *knowledge- empowerment-orientation* used by Sen (1993) are appropriate ways of describing how giving has evolved in these organisations. There are essentially three orientations that characterise giving by Hindu organisations in South Africa. These are similar to those proposed by Sen (1993), and for the purpose of this report, the three major themes that emerge are Poverty Alleviation, Societal and Cultural Development and Development and Service.

47 Interview with Hindu priests, 25 July 2004, Westville campus, UKZN.

48 Interviews with Hindu priests, 25 July 2004

[48] Entitled to actions but not to the fruits of the actions

(i) Poverty Alleviation

One of the obvious consequences of poverty is hunger. Hindus believe that serving food to the poor and the needy or to a begging mendicant is a very good *karma*. The husband and wife of the house should not turn away any who comes at eating time and asks for food. If food is not available, a place to rest, water for refreshing one's self, a reed mat to lay one's self on, and pleasing words entertaining the guest- these at least never fail in the houses of the good.[49] According to a sanskrit scholar "When hunger stares you in the face, giving is not an act of charity or spirituality but the act of humanity yoked together".[50]

Hindus believe that the giver of food attains greater happiness than the giver of other things like land or knowledge (Klostermaier, 2000). Food is also associated with a lot of religious activity.[51] Food is invariably offered to God during most of the religious ceremonies. On specific days in a year food is offered to departed souls. Food is also distributed to people at the end of many religious ceremonies. Many Hindu temples distribute food freely every day to the visiting devotees.[52]

With regard to food giving, a devotee from the Ramakrishna Society Mission cited Vivekananda: "we wander about teaching metaphysics to people. It is all madness. Did not our master say: 'an empty stomach is not good for religion'...".[53] It has been suggested about hunger that: "more bitter than even a beggar's bread is the meal of the miser who hoards wealth and eats alone".[54]

For Ranjith Ramnarain, a purposeful existence is to "give to all" because God dwells in the hearts of everyone: there is no point in praying when people are hungry. He treats the street children to meals and ice-creams on a yearly basis and shows care and concern in a welfare clinic in

50 Apastamba Dharma Sutra, 8.2 cited in http://www.beliefnet.com/features/charity_chaart2.html

51 Interview with H R Maharajh, Sanskrit scholar, priest and philanthropist, 7 June 2004

52 He is liberal who gives to anyone who asks for alms, to the homeless, distressed man who seeks food; success comes to him in the challenge of battle, and for future conflicts he makes an easy ally. http://www.beliefnet.com/features/charity_chaart2.html

53 (http:///.suntimes.co.za/articles//article.aspx?ID=ST6A95523).

54 Interview with Ramakrishna devotee, 25 March 2004

Verulam to treat the local indigent people.[55] Ramnarain states that "a hungry man is an angry man". Thus feeding is critical to his giving style. He has made donations to the Hare Krishna *Food for life*. He believes that by feeding the poor, one contributes towards the creation of social stability and it is for this reason that he privileges food giving as a fixed pattern. Special functions like *Diwali* also sees him contribute food parcels (600-700 at R130 per hamper). He also gives to the Aryan Benevolent Home a daily donation of bread in perpetuity, and has spent his time with the poor and frail; e.g. his 50th birthday was celebrated at ABH with the poor and disabled. He cites an inner feeling that drives him to share with the poor. In this way he does not forget the old, needy and disabled.[56]

Swami Navaler's organisation, an affiliate of the Tamil Federation began South Africa's first large-scale Hindu charity program. Some 1 500 meals are served daily to the poor, irrespective of colour or creed. The *Tirukkural*, 11:103, is often cited as a text that implores individuals to give in an un-coerced manner.

From focus group and individual interviews with members of the ISKCON, food (*anna dhan*) was considered to be an essential component of giving. According to Smita Krsna, *Food for Life* which is an active wing of the Society, is the largest registered non-profit, vegetarian food relief organisation worldwide and is currently the largest vegetarian free meal programme in South Africa. Since 1974, *Food for Life* has served more than 200 million free hot meals in over 70 countries. In South Africa alone, in 2002, a staggering one million plates of food were served.[57]

These interviews reveal an awareness that in South Africa, regardless of colour, culture, creed or race, young and old, "many people are starving – this is a stark reality". The escalating poverty and unemployment rates have caused people to be destitute and homeless, without access to clean running water and sanitation. ISKCON believes that it is the responsibility of individuals, the small to medium businesses, the corporates, and the multinational sector to address this situation. *Food for Life* has developed the concept of "hunger-free zones" within the community. This operates on the

55 Interview with male focus group, 28 July 2004

56 Interview with Ranjith Ramnarain - Treats his workers with the same charity in upgrading, provision of health and safety, aids programme, school fees for employees children, family health programme, 7 September 2004

57 Interview with Ranjith Ramnarain, businessman, philanthropist, 7 September 2004.

principle that no one should go hungry within a 20 km radius of the distribution points. According to this organisation, the vision of this initiative is to have an entire network of hunger-free zones regionally and nationally. Ingredients and donations for meals are collected and provision of facilities for the preparation of meals are organised. More than one hundred and fifty thousand hot meals are served every month.

President Thabo Mbeki captured the following sentiment about the food giving initiative by the ISKCON:

> This understanding that, if I have a plate of food, let me share it with my neighbour, let those who are hungry come and eat, let those who are feeling sad come together with us and together we can share this burden, this understanding should be taken from Food for Life and transmitted to the entire country.[58]

When asked whether giving food was the best thing they could do to help poor people, the women interviewed responded by suggesting that while it was a short term relief it did not provide long term solutions:

> I also don't think food is the best thing. I think they should be given skills that will help them to survive. In that way you will not have to put food on their table for the rest of their lives they can go out there and get food for themselves...
>
> By giving them food they take it for granted...
>
> There are a lot of underprivileged people who come to the Krishna (ISKCON) and if you give them they can waste it and they know that they will get another plate. If they are to work for the food they will not waste it...[59]

Other organisations involved in food-giving at smaller volumes sincerely believe that "Great, indeed, is the power to endure hunger. Greater still is the power to relieve other's hunger".[60] The Tamil Federation commits itself to

58 Interview with Smita Krishna Dasa, 7 March 2005

59 Smita Krsna Dasa (undated): Food for Life Fundraising Brochure, ISKCON.

60 Focus group interview with women, 23 October 2004.

social giving of food hampers during *Joythi Jeevam* – about 1 800 food hampers during the *Deepavali* period.[61] The priests in the interview believed that " ...in *Kaliyuga* charity of food brings liberation from cycle of birth or death".[62]

Food giving as a means of poverty alleviation can be seen as social responsiveness to more immediate needs. In addition Hindu organisations indicated that they were also interested in contributing to long-term societal and cultural development.

(ii) Societal and Cultural Development

People closely associated with religious organisations felt that one of the great services that one can perform is to educate people into spiritual consciousness (transcendental giving or *Jnana dhaan)*, even "if by your endeavour one or two souls who come under your protection become liberated in this life, that is a great transcendental service to the Lord" (Srila Prabhupada, 1998). Hare Krishna devotees who were interviewed believe that it is the duty of every responsible Indian to broadcast the transcendental message of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* throughout the world (Srila Prabhupada, 1982). This is referred to as *jnana dhaan* (knowledge giving).[63] Two categories of knowledge giving are identified. The first *avidya dhaan* is giving knowledge about this world, information about how to live in the material world. The second type of knowledge giving is *vidya dhaan,* which refers to knowledge beyond this world, hence the notion of transcendental giving. This form of giving is largely practised by priests who feel that it is incumbent on them to share such information to the Hindu mass. Knowledge giving would also include the dissemination of cultural literature, seminars and conferences planned by organisations.[64]

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61 Interview with Dr D Moodley from S A Hindu Maha Sabha,, 8 September 2004

62 Interview with representatives from five Hindu organisations in the KwaZulu Natal region, 5 November, 17 November, 2 December, 2004.

63 The Sri Sathnarayan Vrath Katha refers to "charity being done by villagers to a brahmin to uplift him from the perils of hunger. The villagers benefited from the priest's blessings and prospered.

64 Interview with Hindu priest, 25 August 2004.

The 2003 world Sri Hanuman Conference, April 18-20, attracted more than 14,000 people over the three days in Durban, South Africa. Jointly organized by the Ramakrishna Centre and Divine Life Society, the primary objective was to "awaken the great ideals synonymous with Sri Hanuman of bhakti, jnana and shraddha (devotion, knowledge and faith), and to inspire aspirants to tread the path of God Realization with great zeal and sincerity".[65]

Hindus who volunteer their service satisfy a quest for understanding people, organisations, or their communities better. At a community level, the collective action of a group of volunteers who share a commitment to a cause can be a powerful experience. Being engaged in volunteer work allows for the individuals to experience profound sensitivity, a heightened sense of urgency, and dedication.

The South African Tamil Federation's organisational giving has a strong cultural and educational focus. Social giving efforts which took the form of bursaries valued at R108 000 in 2003, and R130 000 in 2004, were allocated to needy students. The selection depends on merit, irrespective of colour. Student organisations within the federation are also supported to study in India (music, language or culture) and flight, accommodation, and other costs are covered by this bursary. A large focus of this organisation as well as its affiliates is on education and book distribution. It has a systematic way of prioritising events and a rigorous budgeting process. Money is raised to ensure that earmarked events are completed successfully.[66]

Many of the Hindu organisations provide the youth with opportunities to take on serious responsibility. This allows for the youth to quickly develop a sense of maturity. It also acts as a leveller between young and old, professionals and non-professionals. Opinions are sought irrespective of one's official standing or level of education. Many youth believed that it raised them to:

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65 See ffg websites for more information on types of knowledge giving offered: http://www.sivananda.dls.org.za
http://www.krsna.com

66 South African Tamil Federation, ISKCON, Divine Life Society of South Africa, Ramakrishna Society of South Africa , these were the most often mentioned organisations in all group or individual interviews.

67 Interview with Bala Naidoo, President South African Tamil Federation, KwaZulu Natal, 25 November 2004.

> A higher level of thinking and acting ... knowing that you will be respected for your ideas and behaviour can make you feel you are making a contribution", e.g. working with people at a hospice with patients diagnosed with cancer – you cannot but be seriously involved with lives of such people".[67]

Hindu youth have been most responsive in promoting awareness and conscientising students by providing a unit which supports disabled people (as in setting up with a guide dog, walking stick, raising funds to get someone a wheelchair or academically, by making tapes for blind people).[68]

(iii) Development and Service

Over the last 50 years, Divine Life Society has given financial assistance to over 30 Hindu spiritual institutions in South Africa and about 25 in India. The organisation considers it a great blessing to have the privilege of serving temples and spiritual institutions.[69] The Divine Life Society obtains its funds from a variety of sources. Much of it is derived from book sales, printed and published by the Society. Also, since the inception of the society in 1949, generous hearted well-wishers and patrons from all over the country continue to provide substantial financial aid in an unparalled and spontaneous way.[70]

The Divine Life Society is currently involved in projects from building of schools for the disadvantaged sector of the community, building 255 homes for displaced Africans and Indians, in Waterloo, Verulam, baptismal centres at Port Dumford and Inanda, disposal of cremated ashes – *ghat* project in Clare Estate, and making of sandwiches for school children at five different centres in KwaZulu Natal.[71] There is a growing networking and co-operation that goes beyond race, culture and class, clearly an influence of the political transition in South Africa.

According to Ina Cronje, MEC of Education in KwaZulu Natal "since January 2004, the Society has completed over fifty schools, with three

68 Vishal Sookhraj, Bhakti Yoga Society UKZN, 23 June 2004.

69 Vishal Sookhraj, Bhakti Yoga Society UKZN, 23 June 2004

70 Interview with Divine Life Society member, 25 August 2004

71 Guru Bhakti Yoga – 31, April 2003

hundred classrooms in total. The Society is also engaged in sanitation and water programmes in schools around the province. Currently, The Divine Life Society of South Africa is building schools in the Okahlamba, Ethekwini, Zululand and South Coast regions. Ina Cronje commended the Society for its support in trying to relieve the backlog of classrooms in rural areas; "we also want to compliment Divine Life Society for its speedy delivery, quality and cost effectiveness".[72]

An intensive Outreach Health Programme was undertaken in the 1980s by the organisation, driven by the idea of their spiritual master, Swami Sivananda, that "God walks in the garb of a beggar. He moans in pain in the guise of the sick ... see Him in all. Serve all, love all".[73] Perhaps also worthy of mention is the construction of the Ganga Baptismal Centre for the Nazareth Baptist Church at Ebuhleni in KwaZulu Natal. This is an example of how an organisation can work beyond ethnicity, culture or race. Since Africans also worship water, the input by Divine Life Society was received with great appreciation by the Shembe worshippers. Swami Sivananda's *Peace* series books contain translation in isiZulu and has recorded sales of more than 30 000 copies. The Baptismal centre has been designed in a way that it is also used for cultural and educational purposes.[74]

The one day monthly Yoga Camp, held at the Sivananda International Cultural Centre, is attended by 300-400 participants, from pre-school children to senior citizens. The Yoga Camp has two main aims: firstly, to impart to all participants the most inspiring and practical teachings of the Divine Master, Sri Swami Sivananda. The second aim is to teach and encourage participants to do spiritual practices daily, not just once a week or once a month.[75]

A post cremation public facility was officially opened on 5 June 2005 by the Divine Life Society. Located along the Umgeni River, next to the Umgeni Hindu Crematorium, this provides an appropriate space for the

72 Guru Bhakti Yoga – January 2003

73 Speech made by Ina Cronje, MEC of Education , KwaZulu Natal http://www.sivanda.dls.org.za

74 See Swami Sivananda His Mission in South Africa: Golden Jubilee (1949-1999) for information about the health and social services provided by the society.

disposal of ashes of the deceased. Over the past two months of its opening, the *ghat* has been utilised by people from all race groups in South Africa and internationally.[76]

The Divine Life Society has entered into a partnership with the eThekwini Municipality towards the development of 263 sub-economic properties, valued at a total of about R7,7 million. Sbu Ndebele, the premier of KwaZulu Natal, noted that this partnership between government and the Divine Life Society has been a longstanding relationship in which The Divine Life Society has contributed more than R70 million towards community improvement projects in the province.[77] This is the second housing initiative that the society has undertaken with the Council, the first being the building of 200 houses in Waterloo, near Verulam. There are currently 220 000 people in the city without access to basic housing and the Divine Life Society was praised by the Deputy Mayor for their "service to mankind " and for providing basic services which has restored the dignity of the poor.[78]

According to Professor Anand Singh, the Ramakrishna Mission of South Africa has an operational cost of R50 000 per month and depends on congregational support and targets business people to procure funds. The vision of this organisation is to render service especially in places where the state has been unable to do so, e.g. specialist surgeons from this society provide systematic and ongoing expert service to patients at selected state

75 See Guru Bhakti Yoga – 36, September – October 2003.

77 Interview with Divine Life Society member, 25 August 2004

78 Divine Life, Sivanda Day to Day, No 72, 2005

hospitals in Durban.[79] The mission statement of this society is "Service to humanity is service to God ".

The launch of the Chidananda Medical and Resource Centre by the Sarva Dharma Ashram means the provision of basic medical assistance to about 20 000 indigent residents of Welbedacht, a low income group on the outskirts of Chatsworth.[80] In collaboration with the KwaZulu Natal Health Department and the R K Khan Hospital in Chatsworth, this centre hopes to provide a 24 hour facility to residents occupying 6000 one-room units in this area. According to Ms Bhagwan, the ashram secretary, "the Ashram's cycle of service includes daily feeding schemes, providing sandwiches for local schools, enrolling children at schools and equipping them with educational aids and books, an adult literacy programme, providing second-hand clothing to the poor and conducting religion and dance classes for the children". The local community participates in the day-to-day operations.[81]

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness liaises with community-based organisations like orphanages, HIV/AIDS support programmes, old age homes and crisis relief centres in KwaZulu Natal. Networks have been forged with the SAPS and Metro Police Community Service and several youth character building initiatives have been conducted in various communities. Volunteers engage in psychological support to prisoners. In South Africa, volunteer teams are a familiar and most welcome sight in townships, squatter camps, impoverished housing schemes, hospitals, crèches, schools, universities and homes for the aged and handicapped. This is done in a selfless way and the Sanskrit term for this action without reward is known as *nishkaam karma.* This approach implies that people who serve are entitled to action but not to the fruits of these actions.

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79 Daily News, 14 September 2005, Footprints: KZN Premier S'bu Ndebele praises Divine Life Society for sterling work done among the needy in the province

80 Interview with A Singh, professor in Anthropology and member of the Ramakrishna Mission.

81 Daily News, 14 July 2005, Society homes in on happy future.
Welbedacht is a township on the outskirts of Chatsworth

In examining selected services at an international level, it was found that ISKCON is engaged in providing shelter for HIV/AIDS orphans and a rehabilitation programme for street children and drug addicts, in Kisumu, Kenya. At the time of writing an orphanage in Colombo, Sri Lanka is being expanded alongside the feeding of 10 000 plates of food per day to tsunami victims. In Vrindavan, India, self-help and self-sufficiency programmes have been established to promote community development.[82]

Service provision at Aryan Benevolent Home (ABH) ranges from providing shelter for abused, destitute women and children, responsiveness to crisis, counselling services, literacy classes for resident children and adults, gardening projects, nursing service, to the provision for HIV/AIDS orphans.[83] The notion of integrity is critical and the community places trust in the ABH. It has an annual budget of R17 million, of which R12,5 million comes from a state subsidy. It is evident that from the nature of the services provided by the ABH, that it has actively responded to the social needs of the day and the service extends beyond narrow ethnic or racial boundaries.

In respect of international relief, there is evidence of some Hindu support towards international disasters, e.g. floods. However, contribution to international causes as per the Strategy and Tactics Survey (2003) was minimal. It is evident from Table 4 that local needs were considered more important than international ones by Hindu.

Table 4: Importance of Local Versus International Causes

Local/international	**Percent**
Local more impt than international	46.92
International more impt than local	4.27
Local and international equally important	41.23
Do not know	7.58

82 Interview with Ms Bhagwan, 14 August 2005. See Tribune Herald, A beacon of hope, health and charity, 2 October 2005.

83 Interview with Smita Krishna Dasa (ISKCON / Food for Life Procedural Chairman), 4 March 2004.

However, systematic relief attempts continue to be made towards international disasters. The South Asia Tsunami Disaster in December 2004 saw immediate reaction from the South African Hindu Maha Sabha who together with the SA Tamil Federation launched an interim relief committee and an appeal to all South Africans to "give up just one day of their monthly salaries to assist those left destitute by the disaster" (*Post*, December 29, 2004 –January 2, 2005).

In June 2005, the International Movement for Tamil Culture launched the Poverty Alleviation and Disaster Initiative in Durban. A team of fifteen volunteers travelled to Tsunami affected areas to offer assistance to rebuild the area (*The Rising Sun,* 14-20 June 2005). This initiative has been set to provide an ongoing relief to those affected by disasters locally as well. The guest speakers commended the team for their selfless effort and reiterated the notion that the greatest service to God was service to humanity.[84]

Sources of Funds

It is obvious that for most of the Hindus that give there is no systematic donor planning in place. This then forces organisations to employ unique models of collection. With the Divine Life Society of South Africa, mandatory monthly collection of stipulated amounts happen through personalised visits by dedicated members. This entails door-to-door physical collections.[85] In this strategy, the amounts to be given are negotiated between the organisational collector agents and the giver. The income of the Divine Life Society of South Africa is primarily congregational giving from private individual donations. Wealthy and generous Indians are attracted by their steady track record of service and their reputation to use the money expeditiously and responsibly. A strict policy governs their handling of donations: "Our society feels - just like our Master - that whatever funds the Divine Mother provides should be immediately utilized for the good of mankind and not invested".[86]

According to a representative from the Hare Krishna Movement, businessmen and Hindu organisations are solicited each year, especially

84 See Singh, K (2000) A Labour of Love: The Biography of Dr Shishupal Rambharos for a historical review of the ABH, founder and cherished Hindu philanthropist.

85 A Rajbansi, KZN Minister of Sports and Recreation and Prof F Mazibuko, DVC of the University of KwaZulu Natal were guest speakers at this function.

86 Interviews with Hindu householder giver, 8 August 2004

during the festive periods to garner financial support. In some cases the solicitation strategy could make the giver feel that it is a "privilege" for him/her to give to an organisation. The Hare Krishna *Food for Life* generates about R350 000 per annum largely through donations by the general public, businessmen, the congregation givers, and donations of groceries and vegetables by supermarkets. The biggest givers are Hindus from Durban and surrounding areas as far as Richards Bay, Newcastle and Port Edward. The money is generated through cash donations from people celebrating birthdays, in memory of others, death anniversaries, but largely through soliciting fixed contributions by way of debit order donations and single large donations by businessmen. Furthermore, several festivals are held annually in different areas. Here the local *nama hattas*[87] organize festivals in a local hall or under a tent and invite the local community who are served a sumptuous meal. The largest feeding at any one festival occurs at the *Ratha Yatra* (Festival of Chariots) on the Durban Beachfront, usually held over the Easter Weekend where people from all cultures and backgrounds are invited, entertained with a cultural stage show of international artists, and fed the entire day. According to a representative of the organisation, "the minimum amount of food distributed has been 120 000 plates for those four days. For this festival large donations are received from regular donors from other provinces as well. A regular Ratha Yatra donor gives between R50 000 to R60 000 just for food distribution at the festival. *Food for Life* may also be commissioned by Government Departments to feed large gatherings of up to 30 000 people, e.g. Department of Transport information dissemination rallies in 2004, or the East Coast Radio Toy Story function at Kingsmead Stadium in 2003".[88]

For the ABH, its Annual Fair generates R400 000 in gate entrance takings alone, largely from community support. Sponsorships from stallholders at the yearly fair are an assured income strategy. Bigger donors like Telkom and Vodakom are also approached. Diwali is a special period when giving happens more generously from the smallest giver (meals prepared for the day) to business houses like Shoprite Checkers (food items). ABH also received R1, 2 million to compensate for the 2002 deficit from the National Lotto in 2003.[89]

87 Interview with member of Divine Life Society, 25 August 2004

88 Congregational service groups held in different areas that meet weekly

89 Interview with Smita Krishna Dasa (ISKCON / Food for Life Procedural Chairman), 4th March 2004

Hindu Giving - Emerging Insights

The giving activities of the Hindu community can be seen as moving away from community-centric to one that is nation-centric thus embracing all racial, cultural and linguistic groups.[90]

The implications of this shift are suggested by the concept of community service which works on the assumption that Hindu institutions are responsible agents for alleviating poverty and enlightening the public culturally and aesthetically.[91] Service is seen as a sacred trust, a cultivation of civic leadership and a performance of nobleness

What has emerged is a kind of social mission paradigm that is more pragmatic and implementation driven, through a better understanding of community life and how problems can be better addressed. It is obvious that Hindu organisations in this study have recognised a clearer vision for their work, and in many cases, have supported and extended the work that they believe should have been done by the government.[92]

It would appear that the patterns of giving take many forms. While there is generally no systematic donor scheduling in place for most Hindus, a significant amount of giving does take place and is driven by a spirit of voluntarism both at individual and organisational levels. This is strongly influenced by a sense of religious and civic responsiveness to community needs. Although very little is known about how poor communities mobilise resources internally in order to cope with difficult conditions, it is clear that Hindus generally respond more spontaneously to crisis situations. This type of responsiveness presents an enabling environment for the poor to mobilise and benefit from reactive giving by Hindu groups. Socially responsive giving is usually conducted in the case of immediate emergencies, e.g. deaths. In this case Hindus work together to facilitate funerals, ceremonies for the dead, bursaries for needy university students, especially in their first year of study. The Strategy and Tactics Survey (2003) also found that the most support was received by the poor and the youth (Table 5).

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90 Interview with PRO (ABH), 9 October 2004

91 Interview with A Singh, professor of Anthropology, UKZN, 24 August 2005

92 Interview with A Singh, professor of Anthropology, UKZN, 24 August 2005

Table 5: Causes Supported

Causes	Percent
Disabled	6.64
Animals	1.42
Aged	9.95
Children/Youth	27.96
HIV/AIDS	19.91
The poor	26.54
Religious institution	0.95
Women	1.90
Crime/violence	0.47
Other	4.27

(Adapted from Statistics South Africa, 2001)

It is, however, conjectured that poor people in these communities are able to survive through various informal mechanisms that facilitate the internal flow of resources within these communities. Formal support at a Hindu organisational level is fairly systematic and offered to the frail and aged, physically disabled, mentally challenged, destitute men and women and children, as well as victims of emergencies and disasters.

(i) Intergenerational and Interepochal Understanding of Giving

Religious leaders believe that much of the giving lessons for Hindus have been learnt through Vedic principles enunciated through the ages. Therefore it can be suggested that in trying to understand the nature of Hindu giving and its rootedness, it is evident that the notion of giving is not just intergenerational (passed from one generation to another) but interepochal (an idea that is carried through from one epoch to the next). There is a kind of knowing about charity that pervades the hearts and souls of Hindus from one epoch to another. The term "charity" is preferred to "social giving" only because it is seen as egalitarian and refers to a decent, positive act of behaviour.[93] It has been repeatedly observed in the religious literature that as

93 Interview with A Singh, professor of Anthropology, UKZN, 24 August 2005

94 see charity in the UK and USA by Karen Wright, 2002, for a fuller discussion of the notion of charity.

a Hindu one cannot avoid to give.[94] According to Smita Krishna Dasa (ISKCON member), the act of giving is:

> ... a profound form of socialisation through religious instructions, as well as a behaviour taught and subsequently learned over the generations in a systematic, intentional way. It is also learned by the act of giving and a feeling of compassion and goodwill ... which then reinforces the act as valuable".[95]

There appears to be a deep value entrenchment between generations of Hindu givers, and the "dialogue" happens through religious instructions as well as intentional lessons on giving. Intergenerational giving ideas have been immutably ingrained, so in a sense it is viewed as expected behaviour. There is a feeling of closeness to the act of giving that spills over from giving in the past to the present givers. However, from the interviews it is clear that individual and subjective giving among Hindus have allowed for a more wilful and circumstantial construction of the ways in which charity happens. Reformulating the notion of giving is clearly not negotiable, but it becomes more expanded and mutates according to the emerging societal needs. This flexibility is created around patterns of giving that align to economic circumstances and emergencies.

Intergenerational ideas and patterns of giving then get pushed into interepochal values that get sustained over time.[96] It is clear from the interviews with the priests that present day giving strategically mimics giving of many epochs ago. In the following section selected concepts from the holy scripture, the *Ramacharitamanasa* is cited to get a broader

95 Interview with Bala Naidoo, Chairman, KwaZulu Natal, South African Tamil Federation, 25 November 2004.

96 Interview with Smita Krsna Das, 4 March 2004

97 http:/www.pucp.edu.pe/eventos/congresos/filosofia/programo_vierues/scim9-10/Lopez Pablo.pdf for a more complete discussion of interepochal. By interephocal dialogue I mean the deep communication or empathy between people of very distant times or historical circumstances. There are epoch-making events creating general situations which are difficult to understand for people of different epochs. History's goal is to overcome those difficulties, by understanding past times and their different mentalities. Even though it is not possible in a literal sense to have a dialogue with deceased people, we can experience a real closeness to people of the past and an exchange of feelings and ideas. We feel that we can understand what they really meant and that they understood our views by anticipating our own perspectives and ideas.

understanding of the ways in which people who were interviewed did in fact give through an "epochal mimicry" approach.

(ii) Voluntaristic Idealism or Welfarism?

Aparigrah, a Sanskrit word, implies the value of non-accumulation or of not keeping anything more than is necessary for one's minimal needs. The concepts of sacrifice and charity are also differently rooted in the Hindu mind. When one gives away one's dearest object to a needy person, the sacrifice would be considered charity. If giving away something is only for one's own self-purity and not aimed at someone else's well-being, it is *tyag* (sacrifice) but not charity.[97] Ideas about generosity and altruism as pure selflessness have been explored by Chaturvedi (1987).

The concept of voluntarism, of voluntary giving or action is almost always associated with ideas of developing a just and fair society, both at individual and organisational levels. In part it can be said that individual giving is frenetic but the palliative endeavours only offer short-term relief. Perhaps the question that arises is: how sustainable is Hindu giving? From the responses by organisational representatives of Hindu organisations, it is clear that the continuous collecting and monitoring of funds is more sustainable. Although most organisations indicate that their involvement is largely cultural and religious dissemination, financial giving happens at a smaller level on an ongoing basis. Almost all interviewees at both organisational as well as individual levels are unable to exclude a deep sense of religious piety in their giving patterns. Welfarism appears as the underlying motive that drives all giving. In the Strategy and Tactics Survey (2003), a fairly large sector of the Hindu sample believed that they would like to influence development in the country (Table 6). [98]

98 Published in The Nonprofit Sector in the global community: Voices from Many nations, a publication of Independent Sector, Washington, pp.422-437, 1992.

Table 6: Influence Developments in my Country

Categories	Percent
Strongly Agree	13.27
Agree	30.33
Neutral	34.60
Disagree	18.48
Strongly Disagree	3.32

(Adapted from Statistics South Africa, 2001)

In order to achieve fairness and justice, cultural codification of compliant and conformist, as well as compulsive, giving behaviour has been noted. This leads from an individual-based giving to collective community and nation-based giving. For the elite givers like Ranjith Ramnarain, there is an expectation that there will be greater opportunities for private and personal giving. One cannot ignore the cultural rootedness of Hindu giving, especially the spirit of voluntarism.

Voluntarism triggered by natural disasters, e.g. fires and floods, have had Hindus call for collective mobilisation and action by all organisations. There has been an eclectic approach to provide immediate material and financial support in such cases. Hindu communities are generally reactive and immediate about their giving. A move to a sustained mobilisation, the struggle for better relief, access to medical data, even legal support have been cited as ways in which Hindu people get involved in disaster relief.[99] A more organised systemic effort especially in response to disasters is evident. Here social spaces get created, opportunities for voluntarism get widened, and opportunities for participation increase dramatically, and networks are established to other agencies in South Africa. According to Ashwin Desai, the entry of government undermines self-help activity. Community initiatives/voluntary participation and aspirations can be destroyed when these activities are fragmented.[100] The spirit of routine and systematic

99 Interview with Hindu priest during rendition of Gita Katha, 30 June 2004.

100 Interview with Bala Naidoo SA Tamil Federation – KwaZulu Natal, 25 November 2004

involvement contradicts the spirit of voluntarism which is largely embedded in ideas of spontaneity.[101]

(iii) Communal Reciprocity

Voluntarism based on *agarigrah* has another dimension, and this is the willingness to receive knowledge from whoever is knowledgeable. Thus giving away something (*pradan*) is accompanied by the inculcation or assimilation of humility and duty towards others. Generally voluntary organisations that emphasize giving on the basis of a relationship with poor people are either seen as paternalistic, or viewed as a source of external resources and skills. Very few voluntary organisations try to tap the technical, institutional or social knowledge of the poor. The *grahan* or assimilation of knowledge from the poor does not constitute "richness" in the ability to maintain subtle differences in protocol, and reciprocity provides a "safety net" of kinship linkages[102] (interviews with women collecting flour is an example of how social spaces get created to experience begging and the potential to learn from this experience).

Reciprocity is an important cultural element of voluntarism in Hinduism. This includes both giving and receiving, but not in the form of an exchange. As Ellis (1989:1) puts it: "it is the giving and not the gift that is important ". Hindu giving has followed through reciprocity in many ways: guaranteed that you will receive. Ellis adds that reciprocities are characterised further by wealth being equated with one's esteem or prestige in society based on giving behaviour, and the assurance of good return because many people owe it to the giver. Although this may be esoteric, and this receiving may take a longer time, it is understood that there is a causative accumulation of good giving deeds to be rewarded in another life.

(iv) Voluntarism Versus Compulsion

There is a subtle compulsion to give and a deep sense of voluntarism that drives much of Hindu giving. Hindu giving is seen as more than just charity - the act of giving is associated with a deep sense of sharing. Smaller, less noticeable and quantifiable giving happens at the community level. In this case there appears to be face-to-face giving starting with family, moving onto

101 Interview with Ashwin Desai, sociologist and welfarist, 17 November 2004

102 Interview with academic and Sanskrit scholar, Dr Rambilaas, 3 March 2004.

neighbours and then the community. Community-centric giving among Hindus is largely done collectively. This style of giving gets co-ordinated, managed and operationalised through reputable Hindu organisations that monitor funding with the strictest of moral principles. Both the individual- and community-centric giving styles lead to a nation-centric building process – contributing to the welfare of the individual and community within a nation. From the Strategy and Tactics Survey (2003), it can be seen that Hindus do give, and the largest percentage of givers come from the R51-R100 category (Table 7).

Table 7: Total Money Given to Organizations in the Last Month

Amount	**Percent**
R1 to R20	8.33
R21 to R50	30.95
R51 to R100	42.86
R101 to R500	14.29
R501 to R1000	2.38
R1001 to R2000	1.19

(Adapted from Statistics South Africa, 2001)

Hindus demonstrate a fascinating consciousness in both the nature and purpose of the material reality around them, and the consciousness to align themselves to the ethics and politics of giving in a powerful way.

(v) Hindu Giving and Development

Although giving in general and Hindu giving in particular are not effective solutions for poverty relief – the question is posed – how the poor can also come to benefit from and be included in systematic mechanisms of social co-operation between government and a nation of givers? In the South African context, de Haan (1999:8) argues for significant overlap between social exclusion and poverty. The process of social inclusion through social giving may mean that those included still experience a sense of exclusion (Sayed, 2002). The poor will always remain poor and excluded given the non sustainable nature of the nature of many poverty relief initiatives. This could have greater implications for social relations of power and structures and systems of inequality (Slee, 2001).

To some extent, there would appear to be a chronic reliance on Hindu charity on the part of the receivers, e.g. feeding schemes. Chronic reliance on the one strategy can harm the poor and subjects them to a form of "hard-core" exclusion in society.[103]

Hindu organizations "did not see development as a product of human endeavour, rather ...as a process of life ... the word 'development' carries within it a sense of patronage, whereas service embodies an attitude of mutuality and humility" (Mahatma Ghandi cited in Kumar, 2003:16). There is a clear need for conceptual tools for understanding the nature and causes of poverty and evaluating the giving potential of all religious groups in South Africa.[104] It would demand reforming relations and systems of co-operations such that voluntarism can be evaluated on an ongoing basis. Most of all, there is a need for a co-operative approach to sustaining social giving and government participation plans for poverty alleviation. Many Hindu organizations in this study have moved from an exclusively spiritual mission paradigm to one that is driven by social concern, poverty alleviation and empowerment.

Conclusion

A review of Hindu scriptures suggests that the nature and the notion of giving are glorified in the religious texts. The Vedantic literature is suffused with hierarchies of giving and ways of giving which are linked to spiritual evolution in a profound way. A very important feature of giving is silence – without acknowledging pride about the benevolence of the act, thus allowing giving to be seen as altruistic, and without glorification.[105]

Seva or service is one of the fundamental principles of Hinduism. Mahatma Ghandi had argued that "service was fundamental to community upliftment" (Kumar, 2003:16). In this regard Hindu temples and organisations serve as "networks for the provision of food, employment, housing and psychological support as an expression of this principle" (Kumar, 2003:16). For example, the partnership between the Ulundi-based Zululand District Municipality and the Divine Life Society dates back 32

103 Published in The Nonprofit Sector in the Global Community: Voices from Many Nations, pp 422-437

104 Interview with Dr Ashwin Desai, sociologistt, 17 November 2004

105 Interview with DrAshwin Desai, sociologist and welfarist, 17 November 2004

years. This co-operation has resulted in numerous multimillion rand development projects, including schools, crèches, clinics, recreation centres, skills and training centres, sanitation projects, sports fields, health care facilities, multimedia resource centre (Jenkins, 2006:5).

It is obvious that in South Africa, Hindu giving has evolved over the years. This is true for most of the organisational givers after the political transition in South Africa. This shift was spurred by the political transition and the need to address the vast inequalities of the apartheid legacy. Hindu organisations in the context of this study generally display an extremely sophisticated articulation and understanding of social giving which could allow them to be seen as prolific givers in the country.

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Schedules of Interviews, Names, Dates and Places

DATE	NAMES	DESIGNATION	PLACE
7 February 2004	Focus group women	Hindu women group engaged in temple duty	Shallcross
4 March 2004	Smita Krishna Dasa	ISKCON – Food for Life (procedural chair)	Sri Radha Radhanath Temple of Understanding - Chatsworth

5 March 2004	Dr Rambilaas	Vedic scholar, member of Hindu organisation	Westville
25 March 2004	Ramakrishna	Devotee	Durban
7 June 2004	H R Maharaj	Sanskrit scholar and practising priest	Shallcross, Durban
23 June 2004	Vishal Sookhraj	Bhakti Yoga Society	UKZN, Durban
24 June 2004	Alankar R Maharaj	Hindu Students Association	UKZN, Durban
30 June 2004	Hindu priest	Rendition of Gita Katha	Durban
5 July 2004	Focus group men	Hindu men and active givers	Midrand, Johannesburg
23 July 2004	D Bundhoo	Sanskrit scholar, philanthropist and welfarist	Pietermaritzburg
25 July 2004	Hindu Priest convention	Congregation of Hindu priests from KwaZulu Natal	Westville, UKZN
28 July 2004	Focus group men	Household givers	Estcourt
8 August 2004	Hindu householder	Household giver	Ladysmith
25 August 2004	Members of Hindu organisation	Ramakrishna Mission, Divine Life	Durban
7 September 2004	Ranjith Ramnarain	Businessman, philanthropist and elite giver	La Lucia
8 September 2004	Mrs Mothilal	Household giver	Shallcross
8 September 2004	Dr D Moodley	Representative Hindu Maha Sabha	Durban
3 October 2004	Bharat Ramkissoon	Hindu scholar, Honours student at UKZN	UKZN, Westville
3 October 2004	Anonymous philanthropist	Householder	Pinetown

9 October 2004	PRO – ABH Shamilla Surjoo	Public Relations Person	ABH – Chatsworth
11 October 2004	Sitaram	Professor of Hindu Studies	UKZN
23 October 2004	Focus group women	Women engaged in temple duties	Chatsworth
17 November 2004	Ashwin Desai	Sociologist and welfarist	Durban
24 November 2004	Receivers	Old and frail	ABH
25 November 2004	Bala Naidoo	Chairperson, KwaZulu Natal South African Tamil Federation	Durban
28 November 2004	Focus group interview with men	Householders	Chatsworth
28 November 2004	Focus group men	Householders	Cape Town
2 December 2004	Representative from Hindu organisation	Unofficial member	Johannesburg
24 August 2005	Anand Singh	Professor of Anthropology and member of the Ramakrishna Centre - SA	Durban, Asherville

Appendix 1

Organisational Biographies

According to Ramson (2005) the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) popularly known worldwide as the Hare Krishna Movement, was founded by A C Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada in New York in 1966. It has since expanded throughout North and South America, to Europe, Africa, Australia and Far East, and back to India, the land of its

origin. In South Africa, the Movement was established in 1972 in Durban.[106] This *Hare Krishna Movement,*[107] as it is popularly known, was introduced to South Africa in 1972, when two American disciples, Rsi Kumar Swami and Ksudhi das Brahmacari, arrived in Johannesburg under the instruction of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. The accounts of how they established ISKCON in South Africa is recorded by Riddha das[108] (1997) in *Destination South Africa* which describes their trials and tribulations, especially with the South African police in the apartheid era. It was Bhaktivedanta Swami's instruction that a Temple be built on its current site in Chatsworth, that gave the devotees the impetus to develop this project (Sooklal, 1985). After much fundraising all over the country, the *Sri Radha Radhanath Temple of Understanding* was officially opened on 18th to 20th October, 1985.

The South African Tamil Federation was established to try to systematise the workings of different temples and smaller organisations under one body. It has 89 affiliates and oversees about 52 temples. The organisation is exclusively for Hindus. Funding is generated from affiliation fees (R50 p.a.) but largely through fundraising efforts. Appeals are made to business houses and the community to support identified religious events during the year.

Established in 1949, the headquarters of the Divine Life Society of South Africa is located in Reservoir Hills, Durban. The society has seventeen branches and prayer groups throughout the country. A major regional centre, called the Sivananda International Cultural Centre, is located near La Mercy on the north coast of KwaZulu Natal. Conceived in 1987, this centre has grown into a complex suitable for the multifarious activities of a rapidly growing congregation who are involved in some or other form of social giving.[109]

[106] This has been popularized by its core teachings- the chanting of the Mahamantra: Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare

[107] These devotees moved to Durban where they were helped by prominent members of the Gujerati community

[108] Prior to becoming a devotee, he emigrated with his parents to Canada in 1954 due to the apartheid policies. At 22 years he joined ISKCON in Vancouver, Canada and returned to South Africa in 1975 to help with the ISKCON 's mission.

[109] Interview with Divine Life Society member, 19 July 2005

The Aryan Benevolent Home has an 83 year old history and is well placed in the public eye. In 1918 a challenge was presented to the Hindu community to establish a home for those who were indigent. The Aryan Benevolent Home was established in 1921 and was described as the greatest step taken by the Hindus in the community to blot out the stigma of shame inflicted on the poor and hungry. In October 1926 children were admitted for the first time as there was no institution to accommodate children in need of care, and the organisation was registered in terms of the Children's Act as a Home for Children in need of care in 1933. In May 1965, the Clayton Gardens Home for the Aged was purchased from the Durban City Council and was registered as a private grade hospital with 18 beds certified by the Natal Provincial Administration in 1967. The ABH is presently located in Arena Park, Chatsworth.

The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa was established in 1959 by Swami Nischalananda. An *ashram*, printing press and Ramakrishna Clinic was established on a fourteen acre property in Glen Anil, Durban. Printing and dissemination of literature, organised medical relief operations, distributing food and clothing to the needy are the primary activities of the Ramakrishna Centre. This organisation was one of the pioneer organisations that worked closely with the black community.[111]

[111] Interview with Ramakrishna devotee, 1 March 2005

Study of Hinduism: Who Does it and for Whose Sake?

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Abstract
In this essay, I want to address the issues of who studies Hinduism and for whose sake it is done. In doing so, I wish to examine 'Hinduism' as a conceptual and analytical tool in the study of Hinduism. Using Hinduism as an exemplum, I want to suggest how the broader study of religion might be pursued. In doing so, I want to see a relationship between the problems that exist in the study of Hinduism and the study of religion. In other words, Hinduism is one exemplum that defies the standard definition of religion and therefore it indeed might be what scholars of religion should pay close attention to in discussions of religion.

Is Hinduism a Case of Exception?

Notwithstanding the fact that Hindu texts have been studied in conventional formats in the orthodox Brahmanical centres, the study of Hinduism in its modern form certainly began with its European and outsider interest in South Asia with all its cultural diversity and complexity. For this reason alone, the construction (or misconstruction!) of Hinduism has been attributed to the Orientalist scholars who for their part received help from the native pundits in translations and interpretations of texts. As such, their hermeneutics is not

entirely based on Western tradition, but included quite substantially the native commentaries. The Orientalist scholars indeed thrived on the insider information. Nevertheless, to the extent that those data were then analysed and interpreted or reinterpreted in the metropolitan centres of Europe, it left a legacy with its European hall marks. That is, in terms of their methodology, they did make use the same linguistic methods that were guided by form criticism and textual criticism which were already in vogue among most Biblical studies scholars of Europe. Getting the data from native sources was only a part of the story of Hinduism. How that data was later moulded and shaped both by scholars, missionaries and colonial administrators is what has raised questions about the 'authenticity' of those interpretations. One of the lasting legacies of this is the fact that unlike the study of Judaism, Christianity, Islam and these days even Buddhism which have been populated by believers[1], the study of Hinduism for the most part remained in the Western academia.

This has raised the question whether the study of Hinduism is a case of exception. To a certain extent, it seems indeed so. First, as Hawley points out, religion in general is seen as a way of life in India and "almost never taught as an academic discipline in public universities" and that "[e]ven in the Hindu university at Banaras and the Muslim one at Aligarh there was no Department of Hindu Studies, Islamic Studies or Religion in general" (Hawley 2000: 715). Second, there is the quibble from within Hinduism whether Brahmins are the only 'authority' to speak for Hinduism or whether those who practice Hinduism (lentil Hinduism) or whether the Dalits and non-Sanskritic practitioners could speak for Hinduism. This, of course, has affected the academic study of Hinduism in more recent times. Brian K. Smith thinks that as secular scholars we have no right to ask whether Brahmins could speak for Hinduism (Smith 2000: 747). Vasudha Narayanan asks us to listen to the local goddesses (Narayanan 2000: 768f), whereas Sarma asks us to listen to the Apta Gurus (Sarma 2000: 781ff). Third, as Brooks informs us— "Our colonial history notwithstanding, Hinduism is not merely the same religion in different places and contexts. Hinduism is, if you will, a plural religion or even a "religions" to be studied comparatively" (Brooks 2000: 825). For all the three above reasons, one might accord Hinduism a special place in the study of religion, in that it has been predominantly studied by non-native scholars (Western) and only recently more and more native scholars as well as scholars of WASH (White Anglo-Saxon Hindus) background are beginning to engage in the study of Hinduism.

[1] This point has been made by Douglas Brooks (Brooks 2000: 827).

However, according Hinduism a special status does not help much in placing the study of Hinduism within the context of the study of religion in general. What matters to me is—what place does Hinduism have in the broader scope of the study of religion? How does studying Hinduism shape or influence the study of religion in general? Two comments are very instructive in this regard—

> While many different theologians may say, with authority, many different things about the unified essence of "Hinduism", it is the outside scholar's task to compare and analyse these different strands and construct his or her own conceptualisation of "Hinduism" on the basis of such work and reflection upon it (Smith 2000: 746).

> Scholars should indeed judge the integrity and validity of religious claims in their contexts. Just because our subject is religion or Hinduism and we may be neither religious nor Hindus by birth, this creates no exemption. Likewise, being of any religious persuasion, including Hindu by birth or by choice, neither qualifies nor disqualifies a work as scholarship (Brooks 2000: 825).

Taken together these two comments may help us move forward. The problems that confronted the study of Hinduism can be of great assistance in understanding the broader scope of the study of religion. We learn lessons from the past. We now know that much of our understanding of Hinduism both as a religion as well as an academic engagement by professionally trained scholars has been influenced by Orientalist scholarship which was assisted by native Brahmin pundits. We are also poignantly aware of the fact that many subaltern voices are not part of that understanding—be they non-Sanskrit goddesses or emerging native scholars who are religiously inclined. From the above two comments two important insights might be gleaned—first comment by Smith reminds us about our task of comparativism and the second by Brooks reminds us of our integrity as scholars. Given the vast amount of diversity that exists within the religion called Hinduism, the inside-outsider scholar modes collapse at some point. That is, the insider to the Madhva tradition becomes an outsider to the Shaiva Siddhanta tradition and perhaps to everything else within what we have included as Hinduism. In this sense, he or she stands more or less in the same predicament as the outside scholar does—or being ignorant of the other tradition and being reliant on another insider. As such, Hinduism as a broader phenomenon has no insiders *per se*. They are all insiders and outsiders at the same time.

It means then, whether one is an insider or an outsider, if one wants to construct Hinduism in the broader sense, there is no escape from comparativism, which to me is the basis of constructing a discussion on religion. In other words, just as scholars of Hinduism, both insiders and outsiders, need to compare the data before them to understand it in its broader scope, study of religion engages in comparing the vast amount of data gleaned from different religions. It is here the experience of our comparisons within the study of Hinduism might be useful as to how comparisons of differences as well as similarities could happen in the study of religion. In this sense, Hinduism is no exception and does not stand alone but joins as a collaborator in the broader study of religion. Its academic beginnings in the hands of the Orientalists perhaps gives it a unique place in that unlike, for instance, Christianity it is for the most part constructed by the 'outsiders'. Although it has exacerbated the problems of method and theory in the study of Hinduism vis ... vis the insiders' many objections, it nonetheless remained an academic engagement and has not been taken over by lay people. That is to say, even the so called 'insiders' are also academics and most often trained in the Western academia. Their being insiders does not change the nature of academic questions and issues that academics need to ask. These questions and issues are framed with the intention to construct the knowledge and understanding of Hinduism. As such, they need to be framed in such a way that makes them answerable and explainable in ways that are publicly available for scrutiny. In other words, no academic engagement is possible if data and its analysis and interpretation are not available publicly. It is in this sense, even if the insiders claim to know more or better than what the outsider knows, such knowledge is useful only to the extent that at some point the outsider has access to it, albeit through the insiders. The idea of inaccessibility of data in the academic study of religion does not gel. *If it is not accessible, it simply cannot be part of the academic analysis and interpretation.*

In other words, there is no different academic engagement for insiders and another one for the outsiders. All attempts at describing Hinduism, is effectively a redescription, whether it is by the outsiders or by the insiders. As such, a redescription uses categories and concepts that are intellectually cogent and available for sustained analysis. Much noise has been made by some scholars both from within and without that scholarly descriptions and analyses must use categories from within the tradition and not impose outsider concepts[2]. A case in

[2] See for instance what some scholars of ritual have argued—"While we should not simply take the general theoretical category of 'ritual'—or 'RITUAL' as Handelman puts it—for

point is the term 'religion' itself. Some suggested that Indian terms such as 'dharma' are perhaps more appropriate to understand Hinduism as there is no such vocabulary in Indian languages for the term 'religion'. Needless to say that not only such selection of terms and concepts can become internally controversial as some Tamil Hindus may not like a north Indian term being imposed on them, but more importantly the issue is whether a term is capable of standing the analytical rigour for purposes of generalisations. In other words, the terms that we have come to deploy in our continued analytical exercises are the ones that have had a long history of surviving the rigour of scientific analysis. In spite of what scholars like W.C. Smith have suggested, the term 'religion' is still the only category that has survived scholarly analysis not to speak of its popular use. While our conceptual tools need to be constantly reviewed, blanket statements such as 'insider terms must be given priority in theorizing or insider's theories must be given a place in the academic discourse' does not serve the academic needs and challenges. To be frank, a theory is what it is because of its ability for universal application. If it cannot be applied universally it does not gain much acceptance, like the term 'dharma'.

It may be a nice postmodernist idea to argue that we as scholars must enter the world of the insiders and speak in their terms. But the point is that scholarly descriptions and analyses are not undertaken for the sake of the insiders *per se*, albeit they might read some of those studies. They are intended for a larger readership and most certainly for the sake of constructing knowledge *about* a religious tradition and compare that knowledge with that of other traditions and then engage in generalisations on the basis of available evidence from the data. When a scholar studies the Gita, for instance, it is not intended to impart the teachings of the text to a religious audience. It is an attempt to provide an understanding of the text within the larger corpus of Indian texts and its religious significance and meaning and as to how it may fit within the larger Hindu tradition. While a particular section within Hinduism might interpret the meaning of the text in a certain way as to fit it within the doctrinal outlook of that branch, scholarly studies of the Gita are invariably comparative. That is, a scholar's undertaking of the study of the text would have to analyse its historical/semantic connections with the text of the Mahabharata, the various commentaries by various traditional scholars from within a particular school and so on. Such broader analyses are seldom necessary for someone's spiritual

granted in epistemological terms, an inquiry into possible emic equivalents for 'ritual' in some other than Latin and modern Western European languages serves as a reminder of non-theoretical alternatives to structuring the semantic universe." (Kreinath et al. 2006: xix)

benefit. But they are the most necessary ways to gain some knowledge of the Hindu tradition. Therefore, the latter type of studies by secular scholars might be of some use to the insiders, but they are primarily attempts of scholars' redescriptions and not meant to be repetitions of what the insiders say. In other words, there is certainly a difference between a devout worshipper of Ganesha saying that "Ganesha is real" and a scholar's redescription of it to the effect that "the worshippers of Ganesha claim that he is real". No serious Biblical Studies scholar could say "Jesus said..." but rather they would say "Jesus is said to have said...."

This leads to the contentious issue whether scholars make their statements with sensitivity towards the religious feelings of the devotees/insiders. Much has been said about the 'emic' statements and 'etic' statements. My restlessness has always been about the so called 'emic' statements. When is a statement counted an 'emic' one and when is it not? When a Hindu says that Mariamman worship is a primitive form of religious expression, it is counted as their internal problem. But what happens if a scholar makes an argument that given the scientific world in which most Hindus live today and given the many changes that have been taking place in the rural life of Hindus, it is most likely that Mariamman worship might be seen as "primitive" way of interacting with the world. Let me take even more a provocative issue. As scholars of Hinduism, we all know (this goes for both insiders as well as outsiders) that in mythological narratives gods have been infatuated by the wives of sages, Shiva becomes infatuated by Vishnu when he appears in the form of Mohini. Most likely average Hindus don't get to read such passages or at best they might turn a blind eye to such narratives just as most Christians don't often read the 'Song of Solomon' for its erotic tone. But what happens when a scholar's theoretical quest to find narratives in the Hindu tradition that might have erotic or homosexual overtones chooses to place such narratives along side modern discourse on sexuality and other such issues? Notwithstanding the fact that a scholar is not engaging in a traditional discourse for the readership of traditional believers, and in spite of a scholar's very specifically stated intention to study such narratives in the context of modern discourses, all hell breaks lose and it is the scholar's alleged insensitivity to the tradition that is questioned. A scholar's engagement with religious materials is not for a repetition of tradition. It is always a redescription for purposes of theoretical analysis. Such redescriptions are necessarily pursued within the framework of scholar's stated method and theory. In light of what I have said above, the case of Hinduism is not an exception in the study of religion, but is indeed a good case in point to

understand the nature of issues that can emanate in the larger context of the study of religion. As much as we might argue about its alien origins, the term Hinduism has come to stay with us both in the academic discourse as well as in popular discourse. Like religion, it has survived our academic rigour and therefore the fuller complexities of Hinduism can only be grasped through comparative methods and by comparing the data from various corners of its common history in South Asia, and perhaps equally importantly the data from the Hindu diaspora. So, let me explore some challenges in studying Hinduism comparatively.

Studying Hinduism Comparatively

The idea that Hinduism consists of several religious traditions that have different schemes of liberation or ritual traditions opens up the opportunity to examine as to how these traditions can be subsumed under a coherent category of Hinduism. Such an examination begins with the admission that the great many traditions that are brought together in this comparative project have their respective histories and cultural roots. It also begins with the admission that they share a range of ideas, concepts and ways of thinking. These differences and similarities provide us with the data to compare and construct our view of Hinduism. Such an attempt will also enable us to avoid the construction of misleading and distorting narratives of a monolithic Hinduism. In other words, it avoids constructing Hinduism as though there is a single coherent historical development from the Vedic history to Vedanta and to sectarian theologies of medieval period. Instead, it takes account of how at different times in different regions in India people have appropriated ideas to construct their own religious narratives. For instance, there is no evidence to show that the theology of Vishnu or Shiva have a direct relationship to the early Vedic texts except the two deities have been mentioned in isolation in those texts. But the local or regional traditions of Vishnu and Shiva, having unique historical and cultural backgrounds, found it meaningful to assimilate ideas from earlier texts in order to authenticate their traditions. Such assimilations and appropriation of ideas is a universal religious phenomenon.

Part of the problem about Hinduism in the way it came to constructed is that it is largely based on texts that scholars began to study initially in their own right and then found some ideas that are commonly mentioned in other texts. No historical evidence exists to demonstrate that the ideas of one text are historically connected to or evolved from another text. Such attempts have been either hypothetical or retrospectively constructed theological arguments. For

instance, to suggest that the early Rigvedic idea of sacrifice has evolved to become the notion of Brahman of the Upanishads is to ignore many historical problems on the one hand and conceptual difficulties on the other. In the face of the many differences in concepts of history between the Western notions and those of the Indian, one might give benefit of doubt to such historical difficulties. Even though there may not be any reliable evidence to suggest that the text of the Rigveda has some connection to the earliest Upanishadic text, one might allow some benefit of doubt. But even then difficulties of conceptual connections and their coherence cannot easily be avoided. That is, how did the notion of sacrifice that is so different in the Vedic texts become the kind of abstract notion of Brahman such as the one we find in the Upanishadic texts. It is naïve to think that such a development from one type of thinking to another occurs in a natural way within the tradition itself. That is, no such outside influence was responsible in such development is to ignore how cultures actually assimilate and evolve.[3] Much speculation has occurred in scholarship in regard to the development of thought from the Rigvedic notions to the Upanishadic notions.[4] Instead of forcing semantic and historical connections between what seems to be entirely different notions, it would be more sensible to understand that ideas come from different historical and social experiences and that they at some point interact with other ideas and then begin to assimilate each others meanings and intentions as they did in the case of the Vedic and the Upanishadic ideas.

Even when one uses semantic history as a method in studying Sanskrit text based traditions, one has to bear in mind that there are different historical levels in the development of the Hindu texts. Scholars of Vedic texts, for

[3] A case in point is Counter Reformation in Europe. It is entirely unimaginable to discount the role of Protestant Reformation and its political underpinnings in Europe in forcing the then Roman Church to consider internal reforms.

[4] Following a semantic analysis, Olivelle (1996) locates the Asrama system within the Brahmanic worldview. But following the ideological analysis, Thapar clearly distinguishes between the Brahamana and the Sramana ideologies saying, "[s]uch bunching together relates to a similarity of concerns suggestive of a common framework of discourse but does not detract from the fundamental differences between the two systems." (Thapar 2000: 967). She rightly locates the Buddhist, Jaina, Ajivika, and other sects, such as Sakta cults, Vaisnava and Saiva within the Sramanic system and points out that the so-called devotional cults "were also in varying degree inheritors of the Sramanic religion." (Thapar 2000: 970). In this context, the eastern origins of all of these religions and cults together with the Upanishadic texts cannot be ignored and perhaps may point to an earlier influence of Sramana ideology.

instance, through internal chronology of texts, have differentiated between periods which can be distinguished by "language, habitat, and in their social, religious, and political features" (Witzel 1996: 3). If we follow the internal chronology of different texts, as Witzel hints, it would be too simplistic to admit that the Samhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads and Sutras appeared in that chronological order. It is also noteworthy to add here as to what Parpola says referring to the development of Hinduism—

> It has been customary to view the history of Indian religions from the perspective affected by the chronological development of the literary sources. However, the corresponding periodization, as well as the commonly accepted view, which sees a more or less unilinear development starting from the "germinal" hymns of the Rigveda, is seriously distorted. It is imperative, especially when studying the religions of "timeless" India, to distinguish between the age of the contents and the age of literary form of a given document. We have already discussed the relation between the old family books of the Rigveda and the younger Veda (RV I and X, the Atharvaveda and the Brahmanas). Although the latter texts are younger as far as the chronology of their expression is concerned, the religion preserved in them often represents a more archaic stage of development than that of the Rigveda (Parpola 1983: 53).

He further states "[t]he Hindu ritual, even as it is practiced today or very recently, appear to have preserved with singular fidelity rites many millennia old, in forms that are closer to the reconstructible Dasa religion than those of the Veda." (Parpola 1983: 54)

In order for such an understanding to prevail one needs careful thick descriptions of the various traditions with their different worldviews. What has been problematic is that before we had any complete and coherent thick descriptions of different cultural worlds in South Asia, texts have been circulated in translations giving rise to speculative connections between texts and their different ideas. Much of what we understand about Hinduism, therefore, came from a reconstruction of texts and their ideas often devoid of their social and cultural contexts. As such, the Hinduism that we understand today both in the scholarly world and among the lay populations comes from an idealisation of a homogenous narrative that is devoid of historical differences. From the Vedas to the Puranas to the later temple ritual traditions a single narrative of Hinduism has been superimposed on diverse traditions.

Such a narrative of artificial homogeneity led to the construction of Hinduism that has no historical, social and cultural parameters. It is for this reason that no matter how long we may engage in talking about such Hinduism, it is hard to find it in real society. In stead what we find are diverse traditions and doctrines and rituals that people practice/observe/believe and are happy to carry on living in those local traditions oblivious to the artificially superimposed homogenous Hinduism. As such diversity in Hindu religious scene is much deeper than one gives credit to. There are fundamental ideological differences and therefore, scholars such as von Stietencron (1995) are justified in calling for accepting what exists under Hinduism as different religions. This recognition of deep ideological differences needs a different approach than mere conventional semantic-historical and philological approaches. Attempts to construct Hinduism with a single narrative also denied opportunities for scholars and lay people to engage in useful comparisons that could lead to a coherent re-conception of how Hinduism might be outlined. The opportunity to engage in thick empirical descriptions of local traditions has been outweighed by scholarly preoccupation with texts. Some that did happen remained in highly specialised studies of Vedic ritual practices on the one hand, or in isolated social scientific studies on non-Sanskritic or village based goddess traditions. Every region in India enjoyed cultural diversity with its own varied ritual traditions. What we need is to conduct rigorous empirical studies to document those traditions not on the basis of Sanskritic vs. non-Sanskritic or Brahmanical vs. non-Brahmanical or Classical vs. Popular. Such polarizations will only distort reality. But if regional traditions are documented as they appear in society with whatever elements it may contain, such documentation can assist us in making useful comparisons among all the various regional traditions and can construct what might be construed as broader Hinduism. In this regard, emphasis must be placed on the study of regional and vernacular traditions. Results from such diverse data will enable us to compare using sustainable analytical concepts such as 'Hinduism'. In other words, the category 'Hinduism' can be deployed as a conceptual tool to compare data from diverse backgrounds. Like the notion of religion, the concept of Hinduism is used for its analytical ability to bring together different data from South Asia rather than thinking of it in terms of an empirical phenomenon. That is to say, Hinduism does not exist in society as a single religion, but it is how we as scholars are able to place certain data under that rubric and not under another rubric, e.g., Buddhism. Why we associate some religious data as Hindu and not as something else is not normatively available for us to find, but rather it is found in our analysis of the data. The data

in itself does not have a face. But it takes shape under the rigour of our methodological and theoretical tools.

It is in this sense that the notion of Hinduism can provide us with a comparative perspective of ideas that were in circulation across cultural boundaries and how they were used to develop various local narratives. In regional narratives, therefore, what constituted as Hinduism depended on how intellectuals and ritual practitioners combined ideas and gave coherence to them through an over arching doctrine or salvation scheme. As such, for a Kashmiri Hindu it is one thing and for a Madurai Tamil Hindu it is another thing. So, the idea that both could be construed as Hindu or as Hinduism has not so much to do with the idea that there is an over arching Hinduism out there, but rather such notion of Hinduism is to be located in the imagination of people. Like wise, scholarly description of Hinduism is based on our scholarly imagination as to which narratives and ideas are reconcilable and which are not. In other words, it is we as scholars decide what ideas might be construed as part of the narrative/s of Hinduism and not as part of Buddhism or Jainism in spite of their being cognate to one another and shared a common cultural history. It is to the legacy of our scholarship that such boundaries between religions and within religions need to be attributed. Suffice to say that such boundaries are based on not only coherence of ideas but more importantly on the social and political identities of the practitioners of those ideas. In a sense, then, defining or describing Hinduism is not only a scholarly act, but a political one too.

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