An Immersion into the Dialogue of Religious Experience at Varanasi

A Christian Engagement in the Devotion and Practice of the *Rāmcaritmānas* of Tulsidas

A Dissertation in Partial Fulfillment of the Doctor in Sacred Theology

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Abstract

In 'geo-religious' contexts throughout the world, the Church faces two crucial imperatives. Called to participate in the *Missio Dei*, it must engage other religions through inter-religious encounters and dialogue. Called to immerse itself within multi-religious realities, it also must deal with the epistemic arrogance that has accelerated religious extremism and contributed to the social construction, domination, and vilification of the religious 'other.'

In response to these imperatives, Church leaders have issued a substantial number of ecclesial documents inviting Christians to enter into dialogue with adherents of other religions and philosophies of life. Ecclesial ministers have been called to reflect upon the 'clash of religions' and offer adequate responses to religious conflicts in various regions of the world. Unfortunately, however, our reliance on the comparative study of religion and the theology of religions, while informative, has not proven to be sufficiently formative. If Christian communities of faith are to respond to the adverse consequences of religious extremism, violence, and conflict, a new way of doing theological education is needed. Formation for ministry must include learning how to approach the religious other in a 'dialogue of life' through 'epistemic humility' that acknowledges, our need for the religious other. It must include cultivating the dialogical virtues of humility, hospitality, empathy, and interconnectedness necessary for promoting a 'culture of encounter.' In the processes of encounter and dialogue, learning by listening deeply can be transformative both for aspiring ministers and for adherents of other religions as they develop relationships of trust and mutual concern, thereby opening themselves to creating a heart for the other.

In this dissertation, I propose that within the context of India, where religious violence is exacerbated by extremism and the marginalization of non-Hindus, the mission of interreligious dialogue entrusted to the Church by the Holy Spirit can be enhanced by encounters and relationships that provide for a deeper engagement with religious texts, rituals, and performative aspects of various faith traditions. I use the method of Comparative Theology articulated by Francis X. Clooney, S.J., that aims at deepening and expanding one's own tradition through interreligious learning. In doing so, I advance the conviction, drawing from my own experiences through immersion, that the popular Hindu devotional text, *Rāmcaritmānas*, from the 16th century, with its textual, ritual, and performative dimensions, offers an instructive model for fostering a 'culture of encounter' and practicing dialogical virtues for the sake of the Reign of God.[1] As a consequence, I argue that ecclesial ministers who are formed and transformed by such experiences will be better prepared to accompany Indian Christians in 'creating a heart for the other.' Furthermore, by introducing aesthetical approaches to the proclamation, communication, and reception of Gospel narratives that deal with the life of Jesus Christ, the fruit and application of their interreligious learning, they also will be more skilled at helping Indian Christians to rediscover and intensify their devotion to Christ. To fulfill these outcomes, the dissertation is divided into five chapters.

Chapter One discusses the theological understanding of *Missio Dei* and the ways in which the Church *participates in God's mission* through interreligious encounter and dialogue. It illustrates how prophetic dialogue and being religious interreligiously are essential to the processes

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[1] Abbreviated form *Mānas*

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of creating and sustaining the culture of encounter envisioned by Pope Francis. To this end, the biographies, and theological frameworks of Raimundo Panikkar, Michael Amaladoss, and Peter Phan are presented and analyzed. Chapter Two describes Clooney's method for doing comparative theology as a form of constructive theological investigation and reflection that contributes to encounter and dialogue through a profound engagement with the texts, rituals, and performative experiences. Chapter Three provides a detailed account of the *Mānas* by highlighting its devotional aspects, its uniqueness from other Rāmāyaṇas as well as its depictions of Rām, the epic's protagonist, and his exemplar devotees, Hanumān, Śabari and Kāka Bhuśundi. Chapter Four explains the people's devotional reception of the text and their popular participation in recitations (*pāṭh*), tellings (*kathā*) and enactments *(līlā)* that lead to experiences of transformation. The personal engagement with the *Mānas*, both from the Hindu *insiders* and *outsiders* of other faith traditions, is illustrated to highlight the interactive dynamic of interreligious transformation. Consequently, pertinent theological questions are raised regarding the appropriateness of outsiders participating in religious readings and rituals. The final chapter, Chapter Five, focuses on significant learnings and their applications. For Comparative Theology, such learning comprises the inclusion of textual-ritual-performative aspects into this theological method as well as the rectification of negative Christian biases in understanding Rām and Hindu devotional practices. The home tradition, in this case Christianity, learns to discover new ways of recovering its own popular devotional traditions and aesthetics in the embodiment of the Gospels. As for Theological Education, such learning offers a promising contribution to the development of a curriculum that includes *engaged* interreligious studies and immersion experiences that are theologically formative and personally transformative for ecclesial ministry in India and beyond. Ideally, it is my hope that these learnings from the *Mānas* will foster '*bandhuthā*' (fraternity) among Christians and Hindus and ultimately promote and sustain genuine encounter and dialogue.

Abbreviations

AG - *Ad Gentes*

AR - *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*

BJP – Bharatiya Janata Party

Bh.Pu. – *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

Br.Up. – *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*

EA – *Ecclesia in Asia*

GS – *Gaudium et Spes*

Ka.Up. – *Kaṭhā Upaniṣad*

LG – *Lumen Gentium*

Ma. Bh. – *Mahābhārata*

NBS – Nārada Bhakti Sūtra

RCM – Rāmcaritmānas

RSS – *Rāṣṭrīya Swayamsevak Sangh*

Sp.Ex. – Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius

Tai.Up – Taittirīya Upaniṣad

VHP – *Vishwa Hindu Parishad*

VR – Vālmīkī Rāmāyaṇa

Glossary of Hindu Terms[2]

Advaita: Non-duality. It is a philosophical school which denies that the Infinite can be counted and hence Brahman and the world cannot be counted as two.

Ānanda: Bliss; happiness; joy.

Antyeśti: The "last sacrifice," cremation rites. (DE)

Anubhava: Direct perception; personal spiritual experience; intuitive consciousness; Self-realization.

Ārati: Literally, "supplication," a ritual of worship of a deity or human exemplar, usually accompanied by the waving of a brass tray bearing a lighted lamp and accompanied by song of praise, also called *arti*. (PL)

Asi: The rivulet that borders Varanasi on the south and enters the Ganges at Asi Ghāt. (DE).

Āśrām: A center of spiritual study or meditation, a hermitage or monastery.

Avatāra: The word is made up of the prefix *ava* with the meaning of repletion or "down," and the verbal noun *tara* derived from the root word meaning to cross over, "to pass." An incarnation, especially of Viṣṇu.

Bhagāvan: One who possesses *Bhāga*, excellence or loveliness, the blissful one, the adorable one

Bhakti: "Devotion, honor, love"; from *bhaj* meaning to share, to be devoted, to love. The heart's devotion and love towards God. (DE).

Bhāva: Attitude, mostly expressing a special relationship with God.

Devi*:* The Divine Mother; a goddess. The word can refer to any female deity in Hinduism.

Dharma: Duty, law, righteousness, religious duties, especially rites; in more modern usage, religion. (DE)

Ganapati/Ganeśa: The Lord of Gaṇas, the elephant-headed son of Śiva and Pārvati, a Hindu deity, remover of all obstacles.

Ghāt: Landing places or bans along a river or coast. (DE)

Guru: Spiritual teacher who leads one from darkness to light.

Hanumān: A powerful deity; the son of the Wind-God; great devotee of Śri Rāma; the famous Monkey who helped Rāma in His fight with Ravaṇa.

Hāsya: Mirth or amusement; fun.

Iṣṭa: Object of desire; the chosen ideal; the particular form of God to which one is devoted.

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[2] This Glossary is prepared with the help of Diana, L. Eck, *Banaras City of Light* (New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1982); idem, *India A Sacred Geograph*y (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2012) (DE); Philip Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale: The Message of a Divine Monkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) (PL).

Iṣṭadevatā: Favorite deity

Itihāsas: Literal meaning "thus it was." Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata epics are known as *Itihāsa*. The *Śāstras* are the product of a Brahmin world, whereas the epics arose within the *Kṣatriya* milieu.

Japa: Repetition of God's Name again and again; repetition of a *Mantra.*

Jnāna: Knowledge; the wisdom of the Reality or Brahman.

Kaliyuga: Age of Kali; iron age; the last of the four Yugas; the present age; the dark, evil age.

Kāma: Desire; passion; lust.

Karma: Action. It has three distinct aspects: *Sanchita* (all the accumulated actions of all previous births), *Prārabdha* (the particular portion of such *karma* allotted for being worked out in the present life), and *Āgami* (current *karma* being freshly performed by an individual). *Karma* operates through the law of cause and effect, binding the *Jīva* or the individual soul to the wheel of birth and death.

Karuṇā: Mercy; compassion; kindness.

Kathā: Narration or Storytelling. A performer is called a *Kathāvacak* or *vyās*. An individual patron or community invites him or her to retell or discourse on a sacred story.

Līlā: Play; sport; the cosmos looked upon as a divine play.

Lokasangṛha: Solidarity of the world; an uplifting of the world.

Mahant: A religious superior, in particular, the chief of a temple or the head of a monastery in Hinduism

Māla: Prayer beads used for counting the number of *Japa* that are done.

Manas: Mind; the thinking faculty.

Mantra: Sacred syllable or word or set of words, through which, by means of repetition and reflection, one attains perfection or realization of the Self.

Mārga: Path; road

Mokṣa: Release; liberation; the term is particularly applied to liberation from the bondage of Karma and the wheel of birth and death; Absolute Experience.

Mukta: The liberated one.

Mukti: Same as Mokṣa

Muni: A sage; an austere person; one observing the vow of silence (*Mauna*).

Mūrti: Idol.

Nāma: Name.

Neti-Neti: "Not this, not this"; the analytical process of progressively negating all names and forms in order to arrive at the eternal underlying Truth.

Nirguṇa: Literally "without attributes," referring to Brahman to which no qualities, attributes, or adjectives may be ascribed; contrast to *saguṇa*, "with attributes," able to be described. (DE)

Pandā: Brahmin priest catering especially to the needs of pilgrims. (DE)

Pandit: Wise, learned, a scholar.

Pārāyaṇ: Repeated chanting or singing of sacred texts.

Pāṭh : The recitation of a sacred text.

Prasāda: An item (usually food) offered to a deity or holy person, and then returned to the devotee as a consecrated leftover. (PL)

Pujā: Worship, ordinarily including the presentation of honor offerings (*upachāras*) to the deity, (DE).

Pujāri: Brahmin priest responsible for worship in a temple. (DE)

Puṇya: Merit; virtue

Purāṇas: The collections of "ancient stories" that preserve traditions of myth, legend, and rites. Most deities and sacred places have a '*Purāṇa*' connected to them. As part of the Hindu scriptures, they have five marks: depicting the creation of the universe, destruction and recreation of the universe, tales of gods and goddesses, the story of the first humans, and solar and lunar dynasties. There are mainly eighteen *Purāṇas* known as '*Maha Purāṇaṡ*. Among them, the most popular one that promotes *bhakti* is *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

Rājā: King.

Rāmkathā: The story of Rāma.

Rāmlīlā: A performance of the Rāma story during the Dussehra festival.

Rasa: Essence (of enjoyment); water; mercury; taste; sweet feeling; food-chyle; Brahman.

Rāslīlā: High point of the cycle of Krishna *līlās*, enacting the circle dance in which Krishna multiplies himself to dance at night with the *gopīs*. (DE)

Rūpa: Appearance; form; sight; vision.

Sādhaka: (Spiritual) aspirant; one who exerts *oneself* to attain something.

Sādhana: Self-effort; tool; implement; spiritual practice.

Sādhu: A "holy man," generally an ascetic as well. (DE)

Śaiva: One who considers Lord Siva to be the highest Lord; pertaining to Lord Siva.

Śakti: Power; energy, or life-force, thought to reside especially in goddesses and women; also, the female consort of a male deity. (PL)

Sanātana: Eternal; everlasting

Sannyāsi: A monk; one who has embraced the life of complete renunciation; one belonging to the fourth or the highest stage of life.

Śāstra: A Sanskrit treatise purporting to systematically treat a body of knowledge or practice. (PL)

Śaraṇāgati: Self-surrender; coming under refuge.

Śaucha: Purity (internal and external); cleanliness; one of the five *Niyamas* in *Aṣṭāṇga Yoga.*

Siddhānta: Established tenet or doctrine.

Sindūra: A paste made of oil and any of several red or orange pigments. (PL)

Śloka: The most common Sanskrit poetic meter, consisting of two lines each divided into two metrically equal feet. (PL)

Smṛti: Memory; code of law.

Śraddhā: Faith.

Śruti: The Vedas; the revealed scriptures of the Hindus; that which has been heard; ear.

Sūtra: Thread; string; an aphorism with minimum words and maximum sense; a terse sentence.

Śudra: In the classical Brahmanical social order, a member of the fourth class of serfs and servants. Ineligible for Vedic initiation, they are supposed to serve the three "twice-born" classes. (PL)

Svarūpas: Literally meaning one's own form, but refers to God's own form.

Tamas: Ignorance; inertia; darkness; perishability.

Tapas: Heat, especially the heat generated by ascetic practice, believed to be creative, like the brooding heat of a mother hen. (DE)

Tilaka: A forehead decoration indicating a religious observance and sometimes a sectarian affiliation. (PL)

Tīrtha: Holy waters; place of pilgrimage; sacred place usually containing a bathing place.

Tīrhayātra: Pilgrimage.

Tretā Yuga: The second half of the four ages in the Classical Hindu time cycle during the latter portion of which Rama appears on earth. (PL)

Utsava: Festivity.

Veda: The highest authority among the sacred texts of Hindus.

Vyās: Assembler, narrator.

Yajna: A sacrifice.

Yoga: Union; the name of the philosophy of the sage, Patanjali, involves teaching the process of union of the individual with the Universal Soul; an unruffled state of mind under all conditions.

Yuga: The "ages" of the world, four in number: *krita, treta, dvāpara, and kali*; the first being the perfect age of the beginnings, the last being this age of strife - our age. (DE).

The Characters in the *Rāmcaritmānas*[3]

Bāli (Vālin) – Monkey King of Kishkindha, elder brother of Sugrīv, father of Aṅgad, killed by Rām.

Bharat – Son of Daśarath and Kaikeyī, younger brother of Rām.

Bhuśuṇḍi – A crow, a model devotee of Rām especially the child Rām, he told the story of Rām to Garuḍa and other bids coming to his abode.

Citrakūṭ – A hill where Rām and Sitā spent the beginning of their exile.

Daśarath – Rām's father, king of Ayodhya from the family of Raghu of the Solar dynasty.

Dandak - Forest near the River Godavari; in one of its parts called Panchavati, where Rām and his companions spent most of their exile.

Garuḍ - The King of Birds, delivered Rām from serpent's tangles.

Guh - Chief of the Niśāds, his capital was Shringavera on the banks of the River Ganges, an ally of Rām.

Hanumān - The son of the God of Wind (vāyu); played an important role in rescuing Sitā from the hands of Rāvaṇ; a model devotee of Rām.

Jāmbavan - Chief of bears who played an important role during Rām's war with Rāvaṇ.

Jaṭāyu – A vulture who tried to rescue Sitā from Rāvaṇ and was killed by him.

Kaikeyi - Junior wife of Daśarath, mother of Bharat.

Kausalyā - Senior wife of Daśarath, mother of Bharat.

Lakṣmaṇ - Son of Daśarath and Sumitra, twin brother of Śatrughna, Rām's younger brother and his constant companion.

Laṅkā – The capital of Rāvaṇ, where Sitā was kept captive by him.

Mandodari – The daughter of demon Māya and the principal wife of Rāvaṇ.

Manthāra – A vicious maid of Kaikeyī, whose intrigue led to Rām's exile.

Niśād – Tribal people whose chief was Guha.

Rāghava – Epithet of Rām.

Raghu –Ancestor of Rām.

Rabhubīr – Epithet of Rām; hero of the Raghu family.

Rākṣasas – Demons their king was Rāvaṇ.

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[3] The explanation of these characters is taken from Danuta Stasik, *The Infinite Story: The Past and Present Rāmāyaṇas in Hindi* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2009), 286-91.

Rāvaṇ - Ten-headed Demon King of Lanka, main antagonist of Rām. He seized Rām's wife, Sītā, and was eventually killed by Rām.

Śabari – An ascetic tribal woman who meets Rām during his wanderings in the forest.

Sītā – Daughter of Janak, beloved wife of Rām. According to the *Rāmcaritmānas,* Rāvaṇ actually kidnapped an illusory Sītā, while the real Sītā was protected by Agni, the God of Fire.

Sugrīv – the king of monkeys, the younger brother of Bāli; ascended the throne of Kishkindha, thinking that his brother had died. However, Bali returned and banished him. Rām helped him regain the throne in return for his help in recapturing Sītā.

Śūrpaṇaka – The sister of Rāvaṇ; in Panchavati, infatuated with Rām, she tried to seduce him but at his behest was punished and mutilated by Lakṣmaṇ, who cut off her nose and ears. Thus, she took revenge on Rām, bringing about the kidnapping of his beloved Sītā by Rāvaṇ.

Tāḍakā – A demoness killed by Rām at Viśvamitra's behest.

Vālmīki - A great sage, in the Rāmāyaṇa tradition considered the composer of the epic; in the *Rāmcaritmānas,* Vālmiki told Rām to settle in Chitrakut.

General Introduction

Pope Francis, in his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, on fraternity and social friendship, writes,

> We encounter "the temptation to build a culture of walls, to raise walls, walls in the heart, walls on the land, in order to prevent this encounter with other cultures, with other people. And those who raise walls will end up as slaves within the very walls they have built. They are left without horizons, for they lack this interchange with others.[4]

He calls for a culture of encounter saying,

> For that is the temptation we face if we go down the road of disenchantment and disappointment… Isolation and withdrawal into one's own interests are never the way to restore hope and bring about renewal. Rather, it is closeness; it is the culture of encounter. Isolation, no; closeness, yes. Culture clash, no; culture of encounter, yes.[5]

The diversity of religions and cultures envelops us and works on us and gets inside us.[6]

Since the Second Vatican Council, the church invites the people of God to dialogue with the world, with other religions and cultures. But, in the midst of growing religious extremism, the constant question is: How do we encounter other religions? The easiest temptation is to keep the other at a distance and build a culture of walls within one's heart in order to prevent an encounter with others.[7] The church's mission of interreligious dialogue is to give witness to our faith's relevance and deepen our understanding and respect for the faith traditions flourishing around us. This mission needs to be continued with greater vitality and fervor. "The first means of evangelization," wrote Paul VI, "is the witness of the authenticity of Christian life."[8]

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[4]*Fratelli Tutti*, 2020, no. 27. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html

[5] Ibid., 30.

[6] Francis, X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology, Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 6.

[7] *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 26. see also Dialogue with Students and Teachers of the San Carlo College in Milan (6th April 2019): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 8-9 April 2019, 6.

[8] *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975, no. 41. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.htm

For a true encounter that emphasizes the "dialogue of life," a deeper study of religious texts, ritual practices, and performative aesthetics of other faiths is essential. The Second Vatican Council, positively acknowledged the beliefs and practices of other religions that are not in contradiction to the Gospel and said in *Lumen Gentium*, "those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God."[9] From a pneumatological perspective, the Church acknowledges the presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of non-Christian people, and also in their values, cultures and religions.[10] This positive understanding of other religions calls for Christians to be witnesses to Christ and to be missionaries of the Gospel.

Catholics in different parts of the world are seriously discerning the "signs of the times" in their own contexts—interreligious dialogue in Asia, the interaction between faith and culture in Africa, the conversation between Christianity and secularization in Europe and Australia – in order to carry forward the mission. *Ad Gentes* maintains, according to Bevans and Schroeder, that "the church is in mission because it has been graciously caught up in the *Missio D*ei, the very mission of God in creation, redemption and continual sanctification."[11] Bevans argues that, from the very beginning, the missionary message of the Christian church incarnated itself in the life and world of those who had embraced it in a particular context. In the twenty-first century, he calls for a new synthesis of *prophetic dialogue* in mission.[12] To foster relationships among the religions, with an attitude of *prophetic dialogue*, there is an urgent need for a dialogical approach that facilitates mutual exchange and nurtures the possibility of conversations undertaken with respect and mutual regard. This demands actual encounters with persons of other religions. To experience genuine

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[9] LG, no. 16.

[10] *Redemptor Hominis*,1979, no.6, 11. Drawing on Vatican II, AG, no.11 and LG, no. 17.

[11] Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context, Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004), 288.

[12] See Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

encounters, one is challenged to find ways that are relational. They may be risky. Others may disapprove. At the same time, these ways must be prudent. In this thesis, I apply Clooney's method of Comparative Theology, I do so by deepening and expanding my own tradition through interreligious learning, study and engagement with the 16th century popular Hindu devotional text, *Rāmcaritmānas*, a classic of early Hindi (dialect) poetry, a religious classic, and a text that remains loved, famed, and performed even now.

Clooney defines Comparative Theology as an

> Act of faith seeking understanding, which is rooted in a particular faith tradition, and ventures out into learning from other faith traditions. The learning is done for the sake of fresh theological insights that are indebted to the newly encountered tradition/s as well as the home tradition.[13]

Clooney privileges a starting point for Comparative Theology in textual reading but admits that "there is no reason why some comparative theologians cannot choose to proceed by way of attention to art, music, ritual, and the various modalities of popular religion."[14] Through this method, there can be a cultivation of a more interconnected sense of traditions. Reading together with sensitivity to faith and reason grounds a deeper validation and intensification of each tradition.[15] In this manner, the method enhances the theology of mission among the religions.

One of the characteristic features of Comparative Theology is its confessional nature. The core of this thesis is that I, as an Indian Catholic, Jesuit, priest, and a research student in *Rāmcaritmānas*, have encountered another faith deeply in and through the *Mānas* traditions. The thesis is about encounters and learnings that contribute to 'epistemic humility' and enhance the mission of Interreligious Dialogue. The thesis is not about the Theology of Religions, the

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[13] Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning*, 10.
[14] Clooney, "Comparative Theology," in *Oxford Handbook*, 664.
[15] Clooney, *Comparative Theology, Deep Learning,* 4.

comparative study of religion, or a study on the literature of Tulsidas, the author of *Rāmcaritmānas*, rather it is about applying the methodology of Comparative Theology to a religious text, fostering encounters in the context of devotion (*bhakt*i), and performative aesthetics. This comparative study is not a comparison of the *Mānas* with Christian texts, but an engagement of a Hindu religious text, on multiple levels, that has deep significance for comparative learning. These encounters raise theological questions and challenge systematic theology to pursue a new direction for engaging other religions. Comparative Theology that is comparative and theological "will help theologians of religion to be more specific, fine-tuning their attitudes through closer attention to specific traditions."[16] For me, these deeper encounters and engagements happened in the holiest place of Hindus, Varanasi, in the crucial context of Hindu religious extremism accelerated during the government of Modi and during the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Varanasi

Varanasi, the center of Hinduism, is known as Kāśi (the City of Light), Banaras.[17] The place is referred to as the land between the rivers *Varuna* and *Asi* on the banks of river Gangā.[18] Varanasi is considered holy because the river Gangā turns to the North, back to its source, at *Dashashvamedh Ghāt.* The place is also the sacred image of the cosmos and accepted as the permanent earthly home of Lord Siva and called "*avimukta*" (never forgotten). Every day the city's famed *ghāts* are filled with activities of ancient rituals and practices.[19] Narrating on the greatness of Varanasi, *Padma Purāṇa*, one of the eighteen *Purāṇas*, enunciates, "making a pilgrimage there in Banaras every day for a whole year; still, she did not reach all the sacred places. For in Banaras,

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[16] Ibid.,14.
[17] See Diana L. Eck, *Banāras City of Light* (New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House,1982).
[18] *Atharva Veda*, IV. 7.1., *Satapatha Brahmana*, XIII.5.4.19, 21.
[19] A series of stepped embankments built along the banks of the river Gangā.

there is a sacred place at every step."[20] The statement concisely recounts the holiness of the city. The unique 'Sacred Geography,' of Kāśi that invites and accommodates everyday millions of pilgrims (*Bhaktas*) to its "crossing place" (*tīrtha*) between this world and the "far shore" of the transcendent *Brahman* offers great learnings and challenges. [21] Yann Vagneux, a French priest living among the Hindus in Varanasi for many years, writes, "the pluri-religious human reality of Banaras is a prophecy of the world to come and an image of the best of what India can offer to humanity."[22]

The liberating dimension of Varanasi makes it the most desired place for death. It is a *Mokṣa Nagari* – the city of liberation, the last of the four *purushārthas* that constitute the Hindu sense of a life well-lived. One can see the unblemished, everlasting pageantry of the cycle of life and death on full display in the holy city. Some of the *ghāts* are designated for cremations and *pujā* (ritual devotionals), and others for bathing and praying. There are eighty-eight *ghāts* in the city. Among them, two stand out, the *Manikarnika* and *Hariśchandra ghāts* of cremation. Ceaselessly, smoking cremation pyres in the burning *ghāts* and the familiar chant of a funeral procession is heard "*Rām nām satya hai*!" as people carry their dead in the lanes and by-lanes of Varanasi, brings to the fore the certainty of death. [23] In Banaras, there is a positive understanding of death. The hope of many Hindus is voiced in the writings of Tulsidas,

> What instruction does the great lord Shiva give to the dying?
> Upon the banks of Ganges in Kāshī, the land of Dharma?
> Hara tells them of the glory of Rāms Name, and he himself recites it
> From age on age, this universe has known it, and the Vedas too describe it.[24]

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[20] As quoted in Eck, *Banāras City of Light*, xvi.
[21] Ibid., 6.
[22] Yann Vagneux, M.E.P., *A Priest in Banaras* (Bengaluru: Asian Trading Corporation, 2020),147.
[23] God's name is truth! God's name is truth!
[24] Tulsi Dās, *Vinaya Patrikā* 184.4 as translated by FR Allchin, *The Petition to Rām*, 206.

The belief is that anyone who dies in Kāśi is given instant liberation. Some even say that not only humans but whatever creature dies in Kāśi - dog, cow or crow- attains liberation. In Kāśi, death is transformed, because death in Kāśi is liberation. The strong belief is that death here is welcomed as a long-expected guest and Varanasi is the "ferryboat set for the crossing" for *mokṣa*. [25] It is a familiar scene in Varanasi of *Sanyāsis*, *Sādhus* and devotees spending their last days as *Mumukṣus* (those bound for *mokṣa*) as this is the birthplace of Siddhi."[26] *The Kāshi Lābh Mukti Bhavan* is a good example that communicates the belief of Hindus in *mokṣa* in Varanasi, as hundreds come here just to die and attain liberation. Hindus understand "death" as a momentary interruption in the succession of life-bodies for an individual experiencing rebirth.[27]

Encounters in Varanasi

My religious experiences (*Anubhava= anu + bhava*) and the similar experiences of others, further ways of understanding religions as living traditions, lived, and experienced by individuals and communities.[28] While studying a sacred text, the *Mānas* often required my direct participation; in doing so, my experiences resonated with the people's expression of ritual life and their lived experience. The collective experience sheds light on the nuances of interreligious relationships that might not be evident through a study of the texts; and such experiences can become a rich resource for doing theology and religious self-understandings. [29] I had an opportunity to combine both 'text' and 'ritual' traditions in Varanasi. I arrived in Kāśi on January 4, 2020. To be there in

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[25] Eck*, Banaras City of Light*, 325.

[26] *Kashi Khand*, 94: 43-4

[27] David M. Knipe, "Hindu Eschatology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 172.

[28] *Anubhava* means an experience that 'gets through' (*anu+bhu*) and transforms one's whole being, leading to a new form of consciousness. Encounters related to reading the Mānas text are explained in Chapter Four.

[29] Emma O' Donnell "Methodological Considerations on the Role of Experience in Comparative Theology?" in *How to Do Comparative Theology*, ed. Francis X Clooney and Klaus Von Stosch (New York: Fordham University Press 2018), 259-70.

that sacred place that offers the 'nectar' (*amrita*) of salvation for so many people, was a fulfillment of long-awaited expectation and 'God's gift.'[30]

As a Catholic, I grew up in a predominantly Hindu place, Barkur, in the Udupi district of Karnataka, that has the recognition of having 365 Hindu temples. Innumerable times in the villages, schools, in local dramas (*Nāṭaka, Yakṣagāna, Kola, Bhāgavat Kathās*) and movies, I had heard the glory of the '*Kāśi Yātra*,' the deepest desire of every Hindu to go on a pilgrimage. As a Christian and a Jesuit priest, it was in Varanasi, that the significant events and people changed my understanding of Hinduism. The deeper immersion into the sacred, ritual, and narrative traditions of Hinduism enabled me to find new ways to interpret the faith of the other in a positive and meaningful way and rectify my prejudices. Genuine encounters occur through an attitude of humility and generosity towards other religions. Observing various rituals at the *ghāts*, one is led to a "restoration of proper understanding of the other."[31] Any visitor to Banaras is captivated by its rich colors, music, symbols, and ritualism. Because of incomprehension, the multiple temples, and *pujās* in honor of many deities in and around the city, may baffle an individual, and a non-Hindu, without much knowledge of Hinduism, may conclude that Hindu religious life is irrational. However, the humble and loving devotion, daily ritual practices, especially those related to the holy river Gangā, reveal that Hindus are seekers of the sacred and make their attempt to obtain the experience of the divine through the means available to them. In the West, Hinduism as a religion is often portrayed as interior, mystical, and otherworldly. Even in the inculturation efforts in India, the early missionaries focused on mystical elements.[32] The one-sided characterization of Hinduism

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[30] On many occasions *Pundits, Sādhus* and pilgrims commented that my presence here was the grace (*Kripā*) of Mā Gangā, Hanumān and Śiva.

[31] Catherine Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology,* Wiley Blackwell: 2020), 121.

[32] See Bede Griffiths, *A New Vision of Reality: Western Science, Eastern Mysticism and Christian Faith* Springfield, Ill.: Temple gate Publishers, 1990).

arises mostly from a classical philosophical perspective. Nevertheless, the bulk of Hindu religiosity consists of narratives and rituals at home, in the village temple, on the banks of a river or stream, under trees, the confluence of sacred rivers called *sangam*, and the annual celebrations in the local shrines (*utsava*). These symbols, narratives, and rituals are not based upon abstract philosophical truths, but upon the concrete and appearances of the divine in the substance of the material world. The rituals mark special occasions to receive graces (*kṛpā*) and to propitiate gods and goddesses for protection and safety. Ultimately, rituals are performed to liberate oneself from the cycle of *Samsāra*. These rituals anchor a deeper sense of identity and belonging to a particular community. For Westerners, Hindu rituals may seem mysterious and ecstatic, and Indian Christians may judge them as irrational and meaningless, but for devout Hindus, these ritual traditions are recognized as a means of attaining grace and seldom do they abandon ancient rituals.

The search for the sacred is vivid on the *ghāts* of the Gangā. A *Sādhu,* with total renunciation, said "I am here on the banks of Gangā. The *Mokṣa Nagari* (Varanasi), Bhagīrathi (Gangā) and Śivȧ supplies my daily needs through the devotees who come for the Darśan of God. What more do I need for a joyous life?[33] His declaration communicates total trust in divine providence and reminds one of the text in the *Kashi Khand*.[34]

> Where the River of Heaven
> Flows in the Forest of Bliss of Shiva
> There is moksha guaranteed [35]

The interior power of Hinduism and its desire for the sacred is lived out in the daily life of Hindus. They seek the invisible God, through visible available means. This was made known to me as I

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[33] Interview near *Harischandra Ghāt* in February 2020.

[34] *Kashi Khand* is a section in the *Skanda Purana* that narrates the history of Kāśi, the importance of temples in Kāśi, and the importance of Manikarnika g*hāt* at, the burning *ghāt* of Kāśi.

[35] *Kashi Khand*, 79: 38

mingled and walked with the pilgrims and devotees to different temples and places of sacred significance and in my participation in the sacred festivals, especially on *Śivarātri* and the festival of *Holi.* The *Bhagavad Gita*'s quote of Arjuna to Krishna" "I want to see your divine form," encapsulates the deep desire of Hindus to see the divine. [36] *Darśan* means "seeing." In the ritual tradition of Hindus, it refers to a religious seeing or the visual perception of the sacred. The pilgrimages made by countless Hindus to Varanasi from all over the country intently communicate the desire of many Hindus to have a *Darśan* of God. Pilgrimages are "Voting with their feet."[37] Among all the pilgrimages, the pride of place goes to the rivers, especially to Mother Gangā, who leads straight to heaven anyone whose ashes she receives.[38] Here in Varanasi, the focus is Kāśi Viśvanāth and Mother Gangā. The encounter with the sacred is not limited to the "divine image" in the temple alone; it extends to the encounters with the holy persons – *Sants, Sādhus, Sanyāsis*, and *Mahants*.[39] In these encounters, Hindus believe that their inner eye is opened, and they have a divine experience. The pilgrims consider these holy people as living symbols of renunciation and as perpetual pilgrims. Unfortunately, the corruption within Banaras has led at least a few of these *Sādhu*s to extort money from these pilgrims.

My daily visits to the *ghāts* and various temples made me realize the boundlessness of the Sacred and the desire of Hindus to capture this sacredness for their salvation. The boundlessness of sacredness is well explained through an analogy in the Hindu tradition. The analogy is known as *ghatākāśa* – "The sky in the pot is measurable, the sky in the sky is immeasurable, but through the sky, in the pot, one is in touch with the sky in the sky." This is a criterion that Hindu minds

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[36] *Driṣṭum icchāmi te rūpam aiśvaryam*, *Bhagavad Gita*, 11: 3.
[37] Eck, *Banaras City of Light*, xvi,
[38] A. Huart, "Pilgrimages and Holy Men," in *Religious Hinduism*, ed. R. De Smet and J. Neuner (Mumbai: St. Paul's 1997), 191.
[39] One rarely meets Hindu women *sants* outside their *āśrams.*

habitually use. To be in touch with the sacred that is as vast as the sky, one discovers that different categories of people take different paths. The *Yogis, Sādhus* and *Sannyāsis,* and the like turn inward, and ordinary Hindus believe that these holy men have experienced the divine vision of God and that they obtain blessings for ordinary men and women. Participation in the *satsaṇg* (gatherings of holy people) also becomes an occasion to experience the sacred. In addition, the great majority of people seek the sacred in other ways; in sacred places, objects, and persons considered to be privileged occasions for special manifestations of the divine (*amśāvatāra*). In a pilgrimage center like Varanasi, both the ordinary and the enlightened see sacredness in water, in mountains and rivers, in holy men and women, and in the transforming power of the whole place into a "sacred geography," filling everything with awe and wonder. My experience of being in Varanasi can be summarized in the words of Rudolf Otto

> The truly 'mysterious' object is beyond our apprehension and comprehension, not only because our knowledge has certain irremovable limits, but because in it we come upon something inherently "wholly other", whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own, and before which we therefore recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb.[40]

A devotee who visits these sacred places tries to have intimate knowledge of the landscape and nature because the sacredness is particular and extends to the entire landscape where the deity presides.[41] In Varanasi, it is the presence of Siva that makes all of Varanasi holy and salvific, and a luminous city. In their belief in the Holy/Sacred, Hindus accept that the sacred can take different names and forms. The *Kaṭhā Upaniṣad* says,

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[40] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, tran. John W. Harvey (New York/London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 28.
[41] Sr. Joan is a nun belonging to Missionaries of Charity, who was a personal secretary to Mother Teresa for many years; She commented that Varanasi has its own presence of holiness that should inspire all Christians.

> Just as fire though one, having entered the world, assumes separate forms in respect of different shapes, similarly the Self inside all beings, though one, assumes a form in respect of each shape; and yet it is outside.[42]

The great devotion of Hindus in search of the sacred is inspiring. However, as a Catholic, I also need to acknowledge the totality of the surrender and humility that is present in the Hindu search for the sacred. In observing and participating in the various rituals on the banks of the holy river Gangā, one cannot overlook the use of senses – seeing, touching, smelling, tasting, and hearing. These rituals, whether spontaneous or scripted, are experiential phenomena that exist in time and the human body.[43] All senses are used to grow in devotion (a totally sensual spirituality) in the worship of Gangā. To visit and worship in the holy river Gangā involves reverently greeting Gangā with salutations, touching it by sprinkling water on the body (*sparśa)* or most often by bathing in it, by reciting and listening to *Gangā Mayya ki Jai* (*śravaṇa)* or other *mantras* related to Gangāji and other gods and goddesses and, finally, sipping of sacred *gangājal.* The Gangā *arti* in the twilights (*Sandhya*) involves ringing the bells, blowing conch shells, offering oil lamps, presenting flowers, pouring water and milk, and so on. In these rituals with colors, fragrances, music, symbols, and the senses, devotees make concerted efforts to establish the presence of the divine deity (*nyās*a) within them. In order to establish the divine presence within them, Hindu devotees perform rituals without any imperfection.[44] For me, the new learning for the home tradition is that one must be 'thoroughgoing in one's own ritual observance and to restore meaning to ritual traditions.[45] These authentic encounters in the "dialogue of life," create true friendships

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[42]*agniryathaekobhuvanampravisto,rupamrupampratirupobabhuva,*
eksasthathasarvabhutantaratmarupamrupampratirupobahischa -Ka. Up. II.9.

[43] O'Donnell, "Methodological Considerations,"261.

[44] For example, a devotee was angry with the pujaris of a temple in *Tulsi ghāt* as they often placed *Tulsi Māla* touching the feet of Hanumān. In the ritual tradition, the *Tulsi Māla* that adorns Vishnu must not be touched by the feet.

[45] Along with the positive roles of rituals, one cannot overlook the corruption in ritual traditions by some local *pujāris* and extracting money from the devotees through elaborate and unnecessary usurping of temple properties. These *pujāris* are led by corrupt behaviors as many of them are poor and have no regular income.

among people of different faiths, and in these friendships social commitment grows, and a feeling of lasting peace is anticipated. In the end, one realizes that encountering others in this type of dialogue is truly a gift of God.

Pandemic and the *Mānas*

My research project on the *Mānas* proceeded as expected for a few months. However, the course of my research was abruptly changed in March due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus and the lockdowns that followed, making some of the ritual observations impossible. However, the research work on the *Mānas* was intertwined with new encounters due to my engagement with relief work. My study and research suffered as there were some limitations in terms of qualitative academic research. At the same time, COVID-19 and relief work helped me to engage with a comparative-theological-pastoral encounter across faith traditions that was - in retrospect – a perfect complement to my research. It was a moment to dialogue with people of other faiths, including Christians, and to discover, in the midst our experiences, how they understood the pandemic and responded to those who were suffering and dying.

In response to the pandemic, Christians were focused less on spiritualizing the pandemic and more on how to help those who were suffering as a consequence of it. The dedicated labors of a few committed sisters and priests enabled them to reach out to more than sixteen thousand families regardless of religious or cultural differences. The aid offered was not based on religious creed but on individual or communal needs. This approach to charity is not always common in India because confessional differences sometimes dictate who is helped. It was enriching and edifying to see this differentiation disappear for a short time. I joined the local Catholic diocesan team of Varanasi to raise funds and distribute food to various marginalized sections of the city. We served street vendors, migrant laborers, slum dwellers, bricklayers, sex workers, widows,

domestic workers, street artists, and transgender people. The Comparative Theological insight around the importance of identity was affirmed in the service work because, as Jesuits, priests, Christians, and native Indians, we were able to get permission from the government ruled by BJP to move about in the area for relief work.

The Hindu response paid far greater attention to the supernatural and cosmic causes of the pandemic. Although, a few temples organized the distribution of relief materials to the poor and to migrant laborers, the temple priests and the people believed that the pandemic was part of the *Kaliyug* curse and resulted from people's refusal to believe in the *dharma.* The gods were cursing the people because of *adharm* (unrighteousness) had grown beyond its limits. Most Hindus believed that a greater commitment to faith and to the ritual traditions of reciting *Hanumān Chalisa* and keeping the fast (*vṛat*) would lead to deliverance. Those devoted to the *Mānas* believed that the recitation could help overcome the pandemic, as most Pundits would quote the text from Tulsidas's life. Tulsi was born in a family of beggars, and from this wretched life, he was "rescued" by the mercy of Rām and Hanumān.[46] They also referred to the outbreak of the plague (*mahamāri*) in Banaras during the first two decades of the seventeenth century.[47] Their strong faith in Hanumān and Rām made them believe that the recitation of these texts would resolve the present crisis. For many Hindus, in the healing of the world, the role of Hanumān is essential as he is Rudra, and in his own way, he will set nature right. Mercy or grace during this time will be given only to those who live righteous lives. Hindus saw the primary need to be on the level of spiritual practices. Thus, there was anger against the local administration for the denial to have religious rituals in the temples and at the river Gangā, as part of the lockdown restrictions. Nevertheless, the *pujari* in the

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[46] *Kavitāvaḷi*, 7.57, 72, 73.
[47] *Kavitavaḷi*, 7.170,176-177.

temple would constantly encourage me, telling me not to be anxious about the virus and saying, "you are in Śiva's place; the abode of Mother Gangā protects you; As a Christian, your Jesus is with you, and above all, you are a devotee of the *Mānas*. All these *Śakthi's* (energies) put together, what can the virus do to you?" In this statement, a bold and robust faith was affirmed in God's graciousness. The Hindu response focused less on alleviating individual suffering and more on the appeasement of the gods because that is what they believed would cause the pandemic to cease. The strong belief in *Karma* theory also must have influenced such thinking.[48] The Hindu belief in the afterlife or reincarnation into multiple births – the transmigration of souls – mitigates anxiety about death as experienced in the "you only have one life" mentality of the Christian belief system.

The other major faith in the area is Islam, and the Muslims response was illuminating. First, the strongest lockdowns came during their high holy days of *Ramadān*. However, even amidst the anxieties of the pandemic and the lockdown, the Muslims did not cease from their religious fasting and prayers. They remained dedicated to their religious practices even as the pandemic worsened around them. Next, the Muslim relief response was most inspiring. During *Ramadān,* Muslims are encouraged to serve the poor, understood as the poor Muslims in their community. Rarely would these charitable efforts be broadened to include non-Muslims. However, during COVID-19, this *Ramadān* practice was offered to all in need regardless of religious affiliation. This response was even more heroic because in India today, Muslims are the most marginalized group, as they are seen as modern-day *'rākṣasa'* (demon) in *Rāmrāj.* However, despite their marginalized status, Muslims in the area reached out to those in need to offer a response to those suffering as a consequence of the pandemic.

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[48] An act and its results which will manifest in time. For an analysis on *karma* see Klaus K. Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3rd edition (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), Chapter 13.

We need not compare these three religious traditions from the outside or pass judgments regarding which religions are good or superior. Rather, there is a need to acknowledge the service and devotion of adherents as seen in light of their beliefs. While reaching out to those in need, there were moments of anxiety and fear of death. The fears and anxieties were calmed down by the strong faith of ordinary Hindus, Muslims, and Christians that God was at work in the midst of suffering and their hope that better days were ahead. My time of service and encounter was filled with learnings, beautiful memories, and lessons to relish and ponder for the future. In serving others, the service team was called to reflect on Meister Eckhart's saying about God: "You may call God love; you may call God goodness, but the best name for God is Compassion." God's compassion and mercy was manifested in different ways by different religious traditions. Christians and Muslims reflected compassion in caring for the poor through service, whereas most Hindus reflected compassion by offering praises and glory to God for the deliverance of everyone.

During the pandemic and lockdown, misery surrounded me and reminded me of the words of Aloysius Pieris, "My desolation was doubled by the sore sight of the scandalous poverty that stared at me everywhere."[49] The pandemic relief work allowed me to practice a theological response on the level of praxis and have a "double baptism" in Varanasi with "multiple poor and multiple religions."[50] I came to realize that in places like Varanasi, one is not merely functioning as a social worker, but there is a need to speak as a person who knows God and offer the *sādhanas* to be hopeful in God. The hope to be created and sustained could not be articulated only in the

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[49] Aloysius Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, 42.

[50] Pieris constructs a soteriology that expresses a unique Asian understanding of the salvific meaning of the Christ-event and a local theology from the heart of Asia. The soteriological theme is centered in Jesus' call for a double baptism in the Jordan of Asian religiosity and on the Calvary of Asian poverty, and in the desire of all people for liberation/salvation. This theology has challenging implications for the Asian church as this soteriology differs dramatically from what has been developed in the West and in Latin America. Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 62-63.

religious language of Christianity. The languages of other religious traditions were needed as well. Each religion provided various ways to look at the crisis and uniquely respond to its challenges. Every response needed to be acknowledged rather than to be judged or criticised from the perspective of Christianity alone. The major learning from the pandemic relief work was an insight on the spirituality of service, which neither negates the spiritual needs of human beings nor the material needs, but is sensitive to every need.

Comparative Theology involves theologizing and theological reflections emerge from liturgy, prayer, music, solidarity with the oppressed, authoritative teachings and polemical, philosophical considerations. All of these modes of theologizing can become modes of doing comparative theology.[51] Hence the role of service in comparative theology is not a foreign element, but an essential one. Tulsidas, gives pride of place to compassion as an expression of spirituality. In his description of the saintly person in the *Uttar Kāṇda* of the *Mānas,* he describes the saint as "one who is unhappy when others are unhappy and happy when others are happy."[52] For me, the connection between spirituality and compassion needed to be unearthed *from* within Hinduism.

Outlines of the Chapters

Chapter One discusses the understanding of the *Missio Dei* as it relates to the mission of interreligious dialogue and the church's response to the challenge to go deeper in its encounter with other religions. Identifying David Bosch's "paradigm shifts" in the understanding of mission, and Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder's notion of "prophetic dialogue," the initial part of the chapter explains the need for a "culture of encounter," as proposed by Pope Francis, in the context of accelerating religious extremism and especially in India, in the context of *Hindutva*. In the latter

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[51] Clooney, *Comparative Theology Deep Learning*, 57.
[52] *para duhkha duhkha sukha sukha dekhem para*

part, the biographies and theological frameworks of three noteworthy theologians – Raimundo Panikkar, Michael Amaladoss, and Peter Phan - are presented. Throughout their lives, these three theologians have encountered other religions deeply and offered critical theological perspectives on encountering other religions. Their respective concepts of *mutual fecundation*, *the identity of the Hindu-Christian*, and *being religious interreligiously*, offer particular insights that enhance the significant encounter with Hindu religious texts and rituals, especially on the *Mānas*.

Chapter Two explores in depth Clooney's Comparative Theological method in relation to constructive theology. In the first part, Comparative Theology is underscored as a constructive theology that is based on faith seeking understanding. It offers resources for doing theology and contributes to global theology. These features and the distinguishing factors of the study of Comparative Theology, in relation to other religious studies, are explained in the second part. Finally, in the third part the limits of the 'textual' based approach to Comparative Theology are acknowledged, and the value of rituals and their performance is illustrated through the *Mānas*.

Chapter Three provides a detailed account of the *Mānas* by highlighting the text's devotional aspects as the text remains unique for its advancement of *bhakti*. Hence, the beginning part of the chapter focuses on the *Rāmāyaṇa* in general, the various tellings of the epic, and its uniqueness from other versions of *Rāmāyaṇa* to favor *bhakti*. Since the devotion is to the epic's protagonist, Rām, the second section considers various features of Rām and the unique characteristics of *bhakti* in the text. In the latter part of the chapter, to illustrate the essence of devotion, the model devotees - Kāka Bhuśundi, Śabari, and Hanumān, are discussed. All of these features provide insights into a personal God (*iṣṭadevatā*) in the *Mānas*.

Chapter Four deals with the engagement of the texts by various popular means in recitations (*pāṭh*), tellings (*kathā*) and enactments *(līlā)* that lead to transformation. The *Mānas*

favors not only textual academic engagements, but it also removes binary schemes that place texts against rituals and classical against popular, as this popular text has ritual and aesthetical dimensions attached to it. Hence, the first part of the chapter focuses on various types of ritual and aesthetical engagement of the text at individual and communitarian levels within Hinduism. Next, theological questions raised by the participation in such engagements by a non-Hindu, who is an "outsider" to Hinduism, are explored. Since I am writing from a confessional perspective, the latter part of the chapter addresses these questions by drawing upon the experiences of three individuals, Morari Bapu, Raghavendra, Camille Bulcke, S.J., and analyzing their respective personal journeys and the meaning of 'reading' a religious text by 'insiders' and 'outsiders' of faith traditions.

Chapter Five focuses on new learnings for the home tradition and for Comparative Theology. Following the Neo-Platonic framework of "exitus-reditus," used in Comparative Theology, emphasis is placed on learning while returning to the home tradition. [53] Learning requires the interreligious virtues of humility, commitment, interconnection, empathy, and hospitality.[54] We learn from other religions by studying their scriptures, participating in rituals, through performative aesthetics and personal encounters. There are different learnings for Comparative Theology and for the Christian tradition in terms of reading, studying, and participating in the *Mānas* rituals and performances. The first part focuses on the two learnings for Comparative Theology as combining textual-ritual-performative aesthetics and correctives to understandings of Rām and Hindu devotional practices. The later part focuses on three learnings

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[53]Neo-Scholastic interpretations of Thomas Aquinas underscored that the three parts fit Aristotelian categories of causality: namely God as the efficient cause, God as the final cause, and God as the exemplary cause of all. Medieval historians pointed to the Neo-Platonic pattern that emphasizes the origin of all things from God and the return of all things to God (*exitus - reditus*). See Francis Schussler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology: Task and Methods," in *Systematic Theology Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schussler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 31.

[54] Cf. Catherine Cornille, *the Impossibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: The Cross Road, 2008).

for the home tradition as the *Mānas* also becomes a *locus theologicus*, by intensifying and recovering popular devotional traditions, aesthetics, and discerning how they can be formative and transformative for theological education when it comes to the study of other religions..

The Outcome of the Thesis

The thesis deals with the question: How can 'reading' *Rāmcaritmānas,* using the Comparative Theological method of Francis X. Clooney, be instructive for theological education and ministry formation for those engaged in interreligious encounters? First, the combination of insights gained from a deeper engagement with the *Mānas,* and its performative traditions, contributes to the methodology of Comparative Theology because it is a 'living text' with rituals and enactments. Secondly, the research offers guidance and direction in the reception of the gracious hospitality of other religious traditions and contributes to epistemic humility through learning. These two virtues are essential in the mission of Interreligious Dialogue. Thirdly, the research lays a foundation for the study of Hinduism by emphasizing the popular and regional traditions, non-Sanskrit vernacular texts as alternative sources for Christian theology. In addition, the exploration of the popular devotional religiosity of "others" can serve as a resource for the growth of the *sensus fidei* in the Catholic church. Fourthly, the learnings from the *Mānas* tradition facilitates the practice of aesthetics (dance, drama, and music) in understanding and proclaiming Christ. Finally, all of these learnings from Hinduism's *Mānas* tradition hold great potential for fostering '*bandhuthā*' (fraternity) among Christians and Hindus.

Chapter One

The Mission of Interreligious Dialogue as a Culture of Encounter

Introduction

St. Anslem defines theology as "faith seeking understanding." Nevertheless, every new generation must take up the task of "faith in search of understanding" with fresh vigor and creativity to develop a relevant Christian Theology to carry forward the *Missio Dei.* Today's world map can no longer be coded as Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh or Hindu. We live in a "geo-religious" reality.[55] In the mission of interreligious dialogue, encountering other religious traditions has become inevitable and challenging amidst lively pluralism.[56] Therefore, "the language of the other is no longer applicable, for we are all other to one another."[57] In these contexts, the shift away from the "*socially unsituated self*" (Robert Bellah) to "*multiply situated selves*" (Michael Sandel) demands the understanding and interpretation of other religions through 'deeper experiences' of participation and multiple conversations for the development of theology.[58] Christian faith "wholeheartedly welcomes religious pluriformity and diversity as the fruits of God's creative act, reflecting God's own being."[59] Theologically we recognize diversity as part of God's creation and otherness and plurality as God's free and loving gift.

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[55] Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Now Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (New York: Harper San Francisco; 2002), 132.

[56] The lively religious pluralism worldwide has enabled a few to cross religious boundaries and identify themselves as a Jewish yogi or Buddhist Christian.

[57] Eck, *Banaras: City of Light*, 134

[58] We need to hear different voices in these multiple conversations. "Voice" includes the whole range of vocabulary, nuances, rhetoric, revelation, intention, reference, and authority that shape how we speak or write in particular contexts.

[59] Peter Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004), xxi.

In his address at the interreligious meeting at the Ground Zero Memorial, New York, Pope Francis opposed every attempt to create rigid uniformity. He said, "together, we are called to say "no" to every attempt to impose uniformity and "yes" to a diversity accepted and reconciled."[60] In *Fratelli Tutti*, he acknowledges this diversity as he writes, "others drink from other sources. However, for us, the wellspring of human dignity and fraternity is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ."[61] To be religious today is to be interreligious, and to grow in the appreciation of the diversity around us demands rethinking the way we encounter other religions in the mission. My study and immersion into the sacred text of *Rāmcaritmānas*, applying Clooney's method of Comparative Theology, enables encounters and carries forward the 'mission of dialogue' from the perspective of a 'culture of encounter' envisioned by Pope Francis. To this end, the biographies, and theological frameworks of Raimundo Panikkar, Michael Amaladoss, and Peter Phan are presented and analyzed.

1.1 The Mission of Interreligious Dialogue

The church visualizes the mission of interreligious encounter in four forms: *dialogue of life*, *dialogue of action, dialogue of religious experience,* and *theological exchange*.[62] Over the years, we have realized an imbalance in approaching the other religions from these four forms. Since there was a lack of emphasis on the dialogue of life, we cannot *take the religious other seriously and encounter them deeply*. The interreligious mission has focused too much on the theological exchange or looking for reasonable terms to communicate Christian faith in Hindu or Buddhist terms, which is needed but insufficient to encounter the religious other. Today in the

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[60] https//m.vatican.va? content/Francesco/en/speeches/2015 Septemebr/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_usa-ground-zero.html.

[61] *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 277.

[62] See Document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue 1984, no. 17; *Dialogue and Proclamation Document,* 1991, no. 42; General congregation 34 (1995) Decree 5: "our Mission an interreligious Dialogue,":

world, when there is a crisis emerging from religious extremism, adherents of religions go back to their particular histories to blame each other and violence increases, as they lack depth in their understanding other religions. The way ahead looks grim. Panikkar views that in encountering other religions, a good intention towards harmony is undoubtedly necessary, but *insufficient*.[63] For instance, the tension between Hindus and Muslims in India is an example of the insufficiency of a merely political or pragmatic peaceful co-existence with apparent and superficial cordiality. He views that the peaceful co-existence may lead to "unnatural suppression" and "pathological repression." So, he suggests the need for genuine encounters that break any human group's 'self-sufficiency' and the necessity of taking others as seriously as ourselves.[64]

In our days, there is a felt need to engage in the 'dialogue of life.' However, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, a pioneer in comparative religions, proposed going beyond "dialogue" to "colloquy" so that there can be a side-by-side confronting of the world's problems rather than a face-to-face confrontation with each other.[65] In his view, he envisioned a world wherein "we all" can talk together about "us."[66] This vision, to be achieved, demands a new way of approaching other religions. Clooney's Comparative Theology, with its uniqueness, broadens theological inquiry, enables interreligious conversation, and allows for ritual and performative participation that enhances the dialogue of life. For example, my research on the *Rāmcaritmānas*, applying the Comparative Theological method in Varanasi, enabled me to understand the Hindu religion much more profoundly than my years of study on Hinduism or Indian philosophy. The intellectual and theological understanding of a religion combined with an incarnational model or immersion

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[63] Raimon Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), 34.
[64] Ibid.
[65] W.C. Smith, *Towards a World Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 193.
[66] W.C. Smith, "objectivity and the Humane Sciences: A New Proposal," in *Modern Culture from a Comparative Perspective*, ed. John Burbidge (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 144.

enables a more profound encounter with religious others. Clooney's Comparative Theology makes the encounter rich and resourceful, focusing on learning for the home tradition by fostering 'epistemological humility,' which creates a heart for the religious other.

Christianity in its history is not generally considered to be a humble religion. Comparative Theologian, Catherine Cornille points out that the spiritual virtue of humility has not included doctrinal humility with Christian thinking. In her view, spiritual humility can stimulate dialogue, but we need doctrinal humility, a "humility about the way in which the ultimate truth is grasped and presented in doctrinal formulations."[67] Doctrinal or epistemic humility is a key concept in learning from other religions. She identifies *epistemic humility* as the first condition for genuine dialogue. She writes,

> Any possibility of change or growth indeed presupposes recognition of one's own fallibility and imperfection. Doctrinal humility thus entails a certain degree of the admission of the finite and limited ways in which the ultimate truth has been grasped and expressed within one's own religious teachings, practices and/or institutional forms.[68]

Raimon Panikkar, pointing out humility as an ontological virtue states,

> In the dialogue we are reminded constantly of our temporality, our contingency, our own constitutive limitations. Humility is not primarily a moral virtue, but an ontological one; it is the awareness of the place of my ego. The truthfulness of accepting my real situation, namely, that I am a situated being, a vison's angle on the real, an existence.[69]

The Comparative Theology method is essential to interreligious dialogue amidst changing understandings of mission and the need for epistemic humility. Cornille asserting the distinguishing factor of Comparative Theology in its attitude of epistemological humility writes,

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[67] Cornille, *the Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 33.

[68] Ibid., 4. Cornille mentions humility, commitment, interconnection, empathy, and hospitality as virtues for a constructive and enriching dialogue between religions.

[69] Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 37.

What distinguishes Comparative Theology from forms of hegemonic engagement with other religions is the attitude of *epistemological humility*. It is based on recognizing one's own particular and limited religious location and on the unfinished nature of one's understanding of the truth. It recognizes the validity and integrity of other religious traditions, and it approaches the religious other as a humble apprentice, grateful for whatever it may learn.[70]

1.2. Changes in the Understanding of Mission during the Second Vatican Council

Changes in the Church's understanding of mission were brought about, at least in part, by changes in the social, political, and religious contexts of the twentieth century. Mission changes following the theology affected by the century's social-political, religious, and institutional context. Robert J. Schreiter, identifies these changes as *ferment, crisis, and rebirth* in the church.[71] With its calls to read the 'signs of times' and its language of solidarity regarding the 'hopes and anxieties' of the world, Second Vatican Council became a ferment. However, the ferment led to a crisis in understanding 'mission,' as some missionaries who understood the church's evangelizing mission merely in terms of 'converting' geographical areas into Christendom felt that the new understanding of mission meant 'no more mission.' At the same time, a new understanding of mission, led to rebirth and new energy.[72]

Schreiter points out three reasons for the Second Vatican Council to function as a ferment for theological developments.[73] Firstly, he points out the Trinitarian locus for the origin of mission in *Ad Gentes,* making the church missionary by its very nature. The communal trinitarian image, he writes, "moves mission away from confrontation and toward invitation. While proclamation

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[70] Cornille, *Meaning, and Method in Comparative Theology*, 189.

[71] Robert J. Schreiter, "Changes in Roman Catholic: Attitude towards Proselytism and Mission," in James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Bevans, eds., *New Directions in Mission, and Evangelization* 2: *Theological Foundations* (Maryknoll, NY Orbis Book, 1994), 113-125.

[72] Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 244.

[73] Robert J. Schreiter, "Changes in Roman Catholic: Attitude towards Proselytism and Mission," 116.

remains the prominent means of mission, it is to be done in a more *dialogical* way."[74] Secondly, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* presented the church as the pilgrim people of God and advanced a positive dialogue with the world. Thirdly, a newer understanding of the nature of other religions in the decree *Nostra Aetate* called upon the Christians to "preserve and promote" all holy elements and to "enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions" not with a spirit of superiority but with an attitude of *dialogue*.[75] In addition, the Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Second Vatican Council identified that all people should be able to seek truth and God freely in good conscience. Because of these significant changes in the church, Schreiter asserts,

> that the frontiers pointed to by questioning the nature of the mission, the church, and the relation to other religious traditions marked out the territory that would need to be explored.[76]

However, in all its positive affirmations of other religions, Peter Phan points out that the documents of the Second Vatican Council self-consciously refrain from affirming that these religions function as ways of salvation in a manner analogous and parallel to Christianity.[77] The church has experienced rebirth in its evangelization of the modern world through proclamation, dialogue, and liberation with the preferential option for the poor. Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* marked the beginning of the rebirth of the Catholic Missionary Movement. The document addressed the issues of liberation theology, inculturation, and emerging consciousness of autonomy by some local churches. The document made groundbreaking statements on the

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[74] Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 250.
[75] NA, no. 2.
[76] Robert J. Schreiter, "Changes in Roman Catholic: Attitude towards Proselytism and Mission," 120.
[77] Phan, *Being Religious Interreligously*, xxiii.

evangelization of culture,[78] the liberating nature of evangelization,[79] popular piety,[80] and basic ecclesial communities.[81] Later, the encyclical by Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, called for a mission "beyond the frontiers of race and religion,"[82] and into urban areas, and communicated that mission extends "modern equivalence of the Areopagus."[83]

1.3. Mission According to the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference

Changes in the perception of mission by the institutional church affected the vision of local church. For example, the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) in 1974 identified mission as a "threefold dialogue" with Asia's poor, cultures, and religions.[84] The bishops pledged themselves to the development of an indigenous theology,

> so that the life and message of the Gospel may be ever more incarnate in the rich historical cultures of Asia, so that in the necessary process of modernization and development, Asian Christianity may help to promote all that is "authentically human in these cultures."[85]

1.3.1. God-Talk in the Mission of Asia

For a Christian, God is trinitarian, present, and active in history and has become incarnate in Jesus Christ. How to communicate this truth in a religiously pluralistic context? The question

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[78] Evangelii *Nuntiandi,* no. 20.

[79] Ibid., no. 30.

[80] Ibid., no. 48.

[81] Ibid., no. 58.

[82] *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 25.

[83] Ibid., no. 37.

[84] See "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia," in Gaudencio Rosales and Catalino Arevalo, eds., *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishop's conference Documents from 1970 to 1991*, vol. 1 (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1997), See also Stephen Bevans, "Inculturation of Theology in Asia (The Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences, 1970-1995), *Studia Missionalia* 45 (1996): 9-10.

[85] Published in G.B. Rosales and C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970-1991* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books; Quezon City, Philippines, 1992), 9.

raises the issue of finding God-equivalent or how to talk about God (God-talk).[86] Different

religions have their experience of the transcendent. Religions are a comprehensive embodiment of

narratives, myths, and ritualized experiences that enable an understanding God, self, and the

world.[87] There is a common religious experience, and this experience, Friedrich Schleiermacher

speaks of as "the feeling of absolute dependence,"[88] Julian Huxley speaks of "man's capacity for

awe and reverence."[89] Rudolf Otto recognizes it as the feeling of awe and fascination, the

"*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*."[90] The divine name in different religions seems to reflect

different experiences and conceptual articulations of God.[91] Using the term "the transcendent

experience," Karl Rahner identifies that different names of God recognize God as the Holy

Mystery communicating diverse expressions rooted in a common experience of the Divine.[92] The

articulation of the experience differs on account of culture, philosophy, and language. Hence, in

religious language, the divine names are mutually comparable in their functions; George Lindbeck

states,

> Just as grammar by itself affirms nothing wither true or false regarding the world
> in which languages are used, but only about language, so theology and doctrine, to

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[86] From a feminist theological perspective, Rosemary Radford Ruether explores God-talk by comparing different primal stories from the Biblical and early Christian traditions and shows how God-cosmos-human relations were conceived in these stories. Through these stories, she expands the imagination on God-talk and systematic theology to have inclusive language while talking about God. She uses the word "God-ess" to suggest that we will find new ways of naming God as we overcome patriarchy. See, Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

[87] George Lind Beck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 32.

[88] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion* trans. John Oman (New York: Harper & Row, 1956: and idem, The Christian Faith, trans. H.R. Mackintosh (New York: Harper & Row, 1956).

[89] See Julian Huxley, *Religion without Revelation* (New York: New American Library, 1958).

[90] See Otto, *The Idea of Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958).

[91] Phan, *Being Religious Interreligously*, 103.

[92] Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William Dyche (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), 20.

the extent that they are secondary activities, assert nothing either true or false about God and his relation to creatures, but only speak about such assertions.[93]

While acknowledging the experiences of other religions, God-talk, especially in Asia, according to Peter Phan must be *pluralistic, contemplative, and* mindful of the *God of the poor.*

A. Pluralistic

There is a quest to talk about God in a pluralistic Asia that Asians understand. Phan writes that the first requisite of God-talk in Asia must be *pluralistic* as the church is not stepping into a religious void, where God was dead or absent, and he recognize that the "Christian God in Asia is not only multicolored but multireligious as well."[94] The task is complex as 'everything in Asia tends to fascinate and frustrate the visitor with its sheer size and dizzying variety.'[95] Any visitor to Asian holy places is captivated by their rich colors, music, symbols, and ritualism. On account of incomprehension, the multiple temples, and devotions in honor of many deities may baffle an individual, and a Christian without much openness to other religious traditions may interest them as polytheistic idolatry. However, the humble and loving devotion and daily ritual practices reveal that these seekers of the Sacred attempt to obtain the Divine through the means available to them. Asia is a religious continent that is a cradle for the world's major religions. Religious traditions originated in Asia, such as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Shintoism. Although, Western hegemony turned Christianity into a Western cultural expression, the roots of Christianity are in Asia. Pope John Paul II in *Ecclesia in Asia* stresses this fact "we thank God for choosing Asia as the earthly dwelling of his incarnate Son, the Savior of the world."[96] Jacques Dupuis acknowledging the multiple religious traditions of Asia, rightly puts

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[93] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 69.
[94] Phan, *Being Religious Interreligously*, 127.
[95] Ibid., 116.
[96] EA, no. 50.

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it "the world's religious traditions represent not the search of people for God but God's search for them."[97] In this pluralistic religious context, Christianity is a minority religion representing just three percent of the Asian population. Pluralistic God-talk demands graceful acknowledgment of the presence of God's divine spirit in other religions. The Asian bishops, referring to *Ecclesia in Asia* points out that

> the multiple and diversified actions of the Holy Spirit continually sow the seeds of truth among all peoples, their religions and cultures, and philosophies. This means that these religions, cultures, and philosophies are capable of helping people, individually and collectively, work against Evil and serve life and everything good.[98]

B. Contemplative

Secondly, God-talk paradoxically makes certain demands "*not to talk but to be silent, not to preach but to listen, not to teach but to learn*," and be open to be taught about God by Asians.[99] The contemplative traditions of Asia are inspirational, and silence becomes a testament for others. For example, the monks of Tibhirine (Algeria) prayed 'in the heart of Islam' through their monastery, realizing that the silence of 'cloistered gardens may assure knowledge and depth of the mystery of God. Jules Monchanin, who founded *Shantivanam Ashram* along with Henry Le Saux (Swami Abhishiktananda), pioneering the encounter between Christianity and Hinduism, desired the church to "send out to the desert those men and women that it chooses, separates and consecrates for the 'praise of the glory of God alone."[100] Charles De Foucauld (1858-1916) was able to call himself a universal brother to the extent that he plunged himself into the obscure daily life of Tamanrasset. "Christians cannot effectively speak to Asians about God unless they first let

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[97] Jacques Dupuis, S.J. "My Pilgrimage in Mission" *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (October 2003), 169.

[98] EA, no. 15.

[99] Phan, *Being Religious Interreligously*, 118.

[100] As cited in Yann, A *Priest in Banaras*, 10.

themselves be taught about God by Asians."[101] After learning if one has to communicate aspects of the Christian doctrine of God, Phan suggests that the exclusivist approach must be avoided Asian imageries and the devotional paths, meditation practices, and monastic traditions must be used to communicate who Jesus is. In the interreligious context, Jesus becomes the enlightened one, *Buddha,* the *Guru*, *Jivanmukta*, etc.[102] Being contemplative does not mean being passive and indifferent to reality but being responsive to misery with a deeper commitment to being a 'contemplative in action.'

C. God of the Poor

The reality of poverty and misery experienced by Asians leads Phan to think of God-talk as talking about the God of the poor. The term poor needs to be defined. The poor constitute a *de facto* social collectivity that live in a situation of "inhuman misery." The socioeconomic aspect of poverty is fundamental but is not the only aspect. Gutierrez writes,

> To be poor is a way of life. It is a way of thinking, of loving, of praying, of believing and hoping, of spending free time, of struggling for a livelihood. Being poor today also means being involved in the battle for justice and peace, defending one's life and liberty, seeking a greater democratic participation in the decisions of society, organizing to live faith in an integral way.[103]

The poor are socially excluded and are victims of "institutionalized violence," and ultimately, poverty means *death*. Analyzing the statement of the Asian Bishops' call for dialogue with the poor, Phan articulates that the document did not focus purely on philosophical or theological discourse on God but focused on God's activities in the world and God's relationship to us in

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[101] Phan*, Being Religious Interreligiously*, 118.

[102] Exclusivism is generally used to denote a denial of the salvific function of other religions, or of their efficacy in attaining the highest religious goal.

[103] Gustavo Gutierrez, "Option for the Poor," in *systematic theology Perspectives from Liberation Theology*, ed. Jon Sobrino, S.J. and Ignacio Ellacuria, S.J (New York/Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 22. See also *Puebla Final Document*. No. 1137.

history. The bishops identified that the most effective way to explain *who* God is to show *where* God is *present*. God's essence is revealed in God's actions, and for the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference, God is present and active most clearly in the Asian poor.[104] While explaining the cause of massive poverty in Asia, the Bishops went beyond empirical and functional explanations to the dialectical explanation and declared the Asian poor to be:

> Poor, in that they are deprived of access to material goods and resources… Deprived, because they live under oppression, that is, under social, economic, and political structures which have injustice built in them.[105]

Poverty has denied basic food, health facilities, hygiene, and value of life. Moreover, globalization, liberalization, and privatization have marginalized large sections of people; it has alienated many people from their land, especially the *Adivasis* (indigenous). As a result, on the one hand, there are spectacularly rich people in India and, on the other hand, distressingly impoverished masses.[106] Johann Baptist Metz states, "in an impoverished situation, we need to realize that God's becoming human is also a becoming poor, to become poor is to have nothing to brag about, have no support, and no power."[107]

1.4. Mission as a Prophetic Dialogue

In his book *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch, acknowledging worldwide changes in the perception of mission*,* adopts Kuhn's theory of "paradigm shifts" and points out six "paradigm shifts" throughout Christian mission history.[108] He demands contextualization on the issues of dialogue, liberation, and mission in the post-Vatican II era of secularization, de-Christianization

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[104] To analyze the FABC's social teaching, see Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books, 2003), 184-201.
[105] *For All the Peoples of Asia* 1:15 (no. 19).
[106] Cf. Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 120.
[107]Johann Baptist Metz, *Poverty of Spirit* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 10.
[108] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991).

of the West, and a religiously plural world with Christians and non-Christians. In his argument for contextualization states, that God is interested in the world he created, and God gets involved with the world. Stressing the sacramental nature of the world, Bevans affirms that "God becomes part of the world—and so the world does become revelatory."[109] Bosch argues that, from the very beginning, the missionary message of the Christian church incarnated itself in the life and world of those who had embraced it in a particular context.[110] Hence, as Bosch observes the different models existing in the New Testament and in church history ought to be recognized as a contextual mosaic rather than a meta-paradigm as he asserts that "different theologies of mission do not necessarily exclude each other they form a multicolored mosaic of complementary and mutually enriching as well as mutually challenging frames of reference."[111]

In the twenty-first century, Bosch's missionary paradigm is taken to a greater height by Bevans and Schroeder and their new synthesis of mission as *prophetic dialogue.* The term "prophetic dialogue" has dimensions of both *prophetic* and *dialogue*. The synthesis consists of six elements: witness and proclamation; liturgy, prayer, contemplation; justice, peace, and the integrity of creation; inter-religious dialogue; inculturation; and reconciliation.[112] They conclude that "only by preaching, serving, and witnessing to the reign of God in bold and humble prophetic dialogue will the missionary church be constant in today's context."[113]

Mission as *dialogue* communicates the nature of God as dialogic and as a communion of persons. In this communion, there is giving and receiving and a call to be in communion with

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[109] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992), 183.
[110] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 421.
[111] Ibid., 8.
[112] Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 351.
[113] Ibid., 398.

Godself. This is God's Mission, the *Missio Dei*.[114] Bevans and Schroeder offer three missionary images for dialogue: *A treasure hunter*, *a stranger and guest*, and *entering another person's garden*.

Mission as *prophecy* communicates how God acts in the world. Being a prophet means being rooted in dialogue: someone who listens, who is attentive, who sees, who has a sensitivity to the world and to women and men.[115] They propose images of the mission as prophecy in terms of a *teacher* and a *storyteller*. Christian Mission is anchored in fidelity to the past and the present with bold and creative fidelity to its context.[116] Over the years, we have realized that in our mission and construction of theology, "mission is prophetic dialogue, and it is dialogical prophecy."[117] However, is prophetic dialogue sufficient to encounter "religious pluralism"? This question demands a response, and we need to open ourselves to the Spirit, listen, and be creative in encountering other religions.

The understanding of mission in various ways invites those involved in the mission of inter-religious dialogue to hunt for treasure that is buried in the soil of other religions, and as a stranger to realize how little one knows about God's magnificent ways and as a good guest not to presume to know about others. When entering another's garden, one must first to gaze, admire and enjoy the beauty of what is there. So, too, with other religions. Clooney's method of Comparative Theology offers the possibility of understanding "prophetic dialogue" in new ways, as it focuses

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[114] Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, Introduction

[115] The mission as prophecy involves four aspects; firstly, "speaking forth" without words: *witness*, secondly "speaking forth," with words *proclamatio*n, thirdly, "speaking against" without the Words: Being a *Contrast Community* and finally "speaking Against" in Words: Speaking truth to power. See Larry Nemer, "Prophetic Dialogue: A new way of Doing Mission?" http://www.instrumentsofpeace.ie/Prophetic%20Dialogue.pdf.

[116] Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 1.

[117] Bevans, Presentation at the RFC Transformation of Religious Life: An Action-Oriented Initiative in April and May 2012.

on learning, deeper immersion that leads to a 'culture of encounter.' In Comparative Theology, one can hunt for the treasure, remain a guest, and be amazed at the beauty of other religious traditions, as the focus of the method is not to convert or claim hegemony over others, but to learn.

1.5. Mission as 'Culture of Encounter'

The encounter becomes imperative due to the church's recent teachings. Today, the church does not consider the followers of other faith traditions as infidels, pagans and it no longer preaches that people of other faiths are condemned to the "eternal fire prepared for the Devils and his angels."[118] It has now entered a stage beyond confrontation; encounter, and comparative 'dialogue,' to a quest for sharing spirituality. The church has learned to appreciate other religions and has high esteem for their 'holy and true' elements, as it 'acknowledges, preserves, and promotes' the spiritual and moral truths found in these religions.[119] *Nostra Aetate* does not speak of "religions" in general but instead points to specific teachings and practices of other religions and commends those specificities. The inclusivism of *Nostra Aetate* remains hierarchical while the document communicates that the other religious traditions have a "ray of truth," and the church possesses the fullness of that truth in Jesus the Christ. Thatamanil notes that this part-whole logic constitutes hierarchical inclusivism.[120] Before this view, missionaries viewed other religions in terms of "virtuous Christians, vicious Hindus."[121] On the contrary *Lumen Gentium* affirms the possibility of salvation for Jews, Muslims, and those

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[118] The Decree for the Jacobite of the Council of Florence (1442), based on Matthew 25:41, considered those who remain outside the Catholic faith, including Jews, Heretics, Schismatics, are condemned to the eternal fire.

[119] NA, no. 2

[120] John J. Thatamanil, "Learning from (and not Just about) Our Religious Neighbors Comparative Theology and the Future of *Nostra Aetate*" in *The Future of Interreligious Dialogue, A Multireligious Conversion on Nostra Aetate*, ed. Charles L. chen, Paul F. Knitter, and Ulrich Rosenhagen (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis Books, 2017), 289-330 here 290.

[121] See Sharada Sugirtharajah, *Imagining Hinduism a Post-Colonial Perspective* (London/ New York: Routledge, 2003); Cf: William Ward's four Volume text, *A View of the History, Literature, and Mythology of the Hindoos.*

who without fault on their part do not know the Gospel of Christ and his Church but seek God with a sincere heart, and under the influence of grace, endeavor to do his will as recognized through the promptings of their conscience.[122]

Ad Gentes, the decree on the missionary activity of the church, recognizes the presence of "elements of truth and of grace,"[123] and acknowledges them as "seeds of the Word" implanted by God before the preaching of the Gospel that may "sometimes be taken as leading the way (*pedagogia*) to the true God and as a preparation for the Gospel."[124] The document on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes,* states,

> With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the entire People of God, especially pastors and theologians, to *hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age*, and *to judge them* in the light of the divine word, so that revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and set forth to more significant advantage.[125]

To hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them, Comparative Theology demands from its practitioners a deeper engagement and immersion into another faith tradition by profoundly studying its languages, traditions, rituals, and performances. These participations result in a more profound encounter, which is helpful for the mission of dialogue of life, social friendship, and the 'culture of encounter.'[126]

The underlying principle of the culture of encounter requires from both religious partners an acknowledgment that they have something to learn from each other, that no one is useless, and that no one is unessential. In other words, the art of encounter ultimately is the ability to recognize other people's right to be themselves and to be distinctive move towards a "cultural covenant,"-

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[122] LG, no. 16.
[123] AG, no. 9.
[124] Ibid., no. 3.
[125] GS, no. 44.
[126] My own encounter during the comparative theological project of 'reading' *Rāmcaritmānas* is explained in chapter four.

one that respects and acknowledges different worldviews, cultures, and lifestyles that coexist in society.[127] These profound experiences are not opposed to each other's religion but are complementary. Jacques Dupuis sees "complementarity" as a reciprocal process in which the Eastern traditions on the divine Reality can contribute positively to the Christian understanding of the mystery of God. He states,

> The religious traditions of the word convey different insights into the mystery of Ultimate Reality. Incomplete as these may be, they nevertheless witness to a manifold self-manifestations of God to human beings in diverse faith communities. They are incomplete "faces" of the Divine Mystery experiences in various ways, to be fulfilled in him who is "the human face of God.[128]

Encountering the other through exchanging and sharing religions' values is complementarity for mutual enrichment and transformation between the religions.[129] Hindu theologian Anantanand Rambachan writes,

> Do we have a religious need for each other? As a Hindu, what is my theological value to you? Does it matter to you, religiously, that there are Hindus in the world? Would it make any difference to you if there were no Hindus? Such questions are not easy ones to answer, but they are certainly among the most important ones that we can ask today in the context of our encounter with people of other religions. Each tradition will have to pursue these questions in its own distinctive ways.[130]

Comparative Theology acknowledges the need of the other religions through its concepts of learning through intensification, recovery, and reinterpretation of one's home tradition. Through

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[127] *Fratelli Tutti*, 218-219.

[128] Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 279. *The human face of God* is the title of the book by J.A.T. Robinson (1972).

[129] Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 326.

[130]See Anantanand Rambachan," interreligious Dialogue: The Political and Theological," https://www.huffingtonpost.com/anantnanad-*Rām*bachan/interreligious-dialogue-the–political-and theological_b_7103124 HTML. See also John J. Thatamanil, "Learning from (and Not Just About) Our Religious Neighbors," in eds. Cohen et al., *The Future of Interreligious Dialogue: A Multireligious Conversation on Nostra Aetate* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 289-301.

these learnings, the encounter becomes meaningful and devoid of superiority. Although we realize the importance of a 'culture of encounter,' there are internal and external challenges.

1.6. Challenges to the Mission of Interreligious Dialogue

1.6.1. Internal Challenges

Amaladoss identifies two reasons for the church's failure to fully understand the imperatives involved in the mission of interreligious dialogue. The church's exclusivist position as the depository of religious truth that is superior to all other claims is the first hindrance to any real possibility for authentic encounter. He writes, "If the church is aware of its limitations as a pilgrim church, it will certainly be open to dialogue, to give and to receive."[131] Gandhi, as a true Hindu, echoed these sentiments, and he reminded his Christian dialogue partners about the prerequisite of receiving as well as giving: "You cannot give without taking. So, if you have come to give rich treasures of experiences, open your hearts out to receive the treasures of this land, and you will not be disappointed, neither will you have misread the message of the Bible."[132] Indeed, the superiority attitude so often associated with Christianity has hindered the church's ability to give full expression to an incarnational model of being in the world and becoming a transformative force for good. Pope Francis once tweeted, "dialogue is born when I am capable of recognizing others as a gift of God and accept, they have something to tell me."[133] Pierre Claverie (1938-1996), a French bishop in Algeria, who sacrificed his own life defending the grace of a "plural humanity", said in humility, "One cannot possess God. We do not possess the truth, and I need the truth of others."[134] As the secular philosopher John Rawls observes, a particular religion may have

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[131]Amaladoss, *Interreligious Encounters*, *Interreligious Encounters Opportunities, and Challenges* (New York/Maryknoll: Orbis books, 2017), xxxiv

[132] M. K. Gandhi, *The Message of Jesus Christ* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,1963), 36.

[133] Twitter handle @pontifex Tweeted on 21 September 2016.

[134] P. Claverie, *Humanité Plurielle* (Paris: le Cerf, 2008), 141.

difficulty in recognizing other religions as having equal validity. However, when different religions embrace an alternative model so as "to arrive" at an "overlapping" consensus regarding visions and values, can grow together in collaboration.[135]

Amaladoss attributes the second hindrance to encounter to the church's instrumentalization of dialogue as a preparation *for* and the first step *toward* proclamation.[136] Over the course of time, issues related to evangelization, conversion, and baptism have remained disputed questions for those involved in the mission of interreligious dialogue. Christianity, while encountering other religions, according to Joseph Ratzinger, can have two types of attitudes towards other religions. The first attitude understands other religions as being provisional, and in this respect, as a preparation for Christianity. Here, other religions are given a positive value. The second attitude understands other religions as insufficient, anti-Christian, and contrary to the truth.[137] Ratzinger criticizes the "the man of today," for not seeing any development from one religion to another and thus recognizing in every religion a spiritual core that is identical with all the others, thereby creating a "worldwide religious citizenship." This leads to spiritualizing everything and seeing religion as a world of symbols.[138] Indeed, Ratzinger's analysis of other religions both tests and contests the mission of dialogue. This fact gives dialogue partners a reason to perceive the combination of dialogue and proclamation cautiously.[139] Anantanand Rambachan, points out that

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[135] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

[136] Amaladoss, *Interreligious Encounters,* xxxv.

[137] Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth, and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003). 18.

[138]Ibid., 23.

[139] See Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, May 19, 1991. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html.

the evident tension between evangelization, interreligious dialogue and diversity may not be problematic from the perspective of the Catholic church, but it is certainly challenging for a Hindu dialogue partner who remains uncertain about the value of her tradition in the eyes of her dialogue partner.[140]

1.6.2. External Challenges

1.6.2.1. Accelerated Religious Extremism in the World

Viewed from one perspective, the world celebrates religious pluralism as a gift; viewed from another, growing religious extremism and violence is a dangerous threat. Moreover, the post-Cold War world has continued to be characterized by a legacy of violence, human rights abuses, political and economic injustices based on religion.[141] Robert Schreiter, while pointing out the ways in which religion serves a resource for reconciliation, speaks of the ambivalent power of the sacred that has both the capacity to reach the transcendent good and also to harm others.[142] Scott Appleby in his analysis on the ambivalence of the sacred, identifies the power of religion to accelerate the ambivalence precisely because religious language is full of symbols, words, and phrases that demand different levels of nuance and explication. Since revelation is interpreted in accord with human capacity to do so, the ambivalence arises due to the wide range of responses given to the dialectical experience of the Sacred within particular contexts.[143] Since humans experience the Sacred as having the capacity both to generate and extinguish life, they struggle to put their experience of the Sacred in expressive language and reason.[144] Given this delicate situation, those who politicize religion take advantage by misinterpreting symbols, texts and rituals, passionately creating the "other," making absolute truth claims, and ensuring that followers adhere in blind

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[140] Rambachan, "*Do we have a Religious Need for Each othe*r," 207.

[141] R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred* Religion*, Violence, and Reconciliation* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), ix.

[142] Robert Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (New York: Orbis Press, 2000).

[143] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 28.

[144] Ibid., 29-30

obedience to religious tenants and religious actors, without critical analysis. As it is said, any religious movement that limits the intellectual freedom and individual integrity of its adherents and believers by enslaving them to a charismatic leader or to a particular idea is a clear sign that a framework for violence is being constructed.[145]

The terrorist attack that occurred in the United States on September 11, 2001, woke up the Western World to the reality of violence perpetrated under the guise of religion. In the recent past, the continent of Africa has experienced new waves of conflict, that have culminated in political unrest and civil wars as demonstrated in South Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Central African Republic, Mali, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. The dangerous memories of the Rwandan genocide in 1994, the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, stifled by Buddhist monks in 2017, and the gruesome killings of more than 300 people on a calm Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka in 2019 by a suicide bomber belonging to an Islamic terrorist organization, portray the horror of religiously motivated violence in the world.

In India, the vision of *Hindutvavādis* (Hindu extremists) *Hindu Rāṣtra* (nation) has lynched Muslims by falsely accusing them of beef consumption. Christians have been persecuted and falsely accused of engaging in conversions. Observing these realities, Amaladoss points out that there are three main reasons for religious conflict in the world. Firstly, for many people, religion is the only basis of identity and community building that they have. Amartya Sen, the Indian economist, and Noble Laureate, notes, "to see a person with only one identity is a crude intellectual move."[146] The second reason Amaladoss identifies is the absolutist claims of the meta-cosmic religions regarding special revelations of the Divine, the privileged access of a founder, and the

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[145] Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, 72.
[146] Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence*, 2006.

uniqueness of certain religious experiences.[147] The third reason takes account of the emphasis placed on political power and authority as the solution for overcoming interreligious violence, rather than focusing on processes of reconciliation.[148] Mindful of these realities, Amaladoss suggests that the theological foundations of every religion must help the religion to purify and transform itself into a truly liberating force and thereby, turn religion into a collaborative force.[149] While briefly acknowledging the pervasive growth of religious fundamentalism throughout the world I turn now to my own context and examine the rise of religious fundamentalism in India.

1.6.2.2. Growth of Hindutva in India

The 'Communal Phoenix'[150] has risen to cast its shadow over India.[151] The term itself serves an illustration of the aspirational hatred pervading the nation.[152] The advance of political *Hindutva* has been accelerated with the gaining of political power by the BJP for a second term under the leadership of Narendra Modi, a Hindu Nationalist. This is exemplified in the rapidity to settle rows

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[147] Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (London: Harper Collins, 2000); Leo D. Lefebure, *Revelation, the Religions, and violence* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

[148] Amaladoss, *Interreligious Encounters,* 218.

[149] Ibid., 114.

[150] The term communal includes conflicts, riots, and other forms of violence between communities of different religious faith or ethnic origins. The Indian law defines communal violence as "any act or series of acts, whether spontaneous or planned, resulting in injury or harm to the person and or property, knowingly directed against any person by his or her membership of any religious or linguistic minority, in any State in the Union of India, or Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes within the meaning of clauses (24) and (25) of Article 366 of the Constitution of India."

[151] A. Vanaik, *The Furies of Indian Communalism: Religion, Modernity, and Secularization* (London: Verso, 1997).

[152] Arjun Appadurai, "A syndrome of Aspirational Hatred is Pervading India," *https://thewire.in/politics/unnao-citizenship-bill-violence-india.*

on *Rāmjanmabhūmi*,[153] the abrogation of article 370[154] and the Citizenship Amendment Bill.[155] In addition, the laws on 'anti cow slaughter,' 'anti-conversion,' 'love jihad' and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) that brands human rights and social justice activists as 'anti-national,' are strong indications that religious fundamentalism dominates daily life. It influences dietary habits, limits freedom of choice with regard to choosing a religion or a spouse and characterizes those who struggle for justice as acting in contradiction to 'Hindu' culture. These examples illustrate some of the ways in which secular India is moving toward a theocracy – a 'Hindu Rāṣtra.'

The misappropriation of religious symbols by political leaders and movements has suppressed diversity. An increasingly common problem among Indians is religious violence. Manipulation of *Rāmāyaṇa* has served as a primary stimulus for political mobilization. In the name of a Hindu theocratic politics, Hindu nationalists have pitted themselves against the Muslims and

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[153] *Rāmjanmabhūmi* (literally *Rām*'s birthplace) is imagined to be the birthplace of Rām on the banks of the Sarayu River in a town called Ayodhyā. Some Hindus had claimed that Mughals destroyed the exact site of Rām's birthplace for the construction of a Mosque. The political and religious debate over the site culminated in 1992 in the Babri Masjid demolition by Hindu nationalists that triggered Hindu-Muslim violence throughout India, killing thousands. The claim on the 2. 77 acres of land by three groups, *Hindu Mahāsabhā*, *Muslim Sunni Waqf Board*, and by a Hindu religious denomination *Nirmohi Akhāra*, was settled by the lower court allotting equal share to all the groups. Since Bhāratīya Janata Party had *Rāmjanmabhumi* in its election manifesto, the issue was taken up in the Supreme Court as soon as they came back to power for the second time. After hearing the title dispute cases on 9 November 2019, the five supreme court judges ordered the disputed land to be handed over to Hindus to build the Rām temple and allotted five acres of land to the Sunni Waqf Board to build the Mosque. Cf. A. G. Noorani, *Destruction of the Babri Masjid- A National Dishonor* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2017)

[154] Article 370 of the Indian Constitution had allowed Jammu and Kashmir a certain amount of autonomy - its own constitution, a separate flag, and freedom to make laws. However, foreign affairs, defense, and communications remained the preserve of the central government. As a result, Jammu and Kashmir could make their own rules relating to permanent residency, property ownership, and fundamental rights. It could also bar Indians from outside the state from purchasing property or settling there. However, the government, led by the Hindu nationalist *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP), revoked Kashmir's special status on 5 August 2019 and proposed that the Jammu and Kashmir states divided into two "union territories" directly ruled by New Delhi. The move is expected to inflame further tensions in more than seven million people and infuriate rival Pakistan in the Muslim-majority region. Cf: A.G. Noorani, *Article 370: A Constitutional History of the Jammu and Kashmir OIP* (Oxford University Press,2014).

[155] The Bill amends the Citizenship Act of 1955 to give eligibility for Indian citizenship to illegal migrants who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, and who entered India on or before 31 December 2014. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, was passed by the Parliament of India on 11 December 2019. The act was the first-time religion-based criterion for citizenship under Indian law as the Bill does not include Muslims.

Christians by invoking a specific set of symbols from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, such as the figure of the warrior-god Rām and his birthplace temple in Ayodhyā.[156] The politicization of Ayodhyā brought archeologists, historians, judges, *swāmis*, political parties, and even the prime minister to favor Hinduism and declare Ayodhyā as the *Janmasthān* of Rām, which is considered *a symbol of the vindication of cultural heritage and national self-respect*. Religiously motivated violent extremists use certain symbols and rituals to exploit the adherents' religious *illiteracy* in order to create fears and biases, often toward some nationalistic end.[157] For example, the *Hindutvavādis* draw their identity from selective signs and symbols, such as *bhāgva dhwaj* (saffron flag), *triśūl* (trident), cow, Ayodhya, and historicization of *Rāmāyaṇa*. Whoever does not internalize these identity symbols is deemed to be anti-national and anti-Hindu. Religion expressed in this manner becomes polarizing.[158]

In actuality, the whole transformation of Hindu society has very little to do with religion, while it has much to do with politics and the struggle for power and wealth among *Hindutva* ideologues.[159] As a result, Rām, the epitome of *dharma*, is transformed into a political warrior. Rām's political use, as Pollock points out, it "seems incomprehensible that a divisive contemporary political discourse is so accessible to, or may be shaped by, what is commonly viewed as a narrative of the divine presence and care for the world."[160] A complex organized religion is always in danger of being manipulated by the ambition of those who seek to control society and politics.[161]

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[156] Sheldon Pollock, "Rāmāyaṇa and Political Imagination in India," *Journal of Asian Studies* 52, no. 2 (May 1993): 262.

[157] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 69.

[158] S. Arockiasamy, ed., *Responding to Communalism* (Anand, Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1991).

[159] Gino Battaglia, "Neo-Hindu Fundamentalism Challenging the Secular and Pluralistic Indian State" *Religions*, 8, no. 216 (2017): 2.

[160] Pollock, "Rāmāyaṇa and Political Imagination in India," 262.

[161] Romila Thapar, *What Secularism Is and Where It Needs to Be Headed*, *https://thewire.in/communalism/what-secularism-is-and-where-it-needs-to-be-headed*.

By controlling religious language, symbols, words, and phrases that emerge from the ambivalence of the sacred, different nuances and explanations are misinterpreted for selfish interests on the part of political leaders.[162]

The BJP's commitment to "one nation, one people, one culture" expresses *Hindutva* ideology. *Hindutva* is seen as "a unifying principle that can preserve the unity and integrity of the nation." [163] Rajiv Malhotra, a U.S.-settled Hindu nationalist, claims *Hindutva* to be a new form of Hinduism and promotes his claim on his *Infinity Foundation YouTube Channel*. However, as Noorani observes, religious Hinduism is only a smokescreen for political agitation and the economic seizure of properties.[164] As a consequence, advancing the harmonious co-existence of different religions has become an even more difficult task because, for the Hindu nationalist, Hinduism is no longer advanced as a religious faith, but as an ideology.[165]

On December 3, 1964, Pope Paul VI, spoke to members of non-Christian religions. During his address, he spoke to Indians saying, "Yours is a land of ancient culture, the cradle of great religions, the home of a nation that has sought God with a relentless desire, in deep meditation and silence, and hymns of fervent prayer."[166] India, a spiritual country with a panentheistic outlook on God and religion, tolerant and respectful, has attracted thousands to the East in their quest to quench a spiritual thirst. The concept of secular India framed by Gandhi-Nehru-Ambedkar played a significant role in maintaining the religiously pluralistic nature of Indian society. The essence of

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[162] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 28.

[163] A. G. Noorani, *The Babri Masjid Questions, 1528-2003, A matter of National Honor*, third edition (Tulika Books, 2019), 160.

[164] Ibid., 289.

[165] Ashish Nandy, "The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance," in *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots, and Survivors in South Asia*, ed. Veena Das (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 69-94.

[166] Address of Pope Paul VI to the Members of the Non-Christian Religions, *https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19641203_other-religions.html*

India is found in its plurality and diversity. Deliberating on this diversity, in1893, Swami Vivekananda defined the greatness of the Hindu religion to the world in his exemplary speech at the Parliament of World Religions held in Chicago, in these words,

> I thank you in the name of the mother of religions…I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth.

Violence in the name of religion, lamented Vivekananda, had "destroyed civilization, and sent a whole nation to despair."[167] He called for an end to persecution "with the sword or with the pen" in the name of religion and to end fanaticism and "uncharitable feelings" among followers of different traditions.[168] Times changed. India changed. Today, Vivekananda, the man who visualized a unified India, has become an icon for the nationalist agenda of *Hindutva*. The growth of Hindu religious fundamentalism has proven detrimental to the fabric of Indian secularism, and today India is known as an "intolerant India" with a '*Modi-fied*' vision on its way to fulfill the Savarkar's vision of the Hindu nation. [169] *Hindutva* means Hinduness. It is a combination of a common nation (*Rāṣtra*), a common race (*jāti*), and a common culture or civilization (*Sanskriti*), which in the words of Puniyani, signifies an Aryan race, a Brahminic culture, and a Sanskrit language.[170] According to this definition, Muslims and Christians are foreigners as their holy land is outside *'Bharat*.' This ideology uses Hinduism politically because from Savarkar's perspective, 'Hinduism is only a derivative, a fraction, a part of *Hindutva*.'[171]

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[167] *https://www.Rāmkrishna.org/chcgfull.htm*
[168] *https://www.Rāmkrishna.org/chcgfull.htm*
[169] *The Economist*, January 2020.
[170] Puniyani, *RSS Genesis & Political Agenda*, 2014
[171] VD. Savarkar, *Hindutva* (Poona City [India]: SR Date; Delhi: World Book Centre, 1942).

1.6.2.3. Modi's Sultanism

Narendra Modi, the present prime minister of India, has become an ideal figure to endorse and promote the vested interests of *Hindutva* ideology. With his rhetorical skills and deviating tactics to turn attention from the real issues affecting Indian society, such as economic concerns, Narendra Modi pushes India to become a Hindu nation in order to resolve all the anomalies of Indian history. Recognized as *an avatar of Rām*, Modi, with his 'Sultanism', combines 'populism, nationalism, authoritarianism, and majoritarianism.'[172] Analyzing '*sultans*' of the twentieth century, Juan Linz and Alfred Stephan define them as those who make sure that "all individuals, groups and institutions are permanently subject to the unpredictable and despotic intervention of the sultan, and thus all pluralism is precarious."[173]

Modi's ascension to power, by his populist stance, marked a turning point in the *Sangh Parivar's* history and India's development *of ethnic democracy.* Modi systematically expressed himself on behalf of 1.2 or 1.3 billion Indians, using "unity" as a recurrent "empty signifier," along with emotionally charged terms like "friends" and "brothers and sisters" in order to become a populist leader.[174] Christophe Jaffrelot identifies three different ways that Modi's ethnic democracy finds its expression. First, the BJP government, at central and state levels, seeks to promote Hindu culture by enhancing the legal protections of cows, by opening up the state to the RSS, by rewriting the history of the country, by harassing secularists (including academics and students), and by reducing the number of Non-Government Organizations operating in the country,

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[172]Angana P. Chatterji, Thomas Blom Hansen and Christophe Jaffrelot, eds. *Majoritarian State How Hindu Nationalism is Changing India* (London: Hurst & Company, 2019), Introduction.

[173] Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Modern Non-Democratic Regimes in Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

[174] Christophe Jaffrelot, *Modi's India, Hindu Nationalism, and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy* (Princeton University Press. (2021), 148.

as well as their ability to function. Second, the BJP engages in the stigmatization and victimization of minorities, mostly Christians and Muslims, through false allegations of conversion, love *jihad*, and the lynching of Muslims. Third, the BJP reinforces the vigilance of the *Sangh Parivar*.[175]

In the Hindi land (or sometimes called the Cow belt region), *Hindutva* politics is taken to new heights with Modi contesting election results from Varanasi, the sacred city of Hindus. It is a strategic plan to capture Hindu sentiments. Many who vote for Modi feel the advent of *Hindu Rāṣtra;* the long-awaited dream is on its way to fulfillment with Modi's victory for the second time. The multiplied *ārtis* (waving light ceremony) on the *Gangā Ghāts*, the cleaning of *Gangā*, and the promotion of cultural and religious festivals at *Subah e Banaras* in Asi *ghāt* are potent symbols to actualize the Hindu nation as it promotes Hindu hegemony with Hindu religious practices, customs, and traditions of monolithic society. Modi, with his victory, has created a political-cultural space in India as he promised to turn Varanasi into Kyoto, the Japanese town famous for its temples.

The renovation of the Kāśi Viśvanāth temple and *Gangā Ghāt Corridor* is Modi's dream to give the Varanasi pilgrimage areas a big makeover. This project will make Kāśi Viśvanāth temple accessible to the pilgrims directly from the *ghāts* along the *Gangā*, sparing them the struggle of reaching it through congested, serpentine lanes. The project, costing Rs 6000 million dollars, is expected to be completed in 2021. One hundred and sixty-six buildings, including forty-six ancient temples and other buildings of architectural importance, have been demolished. The politicization of this holy place is leading to the loss of the people's rootedness in ancestral cultural traditions. Few *Pundits* see the renovation project of Kāśi Viśvanāth Temple by Modi as a political

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[175] Ibid., 248.

activity that will remove the holiness of Varanasi. Instead, they note that the holiness and prominence of Varanasi are in its *ghāts* and *gullies* and there is no way that they will be replaced by Chinese lamps and modern decorations. But Modi goes ahead with his projects as the Hindutva's cultural project, encoded in the slogan `nationalize and spiritualize,' is twofold: First, to retrieve and disseminate the `golden' Hindu past; and second, to eliminate all accretions that have become part of its heritage.[176]

Following on the thought of the *Pundits*, Shashi Tharoor, an Indian politician, and writer, says that right-wing people are striving to re-invent Hindu identity. He asserts,

> they seek to make Hinduism more like the Semitic religions they resent but wish to emulate: to pick fewer sacred books, notably the Gita, and exalt them would produce a less 'baggy,' tighter version of the faith; to focus on fewer gods, notably Shiva, Rāma, and Krishna, with Ganesh and various forms of Devi thrown in, would sharpen Hindu divinity...[177]

With their power, religious and political leaders become 'religious actors' and indoctrinate their followers through their popular actions. They convince people that their vision is what *God wants* and that they do what they do to create a better future for everyone. In a way, it is a prescription for disaster.[178] Modi has been successful in the mission of convincing people that *Rāmrāj* is his vision of India. However, his critics see Modi as 'India's divider in chief.'[179] Modi's blind followers (mockingly called *andh bhaktas*) believe that the golden age of *Bhārat* is back with Modi's regime as he favors the decolonization of India as exemplified by 'made in India.' In reality, all of these examples constitute a sloganeering caption. The distant past with a mythical golden age that never

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[176] K N Panikkar, "In the Name of Nationalism*" Frontline,* 26 March 2004. https://frontline.thehindu.com/cover-story/article30221708.ece.

[177] Shashi Tharoor, *Why I am a Hindu* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2018), 279.

[178] Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, 105.

[179] *Time Magazine*, May 2019.

existed lends itself to all possible fabrications. In these fabrications, the minorities, *Dalits,* and *Ādivāsis* (indigenous) become victims. Today in India, when hearing Christian and especially Muslim names, people's facial expressions change, and suspicious glances are exchanged. [180] The polarized ideology has numbed the conscience of most Indians.[181]

The COVID-19 crisis also was used as a tool for polarization and exploitation. In the constituency of Modi, Varanasi was unable to supply food for the hungry. Starving children were seen eating grass during the lockdown.[182] Supriya Sharma, a journalist, was arrested for reporting such miserable conditions of poverty and misery. Religious extremism has made people blind to the reality of suffering and has motivated them to 'look away' from the sufferings of the poor. Even the rations that were distributed were given only to Hindus with '*Modi kit*' printed on them, giving a clear message that the hunger of non-Hindus is not a concern of Modi. Analyzing the misery of the second wave of COVID -19 in India, Jo McGowan points out Modi as

> A malevolent force intent on amassing power at any cost, leaving misery and destruction in his wake. He taps into the worst of the human Spirit with unerring precision, resurrecting old grievances and pitting communities against each other in an effort to strengthen his political base of Hindu Nationalists.[183]

The right-wing politics of a monolithic *'Hindu Rāṣtra'* has abandoned its primary responsibility to provide for the afflicted. Harsh Mander, a human rights activist, writes that the nexus of religious nationalism with politics has resulted in a combination of three fundamentalisms. First, a market orthodoxy that guarantees unprecedented subsidies to corporations; secondly, communal

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[180] See https://thewire.in/communalism/this-is-what-the-modi-sarkar-has-done-to-indian-muslims.

[181] I had an appalling conversation with a young Brahmin boy aged 22 from Bihar, a staunch member of *Rashtirya Svayam Sevak Sangh* (RSS) from childhood and a student of an exchange program in the Vatican for six months revealed the gravity of polarizing ideologies. He justified the lynching and killing of Muslims in the Delhi riots 2020, and he believes that killing Gandhi, the prophet of peace and unity, was the right decision of RSS to safeguard united India (*Akhand Bharat*).

[182] See Ismat Ara, https://thewire.in/rights/varanasi-hunger-national-lockdown.

[183] Jo McGowan, "The Toll of Modi's Complacency," *https://www.commonwealmagazine.org* 5/7/2021.

fundamentalism that intentionally polarizes Indians based on caste and religion rather than prioritizing the necessities of life; and thirdly, a militant fundamentalism that envisions an aggressive foreign policy. All this has worsened social intolerance and the economic disparity between the rich and the poor. [184] The ruling BJP, with their *Sultan* Modi as their supreme head, is thriving at the grass-root level by creating a false golden age that is lacking in political analysis, diminished in historical consciousness and focused on the social construction of people of different religions as the 'other.' Modi's leadership has fostered the people's blind obedience to their master. As noted earlier, blind obedience to a leader is a sign that a country may be moving in the direction of religious extremism and violence. After considering the rise of a populist leader in India and its subsequent consequences, I turn now to an examination of Christian mission history and its relevance for understanding India's current reality.

1.6.2.4. Internal Crisis and Wounded Psyche's Response

The extremism that has emerged within Hinduism is the result of external and internal forces. Firstly, Hinduism is facing a threat from within, and the fundamentalists are in denial mode. One after another, the traditional schools (*gurukuls*) are emptying as the better-off families do not remain to learn the ritual traditions, and there is a 'vocation crisis' within Hinduism. The senior and learned *Pundits* are vanishing without anyone to carry forward their rich tradition. Only the poorest Brahmins, who are incapable of succeeding at other studies, earn a living through the Vedic cult and ritual traditions. Well-settled Brahmin send their children to the West for better prospects. In the holy places, there are many *pujāris* and a few real priests. The Brahmin *pujāris* are made fun of for seeking financial gain, and the renouncers (a *sanyāsi*) for their licentious hypocrisy, and

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[184]Harsh Mander, *Looking Away: Inequality, Prejudice, and Indifference in New India* (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, 2015), 23.

within the broader society, they are seen as an annoyance as they depend on the generosity of people. There is also dissatisfaction with the limited understanding of Hinduism as preached by the 'gurus' in the Western World, as a healthy and cheap awakening religion.[185] At the same time, Hindus cannot resist such development as it brings lots of financial advantages and other fringe benefits, even to the locals.

Secondly, the development of Hindu extremism is a response to a colonial 'wounded history.' The wounded psyche is the result of the domination of Muslims and Christians in Indian history for six hundred years. The rivalry between the Hindus and Muslims goes back to British India. The British convinced the Hindus that Muslims were despots and religious invaders so that the East India Company could be seen as a rectifier of the historical harm inflicted by the Muslims.[186] The division escalated during the partition of India-Pakistan. This so-called gift of British politics to India has remained a 'thorn in the flesh' of Indians for several decades. There is truth to 'wounded psyche' of Hindus as they were made to feel inferior with regard to their religious, social, and cultural practices and belief systems.

Christianity through the centuries has persisted in a very negative appraisal of other religions, which in turn, has led to very prejudicial attitudes and, in some cases, destructive actions taken against peoples, cultures and lands. The various prejudices of Hindus regarding Christians are brought to the fore by Christianity's' exclusivist soteriological positions. Even today, despite the church's openness towards other religious traditions, it is not uncommon for the ordinary Indian Christian to think and behave in ways that regards Hindus as religiously inferior. To this day, the

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[185] Yann Vagneux, "*Marriage with Hinduism*," *Vidyajytoi Journal of Theological Reflection* 84, no.9 (September 2020): 716.

[186] Manan Ahaed Asif, "How the British convinced the Hindus that Muslims were despots and religious invaders," *https://scroll.in/magazine/85078*, 16 September 2017.

degrading descriptive language of pagan or non-believer continues. Many desire that the holy river *Gangā* be the 'river of Jordan' for mass baptism so that many may be saved from eternal damnation.

Despite their contribution to education, health, and social welfare, Christians are seen suspiciously as people who have an agenda to convert India into a Christian country. The suspicion is understandable in the light of the colonial legacy that ridiculed Hinduism. Hindu extremists constantly point to the 'tribal areas' (Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh) and the Northeastern states, all with sizeable Christian populations due to missionary activities among marginalized peoples. Hindu religious fundamentalists also challenge the 'foreignness of Christians' in their food, clothing, and forms of celebration. The conversion agenda of Christianity coupled with its exclusivist superiority have contributed to the wounded psyche to which Hindus are reacting today. For Christians and Hindus alike, there is a need for the purification of memory.[187] For those who believe 'another world is possible,' dangerous memories can be healed and purified. However, this does not occur by forgetting, but by a common commitment and the determination to initiate new and constructive mutual relations built on dialogue, collaboration, and genuine encounters. Through a deeper immersion in the Hindu world, Christians may be brought to the realization that Hindus, in general, affirm 'one way for me, another way for you' "in a world of exuberant multiplicity and diversity –accept and follow your path to the end." [188]

In the context of growing religious hatred, the internal and external stresses of religious traditions may create a tendency to see religion as the source of violence and keep the other at a distance, thereby paralyzing the possibility of encounter or pulling back from encounters that have begun. Therefore, Christians engaging in interreligious dialogue constantly must ask themselves

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[187] Jacques Dupuis "Christianity and Other Religions: From Confrontation to Encounter," *The Tablet*, 20, 27 October and 3 November 2001.
[188] Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 47.

two critical questions. *How can interreligious dialogue contribute to interreligious understanding in the interest of harmonious existence and progress? What kind of dialogue is needed now to guarantee the possibility and progress of such a vision?* These questions reject the false premise that uniformity leads to peace. Instead, these questions affirm diversity and communicate that diversity envelops us and works on us and gets inside us. In order to be reconciled, the 'wounded psyche' of Hindus needs to be acknowledged by Christians if more genuine encounters in daily Hindu religious life is to occur.

My research on the *Mānas* offered me the possibility of accepting the diversity around me graciously. In addition, it provided me with insights as to how one moves forward the mission of interreligious dialogue as encounter. For Pope Francis' vision of the 'culture of encounter' to unfold productively, the insights, contributions and theological frameworks of theologians who have lived in the midst of religiously pluralistic contexts merits closer attention and recognition. Their witness not only contributes to a more profound understanding of the mission of interreligious dialogue and encounter, but it also expands our understanding and appreciation for comparative theological methodology in the study of theology. To illustrate this point, I present the biographies and theological frameworks of three theologians, namely Raimundo Panikkar, Michael Amaladoss, and Peter Phan, in line with Comparative Theology.

1.7. Biographies of Theologians

The changing landscape of our times calls for new ways of doing theology. In recent years, religious thinkers have endeavored to express theological values, not in systematic formulations of beliefs such as creeds and formal statements of faith, but rather, in narratives that give expression to the actual life experiences of men and women as revealed in their biographies or autobiographies. Genuine faith is best expressed as it is lived. In his book, *Biography as Theology*,

James W. McClendon acknowledges theology as an important inquiry that sets out to answer those whence, why and whither questions.[189] Among other things, such inquiry often focuses on the challenges, hopes, and difficulties that have shaped one's vision and understanding of faith and its articulation. By way of example, McClendon focuses on the biographies of Dg Hammarskjöld and Martin Luther King Jr. to reflect theologically on the doctrine of atonement. In doing so, he states, "by instantiating atonement as a central motif of their own image-governed lives, these two have powerfully reinforced the viability of that doctrine for Christians in our times."[190]

These biographical stories may or may not correlate with traditional doctrines. However, such narratives offer hermeneutical lenses through which truth and meaning can be understood and interpreted. Johann Metz also identifies the importance of biographies and points out the profound schism that exists in Catholic theology between theological systems and religious experience, doxography and biography. In his opinion, biographies are not simply a literary reflection on one's subjectivity. Rather, they are an articulation of one's life story in God's presence and one's life history before the hidden face of God.[191] Metz points out that one's mystical biographies are lost to the doxography of faith that increasingly dismantles experiential content in a subjective and impressionistic ways. Consequently, theology is increasingly unable to bring itself to bear in *public* spheres of church and society.[192] Through the use of biography, theologians can contribute to the development of a "Theology of Character" by incorporating the study of character into theology.[193] Metz states that biographical theology does not allow itself to be forced into the

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[189] James Wm. McClendon Jr. *Biography as Theology, How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 89.

[190] Ibid.,143.

[191] Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society, Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co. 2007), 199.

[192] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 199.

[193] McClendon Jr. *Biography as theology,*

mold of some exact and regulated scientific language. The lived conviction and learned experience of faith cannot be adequately justified by metalogical rules and analytical modes of argument. This is also why it cannot permit itself to be unconditionally subjected to the vocabulary of exactness. Theology is not a natural science of the divine."[194] The biographies of Panikkar, Phan, and Amaladoss are important resources through which their understanding of faith in multi-religious contexts can be communicated and comprehended. Their lived experiences have shaped their theologies. Something similar occurs in Comparative Theology, given its confessional character and its emphasis on doing theology "in a non-technical fashion, [that] is distinct from the study of religion because theology is an inquiry carried on by believers who allow their belief to remain an explicit and influential factor in their research, analysis, and writing."[195]

The appeal of biography is that the reader can ponder the experience and insights of great people and say to oneself. "I know what that means. I have experienced something like it."[196] Clooney emphasizes that a particular context or identity always shapes one's choices of texts, rituals, and performance. The confessional character of Comparative Theology makes a deeper engagement possible, precisely because the Comparative theologian belongs to a particular religious and theological community. According to Cornille, this fact saves Comparative Theology from the negative implications of randomness.[197] [198]

Speaking autobiographically, I identify as an Indian Catholic, with ancestry in Goa, the Portuguese colony. I was born and brought up in the multi-religious, multi-lingual context of

[194] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 201.
[195] Clooney, *Theology after Vedānta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 4.
[196] Harry C. Meserve, Biography as Theology," *Journal of Religion and Health*, 14, no. 4 (Oct 1975): 227-230. *Editoria*l.
[197] Cornille, *Meaning, and Method in Comparative Theology*, 160.
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coastal Karnataka. These factors affect the way I engage Hinduism and the way Hindus offer me hospitality. Conscious of the significance of my own identity when doing theology, I turn now to an exploration of the three theologians whose theologies illustrate the importance of biography for theology.

1.7.1. Raimon Panikkar (1918-2010)

As an embodiment of interreligious dialogue, Panikkar remained loyal to the Christian tradition and was deeply drawn to the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The quote that best captures the outcome of Panikkar's commitment to interreligious dialogue is: "I 'left' as a Christian, I 'found' myself a Hindu, and I 'return' a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian."[199] His claim to be a Hindu and a Buddhist without "ceasing to be a Christian," emerged from his life experience inasmuch as interreligious dialogue was an unavoidable experience throughout his life. On November 3, 1918, he was born in the borough of Sarrià in Barcelona to a Catholic mother from Catalonia and a Hindu father from Kerala, India. The Vedas and the Bible nourished him. He owes much to his family roots where there was a profound harmony between his father and his mother, despite belonging to two different traditions. Panikkar's deeply religious and metaphysical leanings enabled him to say, "I do not see myself as half Spanish and half Indian, half Catholic and half Hindu, but fully Western and fully Eastern. I have always been someone concerned about what is usually called the religious problem." However, he went beyond religious 'fixations,' and later in his life, his far-reaching academic career, with three doctorates in chemistry (Madrid University), philosophy, and theology (Lateran University), helped him see the profound relationality between different religions and cultures.[200]

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[199] Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 42.
[200] Cf. E. H. Cousins, "Introduction: The Panikkar Symposium" at Santa Barbara, *Cross Currents* 29 (Summer 1979), 132.

Panikkar attended a Jesuit school and received an "extraordinary reward" when he completed high school in 1935. From 1936 to1942, he was a university student of both Science and Humanities. He was affected by the Spanish civil war, and he left Spain to study in Germany. In his search for a deeper Christian life within his professional work, he joined a group of laymen who later became members of *Opus Dei*. Later, Panikkar came in contact with José Escrivá de Balaguer, the founder of *Opus Dei*, and was ordained in 1946. After leaving *Opus Dei*, he was incardinated in the Indian diocese of Varanasi. In 1954, he first left for India to study Indian philosophy and religion (University of Mysore and Varanasi). His encounter with Hinduism and Buddhism greatly impacted him and ignited an internal dialogue called "intra-religious dialogue."[201]

In India, Panikkar was influenced by other pioneers of Hindu-Christian dialogue, such as Father Jules Monchanin (Swami Paramarubiananda), the Benedictine monk Henri Le Saux (Swami Abhishiktananda), and the English Benedictine Bede Griffiths (Swami Dayananda). He focused on dialoguing at the existential level throughout his life as he was in contact with the Eastern and Western worlds. Panikkar's multiple religious belonging was not a matter of choice or shallow eclecticism, but rather a matter of personal experience and profound spiritual growth. His vision of interreligious dialogue stretched beyond the rational and into the intuitive realm.[202] He did not comply with any universal theory of religion or promote a pluralistic religious theology. In his view, pluralism is an attitude that subsumes every religious system.[203]

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[201] See Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, 1978.

[202] Harold G. Coward, "Panikkar's Approach to Interreligious Dialogue," *Cross Currents,* 29, no. 2 (Summer 1979), 183-189 here 183.

[203] See Raimon Panikkar. "A Self-Critical Dialogue," in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, edited by Joseph Prabhu (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 227-243.

1.7.2. Michael Amaladoss (1936 -)

Michael Amaladoss, an Indian Jesuit, is a theologian, missiologist, liturgist, and musician. He describes himself as "a hybridized Hindu Christian who is defined by his own non-dual *advaitic* theological vision of unity in plurality."[204] He was born in Dindigul on December 8, 1936, in Southern India. He grew up in a predominantly Hindu village. Village life influenced his personal life as he was immersed in Hindu rituals and festivals and was not a "stranger" or "other" to Hinduism.[205] Sudhir Kakar, an Indian psychologist, points out that religious identity is shaped by one's surroundings and runs deep in the psyche of Indians as in India, identities are primarily formed in the village and jointly with the family system.[206] According to Amaladoss, his encounter with the Hindus allows him to see his hybridity as cohesion in every person and community with complexity and tension.[207] He sees theology mostly from interreligious[208] and liberationist[209] perspectives.

In 1953, after finishing basic studies in St. Joseph's College, Tiruchirappalli, he joined the Society of Jesus. He completed a B.A. in languages and an M.A. in philosophy in Shembaganur, Kodaikanal (1955-61). Then he obtained the title of *'Sangeeta Vidwān'* (Music Master) from Tamilnadu College of Carnatic Music (1951-63). He then completed his four years of theology in Kurseong, near Darjeeling (1965- 1969). After his ordination, he went to Paris for doctoral studies

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[204]Amaladoss, *Interreligious Encounters Opportunities, and Challenges* (New York/Maryknoll: Orbis books, 2017), xvii.

[205] Ibid.

[206] Sudhir Kakar, *The Colours of Violence* (New Delhi: Viking, 1995); idem, "Some unconscious Aspects of Ethnic Violence in India," in *Mirrors of violence*, ed. Veena Das (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[207]Amaladoss, "Double Religious Belonging and Liminality," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflections* 66 (2002):21-34.

[208] See Amaladoss, *Making All thins New: Dialogue, Pluralism, and Evangelization in Asia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990).

[209] See Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom: Liberation Theologies from Asia* (Maryknoll: NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

in Theology (1969-1972) and later taught theology in St. Paul's Seminary, Tiruchirappalli (1974-1979), and in Vidyajyoti College of Theology, Delhi (1974-1983, 1995-2012). He also was a visiting professor of theology at Georgetown University in Washington D.C. Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio; the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California; Centre Sêvres, Paris, France; Lumen Vitae in Brussels, Belgium; and the East Asian Pastoral Institute and Loyola School of Theology in Manila, Philippines. He has participated in scores of theological conferences in many countries worldwide and has written thirty-two books in English and two in Tamil. As a musician, he also has set to music about one-hundred and fifty hymns in Tamil. Along with his theological contribution, he has been an administrator as principal and rector in Vidyajyoti, Delhi (1976-1979); Vice-Provincial for Formation for the South Asian Jesuits (1979-1983); President of Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune (1983); Special Assistant to the Superior General of the Jesuits in Rome (1983-1995); Consultor to three Pontifical Councils in Rome and the Commission for World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches in Geneva (1983-1987); and the President of the International Association of Mission Studies (1989-1993). He has been the Founder and director of the Institute of Dialogue with Cultures and Religions in Chennai (2003-2018). With his vast experience in India and abroad, he brings unique qualifications and insights to mission and evangelization within contemporary Asia. His rich background provides a deep wellspring for his creative theological-missiological writing.

1.7.3. Peter Phan (1946 -)

Peter C. Phan, a native of Vietnam, recognizes himself as an "accidental theologian" due to the Vietnam War that led to his migration to the United States in 1975.[210] Phan was born in

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[210] Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously,* xi.

1946, but his birth certificate was changed to 1943 to enable him to sit for the Brevet examinations, a standard of testing the knowledge and skills at the end of middle school. Since he was intellectually gifted, he was selected to receive a French education in Saigon. This education *French-washed* him. From 1962 to 1965, he studied neo-scholastic philosophy in Latin at Don Bosco College in Hong Kong. These years of study brought him to the realization that Western imperialistic education downplayed Eastern traditions, as he writes, "Eastern philosophies and cultures were not deemed worthy of study because they were judged not to contain any truth which would not have already been known through Christian revelation."[211] From 1968 to 1972, he studied theology in Rome at the international Salesian Pontifical University and again experienced himself a being between worlds. He obtained three doctorates, the Doctor of Sacred Theology from the Università Pontificia Salesiana in Rome (1978), the Doctor of Philosophy from the University of London (1986) and the Doctor of Divinity from the University of London (2000). Phan has authored and edited over thirty books and has published over 300 essays. Currently, he holds the Ellacuria Chair of Catholic Social Thought at Georgetown University.

Phan offers the lens of inculturation, and lays bare a personal narrative that has equipped him to share critical insights regarding a culture of encounter with the sacred traditions of others. His writings draw attention to the Catholic and contextual insights of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC) and the magisterium of the Asian bishops that proposed a new way of being the church in Asia with a focus on the *triple dialogue* with the peoples of Asia, especially with the poor (liberation); their cultures (inculturation) and with their religions (interreligious dialogue). Three of his best-known works include *Christianity with an Asian Face* (2003) that

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[211] Peter C. Phan, "Betwixt and Between Doing Theology with Memory and Imagination," in *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective*, ed. Peter C. Phan and Jung Young Lee (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1999), 117.

focuses on liberation and inculturation; In *our own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation that* explores possibilities for becoming an inculturated church, and *Being Religious Interreligously* that grapples with the complexities of religious pluralism in the postmodern world.   The content of his book *Being Religious Interreligiously* led to his investigation by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) and the Committee on Doctrine of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in 2005. [212] Nevertheless, in his 2017 work, *The Joy of Religious Pluralism*, Phan not only clarifies some positions from his 2004 work but elaborates on the value of interreligious theology.[213] There is a fascinating account of his investigation by the CDF in the appendix of this volume. His life story of being "betwixt and between" enables him to think through a theology of being rooted and having wings of "past and future, east and west, north and south, earth and heaven," and he views that "without memory, theology would be empty; without imagination, it would be blind."[214]

The above biographies of these three theologians communicate their unique context and growth in encountering 'religious pluralism.' Through their respective theological frameworks, the importance of encountering the religious other is recognized. Their insights point out the struggles and challenges of encountering other religions and offer us hope for going forward in the mission of interreligious dialogue.

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[212] Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously,* 2004.
[213] See Phan, *The Joy of Religious Pluralism: A Personal Journey* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017).
[214] Phan, "Betwixt and Between," 115.

1.8. Theological Frameworks of Theologians

1.8.1. A New Theology of Religions

The discussion regarding the epistemological status of other religions is dealt with primarily in the area of the theology of religions. The traditional theology of religions with the readymade framework of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism responds to religious pluralism.[215] Knitter takes these approaches and categorizes them into four basic models, namely, "replacement," "fulfillment," "mutuality," and "acceptance." [216] However, this categorization comes under criticism because the construction of these models is shaped by Christian assumptions. As a consequence, these models are not sufficient when it comes to understanding other religions. Today, Christian theology asserts that God reaches out to people, *not despite their religions, but in and through their religions*.[217] Second Vatican Council document, *Gaudium et Spes*, strongly affirms the universal salvific will of God,[218] and recognizes that all people make up a single community, which has God as its origin and goal.[219] In continuity with this thinking, the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference acknowledged other religions "as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation."[220]

Karl Rahner affirmed that God reaches out to other believers, given their human and social nature, through the beliefs, symbols, and rituals of their religions, through which they are trying to

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[215] See Amaladoss, *Interreligious Encounters.*

[216] See Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll: NY: Orbis Books, 2002). The first type affirms Christianity as a true religion that will replace all other religions totally or partially. The second affirms Christianity as a valid religion but acknowledges others' presence of truth but not in equal terms. The third type affirms that none is necessarily superior to others. Finally, the fourth stresses the diversity of religions and refuses to seek common ground: instead, it urges each religion to foster its aims and practices.

[217] See Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 1999.

[218] GS, no. 22.

[219] NA, no. 1.

[220] Federation of Asian Bishop's Conference, Evangelization in Modern Day Asia, Nos 14-15, in *For all the Peoples of Asia* (Manila, IMC, 1984), 30.

reach out to God.[221] Many Indian theologians recognize and describe this positive appreciation of other religions as *a paradigm shift* in the church's thinking.[222] During the seminar on the *Inspiration of Non-Biblical Scriptures*, Indian theologians concluded that the scriptures of other religions could be considered inspired and as such, used in Christian liturgies. [223] However, this understanding was unacceptable to the Vatican. Another seminar on *Sharing Worship* that took place in Bengaluru in 1987, allowed a certain form of participation in the worship of other religions, since all religions worship, through various symbols, the one God. [224] According to Phan, the realization of interconnectedness among religions in this age is not merely an historical development for interreligious dialogue, but a theological imperative. While examining the four ways of dialogue- "dialogue of life," "dialogue of action," "dialogue of religious experience," and "dialogue of theological exchange," Phan points out that the dialogue of theological exchange is not to construe a universal theology of religions as it is futile to do so, but rather, to "seek understanding of the other faiths and one's own faith in the light of other faiths. Such understanding may and should lead to the other three forms of dialogue, without having to postulate the existence of a core religious experience."[225] All the preceding views do not try to make *a priori* statements on the status of other religions. In this direction, Panikkar, Amaladoss, and Phan suggest a new theology that focuses on divine-human encounters and a God-talk that is pluralistic, contemplative, and oriented toward the poor.

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[221] Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. V (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1969), 128.

[222] Thomas Malipurathu and L. Stanislaus., *A Vision and Mission in the New Millennium* (Mumbai: St. Paul's 2001).

[223] See D. S. Amalorpavadass, ed., Research Seminar on Inspiration in Non-Biblical Scriptures (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1974) and George Gispert Sauch, "Vatican II and the Use of Indian Scriptures, "in *Theological Explorations*, ed. Jacob Kavunkal, 35-48 (Delhi: ISPCK, 2008).

[224] See Paul Puthanangady, ed., *Sharing worship: Communicatio in Sacris* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1988).

[225] Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 99.

1.8.2. Theology of Divine-Human Encounter

Amaladoss, in his writings, says the new theology of religions today needs to focus on God and humans, trying to reach out to each other as every religion is an interplay of divine and human freedom.[226] He identifies divine-human encounters through different religions and their proper scriptures, symbols, and rituals, as he writes,

> We can say that the Gods of other religions are various manifestations of the one God. They are not mere idols but real mediations. They are not merely different "names" of the same reality. They are actualizations in a people's history and culture.[227]

This idea acknowledges that theology is, after all, about God, not about religion. God saves, not the religions, and that God is one and has one plan for the universe. At the same time, God may call and reach out to people in various ways. God's self-manifestation and human responses are conditioned by human, historical, and cultural limitations. God is free to manifest and communicate Godself to them in any way God likes. Acknowledging the divine freedom to encounter human beings leads us to say,

> Whichever form pleases his/her people, that is his /her form.
> Whichever name pleases his/her people, that is his/her name.
> Whichever way pleases his/her people who meditate without ceasing,
> That is his/her way.[228]

God is free to manifest Godself to people in any way and to the extent that God chooses. This divine freedom corresponds to the human freedom to respond creatively. A person who responds to God's creative freedom, as an individual, remains faithful to the committed way in which God has called him or her. Amaladoss holds the view that while I can positively witness to the wondrous

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[226] *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 28-29

[227] Amaladoss, *Interreligious Encounters, 20.*

[228] Clooney quotes a beautiful song of Andal, a ninth-century Tamil devotee who considers herself as the bride of Vishnu. This is the quote of Andal to her friends, who laugh at her pretensions of being God's own bride. *See* Clooney, "God for Us: Multiple Religious Identities as a Human and Divine Prospect," in *Many Mansions*? *Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books), 45.

ways in which God has been active in my community and me, I cannot arrogantly presume to judge the presence and action of God in other people *a priori*, *especially setting my own experience as the criterion and norm*.[229] The theology of divine-human encounter acknowledges that God continues to be active in the majority of humanity through other participated mediations. This understanding leads to acknowledging God as the source of richness and diversity and pluralism as ordered, not chaotic. This theology, based on divine-human encounters and pluralistic God-talk, leads to creative tensions when it comes to religious identity. Panikkar speaks of this experience as mutual fecundation, Amaladoss as being a 'Hindu Christian,' and Phan as 'being religious interreligiously.'

1.8.3. Religious Identity

What happens to Catholic identity amidst an encounter with religious pluralism? Theologians encountering other religions need not renounce their identities or compromise their faith and morals. Pope Francis, at the interreligious gathering in Sarajevo in 2015, stated: "that for dialogue to be authentic and effective, it presupposes a solid identity; without an established identity, dialogue is of no use or even harmful."[230] Clooney, in his Comparative Theology, speaks of rootedness and "cultivated hybridity,"[231] and the liminal position of comparative theologians. Nevertheless, he says, "uncomfortable borderline position must not only be tolerated but necessary, and it must be intentionally nurtured."[232] He also says in *Beyond Compare* that Comparative Theology leads to a situation in which "we have more teachers and few masters."[233]

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[229]Amaladoss*, Interreligious Encounters,* 20.

[230] *http://m.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/sppeches/2015/june/documents/papa-francesco_20150606_sarajevo-incontro-ecumenico.html*.

[231] Clooney, *Comparative Theology*: *Deep Learning*, 160.

[232] Ibid., 159.

[233] Clooney, *Beyond Compare: St. Francis de Sales and Sri Vedanta Desika on Loving Surrender to God* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 209.

Amaladoss, Phan, and Panikkar affirm the importance of faith commitment in the dialogue of life. This does not negate openness to the other. If there is no firmness of identity, there is a danger of a "facile syncretism."[234] Being rooted and the 'risk' involved in identifying oneself with other religious traditions is essential in encountering other religious traditions. Encountering the other becomes a problem not when one's faith commitment is acknowledged, but when the distinct identity of the other is denied or downgraded. In this regard, dual belonging poses a challenge and a risk. Catherine Cornille states that

> The more encompassing a religion's claim to efficacy and truth, the more problematic the possibility of multiple religious belonging. Conversely, it thus seems that the idea of belonging to more than one religion can be tolerated only when and where religion has accepted the complementarity of religions.[235]

1.8.3.1. Rootedness and Self-understanding of One's Religion

Panikkar maintains that encountering other religions is a *religious experience*. Hence, according to him, the prerequisite for dialogue includes deep human honesty, intellectual openness, and a willingness to relinquish prejudice in the search for truth but maintaining "profound loyalty towards one's own tradition."[236] For a dialogue partner, rootedness in one's own religious identity does not indicate that he or she is a religious fanatic or someone who already has all the answers, but rather, it communicates that the person "also is a seeker, a pilgrim making his own unchartered way; the track ahead is yet a virgin, inviolate."[237]

Being rooted and open, Panikkar asserts, does not assume an uncritical approach but sets aside all prejudices and ignorance of other faiths as the aim of the encounter is "convergence of

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[234] See, for example, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 251.
[235] Cornille, "introduction," 2.
[236] Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 35.
[237] Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, 27.

hearts, not just coalescence of minds."[238] He cites Ramakrishna and De Nobili in their encountering other religions as "they were impelled by a belief that their religion was wide enough and deep enough to allow such an embrace."[239] One can "crossover" to others through sharing symbols and experiences and then "cross back again" by mutually integrating testimonies "within a larger horizon, a new myth."[240] In his writing on the *Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges*, Panikkar says that "no religious tradition has a monopoly on the living waters of the rivers (salvation) and that we should not water down the tenets of any authentic religion in order to reach religious concord," and there is a need for "new horizon."[241] Being rooted should not hinder the growth of religious consciousness because there is continuity and novelty in growth.[242] Pope Francis, in his address to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (2013), said,

> Dialogue does not mean renouncing one's identity in approaching others, nor does it mean accepting compromises on faith and Christian morality. On the contrary, 'true openness involves remaining steadfast in one's own identity,' and therefore convinced that the encounter with persons different to ourselves may offer an opportunity for growth in brotherhood, enrichment, and witness.[243]

Being rooted enlarges the scope of self-understanding of one's faith. Panikkar says that a Christian self-understanding needs to consider three important factors. First, the sources of Christian self-understanding, second the interpretation of such sources by tradition, and third, the

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[238] Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 173 ff.

[239] Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, 41.

[240] Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutic*s, 244.

[241] Panikkar, "The Jordan, The Tiber, and the Ganges: Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-Consciousness," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (1989):89-116 here 92.

[242] Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, 71.

[243] Address of Pope Francis to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, clementine hall, Thursday, 28 November 2013. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/november/documents/papafrancesco_20131128_pc-dialogo-interreligioso.html

personal experience *of* and new reflection *upon* these sources and traditions. Historically, Christianity has learned lessons from history and emerged creatively in authentic theologizing through Jordan's Semitic roots and Tiber's intellectual traditions. These factors have created five historical periods of Christianity: *witnessing, conversion, crusades, missions, and dialogue.* They are not chronological but *kairological* moments of Christian History."[244] In today's world, the trend of dialogue no longer wants to conquer, to convert *but wants to serve and learn*.[245] Learning and serving do not deny the past historical traits as he writes,

> the Christian somehow retains all five traits…...Now discovering that they are not alone, Christians open up to dialogue. We are just beginning a new spiral of the interaction between Christians and the peoples of other belief systems.[246]

1.8.3.2. Intra-religious Dialogue

In this rootedness and self-understanding of religion, Panikkar emphasizes 'intrareligious dialogue,' as he writes, "no inter-religious dialogue can yield fruit unless it is preceded by an intrareligious dialogue within the partners themselves." [247] The intrareligious dialogue invites one to step back and critically examine one's own faith with the faith of others. The self-examination indicates room for the enrichment of my own faith through the dialogue experience. The aim of "intrareligious dialogue is understanding. It is not to win over the other or come to a total agreement or a universal religion."[248]

Intrareligious dialogue begins with questioning the *relativity (not relativism)* of one's own beliefs, accepting the challenges of a change, a conversion, and the risk of upsetting one's

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[244] For explanation, see Panikkar, "Christianity and World Religions," in *Christianity* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1969), 78-127.

[245] Panikkar, "*The Jordan, The Tiber, and the Ganges*," 93-96.

[246] Ibid., 95.

[247] Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, 1978.

[248] Ibid., xxvii.

traditional patterns.[249] Because Panikkar believes that "faith can only be lived but living it may at times demand risking it in order to remain faithful,"[250] interreligious dialogue is a stepping stone to intrareligious dialogue "where living faith constantly demands from us a total renewal, or in Christian terms - a real, personal, and ever-recurring metanoia."[251] He understands faith as a "constitutive human dimension" coextensive with all people, cultures, and religions. [252] Hence, we cannot enter a dialogue, Panikkar writes, "having already postulated what will come of it, or having resolved to withdraw should it enter areas we have *a priori* excluded," for it will become "merely an exchange of doctrine or intellectual opinions."[253] Intrareligious dialogue unfolds in characteristic phases. First, it begins with views, texts, teachings, and practices from two different traditions that encounter each other head-on, inside oneself, without judgments or exclusivist attitudes. Second, the meeting point "is not a neutral dialectical arena that leaves both of us untouched, but a self that besides being myself is also shared by the other.' [254] In this process, Panikkar is not advocating reductionism, but deeper reflection into one's own faith tradition.

1.8.3.3. Mutual Fecundation

Panikkar recognizes religions as a different way to perfection and emphasizing one model does not satisfy him. His pluralism undoubtedly speaks of corresponding meeting points as it may be possible that one walks on different roads during the journey. The metaphor of rivers expounds the possible way of meeting points:

> ...the rivers of the earth do not actually meet each other, not even in the oceans, nor do they need to meet in order to be truly life-giving rivers. But "they" do meet; they meet in the

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[249] Ibid., 40.
[250] Ibid., 13.
[251] Ibid., 52.
[252]Ibid., 1-23.
[253] Ibid., 50.
[254] Ibid., 41.

skies—that is, in heaven. The rivers do not meet, not even as water. "They" meet in the form of clouds, once they have suffered transformation into vapor, which eventually will pour down again into the valleys of mortals to feed the rivers of the earth... My metaphor does not stand for a transcendent unity of all religions in an unqualified way.[255]

Panikkar holds that the encounter of traditions through multifaith (and multicultural) dialogue is crucial in the new situation of radical pluralism that confronts our world since no single religion, culture, or tradition holds a universal solution for either our theoretical or practical human problems. Panikkar offers the rainbow as a model that is to say that a variety of religions belong to the beauty and richness of the human situation, and only the entire rainbow provides a complete picture of the true religious dimension of Man.[256] Identifying religious pluralism and the need for encounter, he states

> Man cannot shut himself off, close his ears and eyes, and simply gaze toward heaven or brood over the past; he cannot ignore his fellowmen and act as if religion has assured him, he has no more to learn, nothing to change. He must throw himself into the sea and begin to walk, even if his feet falter and his heart fails.[257]

Panikkar saw human beings as dialogical. He believed that without this dialogical dimension, humans could not be genuinely human. Just as he believed that humans could not be genuinely humans without dialogue, so too he believed that persons are part of a network of relationships. He recognized that "radical otherness" does not eradicate "radical relativity" or the interconnection of all human beings. His "cosmotheandric principle" developed the "radical relativity" and interconnection of all religions and cultures as he states: "the divine, the human and the earthly-- however we may prefer to call them--are the three irreducible dimensions which constitute the

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[255] Raimon Panikkar's,' "The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges" 92.
[256] Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, xxi.
[257] Ibid., 73.

real."[258] In his autobiographical sketch, he identifies himself as a man brought up in the strictest orthodoxy who lives in a milieu that is '*microdox*,' from every point of view.'[259]

Panikkar overcomes the temptation of relativism by acknowledging relativity. He realizes that everything is wrapped in the utter relativity of radical interdependence rather than everything falling into agnostic or indifferent relativism.[260] Through these interconnections, Panikkar visualizes encounters between the East and West in a new way that he describes as *mutual fecundation* in a pluralistic world.[261] In his view, for Christianity to be a universal religion, the way it encounters other religions needs to be changed. For this reason, he suggests interpenetration or *mutual fecundation*. In this process, the "religion of my brother becomes a personal religious concern for me also."[262] The mutual fecundation and deeper encounter do not occur at a doctrinal level but at an existential or ontic-intentional level.[263] The true encounter happens only when the doctrines are considered as a starting point for reaching the reality underlying them. Religions must meet and co-exist in dialogue in the heart, involve the entire person, and realize the 'reciprocity.'[264]

In Panikkar's view, the method of 'dialogical dialogue' fosters mutual fecundation.[265] The dialogical dialogue assumes that one can enter into and experience the symbolic world of the other based on experience and integrate them into one's tradition. In the process, one learns to think and

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[258] Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 60.

[259] Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, 5.

[260]Ibid., 5.

[261] In the human reproduction, the process by which the male sperm unites with the female's oocyte creates a new life. Using this analogy of fecundation, Panikkar, invites religions for cross fertilization and mutual fecundation in the situation of conflict among the religions.

[262] Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 35.

[263]Ibid., 36.

[264] A Cited in Harold G. Coward, *Panikkar's Approach to Interreligious Dialogue*, 184.

[265] See Panikkar "Dialogical Dialogue," in *The World's Religious Traditions*, Frank Whaling, ed. (Edinburgh: TT & Clark, 1984), pp. 61-72 (volume in honor of Wilfred Cantwell Smith).

understand based on the symbol systems of more than one tradition because symbols are concrete, but they also are both bounded and open. Thus, their interpretation is never exhausted. [266] The question to be asked is: How can a person think of different symbols together? Panikkar's notion of "homeomorphic equivalence" is designed to respond to this challenge.[267] The notion of homeomorphic equivalence recognizes the point of encounter. It suggests "mutual fecundation" and infers that religions and cultures continue to intertwine historically and existentially so that self-understandings and symbols are in a constant process of mutual influence and growth.

Mutual fecundation does not become another dogma but becomes a participation in the intrinsic openness of reality. In his approach to religious pluralism, Panikkar understood the requirement of "truly cross-cultural understanding" and "radical metanoia, a complete turning of mind, heart, and spirit." He states,

> It is two-way traffic. . .. The meeting point is neither my house nor the mansion of my neighbour, but the crossroads outside the walls, where we may eventually decide to put up a tent--for the time being.[268]

Mutual fecundation communicates that the people, religions, and cultures can grow and change through their mutual sharing. Panikkar's primary insight on mutual fecundation is insightful for Comparative Theology, as the method focuses on "mutual transformation" and "mutual learning." For example, the Vatican document, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991) states that "Christians must be prepared to learn and receive from and through others the positive values of their traditions."[269] Humans need to learn from each other by encountering other religions. However,

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[266] Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, xxii.

[267] Illustration for homeomorphic equivalence is a continuous deformation between a coffee mug and a donut (torus).

[268] Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, 61.

[269] Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Dialogue and Proclamation (1991), article 49. http: Vatican.va./roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interrel/documents/rc_pc_interrelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-procamtio-en.html.

Panikkar also recognizes that "splendid isolation" is not possible in the modern world. [270] As

Frederick Franck, the artist and author of more than thirty books on Buddhism, observes,

> Alone and isolated, Hinduism is threatened, Christianity is impotent, Islam is in ferment, Buddhism is dissolving, Marxism is bankrupt, secularism is self-destructing. It is not unthinkable that cross-fertilization among the traditions could reconcile the original insights of the various cultures and make the stilled voices of the sages audible once more over the abysses of time.[271]

1.8.3.4. The Identity of Crossing Over (Hindu-Christian)

In the context of religious encounters, crossing over does not mean abandoning one's

primal tradition but deepening and extending it, and creating something new at the level of human

and religious consciousness. The new religious consciousness creates a deep commitment and

desire to understand another tradition and opens up to a new experience of truth since "one cannot

really understand the views of another if one does not share them."[272] Amaladoss claims himself

to be a Hindu-Christian, but he writes, "my roots are in Christianity."[273] Panikkar explains the

practical application of this principle concerning Hindu and Christian understandings of each

other: "A Christian will never fully understand Hinduism if he is not converted to Hinduism in one

way or another. Nor will a Hindu ever fully understand Christianity unless he, in one way or

another, becomes a Christian."[274] Amaladoss' hybrid identity arises from his encounter with

Hinduism as a Christian, and he feels that the construction of identity such as Hindu-Christian is

primarily a personal issue and theologically possible. The identity he defines "primarily in terms

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[270] Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue* bid., xvi.

[271] As cited in Ilia Delio*, Christ in Evolution* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008), 86.

[272] Panikkar, "Verstehen als berzeugstein," in *Neue Anthropologie*, H. G. Gadamer and P. Vogler, eds., *Philosophische Anthropologie*, Vol. 7 (Stuttgart: Thieme, 1975), 137.

[273]Amaladoss, *Interreligious Encounters,* 145.

[274] Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 43.

of a person's relation to God and others in the presence of God."[275] He sees this double identity

not as a "total conversion to another religion but an opening up, and passing to and back, having

two experiences in tension."[276] Based on his personal experience of Indian multiple religions, he

distinguishes between *double religious identity* and *double religious belonging*.

Being a "Hindu Christian" is problematic from the official Catholic point of view. If these

identities are not formed, Amaladoss asks a sharp question, "why should anyone be interested in

encountering Hinduism at all? Must a Hindu who has become a Christian abandon Hinduism?" Is

it possible for someone to belong to one community but share the religious experience of another

community, when such experience may involve beliefs, worldviews, methods of sadhana?

Amaladoss approaches the question not purely objectively but as a partisan. In his book*, Toward*

Fullness: *Searching for an Integral Spirituality*, he wrote in the preface, "I am obviously searching

as an Indian. I can specify this identity further as *Hindu-Christian*."[277]

Aloysius Pieris analyzes this religious structure in terms of three levels: the *primordial*

experience, the origin or the core of religion, *the collective memory* stored up in texts, rituals,

beliefs, and *interpretations of the experiences* in philosophical and theological terms.[278] To these

religious structures of Pieris, Amaladoss adds the element of *institutions*. In his perspective, the

double identity is possible at the level of interpretation of the religious experience of another

community as there is a certain level of freedom to interpret the common religious symbols. He

thinks that a temporary presence in another community is possible during interreligious events and

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[275] Amaladoss, *Interreligious Encounters*, 167.

[276] Ibid., 170.

[277] Michael Amaladoss, "Preface," *Toward Fullness: Searching for an Integral Spirituality* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1994), 2. See also idem, *The Dancing Cosmos: A Way to Harmony* (Anand, Gujarat: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2003).

[278] Aloysius Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 120.

celebrations as a collective memory. He states, "by calling me to encounter other believers, God may also be calling me to cross symbolic boundaries occasionally."[279]

However, belonging falls into the level of the institution. Raimon Panikkar, in his identity, affirmed that he is Christian primarily because he is a believer in and a follower of Christ, not because he belongs to the Church.[280] Cornille has distinguished five types of dual religious belonging: "cultural belonging, family belonging, occasional belonging, believing without belonging, and asymmetrical belonging."[281] Being a Hindu or a Christian is not just about a personal identity, but it has a social and institutional dimension, whereas identity is something personal. Many ordinary Indians and prominent personalities Sadhu Sundar Singh, Pandita Ramabai, Pandipeddi Chenchiah, were disciples of Christ, but they did not belong socially to Christianity. Being a disciple of Christ personally is different from being a Christian socially and institutionally. It is not syncretism. Amaladoss states,

> People who are engaged in interreligious dialogue at the level of spiritual experience are not being syncretistic. Instead, it is an intrapersonal process. They are rooted in their own faith while being open to other faith experiences.[282]

He views dual identity from the perspective of the relationship between the Gospel and culture, in other words, inculturation. The term inculturation is patterned with the word incarnation. Pope Paul VI said, "the Gospel must impregnate the culture and the whole way of life of many… (it is) above all cultures."[283] Benedict XVI told a university audience at Regensburg in 2006 that the

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[279] Amaladoss, *Interreligious Encounters,* 170.

[280] See Raimon Panikkar, "On Christian Identity," in Cornille, *Many Mansions*, 121-44.

[281] Catherine Cornille, "Multiple Religious Belonging," in *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, ed. David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas, 1st ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 325.

[282] Amaladoss, *Interreligious Encounters,* 124.

[283] *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 20.

Judaic culture in which Jesus communicated the Gospel and the Greco-Roman culture in which it took an intellectual shape are normative for all Christians. He said,

> True, there are elements in the evolution of the early church which do not have to be integrated into all cultures. Nonetheless, the fundamental decision made about the relationship between faith and the use of reason are part of the faith itself; they ae developments consonant with the nature of faith itself.[284]

The statement presumes that the Greeks have a monopoly on reason and all those others can do is to adopt it. This view is an insult to other cultures. In contrast, Hans Urs von Balthasar states that "there is, therefore, no cause for dismay in the idea that the truth of revelation, which was originally cast in Hellenistic concepts by the great Councils, could equally be recast in Indian or Chinese concepts."[285] The church in its creedal, ritual, cultural and organized structures needs to embrace all other cultures. French Cardinal Paul Poupard demanded that the complex identity of African Christians should be "a little Semitic, a little Greek, fully Roman and authentically African."[286]

Similarly, plural identity in an Indian context is well recognized as thoroughly Christian and wholly Indian. However, Claude Geffre raises the question, "what would the Indian identity consist of outside Hinduism?"[287] Most commonly, people agree that to be an Indian is to be a Hindu. While agreeing with the inextricable union between religion and culture, Peter Phan resists identifying the Indian identity with Hinduism because it fails to recognize the presence of other minority religions and their oppression by the religions of the majority.[288] However, Amaladoss on the other hand, seems to equate being Indian as being Hindu.

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[284] Benedict xvi, "Faith Reason, and the University," address at the University of Regensburg (September 12, 2006).
[285] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 55.
[286] As cited in Amaladoss, *Interreligious Encounters*, 183.
[287] Claude Geffre, "Double Belonging and the Originality of Christianity as a Religion," 96.
[288] Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously,* 73.

1.8.3.5. Being Religious Interreligously

Peter Phan recognizes that being religious interreligiously is an imperative in the postmodern world. He identifies three main reasons for the present-day reality of religious pluralism: firstly, growing religious fundamentalism; secondly, globalization and communication that favor meeting people of different faiths; and thirdly, migration that occurs due to political unrest, religious violence, and economic opportunities. According to Phan, elaborating on the universality of Catholic identity in a religiously pluralistic context does not call for differentiation and exclusiveness, but rather an "*intensification* and *deepening* of those deep structures that are pervasive in the Catholic Church's faith and practices."[289] He identifies belonging and participating in other religions as pan religious. He recognizes that there have been efforts by non-Christians to acknowledge and participate in Christianity. For example, Mohandas K. Gandhi [1869-1948] recognized Jesus as a model of the moral excellence and was much impressed by Jesus's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. [290] The Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh [1926-] writes, "Jesus is not only our Lord, but he is also our Father, our teacher, our brother, and our Self."[291] Both of these individuals illustrate the fact that it is possible to have spiritual encounters while remaining a Hindu or a Buddhist without becoming a Christian.[292] Within the Christian tradition, especially in the Asian context, religion is intertwined with cultures; pioneers have sustained the tension of double belonging. The Jesuit theologian, Jacques Dupuis, while in India, invited people to reflect "on the concrete experience of the pioneers who have relentlessly endeavored to combine in their own life their Christian commitment and another faith experience."[293] Abhishiktananda

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[289] Ibid., 59.

[290] M.K. Gandhi, *The Message of Jesus Christ* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1963)

[291] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), 44.

[292] See M.C. Parekh, *A Hindu's Portrait of Jesus* (Rajkot, Gujarat:1953).

[293] Dupuis, "Christianity and Religions," 69.

(Henri Le Saux), a French monk, also living in India, looked for the direction of Sri Ramana Maharshi and Swami Gnanananda to hold the tensions in balance; based on his life experience of *Advaita,* he writes, "the best thing is, I think, to hold, even if in extreme tension, these two forms of a unique 'faith' till dawn may arise."[294] Aloysius Pieris, a Sri Lankan Jesuit and scholar in Buddhism, prostrated himself at the feet of a learned Buddhist monk to be accepted as a disciple, an act that enabled him to call the Asian Church to be in "*communicatio in sacris*" or "to be baptized in the Jordan of Asian religions.[295] Based on the examples of pioneers, Phan recognizes,

> that the multiple religious belonging is not for the faint-hearted or the dilettante. It is a demanding vocation, a special call to holiness, which God has only granted a few until now. Nevertheless, it is a gift to be received in fear and trembling and gratitude and joy.[296]

Phan proposes three models for 'being religious interreligiously.' They are *migrant, host and guest,* and *pilgrim*. Firstly, migrants constantly adapt and open themselves to new realities as it is necessary to do so in order to survive in a new environment and live among strangers. Similarly, a religiously pluralistic world demands adapting new ways and means for living among others. Second, the imagery of 'host and guest' communicates that to enter into other religions, one needs to be a 'guest' respecting the customs and manners of the host and receiving the hospitality of the host. Only when there is enough cordiality and friendship between the host and guest can one comment on the perceived limitations of other faiths. Third, every pilgrim searches for the sacred and the transcendent. Similarly, those who engage in encounters with other religions must be prepared to cross over to the other, to go beyond, and be willing to abandon one's possessions, ideas and plans. In doing so, one moves towards the sacred as one builds relationships with the

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[294] Abhishiktananda, *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: The Spiritual diary (1948-73) of Swami Abhishiktannda* (dom Henri Le Saux) (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), 19.
[295] Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom*, 41.
[296] Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 81.

ancestors. In these three models, Phan communicates that we need to learn from others and overcome the 'self-sufficiency' of one's home religion. Through these models, Phan visualizes 'being religious interreligiously,' and invites those who desire to encounter the stranger as friends and learn from them as he states, "By accepting the stranger as a friend, we allow his or her "otherness" confront radically, challenging us with stories we have never heard, questions we have never imagined." [297]

Phan's notion of 'being religious interreligiously' was judged by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Doctrine as "notably confused on several points of Catholic doctrine and also contains serious ambiguities," especially on the topics of the salvific value of non-Christian religions and the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ.[298] Phan, in his response, relies on "Asian pneumatology." [299] In his book *The Joy of Religious Pluralism: A Personal Journey,* he draws upon his life experience and through "interreligious learning," he identifies the topic of religious pluralism, a source not simply of a challenge to Christian self-understanding and mission, but a potential source of "joy." Theologians Panikkar, Amaladoss, and Phan, with their wider understanding of theology, God-talk, and the tension of double identity visualize harmony.

1.8.3.6. Harmony in Tension

The mission of Interreligious Dialogue aims to establish peace and harmony in a pluralistic world. Pope Francis asserts that religions "are bound by their very nature to promote peace through justice, fraternity, disarmament, and care for creation."[300] Dialogue is indispensable for peace as

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[297] Ibid., 81.

[298] Phan, *The Joy of Religious Pluralism*, 175.

[299] Ibid., 62.

[300]*http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/october/documents/papa-francesco_20171018_delegati-religionsforpeace.pdf.*

"a net of peace that protects the world and especially protects the weakest members."[301] The Federation of Asian Bishops Conference called for "deep solidarity with the context and of an open appreciation of Asia's rich religious and cultural traditions."[302] The solidarity and co-existence of diverse religions within the context of Asia is dependent upon the concept of harmony. In seeking harmony, the danger of glossing over the differences and seeking homogeneity must be avoided. While acknowledging the need for harmony Phan calls for a God-talk based on the *God of universal harmony*. Harmony, as understood in Asian spirituality, includes all dimensions of life and world; it is individual, social, and cosmic as it constitutes "the intellectual and affective, religious and artistic, personal and social soul of both persons and institutions in Asia."[303] This vision of God focuses on the reconciling and restoring mission of universal harmony. Therefore, to bring about harmony among the people of Asia, without minimizing or negating the role of Christ as savior and that of the church as the sacrament of salvation, the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference, at its first plenary assembly in Taipei in 1978, asked rhetorically, "How then we do not acknowledge that God has drawn our people to himself through them?"[304] The Indian bishops elaborated on thes salvific value of non-Christian religions more fully, stating that "for hundreds of millions of our fellow human beings, salvation is seen as being channeled to them not in spite of but through and in their various socio-cultural and religious traditions. We cannot, then, deny *a priori* a salvific role for these non-Christian religions."[305]

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[301] *Address of Pope Francis to Participants in the Internati*onal Meeting for Peace sponsored by the Community of Saint' Egidio (30 September 2013), *http://w2.vatican.va/content/franscesco/en/speeches/2013/septembr*

[302] *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 2:292, no. 5.2.

[303] Ibid., 2:232.

[304] Dupuis*, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 220.

[305] Phan, *The Asian Synod*, 22.

Amaladoss, in a similar manner, upholding the principle of harmony while encountering other religions, asks a vital question: "Do we need borders between religions?" In his view, "To be" is to be in a relationship in all directions. In such a dynamic network of beings, who needs borders?"[306] We need *porous boundaries* that accept the other as others. He critiques Samuel Huntington who identifies civilization with popular cultures and religions - in the West as Christian, in Russia as Orthodox, in South Asia as Hindu, in the Middle East as Islamic, and in the East as Confucian. These identities are an instrumentalization of political and economic gains and a reduction of identities. He disapproves of the idea that world peace depends on the ability of dominant civilizations to tolerate one another and live side by side.[307] Amaladoss sees the diversity of religions not merely from the perspective of 'fulfillment theory' and uniformity as he states,

> While God and God's reign are points of convergence, pluralism of religions is not only a value, but inevitable, given the diversity of divine manifestations, history and cultures, and human group themselves. The Biblical vision of history is one of bringing together, gathering, not of making one, so that "God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28). *It is harmony and communion rather than unity, indeed not uniformity.* This supposes freedom and equality, justice, and solidarity. Thus, a theology of dialogue can be supported by a *theology of pluralism and harmony*.[308]

While acknowledging religious identity as a source of tension and conflict,[309] Amaladoss sees no need for any border between religions. In seeking harmony among various religious traditions, he writes, "authentic dialogue is a crossing of borders that eventually makes such borders unnecessary."[310] He visualizes living in an interdependent religious world without borders that

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[306] Amaladoss, *Interreligious Encounters,* 155.

[307] Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations, and the Remaking of the World Order* (London: Touchstone Books, 1996).

[308] Amaladoss, *Interreligious Encounters*, 122.

[309] Amaladoss, "Difficult Dialogue," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflections* 62 (1998): 567-79; idem, "Dialogue as conflict Resolution: Creative Praxis," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflections* 63 (1999): 21-36.

[310] Amaladoss, *Interreligious Encounters,* 145.

would see reality for what it is, not as a monad or a collection of monads, but rather as an inter-being – a mutually dependent network of beings.[311]

The concept of harmony includes integrating the past and the present. Panikkar, in his vision, invites Christian reflection on religious pluralism. Without neglecting the past, he calls for appropriate new interpretations that incorporate both the 'text' and the 'context.' He observes that Christianity has grown in the contexts of the Jordan and the Tiber, but he raises the question: Should it remain so? He responds by suggesting a new direction - moving towards the Ganges. Panikkar reminds Christians to be fully aware of the fact that the geography of world Christianity cannot be reduced to the Jordan of Palestine, the Tiber of Italy, or the Ganges of India. At the same time, for Panikkar, the Ganges does not represent an exclusively Hindu River, rather it serves as a symbol of the wider world.[312] The new context of the Ganges is not just a new territory added to the old one, but the same territory seen in a new light. The art of theology consists of blending different factors into a convincing harmony. Harmony does not mean diluting the tradition for the sake of tolerance and avoiding a confessional stance. On the contrary, Christian rootedness and self-understanding must empower one to be open to other religious experiences and belief-forms (and systems), *to be willing to listen to them, to learn from them, and even to incorporate anything that appears to enrich or deepen Christian interpretation* and, in the process, to be ready for a mutual transformation. This interreligious fertilization may produce a new awareness and even, eventually, a new form of religious consciousness.[313] The historical dimension is necessary, he

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[311] See Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Parallax Press, 1993).
[312] Panikkar, "*The Jordan, The Tiber, and the Ganges*" 112.
[313] Ibid., 97.

says, but it is not sufficient. For this reason, he calls for "a living dialogue, a place for creative thinking and imaginative new ways that do not break with the past but to continue and extend it."[314]

Conclusion

The mission of encountering other religions happens in *conversation* and *participation*. To walk one's own faith path authentically in a pluralistic religious context, it is helpful to understand how those walking different paths make meaning of their religious journeys. Such awareness promotes discoveries and insights about humanity, dignity, and Christianity itself. Moreover, the broader understanding of the other religions reduces conflicts. Therefore, there cannot be a denial that despite religious extremism repudiating the positive role of other faith traditions in one's own, "there is a willingness to listen to believers in other traditions and to learn from their theological reflection is well-thought-out; as a part of the greater intercultural exchange."[315]

The church has a long history of Comparative Theology and inter-religious reflections. This history has been crafted by theological reflection built upon the experience of dialogue and encounter. The theological frameworks offered by Peter Phan, Raimon Panikkar, and Michael Amaladoss contribute to the church's history of reflection on interreligious dialogue, and they foster encountering other religions creatively. As was expounded upon above, three essential principles in their work are: "being religious interreligiously," growing in "mutual fecundation" between religions, and being willing to question 'one's Christian identity' in ways that can enhance dialogue.

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[314] Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, 28.
[315] Clooney, *Learning Interreligiously: In the Text, In the World* (S.l.: Fortress Press, 2018), 7.

Given the church's global context, a question remains: How will theological reflection on the mission of interreligious dialogue continue beyond the works of these thinkers? The diversity and plurality of religions globally, different types of theologies, and the insights of diverse theologians ought to be acknowledged and considered in one's work of interreligious dialogue. Dialogue and encounters between the church and diverse religions, especially on the part of theologians, can ensure the church's mission to witness to the relevance of Christianity while deepening commitment to encounter the faith traditions flourishing around the world. In this venture, that involves moving forward in new directions, the Comparative Theological method of Francis Clooney fosters a sense of interconnectedness to other traditions by deeper engagement with texts and rituals as "the method's focus on reading together with sensitivity to faith and reason, grounds a deeper validation and intensification of each tradition."[316]

Comparative Theology is done for the sake of constructive theological learning. Thus, for example, Stanley Samartha writes that the encounter with mystery is the core of all religion; mystery goes beyond mere reason, and rationality "is not the only way to do theology."[317] The theological frameworks offered by the theologians Raimon Panikkar, Michael Amaladoss and Peter Phan, need to be actualized by some method of religious encounter. The Comparative Theology method contributes to engaging other religious traditions and recognizes the important contributions made by the theologians mentioned above. In the next chapter, Comparative Theology as a theological method is discussed in the light of its significance for theology in general and systematic theology in particular.

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[316] Clooney, *Comparative Theology Deep Learning*, 4.
[317] Stanley Samartha "The Cross and the Rainbow: Christ in a Multi-Religious Culture," in *Christian Faith and Multiform culture in India*, ed. Soman Das, 69-88.

Advancing Clooney's Method of Comparative Theology

Introduction

The history of religious studies reveals a constant borrowing, refuting, and reinterpreting from different religious traditions. During the missionary era, in the 16-19th centuries, Comparative Theology focused on intensely studying languages, cultures, and religions. This approach contributed to languages and cultures, but much emphasis was laid on them as a means to evangelize. In comparing religions with the Hinduism, the colonial period claimed superiority of Christianity over indigenous cultures, religions, and languages. The following quote on the British debate over the Christianization of India, signal the superiority claims of the Christian faith.

> Their [Hindu] minds are totally uncultivated, that of the duties or morality they have no idea. That they possess a great degree of that cunning which so generally accompanies depravity of heart, that they are indolent, and grossly sensual, that they are cruel, cowardly, insolent, and abject, that they have superstitions without a sense of religion.[318]

Nevertheless, the Comparative Theology by Clooney, with its conscious, open, and systematic engagement of other religions, openly acknowledges and credits *other faiths as a repository for constructive theological insight.*[319] One raises a question regarding comparative theology; is it sufficiently theological? Clooney claims and has proven in his writings that he often engages fundamental issues in theology.[320] However, he is concerned that Comparative Theology is not merely a source of information about religions, wherein other religious traditions receive catechesis on questions such as who is God? Who is saved? As he states,

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[318] As quoted in Dharmapal, ed., *Despoliation and Defaming of India- the Early 19th Century British Crusade* (Wardha: Bharat Peetham,1999), 49.

[319]Cornille, *Meaning and Method*, 151.

[320] See, for instance, Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning; idem,* Hindu *God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries between Religion (*Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press. 2001).

while I do not argue for incommensurability, as if differences overwhelm all understanding, I do think we need to keep in mind the inadequacy of our categories, particularly when they are refined and technical while those using them have no grasp of the technical categories' operative in other traditions. The learning process is complex, and so this "theology with a difference" needs to be allowed to find its way. [321]

Comparative Theology aims to learn and see Christ differently, anew, and does not postulate movement from other religions to Christianity as a better religion.[322] Being an integral part of the theological tradition, this method represents a new frontier in theological thinking. It attempts to understand the meaning of the Christian faith with a constructive theology through the material it brings into the theological reflection mainly through textual, ritual, and experiential elements of other religious traditions.[323] John Thatamanil sees comparative theology as determining the truth of theological matters through *conversation* and *collaboration*.[324] Although various challenges exist in theologizing, Comparative Theology emerges as a constructive theology. This chapter elaborates on the salient features of Comparative Theology and advances the method by incorporating rituals and experiences as part of theologizing.

2.1. Challenges For Theologizing in the Modern World

2.1.1. Religious Pluralism

Francis Schussler Fiorenza identifies three basic ambiguities that characterize our present age theological task. They are pluralism and unity, rationality, and its critique, and finally power and its oppressiveness.[325] However, I focus on religious pluralism. In recognizing pluralism, we

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[321] Clooney, "On Some of the Current Challenges to Comparative Theology," 21.

[322] Ibid., 1.

[323] For Clooney, the term new was not meant to distance the field from its 19th-century precedents in any definitive fashion. Hugh Nicholson is the one who popularized the phrase "new comparative theology" as distinct from the version of earlier centuries. See Clooney, *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation,* (London; New York: T & T Clark. 2010).

[324] John Thatamanil, *The Immanent Divine: God, Creation and the Human Predicament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 3

[325] Francis Schussler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology: Task and Methods," 50.

acknowledge that God transcends human languages, and there is a need to express the Christian realities in terms of each one's culture, context, and problems.[326] Fiorenza maintains that no single philosophy can exist as a standard or cultural medium for theological reflection or as a link between faith and rationality in a pluralistic world.[327] Religious pluralism theologically has been responded to differently in different contexts of the world. Some people approach it from the outside-the so-called "objective," "scientific," or "philosophical" approach, and others see it from within their own religious tradition in which one believes, and one is committed.[328]

Paul Knitter goes beyond religious identity and perceives religions as a source for human liberation.[329] In a religiously pluralistic world, Jacques Dupuis offers a "generous theological evaluation of the world's other religious traditions."[330] Others suggest solutions to the complex religious situation using the model of religion-free public social order.[331] Amaladoss observes that in a religion free society, ideology dominates and pushes religion into the private sphere, which is disadvantageous to liberation theology because the methodology of liberation *praxis* begins with theological reflection on faith commitments of the poor and interpret their life experience of suffering from a faith perspective, that gives a vision of hope.[332] Liberation theology respects the autonomy of the public sphere but stresses that the insights of theology, expressed in the universal language of reason, emphasize the importance of protecting human dignity and promoting the flourishing of the human person and society. Today, articulating the significance, meaning, and

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[326] Yves Congar, *Diversity, and Communion* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1985), esp. 9-43 here 40.

[327] See Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), esp. 103-218.

[328] Amaladoss, *Interreligious Encounters, 114.*

[329] Paul f. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes to World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985); idem, *One Earth, Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

[330] Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 30

[331] Rajeev Bhargava, ed., *Secularism, and Its Critics* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Neera Chandhoke, *State and Civil Society: Explorations in Political Theory* (New Delhi: Sage, 1995).

[332] Amaladoss, *Interreligious Encounters, 117.*

unconditionality of the Christian theological vision needs to be done "not in isolation from other religious visions, but in relation to them."[333] Seeking a pluralistic view of theology does not mean negating unity. On the contrary, Congar, in his book *Diversity and Communion*, invites the church to embrace a "pluralist unity" and "rediscover unity."[334]

2.1.2. Growth of the World Church

Today theologies need to be developed within the context of ever-growing 'world church.' In the present age, Christians in Africa, Latin America, and Asia affirm their perspectives on the nature of the church and its mission. At the same time, they offer critiques of the unfair monopoly and colonization of theology by European and North American understandings of theology, the church, and its mission.[335] Recognizing the importance of local churches in the so-called Third World, especially in the Southern Hemisphere, Walter Buhlmann wrote *The Coming of the Third Church.* In his book, he recognizes the 'first church' in the Middle East and the 'second church' in Europe and North America,[336] and locates the 'third church' in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania.[337] The third church offers theology the perspectives of 'liberation theology' and 'religious pluralism' among others. In his book, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* Philip Jenkins draws attention to the massive demographic shift of the worldwide Christian population from the North (Europe and North America) to the South (Africa, Asia, and Latin

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[333] Francis Schussler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology: Task and Methods," 51.

[334] Yves Congar, *Diversity, and Communion* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1985), esp. 9-43 here 21.

[335] For instance, The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EAT-WOT) with its writings challenges the West See Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella, eds., *The emergent Gospel: Theology from the Developing World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978); Virginal Fabella, ed., *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1980); Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres, eds., *Irruption of the Third World: Challenges to theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983).

[336] In the North American Context, Spanish-speaking people are grouped as "Hispanic."

[337] Walbert Buhlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997).

America).[338] In his critique of the book, Peter Phan writes that the term Christendom is a "kind of Christianity that is papal, Roman, legalistic, political, and military, in short, Christendom."[339] Phan recognizes Christianity's demographic shift toward the South. In the midst of this shift, Phan cites two reasons for the church in the Northern and Southern hemispheres to remain more realistically united as communities in solidarity and communion. First, he states that local churches in the North and South should be viewed as communities in communion because theologically speaking, this widely accepted ecclesiology maintains that the universal church does not exist apart from nor is it simply a collection of local churches; rather, it is constituted by the reciprocal communion among local churches (*Lumen Gentium,* 2). [340] Secondly, Christianity in the North and Christianity in the South are communities in solidarity because local churches in the North and South need each other to be fully church in the effort to liberate themselves from possible excesses.[341] Although the church is made known to us through various images,[342] the opening section of *Lumen Gentium* emphasizes that the church in Christ is a sacrament, "a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and unity among all human beings."[343]

In reconciling different factors influencing theology, Harvey Cox argues that Joseph Ratzinger favored a recentering of the church intellectually and theologically within its ancient

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[338] Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[339] Phan, "A New Christianity, But What Kind?" *Mission Studies* 22/1 (2005), 59-83 here 60.

[340] Phan, "Doing Theology in World Christianity: Different Resources and New Methods," *Journal of World Christianity* 1, no. 1 (2008): 29.

[341] For example, Phan writes, "Northern Christianity will have to learn a lot from Southern Christianity's serious (which is not the same as "literal") engagement with the Bible and its practices of healing, prophetic utterance, and exorcism, Southern Christianity will find it profitable to take seriously (which is not the same as slavishly) Northern Christianity's more scholarly interpretation of the Bible and more sober approach to supernatural phenomena." He cites the example of tragic case of AIDs "While a cure of AIDS through faith healing and exorcism is not a priori impossible, it would be a sacred duty for Southern and Northern Christians to provide modern medicine as part of health care." Phan, "A New Christianity, But What Kind?" 79-80.

[342] LG, no. 6.

[343] LG, no. 1.

homeland, meaning Europe. He further contends that Ratzinger by privileging Hellenistic philosophical assumptions promoted a "restoration" of cultural Christendom in which theological formulations and philosophical suppositions were clear and distinct. Whereas Leonard Boff, who was silenced by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, favored 'decentering' whereby the Gospel takes root in various cultures and flourishes, especially among the poor.[344] In his own approach to decentering theology, Johann Baptist Metz makes the memory of suffering central to his theology. The concept of "dangerous memories" was first proposed in the secular philosophy of Harbert Marcus of the Frankfurt school. Within his theological approach, Metz sees the Gospels containing the "dangerous memory" of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through his acute awareness of the egregious suffering of the *Shoah* initiates this particular dangerous memory into a specifically Catholic-Christian theological perspective. His appeal to the dangerous memories of all of history's victims' ties directly into the dangerous memory of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. This paradigmatic memory functions as one of resistance and hope before a God for whom all are alive, even those who die prematurely and unjustly are not lost permanently.[345]

2.2. Comparative Theology as a Constructive Theology

With its openness, to a new way of doing theology and mission in a religiously diverse world, Clooney's Comparative Theology responds to the real needs of the world church. With its constructive theological approach, it provides innovative foundations for the ongoing mission of interreligious dialogue and encounter.[346] In this task, the definition of theology as faith-seeking understanding needs to be deeply grasped. There are three words in the definition- 'faith, understanding, and seeking.' Writing on theology from a global perspective, Stephen Bevans states

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[344] Harvey Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff* (Oak Park, IL: Meyer-Stone, 1988).
[345] See Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 87-113.
[346] Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning*, 8.

that the words 'faith' and 'understanding' need to be kept together. Overemphasizing either faith or understanding may lead to 'fideism' and 'rationalism,' respectively.[347] Theology is not mere curiosity or analysis of someone else's faith but rather it requires us "to think within the context of personal assent to the offer of revelation."[348] In his book *Catholicism*, Richard McBrien, a US theologian, writes that "not all interpretations of faith are theological. Theology happens where there is an interpretation of one's faith. Apart from that faith, the expression of faith is a philosophy of religion rather than a theology."[349] Theology is done only in the context of one's faith. In theological terminology, faith means specifically the assent given to a truth, as in the subjective acts and disposition by which doctrine is believed (*fides qua creditur*); faith can also be defined as the objective body of saving truth as contained in the Scriptures, creeds, and Magisterium of the Church (*fides quae creditur*).[350] "Faith" says Thomas Aquinas, "is the habit of mind by which eternal life is begun is us, making the intellect assent to things that do not appear."[351] In this regard, the Second Vatican Council emphasized,

> The obedience of faith" (Rom. 16:26; see 1:5; 2 Cor 10:5-6) "is to be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals," and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him. To make this act of faith, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind and giving "joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it." To bring about an ever deeper understanding of revelation the same Holy Spirit constantly brings faith to completion by His gifts.[352]

Gordon D. Kaufman, in his book, *In Face of Mystery,* asserts that all theological formulations are the products of humans endeavoring to offer a response to the mystery that

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[347] Bevan, *Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, Maryknoll/New York: Orbis Books 2009) 36.
[348] Ibid.
[349] Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, two vols (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1980), 1:60-61.
[350] Peter Stravinskas, "Faith" in *Catholic Dictionary* (Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc, 2002), 317.
[351] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q.4, art. 1c
[352] *Dei Verbum*, no. 5.

encompasses our world.[353] He acknowledges that our understanding of God has become implausible, unacceptable, and intolerable as the world is dominated by white men who have oppressed and marginalized countless other with their understanding of God. He observes that be loss of an experience of God or a lack of certainty about the existence of God is the beginning of the breakdown of our humanity. To take any human responses as definitive or referential is idolatry as these formulations relativize the mystery and the "imaginative construction," projects limited images of God because they are historically conditioned, culturally formed within a particular worldview, and are in need of constant reconstruction. [354] For instance, Liberation Theology asserts that the "Christian theology which does not contribute significantly to the struggles against inhumanity, injustice and the other serious evils of the world has lost sight of its deepest *raison D'etre*.[355] Kaufman suggests that one must never hold that one has finally grasped the mystery, which is God. Looking at theology as a construction stance, he invites us,

> To open ourselves to everything human, to every position and claim; to listen sympathetically to every kind of experience-Christian, communist, Buddhist, deconstructionist, radical feminist, Muslim, liberal humanist, Nazi; to search for the human in everyone. Furthermore, it encourages deep concern for the full range of modes and dimensions of being in our world—respect for every expression of the ultimate mystery of things.[356]

However, he warns that our God-talk in the process of humanization with our own imaginative construct, must not fall into the category of self-idolatry. He goes on to say that "to confess God's reality is to confess the God that is truly God, the ultimate reality which is not to be

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[353] For Kaufman, the mystery is the principal metaphor for God. In substituting reality for mystery, Thomas A. James argues that Kaufman's theology offers an objective God who "really acts in the world Thomas A. James, *In Face of Reality: The Constructive Theology of Gordon D. Kaufman* (Eugene, Pickwick, 2011), 1.

[354] Gordon D. Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 3.

[355] Ibid., xi.

[356] Ibid., xiii.

confused with any of "imaginative constructions."[357] Keeping these views in mind, we can affirm that Comparative Theology is truly a constructive theology.

2.2.1. Faith Seeking Understanding

The method of Comparative Theology advanced by Clooney and others keeps together "faith, understanding and seeking," because the method itself is marked by a firm faith commitment on the part of the comparative theologian, a commitment that involves both the "intellect and the affective" - the mind and the heart of religion. Through the "intelligent reading" and "affective participation" in rituals and performative dimensions of religion Comparative Theology holds together both "faith" and "understanding." For instance, my research project on Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas,* aimed at integrating "intelligent reading" and "affective participation," resulting in new learning for home tradition. This learning, Clooney maintains, "as we learn another tradition in some depth, we will then begin also to re-read our own in light of that other. In the end, because we are theologians, we must also put the whole together to be able to communicate our learning to wider academic and faith communities."[358]

The phrase "seeking" denotes going deeper to expand the vision of 'mystery.' In Latin American Liberation Theology, "seeking" involves an attempt to make sense out of a life surrounded by inhuman conditions and hopelessness in order to heal it and transform it.[359] In the Asian context, 'seeking' involves theologizing and understanding God's presence in the realities of other faith traditions, histories, cultures, and the poverty of Asian people. Thus, in his process of doing theology Aloysius Pieris invites every Asian to be baptized in the Jordan of Asian religions

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[357] Ibid., 353.
[358] Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 60
[359] See Roger Haight, *An Alternative Vision: An Interpretation of Liberation Theology* (New York/Mahwah: NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 64-82.

and crucified on the cross of Asian poverty.[360] Comparative Theology's "seeking" involves going deeper with greater passion into the religious texts, rituals, and material objects of religion. My research on the *Mānas* which I discuss in Chapters Three and Four appropriately enables "seeking" to understand the divine mystery theologically and carry out the mission of interreligious dialogue in greater depth.

2.2.2. Distinguished Resources for Theology

Comparative Theology is constructive, in part, because it brings to theological reflection valuable resources and materials form other religious traditions and particular contexts. After the Second Vatican Council, theologians realized that theology can no longer be "one-size-fits-all" enterprise, rather it is shaped by the times and cultures in which it has been and is being articulated.[361] Hence, Anslem's definition of theology as faith-seeking understanding cannot be the only universally valid and universally applicable expression of this quest. Roger Haight, in his identification of religious pluralism as an important dimension of Christian life points out that "despite the assumption that there is a fundamental unity in being and commonality of human beings, historical consciousness implies historicity. In Haight's view,

> historicity means no experience of ultimate or transcendent reality can be separated from that which mediates or grounds it historically. This implies that every experience of ultimate reality can be subject to reflective critique because of its limitation….there is no universal meaning that not also tied to the situation of the one who entertains it. Therefore, all experiences and conceptions of ultimate reality are subject to comparison, and valuative judgments in and through study, dialogue and dialectic.[362]

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[360] Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 45-50.
[361] Originally published as chapter 1 in *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, 9–26.
[362] Roger Haight, "Jesus and World Religions," *Modern Theology*, 12, no. 3 (July 1996): 325. For the description of Historical consciousness and method see Ernst Troeltsch, *The Absoluteness of Christianity, and the History of Religions*, trans by David Reid (Richmond John Knox Press, 1971), 45-57, 63-65, 85-106

Thus, Haight contends, "Jesus calls the imagination back to the historical person who is the sole originating source of the content or positive data that we have about the risen Jesus Christ."[363] Theology must be done in the context of community and in face-to-face conversation. Thus Bevans argues that there can be no 'universal theology' there are only contextual theologies.[364] Today understanding the Christian faith in terms of a particular contexts has become truly a "theological imperative."[365] "Contextual theology" as a way of doing theology, considers two things. First, it considers the experience of the past, the experience of our ancestors in the faith as recorded in scripture, and the doctrinal tradition both as a source and as a parameter of our Christian life and Christian theologizing. Second, it recognizes the experience of the present context in which Christians live. The context includes particular time, a particular culture, and the social location of the Christian community. Moreover, the context is constantly changing due to the external factors such as globalization and migration. As a consequence, Christians are called upon to reevaluate their faith and commitment.[366] In the past, theology was understood as reflection on the faith as revealed to us in two modalities of Scripture and Tradition, and as one sacred deposit of the word of God. As *Dei Verbum* states,

> there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Consequently, it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore, both sacred

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[363]Haight, "Jesus and World Religions," 324.
[364] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 2002.
[365] Ibid., 1-15.
[366] Ibid., 2-3.

tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.[367]

However, today, theology identifies contemporary human experience as a theological source or a "*locus theologicus*."[368] This understanding does not negate the normativity of Scripture and Tradition for the Christian faith and theology, but these resources are also seen from the perspectives of the faith experience of the Christian people. Bevan states,

> To be a Christian and a Christian theologian means to be faithful to the community of believers, faithful to our ancestors in the faith whose wisdom we constantly draw upon and to whom we need to be responsible. To be Christian, in other words, means to be faithful to the Christian Tradition. But that had fidelity-given the plurality of the tradition- has to be a creative one. [369]

Edward Schillebeeckx in the introduction of *Geloofsverstaan* (The Understanding of Faith), defines theological hermeneutics by describing its two major tasks. (a) 'how to interpret the biblical message of God's Reign, and how to affirm such interpretation as a Christian interpretation', and (b) 'how to account for such a Christian interpretation of reality to modern thinking.[370] Furthermore, for Schillebeeckx, the category of 'experience' is crucial in order to analyze the current situation. David Tracy speaks of this process as a "critical correlation" between the experience of the past and the present experience.[371] For contextual theology both kinds of experiences are normative. Thus, theology is done by allowing the experience of today to be measured, judged, interpreted, and critiqued by the wisdom found in classical sources and by allowing those "classics" to be measured, judged, interpreted, and critiqued by the current realities of our lives, by our cultural values, by our struggles, and by the epochal changes that are shaping

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[367] *Dei Verbum*, no. 9

[368] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 4.

[369] Bevans, *Essays in Contextual Theology* (Boston: Brill, 2018), 69.

[370] Edward Schillebeeckx, *Geloofsverstaan: Interpretatie en kritiek, Theologische peilingen*, V (Bloemendaal: Nelissen, 1972); ET: The Understanding of Faith: Interpretation and Criticism (London and New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1974).

[371] David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 45–46; 79–81

our world.[372] Bevans offers six models of contextual theology.[373] In his view, contexts constantly change, and theology has to change constantly as well.[374]

Over the centuries, many have undertaken the task, and every theology constructed is recognized as contextual theology. Bevans and Schroeder point out that in the history of the church's mission, there are six "constants." They include Christology, ecclesiology, eschatology soteriology, anthropology, and inculturation. These constants "shape the way the church will preach, serve, and witness to God's reign." [375] To do theology today from a global perspective, ironically, is to look to the local, because we need the blossoming of theologies in every part of the world, in every historical situation, among every social group. To do theology out of our concrete situation today is no longer an option.[376] The contextual approach demands finding new language and expressions. With our current global context of religious pluralism, Comparative Theology contributes specific resources for doing theology. These resources function as a 'depository' for theologizing. Clooney asserts that Comparative Theology "can make possible new insights into familiar and even revered truths, and new ways of receiving those truths."[377] As he states,

> Comparative Theology can also be thought of as truly constructive theology, distinguished by its sources and ways of proceeding, by its foundation in more than one tradition (although the comparative theologian remains rooted in one tradition), and by reflection

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[372] On "The Classic," see David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 99–192.

[373] The translation model, anthropological model, the Praxis model, the transcendental model, the synthetic model counter-cultural model (see: Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology)*. A Model according to Avery Dulles is "a relatively simple, artificially constructed case which is found to be useful and illuminating for dealing with realities that are more complex and differentiated. Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 30

[374] Bevans, *Methods in Contextual Theology*, 94.

[375] Bevans, *Constants in Context,* 33-34.

[376] Bevans, *Methods in Contextual Theology*, 29.

[377] Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 112.

which builds on that foundation, rather than simply on themes and methods already articulated prior to the comparative practice.[378]

The material it brings enables the understanding of one's theological positions within the broader religious and theological horizons through its more profound engagement with the texts, rituals, and performances.[379] Cornille notes that Comparative Theology "introduces a massive amount of new data which are not easy to assess. Moreover, traditional confessional theologians typically do not have the training to judge the validity and relevance of the work of comparative theologians."[380] This view of Cornille, in my opinion seems debatable. The study of *Mānas,* within the context of Varanasi's religious and ritual atmosphere, brings in resources for encounter and theologizing. For instance, the performative dimension of *Mānas*, which is different from the textual but emerging from the text, draws our attention to the non-linguistic dimensions of religions can be evaluated and judged by confessional theologians.

John Maraldo points out that some religious practices are "done for their own sake or for the sake of a goal inseparable from their very performance" to overcome all discursive thinking."[381] Engaging in ritual and performative practices "not only increase the amount of content understood; it can change the very way one understands."[382] The challenging questions on ritual participation, acknowledging the divinity of non-Christian deities may intrigue the practitioner in developing a theology. However, Comparative Theology shows a way "to determine the truth of theological matters through conversation and collaboration" with other faith traditions.[383] Because the method

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[378] Clooney, "Comparative Theology: A Review of Recent Books (1989-1995)," *Theological Studies* 26, no. 3 (1995): 522.

[379] Cornille, *Meaning, and Method,* 150

[380] Ibid.

[381] John Maraldo, "A Call for an Alternative Form of Understanding," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, ed. Catherine Cornille and C. Conway (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 113.

[382] Ibid., 114.

[383] Thatamanil, *The Immanent Divine*, 3.

draws on non-textual, ritual, and religious materials that are woven together for a better comparative theological narrative.[384]

Emphasizing the resources drawn from non-academic circles for theology, Bevans claims that theology is not so much content but rather, an activity, essentially a contextual activity, and not necessarily done discursively. He treats theology as a work in progress' that is continually being shaped and reshaped so as to expand within a worldwide conversation. He emphasizes that the process of doing theology not only involves academic work and study, but also poetry, drama, and the visual and musical arts, among other endeavors. In short, doing theology involves a whole range of expressions that seek to understand and elucidate the relationship between God and his human creatures. If doing theology can be best described as 'faith seeking understanding', Bevan writes, "an important qualification must be added: Doing theology must be faith seeking understanding together." [385]

Sensing the intellectual, affective, religious, artistic, personal, and societal soul of both persons and institutions in Asia, Asian theology must be constructed with the diversity of the "cultural texts" of Asia.[386] Peter Phan points out that the documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference, in correlation with the Bible and the Tradition of the Church, use Asian resources, and the "use of these resources implies a tremendous change in theological methodology."[387] The cultures of peoples, the history of their struggles, their religions, their religious scriptures, oral traditions, popular religiosity, economic and political realities, and world events, historical personages, stories of oppressed people crying out for justice, freedom, dignity,

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[384] Clooney, *Comparative Theology*: *Deep Learning*, 67.
[385] Bevans, *Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, xvi.
[386] On cultural texts, see RJ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 39-74.
[387] Federation of Asian Bishops' Office of Theological Concerns, M*ethodology: Asian Christian Theology: Doing Theology in Asia*, 29.

life, and solidarity all become the raw material of theology, in a "context."[388] The resources available in the Asian context are called multifaith or multireligious, or cross-cultural.[389] Phan maintains that the resources available must be interpreted from multifaith perspectives in order to promote cross-cultural and cross-religious dialogue and thereby to achieve a "wider intertextuality."[390]

2.2.3. Contributor to Global Theology

The Comparative Theology of Clooney contributes to global theology, particularly in the context of growing religious extremism in the world through its method of "reading." Religious violence has created prejudices among religions. These prejudices emerge out of superiority and exclusivist claims by religions. The learning of rectification in Comparative Theology restores to the other religion its own self-understanding. Cornille maintains that: "in recognizing similarities and one's occasional indebtedness to the other certain traditional claims of superiority and exclusivity may be disputed and one's own religion reinstated in its proper relationship with the religious other."[391] The removal of overgeneralizations and prejudices occurs only in the context of more profound and sustained encounters. Comparative Theology offers such a possibility with its focus on 'intertextual reading.' The goal of "wider intertextuality" can be achieved through the Comparative Theological method given its hermeneutics. As Cornille maintains, "though the goal of Comparative Theology is to approach the self-understanding of the other, the perspective of the outsider may also yield theological fruit, even for the insider."[392] In this interpretation of resources,

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[388] *Federation of Asian Bishops' Office of Theological Concerns*, Methodology, 29.

[389] Phan, "Doing Theology in World Christianity: Different Resources and New Methods" 43.

[390] George M. Soares-Prabhu, "Two Mission Commands: An Interpretation of Matthew 18: 16-20 in the Light of a Buddhist Text," *Biblical Interpretation* 2/3 (1994) 282. See also Archie Lee, "Biblical Interpretation in Asian Perspective," *Asia Journal of Theology* 7/1 (1993) 35-39.

[391] Cornille, *Meaning, and Method in Comparative Theology*, 122.

[392] Ibid., 87.

"no outsider perspective is normative or conclusive, each may contribute to deepening the self-understanding of the insider."[393]

Acknowledging the importance of Clooney's "intellectual reading" in Comparative Theology, Bevans suggests an "intercontextual" approach to various contextual theologies. Bevan views that "one contextual theology can be taken as a "text" to be "read" by another contextual theology so that the "reader" might be enlightened, challenged, or enriched by that reading."[394] He cites the example of such "readings" and dialogues happening in the context of a world Christianity. For instance, there has been a conversation going on among theologians regarding US black liberation theology, particularly as developed by James Cone, and black theologies of liberation that began to emerge in South Africa during the time of apartheid.[395] There also has been a dialogue between Latin American Liberation Theology and US Latino/a Theology that emphasizes culture and popular religiosity.[396] Jonathan Tan documents the dialogue between Asian theologies and Asian contextual realities as rich sources for Asian American theologians.[397] The answers that emerge from these 'readings' for Bevans hold out a future for theologizing from the perspective of world Christianity.[398]

The contribution of Comparative Theology's methodology is brought to the fore by Bevans to advance a way of doing theology from a global perspective. Bevans compares the global nature

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[393] Ibid., 87.

[394] Bevans, *Essays in Contextual Theology*, 178.

[395] See Mokgethi Motlhabi, "The History of Black Theology in South Africa," in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, eds. Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 224. Motlhabi cites, in particular, Basil Scott Moore, "Black Theology in the Beginning," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 4, no. 2 (September 1991): 25.

[396] See, for example, Roberto S. Goizueta, "Third World Theologies in the First World: Hispanic," in Fabella and Sugirtharajah, *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, 212–14.

[397] Jonathan Y. Tan, *Introducing Asian American Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008). Also, see 105–106 for a mention of Peter Phan.

[398] Bevans, *Essays in Contextual Theology*, 179.

of theology to Classical music "variations," as men and women seeking to understand their faith in this particular time of World Christianity and global consciousness.[399] In his perspective, the "variations" in theology affect the content of theology and the way theology is understood in general.[400] Theology must not be seen only from an academic perspective, but also from the perspective of everyday people wo need to recognized as "real theologians."[401] Among these variations, One discovers that theology is not done only in articles, homilies, books, or in classrooms. Some of the best theology available also can be found in literature, performances, art, and music.

The study of the *Mānas* as a ritual and performative text offers enough resources for theology from the aesthetic point of view. My encounters in Varanasi were not in libraries or academic circles. However, meeting ordinary Hindus in their faith journey, participating in their rituals and performances of the *Rāmkathā, Rāmlil*a, illustrated for me and for others that "faith has many more ways of seeking understanding than that of cold prose and human words."[402] As Michael Amaladoss writes, theology is "not ….an abstract philosophical elaboration of eternal verities reserved to a few expert professionals. Instead, it is a discerning search for God in the here and now of history that is the concern for everyone." [403] In the twenty-first century, concerted efforts at decentering, along with lived experiences and spiritual practices have received greater prominence in theological circles. Given that religious studies are distinct from other studies in the

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[399] Bevans, *An Introduction to theology in Global Perspective*, 45.

[400] Bevans points out eight variations; namely, theology is not exclusively an academic endeavor, theology is always done in community, theology is not just a body of knowledge but an activity, every genuine theology is a contextual theology, Theology is about personal and communal transformation, theology affects both spirituality and ministry, theology is done with a "missiological imagination,' and Theology is not done Discursively (See *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, 46-60)

[401] Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, 46.

[402] Ibid., 58.

[403] Michael Amaladoss, foreword to JoJo M. Fung, *Shoes-Off Barefoot We Walk A Theology of Shoes-Off* (Kuala Lumpur: Longman Malaysia, 1992), xi.

humanities and sciences. As a result of the emergence of ethnographic studies and participatory sociology, the academic study of religion now includes the study of lived experience within religious communities. Popular traditions, lives of saints and ritual practices have been central to the study of religions and have become important sources for theology.[404] Deeper involvement with the 'dialogue of life' affects one personally as well as one's mission. Jacques Dupuis, who served the church as a member of the Society of Jesus for fifty-three years, of which thirty-six were spent in India, writes,

> Today in the light of what I have seen and lived thereafter, that my exposure to the Indian reality has been the greatest grace I received from God as far as my vocation as a theologian and a professor is concerned. One cannot live thirty-six years in India without being deeply affected by the experience. This is already true at the level of sheer human reality. By sheer numbers, it is no longer possible to think that the future of the world lies on 'this' side; it belongs, whether we like it or not, to the so-called Third world, and especially to the Asian continents.[405]

While engaged in dialogue with people and their lives we are brought to the realization, as Dupuis says, that "as a result, my own faith has been deepened through dialogue with the religions."[406] As a consequence of his experiences Dupuis was enabled to advocate for a theological discourse and *praxis* that extended to all human beings, regardless of religious affiliation, to engage in a deeper discovery of the cosmic dimensions of the mystery of God and God's design for all humankind. Hence the theologian's task is not to do theology not for a billion Catholics in the world, or even for a billion and a half Christians, but rather, to do theology for the six billion human beings who share the same 'global village' on our planet.[407] Mindful of this claim, Comparative Theologians

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[404] Francis Schussler Fiorenza "Systematic Theology: Task and Methods," in *Systematic Theology Roman Catholic Perspectives,* second edition eds. Francis Schussler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (???) 1-78 71
[405] Dupuis, "My Pilgrimage in Mission," 168- 169.
[406] Ibid.
[407] Dupuis, *Christianity, and Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue*, trans. Philip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY. Orbis, 2002), 11.

take up the challenge posed by Dupuis and make a sincere effort to theologize by going beyond their own home tradition and crossing over to other traditions.

2.3. Salient Features of Comparative Theology

2.3.1. Confessional Character

The confessional character of a Comparative Theologian is vital to the method as it represents the starting point or the key point of reference in engaging other religions. Since Comparative Theology contributes to theological reflection within a particular religious tradition, this confessional feature is essential to the method. Clooney maintains that in his method, he seeks "to develop plausible views on God's existence, character, embodiment and revelation in a way that is recognizable to Christians and able to be affirmed by Christians."[408] This confessional character ensures accountability to a larger theological and religious community. Acknowledging the importance of this normative commitment, Reid Locklin and Hugh Nicholson state that the "recognition of normative commitment remains a methodological problem for most religious scholars in religious studies even today, [but] it belongs to the very nature of the comparative theological project."[409]

While narrating on normative commitment and immersing oneself as much as possible in the traditions and texts of others, Clooney writes, "I write from within the Christian tradition and from a Christian perspective."[410] In participating in the faith traditions of others, Clooney was more than a spectator but "nevertheless remained always a Jesuit, a Roman Catholic priest who was also helping out on Sunday mornings in a large urban parish."[411] Clooney in his book, *Hindu*

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[408] Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 27.
[409] Nicholson and Reid Locklin, "The Return of Comparative Theology," 490.
[410] Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, 21.
[411] Clooney, *Seeing Through Texts*, 46.

God Christian God points out his method as interreligious, comparative, dialogical, and confessional (or apologetic). In his perspective, "if theology is an intellectual religious activity practiced in various cultural settings, and if theologians can profitably notice similarities and differences across religious boundaries, this comparative and interreligious theology ideally becomes dialogical."[412] This dialogical nature does not mean a mutual agreement exists amidst religious boundaries. On the contrary, the confessional character involves being apologetic, meaning that comparative theologians "should be able to affirm the content of their faith as true, render it intelligible to those who believe it already, and venture to put persuasive arguments before outsiders in order to demonstrate the truth of the faith, which might even lead some outsiders to believe and convert."[413] The confessional character involves testifying and criticizing, explaining, and arguing, persuading, and disproving. This need not be a problem. However, while doing so, one must be receptive too and acknowledge that one's own theology is not beyond criticism. Clooney states that "such is the high price for useful apologetics today."[414]

Similarly, Cornille points out four principal ways through which Comparative Theology manifests its confessional nature: "in the avowedly religious identity of the comparative theologian, in the choice of the topics, the criteria of discernment, and the stated goal of the comparative theological exercise."[415] From a confessional perspective, the choice of material for Comparative Theology arises from pressing theological questions and challenges that surface from the home tradition. But, again, the criterion of discernment is derived from one's own religious tradition. For instance, for Christians, unconditional love and self-sacrifice becomes criteria for

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[412] Clooney, *Hindu God Christian God*, 10.
[413] Ibid., 11-12.
[414] Ibid., 12.
[415] Cornille, *Meaning and Method*, 18.

assessing the truth of another religion or practice.[416] Based on the contours of our dialogue the criteria can be expanded. Cornille goes on to identify that "a good number of criteria of discernment are in fact shared by numerous religious traditions. And resorting to the revealed norms of a particular tradition may be regarded as a humble recognition that from a position of faith one cannot but understand and assess the teachings and practices of another form within the contours of one's own tradition."[417] Today, so-called experts on religion rarely have theological training or are confessional in their approach to religion. The confessional identity of a theologian may differ based on the context of religions. Some religions are well-defined while others are more flexible, some focus on orthodoxy and others on orthopraxy. Based on the level of engagement, the confessional element influences the interpretation of the text as well as the level of participation in rituals and performative experiences.

2.3.2. Critique of the Confessional Approach

Critique of the confessional character of Comparative Theology merit consideration. By way of example, Henning Wrogemann suspects that the confessional character may lead to "assimilation to one's own convictions and impose a Christian metanarrative."[418] However, Wrogemann's criticism is unfair given the fact that Comparative Theology also may take an approach that is unconstrained by the doctrinal or ritual limits of any tradition in a broad circle of meta-confessional or "theology without walls." In an era of multi-religious belonging and a "millennial age," there has been a growth in the multiplication of loyalties or the simultaneous

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[416] Gavin D'Costa, "Roman Catholic Reflections on Discerning God in Interreligious Dialogue: Challenges and Promising Avenues," in *Criteria of Discernment in Interreligious Dialogue*, ed., c. Cornille (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 69-86.

[417] Cornille, *Meaning and Method*, 23.

[418] Henning Wrogemann, *Intercultural theology volume 3, Interreligious Relations* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2019), 120.

holding of hybrid identities among individuals.[419] The hybrid generation pays attention to universal claims and to an absence of actual or particular communities. For example, Paul Knitter claiming a Buddhist Christian identity and, in his search for an "inclusive pluralist" stance, writes, "*Without Buddha, I could not be a Christian.*"[420] In his view, Christianity offers norms for social justice and Buddhism offers them concerning spirituality. Knitter writes

> I'm not amputating a traditional Christian belief and replacing it with a Buddhist transplant. Rather, the notion of Awakening has become, for me, a flashlight by which I've discovered, and retrieved symbols and teachings that were on the dusty back shelves of the Christian tradition or simply noticed and appreciated by many of its Christians.[421]

Current trends continue to influence individuals who are looking for a consensus between various religions intent on developing a "global theology."[422] There are others, especially among the millennials, who belong to the category of "non-affiliated" and recognize themselves as "spiritual but not religious" or they fit into "nones" category.[423] The commitment to one religious tradition seems to be undervalued. However, Fletcher writes, "even in the situation of hybrid/multiple identities and even those who abstain from claiming religious identity is also at home in

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[419] The generation born between 1980 and 194, because of their familiarity with and reliance on technology, is labeled by the social researchers as Millennial age. Howe and Strauss ascribe them distinct characteristics from the previous generations. They view the millennials as optimistic, team-oriented achievers who are talented with technology and claim that they will be America's next 'great generation.' (See N. Howe and W. Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Vintage, 2000); idem, *Millennials Go to College* (Washington, DC: American Association of Collegiate Registrars d Admissions Office, 2003).

[420] Paul F. Knitter, *Without Buddha, I Could not be a Christian* (Oxford: One world, 2009).

[421] Ibid., 115.

[422] See Wilfred Cantwell Smith*, Towards a World Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981).

[423] Robert C. Fuller writes that the Nones as seekers differentiate between spirituality and religion, connecting the former with a privately expressed faith and the latter with the creeds and rituals publicly expressed in religious institutions. These "spiritual but not religious" individuals pick and choose elements from various beliefs and practices as they construct an individualized spirituality; Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) Linda A. Mercadante notes that Nones are not atheists (as many believe in a supreme being or other spiritual presence) and are a reaction against a perceived secularizing trend or overconfidence in science. In their search, she says that meaning making has shifted from "religious and civic institutions to popularly mediated gathering places," such as the Internet, social media, self-help literature, television, and film; Linda A. Mercadante, *Belief Without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual But Not Religious* (New York: Oxford University Press. 2014), 34.

comparative theology."[424] Robert Neville, speaking from his perspective suggests that a commitment to a specific religion must come at the end of the inquiry and not at the beginning. In his perspective, Comparative Theology needs to be seen "more than faith seeking understanding" and more as "understanding seeking faith."[425]

The above thinkers point out that Comparative Theology could be undertaken without being rooted in a particular religious tradition. These positions are best described as interreligious theology,[426] or trans-religious theology.[427] However, interreligious theology is viewed as an expression of an extremely high level of intellectual sophistication. At a more popular level, it has been seen as a market-driven hybrid spirituality of 'well-being.' While recognizing that a primary commitment to a particular faith community and confessing one's faith is an essential element of Comparative Theology deep immersion into another religious tradition poses a challenge when identifying oneself with another tradition leads to a "fluid identity." In her book, *Dualities*, Michelle Vos Roberts compares the writings of Christian mystic Mechthild of Magdeburg, and the Kashmir Shaiva theologian Lalleśwarī, both of whom use the concept of fluidity as an essential theme in their writings.[428] In the life of Abhishiktananda, his total immersion into the Hindu world

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[424] See Jeannine Hill Fletcher "Shifting Identity: The Contribution of Feminist Thought to Theologies of Religious Pluralism," *Journal of feminist studies in religion* (2003-10-01), 19/2, 5-24.

[425] Robert Neville, "On Comparative Theology: Theology of Religions of Trans- Religious Discipline," *Annual Comparative Theology Lecture at the Harvard Centre for the Study of World Religions*, March 2017 (forthcoming in the Brill Companion to Comparative Theology, ed. W. Valkenberg); 18-20

[426] For example, Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Religious Pluralism and Interreligious Theology* (Mary knoll: Orbis books, 2017).

[427] See, for example, J. R. Hustwit, "Myself, Only Moreso: Conditions for the Possibility of Trans religious Theology," *Open Theology* 2, no.1 (2016): 236-41.

[428] Mechthild of Magdeburg (1207-1282), a Christian Mystic, presented strongly feminine images of mysticism in exquisite poetry to God. Her book *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit* (*The Flowing Light of Divinity*) is a compendium of visions, prayers, dialogues, and mystical accounts. Lalleshwari (1320-1392) is a Kashmiri Mystic of Kashmiri Shaivism, a school of Hinduism. Her mystical poetry is known as '*vākh*s' (meaning speech). She is recognized as a Siva yogini (enlightened one). Voss Roberts offers both a close comparative reading of the thirteenth-century Christian beguine Mechthild of Magdeburg and the fourteenth-century Saiva visionary Lalleshwarı of in her book (See, Michelle Voss Roberts *Dualities: A Theology of Difference* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

was an experience of fluidity, as he floated between Christianity and Hinduism.[429] Clooney points out that through encountering and comparative learning, there emerges a "cultivated hybridity." This leads to the creation of "liminal religious community." In the midst of these uncomfortable and uncertain positions, one discovers that this challenging position "must not only be tolerated, but it is necessary, and it must be intentionally nurtured."[430] These tensions emerge due to one's confession of faith. In my encountering other religions and using the approach of Comparative Theology, I preferred to remain faithful to my 'home tradition,' and being accountable to a particular faith tradition. At the same time, I wholeheartedly accepted the generous hospitality of others and struggled with the experience of fluidity and fluid identity. [431]

2.3.3. Textual Focus in Comparative Theology

Clooney's method emphasizes the 'back and forth' (*exitus-reditus*) reading of texts as the texts provide a scope as well as clear boundaries for comparative analysis.[432] He explains his decision to focus exclusively on texts by pointing out that a "narrow focus in the face of diverse possibilities is a feature of all academic disciplines."[433] But he does not exclude the importance of practices of faith. He points out that text-based learning has been part of Christian theological tradition that includes studying the Bible, the text of Church Fathers, and church documents.

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[429] Swami Abhishiktananda*, Essential Writings* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), 85. Abhishiktananda (1910-1973), born Henri Le Saux, was a French monk, moved to India in 1948 in search of a radical form of spiritual life. Along with Jules Monchanin (1985-1957), a French monk known as Swami Paramarubyananda, he became a disciple of the greatest sages of Modern India, Sri *Ram*ana Maharshi (1879-1950). The sage greatly impacted Abhishiktananda and, following Indian tradition, became one of the pioneers of Hindu-Christian dialogue. See *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart, The Spiritual Diary (1948-1973) of Swami Abhishiktananda* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998).

[430] Clooney, *Comparative Theology*: *Deep Learning*, 159

[431] See, Duane R. Bidwell, *When One Religion isn't Enough: The Lives of Spiritually Fluid People* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018); Esther McIntosh, "Living Religion: The Fluidity of Practice," in *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 79, no. 4 (2018); 383-396; Graham Adams, *Theology of Religions: Through the Lens of Truth- as-Openness* (Leiden/Boston: BRILL, 2019).

[432] Lissa Gasson Gardner and Jason Smith, "Feeling Comparative Theology, Millennial Affect and Reparative Learning," 117.

[433] Clooney, *Comparative Theology*: *Deep Learning*, 67-68.

However, Clooney opines that "refocusing learning on "lived religion" may make Comparative Theology less distinct from religious and anthropological studies, and even more marginal to the way most theologians do their work."[434] The texts, in general, include scriptural texts that are canonized along with their commentaries, philosophical, theological, and mystical treatises. In addition, engaging the sacred texts of other faith traditions is often seen in series of Christian commentaries on Non-Christian Sacred Texts.[435] Comparative Theology intentionally focuses on particularities of one or other traditions and chooses what to read and not read. Narrowing down to the specificity of comparative experiments makes the sweeping claims to similarity and differences irrelevant.[436] As Cornille notes, the focus on a particular religious and theological community saves comparative theology from the negative implications of randomness.[437]

The method, along with texts, includes placing two realities, namely, images, practices, doctrines, persons - near one another to view over and over again. Michelle Voss Roberts points out that the theologian must choose from the internal diversity of traditions to study a single thinker, text, or practice.[438] The choice of the text in Comparative Theology is potentially problematic as a comparative theologian has a broad spectrum of options to select from among different traditions- living and dead, old and new. Klaus von Stosch warns against randomly choosing the text, which may run the risk of Comparative Theology becoming a "playground for

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[434] Clooney, *On some the Current Challenges to Comparative Theology*, 4.
[435] See Joseph Stephen O'Leary, *Buddhist Non-duality, Paschal Paradox: A Christian Commentary on the Teaching of Vimalakīrti (vimalakīrtinirdeśa)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008); Catherine Cornille*, Song Divine: Christian Commentaries on the Bhagavad Gitā* (Leuven: Dudley, MA: Peeters/W.B. Eerdmans, 2006); Leo D. Lefebure, *The Path of Wisdom: A Christian Commentary on the Dhammapad*a (Grand Rapids; Mich, Eerdmans: Leuven: Peeter, 2011).
[436] Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning*, 76.
[437] Cornille, *Meaning, and Method*, 160.
[438] Michelle Vos Roberts, *Comparing Faithfully: Insights for Systematic Theological Reflection* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press), 2.

detail-loving eccentrics who meticulously compare irrelevant subjects."[439] Most often, Comparative Theology focuses on the texts of the so-called "World Religions" rather than on texts based upon oral or folk traditions. The apparent reason for this decision is that the Scriptures, commentaries, and theologies are easier to access when trying to understand other religious traditions, aside from the fact that not everyone can do ethnographic work.

Marianne Moyaert points out three fundamental reasons why comparative theologians have a textual focus. Firstly, she points out that scriptures are the collective memories of religious communities, as they shape and nourish the religious and moral imaginations of believing communities. They also guide the behaviors of humans and explain human vulnerability, and the ambiguities of life. Efforts to understand the dynamics of good and evil through narratives, poetics, and texts often enables humans to cope up with difficult moments in their lives. Secondly, since the Comparative Theological method emphasizes an academic discipline that focuses on texts, she sees religious texts as objects of formal religious studies, especially in the academic field. Thus, she writes that the Sacred Books of the East are more accessible to transport to the classroom than, say, the 12-day Agni fire ritual. Thirdly, Moyaert perceives Sacred texts as central to the theology of any religion as topics of God, the human condition, the world, and the relationship among these are based on the critical engagements with the text.[440] As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, these criticisms do not apply to my selected *Rāmcaritmānas* text precisely becauase rituals and performances are part of the text. The text is different from all these critiques as the text offers ritual and performances as part of the text, and more importantly, it involves all the senses.

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[439] Klaus von Stosch, "Comparative Theology as Liberal and Confessional Theology," *Religions* 3 (2012): 986.
[440] Marianne Moyaert, "Towards a Ritual Turn in Comparative Theology: Opportunities, Challenges, and Problems*," Harvard Theological Review*, 111, no. 1 (2018): 5-7.

Texts are chosen for *comparative reading praxis* because most theologians regard reading as "the most practical and solid means of theological learning."[441] Clooney maintains that "the foremost prospect for a fruitful comparative theology is the reading of texts, preferably scriptural and theological texts that have endured over centuries and millennia, and that have guided communities in their understandings of God, self and other."[442] In his view the interconnectedness of traditions calls for reading together with sensitivity to faith and reason for more profound validation and intensification of each tradition.[443] Emphasis on this aspect of 'reading' of texts raises important questions such as 'How does one read a religious text from another traditions?' Is it possible for persons belonging to other traditions to read the text religiously? Often readers tend to be 'consumeristic' and they tend to 'instrumentalize' the 'other' religious traditions for interreligious learning. Though I raise these questions here, they are taken into consideration in Chapter Four.

Religions studied primarily as textual phenomena are recognized as "elitist, or even intellectualist, and therefore too narrow" and sometimes people are criticized for being 'addicted' to the text. However, as situations of hostility and violence accelerates among religions a deeper engagement of the text is demanded. Although the method is difficult and tedious, much effort must go into removing various prejudices and false interpretations of religious texts, especially hose texts that lead to religious extremism. Sacred texts, through misinterpretations, have become easy tools for violent propagations of religion. Books in and of themselves do not kill people.[444] But the literal interpretation of challenging sacred texts can legitimize violent action. Sacred

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[441] Clooney, "Comparative Theology," *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, 664.
[442] Clooney, *Compartive Theology: Deep Learning*, 58.
[443] Ibid., 4
[444] John L. Collins, "The Zeal of Phinehas: the Bible and the Legitimation of Violence," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 122 no. 13 (2003), 3.

scriptures are not just history, they also provide for an experience of the Sacred. Not only are they full of religious meaning, but they also tell the story of people's relationship with God.[445] Hence every religion must guard itself against the literal reading of problematic texts.[446] Scholars like William Cavanaugh contend that even when extremists use theological texts to justify their actions, "religious" violence is not religious at all but rather a perversion of core teachings. Comparative Theologian with deeper and critical engagements with texts may bring forth reflections that correct false interpretations and mitigate prejudices. For instance, Modi's devotees believe that *Rāmāyaṇa's* Rām is calling them to fight against the minorities and declare India into a Hindu nation. A deeper engagement with the *Rāmāyaṇa* makes one realize that the call of Rām is to build a *Rāmrāj* of peace, liberty, and equality.

2.3.4. Criticism of the Textual Focus

The textual focus is critiqued with an underlying suspicion that the texts do not reflect a lived religion and directly oppose what "real" Hindus and Christians believe. [447] The focus on texts is primarily due to the consideration of religion as predominantly a matter of teachings and belief in teachings, as teachings are formulated and handed down in texts.[448] Moyaert asks a poignant question, "where does God reveal: only in texts?[449] In her view, Comparative Theologians will have a limited revelation of God if they only rely on texts and have not paid sufficient attention to the ritual practices of other religious traditions or constructively engaged them. But I disagree with

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[445] Dolores R. Leckey, "Interreligious Dimension," in *Just War, Lasting Peace: What Christian Traditions can Teach Us,* ed. Paula Minnaret, Mark Mossa, Dolores R. Leckey and John Kleiderer (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2006), 79.
[446] Richard J. Clifford, "Does the Old Testament Portray a Merciful God" A Presentation done at Boston College, USA.
[447] Richard King "Orientalism and the Modern Myth of "Hinduism," *Numen*, 46, no. 2 (1999): 146-185.
[448] Maraldo, "A Call for an Alternative Notion of Understanding in Interreligious Hermeneutics," 89.
[449] Moyaert, "Towards a Ritual Turn," 2.

her views for two reasons. Clooney did his dissertation on Hindu rituals and Moyaert, herself worked on the texts.

Moyaert argues that the reason for the non-engagement of non-textual traditions is "rooted in a long and complex history in which mind (reason, reading, texts) was privileged over the body (senses, performance, symbolic practice)."[450] In accord with her observations, she holds on to the view that the cross-fertilization between "traditions" can happen through practices of *cross-riting* in addition to *cross-reading*, suggesting the practitioners of Comparative Theology participate in the ritual traditions. Hence, incorporating material and symbolic practices of religions leads to the discovery of different ways of thinking about our relationships with God.[451] However, this criticism could be applied to all other areas of theology as well.

The other criticism of textual focus comes from the present-day of 'millennials.' Based on their context, Lisa Gasson-Gardener, and Jason Smith point out in their analysis that millennials are "digital natives" and they have trouble engaging texts in a deep way.[452] Secondly, to read a religious text requires proficiency in languages that involves training for many years, which may create 'multiple anxieties,' among the millennials.' Finally, in assessing the context of 'millennials' and their hybrid identities, Gardener and Smith suggest incorporating material culture–mainly visiting sacred places and religious objects- into Comparative Theology.[453] Hedges questions

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[450]Ibid.

[451] Ibid., 3.

[452]The Millennial generation, born roughly between 1980 and 1994 has been characterized as the 'digital natives because of their familiarity with and reliance on information and communication technology. Their lives are immersed in technology, surrounded by ads using computers, video games, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age (M. Prensky, Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," *On the Horizon*, 1. Tapscott calls them the 'Net Generation.'-these young people are said to have been immersed in technology all their lives, imbuing them with sophisticated technical skills and learning preferences for which traditional education is unprepared (D. Tapscott, Growing up Digital: *The Rise of the Net Generation* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998).

[453] Lisa Gasson-Gardner and Jason Smith, "Feeling Comparative Theology: Millennial Affect and Reparative Learning," 122-23.

whether the subaltern voice is still further marginalized by elite study practices of classical texts as he writes,

> at least in specific influential modes of practice, comparative theology may contribute to every mode of discourse that silences and marginalize the subaltern. In Clooney's system, certain influential texts are chosen for comparison, especially those with long and established commentarial traditions that establish them as a classic within their tradition.[454]

Michael Barnes seeing dialogue through an experiential prism, ground his theory based on lived experience and critiques establishing interreligious dialogue on textual traditions alone. While agreeing with the obvious advantages and fruitfulness of textual practice, he warns that too much emphasis on texts risks projecting onto other religious traditions Christian, and more generally Western, philosophical notions of literacy and literature. Barnes sees much more to religious tradition than a written 'text' because for him,' life of a text' is 'life of a community.'[455] He suggests an alternative focus on 'ordinary life' rather than propositional claim, from 'one-sided concern with reading texts towards a more social engagement with persons.'[456] His sense of the text refers to canonical scriptures and authoritative commentaries and other forms of practice that inhabit faith narratives and give flesh and blood to reality. Using Martin Buber's concept of 'I-Thou,' he states that the emphasis in dialogue must not be on the outcomes of negotiations but on the meeting of persons as almost an end to stimulate the imaginations. In his view, the theological significance is to be found in the very ordinariness of life in the marketplace that builds interreligious understanding, which enriches learning.[457]

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[454] Paul Hedges, "Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Perspective," *Theology* 1.1 (2017), 1-89 here 44.

[455] Michael Barnes, *Interreligious Learning: Dialogue, Spirituality, and the Christian Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), xi

[456] Barnes, *Interreligious Learning*, 18-22

[457] Ibid., 6.

Indeed, Comparative Theology has consistently remained largely a textual endeavor, and the purely textual focus may limit the understanding of religion. Nevertheless, Comparative Theology has not deliberately sidelined the ritual and performative *praxis* elements of faith. On the contrary, it continues to develop new ways to consider the ritual, performative, and experiential nature of religion. Clooney opines that "alternative ways of studying religions can be a solid basis for Comparative Theology."[458] While acknowledging the various propositions and their particular focus, the *material culture of religion needs to be integrated with textual study and not a substitution for the texts*. Because every religion receives its ritual dimension from sacred scriptures. Catherine Cornille states,

> while ritual forms and material artifacts change through time, texts offer a continuous basis for reflection. To be sure, the interpretation of sacred texts varies and differs. Still, they offer a base from which to study those differences and consider their significance for one's own comparative theological reflection.[459]

Keeping this critique in mind, my approach to the *Mānas* has focused on reading and understanding the text with the traditional devotees and participating in the performative dimensions of the text. The experiences mentioned in the fourth chapter communicate that the Comparative Theological approach is not merely a 'textual' but also favors ritual and daily religious encounters. Approaching Comparative Theology from a perspective of performance and rituals enables us to see "Theology as Art." As Samuel Rayan explains: "the beautiful is the point of convergence where man is reaching out to God and God's indwelling in the world meet and fuse into single incandescence. The consequences of such a view of the beautiful are that the theology of the future will have to

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458 Clooney, *Comparative Theology*: *Deep Learning,* 67.
459 Cornille, "*The Problem of Choice* in Comparative Theology," in *How to Do Comparative Theology*, ed. Francis, X. Clooney ad Klaus Von Stosch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 19-36.

be also aesthetics."[460]   Emphasizing the dimension of art, symbols, literature, *Gaudium Et Spes*,

the Second Vatican Council Document on "The Church in the Modern World" states,

> Literature and the arts are also, in their way, of great importance to the life of the church. They strive to make known the proper nature of man, his problems, and his experiences in trying to know and perfect himself and the world. They have much to do with revealing man's place in history and the world, illustrating the miseries and joys, the needs and strengths of man, and foreshadowing a better life for him. Thus, they can elevate human life, expressed in multifold forms according to various times and regions. Efforts must be made so that those who foster these arts feel that the church recognizes their activity and that, enjoying orderly liberty, they may initiate more friendly relations with the Christian community. The church also acknowledges new forms of art that are adapted to our age and are in keeping with the characteristics of various nations and regions. They may be brought into the sanctuary since they raise the mind to God once the manner of expression is adapted, and they are conformed to liturgical requirements.[461]

2.3.5. Learning in Comparative Theology

The highest goal of Comparative theology involves faith seeking to understand, by deep

learning across religious borders. This feature distinguishes Comparative Theology from other

fields of comparative religion and theology of religions. In its efforts to dialogue with other

religions, the Catholic Church tends to 'teach' others in faith and morality. The confessional

character of Comparative Theology emphasizes learning for the home tradition. As a spiritual and

contemplative discipline, the faith of the scholar is intrinsic to Comparative Theology for it enables

transformative effects. As for the method itself, it does not aim at adding something to other

religions, but allows the theologian to recognize herself/himself "as someone with something yet

to discover."[462] When pointing out the 'learning' dimension of n Comparative Theology, Ram

Prasad Chakravarthy observed that this method contributes to a "a global discourse beyond cultural

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[460] Samuel Rayan, "Theology as Art," *Religion and Society* 26, no. 2 (June 1979): 84.
[461] *Gaudium Et Spes*, no. 62.
[462] Hugh Nicholson and Reid Locklin, "The Return of Comparative Theology," *Journal of The American Academy of Religion*, 78, no, 2. (2010), 499.

hegemonies."[463] Cornille, in *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, identifies six possible types of comparative theological learning: *intensification, rectification, recovery, reinterpretation, appropriation, and reaffirmation.* [464] Such learning happens through openness, hospitality, a deep personal resonance with a particular faith tradition, rituals, teaching, and experiences. Some learnings may not be able to be categorize. The learning may occur spontaneously or often unreflectively.[465] All the learning that occurs in Comparative Theology need not be integrated or brought into the home tradition as some learnings may not be compatible with one's faith tradition.

In Corneille's schema, the first learning is *intensification*. The learning of intensification happens in recognition of similarities with other religious traditions. Clooney favors that the reading of sacred texts with similar teachings and experiences enhances the significance and meaning of each religious text. He says, "privileging similarity and resemblance is my contribution to Christian theology, a reflection on our "near others" that I am able to make."[466] By way of example, when reading the Song of Songs along with the Hindu text *Tiruvaymoli,* he writes, "This doubling of memories intensifies rather than relativizes the deep yet fragile commitments of our singular first love."[467] Clooney mentions that comparing Christian and Hindu texts on divine longing may intensify one's "desire for Jesus, a Jesus real enough to come near, to hide, and later become manifest again."[468] The juxtaposition of texts, rituals, and experiences intensifies one's own religious understanding, and the experience may represent a fruitful theological exercise. Moreover, since the intensification reinforces one's faith tradition, Cornille points out that this

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[463] Ram Prasad Chakravarthy, *Divine Self, Human Self: The Philosophy of Being in Two Gita Commentaries* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), xiii.
[464] Cornille, *Meaning, and Method*, 115-147.
[465] Ibid., 116.
[466] Clooney*, Deep Learning*, 76-77.
[467] Clooney, *His Hiding Place Is Darkness: A Hindu-Christian theopoetics of Divine Absence* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 126.
[468] Ibid., 46.

learning represents the more uncontroversial type of learning in Comparative Theology.[469] The intensification does not occur by merely noticing, but it happens through the ways of participation.

The second learning is *rectification*. Prejudices and misunderstandings of the other are common when encountering others. Comparative Theological approach with its deeper engagement restores a proper understanding of the other. Every religion has internal complexities as well as diversity. The overgeneralization of religious teachings leads to a negative image of religion. The mysticism studies of Asian religions often negatively communicate that they are illusionary and lack social responsibility—see for example, Rudolf Otto's *Mysticism*.[470] Hugh Nicholson who reads both Shankara and Eckhart states that: "By redescribing Shankara in terms of Eckhart, I have sought to highlight the theistic and realistic aspects of the former that have been suppressed in the orientalist characterization of his teaching as illusionistic pantheism."[471] Thus, rectification removes imagined or artificially imposed biases on the religion of the other.

The third learning is *recovery*. While studying the religious other, elements that have been buried or forgotten in one's home tradition due to various factors, are recovered for the home tradition. Daniel Sheridan, who wrote a Christian commentary on the *Nārada Bhakti Sutra*, points out that the texts of other religious traditions can be "catalysts" that enable us go forward and grasp afresh elements of our own tradition.[472] Focusing on the love of God in the Hindu text, he recognizes Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) as the "greatest Catholic teacher on loving God."[473] Hindus doing Comparative Theology by studying selected Christian texts, may rediscover in their

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[469] Cornille, *Meaning, and Method*, 121.

[470] Cf: Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism* ((New York, The Macmillan Co, 1932).

[471] Nicholson, *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry*, 198.

[472] Daniel Sheridan, *Loving God: Kṛṣṇa and Christ a Christian Commentary on the Nārada Sūtras* (MA WB Eerdmans,2007), 6-7.

[473] Ibid, 21, 207.

tradition the ethics of *praxis* oriented toward social justice that is present in their own tradition. Thus, Comparative Theology opens up a way for the theologian to "discover, or re-discover, insights from within his or her home traditions."[474]

The fourth learning is *reinterpretation* of one's tradition through theological categories or philosophical frameworks. In the Indian context, Christian teachings have been reinterpreted based upon the Indian philosophical terms of *Advaita Vedanta, Sakti, Trimurti*, and the person of Jesus in terms of *Gur*u, Buddha. Panikkar interpreted Christ from the *Advaitic* perspective, as he writes, "the figure of Christ could be described as that of a person who reduces to zero the distance between heaven and earth, God and man, transcendent and immanent, without sacrificing either pole - which is precisely the principle of *Advaita*."[475] However, the reinterpretation requires careful negotiations of different philosophical networks without instrumentalizing other religions to advance one's home tradition.

The fifth learning is *appropriation*, which is the most challenging learning for Comparative Theology. Appropriations may happen consciously or unconsciously. Cultures also play a vital role in the appropriation of elements from other religions. For example, Indian Christianity in its social sphere has appropriated the caste system of Indian culture, although oppressive and against the Christian ethos. John Cobb points out, "in the course of dialogue with another tradition; partners will encounter ideas in other traditions that seems plausible, compelling, and even true, and yet unavailable within the home tradition."[476] Jacques Dupuis speaks of appropriating elements

[474] Bede Bidlack, "What child is this? Jesus, lord Lao, and divine identity" in *Comparing Faithfully: Insights for Systematic Theological Reflection* ed. Michelle Voss Roberts (New York, NY: Fordham University Press,2016): 195-215 here 212.

[475] Raimon Panikkar, *Christophany: The Fullness of Man* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 181.

[476] Leonard Swidler, John Cobb, Paul Knitter, and Monika Hellwig, *Death or Dialogue? From the Age of Monologue to the age of Dialogue* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 7.

as necessary "by mutual complementarity, by which an exchange and a sharing of saving values takes place between Christianity and other religions and from which a mutual enrichment and transformation may ensue between the religions themselves."[477] In a growing situation of multiple religious belonging, appropriation has become common. When the new elements are appropriated within one's religious traditions, the tradition is expanded as it absorbs new religious elements; this might be called a "double transformation."[478] This could be seen positively as a "liberating interdependence."[479] Musa Dube admits that nations' interdependence has often led to exploitation; she also believes that such interdependence also can "recognize and affirm the dignity of all things and people involved."[480]

The final learning is *reaffirmation*. Comparative Theology aims at appreciating and reaffirming one's own tradition in the light of other faiths. Because Comparative Theology, with its confessional character, preserves and affirms essential, inalienable parts of the tradition and certain apologetics involved in Comparative Theology. For instance, there is nothing wrong with reaffirming the values of the unique salvific role of Jesus concerning other religions. Cornille points out that "the process of reaffirmation includes a certain humble awareness of the faith dimension of all religious affirmation."[481]

[477] Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 326.
[478] Paul Hedges, *Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 67.
[479] Ibid., 70-73.
[480] Musa Dube, Postcolonial *Feminist Interpretations of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 185-86.
[481] Cornille, *Meaning, and Method*, 141.

2.4. Comparative Theology and Other Religious Studies

2.4.1. Comparative Theology and Comparative Study of Religion

Inter-religious dialogue of encounter involves actual conversations, sometimes formal and academic, sometimes just interpersonal conversations among persons of different religious traditions who are willing to listen to one another and reflect upon their stories of faith and values.[482] Such dialogue has motivated different theologians to experiment with different methodologies as they engage - and are engaged by – adherents of other religions. The comparative study of religions, the history of religions, and the theology of religions has opened the new pathways for dialogue with people of other faiths. Although Comparative Theology shares some commonalities or continuity with the other comparative religious studies as well as previous comparative theologies, it has some distinct differences in its approach to the religiously "other." Nicholson identifies three ways in which the new Comparative Theology is different from the old. First, it is resistant to generalizations about other religions, second, it attempts to understand other religions on their own terms, and third, it requires theologians to acknowledging their normative commitments.[483] Thus theologians must be rooted in their own tradition before venturing into another. It is the emphasis placed on learning for the sake of the home tradition (*Exitus- Reditus*) that the confessional approach of Comparative Theology is most distinctive.

Affirming the aspect of returning to one's own religious tradition, David Tracy defines Comparative Theology as an "explicit intellectual interpretation of a religious tradition that affords a central place to the fact of religious pluralism in the traditions of self-interpretation."[484] Thus,

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[482] Dialogue suggests an openness to change; encounter suggests an openness to understanding the wisdom of another, not predicated on change per se.

[483] Hugh Nicholson, "The New Comparative Theology and Theological Hegemonism," in *The New Comparative Theology Interreligious Reflections from the Next Generation* (NewYork: T & T Clark, 2010,), 59.

[484] David Tracy, "Comparative Theology," in *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2nd rev. Ed L. Jones, (Detroit, Macmillan Reference, 2005), 13: 9126.

Comparative Theology is both "comparative" and "theology," and the learning is theological learning rather than a gathering of academic information on the history of religions. As a theology, "it is faith seeking understanding, a practice in which all three words- *the faith, the search, the intellectual goal*- have their full force and remain in fruitful tensions with one another."[485] Comparative Theology contributes distinctively to theology "by its sources and ways of proceeding, by its foundation in more than one tradition, and by reflection which builds on that foundation, rather than simply on themes and methods already articulated prior to the comparative practice."[486] As such, the comparative method does not look only for similarities, rather it seeks to understand the resemblance of religions "deeply" through the study of beliefs, ritual practices, and way of life and accepts the differences with greater ease.[487]

It is evident in contemporary scholarship that comparative, historical, and dialogical perspectives are at the forefront when it comes to understanding other religions. Both the Comparative study of religion and Comparative Theology share in common an academic engagement that involves studying the history of religion and acquiring a profound knowledge of relevant concepts and cultural factors, at times, for their own sake. At the same time, a critical assessment of comparative studies of other religions traditions serves as a reminder of how such

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[485] Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 9.

[486] Clooney, "Comparative Theology: A Review of Recent books (1989-1995)," *Theological Studies* 26, no. 3 (1995): 522.

[487] Examples are multiple volumes of Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); *Religion and Creation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); *Religion and Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); *Concepts of God: Images of the Divine in Five Religious Traditions* (Oxford: One world, 1998); *Religion and Community* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); *Religion and Human Fulfillment* (London: SCM Press, 2008).

studies also have been used to prove the superiority of one religion to other religions, thereby perpetuating religious hegemony.[488]

The "new"[489] Comparative Theology with an "honest acknowledgment of its own normative commitments and interests as the principal means tries to avoid the kind of distortion and bias of its nineteenth-century predecessor."[490] In addition, scholars of the comparative study of religions are only accountable to their colleagues and the academy and not to the adherents of other faith traditions, since scholars remain neutral in this regard. In contrast, comparative theologians are accountable to their faith communities because the goal of Comparative Theology is often expressed in terms of "mutual transformation," [491] "mutual fecundation," or "reciprocal illumination."[492] This mutual benefit is emphasized through a disposition toward learning. James L. Frederick terms Comparative Theology as "not only a revisionist but also a constructive project in which theologians interpret the meaning and truth of one tradition by making critical correlations with the classic of another religious tradition."[493] By bringing to the fore the '*learning'* that comes from other traditions, Comparative Theology enables theologians to approach the other religions with an attitude of epistemological and theological humility.[494] Tracy establishes a

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[488] Like De Nobili, Jesuit missionaries to India studied Hinduism to prove Christianity's truth and inculturated Christianity by distinguishing religion and culture. In his influential book *Orientalism,* Edward Said brings out how knowledge and power constructed the identity of the religious 'other.' In his view, the term 'World Religion' is a Western hegemonic concept. Nonetheless, we cannot say that all the studies of other religions in the past were aimed at 'polemic' and for proving one's religious truth.

[489] The method is considered 'new' for its openness to learning from other traditions and normative commitments. Clooney points out that the term Comparative Theology was used in 1700 in the work of James Garden, *Comparative Theology: Or the True and Solid Grounds of Pure and Peaceable Theology.*

[490] H. Nicholson, "The New Comparative Theology and Theological Hegemonism," 59.

[491] Arvind Sharma, *One Religion Too Many: The Religiously Comparative Reflections of a Comparatively Religious Hindu* (Albany: State University of New York Press)

[492] See Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Andreas Nehring, eds., *Interreligious Comparisons in Religious Studies and Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

[493] James Fredericks, "introduction," in *The New Comparative Theology*, ed. Francis X. Clooney (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), x-xi.

[494] Cornille, *the Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*,9-59.

fundamental distinction between Comparative Theology and other studies of religion when he observes, that different' theologies' from different traditions are being compared in a comparative enterprise within the secular study of the history of religions. Comparative Theology is "more strictly a theological enterprise which ordinarily studies not one tradition alone but two or more, compared on theological grounds."[495]

2.4.2. Comparative Theology and the Theology of Religions

The theology of religions as a theological discipline evaluates and discerns the epistemological status of other religions in accord with the truths and goals defining one's own religion. Unfortunately, the theories of 'exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism' have dominated the interpretation and assessment of the claims of other religions' and have sidelined the vital component of 'learning,' which is so essential in Comparative Theology. Moreover, whereas the previous engagements focused on universal notions such as "religion," "salvation," "grace," Comparative Theology pursues a different path to solve the problems that arise from these notions and others. Wilfred Cantwell Smith called for the abandonment of the term " religion" and advocated for the language of " faith" or " cumulative tradition" as a replacement to describe the religions.[496] As for the new approach of Comparative Theology, it advocates instead for an "immersion into other religious worlds and an embrace of an identity that is in solidarity with religious others."[497] As noted previously, Comparative Theology requires a consideration of the status of one's own religion and that of other religions. Negating the need for *a priori* position concerning other religions, Bethrong and Clooney write, that in today's Comparative Theology,

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[495] David Tracy, "Comparative Theology," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Second rev. Ed., ed. L. Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2005), 13: 9126.
[496] See Wilfred Cantwell Smith*, The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).
[497] Amos Young, "Francis Clooney's Dual Religious Belonging and the Comparative Theological Enterprise: Engaging Hindu Traditions," *Dharma Deepika* (Jan-Jun 2012): 7.

"before any normative theological statements can be made, there is a need for an extended engagement with the texts and *praxis* of those other religions."[498]

Comparative Theology creates a space for a different manner of engagement. It avoids hegemonic thinking, as Clooney states, "I have sought to have comparative theology judged not by an implied theology of religions measured by non-comparativist but rather by the fruits of comparative study's actual fruits for those willing to read my writing."[499] The Theology of Religions often adheres to the perspectives of one's own religion on the matters of faith, and these perspectives then provide a framework for comparison. In contrast, Comparative Theology, as Clooney points out, because it is comparative and theological, "will help theologians of religion to be more specific, fine-tuning their attitudes through closer attention to specific traditions."[500] The method never claims that the Theology of Religions is an obstacle to interreligious learning. Instead, as Clooney says, the Theology of Religions is "something other than comparative theology and need not colonize and coopt the different role played by comparative theology."[501]

2.5. Rituals and Experiences in Comparative Theology

The criticism of Comparative Theology regarding its emphasis on texts carries some validity as the dominance of the textual bias, by default, has pushed   ritual, performance , and the experiential to the periphery.[502] The textual focus is due, at least partly to a Western classical

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[498] John Berthrong and Francis X. Clooney, " Editor's Introduction to *European Perspectives on the New Comparative Theology*", Religions 3 (2012): 1195. Not having a particular stance has given rise to the understanding that comparative theology could be approached only within certain theological paradigms, particularly "new forms of inclusivism and pluralism," see Kristin Beise Kiblinger "Relating Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology," In *The New Comparative Theology,* ed. Clooney (New York: Continuum, 2010), 42.

[499] Clooney, "On Some of the Current Challenges to Comparative Theology," 22.

[500] Ibid., 14.

[501] Ibid., 21.

[502] Emma O'Donnell, "Methodological Consideration on the Role of Experience in Comparative Theology," in *How to Do Comparative Theology*, ed. Francis x. Clooney and Klaus Von Stosch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 259.

approach to religion that has been insensitive to the experiential elements of lived faith traditions that have been objectified.[503] In interreligious encounters, much emphasis has been placed on the specific theological subjects such as monotheism, the Trinity, the Incarnation, Holy Scripture, and the question of salvation as these topics tend to keep theologians focused on the rational aspects of faith traditions rather than affective.[504] The cognitive dimension of religion perpetuates an intellectual understanding of religion. The cognitive approach often is disconnected from the live enactment of religious rituals, and practices.[505] This one-sided focus easily can lead to misrepresentations of religion.[506] For example, many Western Indologists knowledge of Hinduism was acquired through the study of the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads*, an understanding of Hinduism that is referred to as orientalism. However, there is a growing awareness of the importance of symbolic practices that revolve around meaning and rituals. John T. Maraldo, a critic of the cognitive approach to Interreligious Dialogue, writes,

> The standard understanding in much interreligious dialogue takes religion to be primarily a matter of teachings and belief in teachings; it presupposes those teachings are formulated and handed down in texts, or at least that they can be so formulated…the usual emphasis is on what adherents of the religion believe on expressible content.[507]

The discursive dimensions available in texts may not address the imaginative, experiential, and poetic dimensions of lived religion and. Paying greater attention to the importance of participation in ritual traditions and performative experiences makes it possible for art, architecture, symbols, and music to give expression to the religious sense of a place and a people.

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[503] E.g., James L. Fredericks, *Buddhists, and Christians: Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004).

[504] Moyaert "Interreligious Dialogue*," Understanding Interreligious Relations* (November 2013): 193-217.

[505] Gerald Arbuckle, Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians: A Postmodern Critique (MN Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010)

[506] Daniel Lopez, " Belief" in *Critical Times for Religious Studies*, by Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 21-35.

[507] Maraldo, *A Call for an Alternative,* 2010.

Today, religion is seen more as experienced and enacted than written and read. This points to the great need for Comparative Theology to address the experiential elements of religion. The experiential approach helps shape one's language of faith in ways give rise to a theology "with people in it" rather than only abstract principles. While discussing the role of popular religion among Hispanic Catholics, Meredith McGuire sees religion being practiced in all of its complexity and dynamism. She goes on to speaks of those "invisible elements" that make lived religion far more diverse, multifaceted, and contradictory.[508] She concludes that "clothing, pictures and posters, jewelry, coffee mugs, and bumper stickers – connect domestic space with the divine- and also serve to convey both a message about religion and the religious identity of the user."[509] In the world of research, prayer and any form of religious ritual falls under the purview of experiential phenomena. This is because they exist in time and in the human body. As George Lindbeck observes, "[today] religions are seen as comprehensive interpretive schemes, usually embodied in myths or narratives and heavily ritualized, which structure human experience and understanding of self and world."[510]

Lived religion is embodied, Real bodies are part of religious traditions.[511] The embodiment of religion is communicated through body postures, movements, practices, and performances.[512] The significance of an array of embodied spiritual practices in an individual's everyday routines, including, for example, bathing, other purification rituals, the recitation of *mantras*, *yoga*, offering food, greeting each other, reverencing the holy book, and so on, signify bodies and their location

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[508] Meredith McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 17.
[509] Ibid., 78.
[510] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 32.
[511] McGuire *Lived Religion*, 97.
[512] Ibid., Chapter 5.

in a particular religious space. Through these bodily actions, experience themselves as interconnected - body, mind and spirit - with one another, with nature, and with the universe as a whole.[513] Maraldo makes this point when he demands new approach and different form of hermeneutics for making meaning of non-textual practices. He writes, "The approach is through a bodily enactment of the practices rather than a discursive reading of texts and teachings. If interreligious hermeneutics is to account for the full range of religious life, it must articulate an alternative notion of understanding that gives access to religious practices as they are lived."[514] The lived practices and daily routines of religious traditions communicate "wholeness and holiness" as two ways of thinking about the same thing. [515] Maraldo sees this as a matter of doing one thing or the other .

Comparative Theology, as noted previously, is well positioned to address the expressed concern of needing to go beyond the text. Clearly, experience can be a rich resource for the Comparative Theological project. The ritual and experiential aspects have both verbal and nonverbal elements. Emma O'Donnell advances the conviction that Comparative Theology as uniquely positioned to address the need to incorporate experiential aspects as it affirms self-conscious and self-referentiality (understood as the confessional nature). She writes,

> First, it invites the hermeneutical transparency through which the theologian may clarify their starting point and interpretive lens. This addresses the concern raised earlier about the typically Western cognitive approach to religion associated with privileging the textual. Second, the self-referential qualities of comparative theology make it intrinsically related to the experiential. If comparative Theology is rooted in the experience of participation in a religious tradition – whether the theologian's religious identity is static, fluid, hybrid, or otherwise- then comparative theology is inherently about the experience. Comparative theology is therefore

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[513] Ibid., 138-42.
[514] Maraldo, *A Call for an Alternative*, 115.
[515] McGuire, *Lived Religion*, 140.

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ideally positioned to address the ritual, experiential, embodied elements of religion.[516]

2.5.1. *Rāmcaritmānas* **as a Ritualized Performance**

The textual focus and emphasis on classical language in Comparative Theology have been critiqued by those who recognize that the use of texts alone may marginalize the resources found in folk traditions, material artifacts, and vernacular languages. Lawrence Hoffman points out that a "certain democratization of who can do comparative theology is underway and needs to continue. Concerns about the danger and difficulty of making comparison well have often limited it to certain elite textual and trained specialists, but as recent significant books have shown, it can be usefully taught to, and practiced by, a wide range of people."[517] The study of ritual experiences is not absent in the Comparative Theological tradition, however, many studies that focus on the ritual and the textual simultaneously, ultimately tend towards textual. Hoffman criticizes the textual bias of most liturgical studies and challenges theologians to handle "prayer *qua* prayer, not just prayer *qua* literature."[518] According to Hoffman, texts are readily accessible and have endless interpretations but the less available elements of religions, the experiential and the performed, need to be highlighted. However, he recognizes the importance of the text as he writes, "We ought not to argue from the people to the text, but from the texts to the people."[519] He supports moving "beyond the text," by reading the text in such a way that the manner of reading gives way to experience. Although Comparative Theology emphasizes the text, understanding sacred texts often requires

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[516] O'Donnell, "Methodological Considerations," 264.
[517] Hedges, "Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological Perspective," 74.
[518] Lawrence Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 6
[519] Ibid., 8.

participation in the ritual life and lived experience of a tradition that contributes to an enhanced encounter.[520] The *kathā*, *līlā* are part of Mānas rituals.

2.5.2. The *Mānas* as an Experiential Text

Most religious classics are generative of experience. Nevertheless, the highly standardized and dogmatic approach to religion may subdue the experiential elements. Participalting and living among the Hindus, in Dupuis Words, we cannot claim "without *being deeply affected by the experience.*[521] I echo similar sentiments as those of Dupuis after being in Varanasi for the study of the *Mānas* tradition for a few months. The experiences in Varanasi were grounded on *conversations* and *participation*. In these healthy and genuine conversations, I not only asked questions but was interrogated, challenged, and critiqued, as I belong to the Christian faith tradition. The conversations and participation happened in the context of a 'textual study of *Mānas*. So, the experiences have elements of both "textual" and "contextual" factors. These experiences at Varanasi have enabled me to have a more significant encounter with Hinduism and have raised numerous theological questions. The question is, "how do we respond to these experiences usinga Comparative Theological method?" Encounters are treasures in our hands, and they need to be analyzed, reflected upon, and internalized both from academic and spiritual perspectives for better outcomes because experiences are never "mere experience." All experience is processed through, organized by, and made available to us in extremely complex epistemological ways.[522] They have to be interpreted as we recollect it for ourselves and recount it to others.

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[520] Cornille, *Meaning and Method,* 94

[521] Dupuis, "*My Pilgrimage*," 168-169.

[522]Steven T. Katz, "The Conservative Character of Mystical Experience," in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 4.

Focusing on the experiential dimensions that happened in and through the study of *Mānas* enables *new ways of thinking about God*, especially in aesthetic terms. In the philosophical and theological schools, God is defined as *Ens est Verum, Bonum et Pulchrum* (Being is True, Good, and Beautiful). Amaladoss observes that the rational approach to exploring the truth has made us speak little about the goodness and beauty of God. God's goodness and beauty can be part of our theology only when we say of our 'God –experience.'[523]

2.5.3. The Approach of 'Both-And'-Text and Performance

In the subsequent chapters of this dissertation, I prefer to take a 'both-and' approach by using a methodology that incorporates text, ritual, and experiences of lived religion. This was made possible for me in the profound experiences I had *'reading through ritual recitation'* of the *Mānas* and participation in the aesthetics of the text in the city of Varanasi. The months of immersion offered many possibilities for fostering the integration of textual, ritual, and experiential factors into the Comparative Theological method, as the *Mānas* text involves the act of reading through memory, community participation, and performance (*Rāmkathā, Rāmlilā*) as the core of its tradition. The plurality of *Rāmāyaṇas* in Indian history is a known fact. Camille Bulcke, a scholar in *Mānas* tradition, counted three hundred tellings.[524] A.K. Ramanujan, in his essay "*Three Hundred Rāmayaṇa*," points out that for every Rāma, there is a *Rāmāyaṇa* and these hundreds of tellings of a story in different cultures, languages, and religious traditions are related to each other through specific editions.[525] Among them, the devotional text, *Rāmcaritmānas* written in the

[523] Amaladoss, "Seeking God Experience from Theology to Devanubhava," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflections* 84, no.9 (September 2020): 669.
[524] Bulcke, *Rāmkatha Utpatti aur Vikas*, 1950.
[525] A.K. Ramanujan "Three Hundred Rāmayana," 24

sixteenth century by Tulsidas, illustrates his creative literary genre of *doha*[526] and *chaupai*[527] in medieval Hindi dialect, the use of Avadhi moves beyond classical language of Sanskrit and removes the criticism that Clooney's method is elitist. Many critics think that the "Jesuit theologian," works only in Sanskrit, which is not true. Much of Clooney's work deal with Tamil material. The *Mānas*, is the regional re-telling of *Rāmkathā* and not a literal translation of Vālmīki's Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa.* According to Philip Lutgendorf, it is, perhaps, the most influential religious text of the Hindi-speaking heartland. It is a "living sum of Indian culture," singled out as "the tallest tree in the magic garden of medieval Hindu poetry" and "the greatest book of all devotional literature." Western observers have christened it as "the Bible of Northern India" and "a trustworthy guide to the popular living faith of its people."[528]

This written text has remained popular even today because of its devotional (*bhakti)* aspects. However, this written text was not meant to be read in solitude; it was, first of all, meant to be heard, recited, sung, or read, especially by others.[529] The *Mānas*, in this sense, always is intended to be performed, an invitation that is repeatedly emphasized in the text.[530] The closing *chand* of *Kiṣkindha Kānd* declares, "One who listen to, sings, recounts, and understands it attains the ultimate state."[531] These three genres—simple recitation, recitation plus exposition, and full dramatic enactment—may be ordered in a sequence proceeding from simpler to more complex are

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[526] Kind of song which is rustic and simple using colloquial language.

[527] The former refers to a two-line unit containing four equal parts. Its individual lines are each known as an *ardh*a (half) and comprise thirty-two "beats" or "instants" (*mātra*).

[528] As quoted in Tulsidas, *The Epic of Rām*, vol. 1, trans. Philip Lutgendorf (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), vii.

[529] Cf. Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text: Performing the Rāmcaritmānas of Tulsidas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 35–41 and Danuta Stasik, *The Infinite Story: Past and Present of the Rāmāyaṇas in Hindi* New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2009. 79–80.

[530] Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 37.

[531]Jo sunatha gāvatha kahata samujhata par*ām*apadanarapādanarapāvaī RaghubīrapadapāthojamadhukaradāsaTulasīgavaī (RCM, 4, 30a).

part of the *Mānas*.[532]   Although there is an opportunity for singing, reciting, performing, all of these experiences begin with the text. The *Mānas*, along with the solid textual tradition, have a 'privilege of senses' through reverent reading, performance, and narrating. Lutgendorf's book '*The Life of a Text*' elucidates the close relationship between text and ritual. Danuta Stasik, who affirm Lutgendorf's views, writes, "[he] brings to light the existence of the interface between the oral (as well as the aural) and the written." As a product of a culture that lacked a strong prose tradition and widespread illiteracy of those days, through a famous recitation and enactments for mass dissemination, the text is 'words made flesh.'[533]

The popular culture of the *Mānas* interfaces oral, written, and performed traditions, and brings out the close relationship between the textual and ritual traditions. Emma O'Donnell points out that texts are related to the experiential elements of religion through the act of reading and in the process of secondary reflection and gradual absorption of the texts into the religious tradition.[534] Chanting and singing a text resonates emotionality with performers and listeners and communicates something beyond textual meaning. Participation in other religious rituals engages the body and mind differently than observation, reading, analyzing, and translating. My experience in *Saṇkaṭ Mochan Mandir* and the recitation of *Mānas*, along with the devotees of Hanumān, communicated deep encounters through singing the text. The human body performs the textual tradition. Gavin Flood states that the human body, when performing the text, leads to a process he describes as the "entextualization" of the body, in which the "body becomes the text and is

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[532] Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 39.

[533] Philip Lutgendorf, "Words Made Flesh: The Banaras *Rām*lila as Epic Commentary," in *Boundaries of the Text: Epic Performances in South and Southeast Asia, ed.* Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger and Laurie J. Sears (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, 1991), 83-104

[534] O'Donnell, "Methodological Considerations," 262.

inscribed by the text."[535] In this way, the text can be intrinsically tied to ritual experience, and the ritual element offers correctives to the critique of 'textual focus alone' 'classical language alone,' and 'elitist' in Comparative Theology.

Conclusion

The Comparative Theological method offers an opportunity to study the texts and rituals deeply and to have profound and transformative experiences. Living in Varanasi was a *sādhana* for a genuine encounter with the Hindu world that offered joy (*Ānanda*) through the study of the *Mānas* text. Applying the method of Comparative Theology for the study of text offered a genuine encounter with Hinduism. Every encounter enables an individual to see things from a new perspective because, in every encounter, there is "*something happening to me*." These moments are "anchoring" moments in life. They may come across as purifying, enlightening moments. The Indian word for experience or encounter is *anubhava.* The other synonyms and quasi synonyms are *anubhuti, sākśātkāra, avagati, jnāna*, etc. The goal of *anubhava* is not so much one of understanding (cf: *Fides quaerens intellectum* of St. Thomas Aquinas), but an experience that 'gets through' (*anu+bhu*) and transforms one's whole being, leading to a new form of consciousness. This sort of experience is considered the ultimate *pramāṇā* or rule of faith and theology in Hindu traditions.[536] The aim of *Anubhava* in Indian theology is not really to find new articulations or explanations of the mystery of God. But, through interiority, to lead to an experience of God that is transformative of one's life. Hence the experience is not mere intellectual knowledge but involves personal transformation leading to new ways of thinking and acting. All this happened to

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[535] Gavin Flood, *The Ascetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory, and Tradition* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 212.
[536] Gispert-Sauch, George, *"Anubhava" in Gems from India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2006), 97.

me in the study of the *Mānas* text. The Comparative Theological field is still young; by incorporating ritual and experiential elements in methodology, the method could become more profound, precious, and beautiful engagement with the devotional text. The *Rāmcaritmānas* of Tulsidas offers such possibilities.

Chapter Three

Rāmcaritmānas – A Devotional (*Bhakti*) Text

Introduction

The traditional Hindu categories of sacred texts are known as *śruti,* "that which was heard," and *smṛti*, "that which was remembered." Śruti designates the corpus of Vedic texts namely, *Saṃhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas,* and *Upaniṣads*. These texts are believed to have emanated from the transcendent and are directly recognized by seers. The *smṛti* texts include the *Dharmaśāstras,*[537] *Itihāsas*[538] and *Purāṇas*.[539] In contrast to *śruti* texts, *smṛti* texts are assumed to have been composed by personal authors through their 'remembrance.' The *Bhagavad-Gītā* is perhaps the most prominent *smṛti* text today. There are other texts also that have been very influential—e.g., the *Brahmasūtra*—and some scholars feel the *Gītā*'s modern prominence partly reflects the interest of Westerners starting in the 18th century. Among the *smṛti* texts, the epic story of Rām's life has been most popular among the Indian masses for over two millennia. The central character of the epic, Rām, is often described as an ideal man (*maryāda puruṣottama*) who followed the *dharma* whatever might be the cost.[540] He is an ideal son, brother, husband, ruler, and

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[537] The *Dharmaśāstras* are ancient Hindu Law books that prescribe moral laws and principles of religious duty and righteous conduct for the Hindu faith's adherents. They provide/offer social and religious guidelines, even for kings and rulers. The popular texts of this category include *Manu Smṛti, Yajnāvalkya smṛti*.

[538] The *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* epics are known as *'itihāsa'* meaning 'thus it was.' The *Śāstra*s are the product of a Brahmin worldview, whereas the epics arose within the *Kṣatriya* milieu.

[539] The collections of "ancient stories" preserve traditions of myth, legend, and rite. Most deities and sacred places have a 'Purāṇa' connected to them. As part of the Hindu scriptures, they traditionally treat five subjects: depicting the creation of the universe, destruction and recreation of the universe, tales of gods and goddesses, the story of first humans, and the solar and lunar dynasties of rulers. There are 18 *Purāṇas* known as *'Mahāpurāṇaṡ*. Among them, the most popular one that promotes *bhakti* is the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

[540] Dharma is a concept associated with righteousness, virtue, and morality is derived from the root word 'dhṛ,' meaning to hold, contain or maintain. The word has various meanings. In the Vedas, the word meant holding the cosmic support system, *ṛta*, and it is the initial goal of human life (*puruṣārtha*). Dharma is also the individual's code of conduct (*varṇāśrama dharma*) and may include precepts of social behavior (*kula dharma*). The *avatārs* (incarnations) were to 'uphold *dharma*' (Cf: *Bhagavad Gītā*, 4: 7-8). Babineau renders *dharma* as 'social duty,' see Edmour J. Babineau, *Love of God and Social Duty in the Rāmcaritmānas* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979).

protector. He is a heroic person embellished with outstanding human qualities and sets a standard for human life that is a model for all. Bulcke writes that the Sanskrit text of Vālmīki,

> with its noble conception of the sanctity of married love and the sacredness of a pledge, high ideals of duty, truthfulness, and self-control, its living examples of domestic and social virtues, and its deep faith in the ultimate meaning of life as a struggle between good and evil, engages the Indian mind.[541]

The *Rāmāyaṇa* as a story, has captured the hearts of religious-minded Indians and is visible in India's sculpture, rituals, dramas and has become "the second language of the whole cultural area," as its proliferation into hundreds of major texts.[542] The term *Rāmāyaṇa* has become a metaphor for a paradigmatic epic story. In ordinary colloquial parlance of many Indian languages, when a person talks at too great length, people may express impatience by saying, 'enough of your *Rāmāyaṇa*,' or 'I have no time to listen to your *Rāmāyaṇ*.' It is not unusual for even Christians and Muslims to use this expression. The popularity of *Rāmāyaṇ* is found in its many versions and *Rāmcaritmānas* is a one such devotional text that advances *bhakti*. The devotion is to epic's protagonist Rām. Hence, this chapter explains different kinds of *Rāmayana's* and features of *bhakti* and the nature of Rām from the *Mānas* perspectives.

3.1. *Rāmāyaṇa*, A Popular Sacred Epic

The popularity of the epic story of *Rāmāyaṇa* in India was evident during the frightening early days of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdown. On 28 March 2020, Prakash Javadekar, the Information and Broadcasting Minister, announced that on public demand, two episodes of the iconic mythological serial of the 1980s would be broadcast each day -- one in the

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[541] Camille Bulcke, "The Wonder That is Tulsidas," in *Rāmkathā and Other Essays,* ed. Dineshwar Prasad (New Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2010), 145.

[542] A. K. Ramanujan, "Three Hundred Rāmāyaṇas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation," in *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley/Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), 45.

morning (9 to 10 am) and another in the evening (9 to 10 pm). The idea was to "educate, inform and entertain" the audiences and send across a positive vibe" through *Rāmāyaṇa*.[543] The revival of old serials on *Doordarshan* based on the *Mānas* with enhanced broadcast quality had raised suspicion that it was part of the same strategy of the 1980s to create religious division by using 'old symbols in a new language of politics.'[544] The serial *Rāmāyaṇa* by Bombay filmmaker Ramanand Sagar was telecast on the national channel in 78 weekly episodes beginning in January 1987 drew more than eighty million viewers.[545] It featured some three hundred actors and was shown in primetime on Sundays. It was only the unexpected popularity of the serial that made Sunday 9.00AM timeslot attractive to advertisers and created a special timeslot for mythologicals going forward. The serial drew viewers irrespective of religious affiliation.[546] The epic broadcast was not just for entertainment. For many, viewing *Rāmāyaṇa* on television was a religious experience. The streets and marketplaces were deserted as people sought 'darśan' of Rām on television. Arun Govil, who played the role of Rām, was greeted as the partial manifestation (*avatār*) of Rām and Ramanand Sagar as the new Vālmīkī.[547] Philip Lutgendorf, comments on the popularity of the serial as

> …an event, a phenomenon of such proportions that intellectuals and policymakers struggled to come to terms with its significance and long-range import. Never before had such a percentage of South Asia's population been united in a single activity; never before had a single message instantaneously reached so enormous a regional audience. [548]

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[543]https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/on-public-demand-*Rām*anand-sagars-*Rām*ayan-returns-to-doordarshan-during-covid-19
lockdown/articleshow/74844044.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst
[544] See Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics After Television Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[545] India Today's "Epic spin-off" mentions an audience of sixty million (15 July 1988, 72); "The Rāmāyaṇ," *Illustrated Weekly of India,* 8 November 1987, 9.
[546] I watched these serials with Sunday catechism classmates in the parish priest's house.
[547] Eck, *A Sacred Geography* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2012), 431.
[548]Lutgendorf, "Ramayan: The Video," *The Drama Review* 34, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 128.

The popular televised *Rāmāyaṇa* has been credited by some scholars with creating not just religious fervor but also political mobilization, becoming "center stage politics" for the *Rāmjanmabhūmi* campaign led by L. K. Advani, that culminated in the destruction of the Babri Masjid and the killing of thousands in 1992. The noble and self-sacrificing Rām has become a tool for political victories and the subject of intense debate in India's political life. [549] However, setting aside all the text's political misuse, my study will focus on this great epic's positive aspects.

3.1.1. *Dharma* Oriented Epic

Indian epics focus on establishing *dharma* and the fascination for the *Rāmāyaṇa* is for its orientation toward righteousness. The Rām legend is the story of a confrontation between gods and demons, a story of the cosmic struggle of the king of *dharma* with the vast forces of evil. Rām, the incarnation of Viṣṇu confronts and defeats the ten-headed Rāvaṇa to establish *dharma*. Rām embodied *dharma,* not in theory but in practice. He was willing to undergo suffering through unjust forest exile (*vanvās*) to fulfill what he conceived to be the highest *dharma*. In order to dissuade Rām from going to the forest, his kin raised questions of *Kṣatriya dharma, Rājadharma,* and *Aśrama dharma*.[550] However, he was fixed on obeying his father's command and did not crave the kingdom's power and pleasures.[551] *Dharma,* he says, "is the highest truth in the world and is said to be the root of heaven."[552]

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[549] Sheldon Pollock, "Rāmayaṇa and Political Imagination in India," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 52 no. 2 (May 1993): 262.

[550] According to '*Rājadharm*a' the kings were trained to be magnanimous towards their people (prajā) and work for their prosperity. They were to lead their subjects to salvation by incorporating spirituality in their public and personal lives. Ultimately dharma governed the polity. The *Arthaśāstra* of Kautilya, which is considered 'a science of politics' (1.1.1 or 1.4.3), explores the issues of social welfare and collective ethics. It places a threefold duty on the king: *rakṣā,* protection of the state from external aggression, *pālana*, maintenance of law and order within the state and *yogakṣema* or safeguarding and enhancing the welfare of the people.

[551] VR. 2. 31. 32.

[552] VR. 2. 101. 12 *dharmah satyam paro loke mulām svargasyacocyate.*

As a dynastic hero, Rām promotes the ideal of *Rājadharma* and presides over the ideal of the Indian kingdom. To practice *Rājadharma*, he receives Sītā back from Lankā only after her successful endurance of an ordeal by fire.[553] In the family context, he exhibits his virtue as a son to Daśarath and Kausalya, brother to Lakṣmaṇa, husband to Sītā, most loyal friend to Hanumān, and king to the people of Ayodhyā.[554] The *Padma Purāṇa* declares that in the Rām Story,

> we meet face to face the rules of *dharma*, a woman's fidelity to her husband, deep brotherly affection, and youth's devotedness to the elders. In its verses, proper conduct between masters and servants is personified, and before our very eyes, punishment is meted out to the evildoer by the scion of Raghu.[555]

3.1.2. The *Rāmāyaṇa* Story

The story of *Rāmāyaṇa* foregrounds the theme of exile and separation.[556] Diana Eck, concerning the themes of *Rāmāyaṇa* writes,

> The simplicity of the tale of wrenching separation, search, and triumph, however, is but the frame for a complex human drama that touches the heart, stirs the emotions, probes family jealousies and bonds, ethical, dilemmas, and the meaning of human life.[557]

In Vālmīkī, this is signaled right from the story of the killing of the *krauñca* bird by the hunter. But in any case, most versions of the story do not begin with the separation of Daśarath from his son; much happens before that: Rām's birth, early adventures, marriage and so on. In the *Vālmīkī Rāmāyaṇa*, Daśarath, the king of Ayodhyā, has four sons, but wants Rām, his eldest son, to be heir to the throne. The instigation of Manthāra, a hunchbacked maidservant, and the cunning of Rām's stepmother Kaikeyī, who desired her son Bharat to be on the throne, spoils the king's plan. Then

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[553] VR. VI. 106.

[554] Daniel H, H. Ingalls, "*Preface,*" in *The Rise of the Religious Significance of Rāma*, Frank Whaling (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980), x.

[555] Cf. *Pālākhanda,* Ch. 66, 128-129.

[556] The story begins with the separation of Daśarath from his son Rām, later the separation of husband from his wife when Sītā is Kidnapped, and at the end Sītā's exile to the forest separation of Sītā from Rām. See Eck, *India A Sacred Geography*, 401-403.

[557] Eck, *India, A Sacred Geography*, 401.

Rām begins fourteen years of exile in the forest in obedience to his father's command and helps his father keep the promises of two boons made to his wife, Kaikeyi. The life in the forest in the company of his beloved wife Sītā and brother Lakṣmaṇa has episodes of visiting āśrams of seers, meeting devotees, killing demons, and building a hut in Chitrakoot and Pancavati. In the forest, Sītā is kidnapped by the demon king Rāvaṇa in disguise and is taken off to his capital city Lankā. Rāvaṇa had received a boon from Brahma for his austere asceticism of not being killed by either demons or gods. He was fearless of death; absurdly, he was killed by a human king with a company of monkeys. A noble vulture, Jaṭāyu, tries to save Sītā, but in vain. While she is being carried off, Sītā drops her ornaments to give clues to where she is being taken. Rām is grief-stricken and along with his brother Lakṣmaṇa begins the search for Sītā. Hanumān and the army of monkeys and bears help to build a bridge and win the battle against Rāvaṇa. Consequently, Rām rescues his faithful wife Sītā and returns to Ayodhyā, to reign for years (*Rāmrāj*).

According to the German Indologist H. Jacobi (d. 1937), the Rām legend of Vālmīkī had two different sources. The first relates to court intrigue and its consequences; secondly, life in the forest emerged from mythic and supernatural backgrounds. So, Jacobi wrote, "One can recognize at first glance everything is human, natural, totally free from fantasy .... The case is quite otherwise in the second half of the saga, where everything is marvelous and 'fantastic.'"[558] More recently, Jacobi's approach has been seen as reductive, as if the court part of the story is real, and rest merely myth.[559] In the popular understanding there is no such distinction, and the epic is seen as having different stories within, as each story is encased in a meta-story.[560] Hence, the book in its extant

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[558] As cited in Camille Bulcke, *Rāmkathā and Other Essays* (Patna: Vani Prakashan, 2010): see Hermann Jacobi, *Das Rāmāyaṇa* (Bonn: Verlag von Friedrich Cohen,1893), 126-27.

[559] See Sheldon Pollock, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīkī: an Epic of Ancient India* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986).

[560] Ramanujan, "Is there an Indian Way of Thinking," in *The Collected Essays of A. K. Ramanujan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 42.

form has seven books: *Bālakāṇḍa* (childhood), *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* (Ayodhyā Book), *Araṇyakāṇḍa* (Forest Book), *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* (Kiṣkindha Book), *Sundarakāṇḍa* (Beautiful Book), *Yuddhakāṇḍa* (War Book) and *Uttarakāṇḍa* (Later Book). Brockington, Bulcke and a few other scholars see *Bālakāṇḍa* and *Uttarakāṇḍa* as later interpolations in the process of divinization of Rām. But Goldman and Pollock argue persuasively against it. The chronology and "gradual divinization" argument, advanced by some scholars, is controversial and opposed by others.

3.1.3. Many Tellings of *Rāmāyaṇa*

The Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* of 24,0000 couplets ascribed to Vālmīkī[561] has been inspired into various regional variations.[562] Vālmīkī writes, "as long as mountains and streams endure upon the earth, so shall the Rām's story continue to circulate in the world."[563] He visualized the time-transcending strength of the epic story. True to his statement, the story connected to the Hindu tradition has not remained a monolithic narration but finds a place in Buddhist and Jain traditions and is popular beyond India, notably in Southeast Asia. Tradition calls the *Rāmāyaṇa* the first poem (*ādikāvya*) of India and Vālmīkī, the first poet (*ādikavi*) and the inventor of the influential *śloka* meter in Sanskrit. [564] The date of composition of the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* epic is debated. However, it is believed that it was written probably between the fifth and third centuries BCE.[565] Concerning the historicity of ancient Indian texts, A. K. Ramanujan wrote that they "may be

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[561] The historicity of Vālmīkī is not known. The popular legends depict him as a lowborn robber who was transformed into a sage by Rām's grace in the *Tretā Yuga*.
[562] See Paula Richman, ed., *Many Rāmāyaṇas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (Berkeley/Oxford: University of California Press, 1991); Raghavan, V. ed., *The Rāmayana Tradition in Asia* (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1980); D.P. Sinha and S. Sahai, eds, *Rāmayaṇa Tradition and National Cultures in Asia* (Lucknow: Directorate of Cultural Affairs, Govt. of Uttar Pradesh, 1989; Monika Thiel- Hortsmann, ed. *Rāmāyaṇa and Rāmāyaṇas, Khoja Series of Modern South Asian Studies*, vol.3. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1991).
[563] *yāvad sthāsyanti girayaḥ saritaś ca mahītale/ tāvad Rāmāyaṇa kathā lokeṣu pracariṣyati (*VR.1.2.36).
[564] Cf: Kālidāsa, *Raghuvaṃśa,* XV 33 and 41.
[565] *Rām the Steadfast: An Early Form of Rāmāyaṇa*, trans. John Brockington and Mary Brockington (London: Penguin, 2006), xiii.

historically dateless, anonymous; but their contexts and efficacies are explicit."[566] Paula Richman

a scholar in *Rāmāyaṇa* argues that no single answer applies to every textual version.[567]

In addition to its religious narration, the epic's rich poetry in Sanskrit has become a source

of inspiration for numerous retellings.[568] Since the story captures the poetic imagination in different

cultural contexts, every region/culture in India finds some connection with the *Rāmāyaṇa* story.

In a way, the story of *Rāmāyaṇa* creates a "sacred geography" that connects India's width and

breadth. Diana Eck writes,

> the legend is based on a journey, it creates a landscape and a map. The footprints
> of the heroes and heroines of the *Rāmāyaṇa* are tracks that we can follow through
> the land of India.[569]

The vitality and diversity of the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition is reflected in the hundreds of telling of the

story of Rām in India, Southeast Asia, and beyond. [570] Drawing attention to the plurality of

*Rāmāyaṇa*s in Indian history, Thapar writes,

> The *Rāmāyaṇa* does not belong to any one moment in history for it has its own
> history which lies embedded in the many versions which were woven around the
> theme at different times and places, even within its own history in the Indian
> subcontinent. The Indian epics were never frozen as were the compositions of
> Homer when they changed from an oral to a literate form. Professional
> reciters*, kathākāras*, recited the written versions with their own commentary and
> frequently adjusted the story to contemporary norms. The appropriation of the story
> by a multiplicity of groups meant a multiplicity of versions through which the social
> aspirations and ideological concerns of each group were articulated. The story in

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[566] A.K. Ramanujan, "Is there an Indian Way of Thinking?" 42.

[567] She writes most pre-colonial Hindu narratives which retell Rama story begin with his birth on earth, but Chandravatis 16th century Bengali telling of the story opens with Sita's birth. Paula Richman & Rustom Bharucha, *Performing the Rāmayana Tradition, Enactments, Interpretations and Arguments* (New York: Oxford university Press, 2021), 3.

[568] The style and content of *Rāmāyaṇa* are commended in Bālakāṇḍa of Vālmīkī Rāmāyaṇa calling the *Rāmāyaṇa* "*param kavīnam ādhāram,*" VR. 1.4. 27.

[569] Eck, *India, A Sacred Geography*, 399.

[570] Richman uses the term 'Rāmāyaṇa Tradition', referring to many tellings of the Rām story as a whole rather than to Valmiki's telling or some other telling limited to a particular region or particular time. *See* Paula Richman, ed. *Many Ramayanas the Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, 1991.

these versions included significant variations that changed the conceptualization of character, event, and meaning.[571]

These different *Rāmāyaṇa*s also broaden the philosophical and theological dimensions of Rām and devotion. The proliferation of regional *Rāmāyaṇas* followed an earlier pattern of the spread of emotional Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* from south to north.[572] This is an indication that Kṛṣṇa *bhakti* predates Rām *Bhakti*. For instance, the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (esoteric *Rāmāyaṇa*) adds a significant dimension to the theology of Rām not only as the incarnation of Viṣṇu but also as the personification of the ultimate reality, the Brahman.[573] Despite its *Advaita-Vedanta* locus, the *Rāma Gītā* of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* has influenced Rām *Bhakti* in a significant manner. The *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa* attributed to Vālmīkī, that aims to praise the greatness of Sītā has the combination of *Śākta* mythology, and the *Devi Mahātmya*, as well as folk traditions. Bulcke notes that in this *Rāmāyaṇa* Rām praises Sītā with a thousand names. Sītā here is not only *Śakt*i but exalted as a goddess, *Devi*. With her intervention as a terrible Devi with a garland of skulls, she defeats Rāvaṇa and his army.[574] The 12th century '*Irāmāvatarām*' by Kampan in Tamil speaks of the descent of Rām.[575] The exceptionality of Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa* is Rāvaṇa, the opponent of Rām recognizing the divinity of Rām as the descendant of Viṣṇu.[576] Pointing to the Tamil *Irāmāvatārām*, which has no *Uttarakāṇḍa* and is composed using more than twenty different kinds of Tamil meters, Ramanujan says that the story is faithful to the narrative sequence. Nevertheless,

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[571]Thapar, "The Ramayana Syndrome," 72.

[572] Friedhelm Hardy, *Viraha Bhakti* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 3-48.

[573] Frank Whaling, *The Rise of the Religious Significance of Rāma* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980),111.

[574] Bulcke, *Rāmkathā Utpatti Aur Vikās* ,133-34.

[575]Julia Leslie, *Authority and Meaning in Indian Religions Hinduism and the Case of Vālmīki* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 160.

[576] David Shulman, 'Divine Order and Divine Evil in the Tamil Tale of *Rām*a,' *Journal of Asian Studies*, 38, no.4 (August 1979): 651-69.

it is shaped by the Tamil *Bhakti* tradition, and the characters are filled with local folklore, poetic

traditions, and imagery. He calls such texts

> indexical: a text embedded in a locale, a context. *Rāmāyaṇa* is not merely a set of individual texts, but a genre with a variety of instances…. The Rām Story has become almost a second language of the whole culture area, a shared core of names, characters, incidents, and motifs, with a narrative language in which Text 1 can say one thing and Text 2 something else, even the exact opposite. Valmiki's Hindu and Vimalasūri's Jain texts in India- or the Thai Rāmakīrti in Southeast Asia—are symbolic translations of each other.[577]

The Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa* of Kṛttivāsa describes Rāma's wedding as similar to a Bengali

wedding with Bengali customs and cuisine. This text reflects 'the living *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition rather

than being a 'frozen' reconstruction of the classical text.'[578] The Jain telling look sat familiar events

from a non-Hindu perspective.[579] The Kannada *Rāmāyaṇa*s include Pampa *Rāmāyaṇa* by

Nāgachandra (known as Abhinava Pampa) and *Torave Rāmāyaṇa* by Narahari (known as Kumara

Vālmiki).[580] The Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa*s include *Dvipada Rāmāyaṇa, Bhaskara Rāmāyaṇa* and *Molla*

Rāmāyaṇa by a potter woman of low caste.[581] In Sūrsāgar's narration, there is a connection

between Rām and Kṛṣṇa, in which Yaśoda is trying to calm little Kṛṣṇa to sleep, telling him the

story of Rām's deeds.[582] The different versions of *Rāmāyaṇa* indicate the popularity of the epic.

Are these different telling related to one another? Can the Vālmīkī story be an 'Ur Text'? The basic

storyline is similar in all these stories, and the story is based on king Rām and his exile and return.

Ramanujan, in his essay *Three Hundred Rāmayaṇa*, points out that for every Rām, there is a

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[577] Ibid., 45.

[578] William Smith, "Kīrttibās and the Pundits: The Revision of the Bengali Rāmāyaṇa," in Asko Parpola, ed. *Proceedings of the Nordic South Asia Conference* held in Helsinki, 10 June-12,1980, 229- 40 (Helsinki: The Finnish Oriental Society, 1981) 236.

[579] See V.M. Kulkarni, "The Origin and Development of the Rām Story in Jaina Literature," *Journal of the Oriental Institute of Baroda* 9, no. 2 (December 1959); 189-204, and no.3 (March 1960): 284-304.

[580] Bulcke, *Rāmkatha Utpatti Aur Vikās*, 59.

[581] Ibid., 178-80.

[582] *Sūrsāgar's Rāmāyaṇa* 10.198-199.

Rāmāyaṇa and these hundreds of tellings of a story in different cultures, languages, and religious traditions relate to each other through certain modifications.[583]

The *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition allows for multiple voices and shows great fluidity. The relationship between various texts cannot be judged by the notion of being faithful to an original text. These different renditions are also helpful in considering some of the controversial scenes of the epic. For example, the painful passage describing the 'fire ordeal of Sītā' in *Vālmīkī Rāmāyaṇa* is 'solved' in the *Rāmcaritmānas b*y bringing in the concept of a "shadow Sītā" (*Chāya* Sītā).[584] Here, Rām's inviolate *śakti* remains concealed in the element of fire. Kuvempu, a Kannada poet in his Śrī *Rāmāyaṇa Darśanam* introduced an astounding variant on this account. When Sītā offers herself as a supreme oblation to Agni, Rām follows her and comes out of the fire, holding Sītā's palm in his right hand. Both Sītā and the lawgiver Rām proved themselves as honorable persons (*maryāda puruṣottama*). [585] Before the law, all are equal, not excepting the lawgiver himself. This act indicates, along with Sītā's chastity, Rām's love for Sītā.

The diversity of any given version of the text reflects the social location and ideology of those who appropriate it. India's most famous Christian Hindi scholar, a Jesuit missionary Camille Bulcke, counted 300 telling of the epic. In the process of 'semiticization of Hinduism,' that kills diversity, Hindu religious extremists insist that there is only one *Rāmāyaṇa*. There have been attempts in recent decades to homogenize the story and render it monolithic. For instance,

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[583] Ramanujan "Three Hundred Rāmāyaṇas," 134.

[584] See 3.24.1-5, Sītā conceals herself and substitutes her shadow (*pratibimba*), and in 6.108.14-109.14, the shadow *Sītā* is destroyed, and real *Sītā* is restored.

[585] Kuvempu wrote this *Mahākāvya* (great poem) in Kannada based on the Sanskrit Epic Rāmāyaṇa in 1949. The text received the highest literary award, '*jnānapeetha*', in 1967. The composition focuses on the human dimension of Rām and social duty (*dharma*). See Kuvempu, *Sri Ramayana Darshanam* (Kannada), 3rd edition (Mysore: Mysore University Press, 2011).

telecasting a standardized *Rāmāyaṇa* series in 1987 and protest A.K. Ramanujan's essay on 'Three Hundred Rāmāyaṇas in 2011. [586] Affirming the diversity of *Rāmāyaṇa* Amartya Sen writes,

> the great thing about this classic book [*Rāmāyaṇa*] is not the conformity it is allegedly trying to achieve – religious or even literary- but the creative diversity it allows and encourages, which has had profoundly constructive effects across a huge part of the world.[587]

Among these many tellings the *Mānas* is the most popular in the Hindi land.

3.2. The Author of the *Mānas* - Tulsidas

The author of *Mānas*, Goswami Tulsidas (1532-1623)[588] is a poetic genius famous in the Hindi speaking region for his rendering of the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* into the people's language (*lok bhāṣa*) Avadhi.[589] The retelling of the *līlā* of Rām through *Rāmcaritmānas* regarded him as the reincarnation of Vālmiki. Nābhā Dās in his *Bhaktamāl* (c 1600) writes, "for the Salvation of beings in this perverse dark age Vālmīkī has become Tulsi."[590] Tulsi's composition of the *Mānas* in *doha* and *chaupai* style having a lyrical outpouring of devotion (*bhakti*) made Rām the greatest object of personal veneration in North India. His *bhakti* contemporaries Mirabāi, Surdās, Rahīm, and others bowed before his moral authority. Tulsi reacts against the neglect of Rām as an *avatār* by the Sants Guru Nānak and Kabir. In the prologue, Tulsi writes, "for those who have no faith, and love for Raghunāth [Rām], the lake is inaccessible." Even when he had opposition for the spread

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[586] A.K. Ramanujan's essay that he wrote for a University of Pittsburgh conference in 1987 was at the center of controversy after twenty-four years in 2011. The essay was dropped from the history syllabus of Delhi University after protests from Hardline Hindu groups. They believe that the discussion of different versions in the essay offends Hindu belief. See *https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-15363181*.

[587] Eck, *India A Sacred Geography*, 438.

[588] The servant of Tulsi- A fragrant shrub beloved to Viṣṇu.

[589] The most commonly accepted date of birth is, i.e.,1532. For more details, see F.R. Allchin's 'Introduction,' in Tulsī Dās, *Kavitāvalī*, trans. F.R. Allchin, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964, 33.

[590] Nābhadās, a devotee of Rām, was a contemporary of Tulsidās and it is believed that he was established in the Aravalli hills in Rajasthan where the fame of Tulsi's Rāmāyaṇ had reached. Priyadās in his Bhaktirasbodhini, a famous *tīkā* on Bhaktmaḷ claims in verse 517 the encounter between the two in Vṛndāvan Kali Kuṭila jīva nistāra heta bālmīka Tulasi Bhayau (636 (207)? Quoted by F.R. Allchin, *Kavitāvaḷi*, 40. See Frederick Growse S. transl.1880: *The Rāmāyaṇa of Tulsīdās* (Allahabad: Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass,1978), xlii.

of devotion to Rām in Kāśi, he writes in *Kavitāvaḷī* "Tulsi, why give undue weight to others, if Lord Rāma us protector, who shall destroy you."[591]

No exhaustive account is available on Tulsi's Life. The life account is mostly based on legends than reliable sources. The biographical source that is available in *Vinayapatrika* and *Kavitāvaḷī* are not considered reliable. Most traditions agree that he was born a *Smārta Brahmin*, later orphaned by his parents, and experienced poverty. In the *Kavitāvaḷī*, Tulsi writes, "my parents abandoned me at birth; providence wrote nothings auspicious on my forehead, I was wretched, an object of contempt helpless and hungering for the titbits thrown before the dogs." [592] In the *Vinayapatrika*, he confesses his sinful condition and utter dependence on Rām.[593]

3.2.1. Tulsi's Devotion to Rām

Tulsi's devotion to Rām emerges from his personal experience of being saved by the Vaiṣṇava *sādhus*[594] and their introduction to the devotion to Rām, the "purifier of the fallen (*patit pāvan*)."[595] Rām was his refuge and his heavenly guru from the beginning. So, he says, "I worship the lotus feet of my Guru, the ocean of mercy, Hari in the form of a man." Through the initiation by a *Guru*, he became a Rāmanandi and was given the name Tulsidas.[596] He received Rām devotion from the Rāmanandi Guru in the *Kavitāvaḷi,* he says,

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[591] *Kavitāvaḷi,* vi, 48
[592]*Ma, tu pitā jaga jāya tajyo, bidhidū na likhī kachu bhāla bhlāi,*
Nīcha, nirādara-bhājana,kādara,kūkara tūkava tāgi lalāi, Kavitāvali 7, 57,199.
[593] *Vinaypatrika* 275.1-3 and 276.10-3
[594] see Vasudha Paramasivan, "Between Text and Sect: Early Nineteenth-Century Shifts in the Theology of *Rām*," Ph.D. diss., University of California, 2010), 73.
[595] See *Kavitāvaḷi* 6.73, 7. 57 and *Vinaypatrikā* 275.1-3. I Hold poverty at every door; I gnashed my teeth and fell at feet. Till some holy men (*sants*) saw my misery and said, Sorrow no more, Rāma is the refuge of wretches see also closing *chand* of *Mānas*, 7.130.9.
[596] The Rāmanandi *sampradāy*- tradition has three distinct groups of practitioners, namely *tyāgis,* also known as *bairāgis*, *rasiks*, and *nāgas*- is much associated with Rāma bhakti. It is a sect that represents devotion to Rāma, traces its origin to Swami Rāmanand a Vaiṣṇavite saint belonging to the lineage of the Ramanuja of Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition. *Rāmcaritmānas* is the "theological core" of the Rāmanandi sect, and we see conjunction between the text and the sect. See Vasudha Paramasivan, "Between Text and Sect: Early Nineteenth-Century Shifts in the Theology of *Rām*," Ph.D.

You raised me from dust and made me loftier than a mountain
By joining your holy group, I gained dignity among the elders.
Yet, as I was one, so am I still, still performing low acts.
I fill my belly singing of your virtues Rām,
Lord, hide this shame of your befriended
Do not regard me with anger, for
O merciful, one should not kill a young snake having reared it
Nor should one cut down a position tree having planted it.[597]

There is a belief that Tulsi came to Banaras, had his Sanskrit education, returned to his village to marry, and subsequent wandering takes him to Ayodhyā and later returned to Varanasi where he began to write the remaining part of the *Mānas* and died probably in 1623. Priyadas's commentary, *Bhaktirasabodhinī ṭīkā* on the *Bhaktamāl* (1712) has seven legends in the *Kavita* form on the life of Tulsidas. In these legends, the awakening of Rām *bhakti* is marked. In the first legend, Tulsi, having an excessive fondness for his wife, could not bear the separation when she had gone for the customary parental home crosses the swollen river. He had an embarrassing experience upon arrival at his wife's place. She, not pleased with his visit, reprimands him, " have you no love for Rām? My body is but flesh and bone."[598] Rituraj, a *Vyās* who sings the *Mānas* during the *Navāh* celebration, believes that Tulsi's wife was his *Dīkśa Guru* (ordained) and inspirer for his devotion to Rām. This experience awakens in Tulsi the desire to have the *darśan* of Rām, and he moves to Kāśi. Tulsi propagated his devotion by his concept of *Mānas* as *kathā*. Tulsi refers to his work as *kathā,* although he makes use of the words *Granth* (book), *Śāstras,* He promotes a narrative style of *kathā* "conversation" that has a teller (*vaktā*) and a listener (*śrota*). Tulsi uses more than 108 times the term *kathā* which aims to transmit the story through dialogue. Lutgendorf writes that: "Tulsidas conceived of the *Mānas* as *Kathā* - that is a telling of the story of Rām with

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dissertation., University of California, 2010), 73. The social openness of Rāmanandi has been interpreted as the Hindu answer to the conversions of Hindus to Islam under Muslim rule. See David N. Lorenzen, *Bhakti Religion in North India Community Identity and Political Action* (Delhi: Manohar 1996), 300.

[597] *Kavitāvaḷi*, 7.61.

[598] *Prīti rām nahīṃ tana hāḍa cāma chāye haim.*

emphasis on the active, performative sense of this term." [599] In praise of Tulsi, Madhusudan Sarasvati (1540-1623), living at Chausatthi ghat, writes,

> In this Kashi- 'the forest of bliss'
> Tulsi is like moving holy basil (Tulasi)
> His garden of poetry is so grand,
> Where Rām always circles like a black wasp. [600]

3.2.2. Tulsidas's Works

Popular belief tells us that Tulsi, along with his great work of *Rāmcaritmānas*, wrote at least eleven other works. Chronologically they are assigned as follows: *Rāmlalānahachaū* (Avadhi); the *Rāmājnāpraśna* (1564: Avadhi); the *Jānakīmangal* (Avadhi); the *Rāmcaritmānas* (1574: Avadhi), the *Pārvatīmangal* (1586: Avadhi), the *Gītāvaḷī,* the *Kṛṣṇagītāvaḷī* and the *Vinaypatrika* (these three works are in Braj); the *Barave Rāmāyaṇa* (Avadhi); the *Kavitāvaḷī* (Braj), *Dohāvaḷi,* some scholars also mention of *Vairāgyasandīpinī* (Braj) and the *Jnāndīpikā* (1565: Avadhi).[601] Today, Hanumān's most famous texts are *Hanumān Calisa, Bajrang Bāṇi*, and *Saṅkaṭ Mochan.* All are attributed to Tulsidas, but scholars disagree that Tulsi wrote these as a historical person.

3.2.3. Tulsidas and Varanasi

Tulsi's first acquaintance with Varanasi is believed to be his childhood when he, at the age of 12, came to study Sanskrit to Panchgangā *ghāt* under Śeśa Sanāthan.[602] According to folk

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[599] Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 117. The engagement of the text in the *kathā* form will be explained in the fourth chapter.

[600] Madhusudan Sarasvati, *Kavira*j, 38.

[601] G.A. Grierson, Notes on Tulsi Dās' India Antiquity vol 22,1893, 89-98,122-9,197-206,225-36, 253-74. Vedprakaś Garg," Tulsī kī Kṛityā', in *Ārya and Agarvāl, Tulsī Mānas Sandarbh*, 40-57 and Devakīnandan Śrivāstav, *Tuslidās kī bhāśa* (Lakhnau: Lakhnau Viśvavidyālay,1957), 347- 68.

[602] Rana P.B. Singh, *Tulasi's Vision of the Lifeworld in the Middle Ages*, in *Cultural Landscapes and the Lifeworld, Literary Images of Banaras. Pilgrimage & Cosmology Series*, ed. P.B. Singh (Varanasi: Indica Books, 2004),112.

traditions, he returned to his hometown, and after making his pilgrimages to Chitrakut, Prayāg, Vṛindāvan, and Ayodhyā, he returned to Varanasi and completed the *Mānas*. Tulsidas gives testimony in the *Mānas*, saying that he began writing the *Mānas* in 1574 in Ayodhyā.[603] It is believed that Tulsidas wrote from *Kiśkindā Kāṇd* at Varanasi as he writes, "knowing it to be the birthplace of liberation, The treasury of wisdom and destroyer of sin, Where Shambhu and Bhavāni reside, How could one not serve sacred Kashi?"[604] The next verse continues to praise Śiva, the city's merciful patron deity, as he drank the dreadful poison (*hālahala*) that was scorching all gods.[605] Among the people, some stories and narratives indicate Tulsi's strong connection to Banaras.

The ardent promoter of *bhakti* had opposition from the Brahmin in Varanasi. He was harassed for writing in *lokbhāsa* by the *Puṣṭimārgi Gosāins* living around Gopal Mandir, and as a result, he had to change his residence from there to Badaini under the shelter of Rāja Todarmal. Tulsidas had sent one copy of the manuscript for safeguarding to his friend Todar Mal, the finance minister of the Mughal emperor, Akbar.[606] The life span of Tulsidas spread over when North India was firmly under the control of Muslim leaders, especially of the Mughal rulers Akbar (1556-1605) and Jahangir (1605-1627).[607] The orthodox Brahmins rejected the Avadhi compositions. However, there is a popular legend, that happened in the Kāśi Viśvanāth temple, is told to

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[603] The date given in the Vikram Era corresponds to 1574 C.E. The gentle month corresponds to March-April (*Chaitra*) is observed as Rām's birthday. Cf. RCM, 1.34.2-3. All the translations cited here from the *Rāmcaritmānas* are from the seven-volume translation work by Philip Lutgendorf.

[604] RCM, IV srota 1 and the same verse is found in his *Dohāvaḷi,* 237.

[605] Hālahala is a world-threatening venom that was a byproduct of the churning of the cosmic ocean (*kṣīra sāgara Maṇthan*) to obtain the nectar of immortality. To save gods, Śiva drank it, and he is known as *Nīlakaṇṭa* (blue-throated).

[606] Narrating this Vishwambhara Nath Mishra the present *Mahanth* of Sankaṭ Mochan Mandir says, 'why should we fight with the Muslims? The *Mānas* was written and protected during the Mughal empire.

[607] F. R. Allchin, *The Petition to Rām*, *The Translation of Vinayapatrik*a (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1966), 23.

emphasize opposition to the fact that the *Mānas* was not written in Sanskrit. According to the legend, when Tulsidas's writing was opposed, the *Mānas* was kept at the bottom of a pile of Sanskrit texts in the *Sanctum Sanctorum* of the Kāśi Viśvanāth temple. The doors were locked. In the morning, when the doors were opened, the text was at the top of the pile with the inscription – *Satyam, Śivam, Sundaram* (truth, auspiciousness, beauty) and the signature of Śiva. It is assumed that the inscription was written by a divine hand—presumably Śiva's—then the word *śivaṃ* in it was, in effect, a punning "signature." According to Lutgendorf, however, some have also argued that the whole phrase is a Sanskrit translation of an English saying popularized in the 19th century, which would make the temple story very late. In this way, the text received divine sanction from the prominent deity [Viśvanāth] of Banaras.[608] Banaras is the City of Śiva, whom people venerate as Rudra, Bhairav, and Bhola Nāth. Tulsidas popularized the belief that it is by the power of Rām's name, which Śiva whispers in the ear of anyone who dies in Kāśi, that liberation from further rebirth is assured.

There are many miraculous stories connected to the life of Tulsidas. For instance, in addition to Priyadas's *Bhaktirasabodhini*, a commentary on *Bhaktamāl* composed in 1712 , presents eleven stanzas that narrate seven stories that referred to the miracles performed by the poet Tulsi. [609] People believe that he is able to perform miracles because of his ardent devotion to Hanumān. Tulsidas is revered for his connection with Hanumān and for establishing 12 Hanumān

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[608] See John S. Hawley and Mark Juergensmyer, *Songs of the Saints of India* (New York: Oxford University Press,1988), 160.

[609] The seven stories are 1. Tulsi's passionate love for his wife transformed into ardent love for Rām 2. An encounter with the friendly ghost led to a meeting with Hanumān and the ensuing *darśan* of Rām 3. Tulsi's pardoning of Brahman-killer 4. An attempted robbery upset by Rām himself 5. the revival of a deceased Brahmin in fulfillment of a blessing given by Tulsi to the dead man's wife. 6.Tulsi's imprisonment by the king of Delhi who desires to see him perform a miracle and his rescue by an army of monkeys sent by Hanumān 7. Tulsi's pilgrimage to Vrindāvan and his encounter with Nābhadās and the miraculous transformation of an image of Kṛṣṇa into one of Rām. See Bhaktmāl, *Kavittavaḷi,* 508-518.

shrines, among them the famous one is '*Sankatmochan Mandir.*' The story of '*Kodi Hanumān*' is the most prevalent story that the devotees narrate.[610] I have a whole section on Hanumān in the latter part of chapter.

3.2.4. Tulsidas and Pandemic

The section on *Kavitāvaḷī* mentions the outbreak of plague due to the ill-omened astrological conjunctions Saturn with Pisces (*mīn kā śani*) in 1612 and later in 1613, during the first two decades of the seventeenth century, the death of his friend Todar Mal and the outbreak of plague.[611] Tulsidas suffering from pain in his arm spreading all over his body and accompanied by painful boils prays not to Rām but Hanumān. Lutgendorf writes, "an anguished cry to the one god whom Tulsidas evidently thought could relive his distress. They show that the great poet and scholar, in an especially dark period of his last years, turned not to the "purifier of the fallen" (*patita-pāvana*), Rām but the "liberator from distress" (*saṇakt mochana*).[612] In *Hanumān Bahuk,* Tulsi is praying not for ultimate salvation/liberation but release from pain (*sankaṭ*). According to the Gosaimcarit of Bhavanidas, Tulsi died in 1623 CE on *Asi ghāt*.[613] This great devotional poet writes Tarachand, is "like a natural spring in the hill, the water of which provides relief to human beings of the plain."[614] As a religious reformer and poet, remarked George Grierson, "Tulsi is to be placed among the world's three or four great literary giants. In Northern India, he has no comparison. His *Rāmcaritmānas* is as popular as the Bible in England."[615]

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[610] The story is explained in the later part of the chapter. Today these sites have become the personal property of one *pundits* and not maintained at all.

[611] *Kavitāvaḷī*, 7.170, 176-77.

[612] Lutgendorf, *Hanumans Tale*: *The Messages of a Divine Monkey* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 99.

[613] The verse writes, In Vikram Samvat 1680 (1623 CE) on Assi Ghat on the banks of the Ganga, in the month of Śrāvaṇ, on the third day of the lunar fortnight, on a Saturday, Tulsidas abandoned his body
saṃbata soraha sau asī asī ganga je tīra
Śrāvaṇa śyāma tīja śani tulasī tajyau śarīta

[614] Tarachand, *Influences of Islam on Indian Culture* (Allahabad: 1963),178.

[615] George A. Grierson, *The Languages of India*, 399.

The famous scholar of *Advaita*, a Brahmin, Madhusudana Saraswati, writes on Tulsi,

> In the pleasure groves of Kāśi,
> Tulsidas is a moving tree
> Whose poem in the form of a creeper
> is adorned by the bee that is Rām.[616]

3.3. *Rāmcaritmānas*: A Devotional Text

Sir George Grierson called Tulsidas "the greatest star in the firmament of medieval Indian poetry."[617] His composition is known for its remarkable beauty and complexity that has shaped and promoted Rām *Bhakti* among the many tellings. He retells the story "for his own inner joy."[618] Tulsidas acknowledges that Rām's story has no limit in this world.[619] Being faithful to the experience of Rām as his *iṣṭadevata* (personal deity), he creatively reveals the narrative of Rām; that he repeatedly heard from his *guru*. The story has awakened his heart and he desire that the story will do the same to one who listens.[620] His epic's composition is not in the 'language of gods' (*dev bhāṣā*) but follows the devotional movements' ideal. *Braj bhāṣa* had become the literary language of the *Bhakti* poets who were writing primarily on *Kṛṣṇa Bhakti*.[621] Similarly, the *Mānas* text consists of 12,800 lines divided into 1,073 stanzas, in seven sections (*Kāṇḍa*), and written in a regional dialect of Eastern Hindi, Avadhi.[622] The text was also the product of a culture that lacked a strong prose tradition. The widespread illiteracy among the masses and the lack of technology for broad-based dissemination of texts made this text popular and appealing due to its narration

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[616] *Ānandakānane kaśyāṃ tulasi jaṇgamastaruḥ*
Kavitāmanjarī yasya rāmabhrāmarabhūśutā
[617] George A. Grierson, *The Modern Vernacular Literature of India* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1889), 42.
[618] RCM, 1.10.7.
[619] RCM, 1.32.2; 1.33; 1.139.2.
[620] RCM, 1.30.1.
[621] For the discussion on the development of Hindi, Avadhi and Braj, Stuart McGregor, "The Progress of Hindi, Part 1: The Development of a Trans regional Idiom," in *Literary Cultures in South Asia: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 912-957.
[622] McGregor, 'The Rām Story and Rāma Devotion in North India,' in *Vyas Rāmāyaṇa, Its Universal Appeal and Global Role,*" 19.

style. Growse wrote in the late nineteenth century, "the book is in everyone's hands, from the court to the cottage, and is read, or heard, and appreciated alike by every class of the Hindu community, whether high or low, rich or poor, young or old."[623] He also proclaimed of the *Mānas*, "the Hindi poem is the best and most trustworthy guide to the popular living faith of the Hindu race."[624]

Tulsidas's account says the composition of the *Mānas* began in 1574 CE in Ayodhyā, "On Tuesday, the ninth of spring's gentle month - In the city of Avadh, this account is revealed."[625] Most scholars agree on its completion in Varanasi. The evidence cited for this is the invocation in the fourth book, *Kiṣkindha Kāṇḍ*.[626] The text is not a literal translation of Vālmīki's *Sanskrit Rāmāyaṇa* but a regional rendition of it. Tulsidas, with his creative poetic meters of *doha* and *chaupai* composed his version.[627]

Rāmanandi ascetics, the earliest promulgators of the *Mānas*, identified this text as a "fifth Veda," augmenting the spiritual wisdom preserved in ancient Sanskrit scriptures. Indeed, recent scholarship on the Rām *Bhakti* tradition has tended to consider the *Rāmcaritmānas* as the "theological core" of the Rāmanandi sect.[628] Nevertheless. The text's devotional fervor and

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[623] Frederic Salmon, Growse, trans. *The Rāmāyaṇa of Tulsidās*, Cawnpore: E. Samuel, 1891: reprint ed., New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978, XVII-XVIII

[624] George A. Grierson, *The Modern Vernacular Literature of India* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society,1889), 42.

[625] RCM, 1.33.3. The date corresponds here to 1574 CE, and the spring to March-April, traditionally observed as Rām's birthday.

[626] Knowing it to be the birthplace of liberation,
The treasury of wisdom and destroyer of sin.
Where Shambhu and Bhavani reside
How could one nor serve sacred Kashi? (RCM, 4.2. 0a).

[627] In 1442, Vishnu Das of Gwalior had composed *Rāmayaṇkathā*, comprising seven thousand lines in the alternating meters of *Chaupai* and *Doha*, which becomes the structural norm for narrating poems in Pre-modern Hindi, including *Mānas*. Lutgendorf defines *chaupai* as a two-line unit with each line known as *ardhāli* (half), comprising 32 beats. Two feet *(pad)*, each of sixteen beats and separated by a caesura, makeup one *ardhāli*. A *doha* is a couplet with each line comprising two unequal parts, usually written thirteen and eleven beats, respectively. A *soraṭhā* is a *doha* in reverse, each line comprising eleven and thirteen beats. See Lutgendorf, *Life of a Text*, 14,

[628] Peter Van der Veer, *Gods on Earth: The Management of Religious Experience and Identity in a North Indian Pilgrimage Centre* (London-Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone Press, 1988), 81-85.

aesthetic appeal have made Tulsidas's version of the Rām story (*kathā*) a classic text today. In defining a classic, David Tracy writes,

> A classic is a person, text, event, melody, or symbol encountered in some cultural experience that bears a specific excess of meaning as well as certain timelessness; it confronts and provokes us in our present horizon with the feeling that something else might be the case.[629]

A classic as an adjective or a noun refers to an outstanding example of a particular style, something of lasting worth or timeless quality, something that exemplifies. Traditionally the ancient Greek or Sanskrit traditions were recognized as classic. The *Mānas*, with its devotional and performative emphasis, has a particular style and a worth that has a lasting impact on people's minds and hearts. Applying the notion of classic to the *Mānas* is not an exaggeration of the text's worth and high quality.

3.3.1. Sources of the *Mānas*

According to Camille Bulcke, the *Mānas* has drawn from the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* and a mysterious work known as the *Bhuśundi Rāmāyaṇa* for its composition.[630] The other sources include the oral tradition transmitted to Tulsi by his *Guru*.[631] Charlotte Vaudeville points out dramas: *Hanumān nāṭaka, Prasannarāghava*, as well as the *Śiva Purāṇa* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the poetic narratives composed by Sufi authors known as

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[629] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 101-7.

[630] See Bhagavati Prasad Singh, ed. *Bhuśundi Rāmāyaṇa* 2 vols. (Varanasi: Viśvavidyālay Prakāśan,1975); Bhagavati Prasad Singh "Bhuśundi Rāmāyaṇa and its Influence on the Medieval Rāmāyaṇa Literature," in *The Rāmāyaṇa Tradition in Asia*, ed. V. Raghavan. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1980), 475-504.

[631] In time, I myself heard that very story from my Guru, at Sukarkhet, (in Sanskrit Śūkarakṣetra "the boar's field" – a pilgrimage place associated with Viṣṇu's incarnation as the boar (*Varāha*), RCM, 1.30 a.

"love stories" (*premkahānī, premākhyān*) as the resources for the composition of the splendid epic.[632]

3.3.2. The Title of the Text

The title of the epic is striking. *Rāmcarit* from the Sanskrit word *carita* (from the verbal root car, "to move") denotes "going, moving," and by extension, "acts, deeds, adventures," of Rām.[633] *Mānas* is derived from the root *man* meaning "to think, believe, imagine, perceive, comprehend."[634] *Mānas* is also a metaphor pointing to a sacred lake in the Himalayas[635] that signifies a sublime, refined state.[636] 1.35-1.43 b explains the allegorical structure. This allegory esteems Tulsi's version of *Rām Kathā* as divinely inspired. Lutgendorf points out that the title is a "significant condensation that focuses on the central metaphor of the poem."[637] In the *Uttarakāṇḍa,* the last book, the image of the lake is evoked again in the dialogue between Garuda and Bhuśundi, connecting the entire epic as a whole from the perspective of the lake.[638] Tulsidas expounds on the beauty of the poem as follows.

> Its name is *Rāmcaritmānas,* Sacred Lake of Rām's Deeds.
> And just hearing this soothes the ears.
> The mind's elephant, in the burning forest of desire,
> Becomes tranquil if it plunges into this lake.
> This *Rāmcaritmānas* is a delight to sages.
> For it is Śiva's own lovely, sanctified composition,
> Which suppresses the three kinds of sin, sorrow, and want.[639]

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[632] Danuta Stasik, "Crow Bhuśundi and His Story of the Deeds of Rām', in *India in Warsaw: A volume to Commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Post-war History of Indological studies* at Warsaw University (2003/2004), ,eds. Danuta Stasik and Anna Trynkowska, (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2006): 297-8; Lutgendorf, *The Epic of Rām*, vol.1 (Cambridge: Murthy Classical Library of India, 2016), x.; Stasik, *The Infinite story*,76.

[633] Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 389.

[634] Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text,* 19.

[635] RCM, 1.36.1-5.

[636] Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 20.

[637] Ibid., 12.

[638] Ibid., 22; *Mānaspiyūṣ* 7.366-372.

[639] RCM, 1.34.4-6.

The poet states that Śiva gave it the noble name of *Rāmcaritmānas* after joyfully searching his heart.[640] He believes that those who sing this narrative are the skilled guardians of lake *Mānas* and men and women who listen to them without ceasing are like the fortunate gods.[641]

3.3.3. Structure of the Text

The *Mānas* text is presented within the frame of episodes (*prasaṅga*) and dialogues (*samvād*), and each "stanza" or canto comprises a series of *chaupai* followed by either a *dohā* or *soraṭhā*. [642] There are mainly four dialogues and conversations between 1) God Śiva and his wife Pārvati; 2) the sages Yājñāvalkya and Bhāradvaj; 3) Kāka Bhūśundi, and the divine eagle, Garuda; and 4) Tulsidas and his devotees. These dialogues having a narrator and audiences are seen as four embankments (*ghāt*) of the lake, indicating the way to approach the text. These dialogues (*samvād*), reflect the conventions and constraints of oral storytelling and sequential recitation.[643] Hence, based on the *Mānas-pīyūṣ,* Lutgendorf frames these dialogues of the fathomless lake in a diagram and assigns various devotional aspects, namely, the dialogue of Śiva- Pārvati as "*ghāt* of wisdom," Yājñāvalkya- Bhāradvāj as "*ghāt* of ritual duty," Kāka Bhūśundi-Garuda as "*ghāt* of adoration" and Tulsidas-audience as "*ghāt* of humility."[644]

Tulsidas refers to his work as *kathā*. Although he makes use of the words *granth* (book), and *śāstras* to refer to other texts, he promotes the narrative style of "conversation" that has a teller (*vaktā*) and a listener (*śrota*). Tulsi uses the term *kathā* more than 108 times emphasizing that the

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[640] RCM, 1.34.7.
[641] RCM, 1. 37. 1.
[642] Examples, the episode of the departure for the forest (*van-gaman prasaṅga*), Rām's dialogue with the boatman (*Rām Kevaṭ Samvād* (RCM, 2.99-102), and Lakshmana's philosophical discourse to the tribal chief Guha known as *Lakṣmaṇa Gītā* (RCM, 2.92.3-94.2).
[643] Lutgendorf*, The Life of a Text*, 17.
[644] Ibid., 26-27.

narration aims to transmit the Rām story through dialogue and in the active, performative sense.[645]

He demands that both the hearer and the teller be treasuries of wisdom, for Rām's tale is mysterious.[646] The cooperation of the two is essential as the seven books are visualized as the seven stairs (*sopān*) leading to the lake.[647] The number seven has a symbolic meaning of plenitude, completeness, and auspiciousness within Hindu tradition.[648] These stairs seen by wisdom's eye please the heart and lead to the deep waters of the lake of Rām's transcendent and limitless fame,[649] and to Rām and Sītā's glory,[650] the ultimate purpose of the text. Tulsi repeatedly insists that both the narrator and the listener need to be of good conduct. This was also communicated to me by the *Rāmāyaṇis* as they constantly checked on my intention of studying the text. Danuta Stasik points out that the reading, singing, and reciting lead one to a more profound way to reach the core of the mystery of the *Rāmkathā.* [651] Ultimately the structure of the text powerfully communicates that the "*Mānas* was not meant to be "read," but it was always intended to be performed, as is repeatedly emphasized in the text itself."[652] The *chand* of *Kiṣkindha Kānd* gives an invitation to immerse oneself in the text and attain a divine encounter with the text's protagonist, Rām.

3.4. Rām in the *Mānas*

The character Rām in the *Mānas* is a product of the long *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition and hence has a composite nature.[653] Although there are explanations in the *Mānas* concerning the philosophical nature of Rām, first and foremost, Tulsi sees Rām from the perspective of a *bhakta*,

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[645] Ibid., 117.
[646] RCM, 1.30b. Indian poetics speaks of *sahṛdayi* to enjoy an aesthetic art.
[647] RCM, 1.36-1.1. Lutgendorf, "The View from the Ghats: Traditional Exegesis of a Hindu Epic," *Journal of Asian Studies* 48 (May 1989): 272-9.
[648] Hardev Bāhrī, *Prācīn Bhāratīy Saṃskṛti Koś* (Dilli: Vidya Prakāśan Mandir,1988), 409-10.
[649] *raghupati mahima aguṇa abādhā*, RCM, 1.36.1.
[650] *rām siya jasa*, RCM, 1.36.2.
[651] Stasik, *The Infinite Story,* 82.
[652] Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 37.
[653] Stasik, *The Infinite Story*, 229.

viewing him as his chosen deity, *iṣṭadevat*ā.[654] In Tulsi, there is '*nirguṇa Brahman*, ultimate personal being as well as *saguṇa,* merciful lord.[655] Tulsi acknowledges that it is challenging to know Rām's nature. Having difficulty in understanding the nature of Rām, Pārvati asks Śiva, "is that Rām the Son of Avadh's king, Or someone else- unborn, imperceptible, attribute-less? If but a prince, who lost his mind when he lost his woman, How, then, is he Brahma?[656] Clarifying her confusion, Śiva describes Rām as "One, without attributes and form, invisible, and unborn acquires qualities by the power of devotees' love."[657] Similarly, the complex nature of Rām is obvious when Rām, in his exile, reaches Vālmīki's *āśram* and asks for advice on where he should dwell during his exile. Vālmīkī recognizing him as 'lord of all beings,' says, "Rām, your true being transcends speech and intelligence- imperceptible, unutterable, and endless- of which the Veda constantly declares 'No, he is neither this nor that!'[658] Though the text uses the negative philosophical notion of '*na iti, na iti*' (not that, not that) to describe Rām's nature, certain other characteristics of Rām are emphasized in the *Mānas*.

3.4.1. Personification of *Dharma*

Tulsi depicts Rām as an epitome of kingly virtues – *dharma*. His exemplary character of observing *dharma* is displayed in his fourteen years of exile, renouncing his own rights to ascend the throne of Ayodhyā. In his response given to Sumantra, Daśarath's minister, who tries to persuade him to come back to Ayodhyā, Rām, utters his conviction concerning *dharma*, "No other *dharma* can equal truth……abandoning it, I will be defamed in the three worlds."[659] Therefore,

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[654] Whaling, *The Rise of the Religious Significance of Rāma*, 239.
[655] Stasik, *The Infinite Story*, 230.
[656] RCM, 1.107.4- 108.1.
[657] RCM, 1.115.1.
[658] RCM, 2.125.5- 126.
[659] RCM, 2.94.3-4.

Rām is recognized as the 'guardian of the bounds of *dharma*,'[660] as well as a 'mighty upholder of *dharma*.'[661] His devotion to truthfulness is perfect as he keeps his word, no matter at what cost.[662] When Lakṣmaṇa, in an emotional outburst, speaks against his father while enroute to forest exile, Rām knowing it to be inappropriate, stops him from uttering harsh words.[663] He knew, all well-being depends on truth. His firm faith in *dharma* is evident during the battle at Lankā. Visbhiṣaṇa seeing Rām on the battlefield, lacking the usual accouterments of a warrior, asks him, "you have no chariot, nor anything to protect your body, nor shoes on your feet; how will you overcome this stalwart hero?" The astounding reply is a long discourse in which *dharma* is metaphorically likened to a chariot. [664]

3.4.2. Divine Person

Rām as "an exemplar of social propriety" has shaped Hindu culture and civilization, and the question of whether he is divine, or human is difficult to answer. The *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* begins with an important question posed by the author to the sage Nārada enquiring whether there exists in the world a man who exemplifies all virtues and good conduct. Nārada's answer lies in the person of Rām.[665] Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* presents Rām as a human king and as a partial *avatar* of Viṣṇu, half-human, and half-divine.[666] His divinity is debated as there are a few problematic passages that depict Rām's unawareness of his own divine status. In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa,* after Sītā's release, Brahma reveals to Rām his divine status as the great God Nārayaṇa, as Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa

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[660] RCM,1.217.4; 5.38.2.
[661] RCM, 2.77.1.
[662] RCM, 2.206.2; 2. 291.
[663] RCM, 2.96.4-5.
[664] 6.79.1-5.
[665] VR. 1.1.1-8.
[666] See Sheldon Pollock's Introduction to *The Rāmāyaṇa, Book 3, The Forest* (New York: University of New York Press, Clay Sanskrit Library Editions, 2008), 26-28.

and Prajāpati. Rām himself, in Vālmīkī, tells Brahma that he considers himself only to be the son of Daśarath. [667]

Camille Bulcke, noting the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* as a combination of three recensions, writes that "Rām was a noble king and a great warrior, but a mere human being." [668] He views that those texts showing Rām as divine is limited and considered to be interpolations and cites the examples of Sītā pleading Rāvaṇa to give up Rām as he is only a mortal,[669] and Rām's refusal to the throne based on his fear of sin and punishment[670] and of conviction that present trials were fruits of the previous births.[671] Hence, in the evolution of the Rām cult, many scholars view that Rām was probably a human hero, who that was later revered as an incarnation (*avatar*) of Viṣṇu and finally he transcended Viṣṇu and was elevated to the status of Supreme Being.[672] These phenomena are seen as the growing Viṣṇuization of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story. But in Tulsi's *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rām is divine from start to end. These reductionists theories challenge understanding the person of Jesus within the Christian tradition. Can we say the real Jesus was simply a good man chosen by God but later deified? Christian faith communicates that Jesus is fully human and fully divine from the beginning. Tulsi's Rām is divine from start to end. Where and how do I place the divinity of Rām? The empathetic virtue in the interreligious dialogue demands that we recognize the divinity of Rām.

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[667] VR. 6.105,14, 25.

[668] Rāmāyaṇa at first the property of itinerant professional singers called *Kuśilva* or *Kāvyopajīvi*. This is indicated in the *sarga* 4 of *Bāla Kānda* and *sarga 93* of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. For Bulcke, the three recessions include Northwestern, Bengal, and Southern Recessions. See "The *Rām*ayana: its history and Character," in *Rāmkathā and other Essays*, 21-76.

[669] VR. VI. 48, 14.

[670] VR. II. 53, 26.

[671] VR. III.63, 4 and VI, 101, 8.

[672] Whaling, *The Rise of the Religious Significance of Rāma*, 7.

The expressions 'without beginning,'[673] 'desire less, formless, nameless and unborn, who is Truth, Consciousness and Bliss'[674] unborn, embodying pure knowledge, the abode of power, imminent, all-pervading, indivisible and infinite[675] 'an inner knower,'[676] 'cause of the whole world,'[677] 'one who permeates the whole world.'[678] signify Rām's transcendental qualities. Besides, he is not one of many gods. He controls the supreme beings and makes Brahma, Hari, and Śiva dance.[679] Hanumān convincing Rāvaṇa to give up his arrogance, says, "Even a thousand Śiva's, Vishnu's and Brahmas cannot save one who is hostile to Lord Rām."[680] Besides, Rām is also recognized as the guardian of the *Veda*,[681] its summit,[682] and 'the essence of *śruti*.'[683] Repeatedly Veda's authority is used in the *Mānas* to sanction the sacredness of Rām himself.[684] Whaling writes that Rām and his *Bhakti* complete the *Veda*, which otherwise would be like the Holy Bible consisting only of the Old Testament.[685]

Sheldon Pollock argues that the divine status of Rām cannot be denied in the Vālmīki tradition even though Rām's exalted position is hidden throughout the significant part of the story. He postulates three arguments to prove the divinity of Rām in the Vālmīki traditions. The first is based on the traditional commentators' claims and their opinion on the "receptive history of

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[673] RCM, 1.20.1; 1.107.4.
[674] RCM, 1.12.1.
[675] RCM, 7.71 b2-3.
[676] RCM, 2.256.
[677] RCM, 1.208 b; 7.86.4.
[678] RCM, 6.14; 6.14.4.
[679] RCM, 2.126.1.
[680] RCM, 5.22.4.
[681] RCM, 5.38.2.
[682] RCM, 1. 27.2.
[683] RCM, 1.9.1.
[684] Cf. Macfie, *The Rāmāyaṇ of Tulsidas*, 156.
[685] Whaling, *The Rise of the Religious Significance of Rāma*, 272.

Rāmāyaṇa' among the Indian audiences based on social, intellectual, and cultural history."[686] To strengthen this argument, he writes, "nowhere in the history of the indigenous artistic or scholarly appreciation of the poem are arguments ever raised against the divine status of the hero… and the texts related to an avatar of Viṣṇu were never considered to be "deliberate, unassimilable, sectarian interpolations."[687] The second argument is founded on the nature of the divine king in ancient India, wherein the king was noted as an actual meeting and combination of "mankind and divinity."[688] The language of the divine rights of kings is common in European traditions. Since Rām was a king of ancient India, he should be divine. The divinity cannot be ruled out from ruling over the people. The third argument is based on Brahma's boon to Rāvaṇa for his ascetic practices. The boon consisted of no death from the animal world and any supernatural beings and gods, but the humans were left out.[689] Pollock writes that Rām must be a hidden God for the boon motif to make sense.[690] In his perspective, this motif is integral to the entire narrative.[691] Besides, the hidden motif of the divinity of Rām is recognized at the death of Rāvaṇa. Many *Rākṣasa* women speculated Rām to be God identifying him with Rudra, Viṣṇu or Indra to kill Rāvaṇa.[692] Whereas Mandoadri identifies Rām only as Indra.[693] Contrary to these views, the Southern rendition of *Rāmāyaṇa* by an interpolation say that Indra is too weak to kill Rāvaṇa and this is the work of a great performer (*mahā yogi*) Viṣṇu.

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[686] Sheldon Pollock, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki, An Epic of Ancient India, Vol. III: Araṇyakāṇḍa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 5-6.
[687] Ibid., 5.
[688] Pollock, "The Divine King in the Indian Epic," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 104, no. 3 (1984): 505-28.
[689] VR. 7. 10.17-18.
[690] Pollock, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki,* 28.
[691] Ibid., 40, n. 82: In the Mahabharata narration of Rāma's story, twice there is mention of him being Viṣṇu in disguise (MBh.3.147.28: 3.299,18). The motif of the hidden God is shared in Vaiṣṇava circles for salvation purposes.
[692] VR 6.82.24.
[693] VR 6.99.10.

David Shulman views that the theistic traditions go to great lengths to purify the deity of any association with evil and limitations.[694] The divinity of Rām has grown with time, especially in various versions (*Kamban Rāmāyaṇa, Tulsi Rāmāyaṇa*) of Vālmīkī. Tulsi avoids texts that could create a problem in accepting Rām as divine. For example, the episode of 'illusory Sītā,' the omission of the killing of Śambuka, a *Śudra* practicing austerity that violates the caste rules. The deletion of the text can be positively seen to introduce *Bhakti*, as *Bhakti* meant an opening to the way of God, the doors of salvation.[695] Rām's control of his emotions is the primary reason for the enormous esteem of Rām in India.[696] But many episodes indicate that he experienced human emotions, pain, despair, and injury. Some view these expressions of emotions as merely acting out on Rām's part.[697] In his experience of loss and grief, such as Lakṣmaṇa's injury, and lament over the loss of Sītā, Tulsi points to the emotions of Rām as 'mere acting.' Other examples include, Vālmīki's narration has many episodes of Rām's anger. In contrast, angry Rām is depicted only twice in the *Mānas*. In the first instance, during the Lankā journey, Rām tries to persuade the sea to calm. When the sea refuses, Rām angrily frightens the sea, as he believed "unless frightened, he will not show us a favor," and the terrifying ocean begs forgiveness.[698] The second instance occurs in *Lankākāṇḍ,* in his combat with Rāvaṇa. How to reconcile the opposing dimensions of anger and mercy in one person, Rām? The offense is justified, saying the outburst of his anger is to maintain an otherwise impossible order.[699]

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[694] David Shulman, "Divine Order and Divine Evil in the Tamil Tale of Rāma," 652.
[695] Lorenzen, 'Introduction, *The Historical Vicissitudes of Bhakti Religion'*, 15.
[696] Robert P. Goldman, ed., "*Introduction"* in *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki: An Epic of Ancient India*, vols 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 49-50.
[697] Pollock, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki,* notes to 3.29.20; 3.58,10,35 and 3.60.1.
[698] *bole rāmu sakopa taba bhaya binu hoi na prīti*, 5.57
[699] Pollock, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki, An Epic of Ancient India* vol 3, 66.

3.4.3. Incarnated Lord

Popular belief holds that Rām is one of the ten incarnations (*avatār*) of Viṣṇu.[700] The general purpose of an *avatār* is to restore righteousness by destroying the wicked and protecting the good. *Mānas* mentions many causes of Rām's birth.[701] But for Tulsi, the main purpose of Rām's birth is for the sake of *dharma*,[702] to destroy demons and to protect the world from danger.[703] Śiva explains to Pārvati in detail the causes of Rām's birth "as setting right the declining of *dharma* and to protect Brahmans, cows, gods, and earth and to slay the demons and to guard the sacred word."[704] After birth, Kausalya's address indicates that Rām's birth was for the sake of seers, saintly ones, cows, and gods.[705] Sage Vasiṣṭa speaking to Bharat about Rām's birth, says, "he is the cause of blessing in this world."[706] Therefore, Rām is known as 'son of Daśarath, benefactor of the faithful, Kosala's king, and supreme lord.'[707] His earthly existence viewed from the perspective of the divine self writes Stasik "is nothing other than a play, in which he himself participates both as an actor,[708] and as a spectator."[709] The incarnation does not make Rām 'fully human.' Tulsi believes that his incarnation as a human is just an appearance and not real. His docetic theory is explicit in Bhuśundi's description of Rām,

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[700] Derived from *ava* (down) and *tṛ'* (to cross), an avatar is generally a "descent" of a deity, or part of a deity, or some other superhuman being in a manifest form. An extraordinary human being may also be called a secondary Avatāra. See Noel Sheth "Hindu Avatāra and Christian Incarnation: A Comparison," *Philosophy East and West* 52, no. 1 (January 2002): 98-125.

[701] RCM, 1.121.

[702] RCM, 4.8.3; 1.122.1.

[703] RCM, 1.121.1.

[704] RCM, 1.120. 4-121.

[705] RCM, 1.192.

[706] RCM, 2.253.2.

[707] RCM, 1.118.

[708] RCM, 6.73.6.

[709] RCM, 2.127.1, Stasik, *The Infinite Story*, 236.

> For the sake of his devoted ones, Lord Rām, the ultimate God, put on the body of a king and performed supremely sanctifying deeds resembling those of an ordinary man.[710]

The docetic understanding does not diminish the devotion to Rām. Tulsi's understanding should not lead to a conclusion that all *avatārs* are apparent. In his comparison with incarnation and *avatār,* Noel Sheth, a Jesuit Indologist, states that the *Vaiṣṇava avatars* and the Christian incarnations are both real, while the former is imperfect, and the latter is perfect.[711] Within the Hindu understanding of births, all human births are docetic, since in reality, no one is born, and no one dies.

3.4.4. Devotional Lord

God who incarnated out of love becomes a lord for the devotees.[712] Rām in the *Mānas* becomes a venerated God through various factors. According to Whaling, at the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* time, Rām is not fully established as the devotional lord who grants liberation (*mokṣa*) to devotees.[713] Although the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* tries to synthesize the *Vedānta* views of Rām into *Purāṇic* and *Tantric* traditions, it is impossible to separate the devotional lord from the *Adhyātma*. But the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* provides a catalyst for trends that Tulsidas will later underline. The *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* refers to a community of *Rām bhaktas* who had well-developed worship of Rām through the chanting of His name as an instrument of *bhakti*, [714] since his name can remove the sorrows of even gods,[715] bring salvation to all in *Kali-yuga*,[716] and wash

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[710] RCM, 7.72 a.
[711] Noel Sheth, "Hindu Avatāra and Christian Incarnation: A Comparison," 108.
[712] RCM, 2.218.3.
[713] Whaling, *The Rise of the Religious Significance of Rāma*, 91.
[714] AR, III. 4. 44-46.
[715] AR, I. 6. 69.
[716] AR, II. 5. 26.

away sins.[717] The text also makes mention of the recitation of the story (*kīrtana*),[718] keeping His birthday,[719] observing the fast and so on.[720]

In contrast to the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, which stressed *nirguṇa Brahman,* Tulsidas presents Rām not in abstract philosophical or mystical presentation but as a living symbol of love. Rām, depicted by Tulsi as a devotional lord, has qualities that attract everyone to him. He is the giver of all happiness,[721] and protector of all, irrespective of their status. The divine qualities do not stop him from being an ocean of virtues.[722] These virtues make him more divine. Hence, Rām in the *Mānas* is the abode of love,[723] never angry at a wrongdoer,[724] the ocean of mercy,[725] compassionate,[726] true supporter of the poor,[727] compassionate towards the suffering,[728] the refuge of the helpless and uplift the wretched,[729] one who promotes ultimate well-being,[730] and delivers people from ignorance and vices and carries devotees across the ocean of existence (*bhava sāgara*).[731] Besides, Rām is a *Gṛhasṭa*, a householder who married Sītā, a woman.[732] Therefore, the name of Sītā-Rām is a synonym for a bride and a groom, which shows how to live a marital life.[733]

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[717] AR, VII. 1. 60.

[718] AR III. 3. 37.

[719] AR I. I. 36.

[720] AR I. I. 35.

[721] *sevata sulabha sakala sukha dāyak*, RCM, 1.145.1

[722] RCM, 2.242.1.

[723] RCM, 2.66

[724] RCM, 2.259.3.

[725] RCM, 1.121.1; 1.145.4; 2.266.1

[726] RCM, 2.39.2. 2. 65.4.

[727] RCM, 1.12.4.

[728] RCM, 1.16; 2.101. 4.

[729] RCM, 7.50.2.

[730] RCM, 2.297.1.

[731] RCM, 3.3.2

[732] Whaling, *The Rise of the Religious Significance of Rāma*, 243.

[733] Cf. Agarwal, 'Marriage Songs in Harauti', 151-2 and 175-7. ???Mentioning the name of Sītā, a woman has a cultural significance.

3.4.5. *Rāmrāj* in the *Mānas*

The *Mānas* has the idealization of familial and social relationships. Edmour Babineau points out through social duty and love of God, the text transcends Brahminic traditions' narrow social outlook and ritualism and contributes to governance. The most significant contribution is the notion of '*Rāmrāj*' that has become an essential element of Indian ethos. [734] The *Rāmāyaṇa* advocates more than a marital relationship of husband and wife, the familial relationship between the brothers, essential for an Indian family's survival and dignity in society. Tulsi, in his *Mānas*, teaches us how to conduct ourselves in the world with fellow human beings and to govern the state after the model of Rām, the divine king. *Rāmrāj* is a proverbial term in Indian languages symbolizing a prosperous and harmonious society. Gandhi, during the freedom struggle, popularized the phrase *Rāmrāj*. He frequently used this phrase in his speeches to articulate his vision of Independent India. For Gandhi, *Rāmrāj* was a political rule and a '*dharāmarāj*' that was grown from the concept of '*swarāj*' (self-rule) for society's emancipation.[735]

Tulsi devotes almost thirty-seven verses in the opening part of his last book to *Rāmrāj*.[736] A. G. Menon and G. H. Schokker maintain that only verses 7.20.4-22.3 contain Tulsi's original vision of *Rāmrāj*, the rest a mere tribute paid to the Indian interpretation of the golden age.[737] The description of *Rāmrāj* begins just after the presentation of the ceremony of Rām's consecration as a king. *Rāmrāj* is contrasted to the dark ages that Tulsi explains in the latter part of the book that

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[734] See the chapter on 'The Politics of Rām Raj,' in *The Life of a Text*, 371-91.
[735] *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (January-April 1925) (Publ. Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1967), 295.
[736] RCM, 7.20.3-23.
[737] AṄ. Menon and G. H. Schokker, 'The Concept of Rāma-rājya in South and North Indian Literature', in A.W. van den Hoek et al. eds. *Ritual, State and History in South Asia: essays in Honor of J.C,* Heesterman Leiden: EJ (Brill, 1991), 612 and 625.

is full of chaos and filth,[738] where "castes become mixed, and everyone is abundantly amoral,"[739] and *Shudras* talk back to the twice born, saying, "are we any less than you?"[740]

The *Rāmrāj* envisaged by Tulsidas maintains traditional *Varṇa* and *Aśrama dharma* as he laments in the *Kaliyug,* there is no *dharm*a of the four classes or life-stages.[741] In his perspective, anyone who follows the traditional hierarchical order will experience no sorrow or disease.[742] The traditional stages of life for twice-born men comprised –student, householder, pious life, and total renouncer.[743] In a sense, he visualizes a world in which everyone "knew his limits" as prescribed by the authoritative scriptures. [744] The idea of a society based on *varṇa*, the four-fold division of society, is not unique to Tulsi. The earliest reference to the hierarchical caste division is found in the *Rigveda Puruṣasūkta*.[745] Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* also affirms the hierarchical order by stating, "I have created this order based on *guṇas*,"[746] and says, "To follow one's own dharma based on one's caste and state of life is great wealth, and following others is 'terrifying."[747] How to make sense of the oppressive caste hierarchical structure in *Rāmrāj*? Lutgendorf states that Tulsi's description of *Kaliyug* is essentially the human condition: an irreversible malaise that infects everyone. As a humble, pious person, Tulsi is not a belligerence social activist aiming to annihilate the caste system. In his stance on *Rāmrāj*, he has more to say about the corruption of religious leaders, rulers, and himself than on caste status. [748] Contesting this position, Pollock views that

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738 Cf. RCM, 7.97a-102a
739 RCM, 7.100 a.
740 RCM, 7. 99 b.
741 RCM, 7.97 b.1.
742 RCM, 7.20.
743 *Brahmacarya, Gṛhasṭa, Vānaprasṭa, Sannyāsa* these divisions were later influenced by *śrāmaṇic* traditions.
744 Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 371.
745 RV, 10.90.11-12.
746 BG 4: 13
747 BG 3: 35.
748 Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale,* 94.

Tulsi's narrative choice always offers its readers Rām as a *dharma*-crusader against demonized others.[749]

Despite the controversial interpretations, the *Rāmrāj* is a moment when the victorious Rām ascends the throne of Ayodhyā for a just and joyful rule.[750] His governance leads to no pain, no sorrow caused by anyone or things, no animate or inanimate being in this world suffers the effects of inexorable time, karma, temperament, or nature's attributes.[751] There is mutual affection, duty consciousness, and *dharma* that stands on the four feet in such a painless society.[752] In this rule, all are worthy of salvation; no one dies young, no one is poor, distressed, or wretched. Everyone is healthy and handsome; there is the observance of marital fidelity like Rām, no ignorance, no hypocrisy, all are compassionate, virtuous, know the art of discernment of what is good and moral.[753] Ultimately, *Rāmrāj* is returning to the golden age from the present age of wretchedness and sin. In Rām's reign, not only humans' benefit, but the entire creation lives in harmony (ṛta) and has no misery.

> Forest trees constantly flowered and bore fruit,
> elephants and lions dwelled in harmony,
> and birds and beasts, forgetting innate enmity,
> all felt abounding mutual love. [754]

Commenting on the concept of *Rāmrāj*, Lutgendorf points out that many of the verb form ensuing Rām's reign are in the present tense, suggesting an eternal state accessible to devotees

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[749] Sheldon Pollock, "Rāmāyaṇa and Political Imagination in India," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 52/2; 261-97.

[750] Rāmkiṅkar Upadhyay writes that the *Rāmrāj* begins not to form the installation of Rām to the throne of Ayodhyā but from the moment of his stepping across its borders into exile as quoted in Lutgendorf, 'interpreting Rāmrāj,' 258.

[751] 7.21. Traditional Hinduism believes the suffering is caused by bodily elements (*daihika*), fate or by the divine (*daivika*), and disembodied spirits (*bhautika*). The recitation of Triple *Śan*ti at the end of *Upaniṣad ślokas* was to be saved from all these sufferings and pain.

[752] Four yugas are connected to the four feet of cow, and the four feet of dharma are listed as truth, purity, compassion, and charity, *Mānaspīyūṣ* 7.167.

[753] RCM, 7.20:4-21.3.

[754] RCM, 7.22.1-2.

through meditation.[755] From the *Bhakti* perspective, for the devotees, this is an expansion of a divinized king's rule, as the lord of heaven and earth rules over them.[756] When Vishwambhar Nath Mishra, the *Mahant* of *Sankat Mochan Mandir*, considered my presence as a Christian in the Hindu temple sitting among the *pundit*s, pointed out that this is *'Rāmrāj*, meaning to say all can co-exist irrespective of one's belief or status in *Rāmrāj*. *Hindutva* theocracy employing Rām as a warrior God to mobilize people socially and politically gives an identity based on 'divinization' of the self – Hindus- and 'demonization' of others -mainly Muslims and Christians. Today sometimes *Rāmrāj* refers to a process of Hinduization and integrating Dalits and tribal (*ādivāsis*) into the fold of Hinduism. This is done successfully through the rehabilitation of characters of *Rāmāyaṇa* like Śabari, a tribal devout woman.[757] The reassertion of Hindu identity through *Rāmāyaṇa* also fosters the 'creation of the other and creates a culture that talks of 'we and they.'[758] Metaphorical application of Rām story points out Muslims as present-day *Rākṣasa* (*Rāvaṇa vaṁśi*).[759] The glorious presentation of *Rāmrāj* in the *Mānas* becomes an antidote for hate politics. However, the concept of *Rāmrāj* does not negate the presence of evil. The evil will be there, but this evil could be overpowered by devotion to the name of Rām, which brings an end to the dark age. In *Rāmrāj*, God rules the world and is accessible to all those devoted to Rām by the power of the divine name.[760]

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[755] Lutgendorf, *The Epic of Rām*, Vol. 7, Notes no. 45.

[756] Pollock, 'The Divine King in the Indian Epic,' *Introduction* vol.3.

[757] Pralay Kanungo and Satyakam Joshi, "Carving out a White Deity from a Rugged Black Stone? Hindutva Rehabilitates Ramayan's Shabari in a Temple," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 13, no. 3 (Springer 2010): 279-99.

[758] Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, 13.

[759] Pollock, "*Rām*ayana and Political Imagination in India," 270.

[760] RCM, 7.102a, b- 7:103

3.5. *Bhakti* **in the** *Mānas*

3.5.1. *Bhakti* **in the Religious History of India**

Bhakti, a Sanskrit noun derived from the verbal root "*bhaj*" means "to partake of, enjoy; feel; serve; honor; love; adore" both in the active and passive sense. That means being a part of; belonging, attachment, devotion (to) worship, piety; faith; love.[761] *Bhakti* is characterized by a total emotional dedication to a chosen deity (*iṣṭadevatā*), conceived as God and has a combination of faith, trust, surrender, and love. *Bhakti*'s connotation of sharing, "loving participation" in the divine, is most important. In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjun, " in whatever way people come to me in that same way I love (share myself to) them."[762] The response demanded of a devotee (*bhakta*) for the divine sharing is undivided love and devotion (*Ananya Bhakti*).[763] In the Christian tradition, through love and surrender, one enters into union with and thereby becomes "participants of the divine nature," as 2 Pet 1: 4 puts it. [764]

Bhakti traditions promote the love of God mediated through the body and experienced through senses. The devotees employ metaphors of sight, sound, smell, and touch to communicate the passionate and intoxicating love happening spontaneously and other times in formalized rituals and songs.[765] *Advaita* philosophy spoke of Ultimate reality in an impersonal language and advocated methods to become One with a Supreme being (*tat tvam asi*) through meditative techniques, whereas the *Bhakti* movements articulated a desire to experience God rather than to

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[761] Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit Dictionary*, 743.
[762] BG, 18:64.
[763] BG 11.54.
[764] George Gispert-Sauch, ed. *Gems from India* (Delhi: ISPCK/VIEWS, 2006), 92.
[765] A. K. Ramanujan*, Hymns for the Drowning: Poems for Viṣṇu by Nammalvar* (Delhi: Penguin, 1993) 103-69; R.D. Ranade, *Mysticism in India: The Poet-Saints of Maharashtra* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983[1933]). Martin, Nancy M. 1999a. Nancy M. Martin, "Love and Longing in Devotional Hinduism," in *The Meaning of Life in the World Religions*, eds. Joseph Runzo and Nancy M. Martin. Oxford: One world Publications (Penguin/Houghton Mifflin), 201–19.

become God.[766] The recitation of a name (*nām smaraṇ*), active participation in the assembly of devotees (*satsaṇg*), recitation of religious text (*kathā*), *bhajans,* pilgrimages (*tīrtha yātra*) became common in the *bhakti* movements replacing the expensive, elaborate, and complicated rituals . The egalitarian and monotheistic trend of the *Bhakti* tradition became an alternative to 'caste-ridden' Hindu society as these movements assumed that God values devotion above all human-made distinctions–male or female, high or low. Although these movements visualized an egalitarian society, they failed to achieve what they envisaged and yielded to the powerful caste system. David Lorenzen rightly points out, although *Bhakti* movements opened the way to God, *saguṇa bhakti* served to justify *Varṇāśrama dharma* (a fourfold division of society).[767]

    Bhakti tradition is a complex heritage that includes several religious and mystical traditions and a product of many teachers who are known as *sants* in different regions of India.[768] The nucleus of *Bhakti* can be found in the earliest Hindu texts of *Kaṭa* and the *Śvetaśvatara Upaniṣad*. In the sixth century BCE, the theistic movement produced *Bhagavad-Gītā*, expressing ardent devotion to Kṛṣṇa. The texts such as *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras, Śāndilya Sutras*, and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* promote *Bhakti* as the ultimate path of salvation. Vedānta Deśika, Pillai Lokāchārya, Madhva in South India, Kabīr, Ravidās, Mīrābāi, *Dādū* in the North, Vallabha, Chaitanya in Bengal are zealous advocates of *Bhakti* tradition. Sikhism is also the product of *Bhakti* tradition. In continuation of historical trends, Tulsidas composed *Rāmkathā* in Avadhi and linguistically 'democratized' God to promote Rām *Bhakti* in Northern India.

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[766] Nancy Martin "North Indian Hindi Devotional Literature," in *Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, ed. Gavin Flood, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub,2003),185.

[767]Lorenzen, *Introduction: The Historical Vicissitudes of Bhakti Religion*, 20.

[768] There is no word in Indian languages as 'saint.' The holy men and women are called in different titles. In the Lingayat traditions they are called *śaraṇa* (One who surrenders), the Vaiṣṇavas *dāsa*s (servant), the Tamil Saivites are called *nāyannār* and Tamil Vaiṣṇavas as *āḷvārs*. In the northern traditions, the religious persons are called as *sants*.

3.5.2. Rām *Bhakti* in the *Mānas*

The epic of *Rāmāyaṇa* has contributed immensely for the passionate devotion to Rām. Tulsidas realized people's desire to have a royal path to God as they failed to understand and imitate *yoga* and esoteric doctrines' admired practices. In the *Vinayapatrika*, he writes, "the *munis* advocate many opinions; there are many ways of salvation defined in the *Purāṇas* and also quite a lot of squabbling."[769] In his humility, he states in the *Mānas*, "I am no poet nor clever wordsmith and am deficient in all art and science."[770] But he promotes the primacy of devotion as an "easy way that results in bliss."[771] The *Rāmāyaṇis* whom I met in Varanasi indicated that in Tulsi, there is a combination of two schools of thought – intellectual and devotional. To narrate and propose a path, one needs to have '*pratibhā*' (talent/intellect) as spoken of in Hinduism's poetic traditions. Relying only on one's innate capacities may lead to intellectual arrogance. Therefore, Tulsi communicates he is *a bhakta* of Rām and says that he received his devotion to Rām from his *Gurus* of Rāmanandi tradition, and he recognizes the devotional path as a "royal road to salvation."[772] His firm belief was, "no soul opposed to Rām can attain bliss."[773] Although he mentions other ways on various occasions, he proclaims the supremacy and indispensability of *Bhakti*. In the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, he states,

> what is arduous on the *Bhakti* path?
> It needs no yoga, fire rites, mantras, austerity, or fasts,
> but only a simple nature and guileless heart,
> always content with whatever it receives.[774]

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[769] *Vinayapatrika*, no. 173.
[770] RCM, 1.8.4
[771] *Sulabha sukhada māraga*, RCM, 7.44.1
[772] *Vinayapatrik*a, no. 173.
[773] RCM, 7.121 b.10.
[774] RCM, 7.45.1.

In the *Vinayapatrika*, Tulsi says, "yogic practices, nightly vigils, recitation of sacred formulas, renunciation, austerities and visiting pilgrimage places- all these areas useless, as if one would endeavor to twine a rope with sand, to tie up the elephant of rebirth."[775] Rām's graciousness is indicated to his devotees in the episode of the noble vulture Jaṭāyu, mortally wounded, trying to save Sītā. He was honored with funerary rites by Rām.[776] Devotion is emphasized in Tulsidas's saying, "Veda, worldly wisdom and poets all affirm, even hell gives no shelter to a foe of Rām,[777] because *Rām* is life's very breath, the soul of souls, the joy of all joys.[778] The already popular *Rāmāyaṇa* was retold by Tulsidas not to create an immortal epic but to propose a path of devotion (*Bhakti*).

3.5.3. Modifications in the *Mānas* Aimed at Bhakti

Tulsidas recasts the Rām *Kathā* in unique ways only for devotional purposes. He has received much from Vālmīkī and acknowledges in his *Mānas* by paying homage to Vālmīkī and other poets who preceded him.[779] In the invocations, he puts it, "in accordance with many purāṇas Vedic texts, and sacred treatises, and with what is recounted in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and in other places, too, Tulsi, for his own inner joy, extends the saga of the lord of Raghu's as a most delightful composition set in common speech."[780] The use of Sanskrit *ślokas* in the epic points out the resources of Sanskrit origin. They could be understood as a tribute paid to the traditional Brahmin circles and increase the poem's religious status.[781] Ramanujan argues that every author brings out

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[775] *Vinayapatrika,* no. 129.

[776] Raghavendra, my guru who explained this text, was very emotional as he said, Rām was not there to perform the funerary rites of his father Daśarath, but here he is performing the rituals of a 'meat-eating Vultureˑ. Appreciating the humility of Rām he posed a question, what more do the devotees need in life than such an exemplary life?

[777] RCM, 2.251.4

[778] RCM, 2.290.

[779] RCM, 1.14.1-4.

[780] RCM, 1.7.

[781] Stasik, *The Infinite Story*, 76.

a unique crystallization, a new text with a unique texture and a new context. Tulsi's version has a texture of retelling *Rāmkathā* that is imbued with the ideology of devotion (*bhakti*) to Rām as the highest God. Lutgendorf argues that "the *Mānas*'s great achievement was to do for Rām what the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* had done for Kṛṣṇa: promote a universally accessible devotion to him as a personal and supreme God."[782] Hence, Tulsi's changes in the narration are foregrounded to communicate Rām's supreme divinity and single-minded devotion to him.

The structure of the *Mānas* is similar to the organization of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* with one exception of the sub-book, the *Yuddhakāṇḍ* (war Book) is called *Lankā Kānd* in the *Mānas*. The length of the *Kāṇḍa* differs from the Vālmīki tradition.[783] Some *Kāndas* are either shortened or lengthened to focus on the point of devotion. In the prologue of *Bālakāṇḍa*, Tulsi adds salutation to gods and various holy men and glorifies the name of Rām.[784] He also introduces the dialogue between sages Yājnāvalkya and Bhāradvaj.[785] Prominence is given to the narrator Śiva and dialogue with Pārvati. There are three unique stories centered on Śiva, namely, the story of sati, the wife of Siva (1, 48-60); the sacrifice of Daksha and death of sati (1, 60-65) and the story of Siva and Pārvati's marriage (1, 66-124). The *Bālakāṇḍa* of Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* has no explanation on Rām's early childhood and youthful days. Only fourteen couplets communicate the entire childhood.[786] In comparison, Tulsi has devoted more than 150 lines.[787] The influence of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa's Kṛṣṇa līlā* is visible in Tulsi's inclusion of theophany – Rām's dramatic divine revelation to mother Kausalya.[788] Besides, the ten chapters' narration on the descent of Gangā by

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[782] As cited in Lutgendorf, *The Epic of Rām,* vol.1, ix, see Charlotte Vaudeville, *Etude sur les Sources et la composition du Rāmāyaṇ de Tulsi Dās* (Paris: A. Maisonneuve, 1955), 313-314, 325-326.
[783] Lutgendorf, *The Epic of Rām*, trns. Vol. 1 Introduction.
[784] RCM, 1.19-27.
[785] RCM,1.44-104.
[786] VR, 1.17.6-19.
[787] RCM, 1.191-205.
[788] RCM,1.192, 1. 201-202.

Viśvāmitra to Rām and Lakṣmaṇa,[789] is abridged to a half verse (*ardhāl*i)[790] and the fifteen-chapter biography of Viśvāmitra[791] is alluded to at the end of the book.[792] The killing of the demon Tāraka and her two sons is depicted in three lines only.[793] Lutgendorf views the shorter version of these stories in the *Mānas* as "Tulsi providing a pretext for later oral expounders and commentators to digress with their own retellings."[794]

The narratives that promote emotional connection to the epic are expanded in the *Mānas*. Hence, Tulsi devotes the book's extended segment to Rām and Sītā's wedding festivities, which serves as a spectacular catalog of marriage customs, an auspicious scripture for the nuptial rites and the communal enactment of the festival of *Vivāh Panchami*.[795] The elaborate expansion of these narrations serves to the enhancement of devotional practices. The childhood narrations are recited and enacted during the *Rām Navami* celebrations.[796] The ten stanzas *Phulwāri*' text that depicts Rām and Sītā's first encounter in the flower garden of Janaka, during the *Svayamvara* has become a beloved text for the devotees to grow in intense love of Rām.[797] To show Rām as the embodiment of love and mercy, the liberation of Ahalya from an ancient curse is expanded, and she adores Rām as her compassionate savior.[798]

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[789] VR, 1. 34-43.
[790] RCM,1.212.1.
[791] VR, 1.50-64.
[792] RCM,1.359,3-4.
[793] RCM, 1.209.3, 1.210.2-3.
[794] Lutgendorf, *Introduction, The Epic of Rām* Vol. 1, xxiv.
[795] *Vivāh Panchami* is the late autumn festival commemorating Rām and Sītā's marriage.
[796] Rām Navami is a festival that commemorates the birth of Rām, the son of king Daśarath on a ninth day after the new moon in *śukla pakṣ* (the waxing moon), in the *Chaitra* month which falls sometime in April. The feast indicates the victory of goodness on the evil and the establishment of the *dharma*.
[797] RCM, 1.227-236.
[798] RCM,1.211.1-4. Ahalya is a wife of sage Gautama, turned into a stone due to her husband's curse after the God Indra had seduced her: Rām restored her previous form with an incidental touch of his foot.

The Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* depicts the tense encounter of Rām and Paraśurāma with only two brief chapters.[799] Tulsi has more than 160 lines; among them, the devotees' favorite is the Lakṣmaṇ's repeated taunts of the sage. This text of the fierce fight between Rām and Paraśurāma, sometimes seen as a fight between Brahman priest sages and Kṣatriyas, moves from after the wedding to before.[800] According to commentators, the placing of the text has the motive of non-distraction of readers/devotees from the remarkable and ecstatic wedding festivities of their lord Rām and Sītā and to end the *Bālakāṇḍa* with a blissful vision of marital lobe and familial harmony.

Tulsi is not comfortable in portraying human elements in the Raghu family that could hinder devotion. Therefore, in the second book, *Ayodhyā Kāṇd*, Tulsi introduces the non-Valmikian plot device as in *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* of having gods conspire to "pervert" Kaikeyi's hunchbacked maidservant, Manthāra. This is accomplished with the reluctant assistance of Sarasvati. The Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* portrays Lakṣmaṇa as an impulsive and hot-headed figure. In keeping with the devotional theme, Tulsi narrates Lakṣmaṇ's dispassionate instruction in "sweet, gentle words, imbued with wisdom, dispassion, and devotions' nectar," to tribal chief Guha about the illusory nature of worldly life and Rām's supreme divinity in a popularly known text "*Lakshmana Geetha.*"[801] Throughout the narration of Rām story, Tulsi has a dialogue with the readers. In the forest journey, he introduces a young and handsome man who comes in a renouncer's garb. The renouncer is passionately devoted to Rām and expresses his devotion by ground prostrate as he recognizes his 'chosen god.' Rām responds to the devotion by clasping him

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[799] VR, 1.74-75.
[800] RCM, 1.268-284.
[801] RCM, 2: 92.2-94.1; Cf AR, 2.6.4-15

to his heart 'like a pauper who has found the alchemical stonė. Many commentators maintain that the young man as Tulsi is coming in strange ways to advocate devotion to Rām.[802]

Tulsi's central thesis on *bhakti* is visible as Tulsi devotes the second half of his *Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa,* about a hundred and sixty-five lines to Bharat.[803] Bharat is presented as a model of *bhakti,* love, and attachment to Rām's feet.[804] Speaking of Bharat's virtuous and noble nature in their meeting in Chitrakoot, Rām was plunged into a sea of love and recognized Bharat as having goodness that no other has.[805] In the third book, *Araṇya Kānda*, the subordination of Rām's human features is noticeable in Tulsi's portrayal of the anguish and sorrow of Rām when separated from his wife, Sītā. The depiction of sorrow is intense in Vālmīkī that runs through five chapters.[806] Tulsi softens the sorrow and despair just with five couplets.[807] In these ways, he reminds the readers that Rām is just acting out his suffering and is not in a desperate search for his lost wife. The *Vaiṣṇava bhakti* tradition promoted by Vallabhāchārya was doubtful on the role of Rām to represent the fullest expression of divinity.[808] Rām was believed to be an '*amśa avatār'* (partial incarnation) as he shared his divinity with other brothers. In the *Mānas*, he is the full *avatār*. The divinity focus is heightened in Tulsi's construction of "Shadow Sītā," an innovation found in earlier *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*.[809] At the instruction of Rām, Tulsi writes, when Rāvaṇa abducts Sītā, she conceals herself in the hut's sacred fire in her exact shadow-likeness (*pratibimba*).[810] The

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[802] RCM, 2.109.4-110.3.
[803] RCM, 2.157- 321
[804] RCM, 2.288.3-4.
[805] RCM, 2.231.4.
[806] VR, 3.57-61.
[807] RCM, 3.30.4-8
[808] For these pious Vaishnava's, Daśarath Son Rām was a partial incarnation (*amśa avatār*) who manifests only twelve "degrees" of godhood. To have a total manifestation there needs to be sixteen "degrees" that was present only in the life of '*Līlā Puruṣottama*, Kṛṣṇa. See Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 356-357
[809] AR, 3.7.1-4
[810]RCM, 3.23.2-3.

shadow Sītā disappears later in the "fire test" of her chastity in the Lankākāṇḍ.[811] In all these inherent harrowing stories within *Rāmāyaṇ*, Tulsi never forgets that Sītā is "the primal energy of creation, Lord's embodiment and ocean of beauty."[812]

In the fourth book, *Kiṣkindhā Kānda*, the mood of *bhakti* is prevalent in Hanumān and Sugrīva recognizing Rām's divinity instantly and Sugrīva's persistence in the reluctance to accept the throne. The most problematic text, Rām's killing of Bāli in disguise, is submerged with devotional attitudes in *Mānas*.[813] Bāli's description as a person " with love in his heart but harsh words on his lips."[814] and the episode ending with Bali's question of "am I still a sinner, Lord, having come to you in my last moments?" and his appreciation of Rām's presence, "treasury of mercy, a chance of dying in the presence of Rām is imperishable salvation" indicates the devotional attitudes. [815] The fifth book, *Sunder Kāṇd*, has acquired special status among the devotees of Rām/Hanumān for its ritualized recitation as Hanumān emerges as the ideal devotee. Today, the *Sunder Kāṇd* part is recited by millions as an act of devotion to Hanumān, who is worshiped as a significant deity.

The sixth book, *Yuddhakāṇd* of Vālmīki, is the biggest book; in the *Mānas*, the book is titled as *Lankākāṇḍ* and remains one of the shortest of his four longer sub-books. Once again, the human weakness of Rām is downplayed. His lament over Lakṣmaṇ's wound is seen as "all-pervading God, unassailable lord of the worlds is "merely acting out" ordinary human emotions."[816] Besides, Hanumān's two aerial journeys, in the *Vālmīkī Rāmāyaṇa*, to the Himalayas to obtain

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[811] See RCM, 6.108.7-100.
[812] RCM, 1.147.1-2
[813] Cf: VR 4.17-18.
[814] RCM, 4.9.2
[815] RCM, 4.9.3.
[816] RCM, 6.55.3; 6.61.1

herbs to heal wounded Lakṣmaṇa are reduced to a single act. [817] The innovation to the story consists of introducing interruption of Hanumān's journey by Bharat, a devoted brother of Rām and Kālanemi [818] King Visbhiṣaṇa, who despite his name meaning "terrifying" and being the brother of Rāvaṇa, in Tulsi's telling remains a lifelong devotee of Rām. He moves from being a friend and example of dharma to an exalted devotee. He meets Hanumān and shows him where Sītā is.[819] The dialogue between Rām and Visbhiṣaṇa has the exaltation of *bhakti*. [820]

Mandodari, the wife of Rāvaṇa, is another devotee of Rām. She counsels her husband to return Sītā to Rām and save himself from ruin. According to Bulcke, her intervention is not mentioned in Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa. The union of Sītā and Rām, after the battle and coronation of Visbhiṣaṇa in Lanka, contrasts with Vālmiki tradition.[821] After the death of Rāvaṇa, when Sītā is brought before Rāma, he shows doubt as to her innocence, indicating the talk of the people.[822] The most troubling episode of Rām's doubt and Sītā's defense in Vālmīki is dealt with tactfully by Tulsi. He resolves the tension by bringing in once again the theme of illusory Sītā,[823] which was introduced in *Araṇya Kāṇḍa*. [824] The fire ordeal of Sītā only brings out the actual, original Sītā, and there is a joyful ending with blessings.[825] The divinity of Rām is unharmed through these variations.

The alterations in the final book, *Uttara Kānda*, powerfully indicate the *bhakti* attitude. The end book of Vālmīki and Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa devote a substantial part in recounting the life story

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[817] VR, 6.61.26-68, 6.89.13-21
[818] RCM, 6.58-60b
[819] RCM, 5.6-8
[820] RCM, 5.42-51.
[821] VR, 6. 101-106
[822] VR, 6.115
[823] RCM, 6.108.7
[824] RCM, 3.23.4-24.3
[825] RCM, 6.109a, b. See Lutgendorf, *The Epic of Rām,* vol.6, *Introduction.*

of Rāvaṇa and the story of Rām's exile of pregnant Sītā to a forest to the Ashrams and the birth of her twin sons (Lava and Kuśa). Tulsi omits the earlier career of Rāvaṇa. In just two *chaupai*, he mentions Lava and Kush's birth not in the forest but in Ayodhyā, and there is no banishment of Sītā. However, he indicates Sītā's exile passingly in *Bālakāṇḍa*. [826] The entire story has a happy ending by distributing wealth to the people of Ayodhyā and the long reign of Rām.[827] The earthly existence of Rām comes to an end not by ascending to heaven but by moving out with his brothers and Hanumān and great devotion shown to Rām by Bharat.[828] Among all the alterations, the crow Bhuśundi's discourse on devotion at the end of the epic proves the *Mānas* promotes devotion. The great devotion of Bhuśundi is explained later in the chapter.

3.6. Characteristics of Rām *Bhakti* in the *Mānas*

3.6.1. Ecumenical

Ecumenism is a principle that aims at promoting unity among the world's Christian churches. Although this term is usually used in a Christian context, we could say that Tulsi, in his approach to *bhakti*, brings unity among different schools of thought, namely, *saguṇa-nirguṇa*, Śaiva, and Vaiṣṇava of Hinduism. His vast learning and synthesizing skills are evident as he makes use of Vālmīki's Sanskrit text and other regional versions for his composition of the epic.[829] Tulsidas tries to stress compatibility among various strands of thoughts. For instance, in contrast to Vālmīkī that stresses human Rām and *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa,* that stresses on *nirguṇa Brahman*, Tulsidas presents Rām not in abstract philosophical or mystical presentation but as a living symbol of love. Through this, he synthesizes the human Rām of Vālmiki, eternal Brahman of *Adhyātma*

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[826] RCM, 1.16.1-2.
[827] RCM, 7.25.3-4.
[828] RCM, 7.49.3-5.
[829] RCM, 1.0.7.

Rāmāyaṇa and the loving and forgiving Lord making Rām within reach of all. In his approach to Rām as a *bhakti* figure, Tulsidas becomes '*samanvayvādī,*' (integrating) by stressing the compatibility of both *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* conceptions of God. To achieve the *samanvay* in *Rām bhakti*, the best-suggested means of Tulsidas is the recitation of *Rām Nām* that is higher than both *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa Brahman*.[830]

3.6.1.1. *Saguṇa and Nirguṇa Synthesis*

Most *bhakt*i saints and movements are characterized as either practicing *nirguṇa* or *saguṇa* devotion in an oppositional way.[831] In the *saguṇa* Gods are worshipped or venerated in their anthropomorphic manifested form of Śiva, Viṣṇu, Śakti. *Saguṇa bhakti* is rooted in mainstream Hinduism but has included elements from the local cults. In the *nirguṇa* tradition, devotees worship a God who has no form. However, His name, a word, a guru, and *sant* are used as options to worship and they act as partial manifestations. For instance, Kabir, influenced by the *Sufi* tradition, uses the word 'Rām,' but it is a synonym for God's ultimate being. [832] Kabir critiqued both Muslim and Hindu religious leaders and advocated worshipping God beyond form and distinction. Kabir's message is strident, and his language often coarse and denounced all outward forms of religious practice as salvific.[833] Today the Kabir *panthi's* who share low-caste status recognize Kabir as the Supreme Being incarnate.[834]

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[830]RCM, 1.19-27.

[831] John Stratton Hawley, "The Nirguṇa/Saguṇa Distinction in Early Manuscript Anthologies of Hindi Devotion," in *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action*, ed. David Lorenzen. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 160–80.

[832] Sukdev Simh, ed. *Kabir Bijak* (Illāhābād: Nīlābh Prakāśan 1972), 84,91,113,138. Cf: Edmour J. Babineau, *Love of God and Social duty in the Rāmcaritmānas* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass,1979),71; Charlotte Vaudeville, *Kabir,* vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 94 ff.

[833]Linda Hess, and Shukdev Singh, *The Bijak of Kabir* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), 7-37.

[834] David N. Lorenzen, "The Kabir-Panth and Social Protest," in *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*, eds. Karine Schomer and W. H. McLeod (Delhi: Berkeley Religious Studies Series and Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), 281–303

Contrary to Kabīr, in the *Mānas*, despite a few "exclusive" texts, Tulsi has a synthetic and inclusive positioning and embraces multiple religious orientations and divergent traditions (*sampradāyas)*. Kabir is reductive, rejecting most religions, while Tulsi is inclusive. In Pārvati's question to Śiva, she desires to know why *nirguṇa* Brahman became *saguṇa*. Ramanujan says, "All devotional poetry plays on the tension between *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa*, the lord as a person and the lord as a principle. if he were entirely a person, he would not be divine, and if he were entirely a principle, a godhead, one could not make poems about him." [835] Tulsi was aware of Hinduism's philosophical traditions that had the dichotomy between *nirguṇa* (without attributes) and *saguṇa* (with attributes). He acknowledges the two forms of absolute Brahma as *aguṇa* (=*nirguṇa*) and *saguṇa*[836] and declares that there is no difference between *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa*.[837] He downplays the *nirguṇa* tradition as he says, it is easy to understand and promote a *saguṇa bhakti* to Rām, who is the fount of grace and compassion. [838] While describing the beauty of child Rām Tulsi refers to the 'four signs' on Rām's body, an indication of being Viṣṇu.[839] However, Rām of *Mānas* transcended both Indra and Viṣṇu and is identified as the Supreme Absolute. However, this absolute is not *nirguṇa*. In Bhuśundi's explanation, this absolute God becomes personal and resides in hearts.[840]

The absoluteness and Rām becoming a divine *avatār* as a son of Daśarath are held together in the *Mānas*. In Tulsi's narration, every *Kāṇḍa* (book) has an introductory section that expresses the poet's love for Rām, and the concluding sections exhort to worship Rām. The short pauses

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[835] Vinay Dharwadker, ed. *The Collected Essays of A. K. Ramanujan*, 295.
[836] RCM, 1.23.1
[837] RCM, 1.116.1-2
[838] RCM, 7. 73 b
[839]*aṅka kulisādika cārī*, RCM, 7.75b.4, the phrase means "the four marks, thunderbolt and so forth." It is a belief that the feet of Viṣṇu and his *avatārs* are said to bear four auspicious marks on their soles, namely thunderbolt (or diamond), elephant goad, banner, and lotus.
[840] RCM, 7.71b-72.

written in the form of *dohas* and *soraṭhas* (Hindi couplets) inserted in the corpus of the story that allows the author to make personal comment indicate the personal relationship with a God who has attributes. The love of God is the central theme in the prologue. Suggesting God's closeness to the devotes, Tulsi writes that the birth of Rām is to restore what is lost and befriend the poor. For him, devotion to God makes sense only when he is revealed as a personal God and not as an unmanifest God. Only then can one connect with him in a real relationship. The worship of God-with-form (*saguṇa*) is made clear, and the superiority of such bhakti over spiritual knowledge (*gyāna*) is emphasized in 7.115-116. The various rituals connected to Rām worship in modern-day Rām tradition indicate the devotees' preference for a God with attributes. Rām is "father, mother, friend, guru, master, exalted and beneficent, the inner knower." [841] God who has so many qualities, demands from his *bhaktas* to house him and his wife Sītā in the heart and to live in total surrender (*dāsyabhāv*a) that of Bharat, as it is written, "there is no better way to serve a good master than obeying his command."[842] Believing in *saguṇa* Rām is essential as he is the ocean of love and mercy.

Although there is ample evidence on the features of *saguṇa bhakti*, the emphasis on the name of Rām brings to the fore the importance of *nirguṇa* tradition in Tulsi's thinking. In the *nirguṇa* tradition, name becomes prominent. Chanting of the divine names (*nām jap*) has a prominent place in the Hindu ritual traditions. Uttering God's names is considered a pathway (*sādhana*) to overcome the cycle of birth and death. The common practice is to recite hundred and eight names of gods or goddesses deemed auspicious.[843] It is common in the temples, mostly seniors and women, reciting divine names holding a rosary (*māla*). The cult of the name has a long

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[841] RCM, 2.297.1
[842] RCM, 2. 300.2.
[843] The number 108 signifies wholeness in Hindu traditions.

tradition.[844] In the *Bhāgavata* traditions, the four syllables of 'Nārāyaṇa' are considered powerful.[845] The tradition of reciting thousand names - *Śiva Sahasra Nām, Viṣṇu Sahasra Nām, Lalita Sahasra Nām* - is also widespread. Tulsi's theological positions on the name are introduced in the Bālakāṇḍ.[846]Adopting the *tāntric* view on the Sanskrit syllable having divine power, Tulsi assigns the Syllables *rā* and *ma* the divine power representing gods not only Agni Surya and Chandra but also the trinity Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Śiva.[847] He hails the name "Surpassing both Brahma and Rām; the name grants boons even to boon givers."[848] Tulsi tells the readers, "If you desire illumination both within and without," set the crystal lamp of Rām's name on the tongue.[849] Therefore, in the struggle between the manifest (*saguṇa*) and unmanifest (*nirguṇa*), the name becomes the perfect witness (intermediary) between the two. The name Rām is Tulsi's favorite, as he mentions in the title of his epic. He writes,

> I reverence Rām, the great Raghu's name,
> source of fire, sun, and icy moon,
> Veda's life-breath imbued with the three gods,
> attribute less, yet incomparable abode of attributes,
> the supreme mantra Śiva constantly repeats, and his teaching,
> bestowing release in Kashi.[850]

Tulsi alludes that liberation is possible by the uttering of the name of Rām. Śiva teaches that. In the prologue, there is an elaborate explanation of the name's nature and power.[851] The importance of the name is affirmed while debating on the *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa* aspects of God.

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[844] Hans Bakker, *Ayodhyā* (Groningen: Egbert Fortson, 1986),119-124.
[845] Baker, *Ayodhya*,119. The *mantra* of Śri Vaiṣṇava *Sampradā*y is *Śrīmannārāyaṇāya namah.*
[846] RCM, 1.18-1.28.1.
[847] RCM, 1.19.1.
[848] RCM, 1.25. There is a famous story in which Śiva identifies the *mantr*a "Rām" as the essence of primordial, heavenly Rāmāyaṇa.
[849] RCM, 1.21.
[850] RCM, 1.18.1-2.
[851] RCM, 1.22.1- 27.1

Tulsi's understands 'name' as even greater than Rām.'[852] His is an "overbold" claim. This name effortlessly overpowers delusion, gives bliss, frees one of all worry.[853] The name liberated his devotees Śabari, Jaṭāyu, and countless sinners,[854]and Ahalya was released from her curse.[855] His name reforms millions of wicked minds, devotees' despair is destroyed, crushes rebirth's dread, purifies countless hearts, uproots every sin of this dark age.[856] The power of reciting the name is specified as the name dries up the ocean of rebirth, makes devotees turn inward, and blissfully absorbs into divine care.[857] This name was available, and the bliss of it was enjoyed by Sukdev, Sanat, and other sages.[858] Tulsi alludes to the famous controversial story of Vālmīkī, to show the powerfulness of the name. Vālmīkī was initially murderous. In the story it is said, that by reciting the word '*marā-marā* ' in succession becomes Rām's name and he was liberated. Tulsi states, "Vālmīkī, first poet, learned its might, for he became pure saying it backward."[859] According to Tulsi, both Śiva and Viṣṇu love this name, and the name made Prahlad the crown jewel of devotees.[860] Dhruva gained a matchless state, and he became a pole star.[861] Tulsi not only speaks of the importance of the name of Rām but also advocates the practice of repeating the name firmly,

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[852] RCM, 1.22-23.
[853] RCM, 1.25.5-8.
[854] RCM, 1.24.
[855] RCM, 1.210
[856] RCM, 1.23.2-4.
[857] RCM, 1.24.2-4.
[858] RCM, 1.25.1.
[859] RCM, 1.18.3. The name Vālmīkī points to one who has come out of anthill (*valmika*). Popular Rām stories regard Vālmīkī's conversion from a robber into an ascetic through the intervention of Nārada, who imparted the recitation (*mantra*) of 'Rām, Rām.'
[860] The story of Prahlād from *Viśnupurāṇa* depicts Viṣṇus incarnation in the form of lion-man (Narasimha) to protect his devotee. Prahlād as a son of King Hiraṇyakaśipu was an ardent devotee of Viṣṇu. His spiritual inclination to Viṣṇu irritated Hiraṇyakaśipu, and he tortures him in many ways to give up his devotion. Finally, Viṣṇu comes in the form of lion-man and saves Prahlād. Lion-man form because Hiraṇyakaśipu had a boon that either man or beast would not kill him.
[861] RCM, 1.25.2-3. Dhruva means fixed or immovable. He is a devotee of Viṣṇu mentioned in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. As a child, he was ill-treated by his stepmother Suruchi and was pulled out from his father, King Uttānapāda's lap. When Dhruva protested and asked if he could not sit on his father's lap, Suruchi berated him saying, 'only God can allow you that privilege. Ask him. ' The question led him to ascetic life and boon from Viṣṇu to be pole star. Even today, the Hindu marriage ritual includes seeing the polestar for a marriage to remain stable.

"Repeating the name blesses all ten directions,"[862] as the two lovely letters of Rām's name (*Rā* and *Ma*) are, [863]

> The alphabet's eyes and life itself to his people
> Their remembrance gives bliss, is open to all,
> And yields profit to this world, salvation beyond.[864]

Repeating the name frees the sorrow in all four ages and triple worlds but has more significance in the *kali* age, which is also our age as it is full of filth, sin, and duplicity of Kālnemi.[865] In Tulsi's perspective, all the other methods of meditation, sacrifice, and worship are futile. In the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, he mentions that the darkness could be overpowered only by Rām's name. He says, "in the *Kali-yuga*, apart from the repetition of Rām's name, no other discipline or activity can be fruitful as there are no good deeds, devotion or discernment."[866] Suggesting the sole support of Rām name, Tulsi writes,

> In the Kṛta, Tretā, and Dvāpar ages,
> the goal attained by worship,
> fire sacrifice, and yoga that very state,
> in the Kali era, people gain through Lord Hari's name.[867]

For Tulsidas, Rām's name is noble and pure, which has efficacious power. [868] Bakker calls this devotion as the 'cult of Rām.'[869] No doubt that the cult of the name, especially of Rām, has a long history and has been adopted in the practices of various traditions, and it was used as a nonsectarian term for supreme being by yogis and saints.[870] The *Mānas Kathā* is considered a banyan tree, and

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[862] RCM, 1.27.3.
[863] In Sanskrit, Hindi, and other Indian languages, these are two letters of Rām.
[864] RCM, 1.19.1.
[865] Lankākāṇḍ has the reference to Hanumān slaying the demon Kālnemi, who is disguised as a holy man, RCM, 6.57-58.
[866] Shastri, *Mānasmīmāmsā*,196.
[867] RCM, 7.102b.
[868] RCM, 1.10.1
[869] Bakker, *Ayodhyā*, 68.
[870] Charlotte Vaudeville, *Kabir* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 128-143.

the name of Rām as the seed. The "seed utterance" (*bīj mantra*) underlies all creation,[871] and sanctifies "billions of sacred shrines, and wipes out the totality of sins and captures the minds and hearts of devotees."[872] The name of Rām is used as a respectful greeting in parts of India (Rām Rām) and during the funeral processions to receive salvation. Today this tradition has taken a new form in writing the name of God. During the field research, I observed Viṣnudas, an ardent devotee of Rām. He would bring every Saturday a rosary (*māla*) made out of the writing of *'Jai Śri Rām'* made into a paperchain and offer it to Hanumān. The tradition of writing a thousand names of God into a book and offering it to the deity, Lutgendorf recognizes as the tradition of 'banking.'[873] The remembrance of name through writing enables a devotee to focus. A convert in Andhra Pradesh from Hinduism to Catholicism and a father of a Jesuit has continued the Hindu tradition of writing the name and has written the name of Jesus ten thousand times.

3.6.1.2. Synthesis of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism

The division between the various denominations within Hinduism as Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Śākta is not rigid. They intersect in their narrations, belief systems. Although the *Mānas* predominantly has Vaiṣṇava components, nevertheless, Tulsidas brings harmony between devotion to Śiva and Rām, the *avatār* of Viṣṇu. L.P. Tessitori attributes the difference in the *Mānas* text to Tulsidas's orientation of being a *Smārtha Vaiṣṇavite*.[874] However, in the *Mānas*, Rām is not merely an *avatār* but has a Godhood of his own nature. Vasiṣṭa tells Bharat, "King Rām is God himself, utterly autonomous."[875] In the experience of theophany to Kāka Bhūśundi Tulsidas

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[871] Lutgendorf, *The Life of a tex*t, 245.
[872] RCM, 7.91 b.2.
[873] RCM, 2.171.3, Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 413-14.
[874] L. P. Tessitori, "The Rāmcarit*mānas* and the Rāmāyaṇa," *Indian Antiquary* 41 (1912): and 42 (1913) 1-18/: originally published "II Rāmcarit*mānas* e il Rāmāyaṇa," *Giornale della Societa Asiatica Italiana* 24 (1911-12).
[875] RCM, 2.253.1.

communicates that in different ages (*yuga*) there are many Viṣṇus, Brahmas, and Śivas but there is only one Rām. Tulsi was convinced that Sītā-Rām is the ultimate form of God, encompassing and transcending all deities as he speaks of Sītā as "glorious primal energy of creation… from whom spring countless Lakshmi's, Umas and Brahamanis."[876]

The reconciliation of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava tradition is seen in *Agastyasamhita*, that presents a lineage of Rām *bhaktas* in which Śiva is second, initiated by Brahma with the Rām *mantra*.[877] Integrating these two traditions is also seen in the premodern Poonam's Rāmāyaṇ (*Manipravaḷam*).[878] When it comes to Tulsidas, there are references to the persecution of him from Śiva's servants for his popularization of devotion to Rām and his usage of vernacular instead of Sanskrit.[879] However, Tulsidas' composition of the *Mānas* has elements of synthesis. Scholars view that in the process of 'Vaiṣṇavization,' the synthesis could also be seen as downplaying Śiva. Many staunch followers of the Śaiva tradition would not appreciate such synthesis. Nevertheless, Tulsidas's synthesis occurs through composition, the narrative framework, mutual devotion among Śiva and Rām, and in his ardent devotion to Hanumān.

As an abandoned child and saved by Vaiṣṇava *Sādhus* belonging to the Rāmanandi sect Tulsi composes his epic in the city of Śiva.[880] Varanasi is believed to be a place of liberation.[881] In the prologue, putting Avadh on par with Kāśi, Tulsidas says Avadh is the place to escape from

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[876] RCM, 1.147.1-3.
[877] Bakker, *Ayodhyā*, 75-76.
[878] Maṇipravāḷam was a literary style used in medieval liturgical/devotional texts in South India: a hybrid language – a mixture of Sanskrit and Tamil. See Sivan Goren Arzony "Sweet, sweet language: Prakrit and Maṇipravāḷam in pre-modern Kerala," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review,* 58, no. 1 (January 2021): 7-27.
[879] *Vinayapatrika* 8, *Kavitāvaḷī* 7.165
[880] Eck, "Following Rāma, Worshipping Śiva," in *Devotion Divine: Bhakti Traditions from India's regions, Studies in Honor of Charlotte Vaudeville*, ed. By Diana L. Eck and Francoise Malison (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1991), 49-72.
[881] In the prologue, Tulsidas says Avadh is the place to escape from rebirths, 1.34.2.

rebirths. [882] However, for the liberation in Kāśi, Tulsi gives an intrinsic connection between Rām and Śiva. He asserts the liberation in Śiva's place is possible through the power of Rām's name, imparted to the dying person by Śiva - "The supreme mantra [Rām Rām] Śiva constantly repeats and his teaching, bestowing release in Kashi."[883] Bāli, although killed unjustly, at his moment of death says, despite people unable to utter the salvific name of Rām, Śiva in Kāśi gives imperishable salvation equally to all.[884] Even today, it is a familiar scene in Kāśi, people getting their beloved ones to be cremated in the city of Śiva by reciting '*Rām Nām Satya Hai*.'[885] Tulsi depicts Śiva's acknowledgment of the power of Rām's name in liberation before Pārvati.[886]

The second synthesis comes from the narration of the epic. The significance among all the deletions and additions of Tulsidas's epic from other tellings is the framework of dialogue (*samvād*) in the epic. Among the four dialogues, Śiva is given a significant place, and he becomes the prime narrator of the story of Rām. As a narrator, he is dear to Rām.[887] The lengthy section on the life of Śiva and Pārvati/Sati has a theological discussion on *Rām* bhakti for the sake of the world.[888] Pārvati asks Śiva to narrate the story of Rām to remove the ignorance. As a beloved wife, she recognizes Śiva's devotion to Rām as Śiva recites day and night 'Rām, Rām.'[889] In these episodes and narrations, the primal narrator Śiva proves his godhood as well. Śiva is revered as "an eternal yogi, unborn, perfect, passionless, without desire. The powerful Gods Brahma and Viṣṇu declare Śiva as omniscient."[890] Hence, Śiva's position is not degraded but dignified. The

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[882] RCM, 1.34.2.
[883] RCM, 1.18.1-2.
[884] RCM, 4.9.2.
[885] Truth is the name of Lord Rām
[886] RCM, 1.118.1-3.
[887] *siva samāna priya mohi na duja*, RCM, 6.1.3.
[888] RCM, 1.107- 120.
[889] RCM, 1.107.1-4.
[890] RCM, 1. 89.2.

importance given to Śiva is viewed by Whaling as an attempt of Tulsi to reconcile Rām and Śiva devotees,[891] and to widen the figure of Rām even further and include Śiva within its orbit.[892]

Thirdly the synthesis comes in Tulsi's presentation of Śiva and Rām as great devotees of each other. To worship Rām is to worship Śiva and vice versa. Śiva tells Sati that the Raghu hero is his chosen God (*iṣṭa dev*).[893] When Śiva recalls the story of Rām to Pārvati, the devotion of Śiva to Rām is expressed, in mystical language, of shiver with love, tears filling the eyes, the image of the Raghu lord entering his heart and finding infinite joy and bliss.[894] Śiva is passionate about advocating Rām *bhakti*. He uses harsh language, those whose hearts have no devotion to Rām, he calls them an animated corpse, and about those who do not chant Rām's praise, he says, "their tongue is no better than a frog's."[895] By depicting Śiva as a model devotee and storyteller of Vishnu's incarnation, Rām Tulsi reinforces his theological position of compatibility of the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva sectarian traditions.[896] The devotion is mutual among Rām and Śiva. No one can be a devotee of Rām without being devoted to Śiva.

> One who does not adore Śiva's pure feet
> Can never be pleasing to Rām
> Guileless love for Viśvanāth, lord of the world,
> Is true sign of a devotee of Rām.[897]

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[891] Whaling, *The Rise of the Religious Significance of Rāma*, 233, 307.
[892] Ibid., 232.
[893] RCM, 1.50.4.
[894] RCM, 1.110.4.
[895] RCM, 1.112. 3.
[896] Lutgendorf, "The View from the Ghats," 274.
[897] RCM, 1.103.2-3.

Rām propitiates Śiva for his success on his journey into exile by worshipping lingam of clay on a riverbank of Gangā.[898] Similarly, Rām's devotion to Śiva is evident on his way to Lankā in Rāmeśvaram. After installing Lord Shambhu (Śiva) Rām says,

> No one is as dear to me as Śiva.
> Hating Śiva but calling oneself my devotee,
> one cannot even dream of attaining me.
> Hostile to Shankar, yet craving devotion to me
> that one is a witless fool, fit for perdition![899]
> Mutual respect and devotion is vital in the following verse,
> Loving Śiva but hating me,
> or serving me while hating Śiva—
> such a one, for a full aeon,
> will dwell in the foulest of hells.[900]

The reciprocity of devotion between Śiva and Rām is not a dualistic approach. P. B. Singh writes, "realizing the defiled condition of society, he initiated a popular form of *bhakti* that integrated different sects and sections of society, and ultimately succeeded in his appeal."[901] Whaling in his appreciation of synthesis states,

> not only Śiva is displaced by Rāma, but he also becomes a supreme devotee of Rāma. Thus, devotion to Śiva is not a substitute for nor an alternative to devotion to Rāma; it is part of devotion to Rāma. Śiva is not a rival to Rāma. Śiva and devotion to Śiva are included within the Rāma symbol.[902]

In these mutual connections, the rival groups can find a synthesis, and no one can claim the 'exclusivist' position on devotion.

Hanumān is another synthesizer. Tulsidas as a great devotee of Hanumān, narrates the slaying of two battalions of eighty thousand *Rakṣasas* sent by Rāvaṇa and Hanumān's growth into enormous size to fetch a healing herb from the Himalayas, as a manifestation of Rudra's (Śiva)

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[898] RCM, 2.102.1
[899] RCM, 6.1. 2-4.
[900] RCM, 6.2.
[901] P.B. Singh, *Tulasi's Vision of the Lifeworld in the Middle Ages*, 112.
[902] Whaling, *The Rise of the Religious Significance of Rāma*, 233.

energy (*aṃśa avatār*).[903] In the *Vinayapatrika,* Hanumān is hailed as–skull bearing Śiva.[904] In *Dohāvaḷi,* Tulsi writes, "giving up his Rudra form, Lord Śiva as Hanuman adopted a monkey figure, only because of his affection for *Rām*a." [905] Today's Varanasi houses Hanumān alongside the Siva lingam as well as with the statues of Rām. However, in the *Mānas* Tulsi makes no explicit reference to his Śaiva identity because Hanumān's importance lies only in his relationship to Rām as his true devotee as a Vaiṣṇava bhakta. [906] Lutgendorf, in his study of Hanumān, points out that the evidence cited to support the " Vaishnavization" of one's popular Shaiva religion is slim.[907] He rightly points out,

> In some instances, as in the narrative structure of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, one detects an apparent attempt to "Vaishnavize" the Shaiva orientation-for example, by subordinating Shiva to *Rām* as the adoring narrator of his acts. Yet traffic on the "bridge" that is Hanuman sometimes proceeds in the opposite direction, suggesting the "Shaivization" or "Shaktization" of Vaishnavism, as when (in the Ananda Rāmayana) Shiva's awe- some power, transmitted via Hanuman, is emphasized as indispensable to *Rām*/Vishnu's triumph, or the latter is even portrayed (as in the *Mahiravan* cycle) as helpless without Hanuman's intercession. Modern devotees are fond of pointing out that there are far more shrines to Hanuman today than to his master; and within these there is more likely to be a lingam enshrined at his side than the *trimurti* of Sita- Rām-Lakshman."[908]

3.6.2. Devotion to Infant Rām

In the *Bhakti* traditions, God is close to human beings as their beloved, father, and mother, and at times God also becomes a child. The celebrations of birthdays of gods designate the attitude of God as a child. During the *Kṛṣṇajanmāṣṭami, Rām Navami* the devotional rituals include

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[903] RCM, 6.56-57.
[904] *Vinay Patrika,* Rudra incarnates 25:3; first among the Rudras 27:3; Vāmadeva 28:5; O trident handed Śiva, 29: 5
[905] Tulsidas, *Dhohāvaḷi,* poem, 12. Cited in B. I. Kapur, Hanumān Calisā (New Delhi: Trimurti Publications, 1974), 43.
[906] Leonard Wolcott, "Hanumān: The Power-Dispensing Money in North Indian Folk Religion," *Journal of Asian Studies* 37 (1978): 654.
[907] Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*, 56.
[908] Lutgendorf, "My Hanumān is Bigger Than Yours," in *History of Religions* 33, no. 4 (February 1994): 241-242.

cradling, singing lullabies to child Kṛṣṇa or Rām. The prominent *rasa*[909] (mood) in Tulsi's composition is *vātsalya*[910] and *dāsya*.[911] The *Vātsalya bhakti* is detectable in the *Mānas* as Rām's parents Daśarath and Kausalya, are primary examples of devotion. Therefore, the *Bāla Kānda* has a detailed description of *nakh-śikh* (head to toe) and childish exploits or *bāl līlā* that are absent in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*.[912] The influence of *Bhāgavata Purāṇas Kṛṣṇa līlā* is visible as Tulsi includes theophany – the dramatic revelation of Rām's divine nature to Mother Kausalya.[913] The admiration and devotion to infant Rām are elaborated in Bhuśundi's tale. Bhuśundi, although a crow, appears as a devotee of Rām, whose heart is close to the lord's childhood.[914] He explains his own fascination for child Rām as his chosen deity.[915] His devotion prompts him to participate in the birth festivities in Ayodhyā. Taking a crow's form, he stays close to Rām and watches his charming childish acts and describes the beauty of Rām.

> His delicate feet are like just-opened red lotuses,
> with charming toes, nails that steal the moon's glow,
> soles delicately marked with the four signs,
> and beautiful anklets that tinkle sweetly.[916]

The notion of *bhakt*i implies sharing. Bhuśundi's desire to be a partaker in the life of child Rām is relevantly communicated as he goes along with infant Rām to eat the morsels of food fallen

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[909]Rasa – designates aesthetic sentiment in Indian poetics. In the *Nāṭyāśastra*, the oldest surviving compendium on the knowledge of performing arts, of Bharata Muni, sixth and seventh chapters relate to rasas (sentiments) and Bhavas (emotions). He notes eight different *rasas*, namely *śṛṅgāra*-erotic, *virā*-heroic, *karuṇā*-pathetic, *hāsya*-comic, *raudra*-furious, *bhayānaka*-terrible, *bībhatsa*-odious, and *adbhuta*-marvelous. A ninth *rasa śānta*-tranquility was added by later authors, and now the expression of *navaras*a (nine) is standard. *Rasik* is one who can savor aesthetic sentiments.

[910] *Vātsalya* comes from the word *vatsa*, meaning calf, a relationship between a cow and a calf.

[911] Devotion typical of a servant, full of humility and service-orientedness,

[912] RCM, 1.200.1-4. See David Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgānugā bhakti sādhana* (New York: Oxford University Press,1998)

[913] RCM, 1.192, 1. 201-202; Chapter 8 of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* has a similar reference to Kṛṣṇa eating dirt and his mother Yaśoda having a divine vision.

[914] RCM, 7. 114.6-7.

[915] *Iṣṭadeva mama bālaka rāma*, RCM, 7.74b 2-3.

[916] RCM, 7.75b.4.

in the courtyard.[917] In Hindu temple worship, receiving the leftovers (*uchiśta*) is to receive *prasād* (grace) from their beloved deity.[918] However, in all these participations, Bhuśundi is confused about accepting both Rām's childish activities and the totality of consciousness and bliss. [919] The tension within him indicates a struggle to acknowledge both human and divine elements in the child. During this illusion lord, Rām comes after him stretching out his arm grabs him. A beautiful explanation of the love of God coming after a confused soul is rendered in 7.78b, 2-4. Later, to strengthen the faith, Bhuśundi is given a theophany of Rām.[920] Through this divine experience, Bhuśundi was able to experience the tender care of infant Rām. Akshay, a devotee of infant Rām in Varanasi, had pride in his devotional practices as he said, "We [Hindus] can approach God as a child, we can call him names, tease him, play with him, that is the freedom we enjoy with our God. Do you enjoy such freedom with your God?" Infant Rām's worship affirms that Rām's playful embodied deeds are more prominent than God's transcendent qualities. The child Rāma is worshipped through the central tenets of Vaiṣṇava practice, the *navadhā bhakti* of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.[921] So, the present-day *Rām Navami* celebrations include the cradling ceremony, recital of the *Mānas* in public, and holy people's fellowship (*Satsaṇg*).

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[917] RCM, 7.75 a.

[918] *Prasāda* (from *sad*) seems to have meant originally 'to fall into the power of (accusative),' then 'to settle down,' then to 'grow clear, to become tranquil and placid.' Cf. Monier Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 697. *Prasāda* is also said to be the food offered to an idol or the remnants of food left by a spiritual teacher and afterward divided among the people. In the Mahabharata, in the context of distress or calamity and the imploring for aid, we frequently come across the phrase "*prasādaṃ kuru see Mahabharata* 1.78.37: 1.112.21; 1.170.14; 5. 192.30; 13.92.8.

[919] RCM, 7.77 b.

[920] RCM, 7.80.1-82.

[921] The verse from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is: *śrī prahalāda uvāca śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ / smaraṇam pādasevanam/ arcanam vandanam dāsyam / sakhyam ātmanivedanam// iti puṃṣārpitā viṣṇau / bhaktiścennavalakṣaṇā/ kriyeta bhāgavatyaddhā / tan manye 'dhītam uttamam//* (7.5.23). The *bhakti-yoga* is practiced in nine different spheres within the Vaiṣṇava tradition, include hearing about God from authorized persons, glorifying the activities of God, remembering God, serving the lotus feet of God, worshipping the deity in the temple, praying to God, Serving God as a servant, Serving God as a friend and complete surrender to God. The nine different processes enunciated by Prahlada, who learned them from Narada Muni, may not all be required to execute devotional service; if a devotee performs only one of these nine without deviation, he can attain the mercy of God.

3.6.3. All-inclusiveness of Devotion

Tulsi's social openness to 'lower caste' is debated as he considered Brahmins as "gods on earth" (*bhūsur, mahisur*).[922] Furthermore, he grieves for the insult of Brahmins by *Śudras* and laments that in the *Kali* age, there is the mixing of castes, Brahmins becoming illiterate, greedy, and lustful, and the *Śudras* muttering *mantras* and doing religious duties.[923] Tulsi proposes a hierarchical caste structure as a model for the ideal society. The most quoted text of Tulsi's bias on *Śudras* and women is a text uttered during the chastisement of the sea by Rām, "Drum, rustic, *Śudras,* beast and woman are all deserving of beating."[924] The reason for his adverse treatment of women may be based on his life experience as told in legends. His mother abandoned him, and his wife chastised him. This was the view of P. B. Singh and Raghavendra in Banaras during my interaction with them.[925] Jayaram Das Din writes that the text does not imply physical abuse, "here, the meaning of *tāṛṇa* is simply to instruct the five mentioned individuals for the sake of their wellbeing." [926] These texts are problematic, but the entire epic need not be attacked and rejected out rightly. Lutgendorf states, "there have been few who have straightforwardly attacked the Mānas; to do so would be like attacking motherhood or the cow."[927] There is a need to recognize and see Tulsidas's epic as " a work that was itself conservative and hierarchy-affirming in the letter, but inclusive and hierarchy challenging in spirit, and that boldly presented itself as a divine

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[922] RCM, 1.1.2. Lutgendorf views that this compound refers broadly to saintly teachers, sādhus, and devotees of Rām than Brahmanas. See T*he Epic of Rām* volume 1.

[923] RCM, 7.100a, for the analysis, see *Lutgendorf, The Life of a text*, 356-60.

[924] *Dol ganvar sudr pasu nārī, sakal tadana he adhikāri* (RCM, 5.58.3). The word *Tāḍna*' is interpreted as to punish, to beat, to admonish. Cf. *Mānas*pīyuṣ 6.1.432-438.

[925] Conversation on February 6, 2020.

[926] As cited in Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 397. See Din, *Mānas* Śankā Samādhān, 163-64.

[927] Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 395.

revelation in folksy vernacular."[928] In encountering other religious traditions, the key should be to find out the positive than focus merely on limitations or negatives.

Tulsi wanted to expose his vision of *Rāmbhakti* according to the existing social opinions and the teachings of the Veda.[929] Every religion has inherent stress points. Ramanujan views that the epic expands through the responses of the audience to inherent stress points.[930] Texts have a way of growing beyond the limitations of their authors.[931] There are a few instances that suggest inclusiveness in devotion. Rām's visit to the *āśram* of tribal woman Śabari and Rām's fervent embrace of the tribal chieftain Guha, a low born devotee, and a friend are the common examples.[932] The *Kevaṭ-prasaṇga* is a thirteen-line passage from *Ayodhyā Kāṇd* that highlights the exemplary devotion of Kevaṭ, an untouchable who ferries Rām's party across the Ganga. Rāmkiṇkar, a popular narrator of Rām stories, exalts Kevaṭ to an exalted status saying Tulsidas has made Kevaṭ not merely an exemplary outcaste devotee but in fact "the first citizen of *Rāmrāj.*"[933]

Here, I will examine an unusual character, crow Bhuśundi, of the last book to indicate inclusivism. Tulsi presents Bhuśundi as the most outstanding expert on the nature of Rām and *bhakti*, who in Brahminic thinking is the lowest, "untouchable" bird. [934] This text is unique to Tulsi, and the dialogue, unlike others, is conducted by birds using the language of birds, which is used to convey secret knowledge.[935] In the earlier sections, the crow's dreadful behaviors are underlined

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[928] Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*, 82.
[929] *Lokabeda mata manjula kula*, RCM, 1.39.
[930] As cited as a personal communication with Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 393.
[931] J. Duncan M Derrett, "The Concept of Duty in Ancient Indian Jurisprudence," in *The Concept of Duty in South Asia*, ed. Wendy D. O' Flaherty and J. Duncan M. Derrett, Columbia, MO: South Asia Books, 1978), 42.
[932] 6. 120.8
[933] Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 208.
[934] RCM, 5.48.1; *Mānas*piyūṣ, VI: 372-374.
[935] Lutgendorf "The View from the Ghats," 282.

as impure, meat-eater, and one having a harsh voice.[936] But Śiva describes Bhuśundi as "supremely adept in the path of devotion to Rām, wise, a treasury of virtues, and very ancient and one who unceasingly narrates Rām's story for the ceasing of delusion and sorrow."[937] The text indicates the greatness of one who preaches devotion, "Indeed, Lord, my mind holds this conviction that Rām's servant surpasses Rām himself.[938] Hence this lowly crow gains devotion to Rām and expounds the 'love of God' to Garuda, king of birds, and Śiva, who was in delusion after Sati's self-immolation. Garuda's delusion emerged from his experience of self-pride when Nārada had sent him to devour the magic serpents that bound Rām and Lakṣmaṇa. Garuda's power to destroy these snakes by helping Rām, helpless, leads to the delusion.[939] In both these contexts, Bhuśundi becomes a dispeller of confusion, delusion through the narration of *Rām Kathā*. The thought-provoking fact is that, in the prologue, Tulsi presents Bhuśundi as the depository of the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition that crafted by Śiva, shown to Uma and given to Bhuśundi, the crow.[940] In the final chapter, Bhuśundi narrates the story to Śiva in the *Nīlaparvat* (Blue Mountain) after learning from seer Lomaś. The narrations' complexities by various figures communicate that the *Rām* story is still visible to the recipient to gain devotion to Rām.

Bhuśundi is a mysterious figure. He is a hero in the *Bhuśundi Rāmāyaṇa* as a son of Sūrya and Kālakaṇṭaki, the fearsome sister of Kāli. According to this *Rāmāyaṇa,* Bhuśundi as a crow defeated Garuda, Viṣṇu's vehicle, and became a threat to gods. Brahma listening to the pleas of gods asks him to refrain from violence and mentions the greatness of Rām worship. Out of

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[936] See RCM, 1.3.1 and 1.38.2; 1.5.1; 1.91
[937] RCM, 7.61.2-3
[938] RCM, 7.120.8
[939] RCM, 6.74.5-6.74: *Mānas*piyūṣ 7.355-356.
[940] RCM, 1.1.29

curiosity, Bhuśundi hears the story of Rām and becomes a devotee of Rām.[941] In this story, the influence of the *bhakti* text *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, that expounds on Kṛṣṇa devotion, is evident. Mataprasad Gupta, Charlotte Vaudeville, and Camille Bulcke assume that *Bhuśundi Rāmāyaṇa* influenced Tulsi.[942]

After the end of the main narrative of *Mānas*, Bhuśundi's discourse on *bhakti* begins having Sixty-three stanzas.[943] The discourse begins with Pārvathi's question to Śiva on a dialogue between a crow and a serpent's foe (Garuda).[944] The story narrates that Śiva sent Garuda to Bhuśundi to dispel confusion, saying listening to the story will remove all doubts.[945] Bhuśundi's life was a progression towards devotion. He, too, was the prey of the power of illusion (*māya*) in his life.[946] Born in Ayodhyā as a rich *Śudra*, due to hunger and poverty, he left Ayodhyā and reached Ujjain, and there Bhuśundi meets a pious Brahmin who becomes his *guru*. The *guru* tried to convince him the devotion to Śiva leads to devotion to Rām. Bhuśundi had particular contempt for Śaiva ascetics and *nirguṇa* teachers.[947] He was convinced that in the *kali* era, the only thing that surpasses all others for salvation is the repetition of Rām's name.[948] His neglect of his Guru's advice did not make the *Guru* angry; instead, the *Guru* treated him calmly.

The inner arrogance and egotism of Bhuśundi made him pay the price when he did not reverence his *Guru* in the temple. Śiva did not endure the awful sin of disrespect to a *Guru*, and he

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[941] Bh.Ra I.1.4.8
[942] Mataprasad Gupta, *Tulsīdās: ek Samālocanātmak Adhyyan* (Allahabad: Hindi Parishad, 1965), 27; Vaudeville *Etude sur les Sources et la composition du Rāmāyaṇ de Tulsi Dās*, 1955; 302-305; Bulcke, *Rāmkatha* aur *Tulsidas* (Allahabad: Hindustani Academy 1977), 53-60.
[943] RCM, 7.63.1 -125
[944] RCM, 7.54.2
[945] RCM, 7.60.4- 61.
[946] RCM, 7.73b.1.
[947] RCM, 7.98.4-7.98 a; 7.99 b,7.101.4.
[948] RCM, 7.102a, b.

was cursed to be a serpent.[949] Through the intercession of his merciful Guru, Śiva changed the curse, and as a result, he was reborn a thousand times. However, in all these births, he was an ardent follower of Rām. He was finally born a pious *Brāhmaṇa*. After his parents' death, he went to the forest to worship Rām, and there during his travels, he met Lomaś, who tried to convince him to worship the *nirguṇ* form of Rām. Nevertheless, Lomaś failed to win over Bhuśundi. The advancement of the *saguṇa* position of Bhuśundi angered Lomaś who ridiculed him saying, "you are like a crow, look warily at everything,"[950] Furthermore, he was cursed to be an "outcast among winged ones."[951] Nevertheless, Rām, who inwardly inspires hearts, reverses the sage Lomaś' understanding, and he summons Bhuśundi back. Lomaś then imparts Bhuśundi the Rām *mantra*,[952] and meditation on Rām's child form and narrates the *Rāmcaritmānas* and advisees him not to tell anyone who is not devoted to Rām.[953] Then onwards, Bhuśundi passed on to Garuda and other birds the extraordinary power of *bhakti* and Rām's name in his life. This episode is "about a story and its message – a kind of meta-story about the history of Rām."[954]

The prominence to an unusual character has theological and devotional perspectives. The image of the lake is recalled in the narration. Since the entire text of the *Mānas* has a lake allegory, by recalling the image of the lake in the narration, Lutgendorf points out that although Bhuśundi the lowest gets substantially the "last word" in the epic.[955] The lake allegory also crowns the entire

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[949] RCM, 7.106- 107.4.

[950] According to *Mānas*piyūṣ, it signifies the crow's craftiness and constant preoccupation with safeguarding its impure food from being snatched away by others. See *Mānas*piyūṣ 7.366-372

[951] RCM, 7.111b.8.

[952] Devotees believe this to be six-syllable Sanskrit formula ' *Śrī Rāmāya Namaḥ* " (salutation to Lord *Rām*). This *mantra* to be effective has to be imparted by the Guru is a strong belief,

[953] RCM, 7.111.7.

[954] Stasik, "O kruczej opowieści w *Rām*ćaritmanas raz jeszcze" *Wratislaviensium Studia Classica* olim Classica Wratislaviensia VI–VII (XXXVII–XXXVIII) Wrocław, (2017–2018): 261.

[955] Lutgendorf, *The Epic of Rām,* Vol. 7, *Introduction.*

epic into a harmonious whole as the epic's title concerning the epic as explained in the first book.[956]

This allegory gives a distinctive and divinely-inspired feature to Tulsi's version of the *Rām Kathā* as the audience is invited to go deeper into the lake. Hence commentators attach great significance to its narration by Bhuśundi. Bhuśundi's narration depicts the superiority of devotion in the *Kaliyug* –"Without intense love, none reaches the Raghu Lord, despite doing yoga, austerity, study, and renunciation."[957] This episode can be interpreted sociologically, and the discourse can be seen from the perspective of the *bhakti* movement's democratizing' God. The "outcaste (*chaṇḍā*l) among birds" not only has access to God through his devotion as beloved but also befits to be path-teller to others. The caste status does not matter in devotion. Bhuśundi held his 'low' body of a crow dearly as this body was "conducive to his own goal."[958] Ultimately the episode promulgated by a saintly crow makes devotion accessible even to the lowliest.

3.6.4. Morality and Social Duty in Devotion

The *bhakti* proposed in the *Mānas* is based on the virtuous life. Repeatedly, Tulsi condemns sinful ways. He believed that there could not be faith and devotion in the fount of filth and ocean of sin and that Rām is not moved to mercy to an immoral person.[959] In the prologue, he praises the scoundrels, thinking they would return to good ways and says only saintly souls like holy swans (*hamsa)* can distinguish between good and evil.[960] He laments over the wicked, quarrelsome, and one inimical to parents, guru, brother, and those who break vows, disobedient children, who hurt other people, deceive wives and argue.[961] In Tulsi's view, the human body is mercifully given to

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[956] RCM, 1.35-1.43b
[957] RCM, 7.61.1.
[958] RCM, 7.94b.4.
[959] RCM, 7.90a.
[960] RCM, 1.3b- 1.6.
[961] RCM, 2.171.3-172. 1-2.

humans after many births. This body is a great fortune and an instrument for pious practices and gateway to deliverance. [962] Hence, connection to a virtuous life in devotion is stressed, "whoever is guileless in mind, word and deed, to him the way of devotion is easy indeed." [963] The virtues are not to be haste but to discern with great patience. Rām advises his brother Lakṣmaṇa not to act impulsively.[964] Devotion goes well with doing good to others and despising none. Forgiving attitude is indicated through the metaphor of sandalwood and ax, "for the ax cuts down the tree, but mark it, the sandal sheds its natural fragrance on the axe."[965] Integrating one's *bhakti* and way of life (*ācaraṇa*) and controlling one's passions are challenging, but they are possible with God's grace. Living a moral life with great humility and a total self-surrender can constrain the powerful Rām.[966]

Devotion is compatible with a life of engagement in the world around. Hinduism is critiqued for its lack of integration of spiritual and ritual traditions with social duty. [967] The *advaitic* traditions see this world as an 'illusion' (*māya*) and turning one's back to the world (*udāsinatā*) is presented as an ideal attitude for those who seek God. In contrast, the *Mānas* proposes the touchstone of one's devotion depends on the devotee's attitude to one's fellow beings. Hence for Tulsi, doing good to others (*parahita*) is essential in the devotion to Rām. "There is no *dharma,* brother, like kindness to others, nothing more despicable than to cause another pain."[968] Bharata, the ultimate devotee of Rām, is told, "Those in whose hearts dwells desire for the good of others

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[962] RCM, 7.43.
[963] *Dohāvali*, no. 80.
[964] RCM, 2.230.2.
[965] RCM, 7.37.
[966] RCM, 2.294.
[967] See Anantanand Rambachan, *A Hindu Theology of Liberation, Not-Two is Not one* (Albany: State University of New York, 2015).
[968] RCM, 7: 40.1.

finds nothing in the world too hard to win."[969] Rām's words addressed to Jaṭāyu, who died in his attempt to save Sītā from Rāvaṇa indicate the welfare of others as the core of devotion. "Rāma's faithful servants are devoted to the good of others and sorrow when they sorrow, full of compassion."[970] In the description of holy people (saints) Rām says,

> They display no pride or self-conceit or arrogance,
> nor ever dream of setting foot upon the path of vice,
> They are ever singing or listening to my sportive acts,
> unselfishly devoted to the good of others.[971]

In the conversation between Garuda and Bhuśundi, compassion and forgiveness are depicted as characteristics of saints,

> poets have said that the hearts of saints are like butter,
> but they missed the truth of the matter.
> for butter melts of its own heat,
> but the holiest saints melt when another is tried in the fire.[972]

The good of others is also emphasized in *Vinayapatrika*. When in prayer, Tulsi asked God, "when shall I be able to have the qualities of a saint? The answer was to be content with what you get, not to desire anything from anybody, and to be continually engaged in seeking the good of others."[973]

3.7. Śabari a Model Devotee in the *Mānas*

Śabari epitomizes devotion to Rām. In contrast to Rām's bias towards people of 'lower' status, the forty-six stanzas (3.33.3-36) of *Araṇya Kāṇḍ* exemplifies the universality of devotion. The event ensues as Rām and Lakṣmaṇa move deeper into the forest in search of Sītā. Their journey

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[969] RCM, 3:3.
[970] RCM, 2.219.
[971] RCM, 3.46.
[972] RCM, 7.125 *Tapa* means both heat and affliction.
[973] *Vinayapatrika* no.172

was filled with varied encounters, beginning with sages to Śurpaṇakha and other demonic hordes.[974] On that journey, they meet Śabari, a female tribal ascetic, 'bereft of caste status and the very womb of sin,'[975] awaiting the *darśan* of her lord as promised by her Guru Mātaṅga.[976] The wait, fulfillment, and Tulsi's narration evoke devotion among the readers and reveal the effectiveness of devotion as no other method (*sādhana*) can give happiness. The meeting follows after Rām granting the boon of devotion to Jaṭāyu and liberating Kabandh, a headless monster.[977] While instructing Kabandh on *Dharma*, Rām says, "even without propriety and virtue, a Brāhmaṇ deserves worship, but not a *Śudra*, however meritorious and learned."[978] Ironically immediately after these utterances, Rām and Lakṣmaṇa visit a tribal woman who is highly impure outcaste by Brahminic teachings, and she recounts her life story with great love to Rām.

Śabari was a queen in her previous life. However, her detachment, simplicity, and spiritual devotion enabled her to renounce and devote herself to meditation near Gaṅgā. She was reborn as a daughter to a religiously righteous person in a Bhīl, a tribal community, the lowest social order. At a young age, she left her home and became a disciple of sage Mātaṅga and served her Guru with exceptional devotion. Although she wanted to accompany her Guru in his death, Mātaṅga assured her that for her service (*sevā*), she would be given *darśan* of Rām. Śabari's wait was long, but her selfless and complete devotion to the Lord of Raghu's bore fruit when Rām visited her *āśram,* and she was given instruction on nine-fold practice of devotion.[979] In their meeting, Tulsi depicts Rām as a generous person (*udāra*). The adjective of generosity offers Rām going in search

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[974] Atri, Sharabhang, Sutikshan, and Agastya, Anasuya, the wife of Atri, lectures Sita on women's duties.

[975] *Jāti hīn adh janm mahi mukth kīnhi asi nāri*, RCM,3.36.

[976] Sage Matanga, while ascending to heaven, had instructed Śabari to await the visit from *Rām*. Cf. VR. 3.70.9-13. Pollock: 1991: 241.

[977] RCM, 3.33.2. Kabandh was a heavenly musician (Gandharva) cursed to be a headless monster with massive arms and a gaping maw in his belly. Through the severing of his arms, Rām and Lakṣmaṇa liberated him (Cf. VR 3.65-69).

[978] RCM, 3.33.1.

[979] See VR.70.9-13.

of his devotees to be gracious.[980] The earlier beneficiaries of Rām's graciousness were Śarbhanga, Khar, Viradh, Mārīca. The generous heart communicates Rām's lordliness (*aiśvarya bhāv*). The arrival to Śabari's place is equalized with the arrival of Gurus and other great people with the expression '*pagu dhāra*.' Moreover, despite Śabari calling her dwelling a hut, it is identified as an *āśram*, a reserved term for the places of seekers and sages. The *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* and *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* also uses the term *āśram*.[981] Tulsi describes the beauty of brothers entering Śabari's *āśram* with *śṛṅgāra* mood- 'with their lotus-like eyes and long arms.'[982] Commentators view that such expression is apt for a woman devotee. When Rām meets Viśvāmitra and Visbhiṣaṇa the courageous (*vīra*) mood is used as they required to fight the enemies. Her whole self was immersed in love and delighted Śabari was unable to move or speak, and her only expression was bowing to the feet and worshipping again and again.[983] These were the moments of her fulfillment of life and fruit of her meditation and waiting.

In her actions, she communicates that her waiting has not gone waste, and she recognizes the power of the blessings and promises of a holy man (*muni*).[984] She does not forget to offer hospitality. With great devotion (*sādar*) she washes the feet and makes them sit comfortably *(sundar āsan)* and offers them the juiciest fruits, roots, and tubers. Many popular tellings Śabari offered pre-tasted (*Jhūta*) food.[985] Today the expression "the tribal woman's jujubes," (*bhinik ke ber*) has become common to designate the humble offerings to God. Rām receives affection and love of Śabari and praises the food, again and again, an unusual forbidden custom for Indians to

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[980] *Mānas*pīyūṣ, 346.
[981] VR, 3.74.4; AR, 3.10.4.
[982] RCM, 3.33.4.
[983] RCM, 3.33.5.
[984] Explanation of Raghavendra my Guru.
[985] In most popular versions, Śabari had pre-tasted these fruits to ensure their sweetness. There is no reference in Vālmiki, Adhyātma, and the *Mānas* to such acts. In the *Bhaktamāla*, there is a reference to such an act. Some commentators argue that Tulsi alludes to calling the fruit "juiciest" (*surasa ati*) see *Mānas*piyūṣ 5.1.351.

praise or discuss food. The commentary writes, love goes beyond these human norms and regulations, and here the Lord (*Prabhu*) is praising a lovable devotee "where love holds sway. Etiquette cannot endure." In the popular serial of Ramanand Sagar, Sabari's episode grows beyond the *Mānas* text. Lakṣmaṇ's reluctance and revulsion to accept the pre-eaten fruits are visible. In contrast, Rām receives them with great joy and comments the fruits are as if my mother Kausalya gave and tells Lakṣmaṇa that even in Viṣṇu's heaven, we will not have such a treat. The serial depicts the ultimacy of devotion with its contemporary interpretation.

Śabari, aware of her own lowliness, says, "I am the lowest of the low, lower still a woman."[986] Furthermore, she considered herself 'dull-minded,' having no intellect, a typical definition given to a woman in a domineering patriarchal society. Rām's response to Śabari communicates that devotion goes beyond gender, race, status as he says,

> I esteem but one relationship- devotion.
> Caste status, kinship, piety, renown,
> Wealth, power, lineage, virtues, and cleverness
> A person with all of these, yet without devotion,
> Seems as arid as a cloud without devotion.[987]

The expression '*panthi*' is essential as it refers to 'table fellowship.' The rigid caste system does not allow sharing of food and drinks among the various castes. The inclusiveness of devotion is seen in Bhagavad Gītā, "I am equally disposed to all living beings; I am neither inimical nor partial to anyone. However, the devotees who worship Me with love reside in Me, and I reside in them."[988] Rām recognizes devotion as the only norm for relationships. The metaphor used for

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[986] *Adham te adham adham ati nāri*, RCM, 3.34.2.
[987] RCM, 3.34.3.
[988] BG, 9:29

devotion here is water (*jal*), signifying its fluidity.[989] In the prologue, the devotion to Rām is compared to the Gangā stream.[990]

3.7.1. Nine-fold Practice of Devotion

Śabari idealizes the *dāsa bhāva* in the devotional path. To be a servant or slave of Rām is a chosen path of her. To this love-crazed intimate devotee is given the narration of the nine paths of devotion.[991] Rām's narration to Śabari, the nine-fold practice of devotion asking her to listen attentively (*śravaṇ*) and set it in her heart (*man māhi*), communicates the integration of love and service. Nine-fold consists of the company of the holy (*satsaṅg*), love for the story (*Rām Kathā*) or *prasaṅga,* the service of Guru, abandoning hypocrisy and singing the litany of praises of Rām, repeating the mantra with great faith, sense of control and detachment with constant adherence to the dharma of the good, to see all creation imbued with Rām and to hold the holy above even Rām,[992] to be content with one's lot and not see the other's faults even in a dream, and simplicity and honesty towards all.[993]

Navadhā bhakti, (nine-fold path of devotion), in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, is the foundation for all the devotions in Vaiṣṇava traditions. They include listening to the stories of Viṣṇu, singing his praises, fixing the memory on Viṣṇu, rendering service to the feet of Viṣṇu, worship, paying homage to Viṣṇus image, serving Viṣṇu as a servant, friend, and lastly complete self-surrender.[994] Tulsi's narration of *Navadhā bhakti* gives importance to listening, praising, service and fellowship. Nevertheless, the narration has its own uniqueness. The nine-fold practice emphasizes the

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[989] RCM, 7.48.6.
[990] RCM, 1.1.4.
[991] Lutgendorf, "Dining out at Lake Pampa: The Shabari Episode in Multiple Ramayanas," in *Questioning Rāmāyaṇas a South Asian Tradition*, ed. Paula Richman, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 119-37.
[992] RCM, 3.35.2.
[993] RCM, 3.354.4- 35,3.
[994] Cf. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.7. 5.23 and NBS*,* 36.

company of the holy one, s*atsaṇ*g. Tulsi repeatedly makes the mention of good company. The holy company is the root of joy and blessings. They are benefactors of the world.[995] *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra* says that association with great persons is hard to achieve, is inaccessible, but it is effective.[996] The fellowship lies in listening to the stories of Rām and attain the love of God. Secondly, the practice has a greater emphasis on morality, one's involvement in the world, and a devotee's behavior towards others. Hence Rām invites the devotee to abandon hypocrisy (*kapat taji)*, control senses (*dhamśil*), adhere to the *dharma* of good (*sajjan dharam*), and to see creation permeated with Rām, to be content with oneself and not to see the fault of others.[997] The Śabari story of devotion is a call to become beloved of God or lovable to God. This path is not to obtain something but to become beloved of God and say his grace is enough for me. Therefore, Śabari does not claim to be a propagator of devotion; she is shy about praise as she feels her unworthiness as a woman born of low caste but obtains liberation. Despite her 'low status,' she attains salvation through her pure devotion and becomes a metaphor for the endless wait of a true devotee in the bhakti tradition.[998]At the end of the episode, Tulsi appeals to all people to abandon all actions, false doctrines as they yield only sorrow and cultivate fervent love for Rām's feet.[999] Because of devotion, a woman deprived of caste status and the very womb of sin' received liberation, and she directs Rām in search of Sītā.[1000]

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[995] RCM, 1.2.4- 3b.
[996] *mahat-sangas tu durlabho 'gamyo 'moghas ca.* NBS*, 39.
[997] RCM, 3. 35.1-3.
[998] Pavan K. Varma, *The Greatest Ode to Lord Rām* (Chennai: Westland, 2020), 165.
[999] RCM, 3.37.8.
[1000] RCM, 3.36.6.

3.8. Hanumān- Passionate Devotee of Rām

The popular character of Rāmāyaṇa, Hanumān, is one of the most beloved and worshiped gods in the Hindu pantheon. The mere rationalist approach to religion would question human beings degrading themselves and worshipping a lower being, a monkey-faced god. However, the Hindu folk religions, oral traditions, mythologies, both in Sanskrit and regional traditions, have an intimate connection with Hanumān. The deities are separated as "major" and "minor" deities in the Orientalist tradition. [1001] For instance, Ganesh,[1002] Skanda (*Murugan*)[1003] are the minor deities of Hinduism. Irrespective of the denominational affinity of Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism, and Śaktism, the simian companion of Rām, is most popular. The interconnections and powerful intercessions make him a "middle-class god," par excellence among other gods.[1004] Since he has no place in the Vedic rituals and Sanskrit philosophical traditions and is invoked exclusively for this worldly ends than for everlasting bliss (*ānanda)* or salvation (*mokṣa*), most research scholars agree that Hanumān is an aboriginal folk deity that has a non-Aryan, preliterate animistic origin.[1005] However, Lutgendorf describes the present-day status of Hanumān in Hinduism as "the most important god who is not god."[1006]

[1001] William Crooke, *Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India,* two vols (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1968), first published in 1893. Philip Lutgendorf calls the division 'false' in his book *Hanuman's Tale The message of a Divine Monkey* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007*)*

[1002] The elephant-headed God is invoked to remove all obstacles before the beginning of any auspicious events as he is known as *'vigna nivāraka*. He is prominently worshipped in Maharashtra,

[1003]Skanda, a six-headed youth, rides on a peacock and commands the army of Gods. He is the most popular deity among the Tamils, and he is firmly identified as their regional deity. See Christopher. J. Fuller, *The Camphor Flame*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 40.

[1004] Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*, 373-74.

[1005] See William Crooke, *The Popular Religions and Folklore of North India*, 1968.

[1006] Lutgendorf, "Monkey in the Middle: The Status of Hanuman in Popular Hinduism," *religion*, 27/1997, 329.

3.8.1. Devotion *(bhakti)* and Hanumān

The devotion around Hanumān is fostered through the recitation of *Hanumān Chalisa*, and other salutary (*Stotra*) texts *Saṇkaṭ Mochan Aṣṭak* (liberator from distress), *Hanumān Bāhuk* and sixty Stanzas of *Sunder Kānd* from the *Mānas* and the litany of the "thousand names of Hanumān" (*Hanumān Sahasra Nāma Stotra*) in the temple premises. Although scholars disagree, the compositions of these texts are attributed to Tulsidas. The proliferation of private temples, street temples (*svayambhu*) of Hanumān affirm his greatness among Hindus, irrespective of caste. Tuesdays and Saturdays are special worship days of Hanumān, and on this day, many devotees keep the *vrat*.[1007] The famous temple 'Saṇkaṭ Mochan Mandir,' is crowded on these days for the *darśan* of Hanumān. The applying of *sindhūr* to Hanumān is a prominent ritual in these temples,[1008] which is sometimes interpreted as a vegetarian substitute for the blood offerings. [1009] The *sindhūr* applied to Hanumān is orange and is known as "*mahābīrī*" (of the great hero).[1010] The stories related to Hanumān are popular; he is alive in social media and modern-day social and political life. The stories connected to Hanumān "mirror an idealized Hindu male life pattern," and the devotion and rituals around him communicate both the spiritual and material aspirations of devotees. [1011]

[1007] *Vrat* includes a fast, self-discipline recitation, and most common among women as it is an effective form of personal, household-based ritual independent of male and priestly intervention. See Anne Mackenzie Pearson, *Because it Gives Me Peace of Mind* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

[1008] *Sindhūr* refers to a mixture of fragrant oil (such as sandalwood or jasmine) and any one of several substances that produce deep reddish or orange color,

[1009] Daniel M. Coccari "The Bir Babas of Banaras and the Defiled Dead," in Ald Hiltebeitel, ed., Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees, 251-69 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); Lindsey Harlan, The Goddesses' Henchmen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 5-7, 136-137.

[1010] The story connected to applying Sindhur is as follows: The applying of *sindhūr* is a common practice among Indian wives for the longevity of the husband's life. Hanumān, enquiring when Sītā was applying her *sindhūr*, learns that will have a long life to Rām. With great devotion, he rushes to the store, dumps himself over Sindhur, and returns to the palace of Rām. Realizing Hanumān's devotion in such an act, Rām assures, "Today is Tuesday, and henceforth those who offer oil and vermillion to my beloved servant, the son of the wind, on this day will please me and will have their wishes granted. For the story in detail, see Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*, 157.

[1011] Ibid., 234.

Mythologically and iconographically, Hanumān possesses and dispenses to devotees *śakti* (power*)* and *bhakti* (devotion). His selfless and single-minded devotion to Rām is the most endearing quality that attracts the devotees towards him. Hence for the devotees of Hanumān, he is both "*śakti and bhakti.*" Hanumān's strength is visible in constructing a bridge across the ocean for *Rām*'s army to get across, setting fire the enemy's city with his tail and bringing lifesaving herb (*sanjivini)*. Hanumān is muscular, but his devotion enables him to have a deep affection for Rām and Sītā. Thus, his power is divine and not just a brute force. Joseph Alter, noting both power and devotion in Hanumān, calls him a "warrior-devotee," as his *shakt*i is directly derived from his *bhakti* to Rām.[1012] He continues to say, "The more perfect his *bhakt*i, the greater his strength; the more fabulous his strength, the greater magnitude of his *bhakti*." [1013]

In *bhakti*, Hanumān stands for self-effacing love, service, and surrender. The most common bazaar posters depict either Hanumān chanting the divine name, opening his chest and showing Sītā-rām in his heart and bowing as a fervent servant (*dāsa*) of Rām, Lakṣmaṇ, and Sītā. Legends say that Rām entrusted to Hanumān responsibility for the welfare of the world and that he is present and active in caring for the devotees' material needs. There have been installments of Hanumān in the towns and crossroads of India and worldwide with an ambiguous competition of having the "biggest Hanumān."[1014]

In the Vālmīkī story, he is with super-human strength as he is the son of the wind. Occasionally he lapses into monkeyish behavior. Nevertheless, throughout the story, he is familiarly known as a messenger (*dūta*). He narrates the tale of Rām to Sītā in Lanka and to Bharata in Ayodhyā and brings hope, encouragement, and healing as a loyal servant of Rām. Since Vālmiki

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[1012] Joseph Alter, *The Wrestler's Body*, 208.
[1013] Ibid., 199.
[1014] Lutgendorf, "My Hanuman is Bigger Than Yours," 211-245.

was concerned with orthodox ethics, Hanumān serves as a servant model, an ambassador respected by all.[1015] Jnāneśvar, a Marathi poet in the 13th century in his *Jnāneśvari*, a commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* written in Marathi in 1290 CE, portrays Hanumān as the incarnation of Śankara, raising him from a status of Rām devotee to one of the gods in the Hindu pantheon.[1016] Furthermore, the contribution of Tulsi in the promotion of Hanumān's devotion is immense.

3.8.2. Hanumān and Tulsidas

For Tulsidas, Hanumān is the ideal devotee representing the ideal relationship of the bhakta.[1017] The devotion to Hanumān emerges from his life experience. It is believed that Tulsi established twelve shrines to monkey God in Banaras, the famous being *Saṇkaṭ Mochan Mandir*. Based on Tulsi's works, Lutgendorf cautiously advances a theory that Tulsi's attitude towards Hanumān changed throughout his life.[1018] During the outbreak of plague in Banaras, Tulsi prays for mercy to Śiva, Rām, and Hanumān.[1019] At the end of his life, Tulsidas suffered from agonizing rheumatic pain centered on his arms and spread through his body, having bloody boils, and he prayed to Hanumān for the relief. His composition of *'Hanumān Bahūk*,' a fourteen stanzas praise of Hanumān, repeatedly affirms that anyone who comes under the protection of Hanumān will have no affliction. Tulsi writes, "Accessible through adoration; you are ever near to aid your servants; who praise, revere, remember, and repeat your name; you end their miseries."[1020] In these songs, Tulsi refers to Hanumān as his lord.[1021] Kaushik, a *Pundit*, sitting in the *pānda* near Tulsi ghāt, had this to say, "Goswāmi ji, (Tulsidas) was not a devotee of Rām but Hanumān."

[1015] VR 6. 67, 9-15.
[1016] Joseph Satyanand, "Study Based on Hanumān Cult in Varanasi," 183.
[1017] RCM, 6.1-4
[1018] Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*, 92-98.
[1019] *Kavitāvaḷī* 7, 169,176, 181.
[1020] *Hanumān Bāhuk*, 1.
[1021] *Hanumān Bāhuk, Tulsī ko Nāth* Stanza 6; *Tulsī ko Saheeb*, Stanza 11.

Many legends say Hanumān led Tulsidas to Rām bhakti. The well-known story of '*Kodi*

Hanumān,' has a connection to the famous temple Sankat Mochan at Banaras.

> *The twisted tree in the Akhara of Tulsi Ghat houses a small Hanumān believed to be venerated by* Tulsidas. *A few devotees told me that Tulsi daily poured leftover water when he returned after his morning duties from the other side of Gangā (śauca). The remains of the boat that he used to keep the Ganga's purity are kept in the Tulsi ghāt Hanumān Mandir. The tree was a ghost (pret) habitat, grateful for the oblation; the ghost offered Tulsi a boon. When Tulsi requested the darśan of Rām, he pointed out his inability saying, "if I had the darśan of Rām, why would I have remained a ghost?" However, the ghost directed him to seek Hanumān for the favor, who comes to listen to Rām Kathā daily in the evening and sits at last and goes away last in the form of an old leper. Tulsi followed him, but the leper* denied revealing his identity. Tulsidas*'s determination produced the fruit, and Hanumān disclosed his glorious form. Raising one hand over his shoulder, pointing to the southwest, he said, "go to Chitrakut," and placing the other hand over his heart said, "I promise you will see Rām." The present image of Hanumān in the Saṇkaṭ Mochan Mandir is to be the mirror (pratibimba) of this vision. However, today the image is filled with vermillion, garlands and no one can notice that form. Furthermore, no photography is allowed.* [1022]

The temple that has Hanumān as the main deity holds all the celebrations of Rām. The belief is, "Where Rām is, there is Hanumān."[1023] For Tulsidas, devotion to Rām is an essential quality of Hanumān, and on this count, Hanumān becomes a key propagator of Rām *bhakti* through the *Mānas*. Analyzing Hanumān devotion, Leonard Wolcott assumes that the epic's overriding strategy was to foreground devotion to Rām and name.[1024]

3.8.3. Hanumān in the *Mānas*

Hanumān is explicitly visible in the four sub books of *Mānas*, namely, *Kiṣkindha, Sundara, Lankā and Uttarakāṇḍa*. Tulsidas has received much from Vālmīki on Hanumān. Nevertheless, there is a difference in the presentation of the simian companion of Rām in the *Mānas*. In the

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[1022] See also Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 49-50; idem, *The Hanuman's Tale*, 260-61.
[1023] Eck, *India A Sacred Geography*, 416.
[1024] Leonard Wolcott, "Hanumān: The Power-Dispensing Monkey in North Indian Folk Religion," 654-55.

Vālmīki, Hanumān's learning, refinement, and rhetorical skills earn him Rām's praise,[1025] nevertheless, he is violent and performs childish, impulsive, and unstable monkey behaviors.[1026] Tulsidas omits Hanumān's childhood and the curse of the sages (*ṛṣis*), a long narrative of Hanumān's leap, the aerial survey of Hanumān in search of Sītā, but focuses on strength and devotion. There are similar actions in both the tradition of Vālmīki and Tulsi, namely, meeting Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa and carrying them on his shoulders to Sugrīva, his search for Sītā in the Lankā, entering Svaymprabha's cave, fighting with demons, burning Lankā and returning to Rām. In all these events, Hanumān emerges as a powerful force against demons but remains subordinated to Rām. Hanumān himself utters the lowly status of monkeys in his dialogue with demon Vibhiṣaṇa, "one who utters our name in the morning will go without food that day."[1027] In the *Ayodhyā Kāṇḍ*, Kausalya remarks on Sītā's plan to accompany Rām in the forest, "But son, how could this Sītā live in the forest, who takes fright at a monkey's mere picture?."[1028] Despite negative image on monkeys, Tulsidas pays homage to Hanumān at the beginning of his writing,

> I salute the two who happily roam.
> The sacred forest of Sītā and *Rām*'s myriad virtues,
> The embodiment of purity and wisdom
> Lord of poets [Vālmīkī) and Lord of monkeys (Hanumān).[1029]

In the *Bālakāṇḍa* Tulsi hails Hanumān in these following words,
> I revere the son of the wind,
> forest fire to the wicked and cloud of wisdom,
> in whose heart's mansion Lord Rām resides,
> bearing bow and arrows.[1030]

[1025] VR. 4.3

[1026] *bālyāt, cāpalyāt, cancaltā*. Hanumān's monkyness is visible on the occasion of he falsely thinks that he has found Sitā among the sleeping women in Rāvaṇas harem and he scoots up a column and kisses his tail. Cf. VR 5.8.50.

[1027] RCM, 5.7.8.

[1028] RCM, 3.59.2.

[1029] VR, 1. Śloka 4.

[1030] RCM, 1.1.17.

Tulsidas acknowledges Hanumān as wise, son of the wind, pure, and one who has Rām in his heart. Among the iconography on Hanumān, the most prominent has been 'Hanumān opening the chest and showing Rām and Sītā in his heart,' – a symbol of ultimate devotion.

3.8.3.1 Hanumān in the Kiṣkindha Kānd

The first encounter between Rām and Hanumān takes place in the region of Mount Rishyamukh in *Kiṣkiṇḍhākānda*. With the instruction of Sugrīva, the king of monkeys, Hanumān disguises himself as a Brahmin student and enquires about the wandering Raghu heroes. Hanumān recognizes their divinity and falls prostrate, clutches his feet, and is filled with inexpressible joy.[1031] Hanumān's unexplained immediate recognition of Rām as divine implies foreknowledge of divinity.[1032] In this first encounter, Hanumān acknowledges Rām's power to delude (*māyā*) as supreme lord and friend of the lowly. A typical *bhakta* always feels lowly in comparison to the splendid God. Hanumān, with great humility, calls himself "stupid, gripped by delusion, perverse in heart, and ignorant."[1033] Loving and gracious Rām, knowing Hanumān's dependence on loving-kindness of his master, assures, "Monkey, do not think yourself worthless, for you are twice as dear to me as Lakṣmaṇa."[1034] However, the statement here has significance. Rām has brotherly relation with Lakṣmaṇa and Bharat and with Hanumān, a relationship of servitude (*dāsya*). Nevertheless, this servant is beloved. Hence, Rām uses '*dūnā*' (twice as dear). Commentator's view

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[1031] RCM, 4.1.3.
[1032] See *Mānas*piyūṣ 5.2.25-28. This recognition of divinity alludes to the story of Śiva knowing that the Lord Viṣṇu had taken birth as Rām longs to have darśan of Rām. For this darśan, he disguises himself as Madari, a street entertainer as monkey man in Ayodhyā, and the monkey is Hanumān who charms infant *Rām* with his bites and dance, making Rām delighted. For the detailed version of the story, see Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*,136-37 and 192-94.
[1033] RCM, 4.2.
[1034] RCM, 4.2.4: *taim mama priya lachiman te dūnā*. This extraordinarily emotional statement could be interpreted differently. Does this statement communicate that Hanumān has more qualities than Lakṣmaṇa? The above statement is a usual expression among those who are beloved. Rām also says to Sugriva, "you are dear to me as Bharata, Brother. In the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, (RCM, 4.20.4) Rām acknowledging the excellent service of Vibhiṣaṇa, Sugriva, Angada, Hanumān and others tells Vasistha, "they are dearer to me than even Bharat," *tumh priya mohi bharat jimi*

Lakṣmaṇ's service as a norm for his elder brother based on the principle of 'the elder brother is like Fatheṙ.'[1035] Hanumān in no way has a relationship except that of being a servant to Rām despite his non-human existence. Therefore, the expression is not just mundane communication but connects an emotional bond between the two (not only *mādhurya* but *aiśwarya bhāv*).[1036] Rām affirms confidence in Hanumān as he relies on no other and never wavers from the conviction of serving him alone.[1037] Later Hanumān carries the brothers (Rām and Lakṣmaṇa) on his back to Sugriva, for the future mission of searching Sītā. Based on a pledge of "mutual love," "keeping the treasury of mercy [Rām] in his heart,"[1038] Hanumān grows enormous and leaps across the sea with "intense joy" to carry out the mission. [1039]

3.8.3.2. Hanumān in Sunderkānd.

Hanumān's devotion to Rām is strikingly captured in *Sunderkānd*.[1040] This section today has become popular among Rām and Hanumān devotees for ritualized recitation. At the beginning of *Sunderkānd,* Tulsi prays to the omniscient inner self of all beings (Rām) to grant "boundless devotion, and purge mind [*manas*] of lust and other feelings."[1041] Through this, Tulsi communicates that this sub-book's primary purpose is to grow in the 'devotion' of Hanumān. Therefore, the *Mānas* has enabled the devotees to approach Hanumān first for any grace, even to be devoted to Rām, as he is a powerful intercessor. The *Hanumān Chalisa*, the devotional text, has

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[1035] *Jyeṣṭo bhṛāta pituh samah*
[1036] *Mānas*piyūṣ 5.2.34-36.
[1037] RCM, 4.3.
[1038] RCM, 4.22.6-7.
[1039] RCM, 5.2.
[1040] The meaning of the title "Sundar" is regarded as "beautiful," owing to the sub-books focus on the most popular characters.
[1041]RCM, 5 śloka 2

these lines "you are the guardian of Rām's door. There is no access without your leave." Lawrence A Babb writes,

> informants seem to conceive Hanumān as an intermediary between Rāma and humankind. One might suppose that people would address themselves to the more powerful deity. However, informants state that Rāma is far too great a deity for ordinary people to approach directly, so instead, they go to his principal servant.[1042]

Besides, the *Sunderkānd* having the traditional Sanskrit invocations (*maṇgalācaraṇa*), praises Rām as eternal, autonomous, sinless and worshipped by Brahma, Śiva, and Śeṣa (Viṣṇu). Remarkably the third verse has the praises of Hanumān as the abode of matchless strength, wise, the treasury of all virtues, master of monkeys, and chosen emissary of the Raghu lord.[1043] The mission of searching Sītā is demanding, but Hanumān illustrates his complete trust and devotion

> Nothing is impossible, lord,
> for one whom you favor,
> for through your glory,
> a mere wisp of cotton can incinerate the fire of the world's end.[1044]

The analogy used here is Rām is soft like cotton but has the power to reduce to cinders everything, that is, through a divine miracle, "consume" the most awful of conflagrations.[1045] These episodes have given rise to countless drawings and paintings. The calendar art in the Indian Bazaars depicts these images and evokes a feeling of devotion.[1046] Hanumān, while accomplishing the given task, had to overcome hurdles. Sītā raises doubt on these small monkeys defeating the

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[1042] Lawrence A Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy: Popular Hinduism in Central India* (London: Columbia University Press, 1975), 119.

[1043] *Raghpativaradutam, some variants have raghupati priya bhaktaṃ* (beloved devotee of the Raghu Lord)

[1044] RCM, 5.33.

[1045] Bhavabhuti, in *Uttararāmacarita*, describes Rām as *'Vajrdāpi kaṭorāṇi mṛdūni kusumādapi | Lokottarāṇām cetāṃsi ko hi vijñātumarhati* meaning who can understand the minds of extraordinary, which are firmer than diamonds and as tender as flowers?

[1046] Kajri Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar the Economies of Indian Calendar Art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

mighty demon warriors.[1047] Once again, Hanumān responds firstly by giving a pejorative evaluation of his species. "Mother, we monkeys are but branch- beasts with no great strength or wisdom, yet by our Lord's might, even the tiniest garden snake can gobble up Garuda, emperor of eagles."[1048] Hanumān communicates to Sītā that the impossible is made possible through devotion to Rām.

During the search for Sītā, Hanumān becomes an advocate of *Bhakti* path to Vibhīṣaṇa, who doubts his capacity as a demon to perform spiritual endeavors. He assures Vibhīṣaṇa, the graciousness of Rām, as one who continually lavishes love on his servants. Hanumān explains with the illustration of his life of graciousness despite being a restless monkey, lowly, having no lineage, and who is rebuked for the sight of him at dawn. [1049] Paradoxically, today invoking this monkey with a devotional humility is recognized as highly auspicious. [1050]

Besides, Hanumān becomes a sage and counsels Rāvaṇa to surrender himself and accept the servitude of Rām saying, "Without Rām's name, speech lacks splendor. …as a naked woman lacks appeal, the enemy of gods, though comely and all done up in ornaments."[1051] In convincing Rāvaṇa, he goes to the extent of saying, "even a thousand Śivas, Vishnus, and Brahmas cannot save one who is hostile to Lord Rām."[1052]

[1047]RCM, 5.15.4.
[1048] RCM, 5.16.
[1049] RCM, 5.6.4
[1050] *Mānas*piyūṣ, 6.1-80-81.
[1051] RCM, 5.22.2. In the Prologue, Tulsidās writes, "Even a brilliant work by a master poet, if it lacks *Rām*'s name, has no loveliness, though fair-faced and richly bejeweled, a lovely woman without clothes is unseemly," RCM, 1.9.2.
[1052]RCM, 5.22.4.

3.8.3.3. Hanumān in Lankākāṇḍ.

Hanumān's devotion is perceptible in his service to the Raghu brothers. The famous episode of getting the herb (*sanjīvini*) from the Himalayas communicates his eagerness to serve the wounded Lakṣmaṇa. He could not recognize the herb in the Himalayas and rips the entire mountain from the earth and flies back. While he was racing back over Avadh city Bharat, guessing it might be the night-stalking demon, he shoots an arrow. Hanumān falls to the earth senseless, repeating, "Rām, Rām, lord of Raghus."[1053] Acknowledging him as a true devotee of Rām, Bharat calls on Rām to raise Hanumān from unconsciousness. In this episode, Hanumān is tempted in his pride. While Bharat acknowledges his mistake of shooting Hanumān, he tells him that he would speed the mountain through an arrow. Responding to this offer, Hanumān, with pride (*abhimān*), says, "How will the arrow fly with my weight?"[1054] *Nārada Bhakti Sutra* says, "God hates egotism and loves meekness."[1055] In a way, Hanumān, an unwavering devotee, fell victim to vanity.[1056] However, the greatness lies in his awareness of vainglory, recalling Rām's glory, and proceeding towards his mission as he realized "the greater the humility of man, the greater the grace of God; the less the humility, the less the grace."[1057] In his search for Sītā, Hanumān accomplished many things- leaping the ocean, burning the golden city, slaying a horde of night-stalkers, and wrecking a grove. He acknowledges in great humility "that despite being a branch dwelling beasts and having no great aim to accomplish, it was possible through the grace of Rām.[1058]

[1053] RCM, 5.58.1.
[1054] RCM, 6.60.3-4.
[1055] NBS, 27
[1056] K.P. Bahadur, *Rāmcaritmānas: A Study in Perspective* (Delhi: Ess Ess Publications, 1976), 58.
[1057] Maria Shady, *Sermons,* trans. Johannes Tauler (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 119.
[1058] RCM, 5.33

3.8.3.4 Hanumān in Uttarakāṇḍa

  Bhakti tradition focuses on the interior knowledge of one's *iṣṭadevata*. In the Uttarakāṇḍa when the three brothers Bharata, Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrugna wanted to ask a question to Rām and were hesitant, they look at Hanumān. Rām, realizing the happenings, says to Hanumān, "you know my disposition, has there ever been any secrecy between Bharata and myself?"[1059] Through these statements, Rām acknowledges that Hanumān had special knowledge of him as well as Bharata. This mystical union of God and devotee is recognized in Bharat's saying when Hanumān is on his way to communicate the return of Sītā and Rām to Ayodhyā, "Seeing you, monkey, all my sorrows are over and I feel, even now, reunited with beloved Rām!"[1060] A concrete devotionalism is expressed as the devotee has become one whom he worships. God's primary lovers are filled with God and are God's own, and God is present within them and recognized by other devotees. The greatness of Hanumān's devotion comes from Śiva as he tells Pārvati with the ultimate affirmation:

> None is as fortunate as Hanuman, Śiva said,
> and no one loves *Rām*'s feet so passionately,
> Girija, as he, whose love and service
> the lord repeatedly praised with his lips.[1061]

 Since Hanumān in the *Mānas* is primarily a servant (*dāsa)* of his master Rām, there is nothing erroneous in the researchers' tendency to stress one characteristic of Hanumān above all others; his intense devotion to Rām.[1062] The love of God (Rām) is made available through Hanumān. Lutgendorf rightly points out that "Hanumān combines simian agility and restless energy with

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[1059] RCM, 7.36.4.
[1060] RCM, 7. 1b.6
[1061] RCM, 7. 49. 5.
[1062] Babb, *The Divine Hierarchy*, 116.

humanlike sagacity, eloquence, and devotion to emerge as one of the epic's most complex and fascinating characters."[1063] Finally, Hanumān fulfills Tulsi sayings,

> Indeed, lord, my mind holds this conviction:
> that Rām's servant surpasses Rām himself.
> If Rām is the ocean, his staunch devotees are clouds.
> if Hari is a sandalwood tree, saintly ones are a breeze.[1064]

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on devotion from the textual perspective as expected in the Comparative Theological method of 'engaging the text deeply.' As a Christian living at the challenging times of dominant Hindu nationalism, I need to recognize and appreciate the broadness of Hindu devotion (*bhakti*) within the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition for an enhanced encounter and learn to grow in my own devotion to Jesus. The devotional text, *Mānas*, not only favors textual academic engagements, it also removes binary schemes that place text against rituals and classical against popular, since the text has ritual and aesthetical dimensions attached to it. Hence, Chapter Four will deal with the engagement of the text in variant manners, popularly in recitations (*pāṭh*), tellings (*kathā*) and enactments (*līlā)*, and in my journey with the text academically, religiously, and ritually.

[1063] Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*, 49.
[1064] RCM, 7.119b.9

Chapter Four

Transformative Engagement with the *Mānas* Text

Introduction

The chapter has mainly two purposes; identifying the aesthetical elements of the *Mānas* text that are essential for the advancement of Comparative Theology and transformative engagement of the text by the 'insider' and 'outsiders' of the faith tradition for theological engagement on the crucial questions on religious reading and ritual participation. One of the criticisms of Comparative Theology is its emphasis on 'written text.' The charge is that the dominance of the textual bias has, by default, pushed aside the ritual, the performed, and the experiential aspects of religious traditions. However, there are recommendations to go beyond the text to rituals and sacred objects in Comparative Theology. These material resources of religion are seen at times as text-plus.[1065] Hedges opines that there is certainly a need to include more than textual analysis in comparative theology, or "even the supposition that this represents the best way to undertake the discipline."[1066]

Michael Barnes critiquing the textual focus, states that there is much more to religious tradition than written 'text' because 'life of text' is 'life of a community.'[1067] His sense of text refers not only to canonical scriptures and authoritative commentary but to the forms of practice that inhabit the narratives of faith, that has become part of the community which gives flesh and blood to the Reality. John Maraldo argues that engaging the nonlinguistic dimensions of religions and

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[1065] Clooney, *Comparative Theology*: *Deep Learning*, 67.
[1066] Paul Hedges, *Comparative Theology: A Critical and Methodological perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 39.
[1067] Barnes, *Interreligious Learning*, xi.

practices overcomes all discursive thinking and "not only increases the amount of content understood; it can change the very way one understands."[1068] Catherine Cornille points out,

> Understanding sacred texts often require participation in and resonance with their expression in ritual life and lived experience of a tradition. It is in their use in ritual contexts and in daily practice, the meaning of certain texts becomes fully manifested. Whereas solitary reading of texts may lead to projection of one's own religious imagination and interpretation onto the other, participation and actual exchange with representatives of a particular tradition tames the imagination and keeps it focused on the self-understanding of the other.[1069]

In agreement with the above-mentioned views, the enhanced method of Comparative Theology calls for the enlargement of the tent's space and to "spread out tent cloths unsparingly" to a larger tent and not to be outside tents altogether.[1070] Therefore, there is a value in considering the *Mānas* for the Comparative Theological task because moving 'beyond the text' is possible in the powerful story of Rām in the *Mānas* through its widespread recital, ritual, and performative characteristics. This devotional text is a life of a community, and the text is visible in the walls, print, social media and involves the act of reading through memory, community participation, and performance (*Rāmkathā, Rāmlīlā*) as the core of its tradition. Along with the *Mānas* adherents, my personal experiences of 'religious reading through recitation' and 'participation in the ritual aesthetics of the text' in the city of Varanasi have offered possibilities for the integration of textual, ritual, and experiential factors into the Comparative Theological method and have raised relevant theological questions.

[1068] John Maraldo, "A Call for an Alternative Form of Understanding," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, ed. C. Cornille and C. Conway (Eugene: Wipf & Stock,2010), 113-14.
[1069] Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, 94.
[1070] Is 54:2. This biblical text is also quoted in *Ad Gentes* 9.

4.1. *Mānas* on the Walls and Print Media

David L. Haberman, in his book *Journey Through the Twelve Forests an Encounter with Krishna*, critiques the British orientalist's insistence on the understanding of Hinduism based on the right set of authoritative texts. He advocates 'multiple texts' and points out eight kinds of texts in Braj,[1071] and perceives reading the text through a metaphor of pilgrimage.[1072] Similarly, the *Mānas*, with its multiple texts and widely known sacred text, captures the attention from various quarters of the society. Although, the modern digital age propagates sacred teachings through social media and YouTube channels, in India, low accessibility to the internet, digital illiteracy, and religious devotion makes people still prefer traditional means to access religious materials.

The display of worship texts on the walls of prominent temples is a common sight in India. Traditionally, the sacred texts in Hinduism were accessible only to males of the high caste (twice-born-*dvijas*). Nevertheless, today the sacred texts are available through various means. These modern approaches to the Sacred texts, states Lutgendorf, "serve a democratizing and educational purpose."[1073] *Tulsidas Mānas Mandir*, built-in 1964 by the Thakur Das Sureka family in Varanasi, is believed to be built at the same place where Tulsidas wrote his *Mānas*. There are differences of opinion among the locals as some point out Tulsi *ghā*t to be the place. This *Mandir* has the inscription of thirteen thousand lines of the *Mānas* on two floors of the temple. Besides, it also has the entire narration of Rām's life in a tableau. The beauty of white marble construction of this *Mandir*, attracts more pilgrims, especially in the month of *Śrāvaṇ*, than the place where the original *Mānas* is kept in *Tulsi ghāt*. It is a familiar scene in the temple to see devotees glancing through the text written on the wall. These writings, more than reading, function as a "sort of liturgical

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[1071] The number eight is sacred in Braj.
[1072] David L. Haberman*, Journey Through the Twelve Forests an Encounter with Krishna*, vii.
[1073] Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*, 91.

wallpaper, wrapping visitors in its aura of sacral authority and linear prolixity."[1074] The availability of the texts to ordinary folks has led to the dissemination, and therefore standardization of the sacred text. The process happens through printing and other forms, leading "to the veneration of the sacred word by Hindus in its visual and aural form." The propagation of the sacred text by the Hindus may have been influenced by the example of scripture-oriented communities such as Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians.

Besides, the *Mānas* text is available through print media and calendar art. The purview of cheap, mass-produced icons in the "calendar" or "*bazaar*" art is an inescapable scene in Indian shops, restaurants, buses, and in the streets. In these calendars everyone gets to see the images of Kṛṣṇa and Rādha, Ganesh, Rām with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, Hanumān and other deities. Some calendars depict the sacred quotes from the scriptures with great beauty. The calendar art device must have been borrowed from European missionaries, who used them for evangelization purposes. However, the Indian artists have heightened the intensity of religious events and icons, and today they serve to advance the propagation of the Hindu faith.[1075] This calendar art evokes devotion to the sacred text.

Besides, the print media plays a major role in disseminating the text. *Gītā Press, Gorakhpur* established in 1923, is the world's largest Hindu religious text publisher and makes available the sacred texts cheaper. They have stalls installed in most railway and bus stations. Madan Mohan Mālaviya, an education reformer at Banaras, had called for *Mānas pracār* saying, "but still more blessed are those who print beautiful and inexpensive editions of the *Mānas* and place them in the hands of the very poorest people, thus doing them invaluable service. At present, *Mānas Kathā* is

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[1074] *Lutgendorf, Hanumans Tale,* 91.
[1075] Christopher Aslet, "Some Reflections on Hindu Bhakti Iconography," in *Love Divine Studies in Bhakti and Devotional Mysticism*, ed. Karel Werner (Curzon Press, 1993), 207.

going on in many towns and villages. However, wherever it is not, it should begin, and its holy teachings should be ever more widely promulgated."[1076] The printing tradition was introduced in India by the Jesuit missionaries for the spread of the Christian faith. Hinduism, in general, has learned many 'evangelization techniques' from the missionaries. Even today, a few devotees as part of devotional practice, distribute *Hanumān Chalisa*, *Mānas* and other religious texts for free in the *kathā* or *līlā* functions as a service to the *Mānas* text.[1077]

4.2. Recitation of the *Mānas* (*Pūjā Pāṭh*)

Hindu rituals of offering *pujās* reinforce religious belief in the efficacy of the sacred word. In Hinduism, the Vedic *mantras* must be recited with proper pronunciation to be efficacious. For this purpose, Brahmin boys are trained in traditional schools (*Gurukuls/Pāṭśālas*). If the *mantras* are not uttered in a prescribed manner, it is believed that the *mantras* could have an adverse effect. Lutgendorf critiques the notion that the sacred word possesses inherent power through ritual performances as an overgeneralized statement. From his perspective, the category of the "sacred word" in Hinduism is permeable and subject to continual negotiations as "texts move in and out of a hierarchy of sacral efficacy in response to the changing perceptions, needs, and status of their audiences."[1078] Traditionally, access to the utterance of "sacred words" was restricted to a small segment of the Hindus, namely the higher caste males and Sanskrit readers. From the *Purāṇic* times, the potency of the recited sacred word was encouraged, and the *Bhakti* traditions emphasized regional languages and have democratized the sacred words as recitations of the text; singing is common among the devotional movements. These movements moving beyond *Devbhāṣa* (God's language) offered sacred value to people's languages (*lok bhāṣa)*. With the sacred literature

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[1076] Quoted in Poddar, ed., *Kalyāṇ: Mānasānk*, 52.

[1077] I received a copy of *Hanuman Chalisa* and *Mānas* at the Saṅkaṭ Mochan Mandir from a devotee from Delhi.

[1078] Lutgendorf, "The Power of Sacred Story: Rāmāyaṇa Recitation in Contemporary North India," 115.

available in regional languages, the accessibility became prominent as language functions as "dialect with an army."[1079] Tulsidas following the tradition of the devotional movements composed the *Mānas* in Awadhi and Braj, the regional languages of his place. His composition popularized the text. Grierson points out that more than the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, for "the great majority of the people of Hindustan, learned and unlearned, the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Tulsidas is the only standard of moral conduct."[1080]

The *Mānas* as a text with its written and performative dimensions is the most visible and audible text. Many individuals, innumerable households, recite the *Mānas* as a "sacred word" daily at homes or temples as the text guides and inspires their religious activities. At prominent temples, on special occasions, the text is broadcast over loudspeakers. The text is also sung with musical instruments used for auspicious occurrences in the families, namely, on the birth of a child, marriage, anniversaries, and attaining certain material and spiritual benefits. Near the *Dashashvamedh Ghat*, the *Mānas* is chanted each morning from 8:00 to 8:30 by small boys. Some others read the *Mānas* text with a commentary. This process would take more than five years to complete the entire text.[1081] These days, recitation from traditional music has given way to Bollywood music which the traditional *Mānas* readers do not appreciate. The traditionalists believe and are in fear that the modernization of the ritual recitation may remove the sacredness attached to the text.

The recitation of a religious text in Hinduism is technically termed as *pāṭh*. It is a Sanskrit word meaning "recitation, recital, reading, perusal, study," especially of sacred texts. The *pāṭh* is

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[1079] A.K. Ramanujan, *Hymns for the Drowning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 129.
[1080] As cited in *The Life of a Text*, 63.
[1081] I have been part of a *Mānas* online reading group for the past year. We meet on every Tuesday for an hour and have not yet completed the first book of the *Mānas*.

a meritorious activity and a part of daily Hindu worship (*pujā*). Tulsidas's text, *Mānas,* as a narrative is recited sequentially from beginning to end, known as *pārāyaṇ*. The *Mānas pārāyaṇ* has different types mainly *Navāh Pārāyaṇ* (nine days of reading), *Mās pārāyaṇ* (thirty days of reading) and *Akhaṇḍ Pārāyaṇ* (unbroken reading). Through these forms of recitations, the *Mānas* has become accessible to many Hindus.[1082] One who recites and narrates the *Mānas* is known and respected as *Vyās*. The meaning of *Vyās* is assembler. By tradition, the performers were Brahmin males. The growing gender and caste consciousness has allowed women and others to be an authority in recitation. In this sense, *Mānas* recitation has broken the boundary of caste and gender.[1083] The various types of recitation support the devotees to grow in devotion to Rām and Hanumān. The recitation and participation through listening has made the *Mānas* an instrument of democratizing the sacred text, formerly the domain of the special elite. The reading of the *Mānas* also becomes a criterion of literacy in the rural villages. In a wedding proposal, for example, if the girl knows to read the *Mānas*, it is recognized as a sign of literacy.

4.2.1. *Navāh Pārāyaṇ*

The *Navāh Pārāyaṇ* is a formalized type of recitation held for nine days (novena) on special occasions. In Varanasi, the recitation is held during the *Vasanth Panchami* and organized by the *Tulsidas Mānas Trust* on the premises of *Saṇkaṭ Mochan Mandir*.[1084] The ritual singing is carried out for nine days by dividing the entire epic of 1074 stanzas into 119 or 120 stanzas. The length of daily recitation varies according to the time required to recite. The text given to all the participants has a day-to-day division of the *Mānas* for recitation, so that all devotees are able to

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[1082] Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text,* 56
[1083] *Ibid.,* 171.
[1084] The festival is celebrated every year on the fifth day of the *Śukla Paskṣa* of the Hindu Lunisolar month of *Magh*ā, which typically falls in late January or February. I had an opportunity to be in this feast day celebration at *Sankat Mochan Mandir*, Varanasi.

join the singing. The recitation is normally carried out in the morning from 9 am to 12 and in the afternoon from 3 pm to 6 pm. After the morning recitation, students and other groups are invited to participate in various competitions based on the *Mānas*. These activities function as imparting knowledge and as offering religious education on Rām and the *Mānas* tradition. Hundreds of students and adults participate enthusiastically in these activities.

During these recitations, each day has some significant special events to celebrate. For example, day one is mainly associated with the story of Śhiva and Pārvathi's marriage, which forms part of Tulsidas's introduction to the Rām story. Day Two focuses on the birth of Rām and the first meeting of Rām and Sītā in King Janak's flower garden (*Phulwāri*). Day Three is dominated by the marriage of Rām and Sitā, and so forth. These special moments are celebrated with elaborate rituals of *arti* (waving of lights) and distribution of gifts and singing in the high pitch tone. These moments create exuberant feelings among the devotees.[1085] Within the Catholic traditions, accomplished teachers and spiritual guides such as Augustine of Hippo, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross were lyrical in their teaching, and they break into song about the one whom they love. Augustine lyrically writes, "O Lord, that I love you. You pierced my heart with your word, and I loved you. But also, heaven and earth and all within them, behold, they bid me on every side to love you nor do they cease telling this to all."[1086]

The most exciting moments of the experience during the *Navāh* are found in singing the refrain *(sampuṭ)*. The *sampuṭ* serves as an enclosure or frame for each unit of recitation. For example, *Mangal Bhavan Amangal Hāri Drawahu Soo Daśarath Ajir Vihāri* is often sung with

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[1085] Rukmini Bai, a home maker from Varanasi attending daily the *Navāh* recitation would dance during these special occasions of the text. The religious dancing gave her immense joy and helped her to be part of the rituals and gain devotion to *Siya-rām*.
[1086] Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, in Mary T. Clark, trans. *Augustine of Hippo: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 125-126.

different tunes.[1087] Bauman views that the campus (*sampuṭ*) is a formal key by which a reciter assumes "responsibility" for an act of the *Mānas* recitation-as performance.[1088] These familiar tunes and words inspires one to be part of the ritual tradition of singing and the most inspiring dimension of the recitation is continual singing.[1089] In these recitations, many participants join the whole celebration, and others based on their convenience, and the reciters receive gifts and generous donations from the devotees. Since the event is normally held at *Saṅkaṭ Mochan Mandir*, many pilgrims have the rare occasion to join this religious event.[1090] Observing the devotees and participating in all these rituals related to *navāh* celebrations contribute to a profound immersion into the text and provide an experience of the divine.[1091]

4.2.2. The *Mās Pārāyaṇ*

The discipline of *Mās Pārāyaṇ*, thirty-day recitation, is more typically an individual or family activity conducted at home or in favorite temples. Mostly the recitation happens in the temples dedicated to Hanumān since Tulsidas has exposed Hanumān as *'parama Rām bhakta* (ultimate devotee of Rām). Those who undertake the month-long recitation as individuals believe reciting in any Hanumān Mandir's pleases Rām. The potency of the sacred word is visible in these

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[1087] He who is the abode of all happiness and prosperity and removes or defeats all misery and unhappiness, He who used to dwell playfully like a child in Daśaraths front yard, please let your heart melt for me.

[1088] Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance*, 21.

[1089] Dr. Rituraj, the main singer of the *Navāh* program of 2019, told me that dedication and stamina are possible only by the grace of Hanumān. He has sung the Mānas not only in India but in Suriname and British Guyana. In my conversations on the *Navāh Pārāyaṇ*, many cited a popular legend for the tradition. One story includes the miraculous incident of Tulsidas at birth, possessing a *complete* set of teeth and uttering the name of Rām. Second, the miracle occurred when Tulsidas was on his trip to Delhi. A daughter of a nobleman was betrothed through deception to a person of her own sex. This was a disgrace for the family, and the family approached Tulsidas to save them from disgrace. Tulsidas, out of compassion, performed a nine-day recitation, and the woman became a man when the recital was over. Tulsidas was overjoyed and cried out, 'Victory - Victory to Sītā-Rām.' These stories, along with asserting the origin of nine-day recitation, also suggest the sacred word's power. This sort of gender switching motif is seen in the story of Aiyappas birth.

[1090] A devotee visiting from Gujarat, Abhishek Doshi, said that it was the grace of Hanumān that he had such a privilege to listen to the *Mānas* in the *Navāh* celebrations.

[1091] The profound encounter with the divine in the participation of Navāh is recounted later in the thesis.

recitations. Typically, the recitation is held in the mornings and not by the professionals but ordinary individuals who believe that the recitation positively affects their spiritual and material life. Most participants in these recitations are settled middle-class Hindus who have devotion to Rām/ Hanumān and the available time to participate. A significant audience of literate devotees, mostly the elderly, along with the ready availability of copies of the text, make this recitation flourish.

4.2.3. *Akhaṇḍ Pāṭh*

The third form of recitation is the *Akhand Pāṭh* (the unbroken reading). In this form, the entire *Mānas* is recited within a twenty-four-hour period. Some aim to complete the *Akhand Pāṭh* within eighteen hours. The recitation's specialty is the commitment of *Vyās* to recite the text without a break. These recitations are sponsored and conducted as protection to the families and propitiation to the deities and the dead.[1092] These traditions are still alive. However, some prefer a modern style of video film format. For instance, Raghavendra, a *Vyās*, narrated to me his experience. He was invited to recite *Akhand Pāṭh* as part of the marriage ceremony in the family. But he was not happy about the family's attitude towards singing the *Mānas*. The host did not participate in the singing and had no interest in the singing of traditional songs and the host demanded to have the modern style of singing and enacting, thereby making it fancier and more engaging for a younger generation. Raghavendra argued that if there is too much incorporation of modern elements, the original purpose of recitation will be lost, and no one will be given the '*phala śruti'* that is expected by these recitations.

[1092] Lutgendorf*, The Life of a Text*, 78.

Besides these recitations, the *Gyan Vyāpi* (great sacrifice) of the *Mānas* is held every year after the conclusion of the *Rām*lila cycle in Banaras, and during the *Tulsidas Jayanti* celebrations near the Viśvanāth Temple. In all these recitations of the *Mānas*, the importance of the 'sacred word' is affirmed and a challenge is offered to the Catholic tradition. Fr. Anil Dev, a priest of the *Indian Missionary Society* and a spiritual *Guru* of the *Khristbhakta* movement, vividly points out that the popularity of the gospel message among the people of Varanasi to be the devotees of Christ is based on the emphasis laid on the 'word of God' by the movement. He affirmed that the "Word" attracts them and makes them experience a sense of belonging to Christ. "How capable are our Catholic priests in communicating the Word of God?" was his challenging question.

4.2.4. Rites of *Mānas* Recitation

According to Emile Durkheim, religious experiences are expressed in some type of external performance, and rituals that often symbolize these experiences.[1093] Personal purity, the notion of sacred space and time, is essential in any Hindu ritual as they confer both worldly and spiritual dividends. The sacred space within Hinduism is always approached with purity rules and sacred times. Tulsidas's *Mānas* as a "fifth Veda" has ceremonial recitations that are designed to secure specific ends (*anuṣṭān*). Lutgendorf understands the *Mānas* recitation rituals on two levels, firstly to attain both spiritual (*pāramārthi*k) and worldly (*lauki*k) benefits; and secondly, he notes the "vedacization," of the *Mānas* in its recitation and securing the position of Veda through social and economic power.[1094]

The rituals connected to the *Mānas* recitation are similar to the recitation of the Vedic *mantras*. Bathing is essential for those who recite *Rāmāyaṇ Pāṭh*. Most of the devotees in Banaras

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[1093] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976), 229ff.
[1094] Lutgendorf, *The Power of Sacred Story*, 118.

bathe in the Gaṅgā and have their recitation in the temple premises dedicated to Rām or Hanumān. After the purificatory rites in the river and dressing themselves with fresh clothes, religious marks on the forehead are applied and they enter the sacred space. After entering the sacred space, the reciter sits on a grass mat (*āsan* of *kuś*) and places the *Mānas* for recitation. The *Mānas*, as a sacred book is always reverentially kept, rolled up in a cloth bag imprinted with the name of Rām, and it is placed on a wooden stand. Usually, the recitation begins with a salutation to Ganesh, the remover of obstacles, and the *Hanumān Chalisa*. The style of singing the text differs. Some sing in *Līlā Vāṇi*, the tune of *Rāmlīlā* and others sing in *Tulsidas Vāṇi*, an easier one. In the *Mānas* recitational symbols and rituals, the intrinsic values of beauty and devotion in popular religions are communicated.

4.3. *Mānas Kathā* Tradition

Kathā is often translated as a 'story.' From the Sanskrit root, *kath* means "to tell." The Monier-William's dictionary gives the meaning as "conversation, talking together."[1095] The *kathā* with religious connotations is a milieu-oriented art form, arising in and inseparable from a particular community's spiritual outlook and practice.[1096] The *kath*ā tradition is different from personal recitation as the presence of a narrator and listeners are essential in the *kathā*. Today, the print, social media provide much information on sacred texts, however, much learning of the sacred text takes place for most of the devotees through narration (*kathā*) and interaction with fellow listeners/devotees (*satsaṅg*). The devotional environment during the *kathā* favors learnings. *Kathā* style is Pan-Indian, and the tradition is popular, especially during the *Cāturmās* of Monsoon, as the season is not favorable for travel for the holy men and women *(sants)*. [1097] During this season,

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[1095] Monier Williams, A *Sanskrit English Dictionary*, 247.
[1096] Lutgendorf*, The Life of a Text,* 244.
[1097] In Karnataka, there is a tradition of Harikathā.

most wandering *Sādhus* and religious leaders engage in *kathā* and *satsaṇg.* [1098] In the Hindi speaking region, the *kathās* is performed chiefly on *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Mānas*. Identifying the popularity of the *Mānas* Kathā tradition, Hein notes that although the Sanskrit tradition has given a model for the exposition of religious stories, they are in decline, and the *Mānas Kathā* is flourishing.[1099] Acknowledging the importance of hearing in the *Mānas kathā* tradition, Lutgendorf states the *Mānas* is "a story that people invariably hear long before they ever (if ever) read it."[1100]

Kathā is intrinsic to Tulsidas's composition as he writes, "For Hari is endless and so is his story, told and heard in many ways by holy ones."[1101] He encourages transmission of the *Mānas* through *kathā* and to sing as it has benefits (*phalaśruti*),

> They attain fulfillment of their heart's desire
> who renounce hypocrisy and recite this tale,
> and those who tell it, hear it,
> and savor it cross rebirth's sea like the puddle of a cow's hoof print.[1102]

Tulsidas suggests devotion in the *kathā* tradition by alluding to the *Purāṇic* story as he writes,

> Brahma is the milky ocean, knowledge, Mount Mandar,
> and holy ones are the gods
> who, churning it, extract the immortal nectar
> of divine story, whose sweetness is bhakti.[1103]

The *Mānas* text is much more than a purely written text. It is a story, *kathā*. Tulsidas uses the Word *kathā* some 180 times.[1104] In his essay on *scripture in India*, Thomas Coburn offers a typology

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[1098] *Cāturmās* refers to four months of monsoon. During these months, as it is difficult to travel, most religious Sadhus spend their time in particular places.
[1099] Hein, *The Miracle Plays of Mathurā*, 31-53.
[1100] Lutgendorf*, The Life of a Text*, 23.
[1101] RCM, 1.139.3.
[1102] RCM, 7.128.3.
[1103] RCM, 7.120.a
[1104] As cited in *The Life of a Text*, 117. This count is based on Suryakant's word-index to the epic, *Tulsidas Rāmāyaṇ Śabd Sūcī*, 67-8.

distinguishing Hindu scripture into categories of "scripture" and "story."[1105] In his perspective, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* fall into the category of narrative tradition. Lutgendorf contesting the view states the dividing line between "scripture" and "story" within Hinduism is permeable and that the same text can be both at once, as "many Indian texts acquire sacrality only in certain time-bound contexts and that historical and cultural processes have a powerful bearing on the "lives" and the eventual "canonization" of texts."[1106]

The *Mānas* is both a " scripture" and "story" at the same time. Danuta Stasik points out that in the *Mānas*, the verb "*likh*" (=write) is seen in seven different forms (*likhata, likhana, likhā, likhi, likhia, likhita, likhe*), and the verb is found in all the books twenty times in total except in book four. However, only in one instance refers to the actual writing (*likhia*).[1107] Walter Ong, writing on *orality and literacy*, notes that despite Tulsidas's knowing through writing, he gave prominence in his composition to the "sounded word."[1108] Tulsidas introduces his *Mānas* from the oral/aural perspective. Stasik points out that the following nouns suggest *Mānas* as *Kathā*.[1109] She cites nouns such as *bacana* (speech, talk)[1110] or even *bānī* (utterance; speech, talk);[1111] *bhaniti* (utterance; speech, talk); [1112] *gāhā* (song, chant, narrative);[1113] *kabitā* (poetry/poem);[1114] *kathā* (story, tale);[1115]

[1105] Thomas Coburn, "Scripture in India: Towards a Typology of the Word in Hindu Life," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52 (1984): 435-459.

[1106] Lutgendorf, "The Power of Sacred Story: "Rāmāyaṇa" Recitation in Contemporary North India," *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 4 no. 2 (summer 1990): 117.

[1107]RCM, 1.7.6 See Danuta Stasik, "The Oral vs the Written? A Few Notes on the Composition of Tulsidasdas's Rāmcaritmānas," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, T. LXIX, Z.1, 2016 (20-30): 23.

[1108] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 31–33.

[1109] Stasik, *The Oral vs the Written*, 24-25.

[1110] RCM, 1.9.4.

[1111] RCM, 1.10.3.

[1112] RCM, 1.9; 1.10.2; 1.15.5.

[1113] RCM, 1.8.3.

[1114] RCM, 1.9.2.

[1115] RCM, 1.9.3; 1.10; 1.43.

sambāda (dialogue);[1116] *śrotā* (listener, hearer).[1117] The poet also uses different forms of simple verbs, e.g.: *Kaha-* to say: *kahaũ*[1118] *kahaba*;[1119] *gāva-* to sing: *gāvahĩ*[1120] *bakhā-* to expound; to describe, to give an account of *;* *bakhāne*[1121] (e.g. 1.6.1), *bakhānā*[1122] *bakhānī*[1123] ; *barana-* to describe: *baranaũ*,[1124] *baranaba*;[1125] *suna-* to hear; to listen (to): *sunihahĩ*,[1126] *sunata*[1127], *sunahĩ*.[1128] There are also different forms of verbal expressions with the most common of them "to tell a story," e.g. in the form of *karaũ kath*ā [1129] or *karata kathā*.[1130] The above expressions indicate how the text would be alive among the audiences, namely by narrations, hearing and spreading by word of mouth, and the audience receives the fruit (*phalaśruti*).[1131]

The epic itself, in its structural form, is narrated in a dialogue (*samvād*) between Yajnāvalkya and Bhāradwaj and transmitted to devotees by Tulsidas. Tulsidas repeatedly had heard the story from his Guru, Sukarakhet, and narrated this story in a popular speech. [1132] He communicates that the roles of a narrator (*vakt*a) and a listener (*śrotā*) are essential in the story of Rām. Because, Ram's story is mysterious, and listeners must be a "treasury of wisdom" to grasp the more profound meaning.[1133] Through this narrative style, Tulsidas indicates there should be a

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[1116] RCM, 1.43.
[1117] RCM, 1.30.3.
[1118] RCM, 1.9.6.
[1119] RCM, 1.33.1.
[1120] RCM, 1.38.1.
[1121] RCM, 1.6.1.
[1122] RCM, 1.14.1.
[1123] RCM, 1.21.4.
[1124] RCM, 1.2.1.
[1125] RCM, 1.37.1.
[1126] RCM, 1.8.4.
[1127] RCM, 1.18.6.
[1128] RCM, 1.10.
[1129] RCM, 1.3.1.2
[1130] RCM, 1.34.1.
[1131] Also see *The Life of a Text*, 38
[1132] RCM, 1.30. 2–3. 30; 1.31.1
[1133] RCM, 1.30 b. treasuries of wisdom include knowledge of sacred texts, Sanskrit, discerning qualities.

never-ending process of transmission to the audience. Emphasizing the transmission aspect, Ong proposes that the composition that is not performed or that has no audience does not exist.[1134]

In the context of transmitting text, there is a bond between the speaker and the listener is created and together they form a religious community (*satsaṇg*). The association of good people, *satsaṇg*, is repeatedly praised and advocated by Tulsidas as they are always eager to understand the story better, share insights and talk about it (*Anukathān*).[1135] In the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, Tulsidas mentions that without *satsaṇg* there is no *Hari-Kathā*, and without that delusion will not flee.[1136] In the Vaishnava context, the *bhajans, kīrtana*, and *kathā* take place in the fellowship of believers (*satsaṇg*). Although the *Mānas* might be termed a "folk-influenced" retelling of the *Rām*ayana story, it is a work that strongly asserts both its own religious authority and its fidelity to a perceived "great tradition."[1137] Therefore, in the *kathā* tradition, the relationship between *Guru-Siśya* is central.[1138] Even Tulsidas, in his writings, mentions his teacher *Rāmanandi* from whom he heard the story of Rām.[1139] Anjanīnandan Sharan categorizes two schools of *Mānas* interpretation: "Tulsidas" and "Ayodhyā" tradition (*parampara*).[1140] Tulsidas *parampara t*races back its origin to Tulsidas and ultimately to Śiva, the prime narrator of the story, whereas Ayodhyā refers to the *Rām*anandi ascetic lineage, based in Ayodhyā. Associating with certain *parampara* gives a unique identity to individual reciters, and they function not just for empirical information rather for

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[1134] Cf. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 40–42.

[1135] RCM, 1.39.4; 1.41.2, Cf. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 72–73.

[1136] RCM, 7.61.

[1137] *The Life of a Text*, 213.

[1138] *Ibid.,* 137.

[1139] RCM, 1.30.a

[1140] It denotes a succession of teachers and disciples in traditional Vedic culture and Indian religions. Through this tradition of succession, a relationship is built among the gurus and disciples, and legitimate authority is claimed within a religious group.

communicating the teacher-pupil succession and authority (*adhikār*a).[1141] They believe that the

narration is possible only through the grace (*kṛpā*) of *Guru*.

4.3.1. Memorization in the *Kathā* Tradition

Kathā demands that one memorizes the text, know other sacred scriptures and people's

contexts to narrate it relevantly. It is believed that the process of vocalization, memorization and

being "context sensitive" leads to a good narration by the *Vyās*. It is a laborious process. Adding

local references and narratives with the esoteric and allegorical interpretation of the text enables

the devotees to enter deeply into the religious epic. Ong point out that the religious gatherings for

such listening "introduces us to India not only as a culture with a high oral residue but also as a

culture that is significantly word-attentive in a person-interactive context."[1142] Lutgendorf,

referring to the poem's commentarial tradition, rightly notes that such a presentation of the

narrative "exemplifies a traditional pattern in Indian literature: the presentation of a text as an oral

narration by a particular teller to a particular listener, within a carefully delineated context."[1143]

The text of the *Mānas* demonstrates a highly successful attempt on the part of its author Tulsidas

to recreate a contextualized, real dialogic space for his audiences. In this manner, Tulsidas's text

removes the "great divide" between the oral and written.[1144]

4.3.2. *Kathās* as Nourishment to the Faith community

The *Kathās* are still popular as they nourish the community's faith, but they have gone

through significant changes over the years. The hagiographical writings mention Tulsidas

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[1141] Lutgendorf*, The Life of a Text*, 139.

[1142] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 66 (cf. also pp. 42–43). Ong contrasts this type of culture against an object attentive type, noting, however, that "words and objects are never totally disjunct: words represent objects, and perception of objects is in part conditioned by the store of words into which perceptions are nested. Nature states no 'facts': these come only within statements devised by human beings to refer to the seamless web of actuality around them."

[1143] Lutgendorf*, The Life of a Text*, p. 22.

[1144] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*,116,

performing the *Mānas kathā.* In the *Vinayapatrik*a, Tulsidas declares that he "fills his belly" by singing Rām's praises.[1145] Priya Das's commentary on the *Bhaktamāl* mentions Tulsidas's meeting with Hanumān in the context of *kathā.* The tradition begun from Tulsidas times, in the later years received royal patronage as a way to religiously educate those who could not read. Lutgendorf writes that the religious philosophy of *kathā* tended to emphasize spiritual egalitarianism and attracted the people of low social status. Besides, during the Mughal era, it served to counter the social appeal of Islam as Hinduism was losing untouchable groups through conversion to Islam. To prevent such happenings wealthier and royal class encouraged *kathā* practices through patronage. [1146] In a way, the *kathā t*radition helped the Hindu Renaissance.[1147] *Mānas* patronage began in the reign of Balvant Sing's grandson Udit Narayan Sing. His son Ishvariprasd Narayan Sing's (1821-89) era is known as the "golden age of the *Mānas.*"[1148] Later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Hindu rulers turned to Rām and the *Mānas* for a validating model of temporal authority. The popularization of the *Mānas kathā* happens through a combination of political and religious dimensions.

Earlier*, Kathāvachis (Rāmāyaṇi*) narrating the *kathā* in the afternoons with a scarce audience was a familiar scene in the temple's courtyard. But now, apart from a few seniors, others do not attend such narrations. However, the *kathā* tradition has received enhancement through musical concerts, *Saṅkaṭ Mochan Sammelan*, and YouTube channels. In all these *kathā* performances, Lutgendorf points out that there is a creative retelling and "domestication, and thus

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[1145] *Vinay Patrika* 171: 4: "calling myself your servant, I fill my belly." Idem, 185: 5: "I preach to others that saints are boats to cross illusion's stream*. Kavitāvaḷī* 7:61:" I fill my belly by singing your praises, *Rām*! 7:63, "I call myself yours, *Rām*, and sing your virtues, and from respect of you I obtain my daily bread."
[1146] Lutgendorf*, The Life of a Text*, 134.
[1147] Peter van der Veer*, Gods on Earth*, 39.
[1148] Chaube, "Rāmcaritmānas," 121.

the text remains vivid and alive to their audiences."[1149] However, in the formalized setting of narrations, there are fewer interactions, more formalities and less fulfillment of expectations demanded by Tulsidas. In such patterns, the learning from each other is hindered as there is no occasion for discussion and debate. Sadly, there is also a huge competition among the *Rāmāyaṇis* to prove themselves and to earn money and modernize their narration. This is another enticement that *Rāmāyaṇis* yield to Rāmdās, a regular devotee at Tulsighāt cynically comments "Now everyone wants to be a *vyās* to earn more *paisa* (money) and not narrate about Rām or Hanumān *bhakti*." Although these comments look pessimistic, the *kathā* tradition has a positive spiritual effect on those who participate in them. Bhuśan, a boatman and illiterate, learns much on Rām and Hanumān from *kathā* and never misses Tuesday and Saturday observance (*vrat*) of worshipping Hanumān and listening to *kathā*. A masseur Umesh, near *Daśaśvamedha ghāt* on *kathā* says, "how are we to be filled with the love of God, it is possible only by listening to the stories of God in the company of good people (*satsaṅg*)." Therefore, the *Mānas*, through its *kathā* tradition, urges us to go beyond print culture that "has diminished our capacity to grasp the meaning of scripture as an active, vocal presence in the lives of individuals and communities."[1150] Despite COVID and lockdown the presence of a few people gathered for *kathā* in the temple, communicates that these traditions stimulate religious imagination, and the interreligious learning begins with meeting persons in the *satsaṅg* who help us cross over into another religious world.

Understanding and appropriating a sacred text, through the notion of *kathā* challenges the Western notion of "book learning," that focuses on a written text alone.[1151] Furthermore, it

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[1149] Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 213.
[1150] Graham, *Beyond the Written Text*, 8.
[1151] Ibid., 9.

emphasizes the Indian narration method by memory, saying, "You know what you can recall."[1152]

Even within the Christian tradition, the Bible is not solely for learning through silent reading. The oral traditions, folklore stories, parables, proverbs have a strong sense of "sounded word." Lutherans say that the word breaks open in its preaching. The Bible as a story is and continues to be a source of spiritual nourishment that combines both the oral and the written. Although Biblical tradition has oral components, the pure exegetical emphasis on the historical-critical method of Biblical Studies tend to sideline the narrative and its oral traditions leading to a great divide. Accomplished teachers and spiritual guides such as Augustine of Hippo, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross were lyrical in their teaching, and they break into song about the One whom they love. Augustine lyrically writes, "O Lord, that I love you. You pierced my heart with your word, and I loved you. But also, heaven and earth and all within them, behold, they bid me on every side to love you nor do they cease telling this to all."[1153]

In Varanasi, for the *Khristbhaktas,* the Bible is the main source of nourishment and the word of God is preached in the *satsaṅg* and learning biblical verses by repetition acquaints them with the Christian faith.[1154] In the Christian tradition, the Bible that is heard and interpreted in the community bears much more fruit than a solitary reading and analysis. Saint John Eudes (1601-1680) states,

> It is also useful, holy and capable of greatly inflaming our hearts with divine love to speak and converse with one another at times in an intimate way about God and the things of God.[1155]

[1152] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 33.

[1153] Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, in Mary T. Clark, trans. *Augustine of Hippo: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 125-126.

[1154] Jerome Sylvester, *Khristbhakta Movement Hermeneutics of a Religio-cultural Phenomenon* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2013), 52

[1155] John Eudes, *The Life and Kingdom of Jesus in Christian Souls in Thompson*, Berulle and the French School: Selected Writings, 137.

4.4. The Performative Dimension of the *Mānas* (*Rāmlīlā)*

In India, written texts have existed for centuries, along with oral and stage performances. Both the sacred text and performances interact in various ways and have become part of religious traditions. These performances are not just enactments or *nātak* but are recognized as *līlās*. *Līlā* is a complex term, translated as divine "sports" in the Hindu world, it includes creation, preservation, and dissolution of the world springing from spontaneous, joyful, disinterested creativity of the divine (God).[1156] J.A.B Van Buitenen suggests *līlā* as the opposite of *karman*, since "in creating, sustaining, and restoring the world God has no cause to effectuate and no end to achieve."[1157] The concept of divine *līlā* spans several religious traditions.[1158] William S. Sax notes that *līlā*, is simultaneously a "theological," "mythical," and "performative" concept has no apparent analog within Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions.[1159] The worshippers of the God Vishnu especially favor the *līlā* genre.[1160] Vaiṣṇava theologians distinguish *līlā* into *nitya* (eternal/continuous) and *naimittika* (occasional). The former refers to the Lord's cosmic activity and the latter to the Lord's specific incarnations and their celebration and recreation by the devotees.[1161] Most commonly throughout India, Kṛṣṇa's mischievous acts as a child and with the *gopīs* (cowgirls) of Braj is known as *līlā*.[1162] In Northern India, *līlā* refers to both the enactments of Rām and Kṛṣṇa. Among them, the *Rāmlīlā* is the most popular one.

[1156] See *Vedāntasūtra* II.1.33 with *Ramanuja's commentary*, tr. George Thibaut, Sacred Books of the East, XLVIII, Part III, 477.

[1157] J.A. B. Van Buitenen, ed. *Ramanuja's Vedarthasamgrha*, *Deccan College Monograph Series*, no. 16 (Pune 1956), 192, no.83.

[1158] See William S. Sax, ed. *The Gods at Play: Līlā in South Asia* ((New York: Oxford University Press, 1995)

[1159] William S. Sax, William S. Sax "The Rāmnagar Rāmlila: Text, Performance, Pilgrimage," *History of Religions* 30 no.2 (Nov.1990): 130.

[1160] See Norvin Hein, *The Miracle Plays of Mathura* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1972)

[1161] Dvivedi, "*Śrī Rāmnagar Kī śrī rāmlīlā meṃ devatva vā, līlā sākṣāt bhagvat svarūpas*," 54.

[1162] See John S. Hawley, *Krishna the Butter Thief* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983); and Norvin Hein, "Līlā," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade et al. (New York: Macmillan, 1984),8: 550-54.

Rāmlīlā refers to an annual sequential enactment of the Rām story in detail. The performance is the soul of *Dusshera* celebrations in September-October. The performance lasts for a month and culminates at the time of the festival of Dusshera, with Rām's victory over Rāvaṇa and his glorious return to Ayodhyā. Although the *līlā* is popular in the Hindi-speaking areas, its popularity has moved beyond its origin and performed in different parts of the world.[1163] This extraordinarily pervasive tradition is not homogeneous. Each area has its variants in various villages and towns, and in each enactment of the deeds of Rām, Paula Richman states, "they do not change it but make it applicable."[1164] The famous *līlās* are Rāmnagar and Varanasi *Rāmlīlā* headed by the *Mahārāja* of Varanasi. Rāmnagar *Rāmlīlā* is one of the world's most incredible religious performances that happens every year.[1165] In recent years, the *Anavarat līlā* (Non-Stop) in *Ayodhyā Research Institute* (ARI) at the *Tulsidas Smarak Bhavan* is the popular destiny of *līl*a. Chitrakut has its fame for a single *līlā*, *Bharat Milap*. Rām's reunion with Bharat is considered one of the emotional high points of traditional *Rāmlīlā* dramas there. However, in all the multiple enactments, Tulsidas's epic lies at the heart of the Rāmlīlā tradition. Because Tulsidas, in his *Mānas*, repeatedly emphasizes that the text he wrote is not only for "reading" but always intended to be performed. Hein concludes that *līlās* originated either during or immediately after Tulsidas's lifetime and are linked to the *Mānas* text.[1166] She also suggests that there was already a dance-drama tradition in Karnataka (*Yakṣgāna*) and Kerala (*Kathākalī*) and may have influenced the *līlā*

[1163] Trinidad, a Caribbean country, has some twenty-four (24) open-air Ram Lila performances.

[1164] See Paula Richman, "We Do not change it We make it applicable": Ramlila in Trinidad," *The Drama Review* 54, no.1 (spring 2010): 77-105.

[1165] For the details of each day's performance and route of the pilgrimage, see Richard Schechner and Linda Hess's "The *Rām*lila of *Rām*nagar [India]" *The Drama Review* 21 no. 3 (September 1977): 51-82. ; William S. Sax " The *Rām*nagar *Rām*lila: Text, Performance, Pilgrimage," *History of Religions* 30 no.2 (Nov.1990): 129-153; For the experience of the audience see Linda Hess "An Open-Air *Rām*ayana: *Rām*lila, the Audience Experience," in *The Life of Hinduism* ed., John Stratton Hawley and Vasudha Narayanan (University of California Press, 2006).

[1166] See Hein*, The Miracle Plays of Mathurā*," 105-25; also 223-71.

genre. The claim for the *ādi līlā* (first) of Banaras performed by Tulsidas is cited in *Gautama Candrika* which is attributed to Krishnadatt Mishra.

> Having worshipped Valmiki, Hanuman, and the priest,
> He [Tulsidas] produced the *līlā* of *Rām*'s consecration,
> The full moon of Sharad adorned the umbrella.

It is believed that Tulsidas had a vision in his mind's eye contemplating on the Gangā to conduct the coronation of *līlā*. Many continue to believe that Tulsidas is the inspiration for the modern-day *līlās*. Tulsidas in his introduction refers to the entire content of the *Mānas* as "*Harilīlā*" (Cosmic play of Viṣṇu).[1167] He also affirms the supremacy of loving the contemplation of Rām's deeds (*līlā*) over the metaphysical knowledge of his transcendent greatness as ultimate God. In the last book of the Manas he describes the greatness of *līlā*,

> But even those who have known that greatness,
> king of birds remains enamored of these deeds,
> for the fruit of such knowledge is indeed this *līlā*
> so, say the greatest sages, adept in self-restraint. [1168]

Therefore, the *Rāmlīlā* folk dramas are the "theatrical" genre of the *Mānas*. It is a *religious event* with "words made flesh."[1169] The word made flesh is the core teaching of the Christian faith. In the context of the enactment of *Rāmlīlā*, the words uttered are from the text and acting out the text makes for an enfleshment by human actors. In this sense, the words of the *Mānas* become flesh through the actors for the ordinary masses in *Rāmlīlā*.

[1167] RCM, 1. 29c.3.

[1168] RCM, 7.21.2-3.

[1169] Lutgendorf, "Words Made Flesh: The Banaras *Rām*līlā as Epic Commentary," in *Boundaries of the Text*, in Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger, Laurie J. Sers, ed. (University of Michigan Press, the University of Michigan Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 1991), 83- 104.

4.4.1. *Bhakti* in the *Rāmlīlā*

The devotees see the enactments of the deeds of Rām (*Rāmlīlā)* with great devotion. Some devotees shut their eyes and "watch" these performances as they believe that the first *līlā* at *Asi ghāt* began with the inner vision received by Tulsidas while contemplating on the Ganga on the full night of Ashvin. The acting on the *Rāmlīlā* is not a mere stage performance but communicates the humans' desire and thirst for the "Real," [1170] as the devotees of Rām "seek to participate fully in a reality that stands qualitatively above all others."[1171] Hence the acting in *Rāmlīlā* is a "way of salvation," and a *sādhana.* Haberman exploring the Rupā Gosvāmi's method of religious realization (*rāgānuga bhakti sādhana*) in *Kṛṣṇa līlā* positions that the devotee enters the eternal drama of Kṛṣṇa and his associates in Vraja by assuming and having a particular role in that drama and seek to transform themselves into divine actors on the stage of eternal drama in heaven. [1172] Similarly, the *Rāmlīlā* as a *bhakti* event demands full participation in the *līlā*. Linda Hess in exploring the audiences' experience in the Rāmnagar *Rāmlīlā,* notes that the special power of Rāmnagar *Rāmlīlā* is based on God dwelling here for a month, the whole Rāmnagar becoming a microcosm of Sacred *Rāmāyaṇa* geography and people's faith energizing the *Rāmlīlā* for generations with "feeling, emotion, and devotion."[1173] *Bhakti* is participation in the divine. The devotees cheer the epic's essential characters as a participatory event, chanting "*Bol Raja Rāmachandra Ki Jai*" (Victory to King Rāmachandra) and salutation to other *svarūpas*. Along with the drama, some act out by becoming wedding guests of the epic and carve out roles for themselves by carrying the *Svarūpas*. A *dhobi* (washerman) from Śivāla ghat was in an exciting

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[1170] See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959).

[1171] See Joseph M. Kitagawa, ed., *The Comparative Study of Religion* (New York: Columbia University, 1958), 30.

[1172] See David, L. Haberman, *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A study of Rāgānugā Bhakti Sādhana* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[1173]Linda Hess, "An Open-air *Rām*ayana: *Rām*lila the Audience Experience," in *The Life of Hinduism*, ed. John Stratton Hawley and Vasudha Narayanan (California: University of California Press,), 116-18.

mood when he narrated his experience of carrying the *svarūpas*. People also carry the *Mānas* with them to read it along the *Rāmāyaṇis* and sing *kīrtana* (*Jai Siyā Rām*) on certain special moments and offer worship and receive *prasād* during the performance or after. Many travel a long distance barefoot and put up with the hardships of seasonal monsoon rain and muddy streets. In many respects, the *Rāmlīlā* parallels the widespread practice of Hindu pilgrimage as there is the dimension of travel, hardships, the convergence of holy men (sadhus) and darśan of the deities. Devotion is expressed through movement and pilgrimage is one such movement within Hindu traditions that favors grace. *Mahābhārata* recognizes the pilgrimage places (*tīrtha sthān*) as "auspicious because of the extraordinary power of their earth, and efficacy of their water, and because the sages frequented them."[1174] William S. Sax recognizes the Rāmnagar *Rām*lila as pilgrimage as the enactment has the movement and the presence of sages and people's longing for the vision of *Rām* and other characters of the epic.[1175] Anuradha Kapur, who documented the organizational complexity and emotional impact of *Rāmlīl*ā, writes,

> the very act of following gods from location to location as they enact their history on a sacred map gives the spectators a role. Here Rāma rested, he crossed the Gangā here he battled with Rāvaṇa. In visiting places sanctified by divinity, the spectator does what countless pilgrims do, for her/his worship, like theirs, consists of visiting holy places. And her/his journey becomes at once physical, metaphorical, and spiritual.[1176]

4.4.2. *Svarūpas* in the Rāmlīlā

Rāmlīla involves elements of role-playing and enactment. The actors (*svarūpas*) in these enactments, even today mostly young Brahmin boys, play the female parts. Their enactments allow the devotees to participate in the mythic narrative of *Rāmāyaṇa*. Hein believes that the custom of

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[1174] Ma.Bh. 13.3.18
[1175] See William S. Sax "The *Rām*nagar *Rām*lila: Text, Performance, Pilgrimage," *History of Religions* 30 no.2 (Nov.1990): 129-153.
[1176] Anuradha Kapur, *Actors, Pilgrims, Kings and Gods: The Rāmlila at Rāmnagar* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1990),12-13, 23.

male participants is of recent origin and may have been influenced by *Śākta* and *Śaiva* traditions and emerged due to the particular moral climate of Muslim dominance.[1177] Vishvambara Nāth Mishra, the present *Mahant* of *Sankaṭ Mochan Mandir* in the discussion on *Rāmlīlā,* pointed out that the severe need for expression of Hindu *Dharm*a during Muslim rule motivated such customs. However, he was quick enough to add that other castes are part of *līlā* in various ways. [1178] Those who act as *svarūpas* are to observe strict rituals and abstain from certain foods and acts because the people believe that the drama involves the presence of living deities upon the stage as *svarupas*. These *svarūpas* are not merely symbolic representative but rather embody Rām and Sītā and other significant characters of *Rāmāyaṇa*. Besides, the performance genre of *Rāmlīlā* re-creates on a local scale the landscape of *Rāmāyaṇa* from Ayodhyā to Rāmeśvara.[1179] Besides, the *Rāmlīlā* functions as a pedagogical text, demonstrating how to be and not to be in the world.[1180] *Rāmlīlā* links Hindus from different social classes, religious affiliations, and neighborhoods. It is a complex theatrical event that requires musical, dramatic, artistic, physical, intellectual, financial, and organizational skills. It is a small industry and supports various peripheral enterprises: artisans who build effigies and create fireworks; tent houses that lend platforms, awnings, and lights; and shops that provide costumes, masks, and props. There is no denying that the *Rāmlīlā* is an activity with both external and internal dimensions of religion and religious sentiment in all aspects.[1181]

The *Rāmlīlā* functions as a mediator of the words and meaning of the *Mānas* to the Hindu devotees through the musical recitation of the text and acting. The enactment makes the meaning

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[1177] Hein, *The Miracle Plays of Maturā*, 266-67, 231.
[1178] Interview with Vishvanath Mishra, on March 24, 2020.
[1179] Eck*, India A Sacred Geography*, 429.
[1180] Interview with Rām Paṭak, an actor in the *Rām*lila, on March 21st, 2020.
[1181] *The Life of a Text*, 309.

of the text vivid and clear to the public.[1182] It is indeed the position of many devotees that the *Rāmlīlā i*s not a "play" (*nātak*) in the usual sense; it is not "representation" at all, because it is born of the Lord and is one of his primary forms (*vigṛh*). This is similar to the understanding of Eucharist as not just a play or recollection but occurring in real-time. These enactments have some type of soteriological efficacy in a way similar to Christian sacraments. Devotees of *līlā* believe that through specially consecrated actors, the Lord (Rām) manifests Himself and recreates. So, the *Rāmlīlā* has less to do with theater in the conventional sense. This is a *sādhana.*[1183] Lutgendorf, points out that in all these plays, the centrality of *līlā* of Vaiṣṇava theology is emphasized.[1184] Vaiṣṇavas see their Lord as an archetypal actor, repeatedly assuming roles in his universal "play" or "*līlā*."[1185] The intimate relation of aesthetics and religious realization is brought to the fore in the text's enactment. Lutgendorf draws our attention that the performers and connoisseurs have labeled the tradition of *Kathā* and *Rāmlīlā* as "*ṭīkā*" (meaning commentary) to the *Mānas*. Understanding the term *ṭīkā* (commentary) in a unique sense, he writes,

> [ṭīkā] not as an intellectual explanation or analysis of a written work, but as an aural and even visual experience of its creative elaboration and expansion through performance. Such an elaboration is viewed by the tradition not merely as an expedient for those unable to "read" the text but rather as its most fitting and appropriate "realization." [1186]

[1182] Norvin Hein, "*The Rām Līlā" Journal of American Folklore*: 279-304 @ 281.
[1183] Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 323.
[1184] Ibid.*,* 250.
[1185] See David Haberman, "Acting as a Way of Salvation (New York" Oxford University Press, 1988) and Donn M. Wulff, *Drama as a Mode of Religious Realization* (Chico, Calif.: Scholar's Press, 1984), especially 7-44.
[1186] Lutgendorf, "Word Made Flesh," 84-85.

4.4.3. *Svarūpas* and *Bhakti*

The devotional aspect is visible in the *svarūpas* and the desire to have a *darśan* of them. The beauty of the gods in the form of *svarūpas* attracts the devotees. Theatre evokes devotion as those who enact the deeds of Rām (*svarūpas)* savor and celebrate Rām's compassion for the earth's creatures. Usually, the everyday *līlā* ends with the ritual ceremony of *ārati* (waving of lights). During this moment, the audience tries to find a small space in a crowded area to bathe in the divine light. Crowning rituals accompany the *ārati*. Many believe that this is the precise moment when the *svarūpas* become divine. This ritual could be compared to the '*prāṇapratiṣṭa*' ceremony wherein the statue (*mūrti*) becomes a dwelling place of the divine (*vigṛh*). A.K. Ramanujan in his essay "Two Realms of Kannada folklore," encourages Asian folklorists to begin thinking about folk repertories as performances system of meaning, in which each genre is distinguished from other genres. As he writes,

> The notions of possession are never far from the audience mind…bard and character, bard and audience, bard and actor, actor and character are merged at crucial moments and separated at ordinary times. One goes to the theater/ritual to experience such mergers in different degrees.[1187]

"Possession" is a core idea in Hinduism that makes interaction possible between the realms of the profane and the realm of the sacred. Because, in Hinduism, the people, places, and objects can all be regarded as sacred mediums through which deities and spirits manifest their presence in the physical world. Professor Frederick Smith in his book, *The Self-possessed* proposes that positive oracular or ecstatic possession is the most common form of spiritual expression in India and that possession has always been broader and more diverse than in the West, where it has been

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[1187] A.K. Ramanujan, "Two Realms of Kannada Folklore," in *Another Harmony: New Essays in the Folklore of India*, ed. Stuart Blackburn and A.K. *Ram*anujan (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 41-75 esp. 69-70.

almost entirely characterized as "demonic." He concludes "that possession was both a cause and a result of the generally accepted South Asian notion of a permeable embodiment."[1188] The embodiment of the beauty of *svarūpas* in the *Rāmlīlā* enables the devotees to have the feeling (*bhāvana*) of being close to God. Lind Hess states

> Though the literalness of *līlā* piety- the rush to touch the feet, to taste the *prasād*, to wear the garland, to commandeer a prop like a lotus or a bamboo arrow, to shout, to hear, and above all to *see* the forms of the gods- may seem naïve to an outside observer, it is indeed one of the great secrets of *Lila's* power. The belief that God is everywhere- the literal-minded belief that God is in you and me or a stone, that God has physical and mental attributes, that he takes on those attributes to make himself accessible to his devotees- is broadly inculcated and deeply imbibed that it seems to shape the way consciousness is structured.[1189]

Rāmlīlā is a religious and commercial event today. One's disposition matters on what one makes of it. Linda Hess writes,

> If you come with devotion, you will see God. If you come with cynicism, you will see little boys in threadbare shorts. If you come looking for snacks, you will see refreshment stands. If you come for a spectacle, you will see fireworks. If you come with hostility or fear, that will also color what you see. According to the feeling within, each one sees the Lord's form.[1190]

In the *Rāmlīlā*, audiences eschew the use of footwear and chairs not out of stoicism but out of their conviction that they are in the physical presence of God. It is an ordinary Indian way to respect and honor the divine. In these practices, devotees try to experience the divine in their humanity. The *Mānas* text provides ample opportunity for such integration. Hence, William S. Sax rightly points out that dualism is irrelevant to the *Rāmlīlā* "because in it, boundaries between gods and humans, and between the geographies of text and performance, are blurred or nonexistent."[1191]

[1188] Frederick M Smith, *The Self-possessed: Deity and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), xxvii.
[1189] Linda Hess, "An Open-Air *Rām*ayana," 131.
[1190] Ibid.,135.
[1191] William S. Sax, "The Rāmnagar Rāmlila: Text, Performance, Pilgrimage," 133.

4.4.4. *Jhānki a*nd Devotion

In the South Asian devotional culture, places, persons, and actions are intimately related. For the evocation of devotion, they are essential. Besides, in the Hindu *Bhakti* tradition, the systematic physical description of *nakh-śikh* (from toenails to the crown of the head) of the deity is also vital.[1192] The *Svarūpas* decorated with these descriptions give the vision of the beloved deity (*iṣṭa devatā*) to the devotees. For most people, *līlā* is to get God's *darśan*, and they feel that in these *līlā*'s there is a direct- witness (*sākśat*) of God. In the *Rāmlīlā* tradition, devotion is heightened in the ritual of *Jhānk*i, an Urdu word meaning tableau, and in Hindi, it has come to mean glance. After the *ārati* and crowing rituals, the actors (*svarūpas)* cease to move, and the devotees carry them around as the *svarūpas* should not place their feet on the earth. They are carried for a view, glance (*Jhānki)*. Hein identifies *Jhānki* as a "tableau of living deities exhibited for worship; this moment holds the attention of the audience." [1193] The quick *darśan* of divine embodiments which have become "god's own forms" is for a brief moment.[1194] The All-transcendent God becomes Immanent for the devotees as they see them in *Rāmlīlā* "talking and walking." Roberto S. Goizueta, in analyzing the Hispanic/Latino theology of accompaniment, where people are singing "let us walk with Jesus"[1195] and participating in the events of Jesus's passion, states that "walking with Jesus stirs one's senses, and these scenes of crucifixion are not just an event that happened two thousand years ago. However, an event is taking place today and in which the faithful are actively participating."[1196] Similarly, for a devout Hindu, these actions are

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[1192] See RCM, 1.147.1-148.1.

[1193] Norvin Hein, *The Miracle Plays of Mathura*, 13, 17.

[1194] *Jhānki* is often used for the glimpse of Śiva rendered by painting one of his faces or moods on the linga's shaft. See Eck, *India A Sacred Geography.*

[1195] In Spanish *caminemos con Jesus*

[1196]Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesūs Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 32-35.

present here and now, and they actively participate in these rituals. Having the vision of *svarūpas* through *Jhānki* needs to be understood within the context of Vaiṣṇava iconography. *Jhānki* tradition is seen as an outgrowth of Vaishnava temple worship, wherein the divine images are displayed with ever-changing adornments of costumes and settings.[1197] Within the Vaiṣṇava tradition of North India, the visual perception of the divine is done through *darśan, dhyān* and *smaraṇ*. The *smaraṇ* "remembering" or bearing in mind is important in the Vaiṣṇava *bhakti sādhana*. Throughout the *Bhagavad Gītā, smaraṇ* is used as a technique to reach Kṛṣṇa's abode.

> Those who relinquish the body while remembering Me
> at the moment of death will come to Me.
> There is certainly no doubt about this.
> Whatever one remembers upon
> giving up the body at the time of death,
> O son of Kunti, one attains that state,
> being always absorbed in such contemplation.
> Therefore, always remember Me
> and also do your duty of fighting the war.
> With mind and intellect surrendered to Me,
> you will definitely attain Me; of this, there is no doubt. [1198]

The mental imagination is taken seriously among the Hindu devotees. Having a glimpse of the deity or the *svarūpas* helps the devotees to remember and to fix their minds on the deity and have an authentic encounter with the divine. To see God in the most splendid form, as the cowherd women say in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, is the "highest reward of being blessed with eyes; we do not know if there can be any greater felicity than this."[1199] The vision enables the devotees to come closer to God.

[1197] Bhanushankar Mehta, "udit Udayagiri maṇc par Raghuvar bāl pataṅg," 43.
[1198] BG. 8.5-8.
[1199] Bh. P. 10.21.7.

4.5. Individual Engagement with the *Mānas*

The upward mobility of a religious text depends on the motives and fortunes of its patrons, audiences, and institutions associated with the text. The *Mānas* has received wide recognition by the singing and recitations of various individuals as the experience of the sacred is handed down to believers through them. Scriptures are not just history. They tell the story of people's relationship with God.[1200] The experience of God is motivated by engaging the sacred texts as sacred scriptures give space for encounter. Therefore, one should "acknowledge the sacredness of other's scriptures to them."[1201] The *Mānas*, as a devotional text, is elaborated and participated in common by the adherents of the Hindu faith through various forms of aesthetics, namely *kathā, path*, and *līlā*. Nevertheless, here I describe the encounters of individuals who have made the *Mānas* their life transformative text and narrate them to the people for their transformation. So, in the beginning, I narrate the biography of Morari Bapu, a well-known *kathā* narrator, and Raghavendra, my guide and guru in Varanasi, who are 'insiders' of the Hindu faith. Life is transformed for these two devotees of the *Mānas* through their involvement with the text and its traditions. Their experience with the text has motivated them to be better devotees of Rām and motivates them to preach and creatively narrate their experiences to a larger audience for their transformation.

In a comparative theological method, the question of reading or engaging the sacred text by the outsiders of faith tradition needs to receive a response. For the outsiders of a faith tradition, engaging other scriptures is common in interreligious dialogue settings. For instance, the *scriptural*

[1200] Dolores R Leckey, "Interreligious Dimension," in *Just War, Lasting Peace: What Christian Traditions Can Teach Us,* ed. John Kleiderer, Paula Minnaert, Mark Mossa, Dolores R Leckey (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2006), 79.
[1201] David Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 279-80.

reasoning practice promotes interreligious reading in the hope that this can also contribute to reconciliation between "people of the book."[1202] Here I am not engaged in scriptural reasoning but trying to engage the religious text of other faiths with greater devotion. Such practice may create a "liminal space," representing "a space for study and conversation wherever they actually happen."[1203] The questions are: how can someone outside a faith tradition recite the text religiously? Will it lead to the experience of the divine? These are challenging questions? In her book, *the Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, Catherine Cornille notes that "the main challenge in any dialogue between religions remains that of finding a proper balance between commitment to one's own religion and openness to the other." [1204] So, in the latter part of the narration, from the perspective of an t 'outsider' of a faith tradition, engaging the *Mānas* text by Camille Bulcke, a Jesuit, and my personal journeys with the text and effort to read it religiously are elaborated. These narratives are personal journeys and not theological statements or doctrines about one's engagement with the sacred text of the *Mānas*.

4.5.1. Morari Bapu (1946---)

The *Mānas* text is popularized through the preaching of specific individuals who have become the 'text themselves.'[1205] Morari Bapu is a spiritual leader and a renowned expounder of the *Mānas*. YouTube and social media have numerous episodes of his narrations. Through these

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[1202] M. Kavka, "Is Scriptural Reasoning Senseless?" in Scripture, Reasoning and the Contemporary Islam-West Encounter, eds. S. Kepnes and B. Koshul (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 133-148 here 133. For Scriptural Reasoning and Interreligious Dialogue, see Marianne Moyaert, "Scriptural Reasoning as Inter-Religious Dialogue," in *The Wiley-Blackwell companion to inter-religious dialogue,* ed. Catherine Cornille (Chichester, West Sussex, UK; Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 64-85

[1203] David Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 356.

[1204] Cornille, *the Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 84.

[1205] Expression of Keshav, a devotee of the Mānas and an admirer of Morari Bapu in Varanasi.

kathā narrations, he spreads the messages of universal peace, truth, love, and compassion. For his religious and humanitarian service, he received the 2016 Hindu of the Year Award.

Morari Bapu was born into a Vaishnava Bava Sadhu Nimbarka lineage in 1946 in Talgajarda village, Gujarat, to Prabhudas Bapu, a temple priest, and Savitri Ma. Bapu spent his earliest years learning the *Mānas* from his grandfather and *Guru*, Tribhovandas Dada, who brought him into the *kathā* way of life. Remarkably, as a child, he memorized the scriptures, and at the age of fourteen, he sat under the canopy of an old tree in the village of Talgajarda, reciting the *Rāmayana* to his first three followers. Today, his teachings based on the *Mānas* recitation have reached more than one hundred million people around the world. After his secondary school, he taught in the J. Parekh High School for ten years. His love for storytelling enabled him to take leave without pay to deliver *kathā* in the rural villages as the villages were supportive of his venture.

As an enthralling *Kathākār* (storyteller), Morari Bapu, elucidating both in Hindi and Gujarati, believes that "*Rāmcaritmānas* is not merely a book; it is the very heart of the sages of this country." In his narration, the text and structure remain intact, yet he shapes the *Mānas* story in his own way. Bapu has performed over 750 nine-day *kathās* in Indonesia, South Africa, United Kingdom, United States, Brazil, Australia, Tibet, Israel, and Japan. Iran invited him as a state guest in the year 2012. His popularity is due to his universal message and calling out humanity for love and mutual respect inspired by the *Mānas*. He does not consider himself as a *guru* and is not into 'spiritual business,' selling holy products to the Western world. His narration attracts people from all walks of life as he contextualizes the text with humor, multitude of examples, and vivid

imageries. Keshav, who attends his *kathā* says, "when I listen to Morari Bapu, I feel as if I were part of the *Rāmayana* and the powerful message of the *Mānas* is ingrained in my heart."

As a narrator of the *Mānas* tradition, Bapu comes across to devotees as a true propagator of the *Bhakti Mārga* (path of devotion) and one who has grasped the concept of *Rāmrāj*. He brings the communities together with his tolerance of other religious traditions and works for the right causes. With his universal perspective, he insists there is nothing exclusive about his beliefs and calls for acceptance of all faiths in *kathā* as he uses an analogy from Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. Cardinal Tauran warmly welcomed Morari Bapu at the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue headquarters in the Vatican in 2014. He also had *Rāmkathā* based on the *Mānas* in Rome. During this visit, Bapu paid tribute to the life of Jesus Christ by incorporating in his *kathā,* Jesus's principles which mirror those of the Hindu faith mainly, sacrificing themselves for propagating the domain of truth (*satya*), love (*prem*) and compassion *(karuṇā).* The *Mānas* has enabled Morari Bapu to have a universal perspective enshrined in the *Rāmrāj* concept of the *Mānas*. Such an inclusive approach is not appreciated among Hindu extremists.

As the *Hindutva* ideology enforces sectarianism, Morari Bapu tries to promote tolerance. In Mahua, at his *āśram,* every year, a two-day event, the *sadbhāvana parv*a (harmony festival) is organized to celebrate the culture of harmony. In 2018, He invited sex workers from Mumbai to his *Rāmkathā* in Ayodhyā and donated resources for their welfare. By this act, he displayed moral courage and respected the people on the margins of society. In the *Rāmrāj* of *Mānas,* everyone has a place, especially those on the margins. This is evident in the episode of Sabari and *Kevaṭ e*pisode, as explained earlier. Through his *kathā* narrations, and contextualized approach, he makes the entire Hindu society responsible for controlling the damage done to the image of Hinduism by its hard-liner proponents and takes them back to the original teachings of *Rāmāyaṇa*. Morari Bapu is

a prominent religious figure continues to influence thousands of people. The *Mānas* text is popularized not only by the famous religious leaders by attracting thousands of people, but there are also ordinary narrators (*vyās*) in Varanasi and other holy places. Their contribution in popularizing the *Mānas* text through daily commitment to religious recitation cannot be downplayed. Raghavendra is one such example.

4.5.2. Raghavendra Savarni

There are many *Rāmayaṇis* narrating the story of the *Mānas* to people around Varanasi. Their narration inspires devotion and commitment to religion. Raghavendra, aged 46, is a *Rāmayaṇi*, my mentor and guide during my field research in Varanasi. Here I narrate his engagement with the *Mānas* as a true devotee of the *Mānas*, Rām, and Hanumān. His life story is inspiring and transformative. For the last twelve years, he has been reciting the *Mānas* without fail in the Hanuman temple, *Tulsi ghāt,* and is revered as *vyās*. During his explanation of the text, it is most common that the devotees stop by and listen to his singing and explanations, and at times, some add their comments. He considers singing the *Mānas* in the presence of Hanumān that has stories of Rām, as a great honor and blissful (*ānand*a) act. He was born into a family of *Mānas* lovers. His paternal grandfather (*dāda*), as a manager in the Dalmia Bharat Cement industry in Varanasi, conducted nine days of recitation of the *Mānas*, and there he met Raghavendra's' maternal grandfather (*nāna*), and both agreed to have marital relationships. This *Mānas* relationship inspired Raghavendra's' father to marry a polio-infected woman, an unusual event within traditional Hindu society. Raghavendra firmly believes that the *Mānas* inspired his father to take the least expected action, against the social customs of times, by marrying a handicapped woman. His parents' marriage was conducted according to the *Rāmāyaṇa* rituals and customs. From his childhood, he was brought up within the *Mānas* tradition. The family's faith and devotion

to the text earned them their livelihood and gave them joy and peace. As a child, he had a great fascination for the *Mānas* as he memorized a few lines (*chaupai*) from the epic every day. In this process, he was able to balance modern and traditional religious traditions. Nevertheless, he had never dreamt or desired to be a *vyās*. The transformation happened due to personal experience.

In the year 2009, as Raghavendra studied Law at Banaras Hindu University, he had a brain hemorrhage. Even an MRI scan could not determine the illness properly. Being a talkative person, he was unable to talk and pronounce anything. All were worried. At *Saṅkaṭ Mochan Mandir*, he vowed that he would sing the *Mānas* to Hanumān and was immediately healed. His healing is the grace of Hanumān. He says, "I am reciting the *Mānas* not out of fear but out of the experience of great love." The healing power of the *Mānas* kindled in him the desire to be a *Vyās.* Today, as a *Vyās*, he has had the privilege of being an *Āchārya* (teacher) for 111 Brahmins. He even recited in the presence of Morari Bapu. He recognizes it as his greatest honor. In recent days he uses YouTube to narrate the *kathā*. His greatest joy is to sing the greatness of Rām to Hanumān, the 'ultimate listener' (*param śrotṛ*). Three times I noticed him shedding tears of joy for the honor of singing *Mānas*.

Raghavendra possesses the qualifications to be an associate professor since he has successfully passed the National Eligibility Tests in social work and law. However, he still desires to sing the *Mānas*. He does not miss any opportunity for such acts as he firmly believes that the grace of Hanumān will provide daily bread for his livelihood. There is a competition among the *Vyās* to earn more money, but he does not expect remuneration as he thinks it is a religious service. His faith is strong in the *Mānas* as he believes that the *Mānas* energizes those who are depressed, and it gives a code of conduct to live a life of *Dharma.* In the interview, he quoted the *chaupai* from the *Mānas* wherein Tulsidas mentions *Kali-yuga* and the importance of the *Mānas*. He

believes strongly that the *Bhakti āndolan* (devotional movements) of the 15-16th century was made alive by Tulsidas, and to save the *Sanāthan Dharma* all that is needed is to take shelter in the *Mānas*. For him, *Mānas* has made Rām accessible to all, including Christians like me, as the nectar of immortality is given to all through the narration of Śiva and others. He laments that the present generation has no time for the *Mānas* as there are many distractions offered by the internet and the so-called devotees, who on auspicious occasions need the recitation of the *Mānas* in their houses, have money and desire but have no time. He made a humble appeal to all those listening to our conversations, saying, spend just two to three minutes for the recitation of the *Mānas* every day, and you will have peace and joy. In his view, the *Mānas* unites people of all creeds and religions. Even enemies become friends. As the *Mānas* proclaims the *Rāmrāj*, Rām gives first preference to people and invites us to look at the world from the eyes of Rām. He points out that the text is relevant today and has inspired scholars and researchers to dive deeper into the text and receive inner joy.

I cite another example, Raghavendra's friend Akshay Kumar Gupta, a researcher in the Tribal Herbal Medicine Research Centre at Banaras Hindu University and a yoga teacher, thinks that the *Mānas* gives physical, spiritual, emotional, and social help. As a four-year-old child, he listened to the *Mānas* from his father and recited it before meals. His firm belief is that when the whole world is in despair, the *Mānas* can bring hope and make us all filled with hope. He opined that going away from Dharma values can bring disaster. The values of respecting the elders and compassion for the poor are learned through deep immersion into the *Mānas*. For him, the *Mānas* characters are not lofty ideas but are imitable to shape society. By regular participation in the *kathās* and *līlās*, he has appropriated the teachings of the *Mānas*.

Raghavendra and Akshay have grown up in Hindu religious life and seek a more profound encounter with the divine through the *Mānas*. Their commitment to daily rituals and recitation is commendable. As an outsider of their faith traditions, I cannot grasp their commitment rationally to rituals and the *Mānas* tradition. So much devotion is incredible. I cannot deny that the *Mānas* text has shaped them to be good, committed Hindus and they remain inspiration for my religious life. I believe in the power of simple friendships as being the foundation of encountering other religions. That is what has happened with Raghavendra and Akshay. As a Christian, I make my faith known through friendships. In our discussions, I would ask them about the *Mānas* traditions. They, in turn, wanted to know more about the Christian faith and ritual traditions. I was able to talk about Christ and Christian faith traditions. Saint Augustine has this thought on the mystery of Christian friendship "So it happens today in the same way with those who are outside and are not yet Christians; Christ is made known to them through Christian friends."[1206]

4.5.3. Camille Bulcke (1909-1982)

In this section, I present Camille Bulcke, a Jesuit who has engaged with the *Mānas*. As an outsider to Hindu faith tradition, his approach differs from those mentioned above. When Bulcke's mortal remains were taken to his *karmabhūmi,* Ranchi, for reburial in St. Xavier's college campus on March 15, 2018, the newspapers strategically used headlines punning the event as the '*gharwāpsi*' [1207]of Padma Bhushan, Father Camille Bulcke.[1208] The title '*gharwāpsi*' contained a pun in a state that has tensions about the religious conversions of indigenous peoples. Bulcke, who arrived in India from Belgium in 1935 to work as a Jesuit missionary in the Bengal mission,

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[1206] Saint Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, 15.
[1207] The literal meaning is 'back home.' With the rise of Hindu religious fundamentalism, this term means reconversion to Hinduism from Christianity or Islam. The term was also used by the founder of 'Arya Samāj' Dayanand Sarasvati
[1208] It is the third-highest civilian award in the republic of India given for distinguished service.

became an architect of modern Hindi literature, found spiritual inspiration in Goswami Tulsidas, and became one of the best exponents of *Rāmkathā*. His inspiration and contribution to the *Mānas* are evident as the plaque that is installed on his mortal remains is engraved with the following *doha* from the *Mānas* and not a Biblical quote. The *doha* reads,

> There is no better dharma (religious duty) than benevolence,
> nothing more sinful than malevolence towards others. [1209]

Throughout the past five centuries, Jesuits have contributed immensely to the world's knowledge and understanding of Indian languages, cultures, and religions. With his missionary zeal, Roberto De Nobili did not present Christ as a crucified redeemer but as a *guru,* a teacher with spiritual as well as intellectual authority and excellence.[1210] Constantine Joseph Beschi, an Italian Jesuit known for his contribution to Tamil, is recognized as *Vīramāmunivar* in Tamilnadu, and his statue is erected on the Marina beach in Chennai.[1211] In the long tradition of Jesuit contribution to the languages and cultures of India, Bulcke is the among the most noteworthy Jesuits.[1212] Even today, North Indians remember him affectionately for his contribution to Hindi as a lexicographer and towards *Mānas* with his research on '*Rāmkathā Utpatti aur Vikās*' (the origin and development of *Rāmkathā)*. His contribution to Hindi includes *Rāmkathā, and Tulsidas, English-Hindi Dictionary,* and the most authoritative text, *Pavitra Bible* (Holy Bible).

To honor the contribution of Bulcke, the *Rajya Sabha* TV of the Indian Government produced a documentary on Bulcke in 2017. Remarkably the documentary introduces Bulcke as an Rām devotee (*Rām Bhakt*). However, in his autobiography, Bulcke mentions that Christ, Hindi,

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[1209] *Parhit saris dhaRām nahin bhai*
Par peera sam nahin adhmai.
[1210] See Clooney "Christ as the Divine Guru in the Theology of Roberto de Nobili," 1988.
[1211] This title was given to him by the Tamil Literati, meaning "great sage."
[1212] Leonard Fernando "Jesuits and India," *Oxfordhandbooks.com.*

and Tulsidas constitute the three foundational elements of his dedicated life.[1213] Camille Bulcke as

a 'celebrant of Hindi and Indianness', loved the epic so profoundly, that even if he had to leave

India, he wanted to take the *Mānas* with him.[1214] Bulcke, in his autobiography, recounts his first

encounter with Tulsidas's *Mānas*, with a German translation in Belgium. His fascination for

Tulsidas goes back to his formative years in his native land. The verse from *Ayodhyākānda* of the

Mānas inspired him most.

> He alone is blessed, born on this earth,
> Whose deeds, when heard, bring joy to his father,
> And life's four goals come readily to one
> For whom his parents are dear as breath.[1215]

This verse was for him, "like sweet music, invisible strings tugged at my heart."[1216] In a way, we

can construe that Bulcke was trying to resolve the tension by loving the Hindi of *Mānas* rather

than the *Rām* of *Mānas*. His childhood experience resonates with his life decision to join the Jesuits

at the age of 21, and he sees a similarity between his mother and Sumitra, Lakṣmaṇ's mother.

> In this world, that mother alone is blessed
> whose son is devoted to the Raghu lord,
> Better she was barren, who vainly spawns.[1217]

Through this passage, he alludes to his growing devotion to Christ through his mother. Bulcke's

admiration for Tulsidas has various reasons. His devotion to Tulsidas began with his reading of

the *Mānas* and *Vinayapatrika*. The closeness to the text and the person of Tulsidas is deeply related

to his religious convictions.[1218] As a devotee of Tulsidas, Bulcke recognized Tulsidas as

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[1213] *Rāmkathā and Other Essays*, 134.
[1214] Jaya Prakash Mishra, *Father Kāmil Bulcke Hindu Aur Bhāratīyatā ke Pujārī* (Delhi: Marina Publications, 2020).
[1215] *Dhanya janamu jagatītala tāsū | Pitahi pramodu carita suni jāsū | Chāri padāraṭ karatal takeṃ | Priya pitu mātu prāṇa sam jākeṃ* (RCM, 2. 45. 1).
[1216] Bulcke, *Rāmkathā and Other Essays*, 140.
[1217] RCM, 2.74.1. The verb *bhyāna* refers only to the birthing of animals.
[1218] Bulcke, *Rāmkathā and other Essays* 137.

transcending the barriers of time, country, and religion, and called him a "poet of all humanity."[1219]

His narration of *Rāmāyaṇa* with an admixture of art and idealism, lively language, and *bhakti* that emphasizes complete submission to God's will appealed to Bulcke most. Attracted by Tulsidas's stress on morality and non-bitterness despite suffering in life Bulcke acknowledges that for North Indians, the "*Mānas* is not only the most famous epic poem; it sets the moral standards by which they measure themselves and others."[1220] He saw Tulsidas as a most powerful molder of public opinion who brings close connection to devotion, social duty and simplicity of the devotion. Tulsidas helped Bulcke to go forward in the path of his dedicated life as a Jesuit and religious as he writes,

> The God of Tulsidas is Rāma, and mine is Christ. Nonetheless, I find that there is some similarity in our devotional approach. There is a difference, of course, and one reason for it is that I lack the steadfastness of Tulsidas's *Chātak* (the earnest desire).[1221]

His love for Hindi relates to his life in Belgium. He was an engineering graduate from Louvain University. In his native country, Belgium, there was a struggle between French and Flemish speakers. French dominated in all spheres of life and was recognized as an elitist language. Having Flemish as his mother tongue, Bulcke took an active part in the suppression of French in the public and social life of the northern part of Belgium. When he arrived in India, he saw similarities in linguistic domination. In British India, English dominated other Indian languages, and the ability to converse or study in English was recognized as higher than the regional languages. In such a context, he tried to remove the inferiority complex of Hindi speakers through

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[1219] *Ibid.,*141.
[1220] Ibid., 143.
[1221]*Chātak* is a bird in Indian poetry symbolizing longing. The bird is believed to drink water only when it rains. So, the bird awaits the rain. The birds' longing metaphorically alludes to longings in the love poetry and spiritual writings. Ibid*.,* 139.

the study of Hindi and *Rām Kathā*. In this act, he rendered an excellent service to India and Indians.[1222]

In his scholarly approach to language, Bulcke sees a mutual relation between faith and learning and does not see any opposition between the two. However, his involvement with religious tradition was more from the perspective of an academician and linguist. He draws inspiration, peace, and joy from dialoguing with the other traditions. Bulcke's contribution to the *Mānas* is tremendous, however, he viewed *Rāmkathā* more from a historical and literary perspective than a religious perspective and divided *Rāmkathā* into three phases. He sees progression in the divinization of *Rām* in various phases. According to him, in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇas Rām is an ideal man in the *Kṣatriya* clan to be a *Maryāda Puruṣottama*. In the third century, BCE Rām is recognized as an avatar of Viṣṇu and in the later years Rām is not only is the *avatar* of Viṣṇus, but also as revered as attributes less (*nirguṇa*) and ultimate reality (*Para Brahma*). For Bulcke, Tulsidas's *Mānas* falls in the third phase. His approach to the text did not focus on the spiritual and religious dimensions of the text and how it shapes Hindu religiosity. His contribution has enabled interreligious dialogue. However, there seem to be fewer theological engagements on encountering other religious traditions from ritual and faith perspectives. Therefore, most Hindus recognize him as a scholar of Hindi and the *Mānas* than as a theologian.

4.6. Personal Journey with the *Mānas*

Catherine Cornille, explaining the process of learning in Comparative Theology, mentions that "theological learning may occur through various means of solitary reading of texts, study with a teacher, ritual participation, religious practice, or a combination of these."[1223] One of the

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[1222] Now however, Hindi is taking the position once occupied by English in its superiority and the suppression of other languages, called as Hindi Imperialism.

[1223] Cornille, *Meaning, and Method in Comparative Theology*, 115.

characteristic features of New Comparative Theology, in addition to those listed above, is its inclusion of research from a confessional nature. My journey with the *Mānas* text, unlike that of Bulcke, had a combination of all these elements, especially in my ritual practices and confessional identity. As a research student who has a cultural identity of being Indian, and a religious identity of being a Catholic, a Jesuit, and a priest, I was able to have a rich comparative theological encounter with the *Mānas* tradition while living in Varanasi for six months. A unique challenge for my research during this time was the unforeseen COVID 19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns. But I discovered new possibilities within this challenge to engage the religious traditions of that place, which I have narrated in the introduction.

My engagement with the *Mānas* tradition, using the New Comparative Theological approach, is different from Hindus like Morari and Raghavendra and Jesuit researchers like Camille Bulcke. Hindu scholars do not have a comparative theological encounter because the tradition is their own, whereas researchers like Buckle focus more exclusively on literary or linguistic aspects of Hindu religious texts. My focus seeks to study and engage with the *Mānas* tradition, including its religious and ritual expressions that are alive today, while at the same time comparing these rituals and religious traditions with my own faith, which is distinct from that which I encountered and learned for my home tradition. My encounter seeks to draw out what each distinct tradition can learn from the other and how it can be enriched by the other without blurring the real differences between separate and distinct religious faith traditions.

The particular purpose of my travel from Boston to Varanasi was to facilitate the study and enhance personal encounters with the significant religious and ritual practices of the *Mānas*. Recognizing that my experiences and encounters during the study of the *Mānas* text are too numerous to recall, in this section I focus on my experiences in reading the *Mānas* text religiously.

I elaborate on the journey with the *Mānas* and expound on my effort to read the text religiously and participate ritually in religious traditions that are not my own. All these sharings will enable the comparative theological project to move into a new direction of encountering other religions in greater depth with new learnings. The spiritual predispositions that ought to ground such an approach are humility and generosity toward the new faith tradition one encounters to avoid pre-conceived judgments or ideas prior to the encounter.

The Comparative Theological method encourages researchers to immerse themselves in the lived experience of the religious tradition through total involvement in 'textual' and 'ritual' aspects of religion because the textual and ritual elements are most often deeply linked. Sacred Texts are stories and expressions of divine experiences that communicate the relationship of God to a community. Engaging the Sacred Texts of other religious traditions has been a demanding undertaking for me in my study of Hinduism because their faith is not my own, and their religious texts are many. My study has included encounters with texts such as *Upaniṣads, Bhagavad Gītā, Mānas*, and *Koran*. I have also taught these texts in various religious centers. The personal study and teaching of these texts have enriched me academically. Although many acknowledge the spiritual and academic benefits of 'reading' and 'engaging' the Sacred Texts of other faith traditions, a challenge remains when religious texts of one faith are read by those who believe in another faith tradition. Answers to questions of 'why do we read?' and 'how do we read?' for non-devotees of the faith of the texts studied remain elusive. Clooney's new method of comparative theology sheds light on these questions.

As a Christian who studies Hindu texts as a non-devotee of Hinduism, I have raised four questions in my comparative theological pursuit (three are not unique to Christianity):

- First, *is it possible for a non-believer of a religious text to read this text with a religious sensibility*?

- Second, *can reading other religious texts lead to a personal transformation when the religion is distinct between reader and text?*

- Third, *will this reading necessarily lead to a conversion to the religious faith of the text that is read, thus causing either a loss of one's former religious identity or the creation of a 'dual/multiple' belonging*?

- Finally, for the Christian, can a religious reading even be possible considering Christ as the fullness of God's manifestation? This last question emerges from the theology of religions.

In this chapter, I respond to the first three questions. Nevertheless, what happens when a text is read religiously by outsiders of a faith tradition requires deeper reflection and analysis. The *Mānas*, through its ritual and performative dimensions, had offered hospitality and provided me a dialogical space among the listeners, devotees, and narrators for a possibility of religious reading.

4.6.1. Religious Reading of the *Mānas*

Reading the sacred text religiously and not only academically is well expounded in the writings of Paul J. Griffiths. In his book *Religious Reading*, he proposes a distinction between 'religious reading' as opposed to the 'consumerist reading' of the academic circle that focuses on extracting what is valuable or exciting while downplaying the religious meaning of a text. In his argument, consumerist reading is indifferent to religion and actively hostile to it because you are only taking what is valuable to you as a reader and not entering the religious tradition itself.[1224] In

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[1224] Paul J. Griffiths, *Religious Reading the Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press 1999), x.

Clooney's viewpoint, the consumerist mining of texts in service of a pre-conceived plan neglects the text's purpose.[1225] For Griffith, religious reading requires and fosters a particular set of attitudes to what is read, implies an epistemology, and a purpose to develop the skills to give a religious account.[1226] In his analysis, religious reading primarily establishes certain relations between the reader and what is read. These relations are attitudinal, cognitive, and moral.[1227] Hence, the capacity to retrieve the riches of the work by reading is essential for religious readers as they treat with reverence what they read and consider the text as an object of overpowering delight and beauty.[1228]

Besides, Griffith points out the essentiality of giving a religious account of the faith in a religious reading of a text. This religious account possesses three distinctive properties: Comprehensiveness, unsurpassibility, and centrality. These properties demand nonnegotiable commitment and deal with the central questions of life.[1229] He also thinks that one can give religious account through learning in a social, linguistic, and institutional context as one can acquire 'knowing how' (skill) and 'knowing that' (information) of a religion. For example, the Christian account includes God as a creator, a guide of human history, and a redeemer of fallen humanity. Our response to God's love depends on our use of freedom. The 'knowing how' skill, in a Christian account, is 'training of conscience', and the tools to inculcate these skills are worship, prayer, and reading the bible.[1230] However, in all these explanations, Griffith does not answer whether a religious reading is possible for a non-believer of a particular tradition. But his

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[1225] Clooney, *The Truth, The Way,* 2008, 8.
[1226] Griffiths, *Religious Reading*, 40.
[1227] Ibid., 41.
[1228] Ibid*.,* 42-43.
[1229] Ibid., 7-11.
[1230] Ibid., 15-18.

distinction and insights will be fruitful for us in this study insofar as how he understands what a religious reading is. I would make a case that a 'religious reading' is possible for an outsider of the faith tradition based on the Comparative Theological method and my personal experiences.

4.6.1.1. Comparative Theology Favoring Religious Reading

Clooney's new comparative theology emphasizes reading. This reading fosters a religious reading because this reading is not a simple practice of picking up a book from the library and reading it. This reading is a disciplined and learned practice as reading is a practice, not a deferral. He opines that the "act of reading" is not merely picking up a text and musing over what it means to me as the comparative theology, rather it

> is a theology that thrives not on its theoretical clarity or comprehensive reach but in the small, practical choices a theologian, in fact, makes regarding what to read, what to compare in which combinations, and what lessons to draw from what she does in this way. There is great breadth in this intentional narrowness; specific choices open possibilities across a broad spectrum of religious realities.[1231]

The distinctive feature of Comparative Theology is its confessional character and its focus on text, ritual, and experience as these engagements "make possible our knowledge of God" from a different perspective.[1232] The confessional feature of Comparative theology "requires readers, not consumers, and our reading comes to fruition in teaching or in writing that enables our listeners to take up the work themselves with spiritual sensitivity."[1233] In this sense, I was reading the *Mānas* text with spiritual sensitivity of both home and other traditions and was not merely focusing on a linguistic and historical perspective. The spiritual sensitivity makes me accountable to the faith community that I belong. In his experience of reading the sacred texts, Clooney points out that he,

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[1231] Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning*, 87.

[1232] Orlando O. Espin, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism*, xv.

[1233] Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning*, 60.

as a Roman Catholic, does not read scripture alone, or privately and his work is "analogous not to 'sola scriptura.' But to 'scriptura in ecclesia.'[1234]

In reading the text religiously from a comparative theological lens, there is no rush to impose our religious values on the theological traditions of the other, and there is ample scope for patiently listening to the others. This process of religious reading is not a process leading to closure and drawing conclusions but leading to transformation. Clooney points out that transformative knowledge is the study's goal, and a good reader will be vulnerable to being transformed in the reading. This transformative dynamic entails an invitation to participation, even if one remains acutely aware of one's outsider status.[1235] If I must claim that I am reading the *Mānas* text religiously, I need to keep reading as reading is a start, but not enough. As one reads more and more with the community, he/she becomes religiously sensitive to the text. The learning process is long and complex, and this learning and transformation may lead to "theology with a difference," a theology that does not claim superiority over others but a theology that deploy encounters and collaborates with others.

4.6.1.2. Immersion Favoring Religious Reading

The immersion into the *Mānas* textual tradition also favored religious reading. The immersion into the religious life of the other over time creates a deep awareness of the sacredness of the other. This immersion is key in Clooney's understanding of Comparative Theology, which is grounded in the practice of immersive reading. The immersion into the religious text through religious reading opens new layers of meaning that are not evident in the historical and exegetical

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[1234] Clooney, "On Some of the Current Challenges to Comparative Theology," 15.
[1235] Ibid., 3.

study.[1236] This immersion also enables one to acknowledge that "the plurality of the scriptures is a fact to be accepted, not a notion to be discussed."[1237] Griffith's religious reading emphasizes the reverence and appreciation of the text's splendor. In the disciplined reading of the *Mānas* text, I learned to grasp the beauty of the *Mānas* text as the text is evocative. I learned enormously about experiential participation and listening to the devotees and traditional interpreters of the text there. Reading with readers in the other tradition entails accountability and learning with deference.[1238] In addition, I was reading the text with a traditional teacher who, in and through reading the text, was transmitting his wisdom on the *Mānas* tradition.

Pierre Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault,* envisions philosophy as a spiritual practice through the process of transmission and reception. The teacher transmits not only the texts but also the proper way of reading. In my experience of being a student (*śiṣya*) of Raghavendra, I was taught how to read the *Mānas* reverently and, in this process, received Hindu wisdom. Clooney suggests that the reading of religious texts as the comparative theological practice is aimed at the transformation of human way of living as we can receive wisdom and grace from other traditions,

> The real edge of comparative theology lies in the transit from academic study and simple faith-both at first narrowly imagined- to a more complex religious and intellectual learning that draws on several traditions, receiving each in its integrity and changing each by reading it in light of the other.[1239]

4.6.1. 3. Memorization Favoring Religious Reading

Memorization of a sacred text affects religious reading. The religious reading emphasizes the memorization of text, community participation, and functioning within the religious authority.

[1236] Cornille, *Meaning, and Method in Comparative Theology*, 84.
[1237] Stanley Samartha, "the Cross and the Rainbow," 78.
[1238] Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 64.
[1239] Ibid., 59.

In Griffiths' perspective, the religious readers will have a large body of works at the command of memory, placing what is read in the treasure chest of memory.[1240] He applauds the pre-modern era's tradition of memorization that developed a mnemonic technique consisting of three features namely, imaginative creation of storage system; division of stored matter to be memorized into small units, and repetitive reading.[1241]

Hindus and Buddhists prioritize the oral over the written and participate in the sacred word "not through understanding it, but through reciting and hearing it."[1242] *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* insists that hearing (*śravaṇa*) must be followed by thinking about what is heard (*manana*).[1243] The Sufi tradition also prioritizes the oral over the written. To be a religious reader of the text, in Comparative Theology one "is not to be literate in a narrow sense and to the use of particular tools and techniques of composition and storage but also to focus on the "art of memory."[1244] The prevalence of print and electronic technologies is less hospitable to religious reading as it shows the consumerist attitude by half-skimming of work and negating the vocalization process through slow reading.[1245] In my experience of reciting *Mānas* text, many individuals knew at least some texts by memory.[1246] Reciters believe that to "know" the text is to make it *Kaṇṭastha* (situating in the throat) which means memory. This method becomes counter cultural in a context wherein the digital age invalidates the 'memorizing' trend.

[1240]Griffiths, *Religious Reading*, 46.

[1241] Ibid., 48.

[1242] Stanley Samartha, "The Cross and the Rainbow," 78.

[1243] Br.Up. 2.4.5.

[1244] Griffiths, *Religious Reading, 39.*

[1245] Ibid., 59.

[1246] I was surprised when I met Rituraj a Vyās who sings most of the Mānas text without referring to the book but his memory during the celebration of Vasant Panchami. In his interview, he told me that it is the grace of Hanumān that enables him to sing the text in memory.

In my effort to learn *Hanumān Chalisa*, and a few *chaupai,* from the *Mānas* and to sing them devotionally, I created a sense of beauty and belonging to the *Mānas* tradition for me as a Christian. Lutgendorf points out that the chanting and singing of a text resonate with performers' and listeners' emotionality and communicate beyond academic textual meaning. Because in singing, there is participation and engagement of body and mind that is different from observing, reading, analyzing, and translating. My experience of memorizing *Chalis*a, recitation daily in the temple, and participation in the *Saṇkaṭ Mochan Mandir* events favored, to some extent, this religious reading.

4.6.1.4. Learnings from the Religious Reading

The notion of 'religious reading' broadens the concept of 'Scripture.' A text such as the *Mānas* in North India, "in the absence of printing and despite the fact of overwhelming illiteracy is being appropriated and used by people most of whom could neither read nor write." and becomes an apt text for religious reading in the method of Comparative Theology.[1247] Because in the *Mānas* there is orality, literacy, and memorization.[1248] Danuta Stasik comprehends *Mānas* as an outstanding example of a literate culture with a high oral residue.[1249] Tulsidas poem *Mānas* having both written and performative dimensions (memory, singing, enacting) challenges us to reexamine the concept of "Scripture." Lutgendorf's seminal study of the performing traditions of the *Mānas*[1250]

[1247] Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 9.
[1248] See Walter J Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London/New York: Routledge. 2012), 3rd ed.
[1249] See Stasik, *The Infinite Story* 2009); Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*, pp. 110–122, and William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion (*Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1993), 67–78.
[1250] See Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*; idem., "The View from the Ghats: Traditional Exegesis of a Hindu Epic," *Journal of Asian Studies* 1989, 48 (1989):272–288; Linda Hess, "Staring at F*ram*es Till They Turn into Loops: An Excursion through Some Worlds of Tulsidas" *in Living Banaras: Hindu Religion in Cultural Context,* ed. Bradley R. Hertel and Cynthia Ann Humes (Manohar, Delhi, 1998), 73–102; Richard Bauman, *Classic Verbal Art as Performance* (Waveland Press, Prospect Heights Ill. 1977).

attempts to explore the social impact of oral residues in a chirographic, i.e., writing, culture.[1251] The understanding of literary works as composed, displayed, stored, and redisplayed without the use of writing poses a challenge to the pure academician to see writing as one of the modes of storage and not the only one but to acknowledge other aural traditions. The text takes a life of its own that is shaped by participation and context. In India, along with ancient writings, much knowledge was stored in the heads of Brahmins and monks.[1252]

In the *Mānas* recitation, to some extent, I established a relationship with the text and its readers and read the text religiously. I am not a traditional believer with the right lineage and the prerequisite initiation.[1253] However, the *Mānas* as a text is expressive and a product of God Rām by Tulsidas. Hence, the text of *Mānas* did not deliver to me just information on Hinduism but communicated energy and graciousness that can transform my understanding of the divine. The reading was not a scientific activity that produced outputs and definite conclusions. But through this humble practice of reading, I was drawn into the world of *Mānas*, and I can say that "Readers who are willing to take this risk become competent to read text religiously and upon receiving the riches of the great texts, they also become able to speak, act, and write with spiritual insight and power."[1254]

[1251] Walter J Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 2 ff...

[1252] The earliest writings in India were found to be in the 3rd century BC (the edicts of Emperor Ashoka). Emphasizing 'oral' traditions, Griffiths views that literary works were composed, stored very largely not exclusively in the heads of Brahmins and Buddhists but were displayed with their mouths as the memory and mouth remained the essential tools for the storage and display of literary works. Griffiths, *Religious Reading,* 32-38.

[1253] Right linage refers to the belonging to a particular family ancestry or to a tradition. Continuing the family lineage and its name is crucial in Hinduism because the memories and integrity of the ancestors are kept alive through these. The name (specifically surname) of a family is often synonymous with integrity and respect.
Initiation refers to the Sanskrit term *dīkṣā*. It is a rite performed prior to the Vedic sacrifice to consecrate its patron. In the modern Hinduism the initiation refers to the rite conducted by a Guru to initiate his disciples into ones' tradition (*sampradāya*).

[1254] Clooney, *Comparative Theology : Deep Learning*, 58-9.

Reading the text of *Mānas* influenced me spiritually to a significant level. Reading the text alone, with the academic group, and with the religious reciters changed the way I think about Hinduism. The *Mānas* has enabled me to reinterpret Hindu faith in a positive and meaningful way and rectify overgeneralizations. These experiences also enabled me to have a different starting point for the theological enterprises in engaging other religious traditions and Comparative Theology. The *Mānas* text that I read had Rām, Hanumān, Sitā, and other beloved deities of Hinduism. However, I do not venerate them, neither do the Hindus expect me to do so as they are aware that I belong to the Christian tradition. In this religious reading, I acknowledge them as divine beings. The challenge remains: can anyone acknowledge them as divine without expressing some degree of veneration?

4.7. The *Mānas* and Ritual Participation

Comparative Theology incorporates both texts and ritual practices in doing theology. There have been a few works dealing with non-textual elements of religions; Albertus Bagus Laksanas work on pilgrimage and Michael Barnes's practical theology are a few examples. In doing Comparative Theology, Clooney emphasizes both textual and ritual dimensions as he sees a connection between the texts and rituals. For instance, he writes that Christian liturgists are concerned with practice, but they also spend much time with liturgical texts. He also points out that some texts are ritually oriented themselves, opening into practice.[1255] The *Mānas* is a ritually oriented text, and ritual participation was possible for me through the *Mānas* text. Participation in the religious life of the other plays a vital role in stimulating and grounding the imagination, and

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[1255] Clooney, *Thinking Ritually, Rediscovering the Purva Mimāmsa of Jaimini* (BRILL,1990).

it sharpens, deepens, and enhances theological understanding. In moving beyond textual Moyaert asks a pointed question,

> whether one can move beyond the textual focus of Comparative Theology and if a liturgical turn in comparative theology is possible. What would such a liturgical turn entail, and how might a crossing over into a foreign 'liturgical' tradition and participation in foreign ritual practices result in novel theological insights.[1256]

Tulsidas expects the *Mānas* to be ritually used to grow in the devotion to Rām. As a research student and seeker, I participated in various text rituals, and in this manner, I was taking a liturgical turn in Comparative Theology. Therefore, I narrate here the experiences connected with the recitation of the text and the joys and ambiguities of being part of such rituals and raise questions on participation in the 'foreign ritual' practices for novel theological insights.

4.7.1. Personal Participation in the *Mānas* Rituals

The notion of "recitation" (*pāṭh*) of a sacred text for personal worship is called the "*Pujā Pāth*." For this purpose, the book of *Mānas* is divided into various segments. As mentioned earlier, the recitation typically begins on an auspicious occasion. For example, on the bright half of *Margaśira* (November-December) - the traditional wedding anniversary of Rām and Sitā- many begin the recitation. I had the joy of reciting *Mānas* daily with Raghavendra, a *Vyās* at Hanumān Mandir in Tulsidas Ghāt. Raghavendra has been reciting the *Mānas* as his *pujā pāth* for the last twelve years. The recitation typically began after 8:30 a.m. after duly engaging in a few rituals of bathing, singing *bhajans*, applying *tilak*, and visiting a few temples and deities. On some occasions, the recitation was held earlier. There was no fixed number of stanzas to complete. However, the number of stanzas was not to be less than ten to fifteen.

[1256] Moyaert, *Interreligious Relations and the Negotiations of Ritual Boundaries*, 25.

The recitation of *Mānas* is a religious event, so the reciters need to perform certain rituals that help attain the *'phalaśruti,'* attached to the recitation given in the text itself.[1257] Before beginning the recitation, bathing is an essential rite to be performed, and most reciters bathed regularly in Gaṅgā. Although they desired that I bathe in the Gaṅgā for purification, they recognized that I had a suitable purificatory rite in offering daily mass and prayers as a Catholic priest. They theologized Christian customs and allowed me to use them as a background to participate in their ritual prayer. However, I occasionally bathed in the Gaṅgā as a reciprocation of their hospitality, not because I needed to be purified. In this whole process, I personally kept reflecting on how to participate in the rituals with respect and openness, without, at the same time, worshipping their gods, which I felt would compromise my identity in Christ. In the latter part of the chapter, I explain in detail the challenges of 'ritual participation.'

I had the custom of joining Raghavendra and other devotees after the bathing to sing a few *mantras* connected to Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava tradition. At the end of the recitation, the *Pundit* at the local worship place (*panda*) would apply *tripundr* on my forehead. I would often ask, should I apply the *tripundr* and would this count as worship of a god I do not recognize? The simple explanation they gave me was that as long as I did not recite *mantras* connected to their god, there is no issue. It is part of a ritual and symbol of beauty and not worship. They would add humorously Hanumān likes to see you beautiful (*sundar*) with *tilak* on your forehead. *Tilak* on the forehead within the *bhakti* tradition is auspicious and ornamental. Historically, in his effort of inculturation, De Nobili made a distinction between culture and religions and removed the religious significance of the symbols. In his life, he dressed as a Brahmin with sacred thread and lock of hair (*shikha*).

[1257] Every recitation is assured of certain benefits. For example, it is written those who reverently listen and then sing of the joys of the sacred thread and nuptial rites will gain abiding joy by the grace of Vaidehi and Rām (RCM, 2.360. 5).

The rituals also included going around a few temples, especially to the four Hanuman Mandir's built by Tulsidas for the protection of *Mānas* text from stealing. After reaching the Hanumān Mandir, there followed the offering of Gangā water (*jal*) to the deities and receiving *prasād* and sitting on a mat. The reciters' bag usually contains vermillion powder, a basket of flowers, powdered rice to offer for ants and birds, and a container to carry Ganga water. After the ceremonial worship, the reciters would unwrap the *Mānas* with great reverence and place it on the sacred books' wooden stool. The recitation always begins with the invocation of Ganesh to remove obstacles and the singing of *Hanumān Chalisa* as he is the ultimate devotee (*parama bhakt*) of Rām. I felt at home' in Hanuman Mandir. I recognized and acknowledged the divine presence in the temple area as the temple was surrounded by the gods and devotees (Rām and Hanuman *bhaktas*). Customarily before the recitation of the *Mānas* we sang *Hanumān Chalisa*. Since I had memorized a few stanzas of this evocative song, I would reverently remain in folded hands as a sign of reverence to the divine around. A few stanzas that I quote here are inspirational.

> All comforts of the world lie at your feet,
> The devotees enjoy all divine pleasures
> and feel fearless under your benign protection.
> You alone are befitted to carry your own splendid valour.
> All the three worlds (entire universe) tremor at your thunderous call.
> All the ghosts, demons, and evil forces keep away,
> With the sheer mention of your great name,
> All diseases, pain and suffering disappear,
> On regularly reciting Shri Hanumān's holy name.
> Those who remember Shri Hanumān,
> in thought, words and deeds
> with Sincerity and Faith, are rescued from all crises in life.

The experience of standing before the deity of Hanumān and looking keenly at the Sacrosanctum (*garbhagṛha*) of the temple I had religious experiences. On a few occasions, they uttered that I am a devotee of Hanumān and Hanumān's grace has brought me here. These experiences, as Clooney puts them,

> Seeing beyond the limits of predictable and permissible, standing at the point where we begin understanding things we cannot easily put back into words. This is an awkward situation, but a good one… It is also about turning such experiences into words, even imperfect and incomplete words, by which others can share the vision.[1258]

Participation in these rituals enabled me to build relations between the reader and what is read. My presence in the Tulsi *ghāt* was appreciated. However, there was personal concern over the witness that I am giving as an ordained minister of the church. Hindu devotees were open to my participation and some devotees encouraged me to study the text well and become a good *Vyās* in the *Mānas* tradition (*parampara*). They mistook my attire in a traditional Banaras *Pundit (dhoti, kurta)* as being the attire of a person belonging to their tradition. Often, the *Pundits* commented that "our roots are the same, later in history, your ancestors took a deviation from the *Sanāthan Dharma*. We appreciate that you are with us studying our religious text intensely." There was an effort both from them and me to encounter each other from the faith of our 'ancestors.' In any case, how I dressed and presented myself, with the *tilak* on the forehead, had meaning for them, whatever theological reservations I held in mind. I was not sure whether they expected me to 'return' to the *Sanāthan Dharm*a. Sometimes when my identity was revealed, and I was in traditional attire a few were surprised. Most often, the queries on Christianity were based on prejudices and misunderstandings. Some *Pundits* were angry with the motives for Christian conversions and their foreign character - mainly eating and dressing habits.

I would respond by saying, "My faith is Christian, but culturally, I am Indian, and that my parents dressed in traditional Indian dress of dhoti and saree, and taught us Indian customs. We speak Indian languages and follow the cultural ethos of India. Our faith traditions and liturgical traditions in the Catholic Church seem Western. However, despite the colonization of Indian

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[1258] Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning,* 89-90.

Christians, we follow local customs and traditions to solemnize 'passages of life.' The notion of calling us 'foreigners' is a mistaken identity." These responses, at times, were received with greater openness and, on some occasions, were challenged. I responded in this way recognizing culture as a matrix of religions and that Indian Christians find their cultural expression of Christianity to be different from the West. One *Pundit* categorically denied any meeting point between Christianity and Hinduism as Christianity lacks aesthetics (*saundarya*). The *Pundit* had a point as he failed to see the co-existence of beauty and violent bleeding in the crucified Jesus. In his perspective, all Indians are Hindus, and a Christian must be a 'foreigner.' A few Hindus knew the Jesuit Camille Bulcke and his contributions to Hindi and the *Mānas*. His academic contribution was much appreciated, and a few Hindus thought that I am only into academic research like other Christian academic scholars. Because of my openness and easy-going manner in the temple and in their ritual traditions, a few thought that I was deeply interested in their faith practices. I tried to make myself understood by Hindus, in explaining about Christian faith and ritual traditions, by speaking their language and using their metaphors. I had the advantage of being an Indian and being knowledgeable about their traditions and languages. I also had the disadvantage of being an Indian Christian because, for some of them, I was a sheep who had 'strayed' from the *Sanāthan dharma.*

4.7.2. Experience of the Divine Outside the Confessional 'Sacred Space'

The major experience of the divine happened during the recitation of the *Mānas* in the *Saṅkaṭ Mochan Mandir* during the *Navāh* celebrations, a sacred space and time outside the Christian faith. This participation was a great privilege and pushed me to participate with a greater zeal with other faith traditions. During the *Navāh Pārāyaṇ* celebration in the *Saṅkaṭ Mochan Mandir*, when the singing and celebration of Rām and Sītā wedding was in progress, the people gathered around me were in great joy and ecstasy. There was involvement of everyone in singing

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and there was joy around. At that moment, I too was moved with deep joy and inner serenity. The question that kept ringing in my mind was this: "Am I having a divine experience in *Saṅkaṭ Mochan Mandir* among the devotees of Rām and Hanumān?" There was an inner struggle and resistance to acknowledge the experience as it happened outside my faith tradition's liturgical space and time. As a Jesuit, I believe that nothing is profane, and one can find God in all things. A key question in my thesis for later reflections and analysis could be this: Does the religious experience go beyond one's created sacred space and time? How do I interpret such experiences? I had joyous experiences, and there is no value in denying that it happened in the *Mānas* context.

Another experience occurred on the last day of my visit to *Tulsi Ghāt*. To bid farewell and express my gratitude for all the goodness of *Pundit*s and all those associated with this temple, I carried fruits, *Tulsi* plants to offer as a gift. After I reached the *Ghāt*, Raghavendra, my *guru*, requested that I offer six bananas to Hanuman; in these words, "the grace of Hanumān, brought you here, and kept you safe during this pandemic and enabled you to do your research well." Although I was uncomfortable, to be hospitable and polite, I brought bananas and gave them to the *pujār*i of the temple with some *dakśiṇa* (money). After receiving the offerings, the temple priest proceeded with the ringing of bells and offered food (*bhog*). After that *pujāri* gave back a specific portion with *Tulsi* leaves on it to carry them back. As a customary practice, I shared that *prasād* with the devotees around. This day also was auspicious, the beginning of *Chāturmāsya*.[1259] Being an auspicious day, there were many in the temple. This act of mine within the Catholic tradition could be labeled as 'worshipping of other gods.' How do I acknowledge the divinity and graciousness of Hindu Gods? God's graciousness could be available beyond ones' faith. As a

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[1259] *Chaturmāsya* is a tradition of silence and non-travel observed by Hindu monks during the monsoon season. During this time, the gurus engage in narrations of Kathā in the monasteries and temple premises.

Christian, I need to interpret them from the 'Christ' experience. How do I respond to these experiences? Can I bow before the Hanuman, or am I right in applying *tilak o*n my forehead? Am I being given grace by Rām, as most Hindus believed that anyone who comes to Rām, or Hanuman's feet is not unaided? Is grace mediated with the unique figures of "Rām-Hanuman"? All these questions puzzled me. In these participations, I did learn the importance of keeping my identity as Christian intact; I was not trying to be simply a pluralist.

The opening sentence of the letter to the Hebrews says that God has spoken to our ancestors and speaks to us in many partial and different ways (Heb. 1:1) The sentence reveals to us diverse ways of divine communication to the human family. At times, I felt that God calls me to listen to his voice as it is echoed in faithful beliefs and practices other than my own religious tradition. The encounter demanded an effort towards spiritual openness and convergence. Ignatian spirituality includes "finding God in all things," should I, then, create a boundary for the experience of God? Everything is sacred, we say, not profane. *Why can there NOT be a TRUE experience of God in Saṇkaṭ Mochan Mandir?* What is experienced cannot be penned down on a page as these religious experiences are intense. The shared experiences of praying together with Hindus was transformative. Hence, a pluricultural and pluri-religious world of the present time requires a "qualitative leap" to enjoy positive and open mutual relations characterized by dialogue and collaboration between peoples, cultures, and world religions.[1260] At one level, there is openness to encounter other religious traditions. In contrary to openness, I found that few priests and nuns in Varanasi wish and pray that there may be many Blessed Sacraments installed on the *ghāts* of Gangā

[1260] Jacques Dupuis "Christianity and Other Religions: From Confrontation to Encounter," *The Tablet*, 20, October 27th and November 3rd, 2001.

and the river Ganga be turned into river Jordan for Baptism. A few Charismatic Christians would refuse to accept any divinity or graciousness to Hindu deities.

4.7.1. Analysis of the Ritual Participation

4.7.3.1. Being at Home with the Virtue of Empathy

In participating in the various rituals of the *Mānas* traditions, the first question I raised was this: "A*m I at home in all these participations?"* Yes, I was with an empathetic understanding. Being at home removes all prejudices and opens new ways to encounter the religiously other. Basavanna, the 12th-century *bhakti* saint in Karnataka and the founder of the *Lingāyat* movement, in his sayings (*vachanas*) writes, "is there a householder residing in the house, grass has grown in the threshold?" Indeed, much grass in the form of misunderstandings, misconceptions, overgeneralizations about other faiths has grown on the Christian threshold. Participation in ritual traditions removes the grass grown on the threshold and enables the growth in the virtue of empathy. Empathy enables one to be "at home" with other faith traditions. Cornille writes,

> Empathy not only offers a more comprehensive understanding of the other religion but also plays an important role in negotiating the truth and relevance of the other tradition- or at least of particular teachings and practices-for one's own religious life.[1261]

John Dunne explicates the virtue of empathy with the notion of "passing over." He views passing over as shifting of standpoints, a going over to the standpoint of another culture, another way of life, another religion.[1262] Through the value of empathy, I was trying to understand the meaning of beliefs and practices of the *Mānas* tradition and was attempting to identify with the experiential life of the other.

[1261] Cornille, *The im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 141.
[1262] John Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), ix.

4.7.3.2. Offer of Hospitality by the Other

Being at home raises the question of *how do I participate ritually in the faith traditions of others?* Ritual participation in marriages, funerary rites in mixed-religious families, or committed interfaith pedagogies is becoming common. Historically, Christians' adoption of and participation in Hindu and Buddhist meditative practices has been theologically engaged.[1263] Prayer methods, meditation techniques have become part of Indian religious life. In addition, some participate in other ritual traditions as an expression of their ongoing personal spiritual journey. For instance, Christians practice *yoga* and Zen. Finally, some participate in other rituals to fulfill a spiritual lacuna of their own.[1264] Others do this as an expression and enhancement of a religious experience.[1265] However, participating ritually has remained a challenge as one can be scandalous to the faith community.

Every religious ritual is intrinsically tied to a particular religious worldview. Is it not possible to enter the sacred space and rituals of the religious other? Different communities have different boundaries, and ranges of flexibility vary within those boundaries. I am not speaking about the "flexible believers" or those who have "fluid affiliations," but those with 'confessional' identities. For the monotheistic religions, belief and ritual are closely intertwined; the question of what we can do together depends at least to a certain extent on doctrinal questions or on exclusivist feelings ad convictions even before doctrine. Ritual as identity marker is interiorized and

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[1263] See John Thatamanil, "Eucharist Upstairs, Yoga Downstairs: On Multiple Religious Participation," in *Many Yet One?* Ed. P. Jesudason, R. Raj Kumar, and J. Prabhakar Dayam (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2016), 5-22; Mark Heim, "On Doing as others Do: Theological Perspectives on Multiple Religious Practice," in *Many Yet one?* 27-44.

[1264] Cornille, C. (2013), "Multiple Religious Belonging and Interreligious Dialogue," in *Understanding Inter-Religious Relations*, ed. D. Cheetham, D. Pratt, and D. Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 326.

[1265] Amalorpavadass, D. S. (1988), "Sharing Worship, Its Relevance in a Multi-Religious Society in an Inter-Faith Sharing of Life," in *Sharing Worship: Communicatio in Sacris*, ed. P. Puthanangady SDB (Bangalore: National Biblical Catechetical & Liturgical Centre),55-6.

incorporated and have transformative effects. The transformative power of the ritual makes even those who engage deeply in interreligious dialogue refrain from ritually crossing over.[1266] Because, for the believers, confessional perfectionists, the power of the ritual is held in the belief that "liturgy is the locus where belief is enacted, formed and enhanced."[1267]

Different communities have different boundaries and ranges of flexibility within those boundaries. Therefore, remaining very sensitive to respecting the boundaries of given religious traditions in an interfaith context is essential.[1268] According to comparative theologian Cornille,

> performance of ritual gestures without corresponding convictions may be experienced as disrespectful, or as trespassing of proper religious boundaries, and as lacking an essential ingredient for proper understanding: personal belief. [1269]

To cross boundaries without offending the faith traditions of others, involves participating in observances and learning the practices of other religious traditions. As Cornille says further, so is sharing their convictions to some extent. For example, bowing, making prostrations, waving of lights before Rām, Hanumān is an act of devotion, and it is an act of acknowledging their 'divineness' and 'graciousness.' Hindus bow before the statue of Jesus and Mary and other saints without any hesitation as they duly recognize the divinity in Jesus. Nevertheless, for a Christian doing such acts before the Hindu gods and goddesses is a shocking act. Hinduism always offers hospitality to the people of other faiths to participate in their ritual traditions in its accommodative

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[1266] Marianne Moyaert, "Inappropriate Behavior? On the Ritual Core of Religion and its Challenges to Interreligious Hospitality," *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 27, no.2 (2014): 222-42.

[1267] The word "liturgy" is used herein a broad sense to denote the symbolic system as well as the rites, rituals, and gestures, and the structure, shape, and forms of worship that each religious community has evolved in the course of translating its faith into a sustained ritual practice, especially in community. See: W. Ariarajah, *Not Without My Neighbour: Issues in Interfaith Relations* (Geneva: WCC, 1999); A. Chupungco, *What, Then, Is Liturgy? Musings and Memoir* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010).

[1268] Maria Reis Habito, "Bowing Before Buddha and Allah? Reflections on Crossing Over Ritual Boundaries," in *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue Boundaries, Transgressions and Innovations* ed. Marianne Moyaert and Joris Geldhof (London/New Delhi/ New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 34.

[1269] Cornille, *the Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 155-6.

nature. Hospitality is one specific way of opening ourselves and encountering others.[1270] The *pujāris* and the *pundit*s were very hospitable and encouraged me to participate in their worship related to the *Mānas* without many restrictions. It was an invitation to the inner circle' of their life. Anantanand Rambachan acknowledges the restrictions in the famous Hindu temples such as Puri Jagannatha and Tirumala temple at Tirupati. Nevertheless, he points out that most Hindu temples are generous in offering hospitality to non-Hindus. He writes,

> the Hindu temple priest feels a deep obligation to include the non-Hindus visitor in his ritual routine. Since he is God's agent and God's hospitality, and blessings are available to all who come to the temple. The choice is not on the part of the priest; it is with the visitor who must decide to accept or decline. [1271]

The experiences of hospitality nurtured within me the value of "radical hospitality" and to have, as Reinhold Bernhardt points out, "mutual hermeneutical inclusivism" in encountering other traditions, which is an expression of epistemological realism, rather than theological superiority."[1272] The challenge came from the home tradition to accept the hospitality. I participated without being a scandal to the Catholic faith. In these participations, I tried to overcome "theological superiority" as I had the agenda to learn for my home tradition and see Christ differently, worship him differently and anew, and these were not moments to postulate progress from other religions to Christianity as a better religion in its text and ritual traditions.[1273]

4.7.3.3. Accepting the Hospitality with Humility

In accepting the hospitality, my initial doubts and resistance melted away, giving me spiritual joy that I felt deep within. Crossing boundaries is a deeply personal and transformative

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[1270] *Fratelli Tutti,* no. 90.

[1271] Rambachan, "Offering and Receiving Hospitality: The Meaning of Ritual Participation in the Hindu Temple," In *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue Boundaries, Transgressions and Innovations* ed. Marianne Moyaert and Joris Geldhof (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 132.

[1272] Reinhold Berhardt, "Comparative Theology: Between theology and Religious Studies," *Religions* 3 (2012): 971.

[1273] Clooney, "On Some of the Current Challenges to Comparative Theology," 1.

experience. In his book, *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden*, Yossi Klein Halevi describes his experience of joining Sufi prayer and dance. He writes his hesitation "We had come to a place where we did not belong. Maybe the premise of my journey was flawed. What was the point of imposing myself on a faith that wanted to be left alone?" [1274] However, later he joined without hesitation and comments that "after all these years of lonely search for peace with Islam, he [was] finally embraced by Muslim prayer."[1275] I echo similar sentiments without abandoning the Catholic roots; the ritual participation enhanced the vastness of the experience of the Lord. Epistemological humility acknowledges God's experience beyond one's religious structure. "God is not the mystery we comprehend, but the mystery which comprehends us (Karl Rahner)?" Crossing boundaries is possible only with the "openness" and courage" of an individual.

Not all the rituals are religious. Some rituals are emptied of distinct religious content. Nevertheless, they are acceptable, and enacting them is an act of receiving hospitality. Most Hindu rituals invite non-adherents of the Hindu faith to participate, but there is always a deep fear of accepting the invitation among the Christians. Marianne Moyaert, based on the context, the nature of rituals, and religious communities, distinguishes two types of ritual participation as 'outer facing' and 'inner facing.'[1276] Outer facing as responsive is typically political initiatives by the religious leaders to establish peace and non-violence. For instance, the World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi was initiated by Pope John Paul II in 1986. The prayer was not a moment of concession to relativism. However, it was an invitation to follow his or her upright conscience to seek and obey the truth. In the inner facing, there is a paradigm of extending and receiving hospitality. In offering

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[1274] Yossi Klein Halevi, *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden: A Jew's Search for God with Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2002), 102.
[1275] Ibid., 305.
[1276] Marianne Moyaert, *Ritual Participation, and Interreligious Dialogue*, *Boundaries, Transgressions, and Innovations* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

interreligious hospitality to the "other" to participate in the worship, there is an "intentionality" to transcend confessional barriers. However, it is challenging for both the guest and the host to remain loyal to their faith traditions and be open to other religious ritual traditions. In a fragile hermeneutical and theological space, ritual sharing has the risk of misunderstanding and failure. Accepting the ritual hospitality, Moyaert points out, "may penetrate deeper than any other form of interreligious dialogue. Ritual sharing holds the promise of gaining access to the beating heart of another religion; it may touch people at a deep emotional level.[1277]

I agree with Moyaert that balanced ritual sharing is essential in interreligious encounters because the interreligious encounters that do not include the ritual dimension of religious life may have a limited scope.[1278] Rituals are closely connected to the concrete symbols, narratives, and devotional practices of faith. They are the heartbeat of a tradition. Thus, ritual traditions are enfleshed, their truth embodied.[1279] The embodied and performative elements of religion give a new outlook on religion, and we can learn something more from ritual participation that we cannot learn from a discursive interreligious exchange. Ritual participation is indeed a specific and basic form of interreligious encounter and involves risk. However, the risk is worth it because the participation expresses solidarity with another religious community. Comparative Theologian Bagus Laksana, who has lots of direct experience identifies the evocative and powerful nature of ritual, asserts that inter-riting enables him to enter into the sensory world of the religious other: "For the sensory experience of being near the other has the power to make us not only open but

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[1277] Ibid., 3.
[1278] Maraldo, "A Call for an Alternative Notion of Understanding in Interreligious Hermeneutics," 106
[1279] Emma O'Donnell, "Embodying Tradition: Liturgical Performance as a Site for Interreligious Learning," *Cross Currents*, 62, no.3 (September 2012): 371–80.

also vulnerable to their world, not primarily at the level of religious concepts, but rather at the deeper affective, emotional and experiential level. "[1280]

In participating in the rituals, I was 'learning' the other faith traditions deeply. Inter-religious learning is not an act of theological colonialism, a step towards mastery over the other, but a commitment to stay with the other, even in the confusion and misunderstanding.[1281] As an Indian, I felt in these participations, theology and spirituality have to work together.[1282] Because each school of faith has its contributions to make and not look for a final word that can tie up all the loose ends, I realized with the conversation, collaboration, and participation connected to the *Mānas* tradition that " learning about the other is learning more about oneself as it involves double learning."[1283] Ultimately how do I learn from others? Firstly, consider religious engagement as an act of faith; secondly, look for a spirituality of engagement and inculturation rather than a theology that corrects or fulfills. Thirdly, living in the Spirit of Christ and becoming sensitive to the 'seeds of the Word. Finally, through the fruits taken into the inner life of the church (prayerful reflections).[1284]

4.8. Multiple-religious Belonging?

Reading a text religiously and participating in the ritual traditions raises numerous theological questions. For example, *"Am I a hybrid Hindu Christian defined by a theological vision of unity-in-plurality or am I a Christian who studies Hinduism?"*[1285] As a sociological

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[1280] Alberuts Bagus Laksana, *Muslim and Catholic Pilgrimage Practices: Explorations through Java* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014 b), 111.
[1281] Barnes, *Interreligious Learning,* 260.
[1282] Ibid., 264.
[1283] Ibid., 258.
[1284] Ibid., 238-39.
[1285] Jonathan Y. Tan writing on Michael Amaladoss, states that he is a "theologian, missiologist, liturgist, musician, and above all, a hybridized Hindu Christian who is defined by his own nondual advaitic theological vision of unity-in-pluralitÿ *Interreligious Encounters Opportunities and Challenges*, xvii.

category, multiple religious belonging refers to a phenomenon in which a person identifies with more than one religion or religious system. The terms "multi-religious belonging," "hyphenated Christianity," "hybrid identity," "double belonging," and "dual belonging" have all been used in academic studies of religion to denote and discuss the increasingly common experiences of people who are interested to learn how to integrate insights from more than one religious' tradition. It also is a criticism of Western perceptions of religious syncretism.

While multiple belonging phenomena are recognized in other religious or cultural traditions, this belonging is very challenging within the Christian tradition due to the monotheistic claims of the faith and teachings of Jesus and the understanding of Jesus as universal savior. Some Christians think it is impossible to have this dual belonging, while others believe that to be able to identify with more than one religious tradition is theoretically or theologically possible and necessary.[1286] Here, the term "belonging" means that these Christians identify with both the Christian faith and their past religious communities of their Islamic or Hindu-Buddhist faith (at least sociologically). Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, a Nigerian Jesuit Theologian, in the discussion on double belonging in Africa. perceives African religion as the "soil or ground on which the latter [Christianity and Islam] are planted, the foundation that holds up their edifice, and the roots that anchor and nourish a reality."[1287] In such a situation Orabator highlights "asymmetrical belonging," which he defines as the situation of people who are grounded in one religious tradition while also identifying themselves (though unequally) with another.[1288] In *Africae Munus*, Pope Benedict XVI, identifying the challenge of 'dual affiliation' – to Christianity and to the traditional

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[1286] Raimon, Panikkar, *Christophany* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004),168. ; Paul Knitter, *Without Buddha, I could not be a Christian* (Oxford: Oneworld,2009), xiv.
[1287] Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa*, 171.
[1288] Ibid,164.

African religions – called for a "profound catechesis and inculturation" to remove such affiliations.[1289] The process of inculturation helps to overcome the tension of dual or multiple belonging. From a Christian perspective, double belonging is more the fruit of missionary activity and the process of inculturation, while the multi-religious identity at times seems to be a part of a postmodern outlook whereby one selects different religious practices in a supermarket of religions.

A unique category is neither double-belong nor multi-religious identity. People in the category are described as liminal Christians, a phenomenon that I observed in my research study. "Liminal Christians" identify with Jesus Christ and choose to identify with another religious community, either through a paradigm that informs a person's decisions when adopting the practice of dual or through multiple belonging. Abhishiktananda, in his adaptation to *Advaitic* Christology, experienced 'liminality' throughout his life and struggled with that identity. In the Indian situation, the spirit leads the *Khristbhakta* movement. The *Khristbhakta*s (Devotees of Christ) enter Christian experience shaped already by their faith experience in Hinduism. Jerome Sylvester states, "The case of *Khristbhakta*s is one of faith-journey, one to another, not as discontinuity, but as snowballing into transformation. There is no break with one's past religious experience to embrace a new faith and message."[1290] At times the experience of reading the text religiously, I found being in a situation of "cultivated hybridity." [1291] Paul Knitter, who calls himself a Buddhist-Christian

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[1289] Pope Benedict XVI, Africa Munus: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa in the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace,
http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedictxvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20111119_africae-munus.html (Accessed 20 November 2020), no. 93.

[1290] Jerome Sylvester, "Religious Cosmopolitanism as the key to Peace and Harmony in the Third Millennium," in *Spirituality of Interfaith Dialogue a Call to Live Together*, ed., Ambrogio Bongiovanni and Leo Fernando (Delhi: ISPCK, 2019), 123.

[1291] Clooney also states that comparative theology leads to a situation in which "we have more teachers and fewer masters." See Francis Clooney, *Beyond Compare: St. Francis de Sales and Śrī Vedānta Deśika on Loving Surrender to God* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 209.

hybrid, states that "not only does double belonging seem to work," for him, "It is necessary."[1292] What made my encounter truly effective was being sensitive and hospitable to a given religious tradition in an interfaith context. The biggest challenge is posed in the crossing of boundaries of faith tradition. A creative and meaningful way is the most significant help to encounter other religious traditions. Panikkar aptly points out the challenge as he writes, "Does one need to be spiritually a Semite or intellectually a Westerner in order to be a Christian?[1293] Christianity is the religion of these two rivers (Jordan and Tiber), we cannot do without them. However, must it remain so?"[1294] Every country has its rivers, and most of them are sacred. The *Ma Gangaji,* the motherly river of the Ganges. is taken here as the symbol, not just for Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, and primordial religions, but for all other traditions of Asia, Africa, and Oceania, which represent not only other spritualties but also different mentalities.[1295]

I engaged the text as a Jesuit. As stated previously, the contribution of Jesuits to Indian languages and cultures from the time of De Nobili has been immense. Over the years, the Jesuit engagement with Hinduism was to study Indology, *reframe* Christian theology, and aid in interreligious dialogue. The orientalists emphasized Sanskrit and Brahminic traditions as a part of Indology, and even today, they remain the prime path to understand Hinduism. In all Hinduism Studies, there was a desire to find an equivalent theology and philosophy within Hinduism. There were efforts among individual Jesuits such as Thomas Stephens, Beschi, Antoine, and Amaladoss

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[1292] Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could Not be a Christian*, 216.
[1293] Panikkar, "The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges" 89.
[1294] Ibid., 90.
[1295] See, as an example, *Hajime Nakamura, Ways of Thinking of Eastern* People (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985).

to encounter other religions deeply. At a practical level, there are Ashr*a*ms, dialogue centers to meet, learn, and pray together. [1296]

Most of the efforts made at engaging Hinduism have not taken deep roots and had limited or no impact on the hoped-for outcome. Most often, they have remained functional so as to have a general understanding on Hinduism. There is hardly any progress to acknowledge the graciousness of Hinduism with creative imagination. Clooney rightly points out that "the Hindu other was not taken seriously enough to reflect a real change in the Christian heart in all these engagements." [1297] To see a Hindu in his devotion, commitment, and appreciation of Hinduism from the heart, needs an encounter in the Hindu world, especially in their ritual life. How do I make sense of a South Indian Brahmin who is 86 years old and his commitment to his ritual tradition of visiting the prominent temples daily in Varanasi for the last thirty years? Furthermore, what makes Pradeep a devout Hindu daily practice at the *ghāts* in the early hours, whether winter or summer? There is a need to go beyond academic textual study. However, I suppose it is a matter of the heart. In that case, the reader of texts and social analysts are both in the position of either deeply learning from Hindu piety or standing at a distance and analyzing and recognize Hindus from their faith and ritual perspective than evaluate their faith and ritual traditions from the normativity of the Christian faith. It is a judgment in terms of Christian normativity that is at issue here, not whether one reads texts or not. Discussing the normativity of Jesus, Roger Haight states that Jesus encourages Christians to find God operative in the world beyond the Christian sphere and stressing the negative normativity of Jesus he writes, "Jesus as a norm functions primarily in a negative fashion;

[1296] Liberation critique of the study of Hinduism and Christian Ash*Rām* life as well see George Soares Prabhu, S.J. "From Alienation to Inculturation: Some Reflections on Doing Theology in India Today," in B*read and Breath: Essays in Honor of Samuel Rayan S.J.* ed. T. K. John (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1991): 55-99. Xavier Gravend-Tirole, "From Christian Ashrams to Dalit Theology: Or Beyond," in *Constructing Indian Christianities: Culture, Conversion, and Caste,* ed. Chad M. Rauman and Richard Fox Young (London: Routledge,2014): 104-37.
[1297] Clooney, *Western Jesuits Scholars in India*, 242.

positively Jesus opens the imagination to God's presence to the world and guides Christian perception to recognize that what is revealed in him can be enriched by other religious truths."[1298] The 2006, 35th General Congregation of the Society Jesus, declared in Decree 2: "A Fire that Kindles Other Fires": " Our deep love of God and our passion for his world should set us on fire— a fire that starts other fires! For ultimately, there is no reality that is only profane for those who know how to look. We must communicate this way of looking and provide a pedagogy, inspired by the Spiritual Exercises."[1299] This decree offers a deeply sacramental worldview. In this journey of reading the text religiously, with a sacramental worldview, I am on a pilgrimage with the entire humanity to discover greater depths by interreligious learning. Therefore, in the effort to read the text religiously, I was not in a process of losing the integrity of the two traditions to some 'higher' religion but was "growing in awareness of the vastness of the Lord."[1300]

Conclusion

The relations between the followers of the many world religions, including traditional indigenous religions, and Christian believers have now entered a stage beyond 'confrontation,' 'encounter,' and comparative 'dialogue', to a search for sharing spirituality[1301] and to being "beggars at the threshold of God's door."[1302] Church documents such as *Dominus Iesus* push back such efforts. However, Comparative theology is part of a deep spiritual exchange. Studying the sacred texts and participating in the ritual life and lived experience leads to an enhanced encounter.[1303]

[1298] Roger Haight, S.J, *Jesus' symbol of God* (New York/Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 409-410.
[1299] https://jesuitportal.bc.edu/research/documents/2008_decree2gc35/
[1300] Barnes, *Interreligious Learning*, 252.
[1301] George Gispert-Such, "Spirituality of Hinduism and Christianity,*" Geist und Leben*, (5/2010): 361-377.
[1302] See Margaret Eletta Guider, "Beggars at the Threshold of God's Door," in *Religion in the Secular City: Essays in Honor of Harvey G. Cox*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 2001), 148-170.

[1303] Cornille, *Meaning, and Method in Comparative Theology*, 94.

The goal of Comparative Theology is often expressed in terms of "mutual transformation," "mutual fecundation," or "reciprocal illumination."[1304] In no way can I deny that my faith has been deepened through dialogue and participating in the *Mānas* rituals at Varanasi and enabled me to go deeper into spiritual depth for transformation. Living in the heart of Hinduism, the constant question was how to be a Christian. The question motivated me to "dig my well" for the rediscovery of my own liturgical ritual traditions. [1305] In these *ghāts*, while reciting and studying *Mānas*, getting to know the characters of the *Mānas*; Rām, Sitā, Hanumān, and others, my faith was continually challenged, deepened, and cleansed. Michael Barnes writes, "the singularity or uniqueness of Christian faith depends on how it both judges and allows itself to be judged." [1306] The learning was not one-sided. For most Hindus, learning about Christian spirituality was something new through my sharing and presence. Through these encounters, I could see in Jacques Dupuis's words, "asymmetrical complementarity," recognizing complementarity between religions while still affirming the normativity of one's tradition."[1307]

Comparative Theology duly acknowledges that there is no neutral vantage point in engaging other religious traditions, and the engagement is not limited to text alone but goes beyond written textual traditions. By seeing the interconnection between the text and rituals, Moyaert points out that "by paying attention to the material and ritual practices of traditions, we will start

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[1304] See Arvind Sharma *Religious Studies and Comparative Methodology: The Case for Reciprocal Illumination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005). Cf: Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Andreas Nehring, eds. *Interreligious Comparisons in Religious Studies and Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

[1305] C. Salenson, *L'échelle mystique du dialogue de Christian de Chergé* (Montrouge: Bayard, 2016), 68.

[1306] Michael Barnes, "Judged and Being Judged: On the Responsibilities of Faith," in Robert Cruz, Marshal Fernando and Asanga Tilakaratna, eds. *Encounters with the Word: Essays to Honor Aloysius Pieris, S.J.* (Colombo: Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue; Aachen: Missionswissenschaftliches Institut Missio, e V.; Nurnberg: Missionsprokur der Jesuiten, 2004), 309.

[1307] Jacques Dupuis, "Christianity and Religions: Complementarity and Convergence," in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity,* ed. C. Cornille (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 61-75.

asking a different question, and maybe even developing new theological concept."[1308] The most

challenging questions arise in meeting these devotees of the *Mānas* text: "Am I able to take them

seriously as Hindus having divine experiences in their own faith and ritual traditions? How am I

inspired by such a profound commitment to a text and ritual tradition?" Often the tendency has

been to compare the best of Christianity with the worst of Hinduism and critique the faith traditions

of Hinduism. Engaging the *Mānas* ritually and aesthetically has raised more than a few theological

questions requiring me to go deeper into my faith traditions. These engagements have enabled the

"understanding of other" and "the understanding of the self." Personal, cultural, linguistic factors

always shape the understanding of others.

Gadamer argued that "all understanding inevitably involves some prejudices."[1309]

Moreover, prejudices play a constitutive and productive role in understanding as they function as

a preunderstanding to construct comparison and interpret other religions. These prejudices are

based on one's faith traditions, as Cornille points out that "The other religions will be interpreted

in comparative theology based on one's own set of religious categories and experiences." [1310] This

claim may be true for a Western European Christian. Some may question its veracity for first,

second, third generation Christians living in multiple religious systems simultaneously. On such

occasions, interpretating everything only from the perspective of Christianity is to be avoided.

Besides, the religious reading of the text and participation in the ritual traditions fosters sympathy

and imagination that is important to understand the other. Ricoeur states, " it is always through

some transfer from self to other, in empathy and imagination, that the Other that is foreign to me

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[1308] Moyaert, "*Towards a Ritual Turn*," 2.
[1309] Hans-George Gadamer*, Truth and Method*, transl. revised by J. Weinsheimer and D. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1995), 270.
[1310] Cornille, *Meaning, and Method in Comparative Theology*, 83.

is brought closer."[1311] The closeness experienced will lead to a new way of dialoguing with other religions, and the *Mānas* ritual and aesthetical ideas point a way forward to integrate them into the Christian theological reflections by accepting learnings for the home tradition.

[1311] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol.3, trans. K. Balmeu and D. Pellauer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), 184.

Chapter Five

Learnings for the Home Tradition

Introduction

Interreligious dialogue is not simply a matter of exchanging ideas and strategies. The aim is to open the horizons of people's minds through deeper encounters and embrace other religions with greater respect and tolerance. Pope Paul VI, acknowledging the importance of dialogue, states, "how vital it is for the world, and how greatly desired by the Catholic Church, that the two should meet together, and get to know and love one another."[1312] The embrace of other religions with all their differences demands a more profound encounter with the attitude of epistemic humility. In his cultural-linguistic understanding of religion, George Lindbeck notes that boasting and a sense of superiority "destroys the possibility of open and mutually enriching dialogue."[1313]

Cornille emphasizes epistemological humility and distinguishes dialogue among religions from a purely personal exploration of the teachings of different religious traditions for spiritual enrichment.[1314] Raimon Panikkar talks about the shift from the "dialectical dialogue" to the "dialogical dialogue," an engagement and participation in the common task of building new relations and deeper learning about the ways of God.[1315] Humility fosters and recognizes the possibility of change or growth within one's own tradition. Comparative Theology, with its structured reflection on the encounter of religions and its emphasis on learning for home traditions, becomes a crucial example in this venture. In his approach to comparative theology, Clooney opens the space with confessional and dialogical attitudes for learning and deepening one's

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[1312] *Ecclesiam Suam*, no. 1.
[1313] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 64.
[1314] Cornille, *the Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 31-48.
[1315] Panikkar, "The Dialogical Dialogue," in *The World's Religious Traditions*, ed. Frank Whaling (Edinburgh: T and T Clark Publishing, 1984), 201–221.

faith.[1316] Hence, learning becomes imperative. Acknowledging Comparative Theology's promises, Michael Barnes says that learning from other traditions by reading the texts requires imagination and careful discernment.[1317] In my approach to the *Mānas*, the focus was not only on the written text but also on participation in the ritual elements of tradition as the participation enabled deeper encounter. In this learning, the hidden voices and forgotten traces are brought to the fore and presented so as to encounter other religions with imagination. The learning includes for Comparative Theology and the home tradition. They include combining ritual- textual- performative practices in Comparative Theology, the rectification of misunderstanding of the practices of Hinduism, the creative retrieval of resources within the Catholic tradition of devotion to God with its popular religiosity and aesthetics, and discernment on theological education regarding other religions.

5.1. The *Mānas* as Combining Ritual-Textual-Performative Practice in Comparative Theology

Firstly, research on the *Mānas* contributes to the Comparative Theological method. The *Mānas* text removes the binary of 'either-or' (textual or ritual or lived religion) in Comparative Theology. Instead, it offers a 'both-and' approach as the *Mānas* text provides ample opportunity for textual, ritual, and lived religious experiences of religion essential for comparative theology. Although Clooney visualizes the incorporation of 'material' and 'ritual' elements of religion in his Comparative theology, there has been critique of his approach as 'textual' and 'elite.' This critique

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[1316] Francis Clooney's own dialogues are with Hinduism, especially in its theistic Vaishnava form. Among his most important exercises are *Theology After Vedanta* (Albany: SUNY Press; 1993); *Seeing Through Texts: Doing Theology Among the Śrivaisnavas of South India* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996); *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother: Hindu Goddesses and the Virgin Mary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); *Beyond Compare* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008).

[1317] Michael Barnes, "The Promise of Comparative Theology Reading Between the Lines" in *Interfaith Dialogue: Global Perspectives* ed. Edmund Chia (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 238.

is not well-founded because Comparative Theology does offer the possibility of incorporating ritual and material elements of religion as explained in the earlier part of the thesis. For instance, in my research on the *Mānas,* applying Clooney's method of Comparative Theology, I have tried to enlarge the scope of the method by incorporating both textual and ritual elements. However, this does not mean the negation of the text. On the contrary, the *Mānas* goes "beyond the text" to rituals and enables 'reading religiously,' thereby communicating a new experience in encountering other faiths.

In research methodology, reading sacred texts, although significant, is a tiny aspect of religion because religious texts communicate only a fraction of religious elements. Thus, although Comparative Theology emphasizes the text, understanding sacred texts often requires participation in the ritual life and lived experience for an enhanced encounter.[1318] This was possible while studying the *Mānas* at Varanasi, as I have explained in Chapter Four. Besides, the language of the *Mānas* is Avadhi-Hindi and not a classical language like Sanskrit. This way, the research removes the bias that Comparative Theology deals only with classical languages. Clooney himself, in his approach, deals with Tamil texts, the spoken language of more than sixty-five million people in the world. Tulsi's composition in Awadhi, which he recognized as "village speech," like other *Bhakti* poets "aimed at a larger audience much beyond their own dialectical region."[1319] In this manner, the criticism that Clooney's Comparative Theology aimed only at classical languages is addressed.

[1318] Cornille, *Meaning and Method,* 94.
[1319] Mishra, "The Language of Tulsidas," 246.

5.2. The *Mānas* to Rectify the Understanding of Rām and Hindu Devotional Practices

The second learning is 'rectification' of overgeneralizations about Rām and Hindu devotional practices**.** This learning responds to a distorted vision of Rām and Hinduism that has developed both within Hinduism and Christianity due to growing Hindu religious extremism. The distorted vision leads to many misunderstandings about Hinduism that hinder genuine encounters. The effort to discover the 'real Rām' of the *Mānas* tradition by an 'outsider' of the faith tradition is not an act of theological colonialism or a step towards mastery over the other, but a commitment to remain present with and to the other, even amidst confusions and misunderstandings, which dialogue often entails. When these misconceptions about Rām are clarified and understood better, the rectification can contribute to a better understanding of Hinduism itself and provide a better ground for dialogue with Christianity. Acknowledging the divinity and goodness of Hindu's favorite deity, Rām, builds confidence among the Hindus that Christians recognizes them as equal partners in dialogue.

Rectification aims to have a proper understanding of the other. The proper interpretive principle to understand Hindu others is taken from the lives of genuine Hindus. However, the growing religious extremism with Modi "becoming the emperor of Hindu hearts" has promoted exaggeration and overgeneralization of Hinduism, especially in terms of Rām.[1320] The rectifications are essential for understanding of the actual image of Rām, *Rāmrāj,* and the slogan *Jai Śrī Rām*. The *Sangh Parivār* has instrumentalized these concepts to advance a Hindu nationalist, ethnic democracy. The misunderstanding has made Hindus think of Rām only as a warrior God who wages war against the minorities in India. However, a deeper engagement with

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[1320] For *Moditva*, see Christophe Jaffrelot; *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy,* 34-59

the *Mānas* recovers the real image of Rām as devotional, loving, kind, and inclusive.[1321] The

negative images of Rām that occasionally occur in the *Vālmīkī Rāmāyaṇa* have been set aside

through the different telling of *Rāmayana* and gradual divinization of Rām. The distorted image

of Rām that is popular today emerges as a reaction to the "majoritarian inferiority complex."[1322]

The Hindu nationalists are not concerned about religion. Instead, with a blend of history and

mythology, they speak of the golden age and emphasize ethnic historical-cultural traits rather than

Hindu *bhakti* and rites.[1323] Drawing inspiration from Savarkar, who said, "No people in the world

can more justly claim to be recognized as a racial unit than the Hindus and perhaps the Jews,"

Hindu nationalists aim to imitate the purity of the Aryan race.[1324] Savarkar conceives Hindu

identity in opposition to Muslims and Christians who are not part of the nation as they do not look

at India as their *Puṇya Bhoomi* (sacred land).[1325] This thinking has percolated at the grassroots

level, to build a united India, and the religious minorities (Muslims and Christians) buy into the

depiction of Rām as a warrior God. In rectifying, we cannot leave aside the political agenda of

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[1321] These issues are dealt with in-depth in Chapter Three.

[1322] On the genesis of this sentiment in Hindu circles, see Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990s* (London: C. Hurst, 1996), 19. Lack of self-esteem is rooted in the nineteenth-century colonial stereotype, making Hindus a "puny race." See, P. C. Bamford, *Histories of the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movements* (1925; repr., Delhi: Government of India Press, 1985), 111; P. Spear, *The Nabobs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), 198–201; and J. Roselli, "The Self-Image of Effeteness: Physical Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal," *Past and Present* 86 (1980): 121–148.

[1323]Regarding the relationship between the "chosen people" and the sacred land and golden age, Anthony D. Smith writes that the Zionists with a blend of history and mythology speak of the golden age, sacred land, and mission in the world, and are not interested in Judaism as a religion. See Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen People: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 131–217.

[1324] Savarkar, *Hindutv*a, 90.

[1325] Savarkar explains that "any convert of non-Hindu parentage to *Hindutva* can be a Hindu, if *bona fide*, he or she adopts our land as his or her country and marries a Hindu, thus coming to love our land as a real Fatherland and adopts our culture and thus adores our land as the *Punyabhu*. The children of such a union as that would, other things being equal, be most emphatically Hindus." Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 130. The idea that the Hindus were a historical people like the descendants of Israel's tribes was evidenced by the fact that in 2019, 1,000 "descendants" of Lord Rām came from Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan to Ayodhya to have a Rām temple (re) built on the site where he was born. "1,000 'Descendants' of Lord Rām Reach Ayodhya, Demand Temple at Disputed Site," *Indian Express*, September 9, 2019, https://indianexpress.com /article/India/1000-descendants-of-lord-*Rām*-reach-Ayodhya-demand-temple-at-disputed-site -5977994/.

living Hindus even of the right-wing as it has emerged as a response to the wounded history of the colonial past. Leaving aside the view of the right-wing seems to be a selective elitist position that fails to truly engage the text. Hence, rectification must aim at dialoguing with pious Hindus, extremists, and non-Hindus.

Rectification is also needed to properly understand the concept of *Rāmrāj*. *Rāmrāj* is a vision that focuses on equality, fraternity, and justice among all and promotes brotherhood and sisterhood, as an inclusive concept.[1326] The concept could be equated with the Christian understanding of the 'kingdom of God.' For the "family" of RSS (*Sangh Parivār*) [1327] especially to the *Bajrang dal*,[1328] *Rāmrāj* is nothing but a "brotherhood in saffron," the color of Hinduism. [1329] The "brotherhood in saffron" is achieved with the "non-Brahminical *Hindutva*,"[1330] as well in the form of "strategic syncretism" or "strategic emulation."[1331] All these are done to increase the Hindu's physical strength. Besides, Ayodhyā, the holy place related to Rām, has become a vote bank politics. The *Bajrang Dal,* "the angry young men,"[1332] of India, in its first mission in September 1984, carrying effigies of Rām and Sita, claimed to "liberate" gods from the controls

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[1326] Chapter three has explained in detail the concept of *Rāmrāj.*

[1327] Jean Alonzo Curran, *Militant Hinduism in Indian Politics, A Study of the R.S.S* (All India Quami Ekta Sammelan,1979), 11.

[1328] The *Bajrang Dal* was founded in the spring of 1984 as a youth movement not by the RSS but under the auspices of the VHP, adding a layer of mediation that enabled the parent organization to work undercover. The *Bajrang Dal* was tasked with helping the VHP build up Hindu mobilization in the Ayodhya affair, and it was also the organization expected to carry out the Sangh Parivar's dirty work. The word Bajrang, meaning "strong," is associated with Hanumān and refers to the club that he is always depicted as brandishing. The first Bajrang Dal leader is Vinay Katiyar, who said, in an interview with the press, "Might is the only law I understand. Nothing else matters to me. In India it is a war-like situation as between Rāma and Ravana." see Vinay Katiyar, "It Is a War-Like Situation," interview published in Frontline, 24th April 1992, 9–12. Even today, this group uses violence to establish *Rāmrāj.*

[1329] The phrase is borrowed from Walter Andersen and Shridhar Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism* (New Delhi: Vistaar, 1987).

[1330] Sudha Pai and Sajjan Kumar, *Everyday Communalism: Riots in Contemporary Uttar Pradesh* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), 3.

[1331] Christophe Jaffrelot, "Hindu Nationalism: Strategic Syncretism in Ideology Building," *Indian Journal of Social Science* 5, no. 42 (August 1992): 594–617.

[1332] See Christophe Jaffrelot *Modi's India,* Chap. 3.

of Muslims in Ayodhya.[1333] According to them, building the Rām temple is the fulfillment of *Rāmrāj* in India. This is a limited understanding of the metaphor of *Rāmrāj,* and this vision communicates real anger and concern regarding *Hindutva* ideology.

Thirdly, rectification is crucial in understanding the greeting "*Jai Śrī Rām*" (Long live the God Rām!), a customary greeting among the North Indians that fills one with joy. Today, the greeting has turned out to be a cry for violence or war (*Yuddh Ghosh*) against those opposing the Hindu Nationalist ideology. Every political gathering of the BJP begins with *Jai Śrī Rām* and *Har Har Mahādev* that sends shivers down the spines of the non-supporters of *Hindutva* ideology. The deep engagement with the *Mānas* traditions promotes correction in understanding the Hindu image worship. During the *Mānas* performances, the images of Rām's coronation images, his company with his brothers and wife are adored and worshiped. Many non-Hindus consider the image worship (*mūrti-pujā*) as idolatry. Hindu worship needs to be understood in depth. Non-Hindus need to understand that for Hindus, the difficulty of comprehending an abstract Absolute entity as God necessitates a symbolic representation in a concrete form, a *mūrti* (literally 'crystallization') so that the mind can concentrate upon it.[1334] Pope Gregory had recognized the didactic value of images when he states, "For that which a written document is to those who can read, that a picture is to the unlettered who look at it. Even the unlearned see in that what course they ought to follow; even those who do not know the alphabet can read there."[1335]

Finally, the image of Varanasi as a holy city needs to be recovered given the fact that it has become a political center of *Hindutva* ideology. When Modi contested elections from the holy city

[1333] Regarding this foundational episode, see the article by Peter van der Veer, "'God Must Be Liberated!' A Hindu Liberation Movement in Ayodhya," *Modern Asian Studies* 21, no. 1 (1987): 283–301.
[1334] Anuradha Roma Choudhary, "Worship," in *Themes and Issues in Hinduism*, ed. Paul Bowen (London and Washington: Cassell, 1998), 205.
[1335] Cited in Albert C. Moore, *Iconography of Religions, An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 243.

he explained he was merely answering the "call" of the sacred river Ganges.[1336] The speech he gave in December 2013 in Varanasi was peppered with Hindu references, along with mentions of his visits to Kāśi Viśvanāth and the Sankaṭ Mochan Temples. Then, to the sound of conch shells being blown (the call to Śiva devotees), he declared that he had "come from the land of Somnath to seek the blessing of Baba Vishwanath," spoke of the need to resurrect the Ganges, a dying river, and "exhorted the voters of Uttar Pradesh to help usher in *Rām Rājya*." After him, Kalyan Singh, the former BJP chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, began his speech with ideological-religious slogans, such as "*Jai Śrī Rām*" and "*Har Har Mahādev*," and bellowed, "I do not say that every Muslim is a terrorist. However, I ask why every terrorist is a Muslim."[1337] From that day onwards, the city has moved from being a spiritual hub to a political hub. Although political is not necessarily the opposite of spiritual, the more religion is politicized, the more religion loses its essential character, teachings, and concerns. Nevertheless, Varanasi as a holy city attracts thousands of pilgrims not because of Modi but because of its innate capacity to heal and grant liberation and salvation to the people.

5.3. The *Mānas* as Intensifying Loving Devotion to Jesus through Popular Devotions

The third learning from the research on the *Mānas* is the 'intensification' of devotion to Jesus through Catholic popular devotions. Tulsidas has become immortal among the North Indian Hindus for his advancement of the love of God (*Bhakti)* among the people. My study and participation in the sacred text of *Mānas* have purified and intensified my own Christian beliefs and understanding of the love of God. We learn by interior reflection and by exchange with one

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[1336] Prashant Pandey, "Narendra Modi in Varanasi: I am Here on the Call of Ganga Mata," *Indian Express*, 25th April 2014, https://indianexpress.com/article/india/politics/modi-in -Varanasi-im-here-on-the-call-of-Ganga-mata/.

[1337]Cited in L. Verma, "Hindutva Is Backdrop for Modi in UP," *Indian Express*, 21st December 2013, http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/hindutva-is-backdrop-for-modi-in-up/1210180/0.

another. Clooney, in his intertextual reading of the text, writes, "I have found it best to enter upon the careful reading of texts of Hindu religious traditions, with an openness, reverence, and critical attention analogous to how I treat the treasures of my own tradition."[1338] This does not mean settling for an overgeneralization but understanding the love in its vastness in both traditions. Scriptures are formative for understanding God, God's purpose, prayer, worship, and normative teachings on ethics.[1339] The *Mānas*, as a scripture, provides examples of prayer and devotion in the personalities of Śabari, Kāka Buśundi and Hanumān. The devotion is accessible to all in order to experience the love of God. Thus, the reading of the religious text according to the methodology of Comparative Theology is ultimately

> to ponder these texts, explore and express what we have learned of God and love: we need to learn what to say and how to say it. We are thus compelled, in the end, to practice our own Catholicism in yet another of its honored versions by confessing our faith in words that can testify to the abundance of love and presence and surprise which envelop us in the search for God amid the world's religions today.[1340]

The reading through the lens of the other text is neither *metaphorical colonialism*, which often reduces the other traditions to illuminate Christianity, nor *problematic universalism* that erases the differences and sees all texts pointing to a common truth.[1341]

5.3.1. Love of God in Christianity

The foundation of Christianity is Love. Therefore, God's first commandment within the Christian tradition is to love God with all your soul, mind, and strength.[1342] Within the Catholic tradition, God's love is understood as creative and gratuitous. Human capacity is not sufficient to

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[1338] Clooney, "In the Balance: Interior and shared Acts of Reading," *Modern Theology* 29:4 (October 2013): 173.
[1339] David F. Ford, "An Interfaith Wisdom Scriptural Reasoning Between Jews, Christians, and Muslims," *Modern Theology* 29/4 (October 2013): 345.
[1340] Clooney, "Hindu Love and the Practice of Catholicism," *Journal of Vaisnava Studies*, 5 #2 (Spring 1997), 26.
[1341] Gavin Flood, "Reading Christian Detachment Through the Bhagavad Gita" In *Song Divine Christian Commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita,* 10-11.
[1342] See Dt. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18; Mt. 22: 34-40; Mk. 12: 28-34.

love God with one's whole heart, mind, soul, and strength. God must supply the means to do that. The means is love itself. Bernard of Clairvaux's teaching on loving God says, "You wish to hear from me why and how God ought to be loved. I answer: the cause of loving God is God himself."[1343] Nevertheless, often the understanding of the love of God is recognized as equivalent to the love of neighbor among the Christians. 1 John 4:20 says – "if you say, I love God, while you hate your brother and sister, you are a liar, how can you love God whom you do not see If you do not love your brother whom you see." Christians take the love of neighbor seriously by integrating it with the love of God. Still, there is value in recognizing God's love *per se*.

The *Mānas* text with Tulsidas's love of God unearths and intensifies the love of God within the Gospels. Although the Gospels of Christianity and the *Mānas* emerged in different cultural contexts, the difference does not compromise the possibility of gaining more profound insights into the love of God.[1344] The Hindu tradition, in general, recognizes God's love as *bhakti*. The word *bhakti* has its root in *bhaj*, meaning to share with, to give freely, to enjoy together. It connotes the Christian understanding of *agapeic* love. Can we equate Christian understanding of the love of God with the Hindu understanding? In the prolonged practice of reading the different texts of different traditions together, Clooney recommends that creative tension be maintained and drawing normative conclusions must be avoided.[1345]

Every human being is potentially a lover of God. Moreover, those who believe in God must love God and need to be taught how to love God. Love for God or the neighbor could be described in the words of Eberhard Jungel as "the still greater selflessness amid such justifiably great self-

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[1343] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On Loving God,* in G.R. Evans, trans. *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 174.

[1344] Daniel P. Sheridan, "Stations Keeping: Christ and Krsna as Embodied," *Cross Currents* 37 (Fall 1988): 3.

[1345] Michelle Vos Roberts, *Dualities: A Theology of Difference* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster Press, 2010), 4.

relatedness."[1346] Love includes both selflessness and relatedness. Love is understood within the Catholic tradition as *agape* and *caritas*. Augustine's famous cry combines the *eros* and *caritas* of love as he writes, "You arouse us to take joy in praising you, for you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."[1347] Liberation theologians recognized *mercy* as the model of love through which God relates to the world and especially to the suffering world. From their standpoint, love is the particular *praxic* love that swells up within a person at the sight of another person upon whom suffering is inflicted unjustly. For, "mercy is not the sole content of Jesus's practice, but it is mercy that stands at the origin of all that he practices."[1348] Jon Sobrino envisages that the "principle of mercy is the basic principle of activity of God and Jesus, and therefore ought to be that of the activity of the Church."[1349] Mercy also understood as compassion makes human beings whole and complete. In the practice of mercy, there is an interiorization of the suffering of another occurs in such a way "that this interiorized suffering becomes a part of her, is transformed into an internal principle, the first and the last, of her activity. Mercy, as a reaction, becomes the fundamental action of the total human being."[1350]

A characteristic feature of Hinduism is to use the erotic images of love as points of reference to understand and express the intensity of the love of God. Passionate love for God is captured in the concrete experience of the exemplary lovers of the cowherd women of *Vraja* during the *Rāslīlā*, the passionate love dance. To love God wholeheartedly, "passion" is the key. At a peripheral level, it suggests "reckless freedom, immorality," but at a deeper level, it reveals

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[1346] Eberhard Jungel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute Between Theism and Atheism*, trans. Darrel L. Guder (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), 319.
[1347] John K. Ryan, trans., *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960), 43.
[1348] Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy, Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (New York/Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 19.
[1349] Ibid., 16.
[1350] Ibid., 17.

freedom in God. In the *Mānas* tradition, the devotees, Kāka Bhuśundi, Śabari, and Hanumān have a passionate love for Rām. The *Phulwāri* text elaborates on Rām and Sītā's love feeling.[1351] The *Mānas* inspires Christians to explore the new richness of Christian love with these imageries. The passionate love of mystics like Teresa of Avila's love of Christ has not captured the hearts and minds of most ordinary Christians. The *Mānas* resonates with the expression of love of God in the Christian tradition; they reawaken the layers of meaning and levels of passion contained in the religious tradition. For instance, Daniel Sheridan's commentary on the *Nārada Bhakti Sutras* rediscovers and retrieves the love of God within and for the Christian tradition.[1352] Even though I studied the *Mānas* as an outsider to its faith tradition, the text remains a classical Hindu text, but I hope that my reading and interpretation can be a gift to the Hindu lovers of God as they seek to understand God's love. Likewise, Christianity can contribute to an understanding of the love of God from the perspective of the love of neighbor for the Hindus. Therefore, reciprocity of understanding the love of God is essential in such comparative readings. The love of God inspired by the *Mānas* could be developed further through an emphasis on popular devotions within Catholicism.

5.3.2. Popular Devotion in Catholicism

There is a solid affective dimension of religion in Catholic 'popular devotions' such as devotion to the Sacred Heart, Divine Mercy, and the Crucified Lord. These devotions, which often come from local people and cultures, have expressed an affective dimension of the Catholic faith throughout history. Popular religious practices and beliefs are themselves an ancient Christian

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[1351] RCM, 1. 227- 236.

[1352] Sheridan, *Loving God: Krsna and Christ*, 4.

phenomenon, extending back to "at least the post-apostolic church."[1353] In the Puebla Document, the third General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, said that the "people continuously evangelize itself."[1354] Here, popular piety is seen as a true expression of the free and spontaneous missionary activity of the people of God, of which the Holy Spirit is the principal-agent.[1355] Within Catholic academic study, these popular devotions can be overlooked, dismissed as archaic or superstitious, or relegated to be examined by other fields such as sociology or anthropology. As a result, these devotions rarely are treated with serious academic rigor as sites of theological manifestation. However, the Catholic tradition itself acknowledges that popular Catholicism ought not to be simply an object of anthropological and sociological studies, but also a *principal resource for Christian theology*. Therefore, based on the pneumatological approach within Catholicism itself, there is a potential bridge of encounter with the popular religiosity of the *bhakti* tradition of the *Mānas*, which could be a resource for a new understanding of devotion to Christ, not just intellectually, but also experientially. The *Mānas* has proved effective in fostering devotion to Rām through its textual and ritual factors for Hindu devotees prevalent in its popular practices.

The examples of the devotees of Rām, namely, Śabari and Hanumān, are narrated and performed to arouse devotion to God in Hindu popular religious practices. Hindu devotees' experience of God's love and grace is manifested in their adherence to popular religious practices, such as pilgrimages, worships, and performances. The confessional approach of Comparative

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[1353] Sixto J. Garcia and Orlando Espin, "Lilies of the Field,": A Hispanic Theology of Providence and Human Responsibility,' *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 44 (1989): 73-74.

[1354] Third General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, *Puebla Document*, 23rd March 1979, 450; cf. Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, *Aparecida Document*, 29th June 2007, 264.

[1355] John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (6th November 1999), 21: AAS 92 (2000), 482-484.

Theological study enables one to see the Hindu practice as a ground for greater devotion to Jesus by emphasizing the importance of 'popular devotions,' in the lives of the faithful. Thus, for example, there could be a renewed appreciation for popular devotions not just archaic practices but as tangible expressions of faith. Furthermore, the encounter with the *Mānas* tradition might help ground the academic study of these Christian practices within a theological framework and not just a cultural one.

The Second Vatican Council's document on Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* identifies the pious practices of the Christian people as the nourishment of the Christian people and calls them "to harmonize with the Sacred Liturgy and lead the Christian people to it since the Liturgy by its very nature is far superior to any of them."[1356] *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, by Pope Paul VI, regards popular piety as a "treasure of the people of God," that enables "us to see how the faith, once received, becomes embodied in a culture and is constantly passed on."[1357] Popular piety "manifests a thirst for God which only the poor and the simple can know."[1358] It is popular in the sense of being embraced by the poor, the great marginalized majority. Hence, popular piety "makes people capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism when it is a question of bearing witness to belief."[1359] With pastoral charity and discretion, the document says, "When it is well oriented, this popular religiosity can be more and more for multitudes of our people a true encounter with God in Jesus Christ."[1360] Speaking about Latin America, Benedict XVI pointed out that popular piety is "a precious treasure of the Catholic Church," in which "we see the soul of the

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[1356] *Sacro sanctum Concilium*, no. 13.
[1357] *Evangelii Gaudium,* no. 123.
[1358] Ibid., no. 48: AAS 68 (1976), 38.
[1359] *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 48:
[1360] Ibid., no. 48.

Latin American peoples."[1361] In his address to the gatherings of 50,0000 European members of confraternities of faith, Pope Francis said,

> Popular piety is a road that leads to what is essential if it is lived in the Church in profound communion with your pastors…. You have a specific and important mission, that of keeping alive the relationship between the faith and the cultures of the peoples to whom you belong. You do this through popular piety. You express this faith, born of hearing the word of God, in ways that engage the senses, the emotions, and the symbols of different cultures, in doing so, you help to transmit it to others, and especially the simple persons whom, in the Gospels, Jesus calls the little ones.[1362]

The directory on popular piety and liturgy defines the term "popular piety" as "diverse cultic expressions of a private or community nature which, in the context of the Christian faith, are inspired predominantly not by the Sacred Liturgy but by forms deriving from a particular nation or people or their culture."[1363] The document refers to "popular religiosity" as a "universal experience, that has a religious dimension in the hearts of people, nations, and their collective expressions."[1364] Latino/a theologians define popular religiosity as the "set of experiences, beliefs, and rituals which ecclesial and socially peripheral groups create and develop in their search for an access to God and salvation."[1365] "Popular" within the Latino understanding does not mean "widespread," "well-liked," but those who are marginalized, impoverished. The term "Of the People" has a dialectical connotation and its meaning implies that of, "one cannot love the

[1361] Opening Address of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops (13th May 2007), 1: AAS 90 (2007), 446.

[1362] *Pope Celebrates the diversity of Popular Piety, Unity of the Church*, CNS, 6th May 2013, http://www. Catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1302012.htm.

[1363] *Directory On Popular Piety and the Liturgy, Principles and Guidelines*, December 2001, no. 9.

[1364] Ibid., no. 10.

[1365] O. Espín and S. García, "Lilies of the Field: A Hispanic Theology of Providence and Human Responsibility," *Proceedings of CTSA* 44 (1989) 73.

universal and supernatural if one cannot love the particular and natural-and love these precisely as particular and natural."[1366]

The call of the Church as expresses in various documents and teachings that emphasizes the importance of popular devotions, and it could be augmented through the *Mānas* rituals and aesthetics. The *Mānas* devotional practices are "of the people," based on lived religion, and are embodied expressions used to communicate a deep love of God in their life. For instance, Linda Hess identifies *Rāmlilā* as a cultural performance that unfolds spatially and temporarily in ways that are "complex, delightful, moving, amazing, bewildering, and exhausting."[1367] The *Mānas* text, with its popular elements, has become part of people's minds and bodies. The devotees who participate in the popular devotions of *kathā* and *līlā* vividly communicate in their explanations and statements the devotional meaning they draw for their faith journey and their commitment to Rām.

5.3.3. Embodied Expressions to Communicate the Love of God

In popular religiosity, there is a great variety of bodily, gestural, and symbolic expressions: kissing or touching images, places, relics, and sacred objects; pilgrimages, processions; going bare-footed or on one's knees; kneeling and prostrating; wearing medals and badges. On the Christian side, the metaphor of pilgrimage indeed has been a favorite collective image for the Church since the earliest time - namely, the Church and Christians as pilgrims on earth on the journey home to God.[1368] The pilgrimage tradition and the veneration of saints is a crucial part of the formation of Christian identity vis-à-vis diverse (local) realities that Christian communities

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[1366] Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos Conjesus, Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 49.
[1367] Linda Hess "An Open-Air *Rām*ayana: *Rām*lila, the audience Experience," 116.
[1368] Cf. 1 Peter 1:1; 2:11 and Hebrews 11:13 and St. Augustine's *De Civitate* Dei.

came into contact within Latin America, South Asia, and so forth.[1369] As part of embodied expressions of devotion, many Hindus travel for days to visit sacred shrines, and most often, they are allowed to have the *darśan* of deity only for a fraction of a second. The seeing can be just a glimpse of their favorite deities.[1370] Nevertheless, the devotee is happy and joyful that a single glance (*darśan/ Jhānki*) is enough to receive the graciousness of God. *Darśan* is a dual mode of experience. While it is a profound sense of seeing or being awake to God's reality, it is, at the same time, a deep consciousness of being "seen" by God or standing in God's presence.[1371] In the *Rāmlīlā* practice, the colorful *Jhānki* and pageants depicting scenes from the life of Lord Rām are taken out through the city for a glance. God's glance is salvific. George Gispert Sauch, a Jesuit Indologist, writes that the *darśan* theology could be related to the practice of looking at the sacrament of divinity. The look of the *mūrti* or the *guru* communicates the downward (sideward) glance of the divinity towards humanity that turns into salvation.[1372]

The materialistic conception of life, secularistic views, rationalistic understandings of theology and mission makes us religiously insensitive to embodied expressions of devotions. Instead, there should be a balance between rational and affective aspects of religion. The *Mānas* is popular because of its embodied expression in its aesthetics and performative traditions. Deep engagement with the traditions invites one to see the embodied expression of the devotional

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[1369] In the Latin American context, the case of Our Lady of Guadalupe is very interesting, especially with regard to the question of encounters of Christianity with native identity. On this, see Virgilio Elizondo, *Guadalupe* (Maryknoll, 1997). On the question of encounters of Christian saint veneration with Hinduism and Indian local realities, see Corrine Dempsey, *Kerala Christian Sainthood* (Oxford, 2001); also, Margaret Meibohm, *Cultural Complexity in South India* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2004).

[1370] One of the terms for grace in Hinduism is *Kaṭākṣa*, meaning looking at a side look or glance, a leer, a word borrowed from love literature. Thus, the divinity is compared to a lover that cannot avoid throwing side glances at the beloved.

[1371] Rambachan, "Hindu Traditions: Unity and Diversity," 15.

[1372] The word may also imply that the lord's mere side glance is sufficient as a bestowal of grace. There is also a common belief that fish nurse their young by simply looking at them; the tortoise raises their young by merely thinking of them, and the birds do so by keeping them under their wings, George Gispert-Sauch, "Grace in the Viśṣṭādvaita tradition," in *Divine Grace and Human Response,* ed. C.M. Vadakkekara, 34.

dimension within Catholic traditions. They are essential for the living faith. A dogmatic focus alone will dimmish the beauty of religion. Hans Urs von Balthasar warns us against a gradual divorce between head and heart, leading us to "a visionless theology and a mindless spirituality."[1373] In the context that focuses less on aestheticism and more on informal pragmatism, the *Mānas* traditions help us to rediscover the decorum and majesty of divine worship through music, the use of senses, and the element of accompaniment in popular devotions.

A) Musical

In 2016, the then Superior-General of the Society of Jesus, Fr. Adolfo Nicholas, in his address to Jesuits and lay collaborators at Sophia University as it marked its 100th anniversary, suggested that mission today must create "awareness and appreciation of dimensions of reality that are deeper than instrumental reason or materialist conceptions of life, …… to form a new kind of humanity that is musical, that retains this sensitivity to beauty, to goodness, to the suffering of others, to compassion."[1374] Singing and music are essential elements in every religion and are paramount in the rituals of every known religion.[1375] It is performed by individuals, specific groups, and entire congregations and is expected to have a range of effects and functions that directly contribute to the efficaciousness of the ritual.[1376] Music is a universal language known as the "language of the heart" and it helps humans relive special moments, it brings out emotions, and connect the family, friends, and communities. Music is not merely an aesthetic form, but it communicates spirituality and leads to mysticism through its heuristic process. Every

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[1373] Raymond Gawronski, "The Beauty of the Cross: The Theological Aesthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar," Logos: *A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 5, no. 3 (2002): 196, https://doi.org/10.1353/log.2002.0032.

[1374] Christopher Pramuk, "A New Kind of Humanity: The Legacy of Adolfo Nicolas," *America,* July 2020.

[1375] G.L. Beck, *Sacred Sound: Experiencing Music in World Religions* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2006).

[1376] J. Gelineau, Voices and Instruments in Christian worship: Principles, Laws, Applications (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1964) see also C. Page, *The Christian West, and its Singers: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

communication involves three components – a communicator, a message to be communicated, and a receiver. Music as a performative and an embodied art communicates a message to the receiver. To receive the message, the listener must have the ability to *audiate*, that is, the ability to create a sound "in my head," a capacity to be developed. [1377] The Catholic Church's liturgical chants and prayers are a gift to us, and they need to be preserved and promoted by learning their value from other faiths.

The structural chanting of antiphonal singing in the *Mānas* with slow and fast cycles creates a feeling of devotion. It communicates a message of devotion and love, and the devotees receive this message in their "body and mind" and strive towards becoming a mystic. Rituraj, a singer of the *Mānas* text, often says that the message of devotion to Rām and Hanumān that he communicates through his singing energizes him to sing melodiously and he views that the devotees' expression of '*ānand'* (bliss) is the best remuneration that one can receive for the performance. Some of the earliest descriptions of the ideals of Christian life encouraged believers to join in song and music-making as a form of prayer, and a means to make God's presence salient.[1378] The liturgical reformation in the Catholic Church stresses the role of singing as a significant expression of the active participation of the assembled congregants, which in turn is viewed as a pivotal component of the renewed and vernacular from Catholic mass.[1379] Within the

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[1377] For a definition of audiation, see "Chapter 1: Audiation" in Edwin E. Gordon, *Learning Sequences in Music: A Contemporary Music Learning Theory* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2012).
[1378] Kinga Povedák, "*Rockin' the Church: Vernacular Catholic Musical Practices*," *Journal of Global Catholicism* 4, no. 1 (2020): 42-63, DOI: 10.32436/2475-6423.1066.
[1379] *Sacrosanctum Concillium*, 14-20, 30.

Catholic Church, liturgical singing facilitates a spiritual feeling and a connectedness to God, and a social feeling among members of congregation that induces a sense of connectedness. [1380]

In singing, raising our hands, kneeling, and standing together in worship, Steven Guthrie writes that we offer God the very building of the blocks of our rational engagement with the world and through these gestures, movements, and by the sensory experience of the world. We worship our God and savior, and the worship becomes part of our meaning-making movements. These embodied worship experiences lead communities to open themselves to an "embodied experience of the world, and from that experience, they reap new conceptual resources, new embodied metaphors, by which they make sense of things."[1381] In popular religiosity, the people experience a sense of freedom, and the divinity is encountered not in silence but in rituals, singing, and festivities.[1382]

B) Use of Senses in Expressing Devotion

The *Mānas* text and rituals offer the church a new way of looking at popular devotions in an Asian land. The popular religiosity of Hinduism challenges the way that the so-called Christian world evaluates and interprets religions. Much emphasis is laid on the doctrinal elements of faith. However, the performative and ritual elements also express faith and communicate that faith is lived and expressed through symbols and rituals.[1383] According to Durkheim, the objectified sentiments of the religious experience of a group are projected outside of itself, and they are

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[1380] Melanie Wald-Fuhrmann, Sven Boenneke, thijis Vroegh and Klaus Peter Dannecker, "He Who sings, Prays Twice"? Singing in Roman Catholic Mass Leads to Spiritual and Social Experiences That are Predicted by Religious and Musical Attitudes," *Frontiers in Psychology* (17th September 2020), doi:10.3389? fpsyg2020.570189.

[1381] Steven R. Guthrie, "Temples of the Spirit: Worship as Embodied performance," in *Faithful Performances Enacting Christian Tradition* (Ashgate, 2007), 104.

[1382] Gerald Arbuckle calls it "power to liberate," See Gerald Arbuckle "In praise of Popular Piety," in *The Tablet* vol 243, No. 7763 (1989), 544.

[1383] Signs communicate information, symbols effect relationships. On the nature and function of symbols, see Roger Haight, *Dynamics of Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 129-66.

expressed in some external performance. Thus, rituals often symbolize religious experience and provide a worldview of a particular belief system.[1384] When identifying this symbolism of events and gestures Sixto J. Garcia states that "these symbols have a revelatory dimension."[1385] Yann Vagneux, a French priest, living among the Hindus in Varanasi, points out that Indians are profoundly liturgical individuals who inhabit the splendor of the cosmos. In particular, the Brahmin is called to be the cult mediator between man and the gods.[1386] *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* mentions that 'the officiant recites the verses continually, without interruption' to 'make the days and nights of the year continuous' and 'so the days and nights of the years alternate; continually without interruption.'[1387]

At Varanasi on the banks of the holy river Gangā, hundreds performing rituals is a familiar scene communicating that the rite is an essential dimension of being human and the very foundation within which our spiritual growth is made possible. The use of flowers, camphor, and incense in the ritual tradition of Hindus communicate symbolically that these offerings are for the salvation of humans. In these ritual traditions, Hindu devotees use their senses. Most Hindu *pujās* involve the expression of thankfulness through the symbolic offering of gifts to the deity, usually in food and flowers.[1388] Their devotion to ritual tradition intensifies and invites us to go deeper into our Christian ritual traditions. During the study of *Mānas* in Varanasi, one cannot overlook the use of senses – seeing, touching, smelling, tasting, and hearing- on the banks of river Gangā and in the temples. Whether spontaneous or scripted, these rituals have experiential phenomena that exist in

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[1384] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979). 229 ff.
[1385] Sixto, J. García "A Hispanic Approach to Trinitarian Theology: The dynamics of Celebration, Reflection and Praxis," in *We are a People! Initiative in Hispanic American Theology*, ed. Roberto Goizueta (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 116.
[1386] Vagneux, "A Marriage with Hinduism," 712.
[1387] *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa,* 1, 3, 5, 16.
[1388] Stephen P. Huyler, "The Experience: Approaching God," in *The Life of Hinduism*, ed. John Stratton Hawley and Vasudha Narayanan (Berkely: University of California Press, 2006), 38.

time and in the human body.[1389] All senses are used to grow in devotion (all sensual spirituality) in the worship. Vallabhācārya on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* comments

> Conversing with Bhagavān, seeing him, embracing him when we meet him, as well as worshipping him and in that way touching him, kissing the nectar of his lips, enjoying him sexually, and the thrilling of the hair as well; hearing the sounds he makes when speaking, singing, or playing the flute, as well as smelling his fragrance everywhere; constantly moving to be near him and meditatively imagining him at all times; this alone is the reward of all who have senses.[1390]

Within the Christian understanding, there is a deeper seeking of God and to seek "his face always" (Ps 105:4) and to experience God using our senses. For example, Psalm 34: 8 says, "to taste and see" the goodness of the Lord. In the *Spiritual Exercises of Saint. Ignatius*, the Ignatian contemplation invites the retreatant to apply the five senses while contemplating the mysteries. [1391] Ignatius encourages the retreatant to just watch and listen and "smell the infinite fragrance and taste the infinite sweetness of the divinity."[1392] As Michael Amaladoss observes, "to see, hear, taste, touch, or smell the divine is not simply to receive information from a divine source outside oneself; nor is it simply a self-enclosed aesthetic experience; nor is it simply an intellectual "aha!" moment. …. God wants to be known, which initiates the development of a personal "sensing" for God. Moreover, God loves us so much that when words fail, we are given knowledge of God through other forms of communication."[1393] The sensory experience of the divine occurs in music, art, dance as these elements communicate an affective experience of beauty. Beauty is revelatory, and "it is in the acting, in the performing, in the participation, in the living itself that God is revealed."[1394] As something beautiful, the beautiful rituals and performative move the faithful

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[1389] O'Donnell "Methodological Considerations," 261.
[1390] James D. Redington, *Vallabhācārya on the Love Games of Kṛṣṇa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass,1983), 24-25.
[1391] Sp.Ex. no. 121
[1392] Sp.Ex. no. 124
[1393] Michael J. Lamanna, "Honing the Mystical Ear Making Sense of Music as a Means of Mystical Living," *STL Thesis*, 2021.
[1394] Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos Conjesus, Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment*, 103.

interiorly and brings them closer to the divine. Saint Thomas Aquinas is perfectly correct when he says that the sacraments instituted for the salvation of humans who have to be "led by things corporeal and sensible to things spiritual and intelligible."[1395] God as a lover has to be known and experienced through our senses. The *Mānas* tradition uses rituals, processions, singing, divine plays to communicate God because religious art, architecture, and religious symbols reflect the religious sense of a place.[1396] Catholicism, with its principle of sacramentality, uses rituals and symbols to communicate God's grace effectively. The rituals are sacramentals to the people who observe them.

> The term sacrament refers to the revelation of God in the creation and the revelation of God in the person's embodied action in the world, interaction, and participation. What makes man's participation sacred is not the result, but his active involvement in the evolution of the drama and his relationship with God is re-enacted whenever he participates in the ritual.[1397]

A rational approach to Catholicism downplays the importance of ritual beauty within the traditions. John Baldovin, a sacramental and liturgical theologian, pointing to the practice of processions within Catholicism from the fourth century onwards, says they involved much more than walking and singing, and they often involved banners, crosses, relics, candles, and even the consecrated host accompanied by music antiphons, psalms, litanies, and hymns. The processions and venerations on the religious and anthropological level are fine examples of the bodyliness of Christian liturgy.[1398]

[1395] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIIa, q. 61, a. 1.
[1396] Anthony Kolencherry, *Art in Culture-Meditating with the Paintings of Sr. Claire SMMI* (Bangalore: Indian Institute of Spirituality, 1996), 13.
[1397] Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos Conjesus,* 104.
[1398] John Baldovin, "Processions and Venerations," *Brill Handbook of Medieval Latin Liturgy*, unpublished. See also Rubin, *Corpus Christi,* esp. 258-271, 347-361.

The Church is a worshipping community. Within a liturgical setting, sacraments are celebrations of ecclesial communion in the spirit and have a ritual that combines word, prayer, and ritual action.[1399] In sacramental celebrations, the rituals and symbols are used to communicate God's grace in the Paschal mystery of Christ. Liberation Theology looks at the memorial – *anamnesis* -of the paschal event as a festivity communicating symbolically the freedom from all that holds people captive in their current existence and social sphere and offers hope for the future.[1400] David N. Power rightly notes that the *lex orandi* as the first-order language "does not mean it expresses the mystery less effectively than doctrinal teaching or systematic reflection. Indeed, it says more and, in giving rise to thought, asks for deeper immersion in the mystery of the triune God, who reveals and bestows the gift of the divine self in the celebration of the sacraments."[1401] Today, the complex interplay between the *lex orandi* and *lex crendenti* needs to add *lex agendi* (law of action). For example, the authenticity of worship needs verification in the ethical behavior of those who congregate for worship. [1402] The notion of *lex agendi* applies to both the *Māna*s and the Catholic community.

C) Element of Accompaniment in Popular Devotions

In popular devotions, people feel that they are being "accompanied" by the God in whom they believe. The feeling of accompaniment contributes to the understanding of faith. Popular devotions are connected to the revelatory aspect of God as *Abba*. For instance, Latino people pray and deal with Jesus as a living person and project their life experience onto Jesus of Nazareth as

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[1399] David N. Power, "Sacraments in General," in *Systematic Theology Roman Catholic Perspectives*, 462.
[1400] The work of Johannes Baptist Metz built on the ideas of Latin American theology with his idea of the Cross as a dangerous memory.
[1401] See David N. Power, *Sacrament: The Language of God's Giving* (New York: Crossroad,1999), 76–80, 165–77.
[1402] Kevin W. Irwin, *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1994), 52–74

being in solidarity with their lives, an experience that gives hope for the future.[1403] During the *Rāmlīlā* celebrations, people walk with the characters of the play to feel that they are being "accompanied." They accompany them while believing the in the authenticity of the actors and in their performance. The devotees of Rām put faith in the 'performers' of *Rāmlīlā*, as for the participant of the *Rāmlīlā*, God is literally present in the *svarūpas* and place of *līlās* occurrence. The power of their faith is energized with the emotion of *bhakti* through singing *kirtans*, walking pilgrimages, accompanying the artists, and distributing *prasād*s. All these actions communicate the accompaniment of God. Stephen P. Huyler points out that the Hindus believe that the ingestion of *prasād* fills the devotees with the divine energy of the deity to whom they have prayed. Christians, likewise, believe that by partaking in the bread and wine in Holy Communion, they receive the body and blood of Christ into their bodies.[1404]

5.3.4. Popular Devotion and *Sensus Fidelium*

Emphasizing popular religion enables loving devotion to Jesus and contributes to an understanding of the *sensus fidelium* (sense of the faithful) within the Church. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines *sensus fidelium* as "the supernatural appreciation of faith on the part of the whole people, when, from the bishops to the last of the faithful, they manifest a universal consent; in matters of faith and morals."[1405] The importance of the *sensus fidei* in the Church's life was strongly emphasized by the Second Vatican Council. Banishing the reality of an active hierarchy and a passive laity, and in particular the notion of a strict separation between the teaching Church (*Ecclesia docens*) and the learning Church (*Ecclesia discens*), the Council taught that all

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[1403] Orlando O. Espin, *The Faith of the People, Theological Reflections of Popular Catholicism*, 23.
[1404] Stephen P. Huyler, "The Experience: Approaching God," 41.
[1405] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd ed.). *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*. 2019. *Paragraph 92*

the baptized participate in their own proper way in the three offices of Christ as a prophet, priest and king and exercise their priesthood principally in the Eucharist.[1406] In particular, it taught that Christ fulfills his prophetic office not only through the hierarchy but also through the laity.[1407]

Lumen Gentium gives expression to the conviction that the entire body of the faithful possesses a *sensus fidei*, a supernatural instinct bestowed upon Christians that enables them to recognize what is authentic or inauthentic in church teaching, as well as what is central or what is peripheral. [1408] There is an organic unity within the Church between the teaching church (*ecclesia docens*) and the learning church (*ecclesia discens*), a central theme in harmony with the *sensus fidelium* and with broader developing notions of theological reception. Rahner rhetorically asks whether the "hierarchy alone has the exclusive task of teaching the Gospel authentically?" He answers saying, "A true understanding of the church's infallibility is possible only if we heed this [mutually conditioning] relationship between the authority of the magisterium and the whole church's invincible grace of faith, from [and in] which even the office-bearers, with their specific function, live."[1409] Rahner emphasized that the Magisterium "learns and should continue to learn" from the actual faith of the people of God, of whom theologians are part. But he laments that in past times, "in the church's awareness of the faith, the accent has shifted."[1410] In his theological investigations, Rahner argues that popular religion has a more substantial role in the Church's life

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[1406] Cf. LG, no. 10, 34.
[1407] International Theological commission, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, 2014, no. 4.
[1408] LG, no. 12.
[1409] *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, On the Declaration of the CDF on the Church's doctrine, "Theological Investigations, 17, 145.
[1410] *Theological Investigations*, 22, 173.

than merely one of subordination to the teachings of the Magisterium and the explanations of theology.[1411]

Karl Rahner, in his writing on "the relation between theology and popular religion," does not analyze any particular expressions of popular religion but deals with the relationship between theology and the primordial experience of God's self-communication in grace and the relationship between the articulated "faith of the church" and the existence of the Church as a communion of "people" who have experienced God and are not simply "the People of God" in a formal, structured sense.[1412] Pamela McCann argues that Rahner's *sensus fidelium* influences theological thinking mainly in two general areas; the "right relation" between the faithful and the magisterium, and gives attention to communal consensus-building terms of dialogue and experiment in the Church.[1413] Firstly, he recognizes "popular religion," not simply as a "practice" that responds to the "theory," that is theology. Instead, he posits that theology "derives from practice, insofar as the practice is the source, or at least one source of scientific theology." Secondly, he points out that if the "church is a pilgrim body," in which everyone not only receives but also gives and serves," then popular religion can be "a constitutive moment of this Church" in this manner, popular religion can have a creative and normative influence upon theology.

Secondly, Rahner argues that the *Sensus Fidelium* presumes relation to scripture and the teaching authority but does not originate from them. Instead, it "comes from the spirit of Truth, the unction of the saints, and it is given to all." For both the community of the Church and its

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[1411] Karl Rahner, "The Relation between Theology and Popular Religion," *Theological Investigations* (vol. 22), trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 140-47 [originally published in 1979].

[1412] Ibid., 142.

[1413] Pamela McCann, "Karl Rahner and the *Sensus Fidelium*," *Philosophy and Theology* 25 (2013), 313.

teachers, the "unction of the Spirit" is primary.[1414] Thirdly, he says that popular religion has

something to say to "learned theology" because "the people themselves (within the whole Church)

are an addressee of primitive revelation. Recognizing the popular religion of the people enables

the Church to stress the people's alternative paths to adapt the official religion to their particular

needs and circumstances as most practitioners of popular religions are on the 'margins.' For

instance, Latino Catholics in their theologizing, given the marginal status of many, understand the

praxis of popular religion as an essential *locus theologicus* for their theology. Latino/a theologians

advance a robust interpretation of praxis that incorporates: "affective/aesthetic imagination, the

rational intellect, and ethical-political commitments."[1415] Ernesto Valiente argues that in so far as

popular Catholicism expresses the living witness of the faith of the Latino people, it offers a

privileged locus for understanding Latino's *sensus fidelium* and an authentic bearer of intuition in

the faith of the people. Therefore, it is clear that the *sensus fidei* is a vital resource for the new

evangelization to which the Church is strongly committed in our time.[1416] The popular religious

expressions and the *sensus fidei* are "great resources for the Church's mission" and the "work of

the Holy Spirit."[1417] The International Theological Commission's document "*Sensus Fidelium* in

the Life of the Church" (2014), identifies the interplay between the magisterium, theologians, the

faithful at large and claims that "induvial believers cannot be separated from the *sensus fidei* or

sensus ecclesiae of the church itself."[1418]

[1414] Cf. LG, 12.
[1415] Goizueta, *Caminemos Con Jesūs*, 264.
[1416] Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no.119-120.
[1417] *Sensus Fidelium*, no. 112.
[1418] Ibid., no. 66

The document "*Sensus Fidelium"* invites the magisterium to listen to "the living voice of the people of God,"[1419] and to nurture, discern and judge the sensus fidelium.[1420] People's faiths must be taken seriously as a true *locus theologicus* and not merely a pastoral, catechetical problem,[1421] since it is not unfavorably opposed to "official" Catholicism and since, in popular devotions, we receive religious perceptions, and theological instructions that are culturally mediated and determined for evangelization and theology. As Rahner observes, popular religion "exerts on theology itself an influence what is to some extent creative and normative."[1422] It is "the first source of genuine religiosity and real faith that consists in God's universal standing invitation to accept divinization."[1423] Rahner visualizes the Church after the Judeo-Christian and Hellenistic-Eurocentric epoch moving into the third great epoch of church history. In this connection popular piety must be acknowledged as he says,

> I am thinking of theology which can no longer be uniform in a Neo-scholastic approach… I envisage a theology in which the Church at large must be a theology of a worldwide Church. This means theology that does not recite its own medieval history but one that can listen to the wisdom of the East, to the longing for freedom in Latin America, and to the sound of African drums. …. Arise, a long journey lies ahead of you.[1424]

Comparative Theology, in its approach, focuses on the method and model of "*exitus-reditus'*. Returning to one's home tradition after engaging deeply in other traditions in a multi-religious context invites us to be a learning church (*ecclesia discens*) from the elements of *sensus fidelium* in other faith traditions, in this case from the *Mānas* tradition. The *Sensus Fidelium* of the

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[1419] Ibid., no. 74
[1420] Ibid., no. 76.
[1421] Orlando O. Espin, *The Faith of the People*, 2.
[1422] Rahner, "The Relation Between Theology and Popular Religion," 143.
[1423] Ibid.
[1424]Rahner, "Foreword," *Theology and Discovery: Essays in Honor of Karl Rahner S. J.*, ed. William Kelly, S.J. (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1980), vii.

Hindu faith is very much based on the lived reality of religion, popular ritual, and devotional practices. Within the Hindu traditions, faith is more than the intellectual assent to propositions; faith is experiential. This reflects what might be understood in Christian terms as the sensus fidelium of the Hindu faith.

The life of the simple Hindu man or a woman is treasured completely within the ritual framework of the *saṃskāra* (*sacraments*), the various ceremonies that follow from the conception right up until their final funerary offering to the flames of Agni, the sacred fire that is the witness of their complete destiny. The enactment of ritual elements through physical gesture, vocalization, repletion communicate faith. There is no 'official hierarchy' like that of the Catholic Church. One wonders, how despite its non-hierarchical setup in its doctrinal teachings, Hinduism still flourishes in the world. Faith (*Śraddāh*) in Hinduism is used in a broad sense. The faith is explicitly expressed in God, in the scriptures, the teacher (*Guru*), the path (*sādhana)*, *dharma*, and the possibilities of liberation. Faith is at the heart of Hindu devotional practices and remaining faithfu to daily (*nitya*) and occasional (*naimittika*) rituals gives expression to their understanding of faith in profound ways. At times, the vast understanding of faith leads to 'irrational' belief systems, and Hinduism is challenged to articulate its worldview and offer some doctrinal clarity and definition.[1425] Nevertheless, the ordinary people's faith and belief contribute to the *sensus fidelium* of Hinduism. The *Mānas kathā* and *līlā* tradition with the oral, exegetical and storytelling traditions continue to flourish and interact in various ways with other media and promote people's faith. The context-sensitive appraisal of diverse enactments of faith and ritual practices contribute to the *sensus fidelium* within Hinduism.

[1425]Rambachan, "Hindu Traditions: Unity and Diversity," 29.

5.3.5. Popular Devotions and Liberation

One should not romanticize popular devotions. Both in the *Mānas* and the popular Catholic devotions, there are certain dangers. Firstly, the celebrations, liturgy create an alternative world. This alternative world can become a place to hide the reality of life and misery with its "aesthetic grandeur." Secondly, since popular devotions are context-based in the popular devotional celebrations, one needs to be aware of social and economic dynamics that indicate one's caste and class status. Such corruptions "must be patiently and prudently purified contacts with those responsible and through careful and respectful catechesis."[1426] Because "when divorced from theology and social justice, spirituality degenerates into narcissism. When divorced from theology and spirituality, social justice degenerates into social utilitarianism. When divorced from spirituality and social justice, theology degenerates into rationalism."[1427]

The Catholic document on *Popular Piety* reminds the faithful that external expressions indicate an interior aspect of Christians' commitment to Christ. "Without this interior aspects, symbolic gesture runs the risk of degenerating into empty customs or mere superstitions."[1428] The transformation of the world from an aesthetical perspective is essential in an Indian situation of 'multiple poor, religions and cultures.' From a theological perspective, George Soares Prabhu, a Biblical scholar, sees the Indian context as a 'cry for life.' [1429] The cry has three dimensions. Firstly, 'the cry for survival' arises from the massive economic deprivation. Secondly, a 'cry for dignity and affirmation' results from caste and sexist discrimination, and finally, a 'cry for meaning,' which

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[1426] *Congregation for Divine Worship's Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* (2001), no. 5.

[1427] Orlando O. Espin, *The Faith of the People,* xvii.

[1428] *Directory On Popular Piety and the Liturgy, Principles and Guidelines*, December 2001, no. 15.

[1429] "It is a cry for life' he says, "It is a cry for survival, for recognition, and meaning. It is a cry for liberation (economic and cultural) and dialogue". See *Collected Writings of George Soares Prabhu SJ*, ed. Francis X. D'Sa, Vol.4, *The Jesus of Faith: A Christological contribution to an Ecumenical Third World Spirituality* (Pune: jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth and Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, 2001), 276.

represents the religious quest of the Indian peoples.[1430] The aesthetical dimension of religion deepens and broadens the divine experience. With the *kathā* and *līlā* traditions, the *Mānas* allows the artists and narrators to speak to people in their own language and skill for the transformation/welfare of the world. However, within the Indian Church, there is a tendency to overlook aesthetics, in the context of justice issues related to *Dalit* theology, a Tribal theology much focus is given to 'justice and liberation elements.'

Vicente Chong, an Ecuadorian Jesuit writing on "*a theological Aesthetics of Liberation*," points out that the mutual and critical correlations between liberation theology and theological aesthetics are helpful to understand God in his relationship with human beings. He points out three reasons for the correlation between liberation theology and aesthetics. Firstly, aesthetics can help liberation theology make the objects of its reflection attractive since liberation theology has been based on praxis and justice's "good" issues. Following De Gruchy, he claims that goodness without beauty "degenerates into moralism" and lacks the "power to convince."[1431] Secondly, Chong argues that aesthetics can help liberation theology to be a "source of religious insight."[1432] In this regard, he follows Alejandro Garcia-Rivera's views on art as an "indispensable element of "theology's vocation to bring insight of the need and way of salvation in its reflections on the social and cultural environment it finds itself in."[1433] Thirdly, calling attention to the transformative power of art, Chong writes that "a theology that cares for the poor, but disregards aesthetics, is abandoning one of the key elements in the process of liberation of those who are social outcasts."[1434] If the focus is

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[1430] In a broader context, India shares the poverty of the third world and religiosity of Asia; only caste discrimination is specific to India.
[1431] Gruchy, *Christianity, Art, and Transformation*, 105.
[1432] Garcia-Rivera, *Wounded Innocence*, 34.
[1433] Ibid., 34.
[1434] Vicente Chong, *A Theological Aesthetics of Liberation* (Eugene; Oregon, Pickwick, 2019), 3.

only on justice without aesthetics, we push people to both cultural poverty and economic poverty. De Gruchy writes, "a society that relegates the arts to the peripheries of life … is spiritually and culturally poor."[1435]

5.4. Learning from the Performative Aesthetics of *Mānas*

The fourth learning occurs from the performative aesthetics of the *Mānas*. The *Mānas* is popular among the North Indian Hindus due to its aesthetics and rituals, namely, *kathā, līlā,* and *pāṭh*.[1436] The learning comes from examining why the *Mānas* tradition is popular in its religious expression. Of course, this can be done without one's participation in those religious expressions. Nevertheless, the deeper participation in these aesthetic elements raises theological questions on the 'ritual participation in other faith traditions.'[1437] But the learning will ask how Christianity might learn from aesthetics in evangelization. How can aesthetics (dance, drama, and music) of the *Mānas* tradition be used to understand and proclaim Christ? Should not Christians in India retell the story of Jesus Christ similarly to that of *Tulsi Rāmāyaṇa*? Should we not affirm *'Kristkathā' 'Krista līlā'* to preach the good news that can infuse devotion to Christ and give prominence to 'story theology'? Presenting the life of Christ by merely imitating the theatrical skills of *Rāmlīlā* is not sufficient as it would be recognized as theft from other traditions.

Christians are challenged to recognize the deeper dimension of *Rāmlīlā*. The *Rām līlā* is not just simply a theatrical performance but it has a sense of *sādhana* attached to it as the characters are identified with the sacred narrative of the *Mānas* text. Hence, the participants are deeply affected through their participation as it offers a foretaste of the mystical endeavor of the divine.

[1435] Gruchy, *Christianity, Art, and Transformation*, 254.
[1436] These terms are explained in Chapter Four.
[1437] The question on ritual participation is dealt with in detail in the fourth chapter.

People enter into the world of *Rāmlīlā* by knowing at least some part of the *Mānas* by heart. Hess writes about devotees' participation in the *Rāmlīlā*, "the participant not only sees the drama but finds himself acting in it. A vast world is created before and around him. …. The tawdry *samsāra* of ordinary life pales while the *Rāmlīlā* world becomes ever more vivid, brilliant, and gripping."[1438] The challenge for Christians is to learn the theatrical skills of presenting the life of Christ and enable the participants to experience union with Christ through the enactments of the life of Jesus. *Rāmlīlā* as a drama involves the presence of living deities upon the stage. Devotees do not see the characters merely as Rām and his wife, Sītā. But the characters actually in the minds and hearts of people embody Rām and Sītā. Hence, most spectators report that certain 'fruits' (*phal)* accrue to those who regularly attend performances. William S. Sax argues that the forest journey of Rām in the *Mānas* is transformative; that is, it is both restitutive of cosmic order and constitutive of Hindu religious geography.[1439] Similarly, the devotees who participate in the *līlā* as *yātris*, meaning pilgrims, are transformed. Rām's exile and forest journey are the means used to defeat Rāvaṇa, and the consequent transformation of the demon ravaged world into *Rāmrāj,* the righteous of kin Rām. The people who attend these *līlā* have efficacy in their individual and family life and become better in their relationships and motivations. The transformations are experienced tangibly and not merely symbolically.

Khristlīlā also must aim at transforming the lives of individuals based on Christian values. Such transformations are happening to some extent in the *Khristbhakta* movement. In the Christmas and Lenten season, the birth and passion of Christ are enacted in *līlā* style. People participate and feel that they are being accompanied by Christ. The participants communicate that

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[1438] Linda Hess, "An Open-Air Ramayana: Ram Lila: The Audience Experience," 124-25.
[1439] William S. Sax, "The Rāmnagar Rāmlila, Text, Performance, Pilgrimage," *History of Religions*, 30, no. 2 (Nov 1990), 129-153.

this kind of participation has led to the transformation of their lives. The bodyliness of Christian liturgy and sacramental life can be 'rediscovered' by focusing our attention on the aesthetics or beauty as a theological discipline. Richard Viladesau maintains that the experience of beauty is a well-founded religious experience, as he states,

> To experience beauty is to experience a deep-seated "yes" to being – even in its finitude and its moments of tragedy, and such an affirmation is possible only if being is grounded, borne by a Reality that is absolute in value and meaning. In short, the experience of finite beauty in a spiritual being implies the unavoidable (although perhaps thematically unconscious) co-affirmation of an infinite Beauty: the reality that we call God.[1440]

In the European Medieval period of Catholic tradition, topics related to the theory of aesthetics such as proportion, light, and symbolism played an important role. Medieval theologians, appreciating symbolism, saw that creation revealed God and therefore, symbolic meaning could be communicated through artwork, especially for those who were illiterate. Writing of medieval symbolism Umberto Eco explains, "Firstly there was metaphysical symbolism, related to the philosophical habit of discerning the hand of God in the beauty of the world. Secondly, there was universal allegory; that is, perceiving the world as a divine work of art, of such a kind that everything in it possesses moral, allegorical, and analogical meanings in addition to its literal meaning."[1441] The main idea is that the universe reveals God, its author and creator, through its beauty. Pseudo-Dionysius wrote, "Any thinking person realizes that the appearances of beauty are signs of an invisible loveliness." Secularization, rationalization sets aside the aesthetics of Catholicism. Hans Urs von Balthasar acknowledges the necessity of recovering the notion of

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[1440] Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics, God in Imagination, Beauty, and Art* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 149.

[1441] Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages,* trans. Hugh Bredin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 56.

beauty in Christian faith and theology. For Christians this recovery can happen in paying attention and learning form the *Mānas* and other similar traditions of Hinduism.

5.4.1. Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty and Aesthetics

Hans Urs von Balthasar views human contact with the divine, not simply as the truth of God's revelation and human response, but an awesome encounter with the glory of the Lord (Hebr. *Kabod*, Greek: *Doxa*). Human beings indeed encounter God in the humanity of Jesus Christ through their normal five senses and acknowledge Jesus as divine with the "exalted" senses of faith. Through this understanding of divine-human encounter, Balthasar integrates both the transcendental and the media of human senses.[1442] and in his sacramental theology, he sees sac*ram*ent as a participation in the form of God's glory in the world, which is Jesus Christ.[1443] Balthasar writes that the "good loses its attractiveness, the self-evidence of why it is carried out in a world without beauty. A man stands before the good and asks himself why it must be done and not rather its alternative, evil."[1444] While speaking of beauty, Balthasar does not speak merely of the beauty of the world; rather, he is interested in beauty as an attribute of God. When Balthasar speaks of beauty, goodness, and truth of the world, Vicente Chong points out that he is not speaking of them as terms in the world but as transcendentals, "beauty, goodness, and truth are attributes of being. Hence, from a Christian perspective, beauty, goodness, and truth are attributes of God."[1445] Benedict XVI states "The beauty of the liturgy is part of this mystery; it is a sublime expression of God's glory and, in a certain sense, a glimpse of heaven on earth. [...] beauty, then, is not mere

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[1442] Mark Miller "The Sacramental Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," 49.

[1443] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord; A Theological Aesthetics* Vol. 1. Seeing the Form (San Francisco: Ignatius 1989). Also, see M. Miller, "The Sac*ram*ental Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Worship* 64 (1990): 48-66.

[1444] Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, 10.

[1445] Chong, *A Theological Aesthetics of Liberation*, 56.

decoration but rather an essential element of the liturgical action since it is an attribute of God himself and his revelation. These considerations should make us realize the care which is needed if the liturgical action is to reflect its innate splendor."[1446]

Balthasar's vision of theological aesthetics complements the vision of the true, the good and that the beautiful.[1447] His theological aesthetics is not just beauty or art. Instead, the object of his theological aesthetics is God in relationship with the world and reflection about God and his saving action in the world from the perspective of aesthetics.[1448] Understanding beauty only in earthly terms and not divine attributes leads to the "secularization of beauty."[1449] Therefore, Balthasar distinguishes "theological aesthetics" from "aesthetic theology." In his opinion, theological aesthetics is a theology that understands beauty as an attribute of divine Being, whereas aesthetic theology is a theology that understands beauty in worldly and subjective terms.[1450]

In his book, *Glory of the Lord*, Balthasar explains his theological trilogy, "In order to maintain the right balance, a 'theological aesthetics' should be followed by a 'theological dramatics' and a 'theological logic …. only then would the *pulchrum* appear in its rightful place within the total ordered structure, namely as to how God's goodness (*bonum*) gives itself and is expressed by God understood by man as the truth (verum)."[1451] Theo-drama deals with God's action and human action in the world. For Balthasar, the good "cannot be contemplated in pure 'aesthetics' nor proved and demonstrated in pure 'logic' rather the "good" is something done. The good here is God's work of salvation that "take place nowhere but on the world stage, and its

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[1446] *Sacramentum Caritatis, no.* 35.
[1447] Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, 1:9.
[1448] Chong, *A Theological Aesthetics of Liberation,* 55.
[1449] Ibid., 59.
[1450] Balthasar, *Glory of the Lod*, 37, 77.
[1451] Ibid., 11.

destiny is seen in the d*ram*a of a world history that is continually unfolding."[1452] For Urs von Balthasar, the model of drama and theatre is still "a more promising point of departure for a study of theo-drama than man's secular, social activity."[1453]

In this theo-drama, the cross is the manifestation of God's Glory, as Urs von Balthasar writes, "We ought never to speak of God's beauty without reference to the form and manner of appearing which he exhibits in salvation history…..the most abysmal ugliness of in and hell by the condescension of divine love, which has brought even sin and hell into that divine art."[1454] The understanding of theological aesthetics by Balthasar "does not encourage a flight from the world but assumes Christian participation in God's mission to transform the world."[1455] Among the various ritual traditions, *Rāmlīlā*, as a religious event, enables the devotees to have a divine encounter with the glory of God.

A. *Rasa* Theory in the *Mānas* to Grow in Aesthetics

The call of Balthasar to grow in the sense of aesthetics and beauty could be responded to by learning from the *rasa* theory, which is used frequently in the *Mānas* plays and enactments. The *'rasa'* theory in ancient India's poetic traditions classified human emotions into nine basic types.[1456] A poet expresses his feelings through the medium of poems, dance, music, and art, and the purpose is to transmit emotions to his or her audience. The expectation from the reader is to be

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[1452] Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, 1:19.
[1453] Ibid., 11-12.
[1454] Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, 1:121.
[1455] Cruchy, *Christianity, Art, and Transformation*, 129.
[1456] *Rasa* designates aesthetic sentiment in Indian poetics. In the *Nātyāśāstra*, the oldest surviving compendium on the knowledge of performing arts, of Bharata Muni, sixth and seventh chapters relate to *rasas* (sentiments) and *Bhāvas* (emotions). He notes eight different *rasas*, namely *śṛṇgāra*-erotic, *virā*- heroic, *karuṇā*-pathetic, *hāsya*- comic, *raudra*- furious, *bhayānaka*-terrible, *bībhatsa*- odious, and *adbhuta*- marvelous. A ninth *rasa śānta*- tranquility was added by later authors, and now the expression of *navarasa* (nine) is standard. Thus, *Rasik* can savor aesthetic sentiments.

a '*sahṛdayi*' to receive the expressions. The literary theory of *rasa* is applied to the devotional texts as are the love songs in ancient love poetry in order to blur the boundary between the sensual and the spiritual. Love language may be a scandal for the Puritans, however for Hindus these encounters, although they predominantly have an erotic mood (*śṛṅgāra rasa*) they do not merely imply sexual relationship but rather they communicate a deep mystical relationship of a devotee to be partakers with the divine. Ultimately, the theory of *rasa* advances the relishing his relationships.

St. Ignatius, in his *Spiritual Exercises*, invites the retreatants to go beyond understanding and 'relish' (*gustar*). The *ras* means the sap, juice the essence of reality: taste a thing and delight in it. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* states, "he indeed is the essence (*rasa*). Only when one has grasped the essence does one become blissful (*ānandī*). Now, who would breathe in, who would breathe out, if that essence would not be here in space (*ākāśa*) as bliss? For it is that essence that causes bliss (*ānandayāti*)."[1457] The proximity between the aesthetic experience of beauty and mystical experience of the divine is visible in the Vallabha theology of *bhakti* as Kṛṣṇa is the source of *rasa* for the *gopīs* of Vṛndāvan. Nevertheless, in the mid-sixteenth century, influenced by the Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, the worship of the divine couple 'Sitā-Rām' with the emphasis on '*Mādhurya bhakti*' (sweet, delightful) was prominent among the followers of *Rasik Sampradāy*. [1458]

In the Christian tradition, the psalmist prays to seek God's face (Ps. 24: 6) to behold his beauty (Ps.27:4). Vaiṣṇava tradition sees God's beauty in the form of Kṛṣṇa and Tulsidas invites us to see the beauty of God in Rām and Sitā. They vividly appreciate the beauty and glory of each other in their seeing. The *Mānas* explains that when Sītā was shown Rām by her friends seeing his

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[1457] Tai. Up. 2.6.7.
[1458] For more details, see Philip Lutgendorf, "The Secret Life of Ramachandra of Ayodhyā," in Paula Richman, *Many Rāmāyaṇas*, 217-34.

beauty, her eyes were drawn there, and she rejoiced as one finding her treasure.[1459] Rām's physical beauty -chest, neck, hand, waist - was enchanting, and she was enthralled (*parabas*a), meaning, under the control of another."[1460] The presence of the beloved overwhelms all awareness of oneself and one's relationship to others. This selfless experience has an "intoxicating force."[1461] Sītā treasures her beloved Rām in her heart. The combination of masculine and feminine aspects of love is suggested by Rām treasuring Sītā in his mind and Sītā treasuring him in her heart. Rām, admires the beauty of Sītā and finds her a "treasury of joy, affection, grace, and virtue."[1462] In the *Phulwāri* scene, Rām's and Sītā's desire for each other is depicted in the metaphor of the *chakor* bird; Tulsi writes that Rām's eyes are "*chakor* birds for the moon of Sītā's face"[1463] and Sītā is "like a *chakor* hen gazing at the autumn moon."[1464] Rām feels love for his beloved and thinks that the love god has dominated him. Rām when seeing her unearthly beauty in the garden, his pure heart perturbs and his right-side throbs, and as a man, he treasures all this in the tablet of his mind. Tulsi depicts Sītā's desire to see Rām as "her eyes were restless for that sight." Their mutual love has an inherent innocence that combines nobility, respect, and dignity.[1465]

During the nine-day (*Navāh Pārāyaṇa*) period when the *Phulwāri* text is to be recited, a garden scene is created inside the temple with plant pots, shrubs, and flowers. The singing of Phulwari text in the month of *Śrāvaṇ* is something that is a favorite of many. It also awakens passion and longing in young lovers.[1466] The flower garden's visual commentary through *Rāmlīlā*

[1459] RCM, 1.231.2.
[1460] The word used *lona* literal meaning salty /tasty.
[1461] Sheridan, *Loving God: Kṛṣṇa and Christ*, 34.
[1462] RCM, 1.234.2.
[1463] RCM, 1.229.2
[1464] RCM, 1.231.3
[1465] Varma, *The Greatest Ode to Lord Rām*, 65.
[1466] Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text*, 109.

takes care of the minute details of the scene. Lutgendorf rightly views that it "reflects a visual sensibility characteristic of the devotional milieu in which the performance developed."[1467] Appreciating beauty is necessary for devotional traditions. For example, in the Vaiṣṇava Hindu, theism to see God in beauty and attractiveness is one of the great themes. To be attached to his beautiful form is one of the eleven forms of love for God.[1468] In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the cowherd women say, to see God in the beautiful, splendid form is " the highest reward of being blessed with eyes; we do not know if there can be any greater felicity than this."[1469] These traditions must enable the Christian tradition to grow in the love of God emotionally and aesthetically. Through this act of seeing as a popular sacrament, many Hindu devotees contact the divine. Seeing in the *bhakti* tradition is not only for the pleasure of eyes but for inner insights into one's faith. *Bhagavad-Gītā* mentions that even gods are keen on the experience of seeing.[1470]

5.4.2. Karl Rahner on Aesthetics

Although not a professional artist, a poet, or art historian, Karl Rahner sees "arts and theology as mutually related."[1471] For Rahner, theology can be related to aesthetics, as art is mediation and expression of transcendental experience and a mediation of God's self-communication. [1472] Rahner says,

> what is genuine and holy, eternal, and valid, whether of man or God, can only be found in everyday life when our eyes and our hearts have been opened to it in hours that lie outside everyday life.[1473]

[1467] Ibid., 332.
[1468] NBS, no. 82.
[1469] Bh.Pu. 10.21.7.
[1470] *Darśana-kānkṣiṇaḥ*, BG. 11: 52.
[1471] Rahner, "Art Against the Horizon," 163.
[1472] Rahner*, Foundations of Christian Faith*, 8.
[1473] Rahner, "On the Theology of Books," 124.

Rahner, in his theology, thinks of God, not as an isolated divine being but rather as a God in relationship with human beings, as he states, "there is really only one question, whether this God wanted to be merely the eternally distant one or whether beyond that he wanted to be the innermost center of our existence."[1474] Rahner's theology is known as "transcendental theology" as it employs the "transcendental method."[1475] But for Rahner, "every transcendental experience is mediated by a categorical encounter with concrete reality in our world, both the world of things and the world of persons."[1476]

The Christian understanding of human existence is that the human person is the event of God's self-communication.[1477] God's self-communication to human beings "is present in every person at least in the mode of an offer."[1478] Hence, Rahner sees theological aesthetics from the perspectives of theological anthropology. [1479] Firstly, art is a mediation of transcendental experience at the sensory level,[1480] and a "peak experience of a sense domain."[1481] Secondly, for Rahner, art is "ways in which people express themselves" and human self-understanding.[1482] "whatever is expressed in art is a product of that human transcendentality by which, as spiritual and free beings, we strive for the totality of all reality."[1483]

In this manner, Rahner encourages a "poetic theology" as a legitimate mode of theology. However, poetic theology is not about beautifully writing theology; rather, it is about theology that

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[1474] Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 12.
[1475] See Schussler Fiorenza, "Method in Theology," 76-78.
[1476] Rahner, *Foundations in Christian Faith*, 52.
[1477] Ibid., 116.
[1478] Ibid., 127.
[1479] Thiessen, "Karl Rahner," 226; Little, "Anthropology and Art," 939.
[1480] See Rahner, "Theology of the Religious Meaning," 156.
[1481] Ibid., 157.
[1482] Rahner, "Art Against Horizon," 162.
[1483] Ibid., 165.

considers the experience of poetry as a theological source.[1484] Theisen points out, for Rahner, art can be a *locus theologicus*.[1485] Karl Rahner invites us to develop a "theology of emotions" in our devotion to Christ in his emphasis on art. The *Mānas*, with their aesthetics performances and rasa's theory, create an emotional state. For example, *Śṛṇgāra rasa* creates affection (*rati*). The text of *Phulwāri* having *śṛṇgāra rasa* resonates with theological and mystical connotations. This text of "love at first sight" is popular among commentators and audiences and is enacted during the autumnal *Rāmlīlā* pageants.[1486] In her book *Rasa: Performing the Divine*, Susan Schwartz argues that religion is not just a common theme in Indian performing arts but "religion as performing arts in India."[1487] These performances enable participation for a devotee to come closer to God. Therefore, the language of devotion is deeply rooted in the affective experience of human love. The enactments create deep love to their *iṣṭadevatā* as the ultimate aim of *bhakti* is to love God by restraining forces. This love for God is more profound and higher but not within the human language. Therefore, the use of erotic language or *śṛṇgāra rasa* cannot be considered immoral as human sexual desire and love for God both spring from the same source within the human person. The devotion to Rām is expressed through rituals, enactments and has the involvement of a person's whole being.

Catholic dogmatic traditions at times sideline emotional dimensions of experience. Poetry and art evoke the experience of love better than the abstract discourse of theology and philosophy.[1488] Voss Roberts, in her book *Tastes of the Divine*, invites us to consider developing a theology of emotions through the interplay of the texts, "Christian readers might enhance their

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[1484] Ibid., 163.
[1485] Thiessen, "Karl Rahner," 227.
[1486] Lutgendorf, *The Epic of Rām*, Vol. 2, x.
[1487] E. Susan L. Schwartz, *Rasa: Performing the Divine in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 3.
[1488] Rosemary Haughton, *The Passionate God* (New York: Paulist,1981), 1-11.

peaceful contemplation, reinforce their heartfelt love of God or find fuel for their prophetic zeal as they immerse themselves in Hindu texts."[1489] These performances enable participation for a devotee to come closer to God. Therefore, the language of devotion is deeply rooted in the affective experience of human love. The enactments create deep love for their *iṣṭadevata* as *bhakti's* aim is to love God by restraining forces. This love for God is more profound and higher but not within human language.

The Indian aesthetic tradition from the classics as well as from the folk needs to receive greater attention. Jyoti Sahi, a "theologian with a brush."[1490] points out that art expresses the culture and faith reality with a certain depth. An artist confesses his faith, a total fusion of inner and outer, content and form, and aspires to be true to his inner being. Through art, the revelation of God becomes a tangible reality to the scientific and rational world.[1491] From Sahi's perspective, Christian art has been an integral part of the growth of the church. It is like the scripture, which has become the source and foundation of Christian faith; similarly, through icons and religious art, one can enhance one's God-experience as art is not the work of an anonymous craftsman but a self-discovery.[1492] He proposes inculturation in art, architecture, symbols, and gestures because the very setting of worship gives the worshipper a sense of belonging to his own culture. Art is not only buildings, but it is an effort to express an underlying theology taking shape in the church. It implies that the church manifests a world view that is not peculiar to any particular place or community

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[1489] Voss Roberts, *Tastes of the Divine,* 191.

[1490] Anand Amaladoss and Gudrun Lowner, *Review of Christian Themes in Indian Art*, reviewed by Leonardo Fernando, in VJTR (September 2012): 704.

[1491] Jyoti Sahi, *Holy Ground-A New Approach to the Mission of the Church in India* (Auckland: Pace Publishing, 1998), 14.

[1492] Jyoti Sahi, *Steppingstone* (Bangalore: ATC, 1986), 5.

but addresses issues vital for understanding the whole church.[1493] The *Mānas* offers a model of *kathā* and *līlā as* resources to interpret and proclaim the Gospel in a poetic, story theology.

A. Narrative Theology from the *Kathā* of *Mānas*

Stephen Crite says that stories are "among the most important means by which people articulate and clarify their sense of that world."[1494] Hauerwas defines a story as "a narrative account that binds events and agents together in an intelligible pattern… to tell the story often involves a moment to make intelligible the muddle of things we have done in order to have a self."[1495] The narrative offers distinct resources for theological discourse. Johann Baptist Metz defends the centrality of stories and storytelling in Christian faith and theology as he states, "theology is above all concerned with direct experiences expressed in narrative language."[1496] He emphasizes that "Christianity is not really a community that interprets and gives arguments, but rather a community that remembers and tells stories, with a practical intent."[1497] Focusing on the crisis of Christian identity and praxis of discipleship, he makes a case for Christianity's fundamental narrative-practical structure, its historical identity, and the way it talks about eschatological salvation. In his perspective, Christianity's universal offer of salvation is an "invitation" to speak of *Logo*s. In Christological terms, this means "Christ does not become universal by means of an idea, but by means of the intelligible power of a praxis of discipleship. This intelligibility of Christianity cannot be conveyed in a purely speculative way, but narratively."[1498]

[1493] Jyoti Sahi, *Holy Ground*, 179.

[1494] Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of experience," *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 39 (1971), 296.

[1495] Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides Publishers, 1974), 74.

[1496] Johann Baptist Metz, "A short Apology of Narrative," in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids, Mich.: WB Eerdmans, 1989), 252.

[1497] Metz, *Faith in History and Society, Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. J. Matthew Ahshley (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 243.

[1498]Ibid., 154.

Christianity is rooted in the narrative of Jesus Christ. In narrating the salvation history grounded in Christ, there is a need to avoid *grand narratives* that have dominated Christian history. The universal story of Christ must always be contextual and allow for diversity because Christian story connects theological convictions to their lived-out contexts, pointing toward the "inherently practical character of theological convictions."[1499] In his narratives, Metz emphasizes the history of suffering, because "it is the stories of past suffering, which look forward, full of hope to a redemption effected by God - a narrative remembering of salvation-that keep history from becoming a history only of the successful and hold together in a realistic way both the plurality and ambiguity of human history and faith in God's merciful response to that history."[1500] Metz points to a memory narrated by those who experience suffering which cannot be systematized in arguments. From his perspective, "these stories break through the spell of a total reconstruction based on abstract reasoning" to disrupt the present. [1501]

New Testament scholar, Richard Hays, notes that the stories of scripture are the "framework in which we understand and measure our lives."[1502] The *Mānas*, with its tradition of storytelling (*kathā*) and storytellers (*vyās*) offers a model in preaching and speaking of Christ not merely in abstract terms but to narrate Christ in vivid imaginations and metaphors. Metz states,

> A theology that has lost the category of narrative, or that issues a theoretical prescription of storytelling as a precritical form of expression, can only push "authentic" and "primordial" experiences of faith off into the realms of the unobjective and the unspeakable.[1503]

[1499] James Wm. McClendon Jr. and James M. Smith, *Convictions: Diffusing Religious Relativism* (Valley Forge, Pa: Trinity Press International, 1994), 5.
[1500] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 243.
[1501] Ibid., 214.
[1502] Richard B. Hays, *The Moral vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, and New Creation, A contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 295.
[1503] Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 187.

Emphasizing the feature of "storyteller," Walter Benjamin, a German philosopher, writes, "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience- his own or that reported by others. And he, in turn, makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale."[1504] In his introduction to the "Hasidic stories," Martin Buber draws our attention to the decisive aspects of the narrative, stating, "telling the story is an event; it has the solemnity of a sacred action…. The narrative is more than a mirror. The holy essence to which the story testifies lives on in it. The miracle that one narrates becomes potent anew."[1505] We need to grow in the skill of narrating our faith stories and even their stories. *Rāmayaṇi'*s are experts in narrating stories with lots of connections to the other traditions and present-day context. A good storyteller (*vyās*) attracts thousands of people. Bevans in proposing the image of a missionary as a storyteller, states that if the missionary tells the story well, "any person from any culture and context will recognize that it is her or his own story and can give light and depth to that person's life."[1506]

B. The Liturgy as Performative

Christian theological discourse has traditionally been cognitive and verbal from start to finish. However, the *Mānas* tradition offers a possibility to look at the performative dimension of faith. Emma O'Donnell argues that the theological mode rooted in liturgical performance has much to offer to interreligious theological ventures and opens the door to new directions in interreligious learning. Catholic theology speaks liturgy, communicating what we believe in a symbolic ritual. Thus, liturgy is "a sort of catechism in action, and this bears an important implication for interreligious learning: if liturgy forms and speaks belief, liturgical performance may be a voice in

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[1504] Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," in *Illuminations*, ed. And with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 87.

[1505] See Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidism: The Early Masters*, trans. Olga Marx (New York Schocken, 1947), v-vi.

[1506] Bevans, *Mission as a Prophetic Dialogue*, Introduction, 12.

dialogue, speaking our belief for us."[1507] Repeated enactment of the Holy Eucharist acts as a means to remain faithful to the words of Jesus at Last supper "do this in remembrance of me."[1508]

As a noun, performative indicates ''a word or sentence that does something.'' As an adjective, performative ''inflects what it modifies with performance-like qualities.''[1509] Performative builds over time through repetition, iteration, and practice.[1510] Performance is not just traditional, contextual, and personal; it is also essentially creative and is shaped and trained in the life of tradition.[1511] The aim of performative is transformation. Schechner identifies transformation in the theatre at three different levels, as he states, "1) in the drama, that is, in the story; 2) in the performers whose special task it is to undergo a temporary rearrangement of their body/mind (transportation); 3) in the audience where changes may be temporary (entertainment) or permanent (ritual)."[1512] Applying performance theory to the liturgy Richard D. McCall, quoting Schechner, states, "the function of aesthetic drama is to do for the consciousness of the audience what social drama does for its participants: providing a place for, and means of, transformation. Rituals carry participants across limits by transforming them into different persons."[1513] Liturgy is different from social drama, and as such, "whatever it does, or purports to do, or intends to do, it does because of the particular way its parts are synthesized."[1514] "The action around which these liturgical events are unified is not the imitation of action- the representation of a story that one expects in art. Rather

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[1507]O'Donnell, "Embodying Tradition Liturgical Performance as a Site for Interreligious Learning," 372.
[1508] Luke 22: 19 and in 1 Cor. 11: 24 and 25.
[1509] Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), 110.
[1510] Richard D. McCall, *Do This Liturgy as Performance* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2007).
[1511] Michael Partridge, "performing Faiths -Patterns, Pluralities and Problems in the Lives of Religious Traditions," *Faithful Performances Enacting Christian Tradition*, ed. Trevor A. Hart and Steven R. Guthrie (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate), 79.
[1512] Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 170.
[1513] Ibid, 171.
[1514] Richard D. McCall, *Do This Liturgy as Performance*, 81.

the unifying principle of the Eucharist would seem to be the unfolding of an act of reconciliation or offering or praise or thanksgiving performed by the people involved in the liturgy."[1515]

The *Rāmlīlā* as performative aesthetic art within the *Mānas* tradition creates devotion, affects the audience, and provides an opportunity for divine encounter. The Catholic Mass is a performance that has been handed down through generations and has undergone many variations and it produces various effects on those who participate in it. Liturgy is a performance by the priest for the people to share in the sacrament of the Eucharist and to hear the word of God. The faithful expect the priest to be dedicated, properly disposed, and be authentic in life. So that he can distribute communion, the Eucharist. Megan Mac Donald states, "to say that a performance of the liturgy is performative is to say that it produces a series of effects in those who participate."[1516] Trevor Hart refers to liturgy as ''putting the 'story' or 'text' into play through continuous fresh action,"[1517] and he asserts that the focus on the performative dimension of liturgy serves as a corrective to the biblical guild's over-reliance on historical-critical methods.[1518]

Applying the performative analysis to the liturgy brings to the fore the embodiment of faith and tries to answer the question, "What does it mean when this liturgical performance takes place at this time, in this place, with this congregation?" In the Christian tradition, from the beginning, human agency is involved with the sources of Christian faith, and that judgment and interpretation are inextricably bound. Focusing on liturgies, songs, music, art through which religious faith is enacted and performed communicates that God's involvement in the world is diverse. Michael

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[1515] Ibid., 86.

[1516] Megan MacDonald, "Mass Performance: How Material Liturgies Enact the spiritual," in *Liturgy and Performance*, 31-42.

[1517] Trevor A. Hart, ''Introduction: Art, Performance and the Practice of Christian Faith,'' in *Faithful Performances: Enacting Christian Tradition*, ed. Trevor A. Hart and Stephen R. Guthrie (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 4.

[1518] Ibid., 5.

Partridge writes, "God is at the heart of Christian traditions. Not just as a kind of center for beliefs, but as an incessantly and variously creative wellspring, and an underlying 'voce', in all performance of faith." [1519] The *Mānas*' study makes us acknowledge and realize God's creative dimensions in a new "theological picturing" by including performances as part of our faith and reaching out to these performances through inculturation. Inculturation may bring in many issues and problems but going ahead and performing our faith, we may feel as if God is appearing to us 'in the stranger'- just as we hope that those who see us as strangers may at times see something; of God 'in us.'[1520] Michael Partridge asserts that

> The people we live amongst and in whose lives, we encounter their faiths are performing those faiths. And we, to perform our faiths, while others, sharing a bit of life with us, take in our faiths. So, we can say: every person enacts, performs a faith their own. And others can and do encounter that faith in the life of the person; they can make something of it; they can be affected by it. We may not often be aware of this performative. Mostly, it is tacitly involved in our living- but it is involved.[1521]

The importance given to the performativity of the *Mānas* within Hindu tradition has enhanced Hindu faith and built community as "performativity is affective and conscientiously nurtures relationality."[1522] This religious performativity emerges out of an authentic inner life of the performer that takes time to cultivate. For instance, the performers of *Rāmlīlā* tradition, to perform the role of various gods, observe strict rules and regulations to become a resemblance (*svarūpas*) of God truly. Constantin Stanislavsky highlights that the critical challenge in performance is achieving authenticity. He maintains that the,

> effective presentation to the audience is important because the audience is not drawn to falsity; they come to a show to be compelled by truth in the life of the

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[1519] Partridge, "Performing Faiths," 82.
[1520] Ibid., 89.
[1521] Ibid., 76.
[1522] Martin Huynh Ngo, "A Disciple for All Seasons Toward a Theology of Performative Accompaniment in the Midst of Tears" STL *Thesis,* Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, 2021.

performance. All the time and energy an actor invests in exploring physicality, voice, motives, and contextual considerations contribute to the interior work that makes a coherent, new, and authentic reality possible……Put life into all the imagined circumstances and actions until you have completely satisfied your sense of truth, and until you have awakened a sense of faith in the reality of your sensations.[1523]

The actors of *līlā* prepare themselves to enact the play of God, because they are *svarūpas* of God. In religious performances, "Without faith, there can be no real connection with oneself, nor any object, nor any other human being. There is no sense of theatrical communion without faith and a sense of truth."[1524] In order to have the proper disposition, faith is necessary to perceive revelation. This is especially true for Catholic priests who perform liturgy as a 'source and summit of Christian life,'[1525] The *Mānas* offers a challenge to be authentic so that the faithful accompanying the liturgy's performance may be transformed. Emphasizing the beauty and performative dimension of religion enables us realize that God is known not only in doctrine or in justice but also in beauty. The faith appropriated through the *Mānas* gets articulated in various forms of devotional and religious practices. Similarly, the faith experienced by Christians must be allowed to be articulated in various forms of religious practices, without excessively rigid and non-essential liturgical rules and regulations. This indeed calls for inculturation. However, today, the terms 'inculturation 'and 'adaptation' are looked at suspiciously. In India, inculturation model was offered from a Sanskritic and Brahmanical perspective. Hence, indigenization is *anathema* to the vast number of Dalit Catholics, as it is tantamount to accepting Brahminization. According to Dalit critics, elites of the Indian Catholic Church, formerly caste Hindus themselves, have adopted many of the practices of their Hindu culture. In addition, the "preferential option for the poor," Liberation Theology looked

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[1523] Constantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 141.
[1524] M. Ngo, "A Disciple for All Seasons Toward a Theology of Performative Accompaniment in the Midst of Tears," 24.
[1525] *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

at inculturation and indigenization from a variety of perspectives and contexts. Indian Jesuit theologian, George Soares Prabhu, in a letter to a meeting of Catholic *āśram* gathered to discuss their future in the 1980s, writes,

> My experience with the Dalits has convinced me that Brahmanical Hinduism (as it exists today) is highly oppressive. It is a primary source of the oppression of Dalits, tribals, and women in India and, I believe, one of the principal causes of our poverty and backwardness. What is worse is that it seems to be quite unrepentant of the damage it is doing. I have yet to hear of a Shankaracharya, or the head of an *āśram* stand up and publicly condemn the hundreds of atrocities against the Dalits or the scores of dowry deaths that are being perpetrated all over India today.[1526]

Pedro Arrupe, former Superior General of the Society of Jesus, defined inculturation as the incarnation of Christian life and the Christian message in a particular local cultural context, in such a way that the experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no more than a superficial adaptation), but becomes a principle that animates, directs, and unifies a culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about 'a new creation.'[1527] Arrupe pointed towards the synergic dimension of interculturation. What is happening is not just a synthesis of many cultural orientations and the Gospel but an organic and ongoing evolution of a new culture with the capacity to animate and direct toward renewed and deeper levels of identity. Arrupe noted that inculturation "represents for us the dynamic aspect of the incarnation and hence is intimately bound up with evangelization. It is a process by which our experience of Christ so liberates us to be truly ourselves that in our lives, there is no 'split between Culture and Gospel."[1528] But the challenge remains to maintain a distinction between the two.

[1526] George Soares Prabhu, "Inculturation-Liberation –Dialogue: Challenge to Christian theology in Asia Today", 65.

[1527] Pedro Arrupe, "Letter to the whole Society on Inculturation," in *Studies in the International Apostolate of Jesuits* (Washington: Jesuit Missions, 1978), 2.

[1528] Pedro Arrupe, *On Inculturation, to the Indian Assistancy*, 1978. See https://jesuitportal.bc.edu/research/documents/1978_arrupeinculturationindian/

In the past, a particular culture was equated with the Gospel. Christianity, in its call to be universal, sometime needs to break its cultural and familial ties. God's universality entails human equality and equal respect for all cultures. The oneness of God implies "God's universality, and universality entails transcendence with respect to any given culture."[1529] Often Christianity becomes "alien" or a "stranger" in native cultures because of its imposition of one uniform culture. Efforts to balance universality and particularity is a challenge for the church and for mission. Similarly, to overcome alienation, may require a departure from what a local church has held as beloved and important. Yet, departure is part and parcel of Christian identity. Identifying the importance of departure, Miroslav Volf, a Croatian theologian states, "at the very core of Christian identity lies all-encompassing change of loyalty, from a given culture with its gods to the God of all cultures."[1530] The departure model could be viewed from two opposite perspectives. One could view it as purely goal-oriented, too linear and not radical enough, and another view may focus on it as too detached, too aloof, in some sense too radical.[1531] The proper distance from a culture does not take Christians out of that culture. Miroslav Volf asserts that

> Christians are not the insiders who have taken flight to a new "Christian culture" and become outsiders to their own culture; rather, when they have responded to the call of the Gospel, they have stepped, as it were. With one foot outside their own culture while with the other remaining firmly planted in it. They are distant, and yet they belong. Their difference is internal to the culture. Because of their internality – their immanence, their belonging- the particularities, inscribed in the body, are not erased; because of their difference-their transcendence, their distance- the universality can be affirmed.[1532]

Both distance and belonging are essential. Belonging without distance destroys. However, the distance from one's culture must never degenerate into flight from that culture. Rather, it must

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[1529] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace,* 39.
[1530] Ibid., 40.
[1531] Ibid., 40.
[1532] Ibid., 49*. S*ee idem, "Soft Difference, Theological Reflections on the Relation Between Church and Culture in 1 Peter," *Ex Auditu* 10 (1994): 15-30.

be a way of living within a culture, because the departure is no longer a spatial category; it can take place even within the cultural space one inhabits.[1533] Departure must lead us to encounter other cultures and religions in an intercultural way. Today, our encounters with other religions and cultures calls into question how the gospel message should be proclaimed and witnessed.   If the processes of adaptation and inculturation are scrutinized and judged to be outdated, what comes next?.[1534] Evangelization efforts will continue, but more than ever before, the church must continue to seek appropriate expressions for sharing the Gospel in every culture while witnessing ad creatinf a "space for the others" with an attitude of humility.[1535] The criticism of inculturation must not stop us from encountering and learning from others. Encountering other religions must continue and being a Christian in a multi-religious context means responding to the call is to be intercultural.

C. Interculturation

Cultural intelligence is a key to life and mission in a multicultural society. Carl F. Starkloff indicates that the practice of sharing the gospel "involves a conversation between two partners – the universal gospel or the fundamental 'good news' and the cultural uniqueness of each context in which that message is heard."[1536] Today, the term *interculturality* is used to define the complex relations within society that exist between diverse majority and minority constellations in terms of culture, ethnicity, language, religious denomination, and nationality.[1537] The 'particular culture' is no longer 'one culture' but a 'cultural mix' with local cultural orientations. The term intercultural

[1533] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 49-50.
[1534] See Klaus Vellguth, "Finding New faith in cultural Encounters from Missiological Paradigm of Inculturation to the fundamental Theological Principle of Interculturality," 241-56.
[1535] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*,126.
[1536] Carl F. Starkloff, "Inculturation and Cultural Systems," in *Theological Studies* 55 (1994), 69. Starkloff uses the term 'inculturation,' by which he means the incessant dialogue between Gospel and culture. On "good news" within an African indigenous religion, see Eugene Hillman, Toward an African Christianity: Inculturation Applied (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1993), 50. Aylward Shorter addresses these issues in Evangelization and Culture (London: Chapman, 1994), 32-38.
[1537] Gunther Dietz, "Interculturality," *Research Gate* (September 2018), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327455124.

theology has received its thrust and energy from the discovery that all theologies are contextually conditioned within a theological circle.[1538] Intercultural theology recognizes the process of theological giving and receiving and acknowledges the decisive shift in the mind of the Church from a European-centered world to a humankind-centered world. [1539] David Bosch describes the step from a local incarnation (inculturation) of the faith to that of participation in an ecumenical conversation with other local incarnations to "interculturation."[1540] Intercultural theology needs to open up to " interreligious theology" and thus face the experience of dialogue and be open to the future.[1541]

Kristeen Kim, a British theologian and a professor of theology and world Christianity, writes that, in an intercultural approach, inculturation can be called 'interculturation.' [1542] Schreiter recognizes the mission as a 'communicative event,' and the interlocutors and the message must be aware of the globalized cultural flows that are craving for identity. The communicative event thus becomes a moment of intercultural encounter. Thus, "interculturation does not abandon the concept of inculturation but broadens it."[1543] *Rāmāyana* tradition has incorporated various cultures in its storytelling.[1544] The *Mānas* is one of them. Within the *Mānas*, there is a blend of Saiva,

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[1538] See Werner Ustorf, "The Cultural Origins of "Intercultural Theology," in *Mission Studies*, no. 25 (2008): 229-251. www.brill.nl/mist.

[1539] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 451.

[1540] See also, Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1985); idem The New Catholicity, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1997. Hintersteiner, Norbert. "Interkulturelle Traditionshermeneutik. Zur grenzüberschreitenden Kommunikation der christlichen Tradition bei Robert J. Schreiter". Zeitschriftfur Missionsund Religionswissenschaft 85, 4 (2001); 290-314; "Intercultural and Interreligious, (Un) Translatability and the Comparative Theology Project". In Norbert Hintersteiner, ed. *Naming and Thinking God in Europe Today* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2007), 465-491; Volker Küster, "Von der lokalen Theologie zur neuen Katholizität". Evangelische Theobgie 63, (2003): 362-374.

[1541] Richard Friedli "Intercultural Theology". In Müller, Karl, Theo Sundermeier and others, eds. *Dictionary of Mission*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 220.

[1542] Kristeen Kim, "Missiology as Global Conversation of (Contextual) Theologies," *Mission Studies* 21 (June 2004), 39-53.

[1543] Wijsen, "Intercultural Theology and the Mission of the Church," 222.

[1544] See, Paula Richman, *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (Berkely: University of California Press, 1991).

Vaishnava, Brahminic, and folk traditions. Thus, perhaps the *Mānas* offers us a model for exploring what it means to be 'intercultural.'

D. Khristbhakta Movement as an Example of Interculturation

By way of an example, I illustrate in this section how *kathā* and *līlā* aesthetics of *Mānas* tradition have been used in proclaiming and living out the Gospel in an 'intercultural' way. The *Khristbhakta* are non-baptized devotees of Christ, primarily from Northern India, who are not members of any Christian church. They are seekers who accept *Yesu Bhagavān* as their *satguru* and *Iṣtadevata* according to the *bhakti* tradition. *Khristbhakta*s are most fruitfully understood and interpreted as a hybrid community influenced by Hindu *bhakti* (devotion), popular or vernacular Hinduism, and charismatic Catholicism. The movement is a native movement of a subaltern people who have come together in response to the religio-cultural situation of India. As a movement, they have the potential for bringing about social change. For theological and political reasons, the *Khristbhaktas* have yet to be baptized into full communion with the Catholic Church; thus, they remain outside the traditional sacramental life of the Church.[1545] In this movement, they embrace a hermeneutics of humility by their willingness to receive something from others and appropriate it into their interpretation of the Christian faith. The *Mātṛdhām Āśram* in Varanasi is the center of this movement. The *Khristbhakta* movement resulted from fellowship (*satsang*) conducted in the *Mātṛdhām Āśram* of the members of the Indian Missionary Society.[1546] Varanasi has been profoundly influenced by *Bhakti* thanks to personalities such as Ramananda, Kabir, Tulsi, and others. The *Bhakti* movement enshrines openness to *Iṣtadevatā* (a personal deity), the deity who

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[1545] Jerome Sylvester, *Khristbhakta Movement, Hermeneutics of a Religio-cultural Phenomenon* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2013), Introduction, xxviii.
[1546] Indian Missionary Society is an indigenous missionary congregation of priests and brothers founded by Rev. Father Gasper A. Pinto in 1941 in Varanasi. The main charism of the congregation is pioneering evangelization.

responds to one's spiritual inclinations and quest.[1547] For the *Khristbhakta,* Jesus Christ is their *Iṣṭadevatā*. The *Āśram* adopted inculturation as a way of proceeding and has attracted thousands of devotees to Christ. Among these devotees, most have had religious experiences through *Satsang* (fellowship and spiritual discourse). Jerome Sylvester, a priest of the Indian Missionary Society, writes, the "*Khristbhakta* Movement is emerging as people's search for divine intervention in the midst of difficult situations in their social and personal lives."[1548] The lived experience of *Khristbhakta*s is rooted in their cultural traditions, all of which help them to encounter Jesus and find collective meaning among themselves.

Transformed by the Gospel, the *Khristbhaktas* have become a vibrant community in Northern India. Deeply rooted in their social-cultural life, they have developed a new way of belonging to the Christian faith. The Bishops of Northern India perceive this movement as a phenomenon of the Holy Spirit, acting within the context of religious persecution and violence. The spiritual and inculturated atmosphere of the *Āśram* attracts thousands to listen to the Word of God. In this *Āśram,* importance is given to preaching, reading, and singing God's word, like that of *Rāmkathā* or *Pārāyaṇ*. The depth of devotion moves the minds and hearts of all. People come here to seek Christ as a healer and liberator. To celebrate the incarnation of Jesus Christ, their Christmas celebration begins on the evening of December 24th at 4 p.m. and ends the following day at 6.30 p.m. The whole day is spent in celebration. Their enactment of the birth of Jesus is done in a manner similar to Rāmlila.

[1547] Felix Wilfred, *Margins: Site of Asian Theologies* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2008), 143.
[1548] Jerome Sylvester, *Khristbhakta Movement,* 13.

By way of an additional example, R.B. Lal., the organizer of *Yesu Darbar,*[1549] a movement located near Allahabad (now Prayāgrāj), gives testimony to the person of Jesus Christ as 'the power of God,' as 'the presence of God in the *Darbar,*" and he extends an invitation to the people to "Take the Darbar Home."[1550] During the Lenten season, on Good Friday, the passion of Jesus Christ is played out through popular folk media. The movement proclaims the Gospel through books such as *Prahu ne kaha* (The Lord Said), audio and video cassettes, and more recently, through the a satellite television channel, *Nootan Dhara* that broadcasts the presentation of biblical plays and other religious programming. At the Catholic Cathedral of Varanasi, the entire history of salvation is played out in a manner similar to parallels that of Tulsi Mandir. Using the title, *'jeevandhara'*, it attracts hundreds of people every day. Swami Anil Dev, who presently coordinates the *Satsang's* of *Khristbhaktas*, says people are fascinated by the concept of being in relationship with a personal and living God who loves them unconditionally. Presenting the story of Jesus through plays that use their own cultural and religious metaphors, they creatively incorporate aesthetic elements. There is little doubt that in the spiritual capital of Hinduism, the practice interculturation has made this movement most fruitful. Such movements present fresh challenges to faithful Christian believers within Christianity. In the process, Christians and Hindus alike are led to interpret this encounter from social, cultural, legal, pastoral, and theological perspectives. As they do so, they demonstrate the relevance of these developments for all interreligious and intercultural encounters. Serving as a model for interreligious interculturation, the Catholic Church in Varanasi has shown itself to be a leader in the process of incorporating

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[1549] Yesu Darbar means the court of Jesus and includes imagery of a king with his councilors. It is an imperial image.

[1550] Darbar here refers to the community that is witnessing to the message of Christ.

elements from the lived religion of Hinduism into Catholic religiosity. Similar processes need to be appropriated and appreciated in other parts of the Indian Church.

5.5. Learnings from the Mānas for Theological Education with regard to the Study of Religions

The fifth learning focuses on the future direction of theological education and the preparation of a new generation of ecclesial ministers for the mission of Interreligious Dialogue. Engaging the *Mānas* text and rituals has enabled me to imagine and experience a new way of encountering other religious traditions. As someone interested in the formative aspects of theological education in Indian seminaries and religious centers, I hope my efforts in comparative theology will challenge the status quo regarding the study of religions. The comparative theological approach to the *Mānas* text offers a new way of deeply encountering other religious traditions with a greater study of scriptural, ritual, and material elements of religion. The new learning will affect whether and how Catholic education prepares its ministers to engage with other faiths in India and abroad. The question of 'why' and 'how' we engage other religions should be enhanced within these theological education centers to advance the Catholic mission of dialogue and encounter. There has been a long history, especially among Jesuits, of studying Sanskrit and Hinduism. Every seminary in India today has courses on Indian religions, philosophy, and spirituality. All these activities were primarily aimed at understanding other religions and cultures. However, many of the objectives of these studies of other religions focus only on the classical philosophical schools with the aim, as Brahma Bandhab Upadhya puts it, of "a transformation in

the form to be intelligible to the Indian mind.[1551] Today there is a need for a different kind of 'lived' learning.

5.5.1. Challenges in Theological Education on the Study of Religions

Clooney points out that after the Western Jesuits engaged Hinduism, the Indian Jesuits engaged Hinduism and other religious traditions, thereby making a distinctive contribution with "an increase in the quality of Indological research.[1552] As pre-Vatican II Jesuits, the Western Jesuits had a particular rationale, mainly to evangelize in a cultural and linguistic forms that were reasonable and meaningful to Indians. However, later the Indian Jesuits, in the post-Vatican II era, imitated the Western Jesuits and continued to study Sanskrit and Hinduism without having a proper rationale for their engagement. At the most, the study of Hinduism was treated as a "kind of dialogue or aid to dialogue." Clooney rightly points out that this rationale did not create a heart for the Hindu other. In his work on inculturation, he states,

> The Hindu other was not taken seriously enough to effect a real change in the Christian heart. This made it easier for dioceses, seminaries, and mainstream theological writing to overlook work in this area or turn away from it when the initial optimism for dialogue had waned. Consequently, …. the recalculation of Indology as dialogue and *ad extra* made its value depend on the worth of dialogue in an era when dialogue with Brahmins became the subject of great suspicion.[1553]

In 1978, Pedro Arrupe, the then General of the Society of Jesus, invited Jesuits in India and Sri Lanka to respond to his call for "inculturation." [1554] Responding to Arrupe's call, there were efforts on regionalization, contextualization, and immersion programs to understand the cultures and religions of India. Arrupe believed that Indian Jesuits could contribute much to today's world, but

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[1551] Julius Lipner, *Brahmabandhab Upadhyay: The Life and Thought of a Revolutionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 186.
[1552] Clooney, *Western Jesuits in India*, 242.
[1553] Ibid.
[1554] Pedro Arrupe, *On Inculturation, to the Indian Assistancy*, 1978.

to carry out this role, they would have to be open. He believed that openness would be the foundation for the actual "Indian incarnation" of the charism of St. Ignatius.[1555] This letter complemented Decree 5 of the Thirty-Second General Congregation's teachings on promoting the work of the Inculturation of Faith and Christian Life. Dalit Theology raised consciousness from a liberationist perspective. Its proponents questioned the traditional study of Hinduism that was based on the Sanskrit philosophical school. As a consequence, the "pure scholars" of Indology were pushed to the margins as there was limited interest in studying Hinduism in that way. Through social analysis and consciousness-raising, f efforts to advance and defend the rights and dignity of Dalits. In the process, whatever belonged to the Brahminic world, such as Sanskrit and religious texts, was met with rejection and disdain, and characterized as instruments used to oppress the marginalized. The critiques were accurate, in terms of their initial assessment. However, fomenting contempt and hatred of sacred Sanskrit texts was dangerously problematic remedy to injustice, specifically if it resulted in the loss of the irreplaceable ancient treasures of Hinduism. Indeed, Brahminic studies did not create a heart for the Hindus or enthusiasm among the younger generation of priests and nuns to engage with other religions.[1556] However, the critiques failed to offer any alternative that would enable those preparing for ministry to study religions with greater depth and intentionality. In general, the hierarchical Indian church subtly communicated that encountering other religions was irrelevant and suspect. Amaladoss identifies their argument in

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[1555] Ibid.

[1556] On the liberationist critique of the study of Hinduism and of Christian ashram life as well, see George Soares-Prabhu, S.J., "From Alienation to Inculturation: Some Reflections on Doing Theology in India Today," in *Bread and Breath: Essays in Honor of Samuel Rayan, S*J, ed. T. K. John (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1991), 55–99; Sara Grant, RSCJ, and Swami Amal raj, "Response to This Letter from the Ash*ram* Aikiya Satsangi," in *Christian Ashrams: A Movement with a Future?* ed. Vandana Mataji (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1993), 157–60; and Xavier Gravend-Tirole, "From Christian Ashrams to Dalit Theology: Or Beyond," in *Constructing Indian Christianities: Culture, Conversion, and Caste*, ed. Chad M. Bauman and Richard Fox Young (London: Routledge, 2014), 104–37.

this way "it [encountering other religions] dilutes the uniqueness of the Christian faith, trivializes the mission of the Church to evangelize, thus losing its identity."[1557]

The former engagement of Hinduism in the early 20th century was mostly with the Indian philosophical schools. The aim was to find dynamic equivalents with Thomistic philosophy, so as to be able translate philosophical concepts into Christian terms. As for living Hinduism, it was side-lined, along with all of its rituals, beauty and art. The affective dimensions of religions were not considered worthy of inclusion on syllabi. Nevertheless, there were efforts by Joseph Beschi and a few others to make Catholic piety and practice more Indian by paying attention to the literature and culture of the people. *Tempavani* ("The Unfading Garland") is a story of the incarnation, told from the vantage point of Joseph, about the births of Joseph and Mary and their lives up until the death of Joseph and Jesus's visit to the temple at age of twelve. This extensive work, nearly 4,000 verses long, is a Tamil classic that begins with the birth of Joseph and ends with his "coronation" by the Triune God in heavenly glory. Clooney points out that the "Tempavani and the whole range of Beschi's work raise interesting questions about myth and history in Christian self-presentation, linguistic and cultural resources for Christian mission, and the intersection of doctrine and aesthetics in Christian literature."[1558]

The *Mānas* offers us the opportunity to study Hinduism with the methodology of 'both and' and not 'either- or' as the tradition is rooted in classical traditions and also is popular among the people. With the fortification of *Hindutva Rāṣṭra*, formative theological education needs to focus on the methodology of the *new* comparative theology that offers a model of immersion in the world

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[1557] Anand Amaladoss, S.J., "Viewpoints: Hindu–Christian Dialogue Today," *Journal of Hindu– Christian Studies* 10 (January 1997): 41.
[1558] Clooney, Lecture on "St. Joseph in South India," see
https://theology.nd.edu/newsevents/events/2018/03/28/francis-x-clooney-s-j-st-joseph-in-south-india/

of the other and opportunities to appreciate texts, rituals, and aesthetics. There are challenges to encountering Hinduism, but to take Hinduism seriously, to effect a real change in the Christian heart, theological education needs to be reimagined. It needs to incorporate Comparative Theology and interreligious perspectives into the curriculum so as to   offer those preparing for ecclesial ministries meaningful new insights that important for both the 'home' tradition as well as 'other' traditions. Peter Phan writes,

> Comparative theology is offered not as an alternative to the theology of religions but as a way of understanding one's own Christian theology better through a better understanding of others. One tries not only to understand non-Christian religions through the Christian lens (Christian theology of religions) but also to understand Christian faith through the non-Christian lens (comparative theology).[1559]

5.5.2. A Way Forward for Theological Education and the Study of Religions

Firstly, theological education should focus on actively hearing and engaging with lived religions, regional Hinduisms, and regional linguistic traditions rather than Sanskrit alone. Such education will contribute to the development of interreligious sensitivity and foster growth in that "divine grace that makes all human beings' brothers and sisters."[1560] Such study also must involve scriptural texts, along with the aesthetic traditions to which they are directly related. Religion is not merely a depository of concepts but a living tradition. In this regard, it is important for students to understand the praxis of a living religion such as Hinduism, so that all types of Hinduism are studied. This is necessary, because unlike some other religions, Hinduism does not emphasize the systematization of theology, but rather gives prominence to the practice of faith with its ritual

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[1559] Phan, *The Asian Synod.,* 79.
[1560] From the "Introduction" of the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together jointly signed by Pope Francis & Grand Imam Ahmed, El-Tayeb in Abu Dhabi on 4th February 2019.

observances. For a Christian embedded in the systematization of theology, genuine encounters with Hindus will pose certain challenges.

Secondly, the academic study of other religions must be accompanied by immersion experiences that are oriented by an incarnational model of instruction that provides for and integrated approach to studying sacred texts and participating in ritual traditions. When it comes to s deep immersion experiences, there always is a certain degree of risk involved. This fact is illustrated in the words of the Jesuit provincial, Emmanuel Crowther, who commissioned Aloysius Pieris to do a doctorate in Buddhism. In 1966., at the time of the commissioning, it is worth noting his words of counsel, "Son, we are sending you into uncharted territory, we cannot guide you: you will have to guide us one day. Therefore, do not be afraid to make mistakes. Even serious ones, but just keep us informed."[1561] The unknown path, while risky, promises light at its end.

Thirdly, efforts to combine both the classical and popular traditions of Hinduism, in order to bring out liberating aspects of Hinduism, can prove to be another challenge. Indian Christians tend to think that whatever elements of the struggle for liberation or justice exist in India, they exist only because of Christianity. This perspective is a biased one, emerging once again from an attitude of superiority that needs to be rectified. While there may not be an organized movement corresponding to those associated with Christian liberation theologies, as. Rambachan notes, "there are individual Hindu leaders and interpreters who have articulated the significance for the social change."[1562] As we know, when religiosity is intertwined with a lack of social responsibility, it can lead to dangerous consequences such as widespread hunger or misery, especially in India. t. Unless the religions of India address themselves to the socio-economic problems of the country, sooner

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[1561] Aloysius Pieris, *A Theography of My Life*, 41.
[1562] Rambachan, *Essays in Hindu Theology*, 132.

or later, they will be rendered obsolete. For this reason, those who study Hinduism must have some knowledge of the kinds of liberating praxis that are rooted in Hindu tradition.[1563]

Fourthly, emphasis must be placed on studying the performative dimension of religion, such as poetry, art, and aesthetics, for they are the heartbeat of religion. Exposure to the performative aspects of religion will make education formative as well as transformative at the intellectual level of knowing the other and at the affective level of feeling for the other. As Peter Phan observes, there are valuable treasures to be discovered in "stories, myths, folklore, symbols, poetry, songs, visual arts, architecture, music, and dance. The use of these cultural artifacts adds a very distinctive voice to Christian theology coming from the deepest yearnings of the peoples of the Third World."[1564] These performative events enable a missionary disciple to be a storyteller of salvation. "Storytelling resists all attempts to encapsulate wisdom in timeless propositions and freeze them in a fixed time and space. Storytellers do not prize uniformity, consistency, and linearity. Phan writes,

> No story is told the same way twice; rather, the shape of the story depends on the audience, the context, and the purposes for which the story is told. In some way, the story is the common creation of its teller and listeners. The very act of storytelling and myth-making assumes that change, emendation, revision, expansion, and plurality are the stuff of life. Story-telling also presupposes that human beings are primarily agents or doers—story-making and story-telling—within the continuum of past, present, and future and that who they are is revealed in their actions that make up their life stories. [1565]

Fifthly, theological education must focus on growing in 'epistemological humility.' When studying other religious traditions, the student's attitude must be as much about learning and

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[1563] See Anantanand Rambachan, "The Resources and Challenges for a Hindu Theology of Liberation," in *Essays in Hindu Theology*, 131-146.
[1564] Phan, "Doing Theology in World Christianity," 39.
[1565] Ibid., 33.

receiving as it is about instructing and giving. The British missiologist Max Warren offers helpful

advice about engaging with adherents of other religions, when he writes,

> When we approach a man of another faith than our own, it will be in a spirit of expectancy to find how God has been speaking to him and what new understandings of the grace and love of God, we may ourselves discover in this encounter. Our first task in approaching other people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men's dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival.[1566]

Sixthly, theological education needs to focus on studying the saints – the holy men and

women - of the Hindu tradition. Yann Vagneux writes, "In order to keep all the spiritual treasures

of Hinduism alive, it will not be enough to save its rich tradition with scholarly studies because all

that will remain a dead letter as long as the sacred writings are not incarnated within the lives and

progress of living beings. As with every religion in crisis, the only thing that can save it is the gift

of saints who will relive the whole spiritual journey of earlier times at the inner level."[1567] For

instance, one good example, is the life of Tulsidas, whose biography and works have inspired

others to be true devotees of God for centuries.

Seventhly, theological education must focus on forming 'holy men and women for ministry

in the church and the world. In our theological engagement with the study of other religions and

our efforts to construct an 'Indian theology' or do 'Indian exegesis,' there is a prior need to

understand what means to be an 'Indian? A. K. Ramanujan, a poet, folklorist, and translator

comparing the Indian way to the Euro-American ways, identifies Indian thinking as 'context-

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[1566] This passage appears in Warren's introduction to the seven books in the Christian Presence Series (London: SCM Press, 1959–1966), which included books by Kenneth Cragg, George Appleton, Raymond Hammer, John V. Taylor, William Stewart, Martin Jarrett-Kerr, and Peter Schneider. Each book in the series "began with a general introduction … at the end of which was a comment on that particular volume" (Graham Kings, *Christianity Connected: Hindus, Muslims and the World in the Letters of Max Warren and Roger Hooker* [Utrecht, The Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 2002], 123). See, for example, the preface to John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision* (London: SCM, 1963), 10.

[1567] Vagneux, "*Marriage with Hinduism"* 715.

sensitive,' and not context free' of the former.[1568] The Asian approach to religious truth differs from that of Western Christianity, which is much more rationalistic. In Asia, religious truth is known more intuitively than discursively, more symbolically than conceptually, more in practical ways than theoretical ways Hence, Asian religions are known as *sādhanas*.[1569] Aloysius Pieris, a liberation theologian from Sri Lanka, set out in 1959 for Loyola College, Chennai, to study Sanskrit under the personal guidance of Prof. V. Varadachari. Along with learning Sanskrit, he found himself engaged in many philosophical conversations. However, when it came to formation for holiness, his teacher drew his attention to an important realization: "Young Father, I see that intellectually you are very well equipped for your age, but you do not speak as a person who knows God." Clearly, encountering other religions demands being a man/ woman of God.

A single-minded intellectual focus on religion may not lead to transformation. The all-pervasive character of religiosity in India is seen in all areas of life. Sri Aurobindo speaks of religion as being "central to the Indian Mind," any meaningful transformation of India cannot be worked out if it neglects the religious dimension.[1570] A lay Christian, a vowed religious or a seminarian who engages other religions must embody religious virtues of detachment (*Parama hamsa*). A pure academic and secularistic approach to other religions will not create a 'heart for the other.' We must be on guard. Without an intellectual dimension to our identity, there is a danger of fanaticism or superficiality. Without spiritual dimension to our identity, there is a danger shallowness and lack of credibility.

[1568] A.K. Ramanujan, "Is there an Indian Way of Thinking? An Informal Essay in Contributions to Indian Sociology," 42-58.

[1569] George Soares Prabhu, "Inculturation-Liberation –Dialogue: Challenge to Christian theology in Asia Today", in *Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J*, ed. Isaac Padinjarekuttu, Vol. 1, (Pune: Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1999), 63.

[1570] SV Chakravarthy, "Sri Aurobindo on Religion in India," EECs Department, the University of Texas at Austin, (*auro@daedalus.ece.utexas.edu* on 20th September 2012), 4th November 1996.

Ultimately, theological education must aim at helping to create the conditions for students to make friends among adherents of other religions. VS Azariah, an Indian churchman at the 1910 Edinburg World Missionary Conference, unmasked the superiority of missionaries as he said, "Too often you promise us thrones in heaven, but will not offer us chairs in your drawing rooms… You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for love. Give us friends."[1571] Bevans writes that "mission as dialogue is ultimately about ministering out of real relationships, about making friends."[1572] To grow in friendship among religious adherents is essential. As James Frederick points out, Christians engaged in interreligious dialogue and comparative theology develop a love (*agape*) and friendship (*Philia*) with non-Christians.[1573]

Peter Phan takes the view that the love commandment is obligatory for all Christians, by contrast he maintains that "friendship is optional and preferential; it is given only to people for whom one feels a certain attraction because of qualities in them one finds admirable and pleasing or because of mutual interests. Thus, Christians may become friends with non-Christians because of the beauty and value of their beliefs and practices."[1574] True friendship helps one recognize the values of the spiritual quest of the other, to understand the mystical and liberating traditions of others that could enrich the emancipation of the marginalized. Gustavo Gutierrez, at the 2007 CELAM meeting in Aparecida, Brazil, placed friendship at the heart of living out a preferential option for the poor. Friendship will enable us to recognize marginalized people's immense dignity

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[1571] V.s. Azariah, quoted in Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, 1910* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 125.
[1572] Stephen Bevans, *Mission as Prophetic Dialogue*, 3.
[1573] See James Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths*, 173-77.
[1574] Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, 80.

and their sacred worth in the eyes of Christ, who was poor like them and excluded among them. Out of this belief in experience, we will share with them the defense of their rights.[1575]

Dialogue thrives on friendship as it fosters the value of hospitality and sets out to listen to the other with a genuine desire to understand him or her, and it removes prejudices. Living among the Muslims in Algeria, Charles de Foucauld, , developed friendships, with empty hands, and devoted himself to the work uprooting and removing the numerous prejudices that existed among Muslims regarding Christianity and among Christians regarding Islam. . He writes,

> My work […] is to show these people that Christians are not as they suppose that we believe, love and hope; it is ultimately to strengthen the confidence of these souls, to make them comfortable with me, and if possible, to become friends.[1576]

Shortly after his election as pope, Benedict XVI also gave voice to the importance of friendship's role in the experience of encounter: 'there is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. So, likewise, there is nothing more beautiful than knowing him and speaking to others of our friendship with Him.[1577] Mission as dialogue means "doing ministry with a "hermeneutics of generosity,"" and with a "hermeneutics of appreciation," terms used by Filipino theologian, Jose De Mesa.[1578] The hermeneutics of appreciation would be the most appropriate manner of reinterpreting the Judeo-Christian Tradition in indigenous categories as this hermeneutical lens approaches cultures from the insider's point of view. In addition, this lens also

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[1575] See Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1973).

[1576] "Letter from Charles de Foucauld to the Abbé Caron, April 3, 1906." In a letter to the Duke of Fitz James of 11th December 1912, he said again that 'it was not a matter of preaching, but to make oneself loved, inspire confidence, and clear the ground before sowing.' (Quotation)???

[1577] Benedict XVI, *Homily on the occasion of the Mass for the inauguration of the Pontificate*, Vatican, 24th April 2005.

[1578] Jose M. De Mesa, *Why Theology is never Far from Home* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 2003). 112-149.

focuses on the life-giving elements that are found in a given culture and enables a "listening heart" to see the strengths of other cultures. By way of example, the study of *Mānas* enabled me to have good friends and to grow in "appreciation" for the Hindu other. Such friendships create goodwill among people. As I reflect back on my time in Varanasi, I remember with appreciation and affection, Raghavendra, Umesh, a Kabirpanthi, and Dr. Abhishek Gupta. They were my constant gurus and guides in my understanding of the Hindu faith. They also gave a listening ear to my understanding of the Christian faith. Thus, there was a mutual encounter of religions, as suspicions and prejudices of the religious 'other' were removed and true friendships were formed. As I conclude this fifth and final chapter on "learnings for the home traditions," I am filled with joy of learning. At the same time, I am brought to the realization with humility, hospitality, and empathy; I have more to learn in the future as a seeker and pilgrim from other religions.

Conclusion

Experiences of interreligious encounter can be transformative for individuals who enter into such relationships mindful of their own faith commitments as well as the commitments of their partners in dialogue from other religious traditions. As these same individuals return to their home traditions after engaging in such experiences, they do so with new insights and attitudes, not only with regard to the religious traditions of others, but also with regard to their own tradition. As comparative theologian, Catherine Cornille, observes, "Return to the tradition represents an act not only of intellectual and spiritual humility but also of solidarity with the tradition as a whole and with individuals who might otherwise never be able to taste the fruits of dialogue."[1579]

The Pilgrim's Journey

Over the course of several months and in the midst of the COVID pandemic, my pilgrim's journey enabled me to grow in intellectual and spiritual humility and also to taste and savor the fruit of encounter. My encounters with adherents of Hinduism led to openness and genuine enrichment. My encounter with the sacred text of *Rāmcaritmānas* and my appropriation of Francis X. Clooney's method of comparative theology changed my ways of listening, learning, understanding, and appreciating Hinduism. I resonated with claim of Lesslie Newbigin, who succinctly wrote, "A person whose mind is incapable of being changed is incapable of dialogue [encounter]."[1580] I experienced the fruits of encounter because of the changes the occurred within me, specifically an attitude of positive disposition toward the religious other. With humility, I

[1579] Cornille, *the Im-Possibility of Inter-religious Dialogue*, 80.
[1580] Lesslie Newbigin, *Signs Amid the Rubble: The Purposes of God in Human History* (Grand Rapids: Wm, Eerdmans, 2003), 76.

approached the *Mānas* tradition as a Jesuit, learning to understand more deeply the mystery of God, the role of sacred texts, rituals, and aesthetics in Hinduism.

Historically, Jesuits, with their vision of "finding God in all things," have had profound encounters with adherents of other religions through their relationships and their study of languages, cultures, and traditions.[1581] Alongside of Hindus, my own pilgrim's journey led me into the text, ritual, and aesthetic performances of the *Mānas* and opened new layers of meaning regarding the virtues of faith, hope, and love. The journey *w*as a true pilgrimage (*Tirtha yātra*), a true *crossing over*. In this pilgrimage, the insights and perspectives that I derived from Hinduism, and my experiences of its devotional traditions, enabled me to grow in an understanding of the 'vastness of the Lord.' I came to the realization that the vastness of the Lord is grasped more meaningfully when as Christians, we allow ourselves to be transformed by other faith traditions and people of other faiths.

The pilgrim's journey provided me with various levels of experience (*anubhava*). Immersing myself in the traditions of the *Mānas*, there were many opportunities to listen deeply to different stories of God and become attentive to experiences of the divine and performative actions of the divine. These opportunities, in turn, energized me, intensified my love of God (*bhakti*), led me to rediscover home traditions, rectified many of my prejudices, and challenged me to go beyond trodden paths. In the process of being at home in Hinduism, I learned through my pilgrimage that the person who encounters another religion, in the company of adherents of that religion, comes to realize the pivotal elements of dialogue. Through *experiences of difference,* the pilgrim learns to *trust* that such differences are unitive and not separative. Through such

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[1581] For example, in the sixteenth century, Jesuits encountered Islam in the Mughal Court and Ippolito Desideri (1684-1733) encountered Buddhism in Lhasa.

encounters, one who is committed to one's own faith tradition finds the resolve necessary to be a *witness,* and most importantly, to *listen* and *learn* from the experiences and convictions of others.[1582] Thus, these encounters help to bring about proper understandings of existential and essential differences. In no way do these encounters lead to sweeping generalizations or convictions that "all religions are the same." Quite the contrary, the qualities of uniqueness are experienced in clear resolution. Speaking as one who had numerous encounters with non-Christian spiritual masters, the French Benedictine Henri Le Saux (Abhishiktananda), wrote, "We should simply thank God in deepest humility when we happen to meet such a saint or sage, no matter to which *dharma* he may outwardly belong, and be open to accept with the open heart his witness and message."[1583]

Comparative Theology: The Pilgrim's Method for Learning Epistemic Humility

In a multi-religious context, theological humility is both a requirement for and a consequence of deeper interreligious dialogue. The method of Comparative Theology, with its focus on learning *from* and *with* religious others, enables Christians to grow in the virtue of *epistemic humility* that is so necessary for the times in which we live. My study and engagement with the *Mānas* gave me a new perspective on what it means to learn and to recognize the countless possibilities for growing in humility. Although the 1965 decree of the Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate,* acknowledged the 'true and holy elements' in other religious traditions, it did not speak of actually *learning* from other religious teachings, texts, and practices.[1584] In subsequent

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[1582] For the analysis on the four pivotal elements in dialogue, see Paul F. Knitter, "Interreligious Dialogue, What? Why? How?" in *Interreligious Dialogue an Anthology of Voices Bridging Cultural and Religious Divides*, Christoffer H. Grundmann, ed (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2015), 24-44

[1583] Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1974), 19.

[1584] John J. Thatmanil, "Learning From (and not just about) Our Religious Neighbors: Comparative Theology and the Future f Nostra Aetate, in the *Future of Interreligious Dialogue A Multi-religious Conversation on Nostra Aetate*, ed. Charles L. Cohen, Paul, F. Knitter and Ulrich Rosenhagen (New York: Maryknoll, Orbis books, 2017), 290.

years, developments in Comparative Theology and its methods led to a broader focus on the necessity of learning with humility and resisting existing tendencies to forget, deny or ignore the interdependence that exists among religions. The Jewish scholar, Rabbi Abraham Heschel, in his speech entitled *'No Religion is an Island,*' makes a strong point that "we are all involved with one another. Therefore, spiritual betrayal on the part of one affects the faith of all of us."[1585] When there is a forgetfulness or failure to acknowledge the interdependence of religions, automatically, the 'other' is created. As the theologian and missiologist, Robert Schreiter points out, religion is a primary source of identification, and religious conflicts are only sustainable if the 'other' is my enemy and not my friend or sibling.[1586] Given the challenges and dangers posed by the 'self-sufficiency' claims of each religion, the assertion that the 'other is not needed' becomes pervasive conviction.

The Transformative Power of the Text in a Context of Immersion

In this dissertation, I have taken as my focus one of the *Rāmāyana* narratives written by Tulsidas. Although there are numerous recitations and performances of *Rāmāyana,* as indicated in the third chapter, they merit greater comparative exploration on the part of Indian Christians. This being said, *Rāmāyana* performances do not stand alone. There are other performative traditions within Hinduism, such as *Yakshagāna, Hari Kathā, Bayalāta, Tālamadlae, Kathakali, and Kuttiyaṭam.* Taken together, they communicate a powerful sense of the divine. Each performance comes with its own theoretical implications embedded in diverse regional histories, linguistic

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[1585] Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion Is an Island," in *No Religion Is an Island*, ed. Harold Kasimow and Byron Sherwin (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books,1991), 6.
[1586] Schreiter, "Religion as Source and Resource for Reconciliation," 111.

traditions, vocal presentations, and narrative styles. However, these narratives and traditions are not simply texts, rituals, and aesthetics, they are part of an archetypal history.

To know a religious tradition in greater depth, requires an immersion into all aspects of the context in which the religion is practiced. This is essential to the process. The study of sacred texts out of context is insufficient. Inevitably, immersion experiences bring out and reveal multiple dimensions of a religious tradition. Immersions are potentially transformative inasmuch as they create the conditions that enable one to have a heart for the other. In doing so, they create and help to sustain a fusion of intellectual horizons that is essential for theological education.[1587] Lesslie Newbigin, while acknowledging the need to feel the power of other religions, points out, "One has not really heard the message of one of the real religions that has moved millions of people over centuries, if one has not been really moved by it, if one has not felt in one's soul the power of it.[1588] Over the centuries, Hinduism as a religion has *moved* millions of people. To feel its power and dynamism, one needs to experience it, understand it and do so in the company of its adherents.

The Significance of the Dissertation for Theological Education in India and Beyond

Looking to the future of theological education in India and other contexts as well, those preparing for ministry within the Christian churches, and more specifically within the Catholic tradition, must be supported and encouraged by their mentors to understand religious others properly. Through experiences of immersion and encounter, through the cultivation of attitudes of empathy and humility, and through the discovery of genuine openness, the conditions for authentic encounter and dialogue can be created. This dissertation on the *Mānas* offers theologians and

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[1587] Clooney, *Western Jesuit Scholars in India*, 3.
[1588] Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Mission* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 1994), 18.

theological educators alike an opportunity to reflect upon the necessity and importance of engaging Hinduism, not only through academic studies in our seminaries and theological centers, but also through immersions and encounters that help Christians to create a heart for the Hindu that is informed by a relationship of mutual understanding. It is not appropriate in today's world to provide studies in Sanskritic traditions and assert that such study is adequate. Without access to experiences that include personal engagement with sacred texts, rituals, and performative aesthetics in the company of Hindus, future ministers will be denied the opportunity to learn - not only *about* religious others, but also *from* religious others in ways that will enrich and enlarge a student's own understanding of being a Christian and an Indian. As I conclude this dissertation, I want to propose that the *Mānas, Hanumān Chalisa, Itihāsas* and *Purāṇa* literature should be included in the curriculum of seminaries, religious houses of study and theology centers, especially in Northern India. My hope is that this work on the *Mānas* will motivate Catholic theological educators to re-visit- and re-interpret the role of popular religiosity and the regional sacred texts of Hinduism.

Learning to Listen

Ultimately, the encounter with other religions and religious others demands *listening*. In the *Rāmlilā* and *Kathā* tradition of the *Mānas*, '*listening*' is key and it cannot be separated from these religious events. The mission of interreligious dialogue aims at harmony and achieving understanding and mutual respect among the religions. To achieve these goals, we cannot undervalue the auditory and sonic dimensions of religious experience. *Listening* is a sacred gift that enables us to grow in the space of trust. Through ongoing engagement with adherents of different religious traditions and more experiential knowledge of their religious practices, we could learn to listen better - as humble listeners and learners, who are grateful for the experiences of

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being together in a multi-religious world. Amidst distinct experiences of *bhakti*, we come to know ourselves as pilgrims in search of the divine. No doubt, the journey will raise many challenges and questions. However, through listening and learning, these experiences of encounter will make us open to the people of God, and ultimately, enable us to recognize who we are as brothers and sisters who have been made in the image and likeness of God.

Living in a world of escalating religious extremism, the encounters and immersions of which I speak are no longer options or possibilities for ministry, but *imperatives.* We must find ways to bear witness and give expression to our fundamental interconnectedness as human beings. Despite the distinctiveness of diverse religious traditions, one who engages in interreligious encounters needs to believe in the inherent religious connections that exist among adherents of distinct religious traditions. Only with such an attitude can "dialogue [encounter] become not only possible but also necessary."[1589]

In a religiously pluralistic world, religions offer many *opportunities* to encounter others in daily living and in the 'dialogue of life.' By embracing a spirituality that involves a never-ending approach to God, pilgrims on this journey must be prepared to seek out opportunities for encounter that will transform the way they think and acts towards adherents of other religions and their religious traditions. Transformative encounters are always dynamic and interactive. Rarely, are people left untouched by them, provided there is a genuine openness to encountering religious others. Mindful of current geopolitical realities, such opportunities could provide a valid response and alternative to religious extremism in a pluralistic world.

[1589] Cornille, *the Im-Possibility of Inter-religious Dialogue,* 134.

In conclusion, my research on the *Rāmcaritmānas* and my application of Clooney's comparative theological method was an opportunity to encounter Hinduism *deeply*, listening and learning from Hindu others, humbly and seriously, sometimes in circumstances of ultimacy. Among my learnings, I discerned and discovered my call to undertake the mission of interreligious dialogue as central to the ministry of theological education. As Jesuit theologian, Michael Amaladoss, has noted, interreligious dialogue "is a challenge, but a necessary one because we are collaborating with God in Jesus, who is gathering all things together (Eph. 1:8-10), reconciling all of us with one another and with Godself (Col1: 15-20), so that God will be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).[1590]

[1590]Amaladoss, *Interreligious Encounter, Opportunities and Challenges*, 223.

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