

# Seva and Institution Building in Hindu Inspired Faith Movements

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## Abstract

Evidence-based patient choice (EBPC) is a subset of the set of alternative frameworks that have been proposed to supplement or supplant the court-derived doctrines of consent and informed consent. In this paper, we will examine the definition, roles, and hierarchies and topologies of evidence that have been proposed to be provided to patients to use in their decision making related to the own care in health and medicine. Patient-based rational decision making in its present form has a relatively small base of high-quality medical and scientific evidence that are of potential use to patients in decision making relative to the broad range of health and medical decisions that patients face and thus is not reflective of the vast domain of decisions patients face. In addition, the proponents of alternative patient-based frameworks have not fully examined the potential impacts of evidence on patients, how evidence is to be adequately communicated to patients, and thus EBPC is still in its definitional phases of development. In this paper, we also examine a new taxonomy of patient-based decision making inclusive of a broad range of patient decisions. This taxonomy includes characteristics of four types: (1) characteristics of the decision, (2) characteristics of the patient being counseled, (3) characteristics of the patient's counselors (providers of information and those who help clarify the unique patient's values relative to the decision), and (4) characteristics of the evidence underlying the decision. This paper also presents a future research agenda to help fill current gaps in patientbased rational decision making relative to this taxonomy.

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**Index terms**— evidence, medical evidence, participatory decision making, randomized controlled trials, shared decision making.

## 1 Introduction

s institutional actors in civil society, faith-based movements are institutional manifestations of forms of faith that are orthodox, assimilative or accommodative. The concept of social-political capital is an appropriate metaphor to understand faith-based movements in civil society. The aim is to reframe the civic engagement debate by redirecting thinking about the ways in which faith may (or may not) strengthen social worldviews (Wagner, 2008). Faith traditions share a commitment to 'looking out' to the wider community and testing faith through action. While this is often expressed as charity, service provision or interfaith dialogue, there is also the potential to politicise this impetus to engage. Faith-based institutions and movements are generally involved in 'community cohesion' and 'regeneration' schemes (Jamoul and Wills, 2008). These institutional manifestations generate a differential normative and ideational culture by defining and redefining the 'social' within faith discourses. Connections have been sought between practical mysticism and service (Gray and Lovat 2008). They essentially provide access to the sacred at the deep level; and, sometimes break down the dichotomy between mind and body in worship to experiment with worship styles and music and hence communicate with a new generation (Landres and Bolger, 2007). Ample literature in the western context has emphasised on the role of faith-based

institutions and movements as civil society actors in the process of welfare and development (eg. Wineburg 1992). In terms of faith-based institutions/movements in the contemporary Indian context, a particular genre is Hindu inspired. The stances could be purist or syncretic depending upon the orientation of the charismatic guru/teacher (Copley, 2000; Copeman and Ikegame, 2012). Oomen (2004) and Beckregge (2003) have affirmed the existence of Hindu inspired faith-based movements since historicity<sup>1</sup>. Their roles in the sociopolitical arena and their Hindu nationalist leanings have also been discoursed.

Contemporary Hindu Inspired Faith Movements (henceforth HIFMs) are thus headed by teachers or gurus and/or their disciples, their ideological leanings basically translating into the ideology, vision or mission of the organisations (Copley 2000). They are institutionalised religious structures which represent change of religion as a social institution over time. They question hegemony and yet remain traditional in many ways thereby characterising a soft revolution (Rustau 2003). 'Hindu India' herein is presented as an embodiment of the divine and the focus is on 'service' of the 'Hindu nation'. This endeavour of faith-based institutions to engage in seva as depicted in the aforementioned studies can be seen as a move to develop culturally relevant theology -influencing behaviours, worldviews and lifestyles. The attempt is essentially to re-instate the rationality content of a given faith. Inspired by a charismatic leader, the focal point is the 'persuasion of the perfectability of the human nature in the here and now' and much of theorising which predicates this is grounded in the 'belief' that the individual is Divine. In the understanding derived from Feuerbach, here the concern is not with God as the other, but with the God who lives in and for the individual and whose real meaning lies in the conception of human, The epistemic distinction between faith and knowledge is thus blurred -it is, in a Durkheimian sense a connection between the sacred and the profane (Copley, 2000).

The contemporary phenomenon is that of avatar gurus -important element in whose endeavour to fulfill the earthly missions is the setting up of institutional organisations. There are elaborate mechanics of institutional building; ethics of seva as crucial to the spirit of institution building. Thus seva is panegyric i.e. it constitutes an expression of the Hindu topography of the self where the prototypical act of worship is the glorification of the divine (Warrier 2003). This paper looks at this seva epithet of Hindu inspired faith movements from a cross institutional lens. The core questions which this paper addresses are: a) how seva as a mandate originated in these HIFMs b) what in the seva is volitional, what are the prescribed aspects and doctrines c) how tangible seva initiatives interface with various systems and d) how seva contributes to institution building through the interplay of memory and oblivion dynamics thereby evolving the style of HIFMs.

## 2 II.

### 3 Hindu Inspired Faith Movements and Seva

Several case studies have emphasised on the role of Hindu faith institutions in social spheres. Kennedy's (1925) study looks at the ashrama of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu as a potential site for socioreligious transformation. Kopf's (1979) study is on the Brahmo Samaj focusing on the organisational structure and agency effecting upon societal structure and human agency. Pimpley and Sharma (1983) have presented a descriptive account of the role of Arya Samaj in eradication of untouchability in Punjab.

The Hare Krishna movement or ISKCON has invited attention of several scholars due to its Diaspora presence (Squarcini 2000; Guerllo 2000; Madsen 2000; Squarcini 2002; Neubert 2008; Crnic 2009). Sullivan (1975) Sullivan (, 2000) and Brooks (1989) have projected it as a movement with religious and social leanings. The social leanings come with their interventions in the area of education and health care and macro-interventions in the arena of ecological consciousness and a corresponding lifestyle. The other institution is Rama Krishna Mission which echoes the correspondence between Vivekananda's practical Vedanta and nationalist discourses. From a historical-materialist perspective Gupta (1973) talks of Ramakrishna Mission's transformation from an autology of renunciation characteristic of traditional Vedic tenets to a mission of faith-inspired altruistic service. At a higher level of generalisation, the mission has been viewed as a prototype of the native response to the Western challenge, leading to or re-instating tradition (Singh 1973); modernity (Srinivas 1966) or to a traditionmodernity synthesis (Saran 1969).

Babb's (1986) 'Redemptive Encounters' looks at three modern religious movements: Radhasoami, Brahma Kumaris with its millenarian philosophy and Sathya Sai Baba cult. Using deep continuities as the central theme, Babb establishes the fundamental unity in these three modern styles of Hinduism and the single source all these derive from. Service to society and world affirmation/accommodation also emerges out of these deep continuities with the dharma of Hindu tradition. There are basic 'images' of Hindu religious culture which are present in these three modern styles.

Some other descriptive case studies on contemporary Hindu religious institutions have been done by Juergensmeyer (1991) on Radhasoami Satsang, Taylor (1987) on the Satya Sai Baba Seva Mission, White (1992) on the Sai Baba Seva Sansthan and Williams (1984) on the Swaminarayan Sansthan. Falling within the purview of discourses on the sociology of religion, these case studies have from a largely structural-functionalist perspective, laid a dual emphasis on the spirituo-theological and social service aspects of the organisations.

Specifically on the seva aspect of Hindu faith institutions, studies have historiographically mapped its origin through specific HIFMs.

Adopting the historical-materialist approach and the historical method of investigation, Beckerlegge (1995)

has analysed the Ramakrishna Mission with reference to its ideological leanings translating into the practice of "seva" -service to humanity; discussion being undertaken in the context of a historical tradition of continuity maintained with the tenets of social service in the faith. Developing upon the contentions further, Beckerlegge (1998Beckerlegge ( , 2000aBeckerlegge ( , 2000b) ) has also proposed that the mission's social service activities are a manifestation of the social stake of a religious organisation within the purview of modern Hinduism. Extending the discussion in a comparative study adopting the historical and ethnographic method, Beckerlegge (2003) has presented the connection between the extensive promotion and practice of seva (service) within the contemporary Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu left-winged organisation, and the invocation of Vivekananda. The connection has been examined through the dialectical relationship between the first two leaders of RSS-Keshav Baliram Hedgewar and Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar and the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Warriar (2003) has, employing the case study method, examined the mechanics of institution building within the Mata Amritanandamayi Mission. Devotees of the Mata tend to attribute the phenomenal growth and spread of this organisation in the course of the last two decades to the miraculous power of their guru. She has further explored the ethic of seva or selfless service propagated by the Mata through interviews with her devotees and disciples. The ethics of seva, a vital component of spiritual striving among Mata's devotees is crucial to the spirit of institution building in the Mata Amritanandamayi Mission and indispensable to its success as a fast growing and increasingly popular guru organisation in contemporary India. She has further elucidated the rationale for seva in the Mission, the forms of seva rendered by devotees and disciples and means by which their seva effectively contributes towards the organisations' institutional expansion and growth. Srinivas's (2008) ethnography explores the relationship between Sathya Sai Baba and his internationally-diverse, middle-class, city-dwelling devotees. She tells the story of the evolution of the global movement following Sathya Sai Baba, from the more Indo-centric religious pluralism developed by his predecessor Shirdi Sai Baba (d. 1918) to a universalistic mission to re-establish love and service. Devotees negotiate their two identities as members of a worldwide community of faith who live in urban centers. Local community service (seva) is the site for the intersection of universal and local communities. Performing seva, is a form of "practical spirituality" (2008: p.258), a way to enact Sathya Sai Baba's "love all, serve all" doctrine. Devotees who practice seva take an active role in the betterment of their local communities. Their performance of seva demonstrates an alternative and non-nationalistic way to perform citizenship. Seva is a devotional practice, for serving others is equivalent to serving Sai Baba, that is, "feeding the divine in the body of the poor" (2008: p.281). For the many devotees who will probably never make the pilgrimage to Puttaparthi, seva is as an easily accessible pathway that connects a transglobal community to its religious teacher. Moreover, it is through seva that participation in the local life of one's city becomes a sacred activity through the alchemical mediation of the transglobal avatar Sathya Sai Baba. Kasturi (2010) has examined the Sanatana Dharma Sabha movement's engagement with socioreligious charitable gifting practices, or dana, between 1915 and 1940. In late colonial India, elite donors used the language and forms of dana to rework relationships of patronage, reinforce power hierarchies and transform the moral fibre of different 'publics'. Reformist orthodox Hindu socio-religious organisations affiliated to the Sanatana Dharma Sabha movement fostered and shaped sanatana dharma norms, precepts and ritual practices through charitable gifting. Reforming dana was also a significant part of their project of revitalising sanatana dharma to craft citizenship, nationalism and a modern civil society. Sanatani organisations led public initiatives to prevent the misuse of monies by the managers of wealthy religious and charitable institutions and use this wealth to reinvigorate the Hindu samaj and religion. They also utilised the Religious and Charitable Endowments Acts as legal tools of reform to nurture a 'Hindu public' bound by caste, sampradayik and gender norms.

Seva in HIFMs from the epistemic lens translates their theo-spiritual perspective in a tangible form. The focus then is developing their theology of praxis -with faith as a key constitutive thread in the civil society fabric. The source of this insight thus far has been empirical material of descriptive, historical and ethnographic nature -primarily singular case studies which map the growth trajectories, follower profiles, strategies and praxis. If seva is one core proposed strategy of proliferation/world affirmation across HIFMs (Walliss, 2007;Locklin and Lauwers, 2009;Srinivas, 2010;Zavos, 2012) the need is to build analytical bridges across (in the sense of Babb's (1986) deep continuities) and examine the same form a crossinstitutional lens which this paper attempts to do.

### 4 III.

## 5 Methodology

The four broad questions which this paper attempts to address are: the origin of the seva mandate; aspects of volition, prescription and doctrinaire propositions in seva; systemic interfaces of seva initiatives; and how seva contributes to institution building in HIFMs through the interplay of memory and oblivion, thereby evolving the style. Of particular importance is the aspect of volition, prescriptivism and doctrinaire propositions that spearhead seva initiatives. The peculiar analytical approach adopted here derives from the following proposition. Among the HIFM associates there are volitional service tendencies as also prescribed mandates and doctrines, akin to trends in general faith-based movements (Kochuyt, 2009). Drawing from Hefferan (2007), it can be proposed that they provide spaces to negotiate realms not evident in strictly economic discourses such as good, evil and morality and work directed towards higher purposes.

Four popular and contemporary HIFMs were selected, that were founded between 1950 and early 1980s in

India first and then developed a Diaspora presence. These included: Chinmaya Mission, Vivekananda Kendra, Mata Amritanandamayi Mission and Art of Living.

In Chinmaya Mission, it was the teacher Swami Chinmayananda's intent to revive an understanding of the ancient philosophy of Vedanta (Thapan, 2005). Chinmaya Missions genesis in 1953 is further attributed to the adherents inspired by the discourses -christened as jnana yagnas (knowledge portals of sacrifice for transcendence). With respect to Vivekananda Kendra, Swami Vivekananda's (SVs) charisma was posthumously transported by an RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, right wing Hindu militant organisation) member Eknath Ranade who was later fully committed to Vivekananda Kendras work. Vivekananda Kendras genesis in 1972 is attributed to the sanctification of the Vivekananda Rock Memorial at Kanyakumari, an idea floated by the Ramakrishna Mission during his birth centenary year in 1963. The commencing aspect was SVs vision of nation building through cadre creation and capitalising on the heritage and spirituality of India. Amritanandamayi Mission's genesis paralleled the female guru Sudhamani's (later christened Mata Amritanandayayi) divine projections, and certain cause collaborators. These cause collaborators included an initial group of educated young men who wished to renounce family life to practice spirituality. By 1978, the nucleus of the spontaneous ashram grew and in the same year, Mother Sudhamani directed a devotee Balu to go to the Ramana Maharshi abode at Tiruvannamalai and meditate there for 41 days (Amritaswarupananda, 1988). Three years later on 6th May, 1981 with a view to preserving and propagating the teachings of Mother Sudhamani, the Mata Amritanandamayi Math and Mission Trust was founded. For Art of Living, the charismatic guru Sri Sri Ravishankar's transcendental experiences and efforts towards institutionalisation of spiritual training had an osmosis effect. These transcendental experiences of Sri Sri emerged out of a ten day quietude in Shimoga where he meditated after his training in Transcendental Meditation (?). This resulted in the first course on Sudarshan Kriya and Pranayama (SK&P) and the establishment of Ved Vigyan Maha Vidya Peeth (VVMVP) (Lebelley 2010; Gautier 2010). This followed the formal establishment of the Art of Living foundation in 1982 as a 'non-profit, educational and charitable organisation designed to enhance the quality of life'.

Field work was undertaken with all the four organisations in the summer of 2011. This entailed looking at the available institutional literature, discussion with the order or the key informants of the HIFMs and non-participant observation of the range of seva initiatives within the geographical proximity of the headquarters of these organisations (i.e. at Mumbai and surrounding regions, Kanyakumari, Kollam and Udayapura in India) and their modalities. The narratives evolved have been analysed utilising the conceptual networks within the study parameters as specified and a meta analysis has been attempted of the cross institutional picture.

Abiding by the case study tradition, apart from the proposition on volition-prescriptivism-doctrinarism that forms the core, some other initial propositions are as follows:

HIFMs demonstrate either a serendipitous social service initiation and/or streamlined for charisma/ideology practical translation. The mandate is to bring faith back into the public realm (Isaac, 2003). The service ideology is mediated actively by religious/civil practices combining philanthropy and rituals. Norms of community organising around the faith principle are created.

The service scope-mission-mandatemanagement reveal aspects of faith-based program theorisation wherein the faith component, personal spiritual growth, beliefs development accompanies service. The engagement in core service sectors entail a partnership in development goals in an essentially resource limited setting. Mission is to respond to the faith calling and hence religious imagery accompanies the service mission to communicate faith-basedness in the 'public face'. Service mandate and management posit on the middle ground between sacred-secular: faith commune is primary influences aspect of leadership, practical functioning and finance-policy. The overall understanding is to cultivate a faith-based context for service.

Multisystemic institutional relationships can be seen -with the legal system, governance systems, economic system and civil society including adherents/associates/beneficiaries. Amicability/compliance characterizes the general relationship with the legal system and governance processes as the endeavour is to become crucial actors in the public domain (Pipes and Ebaugh, 2002). Beyond market exchange characterises the general relationship with the economic system; somewhere questioning the rational choice market model -as philanthropy is the main source (Twombly, 2002). With the adherent-associate-beneficiary subset, the core idea is to generate social capital (Lockhart, 2005).

The style of faith-based social initiatives of the HIFMs is characterised by dimensions of political economy, memory and oblivion. Political economy dynamics are determined by world perceptions and translations into practice. This would signify a collateral seepage of Hindu hegemony. Co-option and faith coded biopolitics or governmentality reveal power dynamics (see Kennedy and Beilefield 2006; Arif 2008). Faith memories are created through cultural practices, as also there are elements of oblivion (or secularisation) which in turn determine the style.

## 6 IV. How Seva Originated in the hifms

Seva activities in Chinmaya Mission have their genesis through two sources: the vision of the spiritual heads and the seva propensity of individuals committed to the Chinmayananda ideals. The 'secular' seva projects have been equated to the historic 'jnana yagnas' of Chinmayananda -as activities of nation building with the understanding of Hindu religion/ dharma as embracing every aspect of life. In Chinmaya Mission, the component of seva is

embedded in the pledge. It is construed as a component of moral responsibility and that is directed towards 'people' and 'nation', each aspect then translating onto seva to the Absolute 2 .

As Vivekananda Kendra commenced as a spiritually oriented service mission post the establishment of the Rock Memorial -seva component was embedded in its initial design. Swami Vivekananda's message of naraseva -narayanseva (service to man is service to God) was drawn on explicitly by Eknath Ranade. Perpetuation of the Swami Vivekananda memory and translating into action his ideals of 'man making and nation building' served to be the vantage point. The Vivekananda Kendra mandate was initially cadre training -seva vratis and jeevan vratis -a non monastic albeit committed group of individuals willing to mould themselves to the mission of Vivekananda Kendra. Commencing with educational initiatives, Vivekananda Kendra then moved to north eastern areas with the same object followed by rural development, natural resource development and alternative technology initiatives on a broader scale. Simultaneously the shibir culture with training in yoga as also intensive training programmes for the cadre workers including aspects of Hindu philosophy, Swami Vivekananda thought genre and translating that ideational stance through practice continued as viewed so till date. Apart from Swami Vivekananda's ideal, some of the other ideational positions that fed into Vivekananda Kendras stance of seva were: the Adi Brahmoist stance of placing at the centre stage of the national life concepts of Brahman and universal equity; Dayanand Saraswati's spiritual revivalism; concepts of integral humanism and unity of creation and Gandhian thought. Further Eknathji, in view of the then RSS history {ban imposed post Gandhi assassination and uplift and struggle for organisational image annihilation} also viewed Vivekananda Kendra as a forum for translating the 'perceived uncompromising RSS stance into a palatable proposition'. Hence foci shifted from the 'extremist and revolutionary ideational isolate' onto a 'posterior cadre creation facet' for an undebatable purpose of nation building 3 .

In Amritanandamayi Mission, the genesis of social leanings arose from the sporadic and spontaneous acts of helping of Mother Sudhamani in the Parayakadavu village -wherein as per her biography -'she would step in almost anywhere to help people in poverty and need' (Amritaswarupananda 1988). Further as the narrative goes, 'she proclaimed having a divine rendezvous whence she heard a voice tell her that she was not in this world to merely meditate in isolation -but to go out and serve and spread the feelings of love and compassion for all fellow human beings'. With that individual episteme and with the formal setting up of Amritanandamayi Mission in 1981, the vantage point for spiritual-social endeavours was set. The first formal initiative however was undertaken in 1987 when with the corpus created from individual donations as also some from the paternal family property of Amma (as she is called by her devotees) that the first school for Sanskrit teaching which was free of cost and an accompanying branch ashram was opened in Kodungallur Kerala. Subsequently from the year 1989, formal setting up of institutions and training centres under the aegis of Amritanandamayi Mission was undertaken in and around Kollam district of Kerala. Amritanandamayi Mission's main mission of social/ humanitarian seva is the core message of 'unconditional love and compassion for all viewing divinity in them' as proposed by the charismatic teacher. Practical spirituality -a social leaning along with inward movements, form the normative ideational base of the social initiatives of Amritanandamayi Mission 4 .

Genesis of seva of Art of Living can be traced to the early 1980s, colliding with the genesis of the foundation. In early 1985, the 'Care for Children' program geared towards the educational development of children in the surrounding rural areas of the Udayapura ashram and the VISTA India program geared towards women empowerment were launched. Commencing as a figment of Sri Sri or a member adherents' imagination (with the sanction and permission of Sri Sri) these social initiatives have been launched. Art of Living foundation's seva mission is evident in its vision statement which encompasses its 'non-profit' and 'charitable' edifice -geared towards educational activities and enhancing the quality of life. This broad statement then provides room for multiple initiative; and, training/mainstreaming initiatives in Arunachal Pradesh, Nasik and Orissa. For Vivekananda Kendra, the mission is threefold: to live up to the historical image of Vivekananda Kendra as a spiritually oriented service mission; to perpetuate the public memory of SV; and, to build a brand image for Vivekananda Kendra in terms of 'saffronised at core but inclusive in praxis'. 4 The scope and range for Amritanandamayi Mission encompasses educational services, residential institutions for vulnerable groups, hospice and healthcare services, disaster relief and rehab operations, food services, environmental initiatives and ecological conservation and livelihood development. Amritanandamayi Mission has an austere mission of service as an instrument in spiritual growth.

interpretations and a range of activities both social and spiritual which can be subsumed under the same. The mandate is thus of transformation -primordially personal and hence social. Art of Livings basic ideology of seva is governed by threefold norms -love, seva and punarnava. In terms of love, the basis is that of divine love -loving all by seeing God's manifestations in them. With that basic preamble, seva is launched which is ideally a selfless exercise undertaken by Art of Living volunteers as a part of their sadhana. Punarnava is rejuvenation or transformation -bringing in a newness of all forms 5 .

## 7 V.

Volition, Prescriptivism, Doctrinarism: How Seva is Spearheaded

On the postulate of volition, the HIFMs facets are as follows. For Chinmaya Mission with respect to both householders and monastic disciples, the quintessential requisite is the 'thirst for knowledge' of Vedanta in the Chinmaya Mission packaged form. Realising and recognising Chinmaya Mission as the paragon of Hinduised

metaphysical, philosophical and practical view of life and the willingness to fit into the kaleidoscope is the primary component. That in Chinmaya Mission terms cannot be cultivated or infiltrated, but has to be in born. In Vivekananda Kendra terms, volition is the urge for spirituality and propensity to engage in nation building ventures. Seva for Amritanandamayi Mission is an integral part of harnessing the 'spiritual DNA' (Ramakrishnanda, 2006) and hence the volition is a natural outcome of spiritual quests. The preliminary translation of the social service mandate of Art of Living happens at the level of the individual member adherent and Art of Living volunteers and teachers. In the Art of Living genre, volition and prescriptivism collide -as seva (service) has been laid down as an essential component of sadhana (or spiritual practice) and spirituality as per Sri Sri is the 'technology of the consciousness and the whole world is the play and display of consciousness' (Vyakti Vikas Kendra 2005); and 'seva is seeing God in the next person, and when we serve, we are able to go deep 5 Art of Living social initiatives scope encompasses -education, health and substance abuse interventions, livelihood and empowerment through rural development efforts, women's empowerment, prison programmes, sustainable development, disaster and trauma relief and peace initiatives of political and communal nature. In line with the larger vision, the Art of Living mission is to undertake work whenever required and opportunity arises -the HIFMs stake being that of a spiritual institutional actor within the civil society frame. Hence a certain degree of fluidity and permeability characterise Art of Living's social endeavours.

within, the deeper you go the more you are able to serve -they complement each other' (Sri Sri Publications Trust 2005). The self-world connections are inevitably established as seva is a crucial pathway to mumukshatva (desire for total freedom and enlightenment). Seva assumes multiple forms -the hermeneutics are broad enough to encompass a range -from scientific research to disaster interventions to empowerment efforts and charitable giving.

For Chinmaya Mission, prescriptivism and doctrinarism then is in twofold terms: i) the metaphysical-philosophical spread; and, ii) the workoutreach-service ensemble. The metaphysicalphilosophical spread comprises of levels or gradations of courses on the ideational core of Sankaracharya's version of Vedanta -the forms for householder adherents being jnana yagnas (as per the historical method of Chinmayananda referring to austerities and sacrifice to attain 'true' knowledge), spiritual camps, study groups, lesson course {a correspondence course on the fundamentals of Vedanta} and the three month residential dharma sevak course; and, the two and a half year residential course in Vedanta for aspiring ascetics who wish to join and perpetuate the monastic order of the mission. The work-outreach-service ensemble comprises of casting the Chinmaya Mission message in the mould of service-outreach-work for others and nation through the practical philosophies embedded in and drawn from Vedanta itself -the core being oneness, karma yoga and nishkama karma (work as austerity and unattached work), and seva as sadhana (service as a form of penance ensuring other worldly transcendental benefits). Prescriptivism for those engaged with Vivekananda Kendra is the training for workers and volunteers (seva vratis, jeevan vratis, vanaprasthis and shiksharthi) as per the prescribed training package and the acceptance of 'postings' in areas of Vivekananda Kendra service projects. In Amritanandamayi Mission, what is prescribed are the spiritual-service oriented regulations for monastic and householder disciples.

With respect to Vivekananda Kendra, the doctrinaire turn arrives with: i) the acceptance of the Vedanta relationality as having transcultural and transnational implications; and, ii) viewing nationalism as an overarching vision inspired by the historical 'man making and nation building' temper of Swami Vivekananda as also spiritual nationalism of RSS leader Gurusji Golwalker. The language for Vedanta relationality in the public domain is a moral universalism based on compassion for and connectivity with society. The ethics of Vedanta relationality coupled with nationalism are then embodied in acts of yoga practice, vegetarianism, camaraderie with fellow volunteer workers and righteous norms of conduct derived from practical Vedanta translatable across a range of socio-political sites. Hence what is crucial in shaping the doctrinaire forms of Vivekananda Kendra are: sites of sociality, Vedanta relationality and the non-discursive realm of nation building. Vivekananda Kendra also promotes as a doctrine Swami Vivekananda's conception of Vedanta socialism (as distinct from Marxian socialism, with spirituality as the underlying principle) as an abiding tenet of political organisation. What is proposed is Swami Vivekananda as having historically shown the spiritual-social-political path, temporally transported by Eknathji and transposed in Vivekananda Kendra. Along Platonic lines, the genealogy of Swami Vivekananda leadership has, as per Vivekananda Kendra, served the purpose of re-instating moral values that enable engagement in transcendental tasks of nation building.

The doctrinaire propositions are introduced for the Vivekananda Kendra adherents heuristicallycommencing with inwardness of self discovery through yoga then catapulted onto a meaningful outwardness of service at the vital level and nation building at the surreal level.

In Amritanandamayi Mission, the doctrinaire twist comes with the consolidation of faith-service link taking the forms of service groups and tithing practices. Doctrinarism for Art of Living is the mandatory allegiance to the Art of Living courses as the inevitable way forward. The courses are of basic and advanced levels, as also there is the Sahaj Samadhi Meditation, Divya Samaj ka Nirman (DSN) meaning creation of a divine society, All Round Training in Excellence (ART-Excel) course for children, Youth Empowerment Seminars, corporate programs and Sri Sri Yoga.

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## 8 VI. Seva in H ifms and Systemic Interfaces

Through seva HIFMs have systemic interfaces with the legal system, political and local governance, the economic system and civil society. The general view of the legal system is that it is for attestations and sanctions and hence there is historically an element of compliance with the same. Similar notions prevail in Chinmaya Mission and Amritanandamayi Mission. Vivekananda Kendra proposes a compliance and adherence -the legal unit at the headquarters looking into matters of registration, permissions and offering advisory details to branches and centres. With the legal system there is a tradition in Art of Living of attaining sanctions and abiding by controls; the general image of Art of Living being that of a pro-establishment organisation facilitating larger jurisprudential processes.

With the political and local governance, the general trend is that of congruence and collaboration. The Chinmaya Mission and Amritanandamayi Mission tradition is that of collaboration, exchange and coordination, Chinmaya Mission positing as a Hindu faithbased organisation on a spiritual-social mission. In Vivekananda Kendra, there are elements of collaboration and co-operation with the local/state establishment and a consociational 6 form of partnership in development from the Vivekananda Kendra ideational lens. The Art of Living relation is twofold: at one level in keeping with the legal system there is a tendency to align and hence build a consortium with state efforts whether it is in the field of women's empowerment or ecology. At the next level programs also play an arbitration role between the state and conflict ridden situations in a self directed manner. Particularly in the field of ecology, corporate-state clashes have been dealt with by the Deepening Roots initiative, by including a strong component on ecology in the Art of Living corporate courses wherever applicable.

The systemic interface of Chinmaya Mission with the economic domain is threefold: i) self sustenance through revenue generated out of sales of spiritual goods/discursive commodities; ii) remunerations from philanthropy outside market exchange -a kind of beyond rational choice expense of individuals in exchange of the intangible, inexplicable and transcendental; and, iii) in a bridging sense towards the 'secular' program oriented state and global funding {sources such as USAID, NORAD and others}. Chinmaya Mission has a systematic and well worked out policy for receipt of foreign funding, proposal writing and program designing. Within the economic realm in particular, the norm and form of fund requisition, program development and management deconstructs and demystifies the 'sacral' -fuzzifying at times the sacred-secular dichotomy boundaries -Chinmaya Mission functioning as a systematised, translocal, third sector institution in interactionist and exchange relation with the global and local markets and the state. For instance, systematic program proposals have been developed for obtaining funding for sewing unit vocational training centre at Chinmaya Organisation for Rural Development (CORD) {funded by NORAD} and for the obtaining of fully automated wheelchairs for the residential institutions for the elderly or Pitamaha Sadans.

In terms of the economic system, Vivekananda Kendra has three way interface: i) there are ideals of self sustenance as derived from the Gandhi vocab; ii) RSS trajectory of 'Hindu social responsibility' (linking Hinduism to economic growth akin to Weberian links of Protestant ethics and capitalist spirit); and, iii) Vivekananda Kendra bringing the compassionate angle of service which highlights the third interface of 'giving' as a culture beyond rational choice economics. Hence self sustenance, Hindu inspired social responsibility and philanthropy are three domains of Vivekananda Kendra trust with economics. Amritanandamayi Mission economics is managed by philanthropy and international funding and collaborations -Amritanandamayi Mission being an NGO with special consultative status to the UN. With the macro-economic system, the interface of Art of Living is of threefold forms: self sustaining ventures -Art of Living generates its own funds by sale of literature, CDs containing transcribed talks and discourses of Sri Sri as well as its organic and ayurvedic products which are in turn utilised for social service initiatives. Secondly, there has also been a culture of tithe in Art of Living with some member adherents giving a part of their annual income for Art of Living activities. In some cases honorary services are also rendered. Thirdly there are also systematic establishment grant receipt policies (Art of Living is reasonably open to access state funds on schemes applicable to vulnerable groups); albeit within voluntaristic frame of reference.

In terms of the larger civil society, Chinmaya Mission through its social initiatives is instrumental in the image creation as a Hindu missionary. For the same, in terms of the volunteer assets, Chinmaya Mission capitalises on the imagined commune of Vedanta aspirants. The modus operandi is the appeal to the moral-ethical dimension among adherents to solicit collaboration in social initiatives. Two links are the tools: i) the 'dharma-karma-sadhana-seva-moksa link' referring to religiosity-work-austerity-service-renunciation link; and, ii) the 'metaphysical-ethical-praxis link' from the Hindu vantage point. The latter is a more Vedantic description of the imperative of service along with Hindu spirituality using arguments, contentions and propositions from scripture to dwell on the epistemology, ethics and practical aspect in Vedanta. For the Chinmaya beneficiaries, there is a Promethean portrayal of Chinmaya Mission as a material benefactor and spiritual emancipator. For beneficiaries, Chinmaya Mission officials perceive two other flavours of interface: firstly, the privilege of association/adherence as atypical in the existential scheme of things. Secondly, the contention is that such valuable associational prospects should be safe deposited and utilised/expended in future for social-spiritual mobility.

With the civil society Vivekananda Kendra preserves relationships of the nature of brand image building and cadre creation. This is operationalised by highlighting the associational privileges which include: i) Vedantic exegesis; ii) saffron norms which ensure rootedness; iii) service which gives outreach wings and creates spaces for salvation; and, iv) a general impression of collaboration in a generous and secularised task of nation building. Hence the Vivekananda Kendra projection for civil society -extant and plausible member adherents and patrons, is

that of a non renunciant yet compassionate and universalist religious institution -an epitome of 'spirituality' (from the Hindu lens). With the service project beneficiaries, Vivekananda Kendra is unabashed its claim of generating a habitus Vivekananda Kendra loyales. Service projects with respect to beneficiaries who are the core intent of the interventions, then assume two forms: i) sites of production/reproduction/socialisation of Vivekananda Kendra ideals particularly in the educational initiatives as well as training programmes of NARDEP for professionals (the ideological scheme is well chalked out in terms of subjects of faith study, subject matter, quantum and nature of ideas to be developed); and, ii) for the mass populace not too inclined to study ideals but more oriented towards tangible gains (such as the rural/tribal folk in NARDEP and rural development programmes) the object is attainment of the 'mission' of Vivekananda Kendra. What eventually emerges is a sophisticated projection of a benevolent face of a saffron edifice.

With respect to member adherents and volunteers as an independent system in Amritanandamayi Mission, there is a cultural reproduction depending on a niche habitus of Amma adherents. What is reflected is an Amma-inspired ethic of love and service. This manifests in terms of a 'culture of giving and service with a spiritual orientation'. Beneficiaries are drawn to Amritanandamayi Mission services by the very epithet of unconditional love and the hallmark 'Amma embrace' which is perceived as the epitome of comfort by human touch. Further there is an adaptation and self-organisation into the Amritanandamayi Mission fold -most beneficiaries call themselves 'Amma's children'. There are also selfreferential dynamics including learning of Amritanandamayi Mission ways, self-modelling and a chain effect in terms of co-opting newer beneficiaries. In Art of Living, there is a relationship of multilateralism and exchange with civil society particularly through member adherents and volunteers. Two effects of this exchange relationship are: i) social capital generation through a combination of collective-reflexive volunteerism styles; and, ii) institutional-individual actor interface through cadre generation. For Art of Living beneficiaries there as an adaptation, internalisation and routinisation of SK&P and other practices; through a snowballing effect, a normative and ideational patronage is generated.

## 9 VII.

Seva and Institution Building:

Memory, Oblivion and Style

Seva and institution building in the HIFMs has elements of memory and oblivion of Hindu leanings which determine the style. Political economy in seva is the backdoor entry of dominant discourses of Hindu hegemony in the praxis fold. In Chinmaya Mission, the apparent myth and camouflage of 'secular', 'all encompassing' and 'universal' are systematically erased and demystified through the continued emphasis on Volume XIV Issue III Version I

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'Hindu' philosophy and Vedanta as the distinctive way forward. The rewriting is then 'revivalist Hindu' -a syndicated package comprising of oriental and postcolonial answers to Enlightenment rationality, occidental ethnocentrism and modernist scientism -Vedanta believed to be the 'Hindu scientific' paradigm extant since historicity. As for Vivekananda Kendra, there is an austere emphasis on comprehending Vedanta universalism and the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda version of Hindu philosophy -a mode through which the discourse of Hindu enters praxis. In Amritanandamayi Mission it occurs with the emphasis on 'ancient Indian heritage'. In Art of Living, the hegemony seeps in inconspicuously through the position is that 'wisdom' lies in the Vedas primarily. With other tenets such as Buddhist and ecclesiastical, there is the element of seeking congruity -the vantage point of comparison being the Vedic repertoire.

The postulate of memory is an important component feeding into the seva style. In Chinmaya Mission, what remains perpetually alive is the memory of Gurudev-Guruji (Swami Chinmayananda-Swami Tejomayananda) as herald-sustainer of Hindu revivalism and 'Indian' cultural heritage. Through seva endeavours, the public memory of Vivekananda Kendra is characterised by two aspects: i) images of Swami Vivekananda perpetuated through Eknathji where the Kendra is viewed as a vanguard of nationalist reconstruction on the Indian/Hindu cultural edifice; and, ii) a 'back to the indigenous sacral roots' sentiment. With respect to Amritanandamayi Mission, twin memories are created: i) Amma as the divine feminine personification of the love-compassion epigraph; and, ii) of the characteristic embrace 7 and unconditional love epithet. In Art of Living, the strong 'memory' of faith is permeated with the projection of Sri Sri as a brand ambassador of 'ancient' philosophy sophisticatedly repackaged in contemporary form. He becomes an epitome of spiritual tradition-continuity-change within a postmodern-postcolonial epoch.

What accompanies the postulate of memory is the shadow effect of oblivion -a mirroring of secular and profane in the faith repertoire. With respect to Chinmaya Mission, temporary amnesia and oblivion occurs in routine managerial activities which bring two components: i) a sense of corporatism; and, ii) a mirage of desacralisation-secularism. In Vivekananda Kendra, routine and market transactions as well as collaboration/partnerships do betray a neutralist image or a sense of oblivion. Oblivion for Amritanandamayi Mission is not complete in the sense of making memories evasive. Rather what is visualised is a sense of fuzziness in routine business and collaborations with national bodies such as the RBI and NABARD (as for instance for the Amrita SREE self help groups) -thence the projection of Amritanandamayi Mission being that of a non-profit with humanitarian



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concerns but guided by the charisma of Amma who has 'secular and inclusive' leanings. The Art of Living seva omnibus with its routine fades the faith stance. At another level the continuous emphasis on the interfaith harmony position as well as soirees with other faith groups, tends to make the stance almost rhetorically secular.

The core of confluence of political economy, memory and oblivion projects the seva style of the HIFMs. The Chinmaya Mission style has tenets of: a) Hindu theism and faith inspired sadhana-seva link; b) Vedanta epithet; and, c) 'Hindu' hologram in the seva agenda. Owing to the strong Hindu origin base and Swami Vivekananda as a historical and cultural translator of re-imported oriental thought, the Vivekananda Kendra style is hallmarked by an animated Swami Vivekananda imagery. There is an ideological broadcast through claims of philosophical universalism of Vedanta. On the subtle edifice of fascistic Hindu norms, the pronounced seva objects that typify the style are: a) mission attainment, b) spiritual infiltration, c) provision of tangible needs, d) steadfast social capital generation and, e) a perceived matter-of-fact answer to Christian proselytisation.

The Amritanandamayi Mission style is an interplay of two dimensions: a) the Amma persona as the hologram and metaphor of grace, unconditional love and seva; and, b) translocal collaborations and routinisation that facilitate secularisation by camouflaging the micropolitics of the dominant Hindu discourse. The style of Art of Living's seva delivery is an interplay of: a) Sudarshan Kriya as representing an orientalist imagery; and, b) manufacturing of practical spirituality i.e. salvation through seva norms by transcending faith at one level (by spiritualising it) and catapulting it at another (by the edifice of Vedic tenets under the garb of ancient wisdom). This continuum of 'seva sadhana' functions like an aphorism. What emerges in terms of a seva stance of Art of Living is a complex interplay of faith memory, its simultaneous oblivion, and spiritualised assertion. In a Derridaen sense, writings of 'faith' and erasures of 'secularised spirituality' coexist.

## VIII.

## Discussion and Conclusion

For HIFMs the genesis of seva is either serendipitous initially and later systematised or apriori streamlined for translation of guru's ideals. The seva genesis within HIFMs has also meant a paradigm shift from the traditional 'privatised' role with focus on the spiritual-sacred towards the 'public' role which embodies a multidimensional social capital. The idea/mandate is to bring faith to the public realm in a visible way -beyond rituals, towards a community orientation. The seva ideology of the HIFMs is not of the nature of armchair prophecy, but mediated actively by religious and civil practices -philanthropic giving, collective prayer and rituals. Habitual practices of seva, sadhana, yoga within the HIFM context, rather than simple espousal of beliefs have been responsible for the seva repertoire. Hence seva becomes a pillar, position and vanguard of institution building for HIFMs.

This paper argues that seva operationally stems from volition, prescriptivism and doctrinaire propositions given by the HIFMs. Volition entails innate faith tendencies and seva propositions stemming from virgin faith leanings. Prescriptivism is the streamlining and straitjacketing of the volition through HIFM schooling. Doctrinaire propositions alleviate the prescriptions to the level of instrumental directive. The volitional tendencies are, drawing from Sapp (2011), representative of imago dei, incarnational theology and a faith active in love. The imago dei concept holds that all people are created in the image of God -which has inherent self giving implications. Incarnational theology focuses on the image of the Absolute Being and the HIFM embodiment/charisma, in solidarity with the oppressed. Hence what is justified and glorified is the sacrificial/renunciant act of the guru flowing then to the associates' sympathetic participation with humanity. Volition arises precisely from this knowledge of human suffering which needs to be annihilated -engagement is to have and build enduring relationships over episodic involvement with society. Faith active in love is the inherent tendency of faith to reach out -symbolically signifying beyond self and cognitive-virtual-real alliance with the other self. Through prescriptivisms, HIFMs actually construct the selfhood of adherents/associates as a deeply moral endeavour {see Winchester (2008)}. From the theoretical insights of Bourdieu it can also be said that embodied faith practices of ritual prayer, dietary restrictions and seva form within the associates a moral disposition or habitus. Faith practices have morally constitutive properties, serving as key elements in the process of developing and solidifying moral dispositions of significant associates over time.

HIFMs' prescriptions and doctrinaire propositions also complement the contemporary theoretical work on 'lived religion' (Winchester 2008). HIFM traditions not only supply relevant doctrines, narratives and belief systems but also embodied 'technologies' through which the moral subjectivities of associates can be transformed. Akin to Bourdieu's concepts of practice and habitus, the HIFM doctrines play a key role in shaping the moral and faith-oriented selves of associates.

The scope of seva encompasses the core social sectors of development such as education, health and livelihood as also certain customised programmes. It also projects the HIFM assertion/partnership in development goals in a resource limited setting by simultaneously factoring in culture. The mission is inevitably 'social' through the prism of faith. The mandate is seva to eventually realise transcendental ideals of a twin spiritual-material upliftment and proliferate the 'message'. Both these are derivatives of the mission -the HIFM mission-ideals then seep into the social canvass through the projects either in an apriori, parallel and/or retrospective manner. The management of these institutionalised efforts have a 'missionary consciousness' -there is an order ministration of evangelical nature. In terms of practicalities of management, HIFMs public face is characterised by religious phraseology in their mission statements and religious symbolism in their logo. Headed by the charismatic guru,

the members of the order are in charge and the adherent base forms a volitional second line supported by paid staff with a fair degree of formalisation in recruitment. 'Hindu inspired faith' nevertheless remains the overarching raison d'être for engagement at all levels. Finance generation is through modes of exchange beyond market logicsphilanthropy being one core source. In terms of goods delivered, HIFMs provide flexible services involving a range of relational programmes -faith-oriented seva also being a part of the package. The organisational culture is imbued with 'faith' as the overarching and underlying tenet. There is a certain reliance on secular expertise -but not sans the spiritual veto power in information processing and decision making. Hence whereas the secular/profane is not discounted in managerial aspects -faith is an important and unnegotiable add on.

In terms of systemic interfaces of HIFM projects, there are relationships with the legal system, political and local governance, economic system, civil society including member adherents, associates and beneficiaries. The affirmative relationship of the HIFMs with the legal system is an exercise in practiced legitimacy -a way to consolidate their stand as reasonable social actors. HIFM amicability with political and local governance is also a result of the state policy to view the HIFMs as 'communities of character' that can generate social capital that contributes to social change and development. The compliance with the state mechanisms is almost whole hearted -sometimes even complementing establishment efforts. The add on is the HIFM ideology -the signature teachings actually becoming principal rhetorics supporting seva. With the economic system there are relationships beyond market exchange as essentially HIFMs deal with religious goods that are acquired or received through the charisma and/or transcendental forces. With the adherent subset of civil society, HIFMs tap the intrinsic-extrinsic religiosity-spirituality and tamper with the religio-spiritual orientations to then affect notions of self and cognitions of associates. HIFM beneficiaries are viewed as an imagined community of would be adherents/associates -the faith cultural capital utilised to reach out. They also extend, using Wilson's (2011) term, an ethics of hospitality towards potent seva seekers -especially in situations wherein alternatives are limited. That way a combination of bonding-bridging social capital is generated.

The faith and collateral Hindu hegemony seepage through seva is the general political economy dynamics flavour for the HIFMs. HIFMs are particularly inclined towards engaging in sevas that promote wellbeing and are in line with their faith-based outlook. Further contrary to being unblemished 'armies of compassion' (using Kennedy and Beilefield's (2006) term) HIFMs have their mandate of initiation-co-option spelt out in their mandate. This initiation-co-option is either a direct derivative of faith and/or truncated from the teachings-praxis calculus of the HIFMs -the latter being more prominent.

HIFM memory is like a spiritual-rationality wherein there is a shared inherent purpose to experience connectedness with the transcendental vision demonstrated by the HIFMs. Memory also very strongly shapes the social imaginations -placing on the charismatic guru and teachings, a kind of doctrinal responsibility to then feed into the pragmatics and contextualities of social justice. HIFM memory is culturally loaded -they ensure a cultural continuity by preserving the 'knowledge' through mnemonics (practical Vedanta, Integrated Amrita Meditation technique and Sudarshan Kriya) -rendering it possible for adherents/associates to reconstruct their cultural identities. For HIFMs the oblivion dynamics arise in course of the HIFMs reflexive acts in re-defining and refining their own positions in relation to the larger sociopolitical environ. Oblivion has been further enhanced by neoliberalisation which has opened spaces for HIFMs to enter into the public realm in newer ways and also enter into mainstream 'secular' partnerships.

HIFMs styles of seva/action go beyond simple instilling/extolling of virtues, but rather portray as vanguards of fulfilling social obligations. The operational ontology of HIFMs contains communitarian notions of social citizenship. Other aspects are that of integrality of the human experience, commune as predominant (rather than traditional hierarchies which characterise religion, and social justice notions as fertilising/ impregnating virgin aspects of charity/philanthropy. There is a stylised form of faith-based social logic and the 'public good' factoring in the HIFM ideal is the utopia towards which they are geared.

A part from being a pillar of institution building, seva in HIFMs is also a reflection of the flexibility of the charismatic guru to respond to social realities. The guru does not refer to a consistent body of knowledge and practice (Cohen 2012). Perhaps the quality most common to the guru across individuals, institutions and logics is that of uncontainability. The figure of the guru demonstrates that such domains-religion, politics, economy, and culture are mutually implicated, in ways that cannot be anticipated but have to be explored and narrated (Jenkins 2010). Through seva as a strategy, gurus, can be said go beyond all limiting categories of traditional faith (Babb 1986; Srinivas 2010). The guru thus comes to appear something like Marcel Mauss'total social phenomenon. The



Figure 1:

584 guru essentially has an expansive agency (Copeman and Ikegame, 2012) and there are differential multiplicity of  
 585 meanings condensed within guru-ship that are the condition of possibility of such agency. <sup>1 2 3 4 5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The scope of Chinmaya Mission's seva encompasses education, integrated rural development, health and residential services and institutions for elderly. The proclaimed mission is a re-instatement of justice.<sup>3</sup> The scope of Vivekananda Kendra's seva includes: education as a pioneering service activity including Vivekananda Kendra residential/non-residential schools and balwadis particularly in north eastern states; rural development programmes; NARDEP or natural resource development programme including Gramodaya as a model

<sup>2</sup>Seva and Institution Building in Hindu Inspired Faith Movements

<sup>3</sup>Arendt Lijphart has proposed the concept of consociational democracy, moving beyond Hobhouse's notion of organic liberalism and hence advocating the schema that ensures that the will of diverse groups is accounted for in the political process (Mahajan, 1998).

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<sup>5</sup>The BBC has described Amma as the 'hugging saint'. When in an interview she was asked as to why she hugged people (as she is said to have hugged 30 million people till date), she described it as a natural act of motherhood (Amritanandamayi Mission Trust, 2010). Amma embraces people irrespective of caste, creed, ethnicity, nationality and sex.



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