THE ENDURING SELF:
EXPLORING THE IDENTITY OF THE HARE KRISHNA
DEVOTEES BEYOND RACE, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

by

S.M. Ramson

Student number: 205519769

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts Degree (Religion and Social
Transformation)

In the School of Religion and Theology
Faculty of Humanities
University of Kwazulu Natal

JOINT PROMOTERS: Professor P. Kumar
                     Professor R. Sookrajh

January 2006

DECLARATION

I,_____ do hereby declare that this dissertation, which is submitted to the university for the degree of Master of Arts (Religion and Social Transformation), has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at any other university, and all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of a complete reference.

S.M. Ramson

_____

Researcher

_____

Professor P. Kumar

_____

Professor R. Sookrajh

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the founder *acharya* of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (The *Hare Krishna* Movement) who in the face of extreme difficulty presented the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* science of Self Realization and devotion to the Western world, whose courage, insights, perspicacity, purity and love forms the example that I wish to pursue.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

four children "well educated", who made untold sacrifices to see that through, and whose love and support cannot be repaid, I thank you endlessly.

To my joint promoters, Professor P Kumar of the School of Religion and Theology, and Professor R Sookrajh of the School of Educational Studies, the manner in which you received, encouraged and assisted me was beyond the normal call of your duties. I express my appreciation to Professor Kumar for his gentle manner, insightful vision and succinct comments and for facilitating my studies. I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to Professor Sookrajh whose phenomenal offers of assistance, I felt, extended to me more than just as a student. Her incessant energy, her drive to maintain high standards, her concerns about my sustenance, her positive warmth and friendship, accommodation of my requests for clarification about research, and my own difficulties which intruded into her personal space, left me feeling that my efforts were appreciated, but more than that, I was appreciated as a person.

GLOSSARY

Reseacher's note: The Sanskrit or Bengali words used in the study and listed in this glossary are written phonetically, without the diacritics that normally accompany Roman transliteration of Sanskrit or Bengali.

Acharya: ideal spiritual master who lives and teaches by the injunctions of scripture; also refers to the founder of a spiritual institution.

Aratik: worship in which lamps and other items are offered to deities or the guru

Asana: seat or yogic postures

Ashram: a stage in life in the traditional Indian social classes: *brahmacari, grihastha, vanaprastha and sannyasi*

Atma: self or soul

Bhagavan: God

Bhajan: song; usually more meditative type of singing (compared to kirtan)

Bhakti: devotion to God, characterized by intense love

Bhakti-yoga: linking oneself to God through devotional service.

Brahma: In ISKCON theology, he is the creator of the universe commissioned by Krishna to do so.

Brahma Gayatri: mantra given to the devotees receiving Brahmin (second) inititaion

Brahma-Madhva-Gaudiya sampradaya: the Vaisnava tradition to from which ISKCON derives, beginning with Caitanya Mahaprabhu

Brahmacari: celibate student

Brahman: impersonal absolute.

Brahmana/ brahmin: member of the priestly class in traditional Hindu society.

Darshan: to have the audience of God (murti) or a saint.

Dasa or dasi: used as suffix in devotee names to indicate position of "servant" of God

Deity: see murti.

Dharma: one's essential duty. Also refers to religion and spiritual laws

Dhoti: traditional Indian clothing worn by men, a simple cloth wrapped around the lower body.

Diksha: formal initiation.

Diksha-guru: initiating guru.

Gaudiya Vaisnavism: form of Vaisnavism prominent in Bengal deriving from 'Gauda', which is another name for Bengal.

Grihastha: householder/married life

Guru: a teacher, especially a spritual teacher and instructor. In ISKCON this is used to refer to the spiritual master.

Guru-puja: offer of worship to the murti of Bhaktivedanta Swami or guru.

Hare: vocative form of Hara, which refers to Radha according to ISKCON theology.

Hare Krishna mantra: Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare

Harinam sankirtan: congregational chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra.

ISKCON: acronym for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

Janmastami: celebration of Krishna's birthday.

Japa: personal recitation of mantra on a rosary

Jiva: the soul or living entity.

Jnana: knowledge or spiritual wisdom.

Kanistha-adhikari: devotee at the intermediate stage of devotion.

Karatalas: hand cymbals.

Karma: material activity and its reactions.

Kirtan: chanting the holy names of God with musical instruments; usually more boisterous than *bhajan*

Krishna: the "Supreme Lord" in ISKCON theology.

Madhyama-adhikari: devotee at the beginning stage of devotion.

Mangala-aratik: daily worship before dawn in all ISKCON Temples.

Mantra: spiritually powerful chant

Maya: illusiory, external energy of Krishna that governs the material world, according to ISKCON theology.

Mayavadi: follower of an impersonalist doctrine of God.

Moksa: liberation from the repeated cycle of birth and death.

Mirdanga: a two headed drum, originally made from clay

Murti: deity, an authorized figure worshipped in Temples

Nama hatta: gathering of devotees for of worship, and discussion of scripture

Nitya-baddha: an eternally conditioned soul

Parampara: disciplic succession,

Paramarthika: relating to the supreme, essential truth

Puja: worship

Pujari: temple priest.

Radha: Krishna's consort.

Ratha-yatra: cart festival in which the Deity of Krishna in an incarnation known as Jagannath is carried in festive procession.

Sampradaya: a tradition, school, sect or lineage

Sankirtana: congregational chanting of God's holy names

Sannyasi: member of the renounced order of life.

Swami: term of addressing a member of the renounced order of life.

Tilak: clay markings drawn on the forehead and other parts of the body by devotees

Tulasi: sacred basil plant considered dear to Krishna by devotees

Uttama-adhikari: devotee at the most advanced stage of devotion.

Vaisnava: devotee of Krishna or Vishnu.

Vyasa: a Vedic sage, regarded as the compiler of the four Vedas

Puranas: Vedanta-sutra and the Mahabharata.

Vyavaharika: common or ordinary affairs

Vyasasana: seat of honour given to the lecturer in ISKCON temples.

Yoga: "linking with God", types of ascetic or religious practice

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction: Context, Objectives and Overview

Chapter Two: Research Methodology: Mapping the Identity Terrain

Chapter Three: Literature Review:

Identity Explored: Paradigms, Perspectives and Possibilities

Chapter Four: Findings Part one
Intersections of identity: Institutional and Individual

Chapter 5: Findings: Part Two: Dialoguing Truth and Self

Chapter six: Reflections, Emerging Insights and Conclusions

Appendices:

ABSTRACT

In this study I indicate that the variety of psychological and social research perspectives that continue to interrogate the question "Who am I" has generated profuse and ambiguous definitions of identity, and that particular global trends are producing a corresponding flux in identity construction. In this thesis I argue that although such trends are emerging, for those with a spiritual proclivity there is an experience of the self as "enduring", an essence that may not be able to be immediately concretized by the individual, but a sense of continuity of self regardless of the external binaries of race, culture and language, that gives impetus for such individuals to enter into common dialogue as Hare Krishna devotees. The enquiry, which is located within the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) Temple of Understanding, Durban, South Africa, as a context, examines the influence of institutional, physical and cultural dynamics, and self-reflexivity in identity formation of the Hare Krishna devotees.

In relation to the "enduring" sense of self the following **critical** questions are asked in the study, viz. what is the institutional identity of ISKCON and how is it derived; what are the physical, religious, social and educational features of the context within which these identities are formed; how and why are the resident devotees of the who are variegated in term of race, culture and language, able to create their identities as devotees; what are the possible changes in the lifestyle and value-systems of these resident devotees since they first joined; and how do the devotees understand and experience notions of self and Truth? To place the devotee identity in perspective, a brief description of the historical background of ISKCON is undertaken, its position in relation to Hinduism, and various research issues about ISKCON and within ISKCON is discussed.

Through the use of prevalent identity construction theories and perspectives, I review the academic trends challenging sets of value that are exclusionary, and trends of globalization, easternization, and multiculturalism and new religious movements, detraditionalization, and de-institutionalization with a view to understanding identity construction. To understand the ISKCON devotee identity, I examine its theological

perspective that derives from its *Gaudiya Vaisnava* heritage, consisting of several scriptures that describe the nature and characteristics of the self.

Arguing for the use of descriptive and interpretive validity through the lens of an ethnographic scientist, I position myself as a *deep-insider*, discussing the benefits and difficulties of this stance. In arguing for *understanding* as a major component of validity, I address the issues of what constitutes Truth in social science research and introduce a contemporary use of *phronesis* as a methodological technique to extend the argument that expert evaluation based judgements, intuition and practical wisdom play a highly significant role in research, and should not be surpassed in favour of only analytical, scientific and technical knowledge.

It is suggested that the institutional identity of ISKCON is a disseminated process occurring at many sites, framed by various activities, and manifest particularly in its organizational structures, and the physical context and cultural contexts. Using current theorizing about how Truth is generated in the academic arena, the spiritual Truths as understood by the devotees are juxtaposed, as well as intersections between Truth and the notions of identity are examined. Several insights emerge from the data that confirm the existence of a more internal, "enduring" sense of self, beyond external binaries of race, language and culture. For the devotees this sense of self emerges as a spiritual identity, a distinction being made between the *conditioned self*, i.e. that "self" as socially constructed, or reflexively determined, on one hand, and the *individual* or *possessor* of the self, called *atma*, a premise that frames his identity as a "servant" of *Krishna*.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Context, Objectives and Overview

"Who am I?.......because I am a minister, and am supposed to be educated, know a little Sanskrit, some Arabian, they call me a pandita – a learned, well versed scholar...I, to tell you frankly, do not know what I am....[1]

1.1   Introduction

In the late 15th and early 16th centuries when Europe was going through a scientific renaissance and moves toward humanism, a period that may be contested by some as the necessary impetus to our technological innovativeness, or by others as a negation of God-centred society, a major social and religious transformation was also pervading the Indian subcontinent (Rosen, 1991). This reawakening, primarily due to the efforts of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu[2] (1486-1534), spiritual reformer, religious ascetic and considered divine incarnate by followers, was to have major spiritual ramifications for the Indian subcontinent, and for the entire world. In the classic meeting between Sanatana Goswami and Caitanya Mahaprabhu (in the quotation above) Sanatana asks the esoteric question about his real identity, a question that gave rise to a profound philosophical dialogue recorded as several chapters in the *Sri Caitanya Caritamrta,*[3] by Krsnadas Kaviraj. As is evident, questions about identity were contemplated even 500 years ago, notwithstanding the ecclesiastical circumstances of this question. The quotation above

---

[1] Conversation between Sanatana Gosvami and Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, described in a lecture by the founder of the Hare Krishna Movement, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, LA, 1972. Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003).

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

[3] The biography and teachings of Caitanya Mahaprabhu, one of the major canonical works of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003)

has direct significance to the research that I propose to undertake, for two reasons outlined below:

Firstly, the question "Who am I" has permeated and continues to permeate the current psychological and social research on the construction of identity and has been studied from many perspectives – psychoanalytical, philosophical, phenomenological, sociological, socio-linguistic, anthropological, theological, and educational (King, 1996). Several identity construct theories, viz. social identity theories (Erikson, 1968), collective identity theories: race and identity (Gould, 2000; Erasmus, 2001; Hofmeyr, undated), culture and identity, language and identity formation (Murji and Hebert, 1999), feminism and identity, and religious identity (Hood, 1998) have been posited by researchers. Secondly, the question has direct bearing on the context of my research as I propose to investigate how devotees[4] of the ISKCON[5] Temple of Understanding in Durban, South Africa, create their identities as devotees.

In the following sections I discuss the need for the study on devotee identity, suggesting that several benefits will ensue from such a study. In examining devotee identity, I do not wish to essentialize race as a factor in this study but rather interrogate the interlocking issues of race, language and culture, as well as examine the physical, religious, social and educational contexts in which the devotees live and act, and analyse the change in lifestyle and values, in attempting to answer how ISKCON Durban Temple devotees create their identities. I also trace briefly the biography of the founder *acharya*[6] of ISKCON, Bhaktivedanta Swami, describe briefly history of ISKCON, and summarily

---

[4] Devotee -A committed follower of the Hare Krishna Movement, one who is practicing its teachings and lifestyle.

[5] ISKCON – Commonly referred to as the "Hare Krishna Movement", the official name is *The* International *Society for Krishna Consciousness*, founded in 1966 in New York City by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. The ISKCON Durban Temple of Understanding is the site of research. The terms "Hare Krishna devotees" or "Hare Krishna Movement" is used by me in a denotative sense. When I refer to the Institution I will refer it as *ISKCON* in the rest of the study, and when I refer to the site of research it will be *ISKCON Durban Temple*, unless specifically quoted. A map of South Africa is provided in Appendix 1.

[6] Spiritual master – "*acharya*" – one who lives by the scriptural injunctions and teaches by example. Subhananda das (1990)

note some of its crises and successes, as well as its contestations about its "Hindu" identity, and other research issues and trends in ISKCON.

1.2. The Rationale for the Study

The study derives largely from to a need to investigate issues of self and identity which form a core element in ISKCON precipitated by a personal rationale, and research and contextual imperatives. The research imperative is driven by a need for internal research engagement with the institution, a position that is adopted to address the dearth of literature on and research in identity consciousness.

In my fifteen years as a practicing member, I have observed a large number of South Africans and foreigners from various social, cultural, racial and linguistic backgrounds accept the philosophy, tenets, and practices of ISKCON. Compared to most people I encountered in the secular world, such people with a spiritual proclivity seemed to experience a certain acuity about the existence of all living entities, a perceptiveness that was reflexively different from the mundane. An emergent theme in the reflections of these multifarious devotees had been what may be termed "flashes of insight", or realizations about how their lives have been marked with a search for knowledge and an enduring identity. As a South African "Indian", whose parental roots were fixed in Hinduism, I assumed that my cultural upbringing gave me the necessary sovereignty over understanding its philosophies and practices, yet I never felt quite convinced that the plethora of rituals and practices I encountered were to be the inevitability of my spiritual life. Fascinated by the philosophies and practices of ancient cultures even as a school going child, in particular Vedic thoughts on the afterlife and higher dimensions of existence, I accepted a more distinct worldview in which I intuitively felt that, as humans, we all shared a common spiritual existence, irrespective of race, creed or language, a view that was confirmed later in my life when I met the devotees of the Hare Krishna Movement. This first encounter with The International Society for Krishna Consciousness – was to observe from a comfortable distance a cosmopolitan set of shaven-headed monks who visited the university at which I was an undergraduate

student. It was this meeting that sparked my scepticism, curiosity, inquiry, and ultimately my participation. A dramatic performance by them in the main hall that addressed the very questions of identity that I had been contemplating, left me in rapt wonderment at their enthusiasm, dedication, and the transcendental coincidence of my musings. As I initially read the literature, and cautiously observed the devotees, I became aware that a more enduring set of principles determined the dynamics amongst them – a union based on the spirit – a lesson I was to later learn –"that we are not these bodies, but spirit souls" and that "real unity can only be achieved on spiritual platform that negates bodily designation", lessons that emanate from the ancient Vedas. It intrigued me that the philosophy as taught by the founder of the movement, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, which seemed to have a distinct Indian identity, was able to attract people from various races, cultures and languages in different parts of the world within such a short space of time, an intrigue that eventually crystallized into this formal investigation that I am undertaking.

That ISKCON was able to attract so many people internationally within a short space of time was also observed by Hopkins (1999). In his article *Why should ISKCON study its own History,* he described the assembling of evidence of the growth of ISKCON from 1965 to present as a complex matter – since ISKCON did not grow slowly but "exploded across the country and around the world" (1999: 69), the speed of which did not allow much careful documentation of the unfolding of events. Except for a general picture of the events between 1965 and 1967 ascertained from the biography of Bhaktivedanta Swami (endearingly called Srila Prabhupada) by his followers and through the diaries of a few disciples, there is no overall history of "ISKCON's institutional development during Prabhupada's lifetime" (Hopkins, 1999: 69). He therefore contended that there was an urgent need to document as much as possible of the events within ISKCON over the last three decades. Hridyananda Dasa Goswami (1999:71) in his response to Hopkins maintained that "ISKCON desperately needs to develop the ability to think intelligently, critically and historically about itself". Kamaras (2001: 61) also pointed out that "prevailing circumstances and the quality of ISKCON intellectuals are also key features to the future".

4

Hopkins appraisal is certainly persuasive, and I feel as a member[7] it is incumbent upon me to document this part of ISKCON's history in South Africa, in particular the identity formation of the devotees of different racial, cultural and language backgrounds. Within the last ten years, against the backdrop of its transition to a democratic government, there has been a greater awareness by the South African Government and other socially-based organisations of multiculturalism and its impact on racial and religious tolerance, human rights issues, peace efforts, contribution to the Arts, sports and economic development, and South Africa's place in the international community. Yet even within the apartheid years, the devotees of the ISKCON had a varied membership, and multicultural and non racial collaboration. Based on this I contemplated the following issues: What is it about the teachings that allowed this unity to exist? What is it about the teachings and activities that continue to allow the harmonious co-existence of devotees across a broad multicultural and non racial membership? How and why did they develop such acceptance, practices and perceptions?

Given the personal, research and contextual imperatives I described above, I suggest that the following benefits will ensue from such a study:

- There exists a dearth of research about ISKCON in South Africa; the study will augment our understanding of ISKCON as an institution, and the formation of identity in that context;
- ISKCON represents a microcosm of a traditional society established in the modern world, and this study will enable a further understanding of the influence of globalization and multiculturalism on identity;
- Arising from above, it will add to the current body of sociological and historical / inter-epochal research on identity construction;
- As South Africa is a society in transition which involves a search for a new national identity, this study could suggest new models of identification for a

---

[7] I discuss my role as *deep-insider* in greater detail in Chapter 2.

diverse array of people, reflecting the current academic trends of challenging sets of binaries that are exclusionary.

- The ethnographic case study approach will add to the field of identity theorizing and generate future multidisciplinary research;
- The investigation will make available information for use in inter-religious dialogue, and will have corresponding benefits for civil and religious tolerance.

1.3   Objectives of the Research

In trying to understand how the enduring self is experienced, I systematically examine several interlocking features of the ISKCON context which are included in the following objectives:

- To examine the institutional identity of ISKCON and how it is derived.
- To explore the physical, religious, social and educational features of the context within which these identities are formed;
- To examine *how* and *why* the resident devotees[8] of the Hare Krishna Movement in South Africa, who are variegated in term of race, culture and language, are able to create their identities as devotees;
- To describe possible changes in the lifestyle and value-systems of these resident devotees since they first joined;
- To examine how the devotees understand and experience notions of *Truth* and *Self*

1.4   Outline of Research Topic

The several trends in religion and identity that are emerging generate profuse variety and ambiguity, and a corresponding flux in identity construction. However, I will argue that

---

[8] Resident Devotee –a Hare Krishna devotee in a monastic context, in this case the ISKCON Temple of Understanding, Durban..

although such trends are emerging, for those with a spiritual proclivity there is still an experience of the self as "enduring", an essence that may not be able to be immediately concretized by the individual, but a sense of continuity of self, that gives impetus for such individuals to enter into common dialogue as devotees. What that sense of self is, and how it is experienced by the ISKCON Durban Temple devotees forms the main thrust of my research.

In relation to the "enduring" sense of self that I propose, I wish to ask: how do different devotees describe that feeling or experience it? Is there a common sense of identity that enables people from variegated backgrounds to enter into a common dialogue as devotees? Have their lives been characterized by a conscious search to discover that identity? How do they regard external binaries of race, culture, language? How does the physical and cultural context of the ISKCON Durban Temple[9] help evoke the devotee identity? For those who become devotees, do they have a sense of awareness of their self? What is that sense of self, and how do the devotees experience that self? These series of questions frame the *critical* questions asked in the study, viz.

- *What* is the institutional identity of ISKCON and how is it derived?
- *What* are the physical, religious, social and educational features of the context within which these identities are formed?
- *How* and *why* are the resident devotees of the Hare Krishna Movement in South Africa, who are variegated in term of race, culture and language, able to create their identities as devotees?
- *What* are the possible changes in the lifestyle and value-systems of these resident devotees since they first joined?
- *How* do the devotees understand and experience notions of self and Truth?

---

[9] In Chapter 4 I will be responding to the data on the current activities and social projects of ISKCON South Africa, analyzing some of its organisational documents, and major canonical works in an attempt to understand how devotees create their identities.

A brief description of the historical background of ISKCON is necessary for a clear understanding of the institutional, physical and cultural milieu within which I examine the identity formation of the devotees of the ISKCON Durban. In the following section I present a brief history of ISKCON, and an annotated biography of its founder – A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. I then briefly trace the Movement's spread to the West and examine its "Indian" and "Hindu" identity, since these impinge upon the devotees' understanding and experience of their identities, and finally present an overview of the study preceded by the main research developments in ISKCON.

1.5   A Brief History of ISKCON

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

Rosen (1991) in an abbreviated biography describes the life of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. Known as Abhay Charan, he was born in Calcutta in 1896 to parents who were Krishna devotees, thus his life was steeped in culture. Although more eager as a child to engage in cultural activities than going to school, he was an extraordinary student who excelled in all subjects especially oral expression, debate and discussion. Later he entered Calcutta's Scottish Churches College, and completed his studies in Philosophy, Economics, and English. After College he became dedicated to the cause of Mahatma

Gandhi. He then worked as a pharmacist, and it was during this period, at the insistence of a friend, that he met Bhaktisiddhanta Saravati Thakur in 1922, whom he was to accept as his spiritual master. Satsvarupa (1993) also describes how Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur's deep philosophical disseminations made an impact on Abhay Charan, who was to later follow his spiritual master's instructions to publish books and preach this philosophy in the English speaking world. It was only in 1965 at the age of sixty-nine that he set sail to America with only a few rupees and books, by begging a passage on a steamship. After a period of struggle he successfully founded and registered the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in New York City in 1966, and in the decade that followed established 108 temples in major cities around the world. It was within this period that ISKCON spread to South Africa

In 1972 two American disciples, Rishi Kumar Swami and Kshudhi das, arrived in Johannesburg under the instruction of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. The accounts of how they established ISKCON in South Africa are recorded in *Destination South Africa* which describes their trials, especially with the South African police in the apartheid era, as well as their tribulations and achievements (Riddha das, 1997).[10]

After they had spent three years of preaching and establishing ISKCON in South Africa with the help of the local Hindus, especially the Gujerati community, Bhaktivedanta Swami[11] arrived in South Africa on 5th October 1975 in Durban to the welcome of a group of about one hundred members from the Indian community. It was his instruction that a Temple be built on its current site in Chatsworth, that gave the devotees the impetus to develop this project (Sooklal, 1985).[12]

---

[10] As a young boy, Riddha das, prior to becoming an ISKCON devotee, emigrated with his parents to Canada in 1954 due to the South African apartheid policies. He joined ISKCON in Vancouver, Canada when he was 22 years old, and returned to South Africa in 1975 to help with the ISKCON's mission there. *Destination South Africa* traces the development of ISKCON in South Africa up to 1975, and also contains several post-scriptural references to correspondence and documents, as well as anecdotal and photographic references to ISKCON's development up to 1996.

[11] Also referred to as Srila Prabhupada - a term of respectful endearment used by disciples and followers when addressing him.

[12] After much fundraising all over the country by local devotees, the *Sri Sri Radha Radhanath Temple of Understanding*[12] was officially opened on 18th to 20th October, 1985.

By 1977 ISKCON, or the *Hare Krishna Movement* as it became popularly known, had spread to six continents and Bhaktivedanta Swami had circled the globe fourteen times – writing, translating, lecturing and personally administrating this organisation and training his disciples. Rosen (1991) describes A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, whose spiritual lineage follows in the disciplic succession of Caitanya Mahaprabhu (*Bhagavad-gita As it Is*, 1986:34)[13] as one of India's great scholars, philosophers, prophets and cultural ambassadors. Rosen further cites the 1976 *Encyclopaedia Brittanica Book of the Year* which states that Bhaktivedanta Swami "astonished academic and literary communities worldwide by writing and publishing fifty-two books on ancient Vedic Culture[14]...in the period from October 1968 to November 1975". His other projects included establishing several farm communities around the world, *gurukulas*,[15] the Bhaktivedanta Institute,[16] the Mayapur City project[17] and introducing several major cultural festivals to the West, like *Ratha Yatra*.

However, the intense period of ISKCON's development and expansion was not totally free from controversy and crisis. Several crises of leadership, fall down of gurus, implication of a few leaders in drugs, scandals of child and women abuse eroded the reputation of ISKCON and fuelled anti-ISKCON sentiment (Tamal Gosvami, 1998; Ravindra Swarupa dasa, 1999). In establishing ISKCON, Bhaktivedanta Swami had developed a corporate form of governance[18] in 1970, called the Governing Body Commission (GBC), which did not invest spiritual or managerial authority in any one

---

[13] see footnote 2

[14] To do this he established Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, which I describe in more detail later in this chapter.

[15] traditional Vedic religious and cultural schools

[16] an institution staffed by Bhaktivedanta Swami's disciples and followers who are scientists.

[17] An ambitious project to develop a spiritual "mini city" which forms ISKCON headquarters in Mayapur, West Bengal, the birthplace of Caitanya Mahaprabhu, and pilgrimage destination for devotees.

[18] In the traditional model the conception of guru is seen as an "inspired, charismatic, spiritual autocrat, an absolute and autonomously decisive authority, around who an institution takes shape as the natural extension and embodiment of his charisma" (Ravindra Swarup dasa, 1994). The departure of the acharya (as Bhaktivedanta Swami had warned) would create much chaos within his institution, and indeed the demise of Bhaktivedanta Swami traumatized the membership of ISKCON, and created a protracted struggle to resolve the issue of authority. Being astute, Bhaktivedanta Swami recognized the need for a corporate governance of ISKCON as he understood that the infancy and spiritual immaturity of ISKCON would create problems of authority and continuity of tradition especially with fledgling disciples, therefore he did not invest the authority of ISKCON in any single individual but in a Governing Body (Tamal Krishna Goswami, 1998).

particular guru. Yet, even after this was established, there were numerous controversies, particularly when certain leading disciples misused their positions of authority and power, a situation which became more prominent after the demise[19] of Bhaktivedanta Swami in 1977 (Ravindra Swarup dasa, 1999). Tamal Krishna Gosvami (1998) refers to these crises as the "heresies" within ISKCON,[20] describing the period following Bhaktivedanta Swami's demise as a "stormy decade" of upheaval and catharsis. In the early to mid-eighties ISKCON South Africa also had its share of setbacks – the fall down of two leading gurus as well as a temporary spilt in ISKCON cast a shadow on its operations in the country.[21] In 1984 several leading, international, non GBC disciples of Bhaktivedanta Swami (especially the North American Temple presidents) expressed their "collective outrage" which led to the launching of the "guru reform movement"[22] set to purge ISKCON of such an unauthorized system and gross misuse of power (Tamal Krishna Goswami, 1998).

Fortunately for ISKCON, it emerged from this crisis "battered and bruised", but "tougher, more honest, and a thoroughly collegial body" (Tamal Krishna Gosvami, 1998).[23] Shinn (1987: 60) also notes that it is impressive that ISKCON was able to "evolve in a very short time from a charismatic movement to a relatively stable institution in the face of a hostile external environment and a volatile governing structure within".[24]

While several researchers have documented the establishment of ISKCON in the West, its crises and controversies, as well as described ISKCON as a new religious movement

---

[19] Bhaktivedanta Swami passed away in Vrindavan in 1977 at the age of 81 years.

[20] A detailed discussion of these crises falls outside the scope of my discussion. For further information consult: Tamal Goswami (1998): The Perils of Succession *in* A Hare Krishna at Southern Methodist University: Collected Essays 1995-1997. Pundits Press: USA, as well as
Ravindra Swarup Dasa (1999): Pillars of Success: The Principles and Practices of Reform in ISKCON. ISKCON Communications Journal, vol. 7, no. 2. http://www.iskcon.com/icj/7_2/index.html

[21] Information obtained from Ramanujacharya dasa, a disciple of Bhaktivedanta Swami, originally from USA but resident devotee in South Africa for at least twenty years, and who was present during the crisis.

[22] Ravindra Svarup das was tasked with the research of preparing a paper of what had gone wrong with the leadership, and proposals as to how this had to be rectified. This eventually led to power being restored to the GBC, to whom initiating gurus are fully accountable and work under its direction. (Ketola, 2002).

[23] This refers to ISKCON as a registered, legal entity. There are several disciples and members who have formed breakaway groups from ISKCON.

[24] Cited in Tamal Krishna Goswami (1998).

(Brown, 2000) or examined societal attitudes to ISKCON as a "sect" or "cult" (Merudevi, 2001), ISKCON is seen to emerge as an organisation of "consolidation and growing maturity" (King, 2001:146), and one which has become increasingly institutionalized. King describes how ISKCON has since grown into an international federation of approximately 300 centres and temples, 40 farming communities, and 80 restaurants. Each temple, although financially and legally autonomous, is accountable to a local Governing Body Commissioner, who is part of the main Governing Body Commission, the final spiritual and managing authority in ISKCON. Brooks (1995) regards the establishment of ISKCON as a unique social and anthropological phenomenon and views ISKCON as a bona-fide branch of the *Gaudiya Vaisnava Sampradaya,* whose influence has rapidly spread to every corner of the globe, comparable to the spread of Christianity and Buddhism. Thus, ISKCON's establishment within a period of late modernity had important implications for its rapid spread throughout the western world, and I propose, its corresponding influence on social and religious identity.

The opening of the in Chatsworth in 1985 initially had a great impact on the Hindu community in South Africa, regarded by Sooklal (1985) as a revitalization or reformist movement with a clear goal of changing society. In his study of how Indians in India and the West view Western devotees, Brooks (1995) found that Western *Vaisnavas* are accorded full respect and acceptance as devotees. He found this especially significant since membership to Hinduism is often regarded as achieved by being born into a Hindu family, a point I will discuss further in following paragraphs.

1.6 ISKCON and Hinduism

It is no doubt remarkable that Western devotees are accepted as priests, gurus and pandits. It was Bhaktivedanta Swami's vision that the Western devotees would rekindle the religious zeal in India, and currently ISKCON enjoys wide acceptance in India, as well as provides an important community base for Indians in the diaspora, especially for the younger generation.

Geographically and historically it is understood that Hinduism can be located as a religion of the Indian subcontinent. Since Bhaktivedanta Swami left the shores of India to the West, ISKCON has often been regarded as part of the tradition of Hinduism. Yet ISKCON seems to occupy a unique position within the Vedic culture, its public perception and self-perception even being viewed as inconsistent by some (Hinduism Today Magazine, October 1998). In the following section I will establish the identity of ISKCON in relation to Hinduism as this position has significant impact on my investigation of how devotees within ISKCON create their identities, as well as it responds to the question of institutional identity of ISKCON.

There exists two arguments about the position of ISKCON in relation to Hinduism – one view holds that ISKCON is a Hindu Movement, and the other divorces itself of any connection with mainstream Hinduism. In this regard I will examine the statements of Hopkins (1999), Junghare (2004) on one hand, and that of Ravindra Swarup Dasa (1993), Hridayananda Dasa Goswami (1999) and Bhaktivedanta Swami himself, on the other, representing both these positions.

Junghare (2004), in her investigation of Hindu Religious traditions in Minnesota regarded the growth of Hinduism in America to have gained momentum in the 1960s, especially when the Indian Immigration Act was removed in 1965, allowing an influx of Hindu swamis and preachers, and a proliferation of Hindu organisations into the USA. She regards ISKCON and Bhaktivedanta Swami as the foremost representatives of Hindus in America. In the light of ISKCON's relationship to Hinduism it is important to reiterate that Bhaktivedanta Swami did not preach to the Hindus in America. He arrived in New York, lived in the Bowery, and preached to the hippies who were predominantly white (Satsvarupa dasa Gosvami, 1995). He thus provided a platform for the counterculture of the West to find religious expression.[25]

---

[25] To see ISKCON entirely as a product of the counterculture is also misleading. Refer to Ketola (2002) for a fuller discussion.

While the spreading of *Vaisnavism*, and in particular ISKCON, in the West is perceived to be decidedly significant (Brooks, 1995; Junghare, 2004) an even more intriguing phenomenon is found in the biography of Bhaktivinode Thakur (1838-1914)[26] that seems to envisage the Movement's worldwide establishment. A magistrate by occupation, prolific writer, spiritual master and religious reformer of immense influence, Bhaktivinode single-handedly revived the teachings of Caitanya Mahaprabhu which had been lost over time or become perverted by deviant practitioners (Rupavilasa das, 1989). It was he who introduced the teachings of Caitanya Mahaprabhu to the western world in his book *Sree Caitanya Mahaprabhu, His Life and Precepts,* a copy of which he sent to McGill University, Canada, in 1896. What is significant is that Caitanya Mahaprabhu predicted that his "name will be preached in all the countries and towns that exist throughout the world".[27] Prayerfully meditating on this verse while he was writing an article for his monthly *Vaisnava* journal (*Sajjana-tosani*), Bhaktivinode yearned:

> When will that day come when all greatly fortunate souls in countries such
> as England, France, Russia, Prussia and America will take up banners,
> kettle drums, *mrdangas,* and *karatalas* and thus cause the ecstatic waves
> of Harinama-kirtana[28], and the singing of Caitanya Mahaprabhu's Holy
> Name to rise in the streets of their towns and cities....O when will that day
> come? (cited in Rupavilasa das, 1989: 250).

Certainly Bhaktivinode Thakur did not regard *Vaisnava* devotees in the line of Caitanya to be Indians only! Given the situation that India was under British subjugation and that Indology was predominantly under the influence of Christian missionaries (Rosen, 1991) such statements were indeed bold or regarded simply as poetic rhetoric. Seen in the context of Bhaktivedanta Swami's success in establishing ISKCON this is a profound prediction of ISKCON's spreading all over the world.

---

[26]The spiritual master of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, who was the spiritual master of Bhaktivedanta Swami.

[27] *Caitanya-bhagavata, Antya* 4.126 cited in <u>Radha Damodara Vilasa</u>. Vaiyasaki dasa (2003).

[28] *Harinam-kirtana* – the congregational chanting of the *Mahamantra* with musical instruments – *mrdangas* (drums) and *karatalas* (cymbals), performed in procession or in temples.

Hopkins (1999:69) however, asserts that "ISKCON is not the first Asian religion to find a following in the West, but it is the first to gain such a widespread following without losing its Indian identity'. In this way it catered to the needs of the Western followers and enabled continuity for Hindus in the diaspora. He also states that he was surprised to see the degree to which Bhaktivedanta Swami incorporated ritual and tradition into ISKCON, "something that no other movement has succeeded in doing, nor even really tried to do: transplanting a traditional Hindu ritual structure into a Hindu religious movement in America".[29] While earlier forms of Eastern teachings from India to America, were typically *advaita vedanta* – philosophically abstract, monistic and without personal devotional inclination which made it seem universal and nonsectarian, ISKCON with its Indian appurtenances appeared to be a traditional Hindu construction. It would therefore be easy to see why Hopkins would regard the character of ISKCON as "Hindu". Ravindra Swarup Dasa (1993) however, disagrees with this perception and explains:

> Yet even after Prabhupada had everything in place, the Western youth
> who joined ISKCON never thought of themselves as 'converting' to
> something called 'Hinduism' or as participating in 'a traditional Hindu
> ritual structure'. The majority of them, I would say, had explored Eastern
> mysticism and had some familiarity with, and even commitment to, the
> ideas of *advaita vedanta*, yet they did not think that in adopting ISKCON's
> practices they were plunging into the historically conditioned forms of a
> particular religious sect. Indeed, they usually did not think of themselves
> as practising something called 'a religion' at all. Prabhupada managed
> quite compellingly to convey an altogether different vision. He did not
> function on a platform in which he saw himself as practising some
> particular 'religion' over and against other 'religions'. His outlook was
> different......

---

[29] Ravindra Swarup quotes Hopkins in Steven J. Gelberg, ed., *Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna: Five Distinguished Scholars on the Krishna Movement in the West* (New York: Grove Press, 1982), p. 107

Bhaktivedanta Swami (1968: 117, 123) himself explained that:

> There is a misconception that the Krishna consciousness movement
> represents the Hindu religion..... Sometimes Indians both inside and
> outside of India think that we are preaching the Hindu religion, but
> actually we are not. One will not find the word Hindu in the *Bhagavad-*
> *gita*. Indeed there is no such word as Hindu in the entire Vedic
> literature... One should clearly understand that the Krishna consciousness
> movement is not preaching the so-called Hindu religion."

According to Ravindra Swarup Dasa (1993), the word "religion" to Prabhupada, did not
refer to the traditional binaries of particular historical faiths - Hinduism, Buddhism,
Christianity, Islam, or Judaism. "Religion" was regarded as *dharma* – that which is
constitutionally part of one's existence, as much as sweetness is a quality of sugar, or
heat of fire, and is not based on some faith. It is the very innate quality of the soul, and
therefore the religious practice and other parts of the devotees' lives are inseparable, the
self-contained character of which, Ravindra Swarup (1993) feels, often disturbs many.
Linking this to the original description in my introduction as a Movement that took hold
within a late modernist historical framework, Ravindra Swarup declares that ISKCON
does not fit the category of most religions of modernity since it requires a "total
sacralization of human life". Given the fact that Bhaktivedanta Swami taught the Vedic
philosophy in this way certainly has significant implications for how devotees in
ISKCON construct their identity.

Although this may be the case, the lines are unclear as to where ISKCON draws the
distinction between when they are Hindu and when they are not. Nye (1997) in a survey
examining the relationships between ISKCON and Hinduism in Britain, found that:

> one of the main problems faced by ISKCON devotees and British Hindus
> is the extent to which ISKCON is 'Hindu', or to put it more accurately the
> extent to which what ISKCON does (in ritual and teachings, for example),

fits in with the expectations of Hindus in Britain who previously had no real experience of Gaudiya Vaishnavism.

She found that many ISKCON devotees were content with the term 'Hinduism' as a description of their religion, considering it a colloquial use of the original term *sanatana dharma*.[30] Yet there are other ISKCON devotees who feel that the term Hinduism has many implications inappropriate to them, especially considering it to be a miscellany of religious beliefs and practices that "misrepresent and distort the Vedic teachings". These devotees (generally from non-Hindu backgrounds) wish to retain the international character of ISKCON and see the primary purpose of ISKCON there as being to "preach to, and convert, the indigenous white population of Britain. Nye (1997)[31] maintains that it is thus "the 'Indianisation', or more accurately perhaps, the 'Hinduisation' of ISKCON is not absolute". The ethnic composition of ISKCON devotees in Britain, Nye reports, is quite diverse, with more than two thirds from British, American, Eastern European, African and other backgrounds, and less than a third, Indian. Even the Indian devotees who worship at ISKCON temples come from a region and culture that may not be familiar with the Bengali heritage of ISKCON.

Nye (1997) found that although the above pattern exists, there is a greater emphasis by ISKCON to "engage with the idea of Hinduism, and to identify themselves as part of the *sanatana dharma*, in the main arguing that theirs is the most accurate representation of the eternal religion. In the majority of their public statements ISKCON has been very clear in saying that they are most definitely Hindu, and point to the large level of support that they receive from Indian Hindus as proof of their authenticity as Hindus".

Hridayananda Dasa Goswami (1999) further explains the origin of the word "Hindu". In examining the multifarious worldviews of this term, as well as the implications of accepting such a designation, he asks the question "For whom does the word Hindu speak?" and "who can speak for the Hindus"? Although the word 'Hindu' has not been

---

[30] meaning "eternal religion"
[31] Nye, M (1997): ISKCON and Hindus in Britain: Some Thoughts on a Developing Relationship. ISKCON Communications Journal, vol. 5, no. 2. http://www.iskcon.com/icj/5_2/index.html.

used in the classic Vedic scriptures, Gosvami mentions, the word was used by Caitanaya Mahaprabhu in his dealings with the Muslims. With further reference to the use of the word "Hindu", Hridayannda Dasa Goswami, distinguishes between the Sanskrit terms – *vyavaharika* – meaning common or ordinary affairs, and *paramarthika* – relating to the supreme, essential truth, he explains that the Vaisnava devotees (referring also to ISKCON devotees) consider themselves Hindu in the *vyavaharika* sense, but never in the *paramathika* sense. Keeping in mind the Vaisnava understanding of his true nature as a soul, irrespective of what external label, or *upadhi* he may accept, he can "never become anything else in an ontological sense" (1999: 52). An example of how the word "Hindu" may be used in the *vyavaharika* sense is its use as an ethnic, racial or cultural marker, or to evoke national pride (the result of which has sometimes produced inter-religious violence). The term Hindu as self definition for Vaisnavas is problematic since it does not adequately describe the Vaisnava devotees' perception of identity, which is based on the *Bhagavad-gita* which proclaims that every living being is an eternal servant of a supreme, personal God.

Certainly this may be the case for the enlightened ISKCON devotees, but there still remains a perception from the general public that ISKCON is a Hindu organisation. In my study I will examine whether the devotees from Hindu backgrounds create their identities in the dualism described, i.e. in the *vyavaharika* or the *paramathika* sense. The idea of *paramathika* perception of identity, at least for devotees from a Hindu background seems to be in concordance with my proposition that there exists a more "enduring" sense of identity than those which are externally ascribed to individuals.

1.7 Research Issues about ISKCON

To date, several studies of the activities of ISKCON have been conducted worldwide, but to my knowledge only one academic study of the Hare Krishna devotees in South Africa has been conducted by Anil Sooklal in 1985. Described as a socio-religious study, Sooklal examined the development of *Vaisnavism*, the biography and teachings of Caitanya Mahaprabhu, the biography and teachings of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, and the emergence of ISKCON in South Africa as what he called a "reformist" or

18

"revitalization" (1985: 1) religious movement within the broader category of contemporary Hinduism. Sooklal describes a "turbulent" history of Hindus in South Africa prior to the emergence of the ISKCON. He regarded the restrictions imposed initially upon immigrant Hindus, the apartheid policies of the Nationalist government, mass relocations, economic hardships, social disruptions, exposure to a Western family ethic, and the Christian character of the prior National Education policy, as factors that debilitated against the cultural and religious cohesion of the Hindus, which resulted in the disintegration of the joint family unit and the loss of competence in the vernacular. He also regarded the lack of availability of Hindu religious literature in English, and the active conversion of Hindus to Christianity as further factors that resulted in the cultural disadvantage of the Hindus. It was within this scenario that the *Hare Krishna Movement* emerged in South Africa. Sooklal further describes a brief history of the development of the ISKCON, regarding it as one of the largest "Neo-Hindu" Movements" (1985: 56-62) in South Africa. He also investigated the patterns of adherence of the devotees, as well as the attitude of the Hindu community towards the ISKCON, finding that despite its Vaisnavite character it had attracted devotees from a "wide variety of linguistic groups and a wide cross-section of society.

Internationally, research on ISKCON has been conducted in the following areas: historical, social integration, institutional reform, inter-faith relationships, gender issues, psychological and sociological studies.

A significant development in ISKCON has been the establishment of the ISKCON Interfaith Commission, empowered by the Executive Committee of the Governing Body Commission (GBC) to develop an official statement regarding the Society's relationship with other people with faith in God (Saunaka Rsi Dasa, 1999). As its membership and influence is increasing, it behooves ISKCON to accept greater responsibility since it is indeed the first global *Vaisnava* movement. The concept of unity in diversity is embedded in the document as it provides a forum for developing respectful and practical relationships with one another, clarifying that it is not the mission of ISKCON to proselytize members of other faiths. The statement which provides "clear principles,

19

guidelines and perspectives for relationships with members of other faiths" (1999:1), is a milestone in ISKCON's social integration and maturation. Several other studies following this inclination have been conducted by Saliba (undated) in which he examines the various ways in which ISKCON and the Catholic Church could engage in dialogue, as well as by Rose (undated) who investigates whether ISKCON may be able to offer Christianity any theological significance. How ISKCON is viewed by others and well as how ISKCON views others will certainly impinge on how devotees see themselves.

A proliferation of psycho-social and sociological studies have been undertaken in ISKCON in the last few years by both devotee and non-devotee academics. The trend has been to move away from historical developments and crises in ISKCON to fundamental life issues that concern devotee welfare, integration in the external environment, education, rights of devotees, and interfaith dialogue, and personal and institutional analyses to formulate visions for ISKCON's future, reflecting its social integration and maturation I mentioned earlier.[32] Burke (2000) in his analysis of ISKCON for twenty-five years presented in a report to the North American GBC, states that, " ...it is time for the leadership of this movement to offer not only apologies but also 'good works'. Authority and trust in today's ISKCON must be earned." A workshop I facilitated for ISKCON Durban reflects this trend of management of ISKCON Durban towards openness, feedback from its membership and collective vision for the future.[33] How the findings and suggestions derived at workshop are implemented will have important consequences for development of faith and trust in leadership, a concern that was expressed at the workshop by membership. I would assume then that this will be a significant concern of the South African ISKCON devotees in general and together with the other developments described above, will have direct bearing on the contextual and personal identity of the devotees.

---

[32] These trends are occurring within ISKCON as the official, registered body. There are some breakaway groups from ISKCON who continue to contest the validity of ISKCON as an institution as well as its practices, especially in terms of the interpretation of Bhaktivedanta Swami's instructions, referred to in Tamal Krishna Goswami discussions (1998) in section 1.6.

[33] Workshop for projects leaders, department heads, and senior ISKCON community leadership; entitled "Vision 2005 and beyond: Workshop for Strategic Planning". December 27, 2005.

With reference to such trends in ISKCON, I summarize some of the studies below.

Norma Craig (2001) analysed the factors that operate in the identity creation of "Culture kids". She suggested a framework in which the cultural changes facing devotee youth and their parents could be understood. Different factors operate to shape their perceptions: factors of whether they are immigrants, natives, are in ISKCON by choice or birth, affect how they blend with external cultures. She examined the coping strategies and problems of adjustment of children who were raised more in the internal environment of Krishna consciousness but had to adjust to an external world when parents left the Temple environment. Since these devotee parents would probably have made adjustments or shifts in their own cultural values, e.g. working outside, this required that their children develop cross-cultural awareness and intercultural communication skills. Several consequences arise for their adjustment processes and core value system.

This has important implications for devotees' adjustments to and perceptions of what I would call the "internal" environment of the Temple. Those who are *brahmacaris* or *brahmacarinis*[34] will have different perceptions, and requirements from those that are householders. There are also different expectations of their role function, spiritually and managerially. In an independent worldwide survey conducted during *Srila Prabhupada's Centennial*,[35] it was found that the favouring of "a renunciate-sectarian model organisationally in the face of an expanding *grhastha-asrama*" (Rochford, 1999:17) had resulted in a failure of ISKCON to integrate families and family life into its communities. The perceptions of householders would be significantly influenced by such a situation, and impinges on their identities within ISKCON.

Another important study conducted by Kamaras (2001:49) focused on the *Value System of the Hungarian Devotees*, commissioned by the devotees themselves to "provide firsthand knowledge of the lifestyle, customs and value systems of the members of the

---

[34] celibate male and female students, respectively. Householders (married couples) are called *grihasthas*
[35] 1996 was the year in which Centennial Celebrations of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami were held internationally by ISKCON. As part of the celebrations a study was initiated by ISKCON's GBC to provide a reflection on ISKCON's achievements and shortcomings, and to develop a way forward for ISKCON.

21

Hare Krishna Movement in Hungary". This was undertaken with a view to inform the Hungarian government and general public who were unaware of this, and to counter biased impressions of ISKCON in the media. In what he calls the "changing paradigm of identity," Kamaras (2001) found that the experience of *Krishna* consciousness by different practitioners, as well as the development of their journey therein, was varied. No particular crisis was found to herald their participation in most cases, but many acknowledged a gradual realization that they found something missing in their lives, which resulted in their spiritual quest. Another significant finding was that many practitioners of Krishna consciousness had prior interest in yoga, oriental culture, and mysticism. Kamaras' findings are significant in the light of my proposal that there exists an "enduring" sense of self – a feeling that individuals with spiritual acumen have, that they are meant to fulfill some other purpose which is beyond the context in which they find themselves. I wish to examine whether similar patterns will emerge in my proposed study with the devotee residents at the ISKCON Temple of Understanding, Durban, South Africa.

Various psychological and sociological investigations on devotee mental health and personality development have been undertaken. Dhira Govinda Dasa (1998) as part of his doctoral thesis in Sociology, used the *Bhagavad-gita's* description of the three modes of material nature, viz. goodness (*sattva-guna*), passion (*rajo-guna*) and ignorance (*tamo-guna*), to develop a unique personality scale, called the Vedic Personality Index (VPI). Selecting 56 statements in a Likert-type scale, portraying the domain of attributes that make up the influence of the three modes, he sought to validate the statements from the *Bhagavad-gita* using a sample of 619 participants of varying ages and occupations from a city in the southeastern United States as well as subscribers to an Eastern-style spirituality magazine. He found that those with an inclination to spirituality rated higher on the goodness scale than others. Using the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* as a therapeutic method for depression in a new study, he found a significant decrease in stress in the treatment group, as well as a lower rate of participant dropout compared to the control groups. The study presents an important new field of research for counselling and other

22

mental health fields.[36] The categories on the survey are directly related to devotee identity and can determine patterns of stable personality construction or dissonance, and may be useful for further studies in my research area.

A survey by Weiss and Mendoza[37] used the Mental Health Inventory and the Comrey Personality Scales, to evaluate mental health and personality differences arising from differences in acculturation into the *Hare Krishna Movement* for 132 males and 94 females with up to 18 years of membership (sample average membership of 8.6 years) as part of an on-going investigation. Arising from controversy about the psychological impact of membership in "cults," especially where the devotees have been subject to allegations of "brainwashing", the findings have important ramifications for the acceptance of ISKCON in countries where government and public perceptions and attitudes are still largely negative. The study found that:

- There was no evidence that adverse personality traits are associated with greater acculturation into the movement;
- Mental health was not associated with differences in acculturation, except that highly acculturated Hare Krishna men (and women to a lesser extent) reported significantly greater well-being than did their general population norms or lesser acculturated peers.

The investigators contend that higher acculturation may not necessarily indicate increased benefits of religion or vice versa; those joining the movement may be emotionally more stable and better able to fulfill the tenets of their religion with corresponding peer and authority approval leading to feelings of increased self-worth; joining may serve a therapeutic function, enhancing mental heath; such features are also found in other settings besides religious contexts where sound mental health is fostered.

---

[36] Some example of the statements are: "I often act without considering the consequences of my actions" or " I often feel dejected" and "In my life I usually experience deep happiness that is not dependent on anything external".
[37] undated, registered online 2003, http://www.audarya-fellowship.com/ubbthreads.php?Cat=&C=

Although such tests have religiosity measures which are generally non-specific for religion, the test contained the acculturation index, which was specifically used to test the ISKCON devotees. The conclusion in the case of the ISKCON devotees then, is that "significantly greater subjective well-being is associated with greater acculturation". This concurs with Hood's (1998) observation that religious identity is most effectively attained when there is constancy between the collective identity and one's ego identity.

1.8   Overview of Study

In this chapter, I indicated that the several perspectives of psychological and social research have produced profuse and sometimes ambiguous definitions of identity. Although these multifarious perspectives occur, as well as particular global trends are producing a flux in identity construction, I proposed that individuals with a spiritual proclivity have an enduring sense of self which may not initially be concretized, but provides the impetus for the individual to enter into a common dialogue as devotees of ISKCON. It was stated that the need for the study on devotee identity is driven largely by personal, research and contextual imperatives, suggesting that it will benefit the dearth of literature and research on devotee identity. I traced briefly the biography of the founder *acharya* of ISKCON, Bhaktivedanta Swami, and a brief history of ISKCON in which I noted in summary some of its crises, successes, contestations about its "Hindu" identity, and other research issues and trends.

In *Chapter 3,* my Literature Review chapter, I posit the question "Who am I" as a fundamental question in current psychological and social research on the construction of identity, indicating the varied perspectives – psychoanalytical, philosophical, educational, phenomenological, sociological, socio-linguistic, anthropological, and theological – from which it has been studied. The pattern of decreasing reductionistic analysis and trends towards challenging exclusionary sets of values, negation of any single discipline's view of identity, and the metamorphic nature of the postmodern self is noted. I also present the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* theological perspective on identity derived from certain central scriptural texts used in ISKCON, viz. the *Bhagavad-gita As It Is, Srimad-Bhagavatam,*

24

and *Caitanya Caritamrita*, since that philosophical platform is central to my research on the development of identity of the resident devotees at ISKCON Temple of Understanding, Durban.

In *Chapter 4,* Part One of my findings, I respond to the features of the context within which these identities are formed, viz. the institutional, physical, religious, social and educational contexts. Framing my investigation by borrowing from Jenkins' (1996) characteristics of organizations, I initially focus on the institutional identity of ISKCON Durban Temple of Understanding, which enables me to examine the scope and extent of ISKCON's activities, and institutional processes which impact on devotee identity. Subsequently I respond to the data generated about the physical and cultural contexts of ISKCON that shape the identity of the resident devotees, and thereafter examine the intersections between institutional identity and individual identity.

In *Chapter 5*, which is Part Two of my findings, I respond to the data about the notions of Truth and Notions of self. The data generated in my interviews was produced by using provocative statements that derived from the literature review, particularly about the debate between what constituted objectivity, and subjectivity as methods of investigation. I will examine how the elite informers respond to issues of academic Truth and spiritual notions of Truth, how that Truth is operationalized by ISKCON devotees in the material world, and the intersections of methodology between the academic and spiritual.

I also attend to the question "Who am I?" which underscores the central thesis of my research. In this section, I respond to the data generated about the sense of self and how it is experienced by the ISKCON devotees with a view to examining the presence of the enduring sense of self in devotee identity. Finally the emerging data on the intersections of Truth and the notions of self are presented.

In *Chapter 6*, I respond reflectively to the extensive data generated in Chapters 4 and 5, on the factors that impact upon the ISKCON devotee identity that contribute to the central assumption of the thesis that while there is an influence of self-reflexivity, as well

as context on identity construction, there exists a more internal "enduring" sense of self, beyond external binaries of race, language and culture. Several significant insights, reflections and conclusions are drawn and a future research agenda is also suggested.

In the next chapter, I position myself as a *deep-insider* and argue for descriptive and interpretative validity through the lens of an ethnographic scientist, addressing the ambivalent role of the deep-insider and its difficulties. I compare the empiricism of the natural sciences with that of the interpretative methods of the social sciences relating that to the issues of what constitutes Truth, as well as how Truth is viewed. The methodology of *phronesis* developed by Flyvbjerg (2001) is presented as a contemporary social science research alternative, which relies on qualitative expertise, judgements and decisions based on practical wisdom. Further, the specific research appraisal used in the study, the context, research participants and instruments are described.

CHAPTER TWO

Research Methodology: Mapping the Identity Terrain[38]

2.1   Introduction

It may be debatable whether a *Hare Krishna* member studying the organisation of which he is a member for the last 15 years[39] can maintain any degree of objectivity or even abstemiousness during his research! Certainly limitations will exist. Other researchers examining my study may pose questions about the subtle or overt influences on the interaction between interviewer and interviewee, my objectivity, or even whether the researcher will make available contentious issues for public scrutiny. Nonetheless I strongly maintain that how the devotees create their identities, how they develop their meanings and perceptions about contextual, personal, and cultural issues can be effectively derived by this analytical ethnographic stance that I propose.

Kanpol (1997) argues that there is an intimate connection between a researcher's personal history and the data collected in his research. In positioning myself as a *deep-insider* I argue for descriptive and interpretative validity through the lens of an ethnographic scientist, and address the ambivalent role of the deep-insider and the difficulties thereof. Juxtaposing the rationale of empiricism of the natural sciences with that of the interpretative methods of the social sciences, the issue of what constitutes Truth, as well how Truth is viewed, is addressed. In describing the intersections of Truth in the academic and spiritual methodologies, I initially present an interesting contemporary social science research alternative developed by Flyvbjerg (2001) referred to as *phronesis*

---

[38] Although this is not the usual format, I present the Research Methodology chapter as Chapter Two because I wish to establish my positionality at the outset.

[39] I am a member of ISKCON since 1986 and a spiritual initiate since 1994. My services, all of which are voluntary, have included : Former registrar of Bhaktivedanta College of Education and Culture, lecturer in Vedic Studies, Public Relations and Communications Officer, Publications committee and editor, member of Child Protection Committee, lay counsellor, member of various Festival Organisational Committees and fund raising (especially Durban *Ratha Yatra*), ISKCON Youth Services and *Bhakti yoga Society* lecturer and seminar organizer, Facilitator of Management meetings, and Chairperson of Food for Life.

which relies on qualitative expertise, judgements and decisions based on practical wisdom. The research on how the ISKCON Durban Temple devotees create their identities, I maintain, would not have been effective without the influence of my own personal involvement, and personal insights and realizations[40]. The chapter concludes with the specific research methodology used in the study and a description of the context, research participants and instruments.

2.2   Positionality: The "Deep-insider"

According to Edwards (1999) the *deep-insider* is an observer/researcher who has been a "member for at least five years of the organization/group under research". In investigating the ISKCON Durban Temple as a *case study* my position as observer/researcher is regarded as a category of *participant observation*, which occurs when the "researcher is playing an established participant role in the scene to be studied" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 111). Distinctions are made however, to the degree of which the researcher is involved as participant, viz. *complete observer, observer as participant, participant as observer,* and *complete participant* – a continuum from complete detachment to complete participation. Flyvbjerg (2001: 83) asserts that the "…most advanced form of understanding is achieved when researchers place themselves within the context being studied. Only in this way can researchers understand the viewpoints and the behaviour which characterize social actors". Although it would seem from my position as *deep-insider* that the category of *complete participant* may be directly applicable to me, for the purposes of increased objectivity, I would tend toward the position of *participant as observer*. This allows me sufficient space to balance my involvement with detachment, closeness with distance, and familiarity with aloofness (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). My privilege as a member is used as a conscious methodological strategy to *access* certain information that is usually not available to an outsider, yet simultaneously I voluntarily adopt the *outsider position* as an academic researcher and in the *analysis* of the data. As a participant observer I occupy an

---

[40] Realization, I define, is a more intuitive and self-reflective state of consciousness, where one becomes aware that lessons learnt in theory, especially those of life choices and values, are indeed tangible realities.

28

uncommon position as an observer/researcher of an organisation of which I am an active member for many years. The particular benefit of such a position is the knowledge I have about the history, culture, "body language, semiotics and slogan systems" (Edwards, 1999) as well as the tensions, joys, and problems that operate within the organisation. By privileging the insider it is not suggested that an outsider will be unreliable, nor do I wish to minimize the position of the outsider. Several categories of observation described above remain to such a researcher. Furthermore I am aware of the particular complexities of the "deep-insider" position, especially the duty that impinges upon the insider to become a total objective outsider to himself in his effort to objectify what he experienced or saw from the inside.

The Advantages of the "Deep-insider" Role

Borrowing from the discussion by Edwards (1999: 3-7) on the position of the *deep-insider* to frame my role as *participant observer,* I delineate further advantages of such a stance below:

- The information obtained from the interviews is based on long standing relationships between the participant and researcher, and as such a trust and rapport has already been established.

- Two elements exist that validates the data against being fabricated, viz. the interviewee is aware that the interviewer will be able to detect posturing, and the researcher will be familiar with the jargon used within the organisation.

- The researcher has knowledge the history of the organisation, its successes and failures, behaviours and attitudes of members, and about other issues and "unspoken agendas" within the organisation.

The position of deep-insider brings with it the following particular complexities:

The Disadvantages of the "Deep-insider" Role

The deep-insider has to be cautious about the following limitations:

- It is much easier to overlook certain data because of familiarity. Since the data is so commonplace for the researcher, many nuances and subtleties may escape scrutiny. Furthermore, the researcher must be aware of his own subtle influence on the interview situation, and choose appropriate ways of responding that will not compromise his position as researcher and simultaneously, since he is already well-known, not portray his attitude as unfeeling when the interviewee reveals incidents of personal distress.

- The role of the researcher will change as he now accepts the position of an observer/investigator, and thus he may no longer be seen as a colleague or friend. Such shift in the power relationship may work against the interviewer since the interviewee may be hesitant to reveal information knowing that every detail will be subject to scrutiny and possible publication, even though anonymity may be guaranteed.

- The researcher may feel hesitant to reveal issues of the organisation due his own feelings of allegiance (the case of dirty laundry in public!) or be apprehensive to face antagonism from the management who may regard his reporting as betrayal.[41]

While the insider-outsider status of a researcher produces certain particularities and complexities described above, several researchers argue for the advantages of such a position, emphasizing propinquity between an ethnographer's personal history and involvement, and data collected (Mouton, 1990; Kanpol, 1997; Breuer, 2000; Flyvbjerg;

---

[41] The advantages and disadvantages are derived from Maykut and Moorhouse, 1994; Clandinin and Connelly, 1998; Morgan, 1986; Burke, 1989; Humphrey,1995, Goodson, 1992, all cited in Edwards (1999).

2001), indicating that Truth could be more clearly understood if it includes the respondents frame of reference.

2.3   Objectivity and Truth

Cohen and Manion (2000) regard the purpose of research as a search for Truth. Two competing views on the nature of research characterize social science; the first which is based on the model of the empiric sciences, seeks to explain all social phenomena as a product of natural and regulative laws; the other, while sharing the same academic rigour, is a more interpretative method.   In his study, Mouton (1990) maintains that the naturalistic definition[42] of objective research is "less plausible when applied to the social sciences" and "that value-judgements regarding social, political and moral issues are inevitably part of the research process". Breuer's (2000) increasing scepticism and distrust of "standardized and routinized methodical procedures" in psychology prompted him to find methods that could be applied to the "subjective worlds of experience", tending towards a self-reflective stance on the position of the researcher and the relevancy of his interaction with the field of study. According to Flyvbjerg (2001: 3), the natural scientists and some social scientists themselves wrongly believe that the social sciences should emulate the natural sciences in producing "explanatory and predictive, that is, epistemic theory". Social practices that make up society – religion, customs, traditions, require self-descriptions by the participants because they inherently contain apposite norms for particular circumstances. Thus the theoretical study of human activity which is concerned only with the analytic or technical and the production of general theorization (i.e. the natural sciences) cannot do justice to real-world situations which is the realm of the social sciences. However, Mouton (1990) maintains that while social scientists have different "personal values and interests" and that different studies "will embody different values and therefore serve different interests in society," this does not mean objectivity is to be suspended. He regards objectivity as being fundamentally a methodological criterion, which is achieved through maximizing validity. Thus it can be assumed that

---

[42] The traditional scientific method originated in the natural sciences, where objectivity meant research that was devoid of any subjective factors, maintenance of aloofness between scientist and object of research, committed to rationality and objective value-free research.

establishing objectivity and validity in research is congruent with establishing the Truth. With a view to increasing such validity, Flyvbjerg (2001) introduces *phronesis*, which pushes the methodology and analysis of this study beyond analytical research.

2.3.1 Phronesis

In an attempt to show why the social sciences can hold their own as *bona fide* academic enquiry Flyvbjerg (2001) presents a contemporary interpretation of Aristotelian concept of *phronesis*. *Phronesis* refers to the making of judgements and decisions on the basis of sound reasoning and practical wisdom, which goes beyond analytical, scientific knowledge (*episteme*) and technical knowledge (*techne*). Just as the social sciences have not contributed much to explanatory and predictive theory, so to have the natural sciences not contributed to the "reflexive analysis and discussion of values and interests, which is the prerequisite for an enlightened political, economic, and cultural development in any society, and which is at the core of *phronesis*" (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 3). He further cites a very powerful model, called the *Dreyfus model*,[43] in which it was found that qualitative expertise based on intuition, experience and judgement produced better results than analytical rationality. Such results were dependent on the proficiency of the "performer" or investigator, who relied more on "intuitive,[44] holistic and synchronistic action";[45] the more expert the investigator, the more correct the observations and results. Intuitive decision-making has been neglected as an object of scientific study, and Flyvbjerg (2001) emphasizes that although analysis and rationality are important elements in scientific enquiry it must not be utilized to the extent that they overly dominate other equal important modes of human understanding and behaviour.

---

[43] An experiment conducted in USA in which a group of paramedics had to choose from a video of a group of six persons administering CPR, who was the most proficient. See Flyvbjerg (2001) pages 9-24

[44] Intuition is a personal experience of an individual; unless the individual commits his experience to language, generally it is assumed that an observer will not gain access to that. Yet recent developments in the field of consciousness studies indicate revolutionary methodologies for accessing levels of consciousness using methods derived from kinesiology. For further information see Reams (1998). For my purposes however, within the limitations of this study, as well as lack of access to such technologies, I assert that this "intuition" will be accessed by examining common patterns of thoughts and verbalizations from the data.

[45] Flyvbjerg (2001) uses the analogy of expert soccer players to explain this. See p 17.

2.3.2 Truth Perspectives

The search for Truth in the Vedic sciences may be likened to the methods of *phronetic* research – that is, in terms of its reliance on intuition, experience and judgement of an expert in the field. With these central features in mind I will examine how Truth is generated in the ISKCON understanding, such a description being based mainly on the disseminations of the ISKCON scriptures and the arguments of Satsvarupa das Goswami (1977).

The Vedas[46] explain that there exists a category of Truth unknowable by direct perception or by the inductive method. In *Bhagavad-gita As it Is* (1983: verse 4.34) it is stated: "Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Enquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized soul can impart knowledge unto you because he has seen the Truth". This primary deliverer of knowledge is known as the guru, or spiritual master.

According to Satsvarupa, (1977) the Vedic concept of authority does not have any negative connotation that authorities in Western culture seem to create, but refers to a deliverer of primary knowledge whose qualification stems from the concordance between his preaching and practice, and in ISKCON, his linkage to a disciplic succession (*Bhagavad-gita As it Is*, 1983: 34) or *sampradaya* that can be historically traced back to Caitanya and beyond, from which the message of the Vedas descends.[47] Furthermore in ISKCON, the guru's spiritual standards and activities is subject to stringent monitoring by the Governing Body Commission.[48] The scientist may regard this process as dogmatic and indeed his scientific conscience may not allow him to accept such a process. In this regard however, we may examine the following interesting perspective on the dogma of the scientific method as described by Rauche (1990).

---

[46] The word *Vedas* is being used in a broad sense, as ISKCON understands it.

[47] In my findings chapter (Chapter 4) I deliberate further on the role of the guru in ISKCON.

[48] In establishing ISKCON, Bhaktivedanta Swami developed a corporate form of governance[48] in 1970, called the Governing Body Commission (GBC), which did not invest spiritual or managerial authority in any one particular guru (Ravindra Swarup dasa, 1999) but a committee of spiritual masters to oversee ISKCON.

33

Rauche (1990) regards the search for Truth as central to the various fields of activities that man conducts. It is significant that it his realization of reality and life's conditions as constantly changing that motivates him to search for that knowledge that would free him from his *contingent*[49] experience, which prompts the production of his various theories. Yet, the fact that man still continues to conduct research into this question, Rauche argues, indicates that he has not found the Truth. Since scientific methods are man-made, he asserts, no scientific theory can be irrefutable and will remain problematic and contentious. Rauche (1990) regards the various theories that are methodologically constituted from the various types of knowledge as *truth perspectives* rather than Truth. Such truth perspectives are limited to man's contingent experience and specific to particular historical circumstances. A similar view is shared by Strauss and Corbin (1998: 171) that "truth is enacted", that is to say that theories (or interpretations) are not eternal truths since they are subject to modification and refutation, as well as embedded in history, i.e. limited in time.

In his essay, Rauche continues a vehement critique of Karl Popper's functionalistic method[50] as he applied it to the sciences as well as historical and social phenomena. Functionalistic methods produce knowledge of only the sciences and technology, which become destructive when absolutized, and do not comprise the whole truth about man, who "besides functional aspirations, has also other desires, such as moral, aesthetic and religious ones" (Rauche, 1990: 263). Thus the absolutization of functionalistic methods, which he regards as a "cult of scientism and technologism", results in the "development of a false consciousness, an alienation from reality as a contingent experience" resulting in an estrangement of man from his fellow-man.

---

[49] i.e. changing or variable

[50] Karl Popper (1959) introduced the concept of *falsification* in the sciences – that for a theory to be scientific it must be falsifiable, i.e. liable to modification by the discovery of new facts. In this way scientific knowledge expands. Rauche criticizes Poppers's claim to an increase in knowledge, that it means the increase of one type of knowledge only, i.e. the functional processes of science and technology.

According to Satsvarupa (1977) there is a conflict between the empiric investigation of the Vedas[51] on one hand, and the Vedic versions explanations of its own origins, purpose and nature, on the other. The Vedic version is not accepted by empiric scientists. Scientists deem the Vedas claims to divine origin, mythological, and the study of the Vedas via a guru for extracting religious legitimacy is considered unscholarly. Indeed the Vedic paradigm insists on Truth[52], and although there is an intersection between the academic and spiritual framework as regards the enquiry to establish Truth, there exists a difference in how knowledge is derived in these different arenas.[53] If an investigator subjects the Vedas to the critical-historical or empirical approach he will be faced with the very scenario that the phronetic social scientists are arguing against: that the tools of natural sciences and its methodology will not do justice to the understanding of Vedic thought and culture.

My examination of phenomena in a spiritual context spontaneously lends itself to academic rigour by the use of academic arguments on notions of Truth, as well as the use of ethnographic methodology. My committed position, is to remain an ethnographic scientist – to observe and interpret data as is expected of a social scientist committed to this field of research, yet aware of the limitations of functionalistic dogmatism. In the above section I have argued a case for the deep-insider, noting especially the objectivity and validity issues of such a stance. I have also discussed the notions of truth as described by the natural sciences, the social sciences and the Vedic paradigm, likening the use of intuition, experience and judgement (as well as learning and realization) of the Vedic process to that of the position of the expert in the phronetic social sciences. My approach however, is to allow theological voice to be supported by academic rigour, which leads to the consideration of validity issues in qualitative research.

---

[51] The classification of what constitutes the Vedas is a source on ongoing debate between different scholars of religion. The reference to "Vedas" here is how it is understood in ISKCON.

[52] The scriptural injunctions and ideas of Truth will be further developed in Chapter 5.

[53] An academic study usually involves the rigour of the scientific method while spiritual knowledge is based on accepting knowledge from scriptural authority, and confirming that by its practice – what is called realization" of knowledge by experience – *vijnana*. This may loosely translate as the difference between knowledge and wisdom.

35

2.3.3 Validity in Qualitative Research

Validity in the social sciences takes many forms and the reader will do best to waive the idea (if applicable) of a positivist model of validity. Validity in the social sciences might be established through the "honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001). The term "understanding" is more appropriate than "validity" in qualitative research, since these researchers are part of the world that is being researched. Therefore they cannot be completely objective – others' perspectives being equally valid as the researchers', whose task is to uncover these (Mishler, 1990; Maxwell, 1992).[54] Ezzy (2002:45) identifies a person's understanding of the situation as something to be discovered rather than assumed. Such a study aims for depth rather than quantity of understanding (Henning,Van Rensburg and Smit, 2004:8). Data or methods are not considered as important for validity then, as the meaning that subjects give to data, as well as the inferences that are drawn from the data. Honesty of the researcher then is of prime importance.

Maxwell (1992)[55] describes several types of validity that supports the notion of "understanding" for qualitative research; the relevant one's which I paraphrase below:

- Descriptive validity – how factual is the account of the participants;
- Interpretive validity – the ability of the research to capture meanings, interpretations, terms, intentions that data have for the subjects themselves;
- Theoretical validity – the theoretical constructs that the researcher brings to the research; theory here is considered to be an explanation. It refers to the extent that the researcher explains phenomena, and
- Generalizability – how the theory may be useful in understanding other similar situations, viz. within similar groups, or other outsider communities.

---

[54] Cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001)
[55] Cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001)

It is proposed that besides the available literature on identity construction and the theological perspectives (*theoretical* validity), and the context and activities of the organisation under scrutiny, my personal observations of these patterns, processes and activities provide a rich source of data to validate the personal narratives of the participants in the study. My position as a *deep-insider* of the ISKCON Durban Temple has privileged me access to certain information, and enabled me to observe patterns of behaviour, relationships and perceptions of the devotees and understand experiences that would normally not be available to an "outsider". Thus my position as deep-insider enables the research to satisfy the requirements for the *descriptive* and *interpretive* validity described by Maxwell (1992). I propose that my personal experience is highly relevant to the current study, the precedent being mooted by academics (Mouton, 1990; Kanpol, 1997; Flyvbjerg, 2001)) that a personal self-reflectivity will impinge upon data collection and analysis. The above considerations of validity are included in my research design. Internal validity, which refers to how accurately the findings can describe the phenomenon being researched (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001) has several components. Three components are directly relevant to the internal validity of my design and they are: prolonged engagement in the field; persistent observation; and triangulation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985),[56] which will be discussed in the next section.

2.4   Research Design

In the following section I provide a discussion and rationalization of the methods and procedures I adopted in the pursuit of the critical questions of the study.

- *What* is the institutional identity of ISKCON and how is it derived?
- *What* are the physical, religious, social and educational features of the context within which these identities are formed?
- *How* and *why* are the resident devotees of ISKCON in South Africa, who are variegated in term of race, culture and language, able to create their identities as devotees?

---

[56] Cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001)

- *What* are the possible changes in the lifestyle and value-systems of these resident devotees since they first joined?

- *How* do the devotees understand and experience notions of self and Truth?

To investigate the above critical questions, I chose a research strategy that was fundamentally *ethnographic*, committed to the interpretive approach specifically the use of an *institutional case study.* I preferred to use this qualitative *ethnographic* research strategy as I found it relevant for the following:

- exploring the nature of the social phenomena of my study in its natural setting;
- working with a set of open rather than a closed set of analytic categories;
- investigation of a small number of cases; and
- representing a more humanistic, interpretive approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998).

2.4.1 The Case Study

The detailed examination of a single example (Flyvbjerg, 2001) in this case the ISKCON Temple of Understanding, Durban, is deemed a *case study.* The use of the *case study*, which relies on interviewing, observation and documentary analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: xv) has the following benefits:

- It is useful for the purposes of eliciting "in-depth, detailed data from a wide data source" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001: 79).
- It allows analysis of participants' personal narratives[57] which will provide perspectives and interpretations, to glean the "insider's view of reality", which will render social behaviour comprehensible, and as such,
- enable a periodized understanding of the possible changes of participants, in this case the devotees' identity constructs, lifestyles and values, from a first-hand, and

---

[57] According to Polkinghorne (1988) "the meaning of narrative...has been extended to refer to any data that are in the form of natural discourse or speech (e.g. interview protocols)". Cited in Cortazzi (1993).

38

retrospective view of the individual's personal experience, what Denzin (1989) refers to as "thick descriptions".

Further, Cohen, et al (2001) values the case study as a means to recreate reality, to create a sense of "being there", i.e. it will be able to represent the ambience and ethos of the organisation under investigation, this case being the ISKCON Temple of Understanding, Durban.

Flyvbjerg (2001) cites several researchers who have criticized case studies as having limited applicability to *theorization, generalization*, and biased towards *verification*, that is, a bias towards the researcher's preconceived hypothesis. I consider such criticisms, if unopposed, indicts the case study as unscientific, because its very reliability and validity is being called into question. I argue for the use of the case study using the discussions presented by Flyvbjerg (2001) as follows:

- To accept that only "general, theoretical (*context-independent*)" knowledge is acceptable is a misunderstanding. The case study, which produces *context-dependent* knowledge, is important because it allows a "nuanced view of reality", as well as acknowledges that human behaviour cannot simply be reduced to specific factual parameters, a situation produced by context-independent methods which by nature are aloof from the subject under study. Furthermore, "predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs" (2001:73), and ultimately the social sciences can produce mostly concrete, context-dependent knowledge.

- The emphasis on generalizibility of results originates from the natural sciences, although case studies often occupied an important place in the investigations of scientists like Galileo, Darwin, Marx, and Freud. According to Flyvbjerg (2001) generalization in the natural sciences is over-valued, and the utility of a good case study is underestimated. It is useful for both generating and testing hypothesis but its applicability ranges beyond this. In certain instances when a particular

39

problem or phenomenon is being investigated, random sampling would not make sense; it would be more appropriate to choose a typical case, that which Flyvbjerg refers to as a *critical case study*.

- As far as the issue of *verification* is concerned, (i.e. bias towards the researcher's preconceived hypothesis) indeed it would be easy to think that in the light of my involvement as a member of the organisation under study, *verification bias* would pose a problem. I propose however, that my role as "researcher as member" created for me an additional burden, i.e. an overarching concern not to be biased, just as much as a league team soccer coach who is requested to fill in for the referee in an emergency is harder on his own team. I also add that the reader, sensitized to my unique position as a member/deep-insider of the organization under study, may unduly subject me to greater scrutiny and rigour based on an expectation that I may be biased, than if I were a non-member.

- The main criticism against the case study is that it allows greater researcher subjectivity than other methods. While this is an important consideration to be aware of, case studies have their own rigour and advantages: they allow phenomena to be tested *in situ* as they unfold; and on the contrary may disprove certain preconceived notions and assumptions.

2.4.2   The Research Process

In the following section I discuss the important aspects of the research process that underpin the stages of data production: viz. the context and site, the pilot study, the sampling of participants, issues of confidentiality and research instruments. The methodological approaches employed in the study are summarized in Table 2.1.

2.4.2.1   Context and Site: The ISKCON Temple of Understanding

The *Hare Krishna Temple* with its imposing domes, is a prominent landmark in a suburb called Chatsworth, in the city of Durban, South Africa.[58] The Temple, which was designed by Rajaram Dasa, an Austrian architect who used traditional Vedic design combined with modern building technology, was officially opened in 1985.[59] It has a restaurant, gift and book shops and a large inner sanctorum where worship and services are conducted. There are several buildings around the main Temple that serves as devotee quarters for full-time residents. The Temple may be considered a monastic environment and resident devotees are expected to follow a stipulated regular daily spiritual programme, which is also open to the public. The Temple is also the headquarters for ISKCON in the province, housing its central administration offices, and is the organisational hub for all of its festivals and projects, like *Ratha Yatra*, Food for Life, and book distribution.[60]

2.4.2.2   The Pilot Study

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) maintain that pre-interviews allow the researcher to clarify areas of concern, test certain questions, determine effective use of time, and determine other participant and researcher issues that were not previously apparent. My purpose in conducting the pilot study was to learn about the methodology, data production, data analysis, gauge interviewee comfort and type of responses, and to refine my interviewing skills. I began the process with a pilot interview of an Indian (South African) female devotee. The choice of the participant was influenced by the availability of resident devotees at the time of my pre-testing.

---

[58] The main harbour city on the east coast of South Africa. See Appendix 1 for map of South Africa, and Appendix 5 for pictures of the site.

[59] See Riddha Dasa (1997): Significant Events 1975-1996. *Destination South Africa,* as well as, Souvenir Book (1985): Sri-Sri- Radha-Radhanath Temple of Understanding, *Grand Opening Brochure.* Art Printers: Durban.

[60] These are discussed in greater detail in section 4.4.4

TABLE 2.1   **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES USED IN THE STUDY**

CRITICAL QUESTIONS	MODE OF ENQUIRY	SOURCE OF INFORMATION	INSTRUMENTS	PLACE/FREQUENCY
1. *What* is the institutional identity of ISKCON and how is it derived?	Qualitative, ethnographic/ Case study/ Documentary Analysis (features in sacred texts; daily temple schedule / devotee schedule) Observation; Walkabouts Interviews	Significant Questions that interrogate these features in texts and schedules Temple President Head – Governing Body Commissioner Visiting spiritual masters Resident Devotees	Semi-structured interviews; Tape recording/ camera Photographs Analysis of texts	*SITE-* ISKCON TEMPLE OF UNDERSTANDING, CHATSWORTH, DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA
2. *What* are the physical, religious and socio-cultural features of the context within which these identities are formed? (viz. the physical environment (temple), and the tenets, philosophy, practices and activities of ISKCON				The semi-structured interviews will be conducted twice for devotees in the nominal sample: The first interview was to elicit information; second interview to establish content validity
3. *How* and *why* the resident devotees of the ISKCON Durban,, who are variegated in term of race, culture and language, are able to create or re-create their cultural and religious identities.	Qualitative, ethnographic Interviews Oral Narratives Observation; Walkabouts	Resident Devotees of the Hare Krishna Temple, Chatsworth Head – Governing Body Commissioner Visiting spiritual masters	Semi-structured Interviews Tape recording Analysis of texts	Interviews with the elite informers were only done once as they are visiting spiritual masters and left on international travels.
4. *What* are the possible changes in the lifestyle and value-systems of these resident devotees since they first joined;	Qualitative, ethnographic/ Documentary Analysis Interviews	Head – GBC/ Visiting spiritual masters / Resident Devotees Major Canonical works; *Bhagavad-gita As it Is*; *Srimad Bhagavtam*; *Caitanya Caritamrta*; other related texts	Semi-structured interviews Tape recording/ camera Analysis of texts for Truth and self data/ behaviour and values of devotees	Interview with Head of ISKCON SA was done twice: once on issues of self and identity; second on issues of institutional identity.
5. *How* do the devotees understand and experience notions of Truth and Self ?	Oral Narratives Observation; Walkabouts			

The devotee interviewed in my pilot study had been working as a customs clerk at a shipping company before she joined ISKCON as a full time resident, and had been living for more than five years in the temple environment. My intention in conducting the pilot study was to:

- establish the whether questions were ambiguous or confusing;
- to determine the level of difficulty of the questions;
- to determine whether the interview was too lengthy;
- the appropriateness and validity of questions in relation to the critical questions asked in the study; and
- the suitability of the semi-structured interview format in eliciting rich data.

The pilot study revealed that adjustments to the interview schedule had to be made to the following: certain questions that were similar and thus elicited similar responses had to be refined to remove redundancy; the length of the interview needed to be shortened, which was due to the overlap described; and some questions simply elicited "yes/no" type of responses and were unsuitable for the interview since the open-ended format in a semi-structured interview is regarded as more suited to eliciting rich data. Further, the pilot study made me aware about the need to clearly explain to the interviewee the procedure that would be followed, and the need to be sensitive towards personal, confidential issues revealed by the respondent.

2.4.2.3 Research Participants

Various methods of sampling participants for different types of investigation are described in the literature reviewed (Morse, 1998; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001). The sampling technique I used is referred to as *purposive sampling*, where the participants are intentionally selected based on their typicality. The participants of the study included the following expert informers:

(i)   4 resident devotees (1 Coloured male; 1 Black male; 1 Indian female, 1 White
        female) of the ISKCON Temple of Understanding, Chatsworth, Durban;

(ii)   The Governing Body Commissioner (Spiritual Head) of ISKCON South Africa;[61]

(iii)   The Temple President / Chairman of ISKCON KZN

(iv)   3 visiting spiritual masters (2 White males and 1 Black male).

The 4 *resident* devotees were selected using the following criteria: since I was
investigating the identity construction of resident devotees it was appropriate that
residents on the temple premises be sampled, and that the sample adequately represented
gender and race.   The *elite*[62] informers consisted of the visiting spiritual masters and the
head of ISKCON South Africa who were interviewed to provide the rich data
investigated in my critical questions. This would include information about the
institution, and would provide a validation process for information derived from the
resident sample and documentary evidence. An important difference between the
resident and *elite* samples is that the elite sample consisted of three disciples of
Bhaktivedanta Swami who are now fulfilling a role of spiritual masters within ISKCON
who may be referred to as *first generation* devotees, and the *resident* sample consisted of
devotees who are disciples of the disciples of Bhaktivedanta Swami, referred here to as
second generation devotees. I summarize the biographical data of the *resident* and *elite*
respondents in Table 2.2 and 2.3.

The categories *Initiated/Not initiated* and *Renunciant* need explanation. An initiated
devotee is one who has committed himself to following the instructions and guidance of
one of several gurus in ISKCON, from whom he takes "initiation".

---

[61] Also a spiritual master, traveling preacher, scholar and presenter of seminars on *Gaudiya Vaisnava* and
ISKCON philosophy internationally.
[62] The *elite* status is due to their length of time as members (more than twenty years), being spiritually
astute practitioners of the activities of ISKCON, renunciant in status, proficient in scripture, and holding
various managerial and spiritual roles in ISKCON, and having the status as spiritual masters.

TABLE 2.2   BIOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION OF RESIDENT DEVOTEE SAMPLE[63]

Biographical Data

Devotee	No. of years as resident	Gender	Age	Marital Status before joining	Marital Status after joining	Initiated Or Not	Spiritual Status	Pop Group	Nationality	Home Language	Daily Language	Language of Prayer
A	3	F		Single	Single	I	Celibate student	White	European[64]	European	English	Sanskrit
B	20	M		Single	Single	I	Celibate student	Black	South African	Setshwana	English	Sanskrit/ Bengali
C	20	F		Married	Married	I	Householder	Indian	South African	English	English	Sanskrit
D	5*[65]	M		Single	Married	I	Householder	Coloured	South African	Afrikaans	English	Sanskrit

Resident Devotees

---

63 The details of the interviewees are filled in the sequence in which the interviews were conducted.

64 The specific country has not been mentioned for the purposes of confidentiality (see Chapter 4: Findings)

65 Initially lived in this temple, then lived overseas in ISKCON Temples, then returned to live here, the collective period being approximately 18 years.

TABLE 2.3   BIOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION OF ELITE SAMPLE[66]

Biographical Data

A	No. of years as resident	Gender	Age	Marital Status before joining	Marital Status after joining	Initiated Or Not	Spiritual Status	Pop Group	Nationality	Home Language	Daily Language	Language of Prayer
1	27	M	Bet. 51/60	M	S	I	R*	W	Dutch	Dutch	English	English/ Sanskrit/ Bengali
2	32	M	Bet. 51/60	S	S	I	R	W	American	English	English	Sanskrit/ Bengali
3	30	M	Bet. 51/60	S	S	I	R	B	American	English	English	Sanskrit/ Bengali
4	35	M	Bet. 51/60	S	S	I	R	W	New Zealander	English	English	Sanskrit/ Bengali
5	10	M	Bet 31/40	S	M	I	G	I	South African	English	English	Sanskrit/ Bengali

*R- renunciant / G - Grihastha

Elite Informers

1 Kadamba Kanana Swami
2. Jayadvaita Swami
3 Devamrita Swami
4 Bhakti Caitanya Swami (GBC of South Africa)
5 Swarup Damodar das (Temple Council Chairman / President of ISKCON Kwa Zulu Natal)

66 The details of the interviewees are filled in the sequence in which the interviews were conducted.

In ISKCON this means that the disciple, in a formal ceremony, vows to chant on his rosary a minimum of 16 rounds[67] of the *maha-mantra* daily, and vows to follow four religious principles, viz. no gambling, no intoxication (including cigarettes, tea and coffee), no meat eating (including fish and eggs), and no illicit sex, i.e. outside of marriage and only for procreation (Subhananda das, 1990). There are three levels of initiation; viz. the first is called *harinam* initiation. After his progress is monitored and certain levels of "advancement" are achieved, the disciple may be awarded second initiation, receiving the *Brahma Gayatri*. A third category of initiation is the *sannyasa* or renunciant status. To explain renunciant, it is understood that in the Vedic socio-cultural system called *varnashrama* there are four spiritual orders, and four social orders. The spiritual orders are: *brahmacari* (celibate student), *grhastha* (householder/married life), *vanaprastha* (retired householder life), and *sannyasi* (renounced order). To enter into renunciant status, very specific mandatory and spiritual norms are in place about conduct, spiritual astuteness, proficiency in scripture, and history of devotee's commitment and participation. The *sannyasi* takes a vow to remain totally celibate for the remainder of his life and simply dedicate his life to the cultivation of spirituality and becomes a traveling preacher (Bhaktivedanta Swami, 1968). The four spiritual masters interviewed belong to this category of renunciants. In the case of the spiritual masters interviewed, except one, all have received initiation from Bhaktivedanta Swami. These features have implications for my study on identity as each of these categories have different social and spiritual role functions which will impact on the identity of the devotees.

2.4.2.4 Research Instruments

In terms of the internal validity already discussed, three components are directly relevant to my research process, viz. prolonged engagement in the field; persistent observation; and triangulation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).[68]

The use of two or more methods to study human behaviour is called *methodological triangulation*, which allows a fuller, richer description of the phenomenon under investigation as

---

[67] The rosary is a set of 108 wooden beads, and the disciple chants 108 x 16 rounds daily, which takes about two hours. I will discuss this further in Chapter 4.

[68] Cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001)

well as produces greater researcher confidence about the findings when various methods produce corresponding data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001). Thus triangulation is an important measure of validity. The triangulation of methods in my research involved semi-structured interviews, institutional documentary analysis and participant observation (including personal walkabouts/field notes) and visual data by way of photographs of salient features.

- **Semi-structured Interviews[69]**

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) all interviews require some form of given structure. The semi-structured interview is positioned between a total open-ended questionnaire and a totally closed completely structured questionnaire. In the semi-structured interview, the questionnaire employed had a series of questions that had a clear focus, sequence and structure, but an open-ended format allowed the interviewee lexical latitude.[70]

The low rigidity offered with the use of semi-structured interviews benefited the study by creating a flexible framework which allowed the devotees to "tell their stories', or personal narratives. Semi-structured interviews created a less formal ambience in which the participant was at ease to speak, provided *emic* rather than *etic* descriptions[71] and allowed the interviewer to be open to new phenomena as they derived from the interview process (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001; Flyvbjerg, 2001).

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the researcher using interview schedules developed for this purpose.

- At the outset of the interview, the confidentiality statement was read to the participant and his/her voluntary participation confirmed.

- The interview was recorded for the purposes of transcription, discourse analysis and interpretation.

---

[69] The interview transcripts consisting of 120 pages have not been included, but are available on request
[70] see Appendix 4
[71] *emic* descriptions concern the subject meanings placed on situations by participants, and *etic* refers to the objective or researchers' meanings and constructions of a situation. (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 139)

Interviews were conducted with the following respondents:

- 4 resident devotees for the narrative data elicitation (resident sample);
- 3 visiting spiritual masters on questions of identity and notions of truth in spiritual literature (elite informers);
- the Head of the Institution (GBC)[72] to clarify/confirm information extracted from organisational documents, spiritual literature and canonical works;
- the Temple President on issues of institutional identity

I initially made verbal contact with the proposed interviewees and explained the process to them. When they agreed to participate I set up an appointment, and then presented the confidentiality statement and information about the interview process information in writing, allowing them to peruse through the document at leisure before we began the interview.[73] I have already discussed the issues of confidentiality earlier.

- **Institutional Documentary Analysis**

A voluminous amount of literature was available to me for interrogation. Firstly, ISKCON is extremely focused on and places a pronounced emphasis on scriptural texts and authoritative commentaries by the founder, Bhaktivedanta Swami. Secondly, his lectures, written instructions, conversations and interviews have been carefully recorded, transcribed and archived by the devotees internationally, in particular by Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.[74] Thirdly, much of the management of ISKCON is conducted via correspondence. Fourthly, writing being strongly encouraged in ISKCON, most of the prominent disciples of Bhaktivedanta Swami have written

---

[72] The Governing Body Commissioner in this case is also a spiritual master.

[73] See Appendix 2.

[74] To facilitate the printing of his books, Bhaktivedanta Swami formed the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT) in 1972, which has since become one of the "world's largest publisher of books on consciousness, and the philosophy, religion and culture of the Vedic tradition of India". The BBT oversees all aspects of publishing, and funds generated support further printing and temple projects, particularly the project in Mayapur which is the headquarters of ISKCON worldwide. A further significant development of BBT was the creation of Bhaktivedanta Archives in 1978, two months after the passing away of Bhaktivedanta Swami which preserves his legacy. The Archives make available digital records of more 40 volumes of translated Vedic scriptures, communication by mail to and from disciples, taped lectures and conversations, film footage and photographs (http://www..com/main.php?id=22, undated, page 2).

and published numerous books, essays and articles, as well as presented various papers in academic forums (Ketola, 2001). Such writing of books by disciples is not inconsistent with other Western religious traditions. Hopkins (1977) contends that all Christian churches, Talmudic commentaries, rabbinical interpretations, have depended upon a "continuing renewal of ancient authority on the basis of new spiritual insights" (Hopkins, 1997: x).

The written sources that I consulted may be classified as follows:

(i)   Books by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami:

- Translations and purports (commentaries) of scripture, viz. *Bhagavad-gita As It Is, Srimad Bhagavatam,* and *Caitanya Caritamrita*
- transcribed lectures
- transcribed conversations and interviews;

(ii)   Historical Works: official biography of Bhaktivedanta Swami;

(iii)   Books, essays, and academic articles by disciples;[75]

(iv)   Temple Daily Schedule as given in official handbook;

(v)   Food for Life feeding schedules and Articles of Association;

(vi)   Temple constitution.

Knowledge issues of identity, its meaning and features, as well as notions of Truth and the explanation of the social, cultural and religious dynamics that operate within the ISKCON formed the unit of analysis for these texts: the major canonical works, viz. *Bhagavad-gita As it Is; Srimad Bhagavtam;* and *Caitanya Caritamrta,* the biography of Bhaktivedanta Swami, and several other books by his disciples. The selective analysis of other documents enabled me to access institutional structures and hierarchies, devotee schedules and the extent and scope of projects, and activities such as Food for Life with a view to determining institutional identity.

---

[75] A comprehensive reference of categories i to iii listed has been captured on electronic database called *Bhaktivedanta Vedabase,* by BBT.

- **Participant observation (including Personal Walkabouts/Field Notes)**

Since the physical context and temple in which the devotees live and operate was part of my investigation, descriptions of the physical context, and activities of the devotees were significant to my study. Field notes contained the results of my observations. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2001) these could be written at several levels, viz. quick, fragmentary jotting of key words/symbols; transcriptions with greater detail; a fuller description giving an account of what has occurred; pen portraits of participants; reconstruction of conversations; descriptions of the physical settings of events; and descriptions of behaviours, events and activities. As a *deep-insider* I was already familiar with the lifestyle and ethos of ISKCON Durban Temple, and what remained was to systematically record the features of the context, for which I relied on photographic evidence of prominent features of the physical context, as well as written descriptions of the physical context and descriptions of events, behaviours and activities of the ISKCON Durban Temple devotees. This helped to understand the salient points of the written sources in their proper context. Furthermore, participant observation allowed me to crystallize the descriptions of the ritual features of the devotees' life which included the daily worship, lectures, festivals and seminars, rites of passage (initiations and weddings), and dress codes (Ketola, 2001) for the purposes of understanding how and why devotees create their identities. Thus the participant observer status had the advantage, especially in my position of *deep-insider*, of being unobtrusive in the recording of naturally occurring data, and providing rich descriptions of a peoples' cultural world.

2.5   Conclusion

In this chapter I argued that an intimate connection exists between my personal history and the data collected in the research. Adopting the role of a *deep-insider* I argued for descriptive and interpretative validity through the lens of an ethnographic scientist, fully aware of the ambivalent role of the deep-insider and the difficulties posed by such a stance. I compared how Truth is examined in the empiricism of the natural sciences with that of the interpretative methods of the social sciences. It was suggested that the social science alternative used by Flyvbjerg (2001) referred to as *phronesis,* which relied on qualitative expertise, and judgements and decisions

51

based on practical wisdom, had a significant role in understanding social phenomena. This was especially significant in my own personal insider-outside stance as participant observer in researching how the devotees of ISKCON Temple of Understanding, Durban create their identities. I concluded the chapter by outlining the specific research methodology used in the study, viz. a triangulation of semi-structured interviews, institutional documentary analysis, personal walkabouts and field note-taking, as well as a description of the context, research participants and instruments.

In the next chapter, I explore the profuse academic theories about the concept of Self and identity, examining the essentialist and constructionist framing of identity, the theories of identity construction within the collective contexts of race, language, culture and religion, as well a more postmodern view that regards identity as external, pliable, metamorphic, and a product of discourse or of self-reflexivity. Thereafter I will analyse the Vedic theological perspectives on Self and identity as understood and presented in ISKCON's teachings.

CHAPTER THREE

Literature Review

Identity Explored: Paradigms, Perspectives and Possibilities

3.1   Introduction

The understanding of this simple word "I" is central to some of the most intense, as well as most obfuscate discussion. Where does my sense of self come from? Is it a product of my society, education or culture? Is it inherent as part of my psyche? What is it really? Although numerous theories have been posited to explain the construction of identity, and several profound insights gleaned from them, given the limits of my study it is not the purpose of this research to engage in the detailed analysis of each one, but to trace out a brief development of significant themes as they have emerged historically and as they influence ideas of identity construction.

The literature review reveals that there is a pattern of decreasing reductionistic analysis of identity, where binaries of race, culture or language are regarded as more fluid, multiple and transient, rather than mutually exclusive. The trend is towards challenging sets of value that are exclusionary, which indicates that it is part of the "ongoing social construction of cultural identities which makes them never completed, but always in process" (Erasmus, 2001). Furthermore, there is a negation of the monopoly of any single discipline's view of self and identity, and certainly, a blurring of disciplines. While this multidisciplinary approach may produce a substantial increase to an understanding of identity, it is a concern as to how disciplines will maintain their separate academic identities in an arena of increasing specialization, as well as deal with problems of conceptualization. A predominant, postmodernistic view surfacing in current research is that cultures, and hence identities, are essentially mutable, interactive and metamorphic. According to this view categories of race, language, culture and religion may be

historically, geographically or even politically constructed and can therefore change as contexts change (Beck, 1992; Rosenau, 1992; Bendle, 2002; Giddens, 2002).[76]

People with spiritual proclivities, however, experience more directly certain acuity about the existence of all living entities, a perception that is reflexively different from the mundane. Social science theorizing may explain the construction of identity in several ways, but *what* is that essential experience, that feeling or awareness that goes beyond context, through which individuals are able to relate to each other's experience as something similar, particularly in a religious context, that gives rise to a dialogue amongst peoples of different races, cultures and language? I propose that while there is an influence of self-reflexivity as well as context, there exists a more internal "enduring" sense of self, a consistent experience of sameness or consciousness, the essence which is a feeling or a sense of continuity of self which is beyond external binaries of race, language and culture. I propose that this concept of self moves away from the current theorizing about identity.

Using this as my groundwork I wish specifically to examine *how* and *why* the resident devotees[77] of the ISKCON Durban Temple of Understanding in South Africa, who are variegated in term of race, culture and language, are able to create their identities as devotees. In terms of the social scientific theorizing about identity, I begin this essay by discussing the essentialist and constructionist paradigms as two frameworks of how identity gets defined and theories postured. Thereafter I will examine several definitions and theories of identity construction, from Erikson's (1968) psychoanalytic posturing of identity, Mead's symbolic interactionism, and the more postmodern theory constructs of multiplicity and fluidity and self-reflexivity. I will also examine the theories of identity constructions within the collective contexts of race, language, culture and religion, (Hood, 1998; Murji and Hebert, 1999; Gould, 2000; Erasmus, 2001; and Hofmeyr, undated) as well as a more postmodern view that regards identity as external, pliable,

---

[76] Rosenau, cited in Segal, 1997 and Beck cited in Adams, 2003)
[77] resident devotee –a devotee in a monastic context at the ISKCON Temple, Chatsworh, Durban.

malleable and a product of discourse or of self-reflexivity (Beck[78], 1992; Segal, 1997; Bendle, 2002; Giddens, 2002). Thereafter I will analyse the Vedic[79] theological perspectives on identity, as presented in ISKCON's teachings.

3.2   Exploring Identity Theories

An overall review of the literature reveals that identity research falls into two opposing categories - constructionist on one hand, and essentialist on the other. Generally constructionist is regarded as leading to progressive social outcomes, while essentialist is regarded as traditional, positivist and often seen as reinforcing oppression. An interrogation of the available literature on identity theorizing reveals that to concretize or operationalize a definition of "identity" is often indistinct and varied. Bendle (2002: 1) maintains that identity has been deployed in diverse ways in analytical studies, and there exists a crisis in the conceptualization of identity as well as accounts of identity that are "inconsistent, under-theorized and incapable of bearing the analytical load required."

Tamimi (undated: 1)[80] defines identity as a, "oneness: that which endures as a self-regulating unity throughout change." Castells (2000: 6) describes identity as "the construction of meaning, the meaning of actions by social actors on the basis of social attributes,' in other words identity is not constructed in isolation. Gover and Gavelek (undated)[81] define identity as the idea "that we are a part of something beyond our selves" (e.g. South African, a parent, a lecturer) "while at the same time separable from it" (i.e. a unique individual marked by his or her proper name). They characterize identity as consisting of both *person* and the *self.* The *person* is that which is socially defined, that which is capacitated for public action, and the *self* – the origin of one's perception which is constant, neither the *person* nor *self* exist in isolation. Giddens (2002:53)

---

[78] Cited in Adams (2003)
[79] the word "Vedic" or "Vedas" is in reference to how ISKCON understands and uses the word.
[80] http://www.islamic-studies.org/tamim.htm
[81] Gover, Mark, R and Gavelek, J (undated): Persons and selves: The dialectics of identity.
http://www.ot.creighton.edu/.../gover%.20&%20Gavelek_Persons%20&%20selves_The%20Dialectics%20%20Identity.pdf

defines self-identity as that which is "reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his own biography". Thus identity may be seen as the "core" of the person, which can be described as deeply rooted, or the idea of a core may be rejected altogether in acceptance of a more malleable, inherently segmented identity, which is produced by discourse (Bendle, 2002). A reading of the literature suggests that the concepts "self" and "identity" seem to be used interchangeably, although the concept "person" may be used more in reference to the public, external and socially defined sense of self, while "self" is the individual's private experience of himself (Jenkins, 1996).

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

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

The theories of identity construction that I have reviewed in this essay generally fall into one of more of the above categories. Hood, Jr. (1998) places the approaches to identity research and theorizing into two groups: *intrapersonal psychological approach*, with its problems of operationalization and measurement, and typically investigated by clinical procedures; and the *interpersonal sociological approach*, operationalized and

investigated by conventional, empirical methodologies of the social sciences. The first six categories listed by Bendle above, may be classified as interpersonal and the last one as intrapersonal, or more constructionist in nature.

Erikson's (1968) classic theory of *Ego Identity* falls into the intrapersonal psychological approach. He regarded identity formation as a central psychoanalytic concept, and is characterized by how an individual defines one's sense of self. According to this theory ego identity is largely unconsciously determined. If the intricacy of understanding "Who am I?" is what characterizes identity, then identity formation is the process of integrating distinct segments of the self into a unique being, especially in adolescence, where the individual is identifying with different groups and exploring different roles. For optimal psychological health a stable identity is necessary, while the failure to achieve ego identity will result in identity confusion. Erikson's main contribution was his original proposition that personality development is marked by a series of stages universal to humanity, which he called the *Epigentic Principle* (1968: 92-93), stages which unfold according to a "ground plan",[82] characterized by crisis in each stage arising from physiological development and social demands. Crisis is not regarded as a catastrophe but a "turning point" (1968: 96). If the crisis is handled satisfactorily, healthy ego development occurs, e.g. trust, autonomy. If the crisis is handled incorrectly then personality dysfunction occurs, e.g. shame, doubt, guilt (Hjelle and Ziegler, 1981). It was thus Erikson's theory of "identity crisis" that gave impetus to the preponderance of identity studies in psychology, sociology, and other social sciences (Gleason, 1983; Tatum, 2000). However, although he acknowledged that identity formation is continuous over the lifespan of the individual, Erikson's emphasis on identity construction as an unconscious process cannot simply be imported from psychoanalysis or psychology to sociological analysis of identity unproblematically, since it is extremely central to

---

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

sociological analysis and therefore needs "adequate critical analysis and theorization" (Bendle, 2002: 3).

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

As a post symbolic interactionist, Jenkins (1996), basing his arguments on the work of Mead (1934), Goffman (1969) and Barth (1981), proposes a model of *internal-external dialectic of identification*, where he argues for a unitary model of selfhood. Jenkins argues that the "mind" is an inherently social phenomenon, echoing Mead's ideas that mind and selfhood are features of "embodied individuals", i.e. the human body is "simultaneously a referent of individual continuity, an index of collective similarity and difference, and a canvas upon which identification can play" (Jenkins, 1996: 21). Although many authors may regard the mind as automatically synonymous with the self, Jenkins argues, they are not the same. Furthermore, Jenkins contends that since individuals consciously pursue goals, they *want* to be seen in a particular manner to develop successful social identities. In other words, there is a definite self-conscious,

decision-making aspect to human behaviour – the internal-external dialectic between how they see themselves and how they are seen by others. Jenkins sees the "self" as parallel to identity, defining it as an "individuals reflexive sense of her or his own particular identity, constituted *vis-à-vis* others in terms of similarity and difference, without which we would not know who we are and hence would not be able to act" (1996: 29-30). A further concept directly relevant to my research is Jenkins discussion of an *institutional* identity. With specific reference to organisations, he mentions that since organisations are groups, they will have certain established norms of practice, activities and social classification, which will bestow particular socially identities upon its members. While Jenkins' emphasis is more on social and political allocation of individuals to particular identities, his discussion has implications for the allocation of identity within religious organisations like ISKCON. Religious organisations like ISKCON who practice an ancient culture may be regarded as a microcosm of that culture, albeit situated in the modern world. It is part of my investigation to determine how the norms of practice, activities and social classification mentioned by Jenkins, operate within ISKCON to produce the devotee identity.

Membership in organisations or collectives that act as reference groups provides potential sources of identity for the individual. Harter (1977) mentions that there is a resurgence of interest by contemporary theorists in interactive processes of identity formation. While such membership is fundamental to the process of identity formation, it is seldom restricted to one group. Just as the identities are varied, individuals may have a variety of identities or sub-identities, each supported by different group memberships. Although these identities may be hierarchically ordered, compartmentalized, or disparately galvanized in varied situations, a sense of self or personal continuity occurs, accentuating the interpersonal dynamics "in which individuals reflexively define themselves by the same labels used by the groups with which they identify" (Hood, 1998).[83] This idea gives credence to an empirical study with college student identity conducted by Burke and Reitzes (1981:83) that "identities motivate behaviours that have meanings consistent (isomorphic) with the identity", that the same frames of reference are used by a person to

---

[83] http://hirr.hartsem.edu/ency/contrib.htm

assess his identity and behaviour in a particular situation. For example, if being feminine means having a quality of tenderness, and if one defines oneself as being feminine, then one has to act in ways that can be interpreted by oneself and others as acting "tender". Postmodernists, however, would suggest this is an "external imposition" of identity, which contradicts its fluid and metamorphic nature.

3.3 Postmodernism and Identity Construction

According to Segal (1997) postmodernists fall into two groups: the sceptics and the affirmatives, the former having a more pessimistic view of the post modern age, and the latter, optimistic. While certain differences exist, both denounce the appeal to *Reason*,[84] and argue that each situation is different and calls for special understanding as meanings vary from culture to culture. Postmodernists reject *Reason* because it is contradictory to concepts of emotion, introspection, intuition, autonomy, creativity, and imagination. They also view positivism as a form of imperialism – tools of colonial imposition, used to legitimize oppression (Rosenau, 1992)[85]. Classification of individuals is regarded as a bureaucratic device used in government and social control. Social identities are thus regarded as being developed, and allocated within power relations (Jenkins, 1996), a point further elucidated by Harro (2000) in examining diversity and social justice in the USA. He states that we are all born into a particular set of social identities as well as influenced by powerful socializing forces, all of which predispose us to "the unequal roles in the dynamic system of oppression" (2000: 15). His theory of the *Cycle of Socialization* describes how our socialization begins from birth as individuals without choice who are merely shaped into particular identities by already existing structures of history, traditions, beliefs, prejudices, stereotypes and other mechanics. Parents and other significant caregivers shape our self-concepts and self-perceptions, and norms. Some of us are fortunate to be born into "agent" groups, i.e. those that have more social power, privilege and opportunities, while others are born into "target" groups – those that are subordinate, "disenfranchised, exploited and victimized" by various types of prejudice,

---

[84] the view that the same rules apply in all cases
[85] cited in Segal, 1997

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

Giddens (2002) theorizes that the rigid boundaries of tradition and culture pose barriers to one's self understanding, and reflexive self awareness provides the individual in post traditional settings more freedom to construct self-identity. The primary determinants of behaviour then are how individuals receive and process information from the environment, how they develop this *individualization*. According to Beck (1992),[86] " individualization of life situations and processes thus means that biographies become *self-reflexive*, socially prescribed biography is transformed into biography that is self produced and continues to be produced". The self is seen to determine the nature of its own identity through exerting conscious choices, not bound by fixed and culturally determined positions, but increasing autonomy and control.

From the above selected reviews it is therefore gleaned that the theorizing of identity may be categorized as essentialist/constructionist, and intrapersonalist/interpersonalist. Other contemporary social theorists in the field of social change and self-identity have tried to describe an extended "process of reflexivity" as the mainstay of the postmodern identity. The large volume of research about the self described hitherto indicates that the

---

[86] quoted in Adams (2003: 223)

concept of self is at least accepted as real by researchers. Hoyle (undated) provides an interesting synopsis of what social and behavioural scientists understand about the self:

- The self is reflexive – it can become the object of its own attention,

- How one understands the world is filtered through how one understands oneself,

- Although generally stable after adolescence, different aspects of the self may predominate at different times, creating an impression of fluidity, and

- The public self that is influenced by different personal and social motives, may not be congruent with the self of which we are privately conscious.

Furthermore Hoyle lists the following as domains which are still unclear to researchers:

- that the exact location of the self in the body is not known – the exact areas of the brain where "self-relevant thought and emotion" not yet being identified,

- the degree to which the self is extant at birth,

- how profoundly culture influences the self, and

- that certain aspects of self can only be inferred and may not be fully describable, or observable.

Although it may be understood that identity formation is neither only self-reflexive, nor only influenced by the environment, it is useful to describe how identity formation continues to be "enduring" even in collective situations. While the external context shapes choices of dress, music, food, mannerisms, modes of worship, how does the ISKCON devotee deconstruct all of this in relation to his more existential self?[87] Is the experience the same for someone who is "White" or "Indian" or "Black"? As stated earlier, I do not wish to essentialize race, culture or language, but to privilege devotee identity. The purpose for examining these categories arises from the fact that the

---

[87] By the existential self here I refer to the individual's experience, consciousness or sense of awareness of "I am"; a reflective state or an intuitive feeling of being or existing.

membership of the ISKCON Durban Temple consists of individuals from a variety of racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

3.4 Featuring Identity: Race, Culture, Language and Religion

While the research tends to point in the direction of the arbitrariness of racial/cultural identities, "they cannot simply be willed away" and "from a standpoint of social critique … remain crucial categories" (Gould, 2000: 432). This is especially valid in South Africa where the ideas of race were entrenched by law within the apartheid era and still continue to influence society (Erasmus, 2005). The question that arises is: if racial, cultural and linguistic categories cannot be simply ignored, how then do the devotees of the ISKCON Durban Temple, regardless of these differences, create their identities? In the following sections I examine the influence of apartheid in South Africa, race, culture and language and some current trends in identity construction.

3.4.1 Apartheid: A context of Race

In South Africa, the historical and socio-political context of race, language and religion has had a profound influence on how South Africans shaped their identities. In terms of apartheid policy, the people of South Africa were categorised into three main racial categories, namely 'Europeans' (Whites), 'Natives' (Blacks) and 'Asians' (Indians) or those who could not with certainty be classified into either of the first two categories, were grouped together under the term 'Coloureds'. In addition to the socio-political scenario, Blacks, were provided inferior education which reinforced the idea of racial inferiority of Blacks, while Whites, were given a better quality of education, the content of which, to a large extent, transmitted the idea that they were racially superior.

Religion in South Africa was also used to marginalize cultures; Christianity the official religion of the state, and especially the Dutch Reformed Church, was regarded as superior to other religions (Chidester, 1998). The same was true of language. Afrikaans, the language of the National Party was a central prop of Nationalist Education policy.

Those groups who spoke this language were advantaged and those that did not were discriminated against. This crisis was graphically demonstrated in the international media, when Hector Petersen a 13-year old school going youth was shot dead, and hundreds of other youth were injured by police, while protesting against Afrikaans as the enforced medium of instruction in their schools in Soweto on 16 June 1976.[88]

The history of apartheid South Africa is replete with incidents of forceful and visible attempts of state bureaucracy to entrench particular racial identities to maintain power, economic and social control, the influence of which, according to Erasmus (2005), still continues to be prevalent in South Africa. However, under its ten-year-old democracy, South Africa is undergoing "a radical process of transformation, associated with which is the search for a new national identity and new models of identification for a diverse array of peoples" (Marschall, 2001). This transformation has also heralded in a championing of indigenous culture and identity. Yet simultaneously there is a desire of the state to create a "rainbow nation" – a celebration of the multicultural diversity and movement away from stereotyped racial classification of the past, to create a unified nation.

This position also reflects the current academic trends in deconstruction of racial categories and emphasizes the fluidity, and multiplicity of identity construction, not only of black but other race groups as well. Hardiman (1994) in her study of the racial development of whites in the USA states that although many whites in United States have a strong sense of ethnic identity that is tied to their immigrant ancestors' country of origin, they do not have a strong sense of racial identity or consciously think about it. Nonetheless, "their identity as members of the White group in the United States has a profound impact on their lives".

Erasmus (2005: 8) regards race as a product of socio-historical and political factors, without biological or cultural basis, stating that these are meanings one learns or teaches to one's children, and as such can be unlearned as well. Although it is useful to

---

[88] It was against this backdrop that the *Hare Krishna Movement* first reached the shores of South Africa in 1972. Bhaktivedanta Swami was to remark in respect of apartheid: "The philosophy of South Africa is simply on the bodily platform. It is all nonsense" (Letter to Cyavana, 1975, quoted in Riddha dasa (1997: 12) ushering forth one of the main ideas of identity within ISKCON.

understand race as a social construct, "even in 'non-racial South Africa' – racialised scripts of reality and behaviour are norms rather than exception". Erasmus reports that race still continues to shape economic inequality amongst poor and working class black people in South Africa; that learners in high education sectors still tend to group themselves racially; and that historically white, coloured or Indian institutions either marginalize black learners or assume they will assimilate into the existing cultural status quo. Yet tensions created by race may not only be against blacks. In 2003 famous South African playwright Mbongeni Ngema wrote a song, aired on the media, criticizing Indians as exploiters of Blacks which fostered anti-Indian sentiment amongst blacks. This prompted several leading Indian cultural leaders and scholars to react publicly. It took the personal intervention by former state president Dr Nelson Mandela with Ngema to have the song withdrawn and to quell the tension created. Further racial incidents have been reported in the media. A group of Indian teachers working in a rural school in northern Kwa Zulu Natal (which is a black community) were subject to vehement opposition and threats of violence by certain community members who wanted them to be replaced with black teachers (*Daily News* editorial, 2005; Mhlongo, 2005). Such incidents of suspicion and mistrust which seems to easily provoke black backlash, remains an obstacle to inter-racial harmony in South Africa.

Another category of concern in South Africa is the position of the "coloured" person. Chijioke (1999) who is a person of mixed race parents – the so called "coloured" person, focuses on his experiences with race in Nigeria, South Africa and United States. He regards race as "an artificial construct, externally prescribed and imposed by social agreement, not self-determined and assumed by the individual who is 'of race' – "I am black because the society agreed I am black not because I chose to assume a black identity". However in South Africa, the coloured identity has "never been seen as an identity in its own right" (Erasmus, 2001: 17). The ambiguity of being marginalized between Black and White has resulted in several compromises and complexities in terms of political and cultural identity. These conceptions still persist today as many regard coloured people as having no cultural history from which to derive their identity, and many of the "coloureds" seek their religious identity as Christian or Muslim. Racial

comments against Coloured people by Roderick Ngoro[89], a black person who was the media advisor to the mayor of Cape Town, provoked the ire of Coloured people prompting a group of 20 Coloured clergymen to request the mayor for the dismissal of the said accused (Petersen, 2005).

Membership in a racial group may not be of choice but being categorized in a particular situation by oppression – an "ascriptive identity" – which means *how* members of a particular group are considered by others, in particular by the dominant group. That one's identity may be "problematized by external sources" was reported by Francis (2005) in his study of the experience of self-identification of Indian-White biracial young adults and the factors affecting their choice of identity. He found that for the nine biracial youths in his study, their identities were clearly not based on an essentialist notion of race. Race was just another part of a much more multifaceted picture consisting of gender, class, religious, age and sexual orientation identities. For these youth, there was no clear self-definition of race, self-reference being made either in ethnic or cultural terms, with race coming across as "elusive". The youth only became sensitized to issues of their race when attention was drawn onto it from outside sources, i.e. when others tried to categorize them into "rigid racial identities" by asking "What are you?"

In this regard, Gould (2000:433) examines the role of *self-reflexivity* or *self-ascription* in democratically and socially construed characteristics in the USA postulating that racism continue to persist within traditional ideas of democracy because it inherently has " a social ontology of individuals whose relations to each other are external" She argues for a reinterpretation of its norms in terms of "concrete universality", which regards individuals as internally related to one another, which would eliminate the bias that democracy has towards one leading set of cultural characteristics (i.e. of the majority) in favour of a more multicultural democracy. One is aware that the structural dynamics in USA and South Africa differ, nonetheless in a more liberal model there would be liberty to form one's group identity with others and develop multiple group identities determined by a process of "self-ascription". These studies point to the arbitrariness of racial or other external classification.

---

[89] His racial statements led to him being dismissed.

In the South African context at least, progressive steps have been made to accommodate the diverse cultural groups within the democracy. The "inclusive multiculturalism" proposed by Gould (2000) is sufficiently accommodated within the South African Constitution for minority groups to practice and develop their culture and traditions, while there simultaneously exists a desire to celebrate the multicultural diversity of its citizens (Marschall, 2001).

What is significant about this for my research with the ISKCON devotees in South Africa is that even within the apartheid years, this organisation had a varied membership, and multicultural and non-racial collaboration. My proposed examination of the teachings, practices, activities and context is related to my critical question as to *how* and *why* the resident devotees of the ISKCON Temple of Understanding, Durban, in South Africa, who are variegated in term of race, culture and language, are able to create or re-create their cultural and religious identities as devotees. It becomes relevant here then to consider a definition of culture, and the influence of this on identity.

3.4.2   Culture and Identity

According to Scupin (2000: 6-7), culture may be defined as: "a shared way of life that includes values, beliefs, and norms transmitted within a particular society from generation to generation". It is a process of social interaction in which one acquires one's culture through both conscious and unconscious operations which Scupin calls *enculturation.* Such enculturation will therefore strongly influence the forms of cultural expression – music, food, dress, mannerisms and even perception of the world, which is no doubt central to self and social identity.

In the face of initial fragmentation of traditional societies by colonial and European invasions, and of increasing globalization and multiculturalism, it would be difficult to find an intact virgin culture, hidden in the depths of the jungle, or nestled in secret valleys, to be stumbled upon by the caricature of the colonialist or adventurer, who would write perhaps, in jaundiced fascination about the lives and activities of the natives – an article to receive rave reviews back home at the national Naturalist Society! In fact there

67

seems to be an infinite complexity of permutations when one examines the influence of culture on identity – culture, language, and religion often being strongly intertwined. The traditional domains of such cultural observation belong to anthropology, but as discussed earlier there is a blurring of lines across disciplines which increases the complexities of cultural studies on identity even more. Friedman (1994: 8-12) provides examples of several cultural groups often described by anthropologists in ways that would make them seem as isolated communities, as really cultural groups, who have become socially fragmented and become integrated into the larger social and economic systems: the Mekeo on the south coast of Papua, New Guinea; the village societies on the Lower Congo, the Congo Pygmies, Amazonian Indians, Bushmen, and others – all of whom have become "woven into the evolutionary drama of Western self-identity".

Appiah (1996)[90] proposes the idea of race itself be eradicated and be replaced with a concept of "racial identities", which he sees as superior to using the concept of "culture". Gould (2000) argues that while this idea may hold some advantage, it still seems incompatible with a concept of free transformation of people in directions they individually or jointly choose or strive for, proposing instead the concept of "cultural identities" as more advantageous in its openess and freedom. She strongly supports the idea that multiculturalism is prevalent in the production of religion, from which I glean are elements of syncretism and bricolage.[91] She feels that a truly multicultural democracy will support the efforts of diverse cultures in their self interpreted distinctiveness and interaction with other cultures. In South Africa, as I mentioned earlier, there is a desire of the state to create a "rainbow nation" – to move away from stereotyped racial classification of the past while simultaneously commemorating the country's multifarious indigenous cultures and identities. The state has also given official recognition to the use of indigenous languages in the different provinces in South Africa,[92] and while English continues to be a dominant language, schools in these different provinces have the option

---

[90] cited in Gould (2000).
[91] Syncretism- combination of elements of two cultures; bricolage – combination of elements of several cultures to produce a 'newer" one.
[92] South Africa is divided into 9 provinces (states). Historically, different linguistic groups are found in each of these provinces.

to use the local vernacular as the first or second language of instruction, depending on the demographic composition of their learners.

3.4.3   Language and Identity

The research on linguistic identity indicates that while some feel that it is inextricably linked to cultural identity (Mabele, undated)[93] others argue that language does not have to be commissioned to a central role in defining the identity of any ethnic group and a culture can express its thoughts in any language, as well not be restricted by the dominant language of the society (Corson, cited in Murji and Herbert, 1999). In interviews conducted with the Isma'ili community adults in Calgary, Canada, Murji and Hebert (1999) found a diverse set of cultures and languages amongst them, yet their community identity was determined by the traditions of its faith, the binding force of which was the practice of their religion. It may be determined from this that the principal form of identification was their religious faith and not culture or language. Although geographical, political and linguistic affiliations may change, religious identity remained constant as this is what was regarded as crucial, both collectively and individually. Murji and Hebert (1999) maintain that "Such an ideology can provide life-giving symbols which integrate humans socially, establish creeds, beliefs, ritual and ceremony as well as provide enduring elements of community solidarity". That language may not be a primary influence on culture and religion, is also reflected in comments by the president of South African Christian Venacular and Cultural Trust, Deena Muthan, who voices his concern that Indian Christian youths are "becoming too westernized" and "forsaking their culture and language in the name of religion" (Kuppan, 2005: 6). Muthan, who conducts his biblical services in Tamil, expresses that "language and culture has nothing to do with religion".

---

[93] http://wrt-ntertext.syr.edu/XI/linguistic.html

3.4.4 Religion and Identity

A scenario similar to the Isma'ili community may be found amongst the ISKCON Durban devotees – many of the devotees are from diverse cultures. Furthermore, it is observed that the devotees adopt the ancient Sanskrit and Bengali found in their scriptures as language of prayer. The influence of religious faith on identity has important implications for the understanding of the identity of the Hare Krishna devotees. How the common religious practices of the devotees of ISKCON Temple of Understanding, Durban, as well their faith in those practices, significantly influence their religious identity, is the subject of my investigation.

Wuthnow (undated)[94] examines this point in relation to Christianity. The term "Christian" indicates an identity - a self definition, but it is generally conferred upon the person by social institutions, i.e. the Church. He feels that for the term "Christian" to endure in this century will depend on how successfully the church can continue to confer this identity upon the individual. Hood (1998) also contends that religious identity forms a fundamental reference group for the individual as it socially bestows him with a particular identity. Besides the social aspects of identifying with the religious group and practicing its activities, psychological processes also occur which fosters high ego involvement, making religion salient in many situations. Religious identity is most effectively achieved when there is consistency between the collective identity and one's ego identity, which underscores the research that intrapersonal, (i.e. internal, psychoanalytic, and unconscious) and interpersonal, (i.e. product of social interaction) processes are at play in shaping identity. This gives rise to the questions as to how the resident devotees deconstruct "collective identity", their "ego" or individual identity, and what would be regarded as consistency between the two.

3.4.5 Globalization and Multiculturalism

With increasing globalization, and multiculturalism, individuals are subject to extensive and multifarious influences upon identity construction. While some researchers attribute

---

[94] http://www.christiancentury.org

70

this to the predominance of eastern movements (Bellah, 1976; Wuthnow, 1976; Needleman, 1977)[95] others ascribe this to the emergence of holistic movements, indigenous cultures, magical and pre-Christian pagan traditions, feminism, eco-feminism and New Age trends (Melissa Raphael, 1996; Bron Taylor, 1997; Hamilton, 2002) within the postmodern paradigm. Researchers also suggest that such a trend has been extant for some time but has simply gained momentum due to the improvements of communication, migration and multiculturalism between West and East.

- **The Easternization Thesis**

According to Jacobsen (2004:134), "the growing importance of and increasing interest in religious traditions we are witnessing in the world today is connected in several ways to the establishment of diaspora communities". Sayyid (undated: 4) defines a diasporic community as "ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homeland". Jacobsen (2004) maintains that as minorities in a foreign land, people are often challenged to reflect on their cultural identities, increasing their awareness of religious identity as well as religious differences. Several researchers have sought to document an unprecedented explosion of interest in acceptance of Eastern religions with corresponding abandonment of Christianity,[96] while others have examined the impact of specific traditions, like Buddhism, on the West.[97] Especially prominent is the view of Campbell (cited in Hamilton, 2002:244) that:

> The traditional Western cultural paradigm no longer dominates in so
> called 'Western' societies, but.....has been replaced by an 'Eastern' one.
> This fundamental change may have been assisted by the introduction of
> obviously Eastern ideas and influences into the West......

---

[95] all cited in Hamilton (2002)
[96] Needleman, 1977; Bellah, 1976; Wuthnow, 1976, all cited in Hamilton, 2002
[97] Green, 1989; Wilson, 1990; Bauman, 1991; Somers, 1991; Heelas, 1996; Bell, 1998, all cited in Hamilton, 2002.

Campbell sees this as manifesting in the rise of holistic environmentalism and deep ecology, human potential and psycho-therapy movements, religions of the self, a declining belief in a personal God, and increasing belief in reincarnation.

Is the surge of interest in Eastern religions attributable to diasporic communities? Junghare (2004), investigating Hindu Religious traditions in Minnesota regards the upsurge of Hinduism in America to have started in the 1960s, especially when the Indian Immigration Act was removed in 1965. This impelled a large number of Hindu swamis and preachers to enter the USA and establish various Hindu organisations. She specifically mentions the *Hare Krishna Movement* and A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami as the foremost representatives of Hindus in America. What Junghare fails to mention is that Bhaktivedanta Swami did not preach to the Hindus in America. He preached to the hippies (predominantly white) and provided a platform for the counterculture of the West to find religious expression, although to see ISKCON entirely as a product of the counterculture is also misleading (Ketola, 2002).[98]

In the case of the devotees of the ISKCON, an attempt to explain its development as a product of diaspora will be inappropriate. As has been stated in section 1.6, Bhaktivedanta Swami did not preach to the Hindus, neither was there an already established diasporic *Gaudiya Vaisnava* community outside of India which would be more amenable to his efforts of establishing this *Movement*.

It was movements such as these that gave rise to what Hamilton (2002) suggests is a pervasiveness of an impression that the Western religious worldview has become increasingly influenced by Eastern traditions and philosophies (i.e. East and South Asian), especially Buddhism, and more recently the idea of a decline in Western forms of religion and an emergence of Eastern forms – which he calls the *Easternization thesis*.

Hamilton (2002) however, argues that the influence of *Easternization* is less radical than it has been made out to be and describes several problems with such a concept, namely: Eastern religions have been disingenuously stereotyped; there exists an insensitivity to

---

[98] I have discussed the "Indian" and "Hindu" identity of ISKCON in chapter 1, section 1.6.

several and distinct differences between Eastern religions themselves; too eager an acceptance of these developments as religions, and the ignoring of, or inability to deal with the inner worldly nature of trends within Western thinking.

A detailed discussion of each of the above points does not fall within the scope of my research, but in summary Hamilton argues that it may not be so much *Easternization* than the influence of *Globalization* that is responsible. This he sees as a part of a process of exchange of ideas between West and East that has been happening for some time, but has increased in pace due to improvements in communication, migration and multiculturalism, and other shifts like magical and pre-Christian pagan traditions, feminism, eco-feminism and New Age trends within the postmodern paradigm.

- **Understanding New Religious Movements (NRMs)**

New Religious Movements (NRMs) began emerging since the 1960s as religious minorities were allowed greater voice in Western countries. Often they were met with suspicion and fear, generally labeled as anti-Christian, and became the target for anti-cult movements (Brown, 2000). Ideas of "brainwashing" or mental manipulation were posited as techniques for conversion. Initially regarded as an New Religious Movement, ISKCON has had its fair share of anti-sect or anti-cult attacks in the USA, as well as its problems, notably corruption and accusations of child abuse in its early years which may have fuelled anti-cult suspicions, but it has emerged as a bona-fide representative of the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* tradition, and has gained wide acceptance (Brooks, 1995; King, 2001). Although there seems to be a loss of influence of anti-cultists in the US, some political lobbying and sensational media attention has been prominent in Western Europe against NRMs, which governments regard as pretentious religions that mask their real agenda of power and control over followers.

Merudevi dasi (2001) describes the case of the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission in France compiling a list of 173 so called "sects"[99] in 1996. Scholars of sociology, religious history, law and other disciplines criticized the study as flawed due to inaccuracies in distinguishing between groups, using vague and dated definitions, lack of consultation with religious scholars or any of the listed groups. Certainly there are organisations that are harmful, but it was inaccurate to generalize, as these groups varied widely in beliefs and practices. This can be viewed against the backdrop of a largely pluralistic society as one result of globalization expounded by Hamilton (2002). How society responds to this has important consequences for both the personal and collective identities of groups and society.

A detailed discussion about the *Deep Ecology* or *Radical Environment Movement* in North America is given by Bron Taylor (1997), with emphasis on how Euro-americans who try to identify with such movements by practice may be accused of cultural appropriation and cultural imperialism. Furthermore, Native Indian Americans have objected to the commercializing of, and profiteering from their traditional practices by people from outside their culture. It can be gleaned from her article that the identity of the traditional Indian American is fixedly integrated with the practice of their native culture.

Within the last three decades a new form of religiosity referred to as *New Age* appeared. It uses techniques from a wide variety of non-traditional and natural spiritual practices, especially non-Western, like healing, channeling, neo-paganism, and belief in angels and spiritual guardians amongst others. It is controversial, regarded as anti-Christian by some, and has been labelled as a "cult" (Brown, 2000). New Agers are highly cynical of

---

[99] This was after several suicide cases were reported in Switzerland , Canada and France in 1994 and 1995 in an organisation called the *Solar Order Temple*. Merudevi states that there "seems a strong likelihood that most that died were murdered", citing police reports of money laundering and drug trade as possible motives. Without being able to give a description of "sects" the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission produced a report that identified characteristics of groups that would suggest they were sects. Applying these criteria, the report listed 173 so called "sects". Merudevi does not list any names of groups.

organized religion. The scepticism of New Age groups about science, governments and organized religion, as well as its characteristic eclecticism makes it a postmodern movement.

Melissa Raphael (1996:199, 205) discusses the emergence of *Goddess Feminism* as a new emancipatory religion which "is founded within a modern political struggle to bring about the demise of patriarchy", albeit a late modernist movement. In their search for new religious identity, Goddess feminists are modernist in "their critical hostility to tradition". They deny that they constitute a "religion", equating that with "patriarchal authoritarianism" and preferring to be called a "spirituality".

New Religious Movements are characterized by increasingly fleeting ideas of what constitutes *religion* and *spirituality*. I propose a general definition of *religion* accepted in its formalized sense – a worship of God or supernatural being, which may or may not include structured rituals or processes, but the goal of which is to create in the practitioner a mood of reverence, appreciation or devotion and a lifestyle of morality. King (1996) explores the varied and often ambiguous uses of the term "spirituality", ranging from a traditional meaning of religiosity, to a sense of awe and mystery, mystical awareness, the deep human experience, the increasing belief in the paranormal, or anything that may even vaguely resemble religious-like events.

While the term New Religions may include several unconventional movements in the West, one has to distinguish between genuine traditions that have roots going back hundreds, if not thousands of years, and what are syncretistic movements that have emerged as off-shoots from naturalistic, native and ecological movements. It may be a "new" movement in the West, but that may not make it new, a claim that ISKCON makes that it is historically rooted in the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* tradition (Ketola, 2002).

The question that needs to be asked then is – why have *NRMs* emerged? According to Hunter (cited in Dawson), humans have a need for a stable cultural order, a type of institutionalization, but the modern world has become so de-institutionalized, that

75

humans are experiencing greater crises of meaning, alienation, and insecurity which seem "endemic to advanced industrial societies". The emergence of new religions indicates a significant change in the role of religion or the character of cultures. The role or organized religion seems to be waning and individuals are able to exercise their freedom of choice (Dawson, undated).[100] Dawson concludes that indications exist that organized religion is experiencing some serious trouble, but there is a strong interest in so-called "religious questions" and "spiritual matters," especially amongst the youth. Thus the decrease in influence of organized religion, and a rise of new age and "spiritual movements", indicates in part, that the individual is still seeking a more spiritual and enduring identity.

The trends described by Dawson once again juxtaposes the idea of identity as being the "core" of the person, against the self as a more malleable, inherently segmented identity, produced by discourse (Bendle, 2002). Adams (2003) argues that the unrestrained reflexivity as suggested by various researchers is problematic in that it neglects the nature of the current age, and ignores self-reflexivity as largely socially entrenched. The idea that cultural contexts have been surpassed by extended reflexivity is unfounded since thinking is always bounded by the culture and society of which we are part. The understanding of reflexivity is itself a product of a "neo-modernist' perspective – the idea of the self as an empowered, freethinking agent is itself the product of a cultural tradition – that of Western modernity – "a culture that values rationality, teleology, voluntarism and instrumentalism!"(Adams, 2003:225).[101]

Bendle (2002) maintains that while some researchers assume an optimistic view of the self as being able to adapt to the challenges of globalization, the plasticity they ascribe to it dissolves any idea of a core to personality completely. On one hand the individual exercises his freedom of choice, and on the other, the lack of institutionalization and a stable order as described by Dawson, produces for the individual a crisis of identity. In describing the constructionist tendency of total fluidity and multiplicity in identity

---

[100] http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0SOR/is_n2_v59
[101] emphasis (exclamation mark) added

construction, Brubaker and Cooper (cited in Bendle, 2002:12) states that such an idea: "leaves us without a rationale for talking about 'identities' at all.......if identity is everywhere, it is nowhere." The question arises then as to what sustains a continuity of the self in a world where such continuity is increasingly fundamental.

Bendle (2002) thus suggests that a *crisis of identity* exists in two ways, viz. a crisis in theory, and crisis in society:

- **The Crisis in Theory**

The question is which disciplines should the crisis in identity theory concern. Should it concern just psychoanalysis/psychology or sociology? Indeed it must concern sociology, but since there has been insufficient theorizing, it is characterized by imprecision. Just anyone can discuss identity without being accountable in terms of meanings, "its theoretical provenance, ideological commitments, or the source of its positive valorization" (Bendle, 2002:5). The historicity of "identity" reveals that it only became a major issue in Western society from the 1800s following the period of the Industrial Revolution, and democratic transformations of government, decline in feudalism and attrition of religious authority. According to Bendle (2002:16) modernity destabilized existing external social structures like "geography, community, employment, class, etc," that actually buttressed a sense of continuity of the self. Factors like "ancestry, social rank, gender, moral virtue, religion, etc," that provided a sense of differentiation were delegitimized. This intensified during the twentieth century, and produced an "irresistible expansion of postwar capitalism and consumerism". The sudden, profuse social change and differentiation that precipitated itself upon the individual created a crisis of identity. Bendle further describes that it was within this context that ego psychology and psychoanalysis rose to prominence, and the corresponding critiques from quarters like Marxists and other radicals made their presence known. The further influence of Focault and Lacan, and the rise of poststructuralist and post modernist theorists, complexified the theorizing about identity. By the 1990s the concept of identity had become so profuse that it was "crippled by a lack of conceptual rigour" (Bendle,

2002: 16). Thus, Bendle feels, for contemporary social analysis to progress, an obligation exists on the part of contemporary sociology to adequately theorize about the dual organizing polarities of identity and globalization. This should be done while interfacing with key models of identity derived from constructionism, psychoanalysis, and psychology, and provide its own judicious and uncompromising analysis of the concept of identity. Since there exists a crisis in conceptualization of identity, it may be argued that religious models of identity (in organisations like ISKCON) should also be included since such theorizing is becoming more highly relevant within the fields of identity studies. In terms of social scientific understanding of cultural phenomena, the literature suggests a particular shift in paradigm towards a more physio-psychic realm, converging towards more enduring philosophical statements in the realm of traditional wisdom generally and more particularly in the fields of consciousness and identity (Reams, 1998).

- **The Crisis in Society**

The crisis in society s reflected as a crisis in mental health, where the "sense of uncertainty in the external world of risk society is directed inwards to create a sense of an unstable and untrustworthy self" (Bendle, 2002:3). This is clearly observable in the symptoms of increased stress, depression and anxiety,[102] and I would postulate, increasingly antisocial conduct resultant from profuse identity diffusion and nihilism. An article in a local newspaper *The Independent on Saturday,* (1 January 2005: 7) carried the dramatic title: *A lost generation: British teens come first in anti-social behaviour.* This is regarded as the consequences of "a horrifying litany of social, moral and intellectual degeneration". The article further describes that in education,

> "...more insidiously still, the curriculum has been progressively emptied
> of content. Truth and objectivity have been replaced by opinion and
> feelings; overcoming obstacles and coping with setbacks have all but

---

[102] By the year 2020 depression will be the number 2 cause of disability worldwide. (World Health Organisation, cited in "Understanding Depression", information pamphlet distributed by Depression and Anxiety Support Group (2005): Proactive Hygiene Solutions: South Africa

written out of the script; and what children are taught has to be 'relevant' to what they already know, instead of introducing them to experience beyond their own lives." (Philips, 2005:7).

The "decline of organized religion ... the 'me society' of rights and entitlements ..." and the "collapse of national self-belief and Britain's sense of purpose" are given as reasons for this sad state of affairs. Another researcher, Mansfield (2000), contends that although in this postmodern era, the concern with self (what he calls our *subjectivity*) is a main point of reference in Western societies where "things and events are now understood on the level of the pulsing, breathing, feeling individual self", simultaneously the "self is reported to be feeling less confident, more isolated, fragile and vulnerable than ever...the self is at risk". This happens as a result of the ambivalence produced by

" alienated intellectuals and suicidal youth; culture wars and volatile markets; endless addictions to foods, work, alcohol and narcotics; sexual inadequacy and thrill killers – all feed into education and entertainment industries that keep the intensity of our selfhood perpetually on the boil, nagging and unsettling, but also inspiring and thrilling us with mystery, fear and pleasure" (2000: 2).

Harro (2000: 20) also powerfully declares that the very foundations upon which society is built – "dualism, hierarchy, competition, individualism, domination, colonialism and the scarcity principle" – is the root cause of the high drop-out rates, crime, poverty, drug abuse and other problems society is facing. This crisis of identity may be related to greater self emphasis in the current world, greater social mobility, and the flexibility of identity due to what some researchers call *detraditionalization* – where self identity is created without the boundaries of tradition and culture in a post traditionalist society (Bendle, 2002; Adams, 2003). As stated earlier, Hunter (cited in Dawson, undated) also describes how *de-institutionalization* in advanced industrial nations has led to a feeling of alienation and insecurity. This creates tension between the core notion of identity as having a "subsisting sameness" and the models that emphasize an almost unlimited

degree of fragmentation, fluidity and plasticity of the self – that is, between valuing identity as so fundamental as to be crucial to personal well-being, and theorizing that identity is something unlimitedly fluid, multiple, impermanent and fragmentary.

If the crisis in society, resulting from *detraditionalization* and *de-institutionalization* are regarded as producing feelings of alienation and insecurity, which directly impinges upon the individual's perception of self and identity, it would be interesting in view of this crisis to examine whether an ancient tradition or institution with regularized, stringent practices is able to confer upon its subscribers an identity that would lead to stability and security. The development of identity of the resident devotees of ISKCON Durban Temple, which is the subject of my study, is relevant in this regard. ISKCON itself represents an ancient culture, which fulfils the requirement of traditionalization, and its membership consists of an international, cosmopolitan set of practitioners from various religious and cultural backgrounds, which would allow us to examine the influence of easternization, globalization and multiculturalism upon identity.

In the next section I will examine the theological basis upon which the ISKCON devotee identity is created, which consists of several ancient scriptures, especially the *Bhagavad-gita As It Is, Srimad Bhagavatam,* and a compilations of essays, interviews, lectures and other texts by Bhaktivedanta Swami and some of his prominent disciples. The documentary analysis of these scriptures reveals a great emphasis on the nature and characteristics of the self, and its representations within the fabric of society.

3.5   The Self and Identity: Vedic Theological Perspectives[103]

Although the interrogation of available literature on identity theorizing produces varied and sometimes indistinct definitions of identity, viz. that the self is a product of inner psychological processes, or produced in the course of social interaction, or that which is more fluid and reflexively produced, what has emerged from the literature review is that researchers at least accept the concept of self as extant. Baars (1996: 1) considers the

---

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

sense of self as "conceptually coherent and well-supported by hard evidence". While the dynamics of the *self* and the *person* are interwoven, the self may be considered to exist as a separate entity, what Baars (1996: 7) calls "the self as observer" of conscious experiences. This knower is regarded as the "I", which has access to "perception, thought, memory and, body control". Baars regards the self as a structure that remains largely constant across many different life circumstances. In this regard, Bendle's (2002) comments that the plasticity ascribed to the self by postmodernists ignores the idea of a core to personality, and his question as to what sustains a continuity of self in a changing world, becomes increasingly significant. Relevant discussion about the stability and constancy of the self, its nature and how it is influenced by extraneous factors are discussed in the Vedic literature. Since it is directly relevant to my research on the identity construction of the ISKCON devotees, the following section examines the theological perspectives on identity found in the main ISKCON literatures, with an explanation by Satsvarupa das Gosvami (1977) framing the understanding of what the ISKCON tradition considers as constituting the *Vedas*.

Satsvarupa dasa Gosvami (1977) explains that Vedic literature is that which comes from the *Vedas*. Although some scholars maintain that only the original four *Vedas – Rg, Atharva, Yajur* and *Sama,* are genuine Vedic literatures, Satsvarupa cites Madhvacarya[104] who describes the *Rg, Yajur, Sama, Atharva Vedas*, as well as *Mahabharata* (which includes the *Bhagavad-gita*), *Pancaratra*, the original *Ramayana*, and the *Puranas* (supplements to Vedic literature) as all Vedic literature. According to Satsvarupa das Gosvami (1977, 1-2) to be accepted as Vedic, a literature must maintain the same purpose as the original Vedic texts:

> The Vedic scriptures (*sastras*) comprise a harmonious whole with a
> harmonious conclusion (*siddhanta*). Consequently, we accept as a bona
> fide Vedic writing any work that expands on the Vedic *siddhanta* without
> changing its meaning, even if the work is not one of the original

---

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

scriptures. In fact, the Vedic tradition necessitates further authoritative works that convey the Vedic message according to time and place. However to be genuine, these extensions of Vedic literature must strictly conform to the doctrines of the *Vedas,* the *Puranas,* and the *Vedanta-sutra.*

In this regard, Rosen (1991) describes A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, whose spiritual lineage follows in the disciplic succession of Caitanya Mahaprabhu (A.D. 1486-1534) as one of India's greatest scholars, philosophers, prophets and cultural ambassadors. Rosen further cites the 1976 *Encyclopaedia Brittanica Book of the Year* which states that Bhaktivedanta Swami "astonished academic and literary communities worldwide by writing and publishing fifty-two books on ancient Vedic Culture…in the period from October 1968 to November 1975". The comments of several other noteworthy scholars are quoted on the inside of the cover page in *Bhagavad-gita* As it Is (1983): Hopkins states, "There is little question that this edition is one of the best books available of the *Gita* and on devotion. Prabhupada's translation is an ideal blend of literal accuracy and religious insight"; Stillson Judah comments: "In this beautiful translation, Bhaktivedanta Swami has caught the deep devotional spirit of the *Gita* and has supplied the text with an elaborate commentary in the truly authentic tradition of Sri Krishna Caitanya, one of India's most important and influential saints". Other positive reviews and comments are given by Spreadbury, Kalia, Lacombe, Bhatt and Long,[105] which acknowledge the validity and credibility of Bhaktivedanta Swami's input.

In my research I limit my analysis of Vedic literature to the translations and commentaries provided by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, given that these have been accepted by scholars worldwide as bona-fide, and that these books form the basis of the philosophy and practices of the devotees of the ISKCON. I also examine the works of other philosophers in the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* line.[106]

---

[105] All cited in *The Science of Self Realization* (1968, xix, xxiii)
[106] see footnote 25

3.5.1 The Nature of "I"

Questions of identity seem to be central to the deliberations contained in the Vedic literature. Satsvarupa dasa Gosvami (1977) explains that the main purpose of such literature is to disseminate knowledge about self-realization, which when practiced will lead to liberation from suffering (*moksha*). It emphasizes the view that, notwithstanding its apparent pleasures, material life produces suffering due to birth, old age, disease and death. Three categories of suffering are described, viz. the existence of miseries that our own bodies experience; those caused by other living entities; those produced by forces of nature and the temporary nature of the world. ISKCON philosophy describes that we develop a mistaken identity as we come under the influence of illusion (*maya*). We then identify with a temporary body as our real identity, or we consider the temporary world to be the sum total of our existence. This of course begs the question, just who is the "we" or "I" being described here?

Bhaktivedanta Swami (1966: 30-31) expounds:

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

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

83

a proprietor of that. Although identities become embedded in one's mind, that ascription does not in itself constitute one's true identity.

Related to this is Beck's[107] assertion that categories of race, language, culture and religion may be historically, geographically or even politically constructed, and since such contexts can change, one's identity is not fixed or bound by these positions. Harro (2000) describes how we are born into a particular set of social identities and influenced by powerful socializing forces from birth, viz. the already existing structures of history, traditions, beliefs, prejudices, stereotypes – in which parents and other significant caregivers are powerful agents in determining our self concepts and self-perceptions. Giddens (2002) also theorizes that one's self understanding is obstructed by what he regards as inflexible restrictions posed by tradition and culture. It is only by reflexive self awareness that the individual in post traditional settings can develop *individualization*, where the *self* determines its own identity through exerting conscious choices characterized by increasing autonomy and control. As far as the postulations by Beck, Harro and Giddens above are concerned, there seems to be a confluence with the Vedic conception that one's identification as part of a particular tradition, culture, community, nation, or society is limited, external and can pose a barrier to one's self understanding. The Vedic concept however, does not accept that unlimited self-reflexivity can produce a real understanding of self, and is more inclined towards Bendle's (2002) viewpoint that such a stance has produced a crisis of identity in society, manifest as greater feelings of alienation and insecurity. Mansfield (2000: 2) also contends that while the tendency in postmodern society is greater self emphasis as a point of reference, it has simultaneously produced more insecurity, fragility, isolation and vulnerability of the self due to ambivalence produced by conflicting signals from our education and entertainment industries, world events like wars, and greater addiction to narcotics and fads. Thus the identity derived from unlimited self-reflexivity may also be illusory and produced from the tendency of the post modern individual for immediate gratification and greater hedonism, what Satsvarupa Gosvami (1977) referred to as *maya*, or our mistaken identity.

---

[107] cited in Adams, 2003

Bhaktivedanta Swami (1966)[108] in an elaborate discussion on identity and designation mentions:

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

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

---

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

3.5.2 The Mind/Body Issue and Consciousness

I summarize the main arguments about the mind/body issues and consciousness as it has implications on my deliberations on the nature of identity, as well as for points of similarity and juxtaposition in relation to what I will describe as the Vedic model.

What exactly is "consciousness"? According to Velmans (1996), consciousness may be described as follows:

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

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

In early Western thought, consciousness or mind was regarded as non-physical and distinct from the brain. The current philosophical understanding of mind/brain dualism is identified with seventeenth century French philosopher Rene Descartes (Drutakarma, 1997) whose utterance, "I think therefore I am" popularized the idea of reality as a dichotomy of matter (substance extended in space) and spirit (mind existing outside space) which gave impetus to some of the most vociferous discussion on mind/body dualism (now called Cartesian dualism, after Descartes). He attempted to formulate his

86

discussions in such a way as to reconcile the dominant Christian worldview and rise of mechanistic science (Cromby, 2003). His explanations that mind and matter can and do affect each other (known as *interactionism*) however, proved problematic for advocates of the Cartesian model, who were unable to counter strong criticism from physicists who claimed that a nonmaterial substance could not influence a material body without violating the physical laws of conservation and momentum (Drutakarma, Bhutatma and Sadaputa, 2003). Other attempts at dualistic models that fitted with the emerging scientific paradigm followed. *Epiphenomenalism,* associated with Thomas Huxley, asserts that matter gives rise to a nonphysical consciousness without a corresponding influence on matter. *Monism* maintains that the mind and the brain are the same, an offshoot of this being *panpsychism* that describes matter as innately possessing consciousness.[109] Several other explanations may be grouped into the following categories: *materialism or physicalism*, the view that mental events exist ultimately as physical events (that is reduced to simply the firing of neurons in the brain); and *phenomenalism or subjective idealism*, the view that physical events are reduced to mental events ultimately (that is, it all happens in our mind).[110]

Several difficulties with mechanistic explanations of consciousness have been posed by notable philosophers and researchers themselves. Kerins (1998)[111] however, states that lest one assume that the entire Western thinking is rationalistic and atheistic, one should consider the contribution of Leibniz whose philosophy opposed both Descartes' rationalism and Spinoza's atheism, and as "genuinely reflecting the ancient religious roots of Western philosophy and ...uniting Western and Eastern theistic thought". Although the eminent Karl Popper (1977) holds the view of mind as emergent from matter, he strongly argues for the nonphysical nature of the mind, yet he finds himself in an ambivalent position: "From an evolutionary point of view, I regard the self-conscious mind as an emergent product of the brain...Now I want to emphasize how little is said by saying that the mind is an emergent product of the brain. It has practically no explanatory

---

[109] In *Origins: Higher Dimensions in Science* (2003). Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA
[110] In Fingelkurts, A and Fingelkurts, A . (2005): Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind-body_problem
[111] Letter in her capacity as a member of ISNS (International Society for NeoPlatonic Studies) to Back to Godhead magazine (1998) in response to Drutakarama's article on Descartes.

value, and it hardly amounts to more than putting a question mark in a certain place in human evolution".[112] His view assumes that conscious awareness exists, directly experienced by the conscious self and inexplicable by laws governing matter. In the 1990s a major shift occurred in the neurosciences due to the influence of Nobel-laureates Francis Chick and David Chalmers[113]. Consciousness and its relation to brain function became a more respectable topic for investigation – a trend aptly captured by Baars (1996) when he referred to subjectivity as a "resurrection of the observing self". The majority of scientists however, continue to insist that all mental phenomena are products of the physical brain and nothing more, i.e. the reductionistic view of mechanistic science, and the search continues in the neurosciences for the NCC – a neural correlate to consciousness (Fingelkurts and Fingelkurts, 2005). While it is accepted that there may be physical and neurophysiological causes and correlates of a given experience within the brain, theorists still disagree about the nature and location of consciousness and its effects. Velmans (1996) motivates for a move away from both dualist and reductionistic models towards a more "reflexive" model – that we do experience the phenomenal world to be an external reality, but to research what we actually experience and how it comes to be that way, needs a more ecological and unified understanding of consciousness,[114] a view which may be to some extent congruent with the Vedic model of consciousness. Thus the Vedic model is consistent with current theorizing in the sciences that there are physical and neurological correlates of consciousness, but also proposes a non-physical aspect, which I examine in the next section.

3.5.3 The *Gaudiya Vaisnava* Model of Identity

According to Sivarama Swami (1998), three basic concepts of transcendence surround the nature of the Absolute Truth, viz. the personal, impersonal and the void. Several

---

[112] Popper, Karl, R and Eccles, J.C (1977) cited in Origins: Higher Dimensions in Science (2003). Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003). [CD ROM]. The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA.
[113] Chalmers explanation of "Global Workspace theory",
[114] For a more detailed explanation, which is beyond the scope of this discussion, see Velmans, M (1996): An Introduction to the Science of Consciousness *in* The Science of Consciousness: Psychological, Neuropsychological and Clinical Research. Velmans, M (ed). Routledge: London. http://cogprints.org/395/00/Definingconsciousness.html

variations exist within each category, and even the Vedas are cited by different schools to establish their own understanding. Since the concept of the Absolute Truth is central to any spiritual practice, a brief description of each of these categories is necessary to understand the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* concept of the Absolute Truth in which the ISKCON tradition follows.

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

Since the views of the nature of the Absolute as well as the views of identity differ, it follows that the attitudes, practices, activities and understanding of the practitioner will be influenced by the particular viewpoint, as well as the definition of his or her goal. Thus for the devotee in the ISKCON tradition, his or her view of reality and identity will be framed by the understanding of the Absolute Truth as described by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami in the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* tradition. In the following section I will be examining these concepts as understood and described in the ISKCON tradition.

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

Drutakarma, Bhutatma and Sadaputa (2003) quote several medical and clinical cases of NDEs (near death experiences), spontaneous past life memory recall in children and hypnotic regression studies (notably by Steveson 1966, 1974; Sabom, 1982)[115] as evidence for the existence of the non-physical, conscious entity. Sadaputa (1980) proposes that an understanding of the *atma* as innately conscious, and possessing "the sensory faculties and intelligence needed to interpret abstract properties of complex brain states", opens up further avenues of study and exploration. Thus he presents the non-mechanistic Vedic paradigm of *sanatana dharma*[116] which regards the "conscious personality as fundamental and irreducible". It is possible to experience this level of consciousness directly. Sadaputa das (1980) explains that:

---

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

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

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

To accept the question of identity as beyond material designation then begs the question
of individuality. Tamal Krsna Gosvami (1998) elaborates that unlike the *advaita*
vedantists who maintain that at liberation the *atma* becomes "consumed by the One
Supreme Self" i.e. *Brahman,*[117] Vaisnavas maintain that the *atma* remains distinctly
individual even after liberation. He argues that to consider *atma* and *Brahman* to be
undifferentiated disregards the individuality and personality of the soul, and thwarts a
state of ultimate bliss in service to God. He asserts that the process of *bhakti yoga* or
devotional service is the means by which to attain that ultimate bliss and unstultified
consciousness.

Gaudiya Vaisnavas believe that as spirit souls we once were with *Krishna,*[118] but we
made a wilful decision to give up that relationship, a costly miscalculation that resulted in
us plunging into the material atmosphere, where we became imprisoned in material
existence since time immemorial. Bhaktivedanta Swami explains that "regarding when
and why such propensities overcame the pure living entities, it can only be explained that
the *jiva-tattvas* have infinitesimal independence and that due to misuse of this
independence some of the living entities have become implicated in the conditions of
cosmic creation and are therefore called *nitya-baddhas*, or eternally conditioned souls".[119]
Yet that imprisonment is not permanent, and when those acts that pollute our
consciousness are removed we can be liberated. Bhaktivedanta Swami (1972) elaborates:

---

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

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

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

False ego means accepting this body as oneself. When one understands that he is not his body and is spirit soul, he comes to his real ego. Ego is there. False ego is condemned, but not real ego. In the Vedic literature *(Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.10) it is said, aham brahmasmi: I am Brahman, I am spirit. This "I am," the sense of self, also exists in the liberated stage of self-realization. This sense of "I am" is ego, but when the sense of "I am" is applied to this false body it is false ego. When the sense of self is applied to reality, that is real ego. There are some philosophers who say we should give up our ego, but we cannot give up our ego, because ego means identity. We ought, of course, to give up the false identification with the body.[120]

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

3.6   Conclusion

Postmodernists reject the notion of a core identity, and regard identity as external, pliable, fragmented, multiple and transient. The Vedic view agrees that our identifications of the body and mind are indeed external, pliable, fragmented and transient. However, it has also been established that the Vaisnava theological perspective claims a core notion of identity as spirit, which may be considered by some as essentialist. While essentialist views have been criticized by the postmodernists as positivist and often reinforcing oppression, the Vaisnava view is not quite the fatalistic resignation described by the postmodernists or Schweitzer; it is considered ultimately liberating from political and oppressive social designations. The Vaisnava view regards political and oppressive negation of one's true identity by others as occurring only because of identification with

---

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

the illusory designations of the body and mind (Satsvarupa dasa Gosvami, 1977). In South Africa within the current political scenario, as people seek unity more beyond bodily differences (Marschall, 2001), it would be reasonable to assume that the notion that the real person cannot be reduced to the external body and that our differences are literally superficial, would be a favourable world view upon which to base social unity (Hridayananda dasa Gosvami, 2005).

I began the literature review by positing the question "Who am I" as a fundamental question in current psychological and social research on the construction of identity and that which has been studied from many perspectives – psychoanalytical, philosophical, educational, phenomenological, sociological, socio-linguistic, anthropological, and theological.

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

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

I found it necessary to present the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* theological perspective on identity since that philosophical platform is central to my research on the development of identity of the ISKCON devotees. The theological basis I examined consisted of several ancient scriptures, collectively categorized as the *Vedas,* as understood in ISKCON. I examined

selective extracts from the central scriptural text *Bhagavad-gita As It Is, Srimad-Bhagavatam*, essays, interviews and lectures as well as several other works by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, and his disciples who are teachers and spiritual masters in the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* tradition. The documentary analysis of these scriptures reveals a great emphasis on the nature and characteristics of the self, and its representations within the fabric of society.

In the next chapter I respond to the features of the context within which these identities are formed, viz. the institutional, physical, religious, social and educational contexts. Initially I focus on the institutional identity of ISKCON Temple of Understanding in Durban, framing my analysis by borrowing fom Jenkins (1996) characteristics of organizations. This framework will enable me to examine the scope and extent of ISKCON's activities, and institutional processes which impact on the context in which the devotees live and operate, and their identities. Thereafter I respond to the data generated about the physical and cultural contexts of ISKCON that shape the identity of the resident devotees, examining the intersections between institutional identity and individual identity.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings: Part One

Intersections of Identity: Institutional and Individual

4.1   Introduction

Given that ISKCON has an institutionalized framework with a distinct set of beliefs and practices that may be regarded as stringent, (King, 2001) I wish to respond to the features of the context within which these identities are formed. The context that I am referring to is understood as institutional, physical, religious, social and educational contexts. My focus in this chapter is to respond initially to the first critical question asked in the study: *What* is the institutional identity of ISKCON and how is it derived? Jenkins (1996: 127) regards *institutions* as "an integral part of the construction of social reality, with reference to which, and in terms of which, individuals make decisions and orient their behaviour". Institutions therefore influence the way things are done and exercise social control. In response to this assertion, the data that is presented responds to the second, third and fourth critical questions in this study as well, viz.

- *What* are the physical, religious, social and educational features of the context within which these identities are formed?
- *How* and *why* are the resident devotees of the ISKCON Temple of Understanding, Durban, who are variegated in term of race, culture and language, able to create their identities as devotees?
- *What* are the possible changes in the lifestyle and values of these resident devotees since they first joined?

These critical questions encompass the social reality, activities and behaviour produced in the concept "organization" that Jenkins describes. The institutional identity impacts on

95

the features listed in the critical questions above: traditions, language, behaviour, dress, gestures, and cultural roles are directly influenced by institutional requirements. At the outset I wish to emphasize that there is a permutation of factors responsible for producing the devotee identity but for the purposes of a coherent and thematic presentation I delineate them into several categories.

Using my deep-insider position as participant observer, I used personal walkabouts and field note-taking, documentary analysis, and interviews with the Governing Body Commissioner,[121] Temple president, resident devotees and four visiting spiritual masters. In doing this I examined ISKCON's objectives, organizational structures, physical context (i.e. the Temple environment), symbolism of its prominent features, activities and teachings, daily temple schedules, and social and educational projects, with a view to determining how institutional identity of ISKCON is derived, and specifically how the institutional identity impacts upon the individual identity.

My ethnographic stance enabled me to view the situations and concepts as the participants understood them, as well as their "their intentionality and interpretations of frequently complex situations, their meaning systems" and other interactions (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 293). Of several procedures suggested by Cohen *et al* (2000) in analyzing and authenticating accounts such as those obtained in my interviews, two are directly relevant, viz. *tracing of themes* and *categorization of content*. Tracing a theme enables the researcher to transcend the "artificial barriers" implied in the items as well as collect "as much data as possible regardless of where it occurs in the interview material". The data collected in this way is further analysed in an attempt "to develop some categories into which all the material will fit". I used their suggestions as the basic rationale behind the scrutiny and categorization of the data generated in my research to analyse the data in a coherent scheme, as well as present it thematically. In doing this, I found Jenkin's (1996) framework of organizations highly relevant as a unit of analysis to present data generated in response to the first three critical questions asked in the study.

---

[121] Spiritual Head of ISKCON South Africa

Using the above approach I begin the chapter by responding to the critical questions in the following categories:

Firstly, I describe *ISKCON as an organization* through an analysis of the following:

- ISKCON's identity through its objectives

- Governance, administration and management

Secondly, I describe the *physical context* by examining the architecture and symbolism of the ISKCON Durban Temple, as well the devotee accommodation. Thirdly, I examined the *cultural context* on identity under the categories of religious, social and educational contexts: In examining the *religious context* I found it suitable to analyse it as follows:

- A summary of teachings of ISKCON

  - The concepts of *dharma* and *bhakti,*

  - The stages of Bhakti

- Spiritual Processes

  - The nine processes of devotional service

  - The chanting of the *maha-mantra*

  - The daily Temple programme and *mangal-aratik*

- The Role of the Guru in ISKCON

I described the *social context* under the following headings:

- Language, race and culture of the ISKCON Devotees

- Lifestyle Changes (devotee attire, diet, values, levels of spiritual practice)

- Educational / Community Outreach contexts (Temple activities, social and educational projects, viz. festivals, education, Food for Life)

97

Although for the purposes of a coherent and thematic response to the data I have used the above categories I emphasize that there is an intersection of data across categories. From my analysis of documents[122] and interviews with the Temple President it was found that in ISKCON there are constitutional requirements given by the founder A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami that determines how it is organized and run. The physical setting and temple religious schedules are influenced by the institutional requirements. The teachings follow the inherited traditions of *Gaudiya Vaisnavism*, and the social and educational projects derive from certain instructions given by Bhaktivedanta Swami, all of which lead to changes in the lifestyle of devotees in their language, dress, diet, mannerisms, and values. Thus institutional identity impinges upon individual identity in specific ways.

4.2   ISKCON as an Organization[123]

While collective habituation can produce institutionalization, and is a source of identification, Jenkins (1996) distinguishes between a general definition of *institutions*, and *organizations*. He lists the following as characteristics of organizations:

- "members combine in the pursuit of explicit objectives, which serve to identify the organization;
- there is a division of labour in the specification of the specialized tasks and functions performed by individual members; and
- there is a recognized pattern of decision-making and allocation.
- there are criteria for identifying, and processes for recruiting, members" (Jenkins, 1996: 136-137).

Organizational membership forms an important aspect of individual identity, but Jenkins contends that a distinction must be made between the *nominal* and the *virtual* – the

---

[122] Articles of Incorporation, ISKCON Constitution

[123] My position as a "deep-insider" (Edwards, 1999) grants me privy to observation and reporting of certain phenomena, patterns and activities of the Movement, a point I discussed in detail in Chapter 2 as part of my research methodology.

nominal referring to the name or title, rights and duties of the institution, while virtual refers to how the member works out his or her particular identity within the institution. The characteristics of organizations listed by Jenkins above provide a framework to understand the scope and extent of ISKCON's activities for the purposes of understanding the processes which determine the context in which the devotees live and operate, and how they create their identities. To do this I begin this chapter by responding to the data under the following themes:

- ISKCON's Identity through its Objectives

- Governance, administration and management:

  - Division of Labour, Decision-making and allocation
  - Recruitment of Membership
  - Monitoring of Standards

4.2.1   Understanding ISKCON's Identity through its Objectives

With reference to the first characteristic of organizations described by Jenkins that "members combine in the pursuit of explicit objectives, which serve to identify the organization", my interview with the Temple President[124] indicated that he was familiar with the constitutional stipulations that underpin ISKCON as an organization, and stated that the objectives of ISKCON are quite explicit as laid down by its founder A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami:

It is the basis of all ISKCON activities, e.g. one of the purposes is to systematically propagate spiritual knowledge to society, another purpose is to bring the members together in their understanding and worship of the Supreme Lord Krishna, and so on.

Documentary analysis reveals that Bhaktivedanta Swami registered the *Articles of Incorporation* with the formation of ISKCON in 1966. A careful scrutiny of the *Articles*

---

[124] Interviews with Temple President, Swarup Damodar das, November 2005

of Incorporation listed below indicates that the institutional identity of ISKCON is created around the fulfillment of these specific objectives:

The Seven Purposes of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness:

1. To systematically propagate spiritual knowledge to society at large and to educate all peoples in the techniques of spiritual life in order to check the imbalance of values in life and to achieve real unity and peace in the world.

2. To propagate a consciousness of Krishna, as it is revealed in the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Srimad Bhagavatam.*

3. To bring the members of the Society together with each other and nearer to Krishna, the prime entity, thus to develop the idea within the members, and humanity at large, that each soul is part and parcel of the quality of Godhead.

4. To teach and encourage the sankirtan movement, congregational chanting of the holy name of God as revealed in the teachings of Lord Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

5. To erect for the members and for society at large, a holy place of transcendental pastimes, dedicated to the Personality of Godhead, Krishna.

6. To bring the members closer together for the purpose of teaching a simpler and more natural way of life.

7. With a view towards achieving the aforementioned Purposes, to publish and distribute periodicals, magazines, books and other writings.

   (cited in Satsvarupa dasa Gosvami, 1993)

Questioned about how this is manifested in the Temple, the Temple President stated:

As the headquarters for ISKCON South Africa, we try to accomplish all of the objectives stipulated by Srila Prabhupada.

It is evident that there is an emphasis on the propagation and educational ("teaching") aspects of the objectives, which translates into a systematized form of preaching. The

100

Temple president explained that the temple served as a place of gathering for its members, for the common purposes of being involved in Krishna consciousness, thus fulfilling the main aspects of the *Articles of Incorporation* listed above.

These *Articles of Incorporation*, which may be regarded as the overall constitution of ISKCON, specifically makes provision for the creation of the physical context (number 5), religious context (numbers 1, 2, 4 and 7), the social context (numbers 3 and 6) and educational context. This supports my earlier assertion that there is an overlap of institutional identity and those of the physical, religious, social and educational contexts, aspects of which I describe in more detail later in this chapter.

4.2.2 Governance, Administration and Management

With a view to further understanding the institutional identity of ISKCON, I examine, in the following sections, how the characteristics of organizations listed by Jenkins, viz. division of labour, decision-making and allocation of duties, recruitment of membership, and monitoring of standards apply to this institution.

- **Division of Labour, Decision-making and allocation**

In my examination of how the second and third characteristics of organizations stated by Jenkins (1996) that "there is a division of labour in the specification of the specialized tasks and functions performed by individual members;" and "there is a recognized pattern of decision-making and allocation" apply to ISKCON, it was found that:

Temple President: *The Governing Body Commission (GBC) whose headquarters are in Mayapur, India, is the ultimate managerial and spiritual authority. The GBC is made up of various spiritual masters and senior devotees, who oversee different regions of the world.*

101

A summary of the organizational structure in descending hierarchy may be represented as follows: Governing Body Commission (Mayapur) ⟶ local Governing Body Commissioner ⟶ Temple President ⟶ Temple Council ⟶ Heads of Departments. It can be thus determined that in ISKCON the organizational structure is very clearly delineated, and a specific hierarchy in terms of management, administration and accountability is demonstrated. Of further note is the fact that the authority is not only for managerial purposes but for "spiritual" purposes as well, which advises about the development of local projects and expansion of Krishna consciousness in the region, and maintains specific standards of worship and practices of the devotees. A prime spiritual purpose of ISKCON as an institution is to provide support for the missionary activities of Krishna consciousness as envisioned by the founder Bhaktivedanta Swami (Bhakti Charu Swami, 2003).

- **Recruitment of Membership**

With reference to the fourth criteria of organizations listed by Jenkins (1996) that "there are criteria for identifying, and processes for recruiting members," the data suggests that:

Temple President: *We do not have a specific strategy, an intentional way of going after someone to get him to become a member, but there are several activities conducted which I could say are to attract the attention of people to a more sublime life.*

He delineated several activities considered to be the ways in which people may be exposed to Krishna consciousness, viz. the Temple and its religious programmes being open to visitors, the Sunday guest programme, festivals, music and street chanting, Govinda's restaurant, *nama hattas*[125], Bhakti Yoga Society, Food for Life and Bhaktivedanta College of Education and Culture. I will respond later to this data in more detail as the social, religious, and educational projects of ISKCON.

---

[125] these are smaller religious gatherings of congregation members in their respective residential areas, at least weekly.

In response to how members are recruited, the Temple President explained that:

When they are attracted to the philosophy and activities...then we request them to study the books more seriously and attend the Temple programmes more systematically to see if they really like this.

Although there does not seem to be a premeditated strategy of converting people but an emphasis on voluntary participation, the above data indicates that there is a clear, albeit unstated structure in place to attract membership:

- Point of contact and presentation of teachings
- Opportunities and spaces for enquiry
- Further exposure to literature and philosophy
- Participation in activities
- Gradual acquisition of insider status

There is a strong emphasis on gaining knowledge before a commitment is expected on the part of a potential devotee.

From my interview with the Temple president and resident devotees, my personal walkabouts and field notes, I have gathered the following: when persons develop an interest in the philosophy and practices of ISKCON via any of the above processes or activities, and wish to join the Temple, their legal age is initially ascertained and a meeting held with them where the Temple president explains the requirements of joining the Temple. Once they join the temple on a full time basis, it becomes mandatory for resident members to follow the prescribed regulations, viz. abstinence from meat, fish and eggs; abstinence from all intoxicants and cigarettes (and caffeine and tannin); abstinence from gambling, and abstinence of sex outside of marriage and within marriage only for procreation.[126] Furthermore, the resident devotees are required to engage in

---

[126] There same principles are expected of members of the congregation, although certain specific service requirements which are mandatory on resident devotees are voluntary for the congregation.

regularized service as decided by temple authorities, study the scriptures, and attend the Temple morning programme.[127] The recruit is encouraged to study the biography of Bhaktivedanta Swami and follow his instructions.

- **Monitoring of Standards**

Since resident devotees make a commitment to join the Temple and accept the conditions stipulated, a system of monitoring devotee standards and practices occurs. The Temple President describes what this entails in the following questions:

Is there ongoing development of godly qualities? Does he show increasing eagerness to perform his spiritual duties? Is his sadhana[128] regular?

Thus while the devotee voluntarily commits to being a resident at the Temple, there are certain expectations of such a commitment. It would appear from the above that the one's engagement in the Temple requires discipline.

Sometimes dissension is experienced, like disrespect, continuous refusal to conduct duties, or breaking the principles. If advice, or other corrective measures do not work then the devotee may be requested to leave the temple and encouraged to remain outside as a member of the congregation.

In the interview the Temple President emphasized discipline indicating that the commitment to being a resident devotee was serious, stating that as a missionary organization it was expected that a devotee's standard of behaviour be exemplary in society.

---

[127] This is called *sadhana bhakti* – regularized devotional service in practice. The Temple schedules will be described in more detail later in this chapter

[128] refers to the regulated schedule of devotional training known as sadhana bhakti – rising early, following the worship schedules, reading, missionary activities, etc.

He further explained that the devotee is also encouraged to progress towards accepting initiation from one of several spiritual masters in ISKCON. A devotee who has served for some time was required to attend an initiation seminar which describes the requirements for initiation, the position of the spiritual master, the rights and qualifications of spiritual master and disciples and other practical and philosophical points, as well as other classes on scripture. With such information the devotee eventually meets a certain minimum standard of practice and knowledge which indicates he is ready to accept a spiritual master and take initiation from him.[129] However, even after initiation the resident devotees continue to serve under the Temple authority.[130] Thus the devotee's identity appears to be bound by an allegiance which manifests in three features:

- an allegiance to Bhaktivedanta Swami and the constitutional and documentary requirements of ISKCON,
- an allegiance to the Temple authorities, and
- an allegiance to his spiritual master.

It may appear then that the regulatory standards placed upon the resident devotees are stringent and demanding. The data on monitoring of standards introduced a debate of the place for individuality and reflexivity for the devotee. With reference to this, my sample of resident devotees was questioned as to whether they were able to express their individuality as devotees, and whether their opinions and feelings were considered:

Devotee A: *In this temple I actually feel not so much but overseas[131] yes.*
...sometimes here I have to be more diplomatic and I can't trust people so much as there.

---

[129] A list of spiritual practices, regulative principles and levels of education is delineated to monitor the level of practice of a devotee. For the aspirant in ISKCON the acceptance of a guru is one of the main processes in the Gaudiya Vaisnava line based on the instruction by Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad-gita* As It Is (4.34). Several disciples of Bhaktivedanta Swami currently serve as spiritual masters being mandated by the GBC to do so. This is further discussed in this chapter under the heading "Teachings of ISKCON".
[130] All of the above paragraphs derived from interview with Temple President, Swarup Damodar das, 2005.
[131] The name of the country has been left out for the sake of confidentiality.

Devotee A was from a foreign country. Regarding the circumstances which led her to make that statement, Devotee A explained that she previously had some bad habits like smoking, and some of the resident devotees seemed to be unduly concerned about that. She felt the people from her own country, were more open-minded about a devotee's past. Yet simultaneously she felt Indian people, who make up the large percentage of the Temple population, to be virtuous:

From the birth you do all the right things because you know all the right things. I never sensed that I did something wrong. I never thought that.

Devotee A's feelings seems to indicate a certain insecurity as to how she is received as an individual from the Indian resident members. She also indicated that although she is engaged in sewing outfits for the Deities as her main service which she loved to do, she would like to draw more, since she was an artist, as well as go out to meet people and help them. The main constraint of her individuality appears to be from her peers rather than standards implemented by the institution. Thus, alongside the institutional monitoring of standards, this indicates that there is also a peer monitoring of a devotee's acquiescence.

However Devotee B felt there was sufficient room for one's individuality:

Service to God is more based on love and trust. You have to want to serve God.

According to this devotee, individuality initially referred to the choice of wanting to become a devotee or not, which he regarded as: "free will, which in effect is individuality". He explained that although there were general requirements for the devotees to fulfil, individuality is expressed in terms of the types of service he or she was inclined towards:

Initially one may do many things but he may have an area where he or she will be outstanding at.

Devotee C extended the idea of individuality but expressed that: "individuality comes in the years of service that one does. One actually finds ones place at the end". She regarded individuality as an achievement after perfecting one's service. She also felt that there was sufficient space in meetings with the authorities to enable her to express her opinions to rectify any problems, which would allow her a peaceful engagement in her service.

Devotee D while expressing that there was no force by his spiritual master, presented an interesting periodized analysis of how individuality was viewed in ISKCON:

In the early days it was a little bit harder. But I find now the Movement is changing a lot socially, with the leaders encouraging individuality more and more all the time.

He felt that as an artist he was never initially encouraged in that direction, but since ISKCON was changing and encouraging individuality more, this allowed him greater personal expression. This was an important consideration for Devotee D in terms of identity:

First I'm a person with needs, aspirations, and interests within my spiritual life; I'm a person, then a devotee and then an artist maybe.

He supported this assertion by indicating that *Krishna* in *Bhagavad-gita* says that persons are individuals and always will remain so. One can maintain one's occupation and yet maintain one's spiritual identity. By using his individual talent, such as art, in a spiritual way, this devotee expected that greater personal fulfillment would be achieved.

The responses by the devotees indicate that there are idiosyncratic ways in which they understand individuality. Since there are the institutional standards on one hand, and devotees' expression of individuality on the other, it was central to understand where the

intersection occurs in terms of how identity is created. Devamrita Swami[132] felt that although "there has to be room for individuality", the practicing devotee should initially not be too concerned at that stage about their individuality. They should just be engaged in the process of devotional service so that they could begin to get rid of bad qualities and make spiritual progress. This he likened to getting rid of one's disease, which would then allow one to really express one's individuality in a pleasing manner. Kadamba Kanana Swami[133] uses the analogy of student and teacher in an academic scenario to demonstrate the idea of individuality:

Just as in the academic world a student is being educated in a particular faculty, and the professor is guiding him in a doctrine of knowledge, still he remains an individual in his experience of that knowledge.

The Temple President felt that everything in the institution has an influence on devotee identity. Just as a university was "a place of learning" which was meant to encourage a student to learn, ISKCON as an institution similalrly existed. He also felt that devotees should also be involved in personally monitoring their own standards, stating that "the onus is upon the person to take advantage of the atmosphere".

These responses indicate that although the student has an individual experience, he or she must be willing to submit to a particular process in order to derive the benefit. Thus while it would seem that some restrictions are imposed upon the devotee's individuality, these restrictions define mostly what the limitations are in regard to *spiritual* and *material* behaviour. The devotee is prohibited from engaging in behaviour considered detrimental to his spiritual progress, while simultaneously his participation in spiritual programmes is encouraged and required. While the spiritual masters regard one's individuality as being respected within the tradition, their responses correspond more with a stringent view of

---

[132] Visiting spiritual master, an elite informer in my study. Devamrita Swami is the GBC for North America, author of "Searching for Vedic India" and several other books; travelling renunciant and presenter of various spiritual seminars.
[133] Visiting spiritual master, originally from Holland; former Temple President of Vrindavana Temple, India, travelling renunciant and presenter of various spiritual seminars.

the standards to be adhered to, perhaps due to greater enculturation on their part as well as their renuciant status, and higher levels of spiritual advancement. Some resident devotees in my sample do present a tension about personal expression, acceptance and interpretation of individuality within the Movement. Nonetheless they all agree that sufficient ambit exists for the dovetailing of one's personal talents and abilities in devotional service.

Jenkins (1996:137) asserts that organizations are "networks of specialized nominal identifications: positions, offices, functions..." and in the light of these characteristics I have attempted to examine the local ISKCON Temple as an *organization*. My attempt at exploring ISKCON as an organization, delineated in its objectives, regulations, structures and activities above, was to determine the institutional identity of ISKCON, as well as how that impacted upon the identity of the resident members. Thus it is found that ISKCON is prescriptive in shaping particular norms of behaviour. The specific injunctions from which expected standards of behaviour is derived indicates that the identity of the devotee is shaped by what is a largely decreed set of norms and standards, although there is sufficient space for the expression of individuality. As suggested in the literature review that although identities may be disparately galvanized in different situations, a sense of self or personal continuity occurs, emphasizing the interpersonal dynamics "in which individuals reflexively define themselves by the same labels used by the groups with which they identify" (Hood, 1998).

In the next section I respond to data generated about the actual physical context in which the resident devotees participate and reside and the impact of the physical context on identity formation of the devotees.

4.3   The Physical Context

According to Datey (1996) "all cultural production is a consequence of its context and is infused with meaning and identity". Patnaik (undated) states, "all religions have their sacred places of worship. A temple means a building for religious exercises and is a

centre for worship. It is the abode of God who is the spirit immanent in the universe." Nandagopal (2000) describes how the different religious orders, viz. the Buddhist, *Jaina, Saiva* and *Vaishnava* have reflected in their structures the functional aspect of those religious systems, each "characterised by their own deities, monastic orders, leaders and propagators, rituals, festivals and fairs" and "influencing in a great way the ethos of the habitat". Thus it can be understood that almost every architectural structure directly espouses cultural identity and philosophy within a physical context.[134]

How does the ISKCON Durban Temple architecture communicate information about the culture that erected it? How do the Temple buildings, activities within it and its immediate surroundings define the identity of the inhabitants? These are the questions I wish to answer by focusing on the physical context of the Temple, particularly its architecture and symbolism. To do this I respond to the data under the following headings:

- The Architecture and Symbolism of the ISKCON Durban Temple

- Devotee accommodation

4.3.1 The Architecture and Symbolism of the ISKCON Durban Temple[135]

It is not my purpose to give an extensive description of Temple architecture, but to examine aspects of the physical context (represented by temple architecture and environment) that have impinged upon the devotees' construction of identity. To this end it is necessary to provide a brief description of the functional and expressive aspects of the architecture because it is the environment in which the devotees live, worship and conduct other activities, which focuses on the intersection between the individual and institutional identity. In placing the ISKCON Durban Temple in spiritual context, the Temple President explained that:

---

[134] http://www.islamicart.com/main/architecture/future.html : The future of Islamic architecture.
[135] See Appendix 5 for a visual record of the Temple design and environment.

Historically our roots are from the Gaudiya Vaisnava tradition connected to Sri Caitanya
Mahaprabhu. Our temple architecture, designed by Rajaram from Austria, is definitely
linked to the Gaudiya Vaisnava tradition. At the same time it is quite unique.

It will be obvious to any observer of the Temple site under study, that one of the
outstanding visible cultural productions of ISKCON is its temple architecture. The
ISKCON Temple in Chatsworth is a combination of traditional Vedic design and modern
technology. Datey (1996) regards the visual and symbolic aspects of architecture, viz. its
form, shape, pattern and stylistic motifs, as representative of the identity of certain
cultural groups. O' Connell (2001) asserts that "most buildings are constructed with
explicit functional purpose in mind, by groups whose identities are historically rooted and
organically connected to the practices the buildings will accommodate." Thus while
functional, the expressive role of architecture is quite prominent, as Rajaram (1995)
describes it in its "traditional, contemporary and futuristic" aspects. This indicates that
while ISKCON is strongly influenced by the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* tradition, there is a
specific attempt in ISKCON to create its own identity.[136] Kadamba Kanana Swami
(2006)[137] states that:

While the Gaudiya Vaisnava sampradaya initially existed in Indian society, Srila
Prabhupada[138] implanted it within the culture of the West, and although rooted in
Gaudiya Vaisnavism, ISKCON has its own unique elements.

Salingaros (2002) asserts that it was religious ardour that produced some of the greatest
architectural creations, attested by the preponderance of cathedrals, churches, mosques
and temples around the world. He states that "all religions are based on worshipping
some higher form of order, which means that a key aspect of religion is trying to recreate
this order as a geometrical expression using physical materials". Several ancient texts

---

[136] Interview with Temple President Swarup Damodar das.
[137] Kadamba Kanana Swami (2006): Hearing and Chanting. Seminar conducted for ISKCON members,
Alpine Heath, Drakensberg, South Africa. January 4 - 8, 2006.
[138] A term of endearment used to address Bhaktivedanta Swami. The meaning of "Prabhupada" is "one at
whose feet all other masters sit".

stipulate the formal architectural styles that are ubiquitous in many religions, and the specific Vedic authoritative text on this matter is called the *Vastu Sastra*. This determines the basic temple styles as *nagara, dravida* and *vesara,* viz. square, octoganal, circular in their plan (Patnaik, undated).

Austrian devotee architect, Rajaram das, a disciple of Bhaktivedanta Swami, designed the ISKCON Durban Temple[139] compliant with the ancient Vedic science known as *vasta purusha mandala* – a geometrical layout with symbolic and philosophical meanings.[i]

With reference to the functional and expressive roles of the Temple environment, Bhakti Caitanya Swami[140] was interviewed to elicit his response on the influence of the physical context on devotee identity. He felt that:

Living in the temple with deities is a natural atmosphere in those terms...The atmosphere is surcharged and a person will get to some degree swept along with that.

This contention is supported by O' Connell (2001) who, in examining the meanings that cultures imbue in their architectures, suggests that there is a relationship between architecture and "human self awareness", and that architecture is capable of expressing identity. Bhakti Caitanya Swami believed that a devotee's determination and seriousness, regardless of where he is situated, has a strong role to play in his devotee identity. However, living in the Temple environment is more conducive and will encourage it, while another circumstance may be less conducive and discourage it.

If a devotee is staying at home and working then on a certain level it will not be as easy to maintain the identity because they have to adopt another identity like as a worker in a material working situation and they have to perform in those terms.

---

[139] Documentary analysis: From An Expression of Transcendence: Symbolism in Temple Architecture *in* Sri-Sri- Radha-Radhanath Temple of Understanding: Grand Opening Brochure. Art Printers: Durban. See Appendix 5 for a visual record of the Temple design and environment.
[140] GBC (Spiritual Head of ISKCON SA)

It can be determined from the above response that the Temple environment creates a special ambiance that impresses itself upon the devotee's identity. This assertion is supported by Ruane (2004) who states that symbols are imbued with special meaning, and possess the ability to influence "behaviours, attitudes and emotions." While the Temple building itself is the place of worship and preaching, the devotee accommodations are separate and much simpler. In the following section I respond to the data on how the devotee accommodation influences the devotee identity.

4.3.2   The Devotee Accommodation

From my observation and personal walkabouts, it was found that the devotee accommodation, adjacent to the temple, is divided into three types according to the *ashramas*[141] in which the devotees live. One section serves the *brahmacaris*, the other for *brahmacarinis*, *grihasthas*, and the other for *sannyasis*.[142] The *brahmacaris* have communal residences and ablution facilities. In response to my interview questions about the simplicity of the devotee accommodation and its influence on identity, the following responses were elicited:

Bhakti Caitanya Swami: *In order to minimize the possibility of becoming distracted by other pursuits the devotees try to live simply materially: simple living and high thinking.*

Temple President: *Resident devotees voluntarily live here in simple quarters, whose lives are dedicated to studying and understanding this philosophy to become effective preachers and to develop their own spiritual lives.*

Bhakti Caitanya Swami further explained that the simple lifestyle of the devotees is meant to minimize the influence of material distraction which would otherwise place several demands on the devotee's time, energy and effort. It can be assumed then that

---

[141] spiritual status
[142] celibate male students, celibate females, householders (married) and renunciant males respectively.

113

although the Temple itself is a monumental expression of traditional and contemporary design, which creates a reverential ambiance and awareness for worship, the devotees' personal accommodations and life of simplicity is regarded as an important aspect for a devotee's spiritual identity development.

Thus the physical context of the ISKCON Durban Temple which incorporates both the expressive (symbolic design) and functional (e.g. devotee accommodation) aspects in its architecture is regarded as impacting upon devotee identity in specific ways. The Temple expresses a type of reciprocal identity: it is simultaneously an expression of the cultural heritage from which it derives, as well as provides a physical and cultural context that further impacts upon the devotee identity. In the following section I will discuss the cultural influences upon devotee identity under the following themes: religious, social and educational contexts.

4.4 The Cultural Context: Religious, Social and Educational

Culture is defined as "a shared way of life that includes values, beliefs, and norms transmitted within a particular society from generation to generation" (Scupin, 2000: 6-7). Gover (undated)[143] describes how language, behaviour, dress, gesture, cultural roles, and other traditions,[144] which he regards as *artifacts*, are accepted by such members in developing an identity. Although these artifacts pre-exist the members in a culture, they continue to provide material for the "ongoing construction of personal identity". An essential aspect of such a process is that it does not occur in isolation but in relation to others. As a process of social interaction, this *enculturation* ensures acquisition of one's culture through both conscious and unconscious operations. It is therefore difficult to separate aspects of religious practice, social activities, types of education, since they all fall under the broad category of culture.

---

[143] http://www.msu.edu/user/govermar/narrate.htm
[144] which obviously would include religious practices

While it is the culture of *Gaudiya Vaisnavism* that has influenced the institutional identity of ISKCON, which will be evident in the religious, social and educational contexts that I describe from the data, it is important to be mindful that this was a culture implanted in the West by Bhaktivedanta Swami, and therefore has its unique cultural aspects. For my purposes of a coherent and thematic presentation I respond to the data generated about the "culture" of the ISKCON devotees under the broad headings of religious, linguistic, social and educational contexts, bearing in mind their integral nature.

4.4.1   The Religious Context

In describing the religious context, Seul (1999:553) states that "each religion typically provides its followers with a distinct theology and coherent and stable set of norms, institutions, traditions and moral values that provide the basis for an individual to establish and maintain a secure identity".[145] Although it has been established in section 4.2.2 that ISKCON as an institution has a significant missionary agenda, its activities are in accordance with Bhaktivedanta Swami's instructions that there should be a balance between *pancaratrika-vidhi* and *bhagavata-vidhi*, i.e. regularized worship of the deity in the temple and book distribution or preaching activities.[146]

To understand the lineage from which the teachings of ISKCON derive and thereby place its heritage in context, I cite Ketola, (2002: 70) who states, "according to ISKCON theological understanding, all orthodox traditions of Vaisnavism derive from *Krishna,* who is the original guru of all of them". Four orthodox disciplic successions are distinguished, and within each tradition the main reformers have been: Ramanuja (AD 1017 -1137), Madhava (AD 1239 – 1319), Nimbarka (12th century), and Visnusvami (AD 1479 – 1531), respectively. The *Gaudiya Vaisnavas,* who are followers of Caitanya (AD 1486 – 1534), trace their spiritual lineage from Madhva – thus following in the disciplic line of the *Brahma-Madhava-Gaudiya sampradaya* (Satsvarupa das Gosvami, 1977; Ravindra Svarup dasa, 1993; Ketola, 2002).

---

[145] cited in Minkler and Cosgel (2004), working paper, University of Connecticut.
[146] Srimad Bhagavatam (2003): Canto 4.27.24. Purport. Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003). [CD ROM]. The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA.

Through a documentary analysis of sacred scriptures, primarily the major canonical works translated by Bhaktivedanta Swami, viz, the *Bhagavad-gita, Srimad Bhagavatam,* and *Caitanya Caritamrita,* analysis of other smaller texts, as well as interviews with my *elite* and *resident* sample of devotees, I attempt a summary of the main teachings here of ISKCON for the explicit purposes of understanding the institution and how the teachings frame the devotee identity. Without a basic understanding of its teachings, one would be unable to explore the more subtle dimensions of its various activities. Salient verses and commentaries have been selected to describe the devotional context and practices of the devotees. For the purposes of clarity in examining the religious context of ISKCON, the following themes/categories have been identified:

- A summary of teachings of ISKCON

    - The concepts of *dharma* and *bhakti,*

    - The stages of Bhakti

- Spiritual Processes

    - The nine processes of devotional service

    - The chanting of the maha-mantra

    - The daily Temple programme and *mangal-aratik*

- The Role of the Guru in ISKCON

4.4.1.1 A Summary of ISKCON's Teachings

While it is impossible to capture the vastness and the nuances of the teachings of Bhaktivedanta Swami within the limited constrains of my presentation, an extremely useful synopsis of ISKCON's teachings is provided by Ketola (2002: 72) as follows:

a. Supreme Personality of Godhead, named Krishna, is the eternal, all-knowing, omnipresent, all-powerful and all-attractive cosmic creator.

b. Living beings are not to be identified as material bodies but as spirit souls (*atman*), which are "parts and parcels" of God; every living being is eternally a

> subordinate servant of the Supreme Being, but living under the force of illusion (*maya*), they have forgotten this fact.

c. Having lost their original pure consciousness, they futilely attempt to achieve happiness in the material world.

d. These attempts bring karmic reactions, tying the living entities ever more deeply into the material world for repeated lifetimes of misery (*samsara*).

e. Liberation consists of 'going back to Godhead", i.e. getting to Krsna's pure abodes in the spiritual world and serving Him eternally, which is the constitutional position re-established.

f. Liberation can be achieved by learning the "spiritual science" (*dharma*) under the guidance of a self-realised teacher (guru).

g. The latest incarnation of Krishna, Caitanya (1486 – 1534), has established the principles of bhakti yoga most suitable for people of our present age, namely, congregational chanting of the Hare Krishna *maha-mantra* (*sankirtana*).

I have discussed some of the points (a to e) listed above by Ketola in section 3.5 in which I examined the *Vaisnava* theological perspectives on identity. The last two points, on *dharma* and *bhakti*, require further clarification as these concepts form the essence of the teachings and activities of ISKCON devotees, as well as form the most salient features of the individual identity of devotees.

- **Dharma and Bhakti**

According to *Gaudiya Vaisnava* teachings, the process for attaining Godhead, is to understand our *dharma*, or duty, that every individual constitutionally possesses. The perfection of one's *dharma* is attained only in pure *bhakti*, or pure devotional service to God. The *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (1.2.6): explains the words *dharma* and *bhakti* as follows:

> 'The supreme occupation (*dharma*) for all humanity is that by which men can attain to loving devotional service unto the transcendent Lord. Such devotional service must be unmotivated and uninterrupted to completely satisfy the self.'

117

Thus *dharma*, according to Ravindra Svarup (1993) is an integral part of one's daily life, which gives "ISKCON that all-absorbing and self-contained character" and which demands a "total sacralisation of human life". *Bhakti* is regarded as a natural and intrinsic to the soul and thus transcends considerations of different religious faiths. Sri Rupa Gosvami, a direct disciple of Catianya Mahaprabhu, and a predecessor *acarya* of great significance in the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* line in the 16th century, explains that *bhakti* means pure devotion (*bhaktir uttama*) – to *Krishna*, that is free from all superfluous desires and from all contamination of *karma* and *jnana*.[147] Ravindra Svarup elaborates that *karma* is described as acts performed towards enjoying the results, and *jnana* refers to philosophical speculation, the elements of both being contained in all religions. In the Vedas, *karma* refers to the execution of Vedic ritualistic sacrifices or *yajnas*[148] for the purpose of obtaining material rewards in this life and the next. In *jnana*, however, this world is rejected as false, and *karma* is seen as the cause of bondage. *Jnanis* therefore seek liberation through renunciation, and immerse themselves in the philosophy of negation.[149] Ravindra Svarupa dasa (1993) explains that according to Vaisnava teaching, the undifferentiated spiritual light apprehended by the *jnanis* is the effulgence emanating from the transcendental personality of the Godhead. From the Vaisnava point of view *jnana* represents the penultimate, not the ultimate, platform of spiritual realization.

In this regard it is extremely important to note that Bhaktivedanta Swami strongly emphasized that his followers understand God to be a person. Unlike the embodied living entity that is temporary, God is a spiritual person, unborn and without any cause, having six opulences, viz. full strength, full fame, wealth, knowledge, beauty and renunciation.[150] The living identity is regarded as having its own individuality in a devotional relationship with the Supreme.

---

[147] Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu, Purva 1.1.11 (The Nectar of Devotion). Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003) [CD ROM] The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA.

[148] especially fire sacrifices, or havans, where oblations are offered into the fire which represents Vishnu.

[149] As propagated by the advaita vedanta school of ninth century Sankara (Ravindra Svarup dasa, 1993) that this world is false and in the spiritual destination there is no form, activity, or attributes but an impersonal merging with the Universal Absolute known as the Brahman or Brahmajyoti.

[150] Bhaktivedanta Swami, Purport, Bhagavad-gita As It is, 10.1, 1983. He also explains the word "Bhagavan", a term for God which means "one who is full in six opulences".

Thus for the *Krishna* devotee in the ISKCON tradition then, his or her perceptions, thoughts, attitudes, verbalizations and practices will be framed by this premise of the Absolute Truth as the supreme transcendental person, as described by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami.[151]   To attain that supreme transcendental person, a practitioner of *bhakti yoga*, must progress through various *stages of bhakti* until he reaches perfection, which I discuss in the next section.

- **Stages of Bhakti**

According to *Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu* (1.4.15-16: Bhaktivedanta Vedabase, 2003), for a person engaged in Krishna consciousness nine stages of *sadhana bhakti* may be distinguished:

- *sraddha* – faith: a person's interest is aroused and he wants to find out about Krishna consciousness
- *sadhu-sanga* – association with devotees: seriously tries to associate with devotees, enquires, discusses, and tries to understand how they feel
- *bhajana-kriya* – serious execution of *Krishna* consciousness; makes a commitment and considers spiritual initiation
- *anartha-nivritti* – removal of undesirable qualities: "anartha" means "undesirable" and "nivritti" means "removal off". By practice a devotee begins to remove undesirable qualities.
- *nistha* – refers to a position of steadiness or fixedness in devotional service
- *ruci* – refers to "taste", or a joyful engagement in his devotional practice
- *ashakti* – an intense attachment for *Krishna* which is automatic
- *bhava* – an experience of loving affection which is described as ecstasy
- *prema* – pure love of *Krishna* in which one enters into direct association with God, considered the perfection of life.

---

[151] See Chapter Three, section 3.5.

The engagement in *bhakti yoga* leads the practitioner through successive stages of spiritual advancement which is alluded to as levels of *purification*. This is evident in the comments of the following devotees interviewed:

Temple President: *The idea is that the Holy Name will purify everyone of their sinful tendencies.*

Bhakti Caitanya Swami: *These activities are which Lord Caitanya said are the most powerful in arousing the dormant Krishna Consciousness. They have the most purifying effects.*

Devotee C: *I am just trying to perfect this life and purify it so that I don't have to come back and suffer. The only way I feel that I can do it is by serving God and actually serving everybody else who is actually serving God.*

The devotee feels by engaging in devotional service, his or her materialistic propensities for sense gratification will begin to diminish, and their spiritual qualities (purity) will begin to emerge eventually leading to liberation.[152] Thus devotees may be found to be on different stages of spiritual progress leading to the understanding that some devotees are advanced or still on the lower rungs of devotional practice.[ii] To begin this *purification* described, the devotees feel it is necessary to engage in specific spiritual processes.

4.4.1.2 Spiritual Processes

There are several, as well as varied, spiritual processes within ISKCON. Documentary analysis reveals that these multifarious processes may be grouped into nine essential processes by which devotional service may be executed. Within those nine processes the chanting of the *maha-mantra* is considered most important. The resident devotee

---

[152] Bhaktivedanta Swami, Purport, *Bhagavad- gita* As It Is, 16.22. Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003) [CD ROM] The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA.

activities in the temple are circumscribed by mandatory stipulations, part of which is the daily temple programme, and attendance at *mangal-aratik.*

- **Nine Processes of Devotional Practice**

To achieve this personal relationship the *Srimad Bhagavatam* (7.5.23) describes that there are nine processes of devotional service as follows:

sravanam kirtanam visnoh

smaranam pada-sevanam

arcanam vandanam dasyam

sakhyam atma-nivedanam

These nine processes of devotional service are translated as:

sravanam –	*hearing* the name and glories of God
kirtanam –	*chanting* his glories
smaranam –	*remembering* God
pada-sevanam –	*serving* the Lord's feet
arcanam –	*worshipping* the Lord in Temples
vandanam –	offering *prayers* to God
dasyam –	acting as the Lord's *servant*
sakhyam –	making *friends* with the Lord
atma-nivedanam –	*surrendering* oneself fully to God

Performing the above activities is considered to be the real engagement of the individual and other worldly affairs are regarded as peripheral, even antagonistic to one's real nature. Devamrita Swami, an elite informer, responds:

The nature of my true self comes out in devotional service to Krishna… Separate from the devotional service to Krishna you will only see my true self-manifesting pervertedly in material affairs.

121

However Devotee A expresses her feelings differently:

It's very hard. It's very easy to say that I am servant of God but I don't realise that really, actually right now. But I try to...but I know that...in everyday and every year I can understand better.

It is interesting to note that the elite informer, a spiritual master, is more confident and convinced of his identity as a "servant of *Krishna*", while the resident devotee, although honest, presents a certain uncertainty about her identity. This is possibly due to different levels of experience, knowledge, conviction and realizations of these devotees. Her answer however, does acknowledge that the processes described, if adhered to, would produce a result. Thus the nine processes of devotional service listed frames the devotee identity as a "servant" of God. It appears from the texts quoted above and the responses of the devotees that an initial part of the identity of becoming a "servant" of God must of necessity be linked to the chanting process, which I describe in the next section.

- **The Chanting of the Maha-mantra**

The process of *sadhana bhakti* begins with hearing and chanting of the *maha-mantra*.[153] Inaugurated by Caitanya Mahaprabhu, this central process of *Gaudiya Vaisnavism* emphasizes the congregational chanting of God's names with musical instruments (called *sankirtana*) as well on a rosary as a form of personal meditation referred to as *japa* (Ketola, 2003). In my interview with Kadamba Kanana Swami he explained:

The chanting of the maha-mantra is considered to be a direct association to the Supreme Lord. The name is considered to be the Supreme Lord and one is directly associating with the Supreme Lord.

---

[153] The sound vibration encapsulated in a specific format, which is the main practice of the Hare Krishna devotees: Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare.

Regarding the personal experience of chanting certain emotions are felt what often in devotee terminology is referred to as "taste", a feeling that devotees regard as essential in nourishing their engagement in devotional life:

Devotee D: *I have a sense of happiness, a sense of belonging. If I don't chant I feel I'm missing a whole area of my spiritual life, I feel I'm drifting away.*

Bhaktivedanta Swami (1970) asserts that the *maha-mantra* is the prime process to revive one's original Krishna consciousness. He explains the meaning of the words as follows: "Krishna" which means "all attractive" and "Rama" which means the "reservoir of pleasure" are forms of addressing the Lord. "Hare" is a vocative case of the word "Hara" which refers to the *Radha*, the pleasure potency of the Lord, manifest as his consort; hence a complete name of the Lord is *Radha Krishna*. The chanting, Bhaktivedanta Swami explains, is likened to the cry of a child for its mother, defining a mood of dependence or helplessness, in which one calls for protection from God. For the mantra to have the most effect it must be received or heard from a pure devotee, and it must be chanted without offenses.[iii] This chanting forms a foundation for all the activities in which the devotees are engaged; either the chanting occurs congregationally with musical instruments, or personally on a rosary. It is an integral part of a devotee's daily programme which I describe in the next section.

- **The Daily Temple Programme and Mangal Aratik**

Ketola (2002) notes the standard of deity worship as well as the "cycle of rituals standardized to a high degree" in all ISKCON temples.[154] That the context of worship in all ISKCON Temples is very structured and formalized is evident in the stipulations found in *The Handbook of Vaisnava Songs and Practices* (Ramanujacharya das, 1999) as well as noted in my observations.[iv]

---

[154] The rich symbolism and intricate detail of worship cannot be fully represented within the constraints of my presentation. For a detailed history, standards and procedures of deity worship in ISKCON, see Ketola (2002).

Alongside the schedule of worship conducted on the main altar or in the Temple room, listed by Ramanujacharya (1999), the resident devotees have various engagements either in the Temple or outside.[155] Using my participant observer status, and field notes, I have attempted to understand how devotee identity is constructed by these different activities, particularly the formalized structure of Temple worship, by describing a typical worship scenario that occurs in the Temple. I felt that since the morning programme (*mangal aratik*)[156] is mandatory on resident devotees, it would be relevant to respond to the data generated about it. [v]

Arati refers to the process of worship of the deities on the main altar,[157] to the *Tulasi* plant or to the deity of Bhaktivedanta Swami, by the offering of certain sacred paraphernalia like incense, flowers, lamp with wicks made of clarified butter, whisks and peacock feather fans. It is quite elaborate and performed by Brahmins or *pujaris*[158] who have had the necessary training. Male and female devotees gather on separate sides of the Temple room, and take part in the worship by a respectful observance of the entire worship (*darsana*) during which *kirtan*[vi] is often held. Often as the tempo increases, the devotees raise their hands, clap and dance.

In my interview with the Temple President about the significance of the morning spiritual programme on devotee identity, he explicitly declared that:

---

[155] e.g. the book shop, temple tours, book distribution, university (BYS) programmes, Food for Life, cooking, deity worship, reception services, fund-raising, congregational preaching programmes (nama hattas), etc.

[156] Mangal-aratik is the first daily worship that occurs at 4.30am. It is mandatory for resident devotees to attend *mangal-arati*, unless ill or traveling. Aratis are performed six times daily; attendance at the other aratis is optional.

[157] In this temple, as in many other ISKCON temples, a standard altar comprising of the deities of Radha and Krishna, Caitanya, Bhaktivedanta Swami, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati and pictures of the prominent spiritual masters of the disciplic succession that precede them, forms the main focal area of worship. Opposite the altar but facing it, is the *vyasasana* or seat of honour on which a life size deity of Bhaktivedanta Swami is seated.

[158] *Harinam diksha* is the first initiation given to devotees. As the devotee gains knowledge, experience and progresses in standards of worship and behaviour, he may be awarded a second initiation, i.e. *Brahmin gayatri,* the awarding of the sacred gayatri mantra and sacred thread. A *pujari* is a devotee who has received Brahmin initiation and trained specifically in the worship of the deities.

Srila Prabhupada, tailored an early morning programme of spiritual practices for linking our consciousness or meditation to the Supreme Lord.

The intersection between the institutional identity and individual identity is evident in his response. The Temple President felt that the morning programme which was specifically developed by Bhaktivedanta Swami, if followed seriously will purify the "consciousness" of the practitioner and reward him with attachment to *Krishna*. He regarded consistent attendance of the morning programme as a standard to monitor a devotee's spiritual progress. Devotee B expressed his feelings about the morning programme:

Getting up and chanting early in the morning helps us to be regulated. When we are regulated, thinking about God, doing some service, He just becomes part of our existence

Devotee B explained that it was important to be involved in a regulated programme of worship because it supports his identity as a devotee by creating a "spiritual culture within you". He felt that for someone not involved in such a programme it was easy to forget or even procrastinate about one's prayer. He considered the morning programme as essential in nurturing his identity as a spiritual being, expressing that the more one "thinks about God the more you become Godly".

In this respect Ketola (2002) cites several researchers who have attempted an explanation of *puja* or worship in Temples.[159] The reasons for the *puja* may be categorized as follows:

- an act of respectful honouring and invocation;
- as an act of purification both of the worshipper and the paraphernalia used in worship;
- praise and glorification of God;
- association and communion with the deity.

---

[159] Gonda, 1970; Babb, 1975; Fuller, 1992; Milner, 1994; Eck, 1998

Yet the reasons for *puja* cited above do not quite capture the essence of the devotees' mood. For the devotee a certain serious contemplation seems to occur, which expresses itself as internal mood of dependence, meditative consciousness, or devotion that becomes apparent in the devotee responses. Thus the morning progamme provides an intense schedule of activities, a structure and experience which governs the devotees' lives and impacts upon their consciousness. To make further progress in devotional life, the devotees feel, the acceptance of a guru and willingness to be directed by him is essential.

4.4.1.3   The Role of the Guru in ISKCON

The devotees regard the acceptance of a guru and direction by him as necessary in the process of *bhakti*. The guru occupies a significant and prominent position in the ISKCON tradition. My interview questions about the position and role of the guru elicited the following responses:

Kadamba Kanana Swami: *The guru is like a supervisor who is monitoring the performance and progress of the individual students.*

Devotee B: *A Guru is a spiritual master or a spiritual teacher who is a representative of God. He is connected in an authorised succession of teachers.*

The guru or spiritual guide (Ketola, 2002) is essential to the spiritual advancement of a devotee. As can be ascertained from the above the authority of the guru as a representative of *Krishna* is dependent on whether he is linked to the predecessor spiritual masters, highlighting the principle of disciplic succession. In the responses that follow, the central position that a guru occupies in the life of a disciple is clearly demonstrated:

Devotee A: *Without my guru I wouldn't have anything, absolutely anything... he is so merciful.*

126

Devotee B: *I think my step into spirituality was accepting the spiritual master and feeling sincerely that he's accepted me. I felt so secure, I felt so protected by that.*

The thoughts of one's guru, or the guru's personal presence or instructions seem to evoke in the disciple certain emotions and feelings of dependence and assurance.   In addition to his role as an authorized representative of God, and his role as a link for the disciple, it seemed important for the disciple to have a sense of acceptance, and understanding that the guru has a personal involvement in the devotee's life.   To understand how the devotee reconciled his own initiative and individuality with a dependence on the guru, the question: "Do you think in following a religious tradition like this, one suspends one's faculties of critical judgement and simply accepts convictions supplied by an authority," produced the following responses:

Bhakti Caitanya Swami: *We had people who were gurus, a very authoritative position, but they actually deviated from the process and the philosophy of the process.*

Kadamba Kanana Swami: *It is certainly not a case where a person is asked to give up his healthy intellectual scepticism and enter into a blind belief. If they find apparent contradictions in the process they must again present those before their teachers.*

Temple President: *There is no coercion, and we don't advocate blind following. We like them to question everything.*

Bhakti Caitanya explained that the authority of the guru is accepted based on certification by the disciplic succession, and in ISKCON specifically mandated by the GBC. He did not regard the authorities in devotee society to be generally motivated for political or economic reasons. Devotees are generally willing to accept the authorities. However, devotees are allowed to be critical and analytical if they observe that a person in an authoritative position shows symptoms of being motivated in ways that deviate from what is expected.   From the above it can be established that a disciple's allegiance is not characterized by blind subservience to a guru and that a guru has to display certain

127

mandatory and personal qualifications, which are summarized by Ketola (2002: 77) as follows:

- the spiritual master must strictly follow the principle of disciplic succession;
- he must have spiritual knowledge and be learned in Vedic literature;
- he must be able to free his disciples from birth ad death and lead them back to Godhead;
- the spiritual master must teach by example.

Initially, *neophytes*, are expected to accept the instructions of Bhaktivedanta Swami, and as he or she becomes more serious, encouraged to consider developing a spiritual relationship with an authorized initiating spiritual master (generally a disciple of Bhaktivedanta Swami), from whom they will receive *diksha* or spiritual initiation.[160] In ISKCON, while the guru is to be offered worship like God, he is not equated with God, but seen as his representative (Sivarama Swami, 1999). The devotee then engages in the process of *sadhana bhakti*, or devotional service in practice following the rules and regulations under the instruction of a guru, and his spiritual progress can be discerned by examining certain benchmarks given in the scriptures.

My aim in describing the above activities was to understand the ethos or ambiance of the context in which devotees worship. The philosophical understanding summarized as the *Teachings of ISKCON* in the above section, underscores all the activities of the ISKCON devotees, whose worship is offered to a personal God called *Krishna*, attainment of whose abode or personal service is the prime motivating factor of the devotees, which begins with accepting the process of chanting the *maha-mantra* and surrender to a guru. To facilitate this "consciousness of *Krishna*" a routinized, structured programme of worship and activities has been laid down by Bhaktivedanta Swami which continues to be implemented in ISKCON Temple, as well as several major social and educational projects are initiated which articulates its outreach or missionary aspirations. In addition

---

[160] The detailed theology of guru in ISKCON is given by Sivarama Swami (1999): The Siksa-guru: Implementing Tradition within ISKCON. Bhaktivedanta Institute: Hungary

I respond to the important social dynamics that impact on the devotee identity, which I describe under the issues of language, race ad culture, as well as the lifestyle changes of the devotees.

4.4.2 The Social Context

The social context of ISKCON encompasses a wide variety of activities in which devotees interact at different levels with one another, as well as with the general society outside the Temple community. As already emphasized there is an intersection of data across categories; it can be argued that everything I have observed may be categorized as "social". After all, an ethnographic researcher's objective is to analyse particular social phenomena. In this section I respond to my critical question: *How* and *why* are the resident devotees of the ISKCON Durban Temple in South Africa, who are variegated in term of race, culture and language, able to create their identities as devotees? I respond to data about the social context generated from my documentary analysis, walkabouts, field notes, participant observation and interviews, in the following categories:

- Issues of Language and Race of ISKCON Durban Temple devotees

- Lifestyle changes (devotee attire, diet, values, levels of Spiritual Practice)

- Educational/Community Outreach contexts

Within the categories listed above it is evident that devotees' responses indicate several changes in their lifestyles (language, behaviour, dress, mannerisms, cultural roles, etc) and views. Thus it is also pertinent within this section to respond to the critical question: *What* are the possible changes in the lifestyle and values of these resident devotees since they first joined? It is proposed that these characteristics will reflect how devotees see themselves, and is integral to the understanding of identity construction. In Section 4.4.1.1 above, it became evident that devotees experience what they refer to as a "purification", or change of consciousness. It can be inferred that such a change in

consciousness or purification will lead to a devotee's change in life-style and values, a point I respond to later in this section.

4.4.2.1 Relevance of Language and Race

In section 3.5.1, I examined Beck's[161] assertion that categories of race, language, culture and religion may be historically, geographically or even politically constructed. He felt that since these contexts can change, one's identity is not fixed or bound by these positions. In view of this I respond to the data on the issues of language and race in the ISKCON Durban Temple context:

- **Language Enculturation: Reverential Appreciation**

ISKCON has inherited the traditions of the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* line in which the language of scripture, prayers and hymns are either in Sanskrit or Bengali. At spiritual initiation, devotees receive names which are also in Sanskrit or Bengali. Given the fact that this philosophy has been translated into so many languages internationally, I asked the following questions: How relevant is English, as well as the devotees' traditional language in their identity construction? How do the devotees regard Sanskrit and Bengali as language of prayer and naming? To these I respond to data generated from interviews, as well as supporting data derived from documentary analysis.

The devotees generally felt that the cultural, religious or linguistic background of the person attracted to *Krishna* consciousness was not important:

Devotee A: *They are not different, they're the same, exactly the same…it is not the background only that they are following their own wishes.*

Devotee B: *Actually spiritual life has nothing to do with race, colour or creed, or religion or any material culture because it has something to do with the spiritual self.*

---

[161] cited in Adams, 2003

Devotee D: *I think that we are all unified by service.*

It is evident from the responses of the devotees here that religious practice and tradition is central to identity rather than language. In this regard one may appreciate the phenomenal effort of Bhaktivedanta Swami who translated over 55 books which have been printed in more than 50 languages, 450 million of these books having been distributed throughout the world.[162] Since English is an important language of commerce and communication in South Africa, I questioned the devotees on its utility:

Devotee A:[163] *I still think in my native language. Maybe after a while I won't need it so much when my English is good, but right now I can't express myself so well in English. But otherwise I am not so attached to my native language.*

Devotee B*: I don't use my traditional language often. I do use it for communication if I meet someone who speaks Tshetswana.*[164] *But, when I think now, I think in English*

The importance of English in propagating this philosophy was already envisioned by Bhaktisiddhanta Saravati when he instructed Bhaktivedanta Swami to preach this philosophy in English. Riddha das (2003) describes a private conversation in which Bhaktivedanta Swami himself recalled his initial meeting with Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati:

> "So we went to see [Bhaktisiddhanta Saravati Thakura] Prabhupada and offered our obeisances. So immediately he said that "You are all educated men—why don't you preach Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu's message throughout the whole world?"

Bhaktivedanta Swami also writes (1974), "Fortunately, even at our first meeting His Divine Grace advised me to preach the cult of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu in English in the Western countries",[165] and in the purport of *Srimad Bhagavatam* (SB 6.5.18) he states:

---

[162] Statistics from Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, http://www..com/main.php?id=198, 2005, page 2
[163] I found that although this devotee had a foreign accent she was quite proficient in English.
[164] Tshetswana is a traditional language spoken in the North West of South Africa.

> The Krishna consciousness movement is very eager to present Vedic literature in modern languages, especially Western languages such as English, French and German. The leaders of the Western world, the Americans and Europeans, have become the idols of modern civilization because the Western people are very sophisticated in temporary activities for the advancement of material civilization...therefore the Krishna consciousness movement is very much interested in giving the Western people knowledge by translating the original Sanskrit Vedic literatures into Western languages.

It is evident from his explanation above that Bhaktivedanta Swami regarded his preaching in English as a significant missionary objective, in which he implied that the Western countries, although technologically advanced, were bereft of *Krishna* consciousness. Yet simultaneously he introduced the Western countries to the Sanskrit and Bengali. I ascertained the feelings of devotees about when they first encountered this language:

Devotee A: *I was trying to empty my mind and meditate on these words. Sometimes I was happy, sometimes I was crying afterwards.*

Devotee B: *I was wondering why they didn't translate these songs into English.*

Devotee C: *It sounded a bit like Hindi to me. So it wasn't so bad... It sounded very foreign.*

Devotee D: *I didn't understand the meaning. It was just so peaceful and so close to me that it was a link with my soul.*

All the devotees indicated that they initially did not understand the meaning of the language. Although their reaction to hearing Sanskrit or Bengali the first time was varied, some responses indicate an affective state which the devotees could not quite

---

[165] Bhaktivedanta Swami, concluding notes at the end of Antya lila, Caitanya Caritamrta. (Bhaktivedanta Vedabase, 2003)

explain at that time. However after initiation, which would mean that the devotee had been practicing *Krishna* consciousness for a while, their responses especially to receiving spiritual names in Sanskrit or Bengali, were:

Devotee A: *I was very happy, not only as a devotee but because I can relate with this name much better than the name I had previously.*

Devotee B: *I really liked it...It is a reminder that in my constitution I am the servant of God.*

Devotee C: *I really liked it. We get initiated names so that we can actually make advancement by calling the names of the Lord.*

Devotee D: *I thought it was very short and very sweet and very beautiful. Now I was officially part of the Vedic culture. It is a very high culture. I think it is important to change the name.*

The names given at initiation are accepted as highly significant for all the devotees, especially since it frames their identity as devotees. Some devotees explained that they did not like their own names they had received at birth because it had no meaning. They liked their spiritual names in Sanskrit or Bengali since it had meaning and assisted them in framing their identities as devotees.[166] What is noticeable in devotee responses was an accompanying explanation to their acceptance of such names, which indicates an increase in the devotees' knowledge component.

I found that devotees regarded English as an important language of preaching, and if they had a traditional language, used it only when necessary. For most of the devotees at the Durban Temple the dominant communication was in English, except when prayers and

---

[166] When devotees receive spiritual initiation, they are given a spiritual name by their spiritual master. That spiritual name may be one of the many names of Krishna or Radha, or other divine associates considered to live in the spiritual world. They may also be named after any one of the great spiritual masters or even after one of the Holy places in the tradition. The important point to note is that the males are given a spiritual name with the suffix "das", and the females "dasi"; e.g. Krishna das or Radha dasi. The suffix means "servant". Thus the devotee always frames his identity as a "servant" of Krishna or Radha.

songs were being recited. Clearly they had a reverential appreciation for Sanskrit and Bengali. The Sanskrit and Bengali language in names, prayer, and songs, especially chanting the *maha-mantra,* produce a significant emotional affect that devotees refer to in standard idiom as "ecstasy" or "taste" which continues to sustain their involvement. The use of Sanskrit and Bengali does point to a particular privileged status within ISKCON although the philosophy and devotee's faith is not dependent upon it, which indicates an enculturation into a different cultural and linguistic ethos from the devotee's background.

In section 3.4.3, it was mentioned that that while some researchers considered language inextricably linked to cultural identity (Mabele, undated)[167] others assert that language does not have an essential role in defining the identity of any ethnic group. A culture can express its thoughts in any language, as well not be constrained by the dominant language of the society (Corson, cited in Murji and Herbert, 1999). In section 3.4.3, I also cited the example of the Isma'ili community in Calgary, Canada, which comprised of a diverse set of cultures and languages, and whose community identity was determined more by the traditions of its faith, and the practice of their religion, rather than language (Murji and Hebert, 1999).

- **Beyond Racial Binaries**

While current global trends indicate an attempt to deconstruct racial binaries (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 2002), it is difficult to ignore the history of South Africa which abounded with often violent attempts of bureaucracy to entrench such identities for the purposes of power, economic and social control, which still continues to affect society (Erasmus, 2005). ISKCON in South Africa attracted a varied membership and it is therefore relevant to examine how members create their identity regardless of race. In Chapter 2, *Research Methodology,* I indicated my use of a *purposive sampling* technique, where the participants were intentionally selected because of their typicality. In this case my *resident* sample consisted of 4 resident devotees, viz. a Coloured male, a Black male, an Indian female and a White female. I did not essentialize race, culture or language, but privileged identity construction. I examined these categories since the membership of the

---

[167] http://wrt-ntertext.syr.edu/XI/linguistic.html

ISKCON Durban Temple consisted of individuals from a variety of racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In my elite sample I included respondents of different nationality and racial category.

In response to my interview question: *Why do you think people from different races, cultures, languages or religions can come together to practice Krishna Consciousness?* Jayadvaita Swami offered an incisive comment that ISKCON does not a "have a monopoly of being able to attract disparate followers" because people can come together for any common goal. However, he felt that an understanding that transcended temporal designations could include people from any type of background. Philosophically he offered the reason that it was only on the "platform of spiritual identity that living beings have a true commonality". Devamrita Swami in providing his own example as a "black" American, gave a witty rebuttal to my question regarding the issue of race, as arbitrary:

My birth certificate said "coloured" and later they said "coloured" is not a good word, you're "Negro"; then later, that is not a good word, you're "black"; then, that's not good, you're "Afro-American"; actually more precisely, "African-American!"

The fact that the American society was so mixed, he felt, made the issue of race meaningless and amusing, quoting his own origins as having Scotttish and Native Indian American roots, and laughingly mentioning his experience in Nigeria where the customs officer thought he was Turkish! He felt it was illusion to think that "I am this body". He offered the explanation that the unity of the devotees regardless of race and culture, was due to the knowledge and experience provided by *Krishna* consciousness, that one is beyond external designations.

Although the philosophy may provide a basis upon which devotees may interact regardless of external binaries, to examine how this was practically experienced in ISKCON, I asked one of the "black" devotees in my sample[168] whether he felt any tensions in the organization because of race. He responded:

---

[168] resident devotee B

Devotee B: *Not really. Some individuals may come with their own obscured vision,*
but that doesn't mean that the society is like that.

He explained that he did not really have personal experience of such incidents, noting
that since the society is open to everyone, they may have been some discrimination but
only because someone in particular may have come with that kind of mentality originally,
not that the society encouraged this at all.   This was supported by Devotee D's response
as follows:

I have been in the Movement for twenty years with so many devotees from other cultures
and religions there was not one stage when anyone made me feel I was a coloured.

To gauge the level of social interaction that could occur regardless of race I asked
Devotee A, a "white" person whether she would marry someone from another race group.
She expressed surprise at the question, retorting:

Of course I would marry someone from another race group. I'm not from South Africa!
Here is so big deal with the skin colour. I'm just so amazed actually!

Her answer indicated that she felt these racial binaries to be entrenched in South Africa
rather than in her own country of origin. The data generated from my participatory
observation however, did indicate that there was a tendency for devotees of similar race
groups to group together. Jayadvaita Swami comments:

In the USA we find that Indians don't mix with the Americans; in Miami the Puerto Rican
devotees congregate together.

He regarded this as natural, explaining that there are dual or multiple identities which
creates a tension between our temporal identity and eternal identity. Although on a
certain level we needed to transcend our tendency to identify with the body and mind, we

live in a world where these identities pertained in some way. Ultimately however, he felt, that we must put aside our temporary identities and acknowledge the permanent identity, as taught by Caitanya Mahaprabhu.

Presenting my observation to Bhakti Caitanya Swami that there was a tendency of devotees from similar races to group together, even at the Temple, I asked whether he considered this natural or was there is a tension between the devotees' temporal identity and true identity. His response was:

BCS: They are not completely pure. There still are hangovers from material existence.

He indicated that devotees were still conditioned by their material existence, and it would take time before the tendency to relate to others on the basis of race was eradicated, which was actually only to be found at a high level of spiritual advancement. He felt that while in the early stages devotees may gravitate toward their own race to some degree, this was a subtle and secondary type of factor; it was actually their *Krishna* consciousness that governed their lives.

Thus while race is not an important factor in determining the social interaction amongst devotees, any such tendency is to be understood as a conditioning from a previous identity. From the literature review, the Vedic view indicates that there is a reality of bodily designation, but this is superficial and that identifying the possessor of the body with the body is erroneous. While the *neophyte* devotee may have a tendency to relate on the platform of race initially, the elite informers do not see race or colour.

4.4.3 Lifestyle Changes

The changes in the lifestyle and values of the resident devotees since they first joined, reflects on how devotees see themselves, and is therefore integral to the understanding of how the devotees construct their identities. In the following section I respond to the data generated about devotee attire, diet, values and levels of spiritual practice as aspects of a devotee's life where the changes are most observable.

137

- **Devotee Attire**

From my observations of the ISKCON devotees, one of the most distinguishing characteristics of a devotee is the type of clothing adopted. This is especially the instance in the Western societies where the devotee is noticeable by the "foreign" dress adopted. The females generally use a sari, while the males use a *dhoti* and *kurtha.*[169] A prominent decoration, called *tilak,* is drawn onto the forehead and bridge of the nose with a whitish type of clay. Kadamba Kanana Swami explains:

When a person enters into some tradition he will enter into the external social, institutional part that brings with it certain dress, certain behaviours, and certain codes which is a major adjustment in a person's life.

The externals of dress seem to be peculiar to a culture derived from India, and as discussed in section 1.6, a large amount of debate surrounded the Indian /Hindu identity of ISKCON. How does this then impact on the identity of the devotees?

Devotee A: *I just feel myself somehow very secure, very protected by a sari especially when my head is covered. More important I feel is wearing tilak.*

Devotee B: *This is part of a uniform for the devotees to wear – dhothi and kurtha. It has a sort of Indian identity, because of the dress... before I used to feel like I was not comfortable when I first joined.*

Devotee C: *It is actually the chastity of a woman. It is part of our dressing to actually symbolise that we actually belong to ISKCON.*

Devotee D: *There was a bit of re-socialising, but I was familiar with a little bit of the habits, eating habits, bathroom habits but I had exposure to that because of my schooling. But I never felt that it was a Hindu Movement.*

---

[169] A dhoti is a length of cloth usually about three meters in length and is draped from the waist downwards. One end is pulled in between the legs and tucked at the back, and the other end is pleated and tucked in front. The kurta is a generally a collarless shirt. Householders, and males who have not formally committed to celibacy wear white cloth, while brahmacaris (celibate students) and sannyasis (renunciants) wear saffron.

138

Most devotees explained that initially they found adapting to the dress code difficult, but became accustomed to it with time. They feel uncomfortable if they do not use devotee attire. The female devotees felt that the devotee attire afforded them a type of protection. Of particular note is that they both identified with the use of the sari as indicating a quality of "chastity". Devotee D was familiar with some of the cultural patterns since he had been to a school which had learners from various cultures, but he did not consider any of these trappings to be Hindu. He explained that he always used his devotee attire even when he went outside the Temple precinct since this was "his identity". This also afforded him the opportunity to meet interested people and share with them his lifestyle. Devotee B was adamant that although externally the dress appeared "Indian", it did not mean he had adopted an Indian identity because the principles followed by ISKCON devotees are not generally followed by people in India except those who are devotees. The spiritual masters (elite informers) elaborated on this point:

Kadamba Kanana Swami: *As an Indian based tradition, certainly there are confrontations with our Western conditioning, habits, and cultural patterns. Undoubtedly it created a certain amount of tension to function on the social level.*

Jayadvaita Swami: *That is a very superficial way of looking at things. It is like looking at gold and saying this is Indian gold or South African gold. It is either gold or it is not.*

Devamrita Swami: *Just like the sun appears to arise from the east but it is not the property of the east. Similarly Krishna Consciousness appears to be Indian but it is not the property of India.*

Devotee C, a resident devotee focused on the institutional identity of ISKCON in relation to the assertion that it appears Indian:

It attracts all different types of people... white, the black, the Indian. It attracts the rich, the poor, the distressed, it attracts the happy.. "International" is a big word. International Society for Krishna Consciousness. It's a global identity.

139

Kadamba Kanana Swami further questioned the social manifestation of ISKCON, suggesting that the pertinence of Indian traditional standards to modern times was debatable. In regarding the original Vedic culture of India deeply spiritually orientated, he intimated that ISKCON was following this original spiritual experience and that was more relevant rather than externals or cultural change. Devamrita Swami also regarded this experience to be on the level of the "pure" self, regardless of nationality.

It may again be noted that the of code of attire is an institutional requirement (Scupin, 2000; Seul, 1999; Gover, undated) that directly impinges itself upon the devotee identity; accepting the identity of a resident devotee requires one to adopt the particular type of attire stipulated. It was found that the attire adopted by devotees is not for reasons of representing an Indian culture, but rather because of the values it represents. Some devotees directly chose to dress in devotee attire as they felt it provided an ambassadorial role for them, and as it directly impacted on their identity as devotees.

- **Diet**

Another distinguishing characteristic of ISKCON is its practice and promulgation of a vegetarian diet. Some devotees saw vegetarianism as an important part of spirituality even before becoming devotees:

Devotee D: *I was already practicing yoga by myself and I was vegetarian.*

Others reported becoming vegetarian by being impressed with the standard of vegetarian preparations by the Movement. Most of the vegetarian meals have a large variety, especially when there is a festival. A standard term used by devotees when referring to these meals is "feast".

Devotee C: *We were very impressed the way the food was cooked and the variety of vegetarian preparations made. So that actually inspired me a lot to become a vegetarian also.*

For this devotee becoming a vegetarian was an important decision since initially such a change created tension within the family between herself and other non-vegetarian members. Of significance is that vegetarianism is considered one of the four main regulative principles that devotees are expected to follow. Besides the abstinence from all meat, devotees abstain from fish and eggs as well. The importance of this is discussed by Devotee C:

There's this aspect about karma where you know for every action there is a reaction.

Devotee C felt that eating meat involves killing, which in turn will bring a similar type of reaction, which the devotees refer to as *karma*. She elaborated that foods are classified in different modes, viz. ignorance, passion and goodness, which affected the moods of the person. By being vegetarian one was in the mode of goodness which enabled one's mind to be sober, to be able to concentrate, and control one's temper. She described that the *Bhagavad-gita* explained that one should not kill, but offer with love and devotion to the Lord fruits, flowers, water, which thereby becomes sanctified.

From close observations it was found that the diet of the devotees is an act of sanctity which was regarded as devotional reciprocation with God.

Govinda's Restaurant, which tangibly demonstrated this aspect of the ISKCON philosophy, was strategically located on the Temple premises. The restaurant manageress explained:

People actually become vegetarians when they see that I can make a variety of vegetables.

She believed that an important function of the restaurant was to create an awareness of vegetarianism for non-vegetarians. She also regarded this as a service to encourage people to become vegetarians so that they would not suffer any reactions. She also felt that the consciousness of the cook who prepared these meals was important; he or she

must be following the regulative principles themselves, chanting *Hare Krishna* in a regulated way, and be exceptionally clean when cooking. More than just nutritional sustenance she devotees believed that this food prepared by devotees and offered in a consciousness of love to God, becomes sanctified and could therefore elevate the consciousness of whoever partook of it.[170]

Vegetarianism is not just restricted to the ISKCON devotees, although for them it is a act filled with sanctity, with deep philosophical ramifications. Several organizations promote vegetarianism for moral, health, economic and environmental reasons[171]. The aversion to killing or causing suffering to other creatures is often cited as a main reason for accepting a vegetarian diet. Francione (1996)[172] describes in detail the "horrific" manner in which animals are slaughtered for food, or used in experimentation, emphasizing the lack of moral concern over such exploitation. In section 2.1.3, it was mentioned that people with a spiritual proclivity seemed to experience a certain perception about the existence of all living entities. This is supported by the viewpoint of many vegetarians, who regarded other creatures as sharing a brotherhood, an impetus for not encouraging their suffering.[173] This view, that all creatures are a creation of God, is also central to the understanding of how the ISKCON Durban Temple devotees create their identities.

- **Changing Perceptions and Values**

In the previous section it was noted that devotees reported a change in consciousness, due to the devotee's engagement within the religious, social and educational contexts described. I have sufficiently responded to the data on language, views on race and culture, devotee attire and devotee diet, the categories within which change in lifestyle

---

[170] Telephonic conversation with restaurant manageress to clarify issues of vegetarianism, November 2005
[171] all-creatures.org. The Vegetarian Society (www.vegsoc.org/21cv)
[172] Rutgers law professor, co-founder/director of Rutgers Animal Rights Law Centre. Address delivered at World Vegetarian Conference, University of Pittsburgh, 1996
[173] Metha, S (1996), former president of International Vegetarian Union; Sapon S (1996): co-founder of Rochester Area Vegetarian Society, emeritus Professor o psycholinguistics; papers delivered at World Vegetarian Congress, University of Pittsbugh, 1996.

was apparent. I now respond specifically to the data generated on the change of values of the devotees. One of the categories of change was in their religious values:

Devotee A: *When we were Hindus before then different types of demigods were worshiped... only when we joined ISKCON and we started reading the Bhagavad-Gita we actually understood that we had to worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead.*

The response from this devotee indicates that she does not consider her participation in Krishna consciousness to be "Hindu", a change in her perception from prior to becoming a devotee. Furthermore her response indicates a change from a polytheistic type of worship to a monotheistic one. It is evident from the above that she accounts for such changes as the result of an increase in the knowledge component of her life. Devotee D's response also indicates a change in religious values:

I grew up in the church, in a very religious and spiritual life in Christian terms.

He explained his change in religious outlook was due to feeling a vacuum in his spiritual life. He indicated that from a very early age he had strong spiritual inclinations, and interests in matters like yoga and mysticism. He quoted an incident with amusement, that when he was only six years old, reminiscent of a fairy tale character, he packed a bundle of clothes upon his back and left home telling his mother that he was *"going to search for the truth"*. Devotee D felt it was these natural inclinations that actually allowed him to become a devotee. All the devotees sampled reported a positive change to their outlook in life, as well as in their personal habits and qualities.

Devotee B: *I have developed certain values like tolerance and forgiveness.*

Devotee C: *It was my attitude...In order to be a proper role model, I had to learn the, to be tolerant, clean, mild, meek, humble, punctual.*

Devotee D: *I feel much more responsible person as a devotee and also as a father, as a husband.*

For Devotee C, being a proper role model was important. This could be understood against the backdrop that she was the first person in her family to become a devotee, and that she was a mother. Honesty was also an important quality that she developed. Devotee D, who was also parent, reported a similar change in values, responsibility featuring strongly in his role as a father and husband. He also indicated that prior to being a devotee he was unable to discern between what material and spiritual values, especially in regard to diet and sexuality. Having lived in a European country where sense gratification was rampant, he claimed that had he not become a devotee his hedonistic life would have led to his death. Devotees also reported that although they experienced some difficulties in the past with management, in personal relations with others, or general difficulties of life, they accepted these as "tests" that they had to go through. It was apparent from their responses however, that they are pleased with the positive changes in their lives.

Devotee C: *I am still blissful as I am from the day I joined and I pray that I still remain blissful... I definitely feel very enlivened... I hopefully I am also trying to give this others as well.*

The changes in values reported by the devotees in my *resident* sample were consistent with the view of Kadamba Kananana Swami, one of my elite informers. When asked about the activities and behaviours he would consider being consistent with the true self, he responded:

144

Happiness, an inclination to its truthfulness, tolerance, peacefulness, self control, being equipoised, and not affected by external circumstances.

He further explained that a devotee should also display a constant remembrance of God, and being always inspired, he would not consider his religious activities to be a great austerity, but an ecstatic experience. This was confirmed in a study by Weiss and Mendoza (2003) cited in section 1.7, in which they evaluated the mental health and personality differences of devotees acculturated into the ISKCON. They found highly acculturated *Hare Krishna* men and women reported significantly greater well-being than did their general population norms or lesser acculturated peers.

In section 3.4.5, I also discussed the contention that there existed a crisis in general society, a sense of uncertainty, manifested in symptoms of stress, depression and anxiety (Harro, 2000; Mansfield, 2000; Bendle, 2002; Philips, 2005). This crisis was due to *detraditionalization* and *de-institutionalization*, which has produced feelings of alienation and insecurity – resulting in a less confident, more isolated, fragile and vulnerable self. I argued that if detraditionalization and de-institutionalization produced feelings of alienation and insecurity, which directly impacted upon the individual's perception of self and identity. Then in view of this crisis, an ancient tradition or institution with regularized, stringent practices should be able to do the opposite, i.e. confer upon its subscribers an identity that would lead to stability and security, a proposition that was confirmed by the data as responded to in the above sections.

The cultural context of ISKCON which I examined under the broad headings of the religious, social, and educational contexts, presents an intense and multifarious schedule of activities that the devotees are engaged in daily, which must impact itself directly upon the identity that the devotees creates, apparent in the lifestyle and values practiced by the devotees.

4.4.3.1 Levels of Spiritual Practice

Seul's (1999)[174] assertion that religions provided its members with a definite theology, consistent and established set of standards, institutions, traditions and moral values, which formed the basis for an individual to establish and maintain a secure identity, was evident in data that I gleaned from within the physical and cultural contexts of ISKCON in the previous sections.

In section 4.2.2, the Temple President stated that although all of these contexts were meant to produce the devotee identity, ultimately "the onus was upon the person to take advantage of the atmosphere", and that devotees did leave the ISKCON sometimes. Part of this interview schedule examined whether this enculturation into ISKCON produces the enduring identity of the devotee, or whether it was simply re-socialization or conversion. The spiritual masters (elite informers) responded in the following ways:

Bhakti Caitanaya Swami: *There is a social element where a social atmosphere has an effect, but ultimately the effect that is occurring is that through the process of devotional service – one's eternal nature is becoming uncovered.*

Kadamba Kanana Swami: *The devotees who are new will naturally not be so deep in their relationship with the Supreme Lord, their realisations and religious practices. They greatly depend on social interaction, group membership and group activity for inspiration.*

The responses indicated that the social structure provided by ISKCON was an important aspect of forming the devotees' identity. Emphasis however, seems to be on the personal practice of the devotee within the framework, and his realizations, rather than just the social structure that was in place. Realization may be understood in this context to be insights, or higher awareness. Kadamba Kanana Swami proposed that all religions claimed three levels in which members participated: on the first, lowest level there was

---

[174] cited in Minkler and Cosgel (2004), working paper, University of Connecticut.

the *social manifestation* of the church, or institute; on the second, intermediate level there was the *spiritual substance* of the institution which are its teachings, and third, on the highest level, was the *active presence* of God. He explained that although the *Krishna* conscious tradition conformed to the social, cultural norms and the performance of one's religious duty within the context of worship, one must view this in terms of the levels he proposed. *Krishna* consciousness meant that there was great emphasis to enter immediately to level three. This was manifest in the process of chanting of the *maha-mantra* because the name was considered to be the Supreme Lord and by chanting one was directly associating with the Supreme Lord. Bhakti Caitanya Swami (elite informer) further explained that the practitioner experiences a "deeper idea of a changeless sense of identity that comes to the forefront more and more". He felt that the people who have realized it were actually at very advanced levels, and knew what it is, having perceived it very vividly and clearly themselves. This concept introduces the discussion in the next chapter of notions of self and truth.

4.4.4 Educational / Community Outreach Contexts

- **Temple Activities**

The data I responded to in the following section has been generated from my participant observation, walkabouts, field notes and interviews with the Temple president and heads of the different departments at the Temple. The Temple, as described by the Temple President, formed the headquarters of ISKCON South Africa and therefore several activities were based here:

Temple President: *Our offices are here for management, finance, spiritual standards, to plan our festivals.*

Keeping in mind that the Temple is part of the missionary objective of ISKCON, it formed the hub of several activities and was open to members,[175] guests and tourists daily. Several tour companies brought their national and international guests, and schools often conducted excursions there as well. A devotee guide is often available to explain aspects of the Temple history, architecture, symbolism and activities to the visitors. On the premises is *Govinda's Restaurant* whose main purposes are: to provide a vegetarian alternative to the community; provide pure vegetarian cuisine for strict vegetarians; meet the religious needs of the local Hindu community, cater for visitors and promote vegetarianism.[176] An important function of the Temple, as described by the Temple President, is that it served as a central gathering place for its membership.

Temple President: *It is the centre for our congregation to gather, and worship, attend classes and seminars.*

In this regard the *Sunday Love Feast* was a standard, public guest programme in all ISKCON temples, held weekly on Sunday afternoons. The programme consisted of *aratis* to the deity of Bhaktivedanta Swami and then to the deities on the main altar accompanied by singing, music and dancing. The males and females gathered separately on either side of the Temple room. The Sunday *kirtan* is usually very energetic and boisterous as several congregational youth are often in the forefront playing the traditional instruments. Visiting spiritual masters, seniors or temple resident devotees present the lectures, attended by the membership, who are also encouraged to invite new guests as often as possible. A spirit of festivity predominates and the programme culminates with the entire gathering being served a "feast".[177]

---

[175] several congregational members, as well as interested visitors often attend the daily morning programme which begins at 4.30am. See information under "Daily Morning Programme" already discussed.

[176] Interview with Mallika dasi, manageress of Govinda's restaurant, 7 July 2005.

[177] Data generated from participant observation, and fieldnotes

- **Other Social and Educational Projects**

(i)   Education

The Temple President explained that one of the significant policies of ISKCON was to educate its members[178] in philosophy, as well as train interested members in standards of deity worship, standards of personal practice, initiation standards, music and cuisine.

Temple President: *We also have our Food for Life kitchens, Bhaktivedanta College, our book distribution offices.*

To this end, several seminars are held on the Temple premises where local or international seniors conducted the presentations. An important education wing is the *Bhaktivedanta College of Education and Culture (BCEC)*[179] which is a part-time educational facility for children and adults. The College facilitates the study of scripture, especially *Bhagavad-gita* and *Srimad Bhagavatam* and other books by Bhaktivedanta Swami, and conducts teacher training. Another educational outreach programme is the *Bhakti Yoga Society (BYS)* [180] held at university campuses and other tertiary institutions, which presented aspects of the philosophy in a contemporary manner to students. Senior resident devotees with experience and qualification, as well as visiting seniors conduct these classes. Interested students are also invited to retreats and other seminars for beginners.

Thus, there is a major emphasis on acquiring knowledge of the scriptures and etiquettes of worship and conduct, using the voluminous translations provided by Bhaktivedanta Swami as the basis. One of the foremost missionary activities related to education is the distribution of Bhaktivedanta Swami's books. Documentary analysis revealed a large

---

[178] ISKCON does not have its own school yet, although some discussion has been held about it. A recent addition however has been the opening of its own pre-school.
[179] Interview with Brhat-mridanga das, International Director of BCEC. Introductory courses are offered to the public, as well as progressive levels of qualification in philosophy. Since its inauguration in 1991, more than 2000 students have graduated locally and 9000 internationally.
[180] Interview with Krishnacandra das, organizer of BYS, 22 June, 2005.

volume of correspondence where Bhaktivedanta Swami strongly emphasized this book distribution:

> Please continue to use your intelligence to find out how to distribute my
> books more and more. I am especially pleased to learn that you are
> introducing my books as textbooks in the colleges. We especially have to
> try to attract the educated young men and women in your country so that
> in future there will be many strong leaders to keep our Krishna
> Consciousness Movement strong.[181]

He particularly wanted these books to be placed in tertiary institutions and libraries as he felt that the message would be appreciated by educated people, by whose influence this mission could spread. Book distribution is a priority[182] of ISKCON Durban Temple, with devotees going out on a daily basis to distribute literature on the streets to passersby, to individual homes or to business houses where sponsorships are sought. The sponsored books are donated to libraries, schools, libraries, orphanages and geriatric homes as well as given free at public programmes. The local office of the book distribution department, located on the Temple premises, draws its stock from the South African BBT[vii] warehouses based in Johannesburg. A bookshop existed in the Temple foyer for guests and visitors, and at every major ISKCON public festival a book display/shop is a standard feature. This forms an important wing of the missionary activities of ISKCON.

(ii)   Festivals

Reiterating the Temple President's statement that the Temple provides a site to "plan our festivals", I respond to the data generated about festivals since this formed one of the principal religious, social and cultural phenomena in ISKCON and its corresponding influence on identity. Many festivals are celebrated annually to which the public is

---

[181] Bhaktivedanta Swami correspondence to Govinda das, New York, 7 April 973
[182] Interview with Raghunath das, Department head, book distribution., 16 July, 2005

invited. The main festivals are *Krishnastami, Radhastami, Gaura Purnima, Ramnaumi*[183] and a host of other festivals commemorating the appearance or disappearance[184] of the prominent spiritual masters in the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* line, especially of Bhaktivedanta Swami. One of the largest public festivals is the Durban Ratha Yatra (Festival of Chariots) held annually for four days on the Durban beachfront over the Easter Weekend, which attracts more than one hundred thousand people each year.

Bhakti Caitanya Swami explains the importance of festivals to devotee identity:

Bhaktivinod Thakur[185] said, "madhava tithi bhakati janani" – these festivals, special occasions that have to deal with Krishna – they are the mothers of our devotion.

He strongly believed that festivals are an important element in consolidating devotee identity. There was an essential element of happiness that was experienced which came from associating with so many devotees in a mutual purpose of glorifying God.

The Temple President expressed a similar response in terms of the emotions generated by festivals:

People often tell us that there is a certain spiritual ambiance that they don't quite experience anywhere else.

Although there were many cultural activities associated with the festivals, he believed that it was the high standard of worship of the deities, which is the central focus of the festivities and the enlivening *kirtan* and the lectures that attracted people.

---

[183] The appearance of Krishna, Radha, Caitanya Mahaprabu and Rama respectively.

[184] Devotees refer to the birthdays and days on which spiritual masters have passed away as *appearance* and *disappearance* days respectively. This is motivated by the belief that such devotees do not die, but are commissioned to appear with a spiritual mission, and then they "leave" this existence either to continue their mission elsewhere in the material universe, or return to the spiritual world.

[185] Bhaktivinod Thakur was the spiritual master of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur. For his biography see: Rupavilasa Dasa (1989): The Seventh Gosvami: A Biography of Srila Bhaktivinode Thakura. New Jaipur Press, USA. The meaning of the Sanskrit is as follows: ; *madhava-tithi*–the holy days of Madhava (Krishna) are *bhakti-janani*–the mother of devotion (Bhaktivedanta Vedabase, 2003)

151

(iii) Food for Life

One of ISKCON's major social projects is its free, voluntary vegetarian hunger relief programme. According to Jatipur das, Chairman of *Food for Life,*[186] "approximately 25 000 meals are distributed weekly in Durban and its surrounding districts". The Food for Life kitchens are based at the Chatsworth and Phoenix Temples.[187] In keeping with the instructions of Bhaktivedanta Swami, that "No one within a ten-mile radius of our temples should go hungry",[188] food distribution occurs daily from these kitchens and the recipients constitute of school-going children, residents of squatter camps and impoverished areas, shelters for the homeless, the unemployed, hospitals, public crèches, universities, and other programmes like HIV/AIDS support and disaster relief.

It was observed that while the cleaning staff may not necessarily be devotees, the cook must be a devotee and the same principles regarding the consciousness of the cook, the principles of hygiene, and the consecratory nature of the activity, as discussed under "Diet" in section 4.4.3, apply to the preparation of meals in Food for Life.

Several other activities occur in ISKCON which are too numerous to discuss in detail in this study, viz. *nama hattas*, counselling, and new construction projects, amongst others. I have summarized these in my end notes.[viii] The entire gamut of requirements, religious, social and educational contexts described thus far, provides a comprehensive domain which impacts on the devotee's consciousness in profound ways indicative of an intersection between the institutional identity and individual identity of the devotee. It is an environment which facilitates the devotee identity, yet the onus is upon the devotee to take advantage of the ambiance to seriously practice the activities, the result of which, devotees report, will be *purification* or spiritual advancement; such a change in consciousness or levels of advancement produces a corresponding change in life-style and values of devotees. The process seems reciprocal: initially at least adopting the

---

[186] Jatipur das (June 2005). I formerly held the position as Chairman of Food for Life and therefore have access to the workings of Food for Life.
[187] See map of South Africa in Appendix 1.
[188] Bhaktivedanta Swami, 1975

external requirements of the institution, if applied seriously, produces a change in the devotee consciousness, which produces in him a "realization" of his position as a devotee. Devotees describe this as manifesting as a certain serious contemplation about life, which expresses itself as internal mood of dependence, meditative consciousness, and desire to engage in devotional service, and happiness.

4.5 Conclusion

Using documentary analysis, walkabouts, field notes, participant observation and interviews, I responded in this chapter to the data generated in terms of the institutional identity of ISKCON, the physical context, and cultural context (religious, social, and educational features) which creates the devotee identity. Specifically in terms of the social context I responded to data generated in the following categories: language, issues of race and culture, devotee attire, diet, temple activities, other social and educational projects, values and levels of spiritual practice. As mentioned in the introduction, for the purposes of coherence and thematic presentation, I chose the above categories yet fully mindful of the integral nature of these features of the contexts. I attempted to replicate the ambiance in which devotees lived, thought and acted with a view to understanding how and why devotees created their identities.

The data suggests that the institutional identity of ISKCON is a disseminated process which is varied, manifest particularly in its organizational structures, the physical context and cultural context comprising of religious, social and educational features. While deriving from the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* heritage, unique managerial and spiritual requirements for the administration of ISKCON have been stipulated by Bhaktivedanta Swami. ISKCON Durban subscribes to these instructions, and to fulfill its missionary aspirations, has implemented several original projects, social, cultural and educational activities at the local level. This rigorous scenario, enacted by specific structural, religious, and worship provisos stipulated by the founder, impacts strongly on devotee identity. The physical context, viz. the architecture, and devote accommodation, and cultural context comprising of the religious, social and educational features and activities

153

provide a compelling environment which shapes the devotee identity. The chanting of the *maha-mantra*, and surrender to a guru in disciplic succession forms the basis of the devotee's philosophical understanding that he is a "servant", of a personal God called *Krishna*, to whom worship and personal service is to be directed in all activities, frames the devotee's identity. Such an intense arena of interlocking factors produces in the practitioner a tangible change of habit, lifestyle, values and consciousness, towards concretizing the devotee's "enduring" sense of self.

In the next chapter, deriving from current theorizing about how Truth gets generated in the academic arena, and the emphasis of the ISKCON devotees on spiritual Truths as understood from their the scriptures of their tradition, I firstly examine the elite informers perceptions of Truth and objectivity. I also motivate that there is intersection between what is understood by Truth and the notions of identity. In the second part I respond to the data generated about the sense of self and how it is experienced by the ISKCON devotees with a view to examining the presence of the enduring sense of self in spiritual identity construction.

End Notes

[i] There is phenomenal detail about the symbolism of the architecture of the Hare Krishna Temple, which is found in *An Expression of Transcendence: Symbolism in Temple Architecture* in <u>Sri-Sri- Radha-Radhanath Temple of Understanding: Grand Opening Brochure</u>. Rajaram das (1985) explains that besides the *vasta purusa*, other aspects important in Temple design for a *brahminical* architect is the consideration of one's spiritual master, and the donor or person who has arranged the Temple construction, to be symbolized in the structure. In this case it was Bhaktivedanta Swami, so Rajaram das had to symbolize the Temple design in the following ways: the dimensions of the Temple had to in some way reflect figures which are drawn from the name of the spiritual master, his birthday, or the name of the deity; measurements of the length and width of the Temple had to be drawn proportionately to the body of the spiritual master; the mood of ISKCON, which he regarded as being traditional, contemporary and futuristic, had to be captured in the design.

[ii] Based on the devotee's stage of devotional progress, one may also distinguish amongst three levels of devotees, viz. *kanistha-adhikari, madhyama-adhikari* and *uttama-adhikari.* The *kanistha-adhikari* is a neophyte and considered to be on the lowest platform of devotional service. His faith is pliable and although practicing he is without sufficient knowledge in the theological science and unfamiliar with the conclusions of the scriptures. His main focus is worshipping in the temple but does not know how to behave toward devotees or people in general. The *madhyama-adhikari* is on the intermediate level, has firm faith and is convinced, well-versed in scripture, is able to preach effectively. He is also able to relate appropriately to different kinds of people, discriminating amongst favourable and unfavourable persons, events and things. The *uttama-adhikari* is considered the most advanced, pure of heart and manifesting

154

only good qualities and having achieved the highest stage of devotional life, which is the liberated state of unalloyed Krishna consciousness. (Purport, SB 4.22.16; Nectar of Instruction, 5).

[iii] The ten offences against the Holy Name which will prevent a devotee from deriving the ultimate spiritual benefit of chanting these names (that is successive levels of purification leading to love of God) are listed as follows:

(1) to blaspheme a devotee of the Lord, (2) to consider the Lord and the demigods to be on the same level or to think that there are many gods, (3) to neglect the orders of the spiritual master, (4) to minimize the authority of scriptures (Vedas), (5) to consider the glories of chanting to be imagination (6) to interpret the holy name of God, (7) to commit sins on the strength of chanting, (8) to compare the chanting of the holy name with material piety, (9) to instruct the glories of the Lord's name to the unfaithful, and (10) to be attached to material things in spite of chanting the holy name. A further offence is to be inattentive while chanting the holy name.

[iv] **The Daily Temple Worship Schedule:**

Mangal Arati	4.30am
Tulasi puja[iv]	4.55
Chanting japa	5.15
Greeting the Deities	7.00
Srila Prabupada's Guru Puja	7.10
Srimad Bhagavatam Class	7.40
Dhupa Arati	8.00
Midday Arati	12.30pm
Afternoon Dhupa Arati	4.15
Sandhya Arati	7.00
Sayana dhupa arati	8.30

[v] Using my participant observer status, and field notes, I provide a description of the *mangal-aratik* in attempt to capture the ambiance and mood of this feature:

At 4.30 am a conch signals the opening of the altar curtains and the devotees bow down, and then have the first *darsana* for the day. During the *mangal-aratik* a senior devotee leads the *kirtan*, beginning with a traditional hymn in praise of the guru, then the maha-mantra, while the devotees chant responsively. This is accompanied by musical instruments, especially the drum, *mridanga*, and cymbals, *karatalas*. The *kirtan* often builds up in volume and tempo until many devotees chant loudly and dance by either swaying side to side, moving forward and backward, or jumping up and down with arms raised. After the *arati* which lasts about twenty minutes, devotees bow down while the senior devotee chants prayers in glorification of the disciplic succession, the deities, the holy places and the devotees themselves. Another hymn is chanted in praise of *Nrsingadev*, an incarnation of Krishna regarded as the protector of the devotees. Thereafter everyone recites the list of ten offenses against the Holy names in unison. Devotees bow down again and offer invocations to Tulasi, the sacred basil tree. An *arati* is performed for *Tulasi*, while someone leads the song in glorification accompanied by musical instruments. As the *arati* finishes, devotees circumambulate *Tulasi*, and then queue to offer her a few drops of water. When this is done everyone bows down to *Tulasi*, and gets ready to chant *japa* at approximately 5.15 am, the entire early morning worship lasting about forty five minutes.

155

After the worship the devotees chant *japa*, i.e. the individual chanting of the *maha-mantra* on a rosary, either by sitting on the benches or floor or pacing Approximately after one-and-a half hours of *japa*, the deity greeting is signaled by the blowing of a conch at 7am and the devotees gather in front of the altar to observe the deities worshipped in their new outfits for the day. The curtains open to reveal the deities majestically dressed in opulent clothing and bedecked in ornaments, jewellery and other finery. The altar itself is decorated with flower arrangements. A standard recorded song is played over the loudspeakers while the devotees reverentially meditate upon the deities. After this worship the devotees turn to the *vyasasana* on which the deity of Bhaktivedanta Swami sits, and special *kirtan* that glorifies the spiritual master is sung, while devotees queue to offer flower petals to the deity, after which they bow down. As the *kirtan* progresses, often the tempo increases and devotees break up into smaller groups to dance in circles or in lines. When the *kirtan* stops, devotees bow down and offer some prayers in response to a senior devotee who leads the prayer. A senior devotee or visiting spiritual master then sits on an elevated seat and devotees sit on the floor facing him to hear the daily lecture based on *Srimad Bhagavatam* and Bhaktivedanta Swami's commentaries. The Sanskrit verses are read word by word, then line by line and the devotees repeat responsively. The speaker then beckons for devotees to lead the verse while others respond. In this way the Sanskrit words are learned. The speaker gives the translation, reads Bhaktivedanta Swami's purport on the verse and thereafter attempts an elucidation of its content. At the end of the class questions are encouraged and the speaker attempts to explain often with other scriptural quotes and anecdotes.

[vi] One of the central features of ISKCON is its music. The chanting of the Maha mantra is often conducted in different melodies using traditional drums (*mrdanga*) and cymbals (*kartalas*), and sometimes the *harmonium* (traditional keyboard played with one hand while the other pumps the bellows) and accordion. These *kirtanas* are performed by devotees in temples and unabashedly on streets (*harinam*) in parade. The street chanting is often received with curiosity in new areas, and sometimes amusement, but often onlookers participate by clapping or even dancing. *Kirtan* is often an exuberant affair with most of the youth and adults participating. Several local and international devotees have recorded these traditional hymns and chants in a wide variety of musical styles.

[vii] To facilitate the printing of his books, Bhaktivedanta Swami formed the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT) in 1972, which has since become the "world's largest publisher of books on Krishna consciousness, and the philosophy, religion and culture of the Vedic tradition of India". The BBT oversees all aspects of publishing, and funds generated support further printing and temple projects, particularly the project in Mayapur which is the headquarters of ISKCON worldwide. A further significant development of BBT was the creation of Bhaktivedanta Archives in 1978, two months after the passing away of Bhaktivedanta Swami which preserves his legacy. The Archives make available digital records of more 40 volumes of translated Vedic scriptures, communication by mail to and from disciples, taped lectures and conversations, film footage and photographs (http://www..com/main.php?id=22, undated, page 2).

[viii] *Nama Hattas* – these are decentralized congregational meetings that are held in residential areas on a weekly basis. Visiting spiritual masters, seniors and temple resident devotees visit in turn to present the lectures. Members invite new people to attend these gatherings. **Counselling** – a lay service available to anyone who requires help in grief, or emotional difficulties. Devotees are often requested by members of the public to provide such emotional support at home by way of religious services and individualized visits. **New Construction projects** – especially the Phoenix Temple project, another large Temple project north of Durban.[viii]

CHAPTER FIVE

Findings: Part Two

Dialoguing Truth and Self

5.1   Introduction

In this chapter I respond to the critical question: *How* do the devotees understand and experience notions of Truth and self? In analysing the data I have divided the chapter into two parts, viz. *The Notions of Truth,* and *the Notions of Self.*

Interviewees were required to respond to provocative statements about the notions of Truth. These statements were derived from the literature review about how Truth is generated in academia (Mouton and Joubert, 1990; Rauche, 1990; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000; Flyvbjerg, 2001), particularly the debate between what constituted objectivity, and whether subjectivity was admissible as a method of investigation. It was therefore relevant to understand the following:

- how the elite informers responded to the academic positioning on the quest for Truth ;
- spiritual notions of Truth, and how the Truth is understood, and operationalized by the ISKCON devotees; and
- the intersections of methodology between the academic and spiritual.

In the second part I attend to the question "Who am I?" which underscores the central thesis of my research on a sense of "enduring" self. In section 3.2, it was established that there are several trends emerging in religion and identity, the variety and ambiguity of which created a corresponding flux in identity construction. The question above frames my central thesis that while there is an influence of self-reflexivity, as well as context on identity construction, there exists a more internal "enduring" sense of self,

157

beyond external binaries of race, language and culture. In this section I respond to the data generated about the sense of self and how it is experienced by the ISKCON devotees with a view to examining the presence of the enduring sense of self in identity construction.

While it beyond the ambit of this study to proliferate philosophies of Truth, I submit that there is an intersection between how the devotees understand Truth, and how the devotee identity is created. For the enculturated ISKCON devotee his conceptualization of Truth will be in concordance with the Truths promulgated by the scriptures and disseminations in their tradition, which will impact on his or her perceptions, thoughts, attitudes, verbalizations and practices. Particularly, these will be framed by the premise of the Absolute Truth as the supreme transcendental person, described by Bhaktivedanta Swami.[189] Thus it is relevant to examine the Truths in academia, the methodological intersections between academic and spiritual Truths, and intersections between Truth and identity.

5.2   Notions of Truth

5.2.1   Academics are "open-minded"

Rauche (1990) regards the search for Truth as central to the various fields of activities that man conducts. He contends that due to the man-made nature of scientific methodology, scientific theories were always refutable because they were inherently contentious. Others (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) share a similar view that theories were interpretations made from a particular perspective adopted by researchers hence "truth is enacted" or may be "historically embedded". Rauche (1990) further argues that since man still continues to conduct research into the question of Truth indicates that he has not yet found the Truth. When I questioned my elite informers about such propositions, their responses indicated an insightful concordance with the above academics as follows:

---

[189] See Chapter Three, section 3.5.

Kadamba Kanana Swami: *Whatever stands as a fact today will be dismantled in the future by the very process of science itself....because science is based on beliefs that occurred at a particular period of time.*

The respondent felt that that science and any other approach in the search of Truth began with certain preconceived ideas, resulting in theories. In support of this he cited Karl Popper who said that each time the Truth is established, one finds out that, that was not the case. He regarded academics as being "open minded", looking at many viewpoints, but ultimately not making a choice, the result of which led to a lack of progress in ascertaining the Truth. However, he felt that science's negation of "divine input" in religious systems, on the grounds that it was illogical, was a scientific "dogma". To the issue that it would be more likely that science would regard religious impositions as dogmatic, he responded there were limits to the knowledge that science claimed, as well as to the factuality of that knowledge, e.g. "sweeping statements about the beginning of the universe"; based on this, the beliefs that science tried to impose were "dogmatic".

Jayaadvaita Swami agreed that truths are "historically embedded" as follows:

The notion of what is true may historically change. In that sense we can grant the proposition that truth is historically created or the truth is negotiated socially.

He quoted the example of the American Indians who, historically regarded as "savages" that attacked the civilized settlers of America, were regarded only a few hundred years later as "peaceful indigenous people living with great wisdom and in close relationship to the land, who were brutalised and oppressed by the invaders". Nonetheless he proposed that there existed also a phenomenon of *objective* Truth, which did not arise from historically negotiated perceptions:

I start with the presumption that there is something deeper that is not subject to that jurisdiction, not socially, psychologically, or intellectually created, that is objectively the fact.

In support of his proposition he listed birth, old age and death as these objective phenomena, pointing out that even "if the whole world" were to agree that these did not exist it would not invalidate its objective existence. Jayadvaita Swami presented an interesting and cynical view of academic Truth:

For anyone who wants to deny that there is such a thing as objective truth, here's a pill – I call it cyanide and we'll see what you think. I uphold that there would be an objectively verifiable event that will take place after you swallow the pill; that you will no longer be in a situation that you can argue about it after you take it.

When questioned that the process he was recommending was not unlike academic research in that there was a method, and observable results, he commented that while science may rely on observation there are phenomena which are not observable that are not true or false. He gave the example that a cat may be on the other side of a wall, either alive or dead. Its condition did not depend on whether we saw it or not; the objective reality was independent of whether or not it was observed. He did acknowledge that experience of phenomena however could "exist in your constructed world". This intimates the classic academic discussion of the *nominalist-realist* debate, which I pursue in the next chapter as an emerging insight.

5.2.2 Methods of Enquiry

From the data it can be assumed that Truth is considered as "enacted" or "historically embedded" or exists as an "objective" reality. Elite informers were asked about possible points of intersection between how Truth is generated and observed in the spiritual arena and in the empirical world. Devamrita Swami responded that

160

The proper arena of academic intelligence is to try to understand what the enduring truth is; what exists, if anything, besides just matter. We don't decry academic intelligence. We just say that it should be focused on the proper issues.

Devamrita Swami felt that empiricists are "locked into a certain level" of knowledge acquisition because they do not accept that knowledge is "state specific". According to one's consciousness, different levels of reality could be accessed. This access, according to the Vedic system, he explained, had to do with one's habits, consciousness and purity. Extrapolating further from the philosophy of quantum physics, Devamrita Swami explained that according to Heisenberg Uncertainty principle, when scientists are studying nature, it was not so much nature they were studying but nature revealed according to the particular method of questioning; "what you see depends on how you look". Extending the point he claimed that "what you see does not only depend on how you look, but who is looking!" The objectivity that scientists claim, he concluded, was "simply part of their subjectivity".

This is in keeping with the idea of Bhakti Caitanya Swami's response that one's premise and conviction is linked to how one understands the Truth:

Bhakti Caitanaya Swami: *The meeting point is the basic conviction: Am I a devotee? Am I not a devotee?*

He explained that the acceptance of the conviction, or identity as a devotee, will frame how the devotee will begin to perceive the Truth, as well as how he will function. Accepting the spiritual premise will lead to a spiritual understanding of Truth, whereas if one, on an empirical level accepts that one's identity is "I am this body" and that one is part of the material world, then these two ideas of Truth will be at odds. He regarded the capacity of the empiricists to conceive of and understand the Absolute Truth would be limited in terms of the parameters within which their minds functioned. Quoting an example, that *Krishna* is said to be, "*adyam purana purusam navayuvanams ca*" – "the original, most ancient person who is always a fresh youth", he mentioned that the

161

materialistic thinker will not be able to accommodate the two opposing concepts; either someone is very old or is a young person. The material consciousness, because of the relativities that it is exposed to in material life, would not be able to accurately understand the Absolute, and a particular type of logic needs to be applied to accommodate the concept of "Absolute Truth".

If the Truth, as the elite informers understood it, was not so accessible through the methodologies of empiric sciences, then how was this Truth operationalized or managed in the material world, a question I asked in my interview.

Bhakti Caitanya Swami: *The spiritual nature exists behind the material nature, supporting it, but we need to be able to penetrate it by rendering devotional service in order to make contact.*

Devamrita Swami: By acting upon them; apply your senses according to what Krishna says then you will get the experience.

KKS: Spiritual truth is stored within scriptures. Spiritual truth is also revealed from within the heart by the Supreme Lord. Spiritual truth is manifest in personalities who are the personification of the scriptures.

The elite informers are suggesting that Truth as they understood it could be accessed through what is called "devotional service", that there had to be a practical application of instructions given in scripture. Scripture here would refer to those in the tradition of the ISKCON. Additionally the process was to approach "personalities" that practiced the instructions of the scriptures, which referred to the role of the guru in the life of the devotee practitioner.[190] By these two methods the practitioner begets a revelation of spiritual truths, which is likened to the role of intuition discussed by Flyvbjerg (2001).

---

[190] previously discussed in section 4.4.1.3

162

Thus, in this section I responded to the data generated on the notions of Truth in the academic and spiritual modes of enquiry. Several viewpoints about objectivity, subjectivity and Truth in the empirical and social sciences produced the rationale to investigate how Truth was understood by the devotees. The data suggested that academic enquiry is not discouraged by those following a spiritual mode of inquiry, but in line with several academic debates, devotees regard Truth produced by academic research as limited, and its claims to its objectivity, debatable. Given that the devotee framed his identity in accordance with Truth as he derived it from the devotional process in which he was engaged, I respond to the data generated about spiritual notions of Truth in the next section.

5.2.3 Truth in Three Phases

If according to my elite informers, there existed a Truth that was beyond the purview of academic investigation, I then asked about their understanding of the nature of Truth:

Devamrita Swami: Absolute truth means that it is true in all three phases of time; past, present and future. What was true yesterday remains true today and tomorrow. Relative truth changes through out the phases of time.

Bhakti Caitanya Swami: The real truth is that there is God and everything is expanded from him and everything exists in terms of its connection with Him.

Jayadvaita Swami: *When we talk about absolute truth it is defined as being the source of everything... The Absolute Truth is that entity from which everything emanates, which sustains everything, by which everything is destroyed and then to which everything returns.*

According to these elite informers Truth was regarded as being "Absolute", presenting the idea that it is all encompassing. The idea of Truth here includes that which is both spiritual and material; God and his creative impetus on one hand, and the creation on the

163

other, yet sustained by him. An important concept introduced by Devamrita Swami was that of *time*. The material condition is regarded as having phases of time; a condition in which any truth generated would be "relative". The Vedic reference to Truth is in concordance with the academic proposition with the nature of Truth in the material sciences as "historically embedded".

5.2.4 Truth and Consciousness

When questioned about the link between Truth and identity, Jayadvaita Swami responded that

The existence of the conscious living beings, or the conscious nature of that conscious living being is a truth.

He believed that the individual who constructs a sense of self is a conscious entity, and that entity is one of the categories of Truth. Just as one considers death as a category of Truth, similarly consciousness is a Truth according to Vedic understanding. Although consciousness maybe relative or its capabilities may be different, three features may be distinguished: there is some sort of thought, feeling and intention. Without consciousness there was no question of constructing a self or changing one's self image to another. He felt that although the psychologically constructed self or the sociologically constructed self had academic relevance, one needed to question as to what was that actual entity that was assuming from time to time those different masks, or different perspectives of the world. Clearly he was making a distinction between an individual, who was the possessor of the self, and the self as the identity that one assumes in this world in terms of material designations, or in terms of one's relationships with various material phenomena.

Jayadvaita Swami's response may be juxtaposed with the findings of a study conducted by Reams (1998), who presents a radical view of consciousness as a "non-local field that shapes the limits of our perception." He explains that since sense perception is limited in

164

our construction of reality, thought construction of images of reality will also be limited, causing one to accept a constructed image as direct perception of reality itself. By extending this process to the construction of identity he explains that the tendency is to take our self image to be the real thing. He draws a distinction between "I" and "self", equating the "I" with "awareness", and introducing the notion of a "creative being rather than an identified being" (Bohm, 1984; DeMello, 1990; Deikman, 1996).[191] Reams presents a method of mapping states of consciousness derived from the research of Hawkins (1995) using kinesiology to produce tangible measurements on a logarithmic scale.[192] Experimenting with this method, Ream arrived at an understanding of consciousness as "being soul's relationship with embodiment". The most significant implication of the findings for Ream was an empirical validation that the self is "essentially spiritual in nature".

Another elite informer, Devamrita Swami explained that:

The truth is something that never changes. I am Krishna's servant; I am spirit soul, part of the supreme soul. That doesn't change even amidst the material world, whereas other kinds of so-called truths, relative truths, can change all the time.

He considered the Truth as a constant, and that his identity as a servant of God is also a constant, thereby presenting his idea of the intersection of Truth and identity. He explained that on his international travels people often mistook his nationality, which provided him the experience to understand that bodily designations are quite confusing and insubstantial. His answer indicated that he considered identity based on some external criteria not to be within the category of Truth, but his position as a "spirit soul".

---

[191] all cited in Reams (1998). Article adapted from author's address at inaugural meeting of the Society for Multidisciplinary Study of Consciousness. http://www.fourgateways.com/uversity/Reams.htm

[192] According to Reams, Hawkins was able to "create a map of consciousness, using relative energy levels, or frequencies, of various states of consciousness to contextualize the entire range of human experience...extended to include concepts of identity, providing us with a tool to critically evaluate and analyse the frameworks from which we ground our dialogues on consciousness".

Thus the data suggests that there exists a concept of Truth on different levels: truth that may be historically, or socially embedded; truth that is materially apparent (relying on the sense experience), and a transcendental spiritual truth not accessible by empirical science, but by a spiritual process as understood by the devotees.

5.3   Notions of Self

In the previous section I discussed that the fundamental goal of academic research was to establish Truth. I established in section 1.1 that: the idea of self is fundamental to the construction of identity; that there are several idiosyncratic ways in which ideas of self get constructed, and that an academic framework has been used by several researchers to understand the concept of the self (Mead, 1934; Erikson, 1968; Harter, 1977; Burke and Reitzes; 1981; Jenkins, 1996; Hood, 1998; Harro, 2000; Bendle, 2002; Giddens, 2002; Gover and Gavelek, undated; Adams, 2003). This implies that there is an intersection between the search for Truth and the notion of self – in other words there is a search for the Truth about the self.

In my interview with the elite informers, I considered it an appropriate technique to use the concepts of self proposed by academic researchers as provocative statements to stimulate a debate about the notions of self. I presented the assertions made by prominent academic researchers in the field as questions to my elite informers. The data generated on how the ISKCON devotees understand the notion of self is central to my thesis that although there is an influence of self-reflexivity, as well as context on identity construction, there exists a more internal "enduring" sense of self, or a sense of continuity of self, that gives impetus for such individuals to enter into common dialogue as devotees. Additionally I respond in this section to the data on the relationship between Truth and the self.

5.3.1 The Self: Cognizant or Constructed?

My first question was to examine the posturing by Mead that a concept of self does not initially exist at birth, but develops only in the process of social relations. His idea was that "self" is a product of group dynamics. In Mead's own words, "The individual possesses a self only in relation to the selves of other members of his social group".

Jayadavaita Swami believed that:

According to Vedic conception there is an individual which exists permanently. It is called atma or usually translated as the "self".

Jayadvaita Swami argued that Mead's assertion meant there was an acknowledgement that there was an "individual" and a "self". Jayadavaita Swami agreed with Mead that at birth the "individual" may not have a developed concept of "self" but pointed out that Mead had made a distinction between these two concepts, although inadvertently. However, he explained that in the Vedic terminology *atma* was understood as being the individual and the usual translation would be the "self", but that did not correspond to the self that Mead was talking about. The main point, according to Jayadvaita Swami, was that Mead acknowledged that there was a cognisant individual who constructed or conceptualised a temporary identity.

Bhakti Caitanya Swami also explained that the self was the eternal person that was not transformed by all the different experiences that a person went through in the course of their life, adding however that:

People come into to this lifetime, already with some degree a personality as little children. Therefore some children are fundamentally more peaceful, some are fundamentally more aggressive by a nature already existing within them.

In the interview, Kadamba Kanana Swami concurred with Bhakti Caitanya Swami that:

167

His particular individuality and his nature are there from the very moment of birth, and in fact in our understanding even before birth.

Both agreed that the living entity may initially not have much ability to express himself in a social context. According to the elite informers, one was born in a certain situation and environment, associated with others at school, at work or in social situations. In this way one's material personality developed further in terms of the type of association. This concurs with Harro's (2000) descriptions that we are born into a particular set of social identities, and powerful socializing forces from birth –viz. the pre-existing structures of history, traditions, beliefs, prejudices, stereotypes – in which parents and other significant caregivers are compelling formative agents in our self concepts and self-perceptions.

However, Kadamba Kanana Swami explained that the individual nature of the living being was considered as connected to the soul, and the soul was considered to be eternal. The biological origin of life involved the soul becoming captured within the body at a particular time, and then that soul began to express itself through the body, being conditioned in consciousness. This also suggests a concordance with Baars' (1996:1) postulations that the self as a structure remains largely constant across many different life circumstances (discussed in section 3.5). Although dynamics of the *self* and the *person* are interwoven, Baars considered the self to exist as a separate entity – "the self as observer" or knower of conscious experiences, which he called "I", which has access to "perception, thought, memory and, body control". The responses of the different elite informers above indicate such a distinction is being made between the "individual" and "self". Specifically however, they regard the *individual* as the *atma* or spirit soul, and the *self* is considered to be that conditioned personality that expresses itself in a social context.

168

5.3.2 The "Reflexive" Self and Conscious Choices

Questions about the self are a central concern of postmodern thought. Using a provocative question, I wished to generate a response from my elite informers about selected postmodern concepts of the self. Postmodernists explain that in traditional societies, the individual had a fixed, culturally bound identity, but in post traditional settings the individual can consciously choose an identity free from the restraints of tradition and culture (Giddens, 2002). The self is seen to have increasing autonomy and control, and is capable of reflexive choices. Self-identity is simply what the individual is conscious of. Asked about their viewpoint on this concept, my elite informers commented:

Bhakti Caitanya Swami: *To some degree that is true. We are certainly capable of making choices but we are not absolutely capable of putting those choices into effect.*

He felt that although one may have some degree of choice, the reflexivity suggested was not totally flexible. Citing an example of a "smoker" or a criminal who wanted to give that up but kept slipping back into the habit, he explained that there were deeper seated desires and attachments that were difficult to change, which he called "conditioning". Jayadvaita Swami's stance was slightly different:

Whether he's engaged in a reflexive or reflective enterprise or is or too dull to reflect or too imposed upon to have the privilege of reflection is another matter, but he exists.

He agreed that postmodernism concerned itself with the construction and definition of identity in terms of a largely cosmopolitan environment in which there was an interaction of various "stories", cultural assumptions, and world views. He acknowledged that reflexivity existed, but insisted that one must initially acknowledge that there was an entity that was involved in the reflexive act, prior to even beginning to concern oneself with what identity constructions were taking place. Thus he continued his theme that there was a distinction between the "individual" and "self".

169

Devamrita Swami's response indicated that the choices the reflexive self was faced with was limited:

Either it is the tribal, native, traditional, ethnic centred culture or it is the global pop culture.

He felt that these were the only two choices, which were clashing with each other. He regarded the traditional, ethnic, tribal, or native integration as having broken down in many parts of the world, and what was emerging was simply a replacement material identification. In his response Kadamba Kanana Swami similarly felt that mankind is stalled by the "consumption/production" mode, which involves heavy economic pressures to survive – "loans, maintenance and long work hours" – which really limited the choice for the individual. He had an interesting viewpoint that since the world has become a global village, it is experiencing an imposition of *both* immorality and morality, and that a common spiritual understanding was also being imposed. This is in concordance with the theorizing on globalization and multiculturalism as important influences on identity construction (Bellah, 1976; Wuthnow, 1976; Needleman, 1977[193]; Melissa Raphael, 1996; Bron Taylor, 1997; Hamilton, 2002).

Although increasing globalization, and multiculturalism, is considered producing extensive and multifarious influences upon identity construction, Jayadvaita Swami responded that:

It is utopian and naïve to think that simply by ditching whatever forms of culture one is accustomed to, one will obtain a sort of liberation or access to unlimited wonderful possibilities.

He felt that the postmodern era was characterized by a lack of commitment, as well as by an erroneous conclusion that reflexivity created more options for the individual,

---

[193] Bellah, 1976; Wuthnow, 1976; Needleman, 1977, cited in Hamilton (2002)

170

indicating that the individual was simply swapping one set of limitations for another. He argued that as long as one continued to identify oneself with particular transitory identities, then one was in the "unfortunate process of misapplying these identities to itself". He asserted that true self identity will be reached only when one is able to identify himself as a conscious living being that was the possessor of a particular transitory identity, instead of identifying oneself with a temporary identity.

If this is the premise from which the ISKCON philosophy is derived, then it would be interesting to examine whether the data generated indeed revealed whether the ISKCON devotees' lives have been characterized by a conscious search to discover a "real" identity and how the different devotees describe or experience that identity.

5.3.3   Intimations of Identity: In Pursuit of the Self

In section 1.3, I proposed that for those who become devotees their earlier lives were characterized by a search for an "enduring" sense of identity, which initially may not have been concretized by the individual, but there existed a feeling, consciousness, or a sense of continuity of self, that gave impetus for such individuals to enter into common dialogue as devotees, irrespective of race, language or culture. With regard to this I questioned my elite informers and resident devotees about their personal thoughts on life and its purpose prior to becoming devotees, and whether it was characterized by a search for identity. Their responses are as follows:

Bhakti Caitanya Swami: *It was the in the hippy days. There was the idea that you got to find yourself...definitely a sense of desire, an idea or intuition that there must be something better although I didn't know what it was.*

He felt that there was a general momentum in the hippy culture of which he was part, that society was mundane, and that work was unnatural and unsatisfactory, an experience he had himself of not being happy in the work situation. Although the ideas of love, and peace and harmony was the hippy motto, and there was great inspiration in finding a

171

higher awareness and living life by those terms, but the means to find it appeared not to be there.

A personal response was elicited from Jayadavaita Swami:

I had a definite sense that I needed to understand what I was and even I suppose, a sense of despair because there was no good answer to that question forthcoming.

He explained that he experienced a sense of despair as well as frustration because he could not find the answer to his search for identity. He found the scientific, reductionistic answers to the question of identity during his youth as "bleak", unsatisfying and producing in him a sense of restlessness. Jayadavaita Swami's response may be juxtaposed with the framework of the modernist period ISKCON took hold in the West. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) describe the modernist phase as developing after World War II and extending to the 1970s. Within that paradigm, philosophers of science concurred that *Reason* was the main instrument in scientific progress. Truth, within the modernist paradigm, meant that only scientific knowledge was regarded as useful, and legitimate (Mouton and Joubert, 1990) a condition that Jayadvaita Swami felt frustrating, "bleak" and unsatisfying.

The personal search for a more "enduring" identity seems to characterize most persons who became devotees as listed in their responses below:

Kadamba Kanana Swami: *Frankly speaking, I was seeking. Throughout my life I was questioning things. I was always a thoughtful person, so even when I was young I was wondering about various questions.*

He recollected that his life was characterized by a search for identity, benchmarking particular ages at which significant events occurred in relation to this search. He remembered deeply contemplating the issue of God as young as six years old; at 12 years deeply questioning these issues again; at 15 years rejecting the "identity society was

172

trying to impose" upon Him, mentioning specifically his reluctance in accepting the role his parents were trying to define for him. He left home at 17 years to pursue a spiritual goal and find his "true self" finding himself in India deeply impressed by "such a presence of God consciousness" that it gave him purpose to life. Other devotees in my sample indicated a similar search for identity:

Devamrita Swami: *I was looking for life and its purpose; in the meantime while looking I thought why not enjoy life, as it is commonly known, while searching.*

He remembers even as a little child that he did "really not fit" into society. Devotee D who is an artist also recalls:

I was an artist and for artists they normally have a search for something...

He regarded his search occurred through his artwork, where the production of new art indicated that he was always trying to find the "essence of life" through his art. He emphasized that nonetheless he felt unfulfilled spirituality. Devotee B, although initially identifying himself as a "a young black man" explained how he felt:

I felt I was not living out my identity, especially when I had to interact with the white people. I felt that they were people that I loved inside me; I didn't see that there was a difference.

Devotee A: When I was smaller I always spoke with God. I had my actual prayers. Usually I didn't ask him for things... when I was ten or eleven or so ...something happened I forgot God... until I was 21.

Devotee A explained that although she accepted an idea of God when she was a child, she temporarily gave up her practices of religion for a large part of her youth. Although this had happened, and that she became distracted by drug use, her description of her lifestyle in those years indicated she continued to search for an identity that was spiritual.

173

She was involved in meditation and a practice of "nature religion" she called *shamanism,* supposedly quite common in her country, by which she had become vegetarian. It was there she was introduced to the idea of a "soul", but her concept of God was an "impersonal" one. An interesting occurrence, although she did not know its origins at that time, was that she had begun chanting the *maha-mantra* having heard it on a CD.

The early life of Devotee C was not really characterized by a search for an identity. She indicated that being brought up in a traditional household, and being quite poor, she focused more on daily issues of survival than "for looking for knowledge or studying". However, the sudden death of her sister and the distress produced by that launched her into a search for answers, and it was a week later that she met the devotees:

So out of distress we also looked, but at the same time after looking we found that there was something more…although looking for something to fill that void, it was something higher in the sense of realising the values of life…

Devotee C regarded her spiritual life as "dormant" until she met the devotees who provided her with a "wake up call" to spiritual life. She felt that the knowledge she obtained from meeting the devotees replaced the lack of understanding that was prominent in the traditions and customs of her grandparents. This knowledge component was an important milestone in her serious practice of spiritual life which allowed her to understand her identity as a devotee.

Thus for most of the devotees their lives were characterized by a search for an "enduring" identity, while some devotees do indicate that their spiritual lives were precipitated by a crisis. Nonetheless it does appear that the knowledge component played a significant role in their acceptance of the practices of *Krishna* consciousness. Another interesting phenomenon was that most devotees interviewed began a search for spiritual identity early in their lives, which continued throughout their youth, intimating trends of the "enduring" identity that I proposed.

174

5.3.4 Devotee Identity Articulated

In this section I wish to respond to the data that indicates how the devotees understand their identities. The responses of the spiritual masters (elite informers) indicate a conviction that their identity is framed in reference to *Krishna,* who they understand as God. The identity that frames their consciousness, thoughts, verbalization, and activities is a constant understanding that they are "servants" of God, and that beyond this body, which they consider temporary and material, they are the "soul", which is spiritual in nature, but temporarily accepting material designations.

Bhakti Caitanya Swami: *I have a basic conviction that I am the eternal servant of Krishna.*

Devamrita Swami: *"Jivera swarupa hoi Krishnera nitya das" – I am the eternal servant of Krishna.*

Kadamba Kanana Swami: *My true-self is not known in the relationship with this body, or in the relationship with the environment, but in a relationship with Krishna.*

They further believe that the more they develop their relationship with *Krishna*, then the more their real identity as a spirit soul will manifest. In his response, Kadamba Kanana Swami explained that when this happens the spirit soul will still "function in this temporary body", but internally he will be detached from the material nature, being always conscious of God, a state that will produce increasing joy, revealing the "true nature of the self".

Granted that the spiritual masters will have more experience, practice, and levels of spiritual advancement than the resident devotees in my sample, and therefore may be able to experience the state of consciousness that they describe, how do the resident devotees understand the notions of self? In response to my question on how they understand and experience their true identities, the resident devotees responded as follows:

175

Devotee D: *I am that rich, holistic person, the spark of the Supreme whole person.*

Devotee D felt that the knowledge of his "real" self produced a feeling of amazement and happiness, something that he always seemed to know by intuition, but was confirmed when he read the scriptural references and associated with the devotees. Devotee B also responded:

Devotee B: *I'm a spirit soul, part and parcel of God.*

He presented an elaborate explanation of the distinction between the body and spirit soul, explaining that the real person is actually the spirit soul, a "proof" that one could tangibly see when one is at a funeral: when someone dies people say, "he is gone" but the body is there, which indicated that the body and person are different. He explained that while he has this understanding, he still had to function on the platform of social relevance within the material world, saying that, "When I go to public toilets, I enter a male one", clarifying that for social interactions some type of material identity is necessary.

Devotee A in responding to how she conceptualizes her true identity, regarded others as "servants of God" but admitted that she finds it difficult to realize that, echoing a similar response she made in section 4.4.1.2.

I try hard to realise that. Sometimes I almost can understand.

Further she explained that she was engaged in devotional service not because she realized her true nature as a servant of God, but mostly to please the authorities. Her mode of service was still very much involved in "following the rules". This may be understood in the light of her being a devotee for only three years, while others were members for much longer. Devotee C had a similar response:

I think my real identity would be to understand who I am – a spirit soul.

176

Rather than give her own experience of that, she relied on the explanation of the *Bhagavad-gita* to structure her answer that she was "part and parcel" of God. She conceded however, that to maintain the identity as a spirit soul in the face of crisis, for example if someone close to her had to die, was difficult. This she reasoned was because one had feelings and emotions. She considered however that these instances of crisis will help one to understand their identity as spirit soul, because it awakens one from a "dormant nature".

In the responses of the various devotees above, it can be seen that the elite informers (spiritual masters) are articulate about their identity as spirit soul. The longer standing resident devotees generally express a similar vocalization about their identity, while mindful of the social relevance of dual identities. Some devotees, while theoretically understanding their identity as spirit soul, express that they have not realized that yet, but feel confident that with practice they will achieve that. Thus varied responses indicate different levels of consciousness and levels of spiritual advancement.

5.4 Conclusion

In the above section I attempted to respond to the data generated in two broad categories, viz. the Notions of Truth, and Notions of Self. I suggested that the Notions of Truth impacted upon one's Notion of Self and therefore an investigation of the intersection between the two was relevant to understanding how the devotee identity is created.

In response to how the Truth gets understood and operationalized by the ISKCON devotees, the data suggests that there is an acknowledgement of Truth at different levels, viz. it may be historically, or socially embedded; it may be experienced through the senses but adulterated by our *nominalist* perspective of reality; it may objectively existing as understood from a realist perspective, or a transcendental, spiritual truth accessible by particular spiritual paradigms.

The data on the self as a product of social dynamics indicates that psychological and social dynamics are important influences on the construction of self. A distinction was made however, between a socially constructed sense of "self", called the "conditioned self", and the "individual" that possesses the self, called *atma*. Further the data indicates the existence of the "reflexive" self of postmodernity free from traditional and cultural restraints, which the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* viewpoint believes is erroneous, regarding that identification as also temporal. The data also suggests that for a devotee of ISKCON, his self identity is reached when he is able to identify himself as a conscious living being in *possession* of a particular transitory identity, instead of identifying oneself as the temporarily constructed identity. In terms of the data generated about the devotees' lives prior to them becoming devotees, it was gleaned that the devotees lives were characterized by an automatic search for an "enduring" identity and in most cases it was clearly evident that this sense of awareness, or ecclesiastical impetus, straddled many years, beginning in childhood. While in some cases their quest for identity was precipitated by crisis, the data indicates that *knowledge* for all devotees was an important component in their acceptance of the devotee identity.

As a participant observer, the use of semi-structured interviews, walkabouts and field notes as my research methodologies produced a profuse amount of data on institutional and individual devotee identity which I responded to in Chapters 4 and 5. In Chapter 6, several significant insights, reflections and conclusions are drawn from this data and a future research agenda is also suggested.

CHAPTER SIX

Reflections, Emerging Insights and Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

The extensive academic and theological posturing on the question of "Who am I?" has produced a miscellany of definitions of self and identity that still persists in the literature reviewed.

In relation to the concept of self and identity, this study hypothesises that although there is an influence of self-reflexivity, as well as context on identity, there exists a more internal "enduring" sense of self, a sense of continuity beyond external binaries of race, language and culture. In relation to that enduring sense of self it is maintained that different cultures may describe that feeling or experience in different ways, but there exists a common sense of identity that enables people from variegated backgrounds to enter into common dialogue as devotees. For individuals who become devotees there is already an intuitive feeling of being more than the external labels ascribed to them by society, and a conscious search to discover that identity, which comes to the fore when the spiritual context (in this case the ISKCON context) is encountered.

The reflections and emerging insights described in the following section are derived from the data generated and methodological approaches used in the study.

6.2 Insights emerging from the data

There are several insights emerging from the data that confirm the hypothesis that although there is an influence of self-reflexivity, as well as context on identity, there exists a more internal "enduring" sense of self, which extends beyond external binaries of

race, language and culture. These include the interface between the institutional identity and quest for individual identity and Truth.

6.2.1 Interface: Nominal and Virtual Identities

Borrowing from Jenkins (1996) analysis of organizations, I explore the interface between the Institutional and individual identity. Jenkins contends that while organizational membership impacts significantly upon the individual, the *nominal* and the *virtual* features must be distinguished – the *nominal* referring to the name or title, rights and duties of the institution, while *virtual* refers to how the member works out his or her particular identity within the institution.

The insights emerging from the data suggest that the entire gamut of requirements, religious, social and educational contexts of the institution provides a comprehensive *nominal* domain which impacts on *virtual* identity of the devotee in profound ways, which is indicative of an intersection between the institutional and individual identities of the devotee.

The data suggests that although the environment facilitates the devotee identity, the onus is upon the devotee to accept the basic conviction of being a devotee and seriously practice the activities. The devotees contend that this will result in a *purification* of consciousness, producing galvanized spiritual advancement and change of life-style and values of devotees, enabling the enduring sense of self to establishing his/her spiritual identity that transcends external binaries.

Another insight emerging from the data is that there appears to be reciprocity between institutional identity and individual identity; while the institutional identity impacts upon the individual identity in various ways, the institutional identity is also proliferated and impacted upon by the individual identity or membership. The devotee initially adopts the external requirements of the institution, but when applied seriously, produces a change in the devotee consciousness. The devotees felt a sense of inspiration to engage

in devotional service, which then reciprocally serves the purposes of the institution; thus there is a confluence or convergence between the goals of the institution and the individual devotee.

According to Kadamba Kanana Swami, an elite informer, the interface between institutional and individual identity occurs at three levels, viz. the *social manifestation* of the institution, its *spiritual substance* and an experience of an *active presence of God*.

At the first level, he observes, is the *social manifestation* of the institution, which concerns the social integration, cultural aspects and community outreach contexts which form a support structure for the new devotees. It includes aspects like attire, and codes of behaviour determined by governance. According to Kadamba Kanana Swami, a devotee at this level does not have a deep relationship with God. In the data generated it was evident that particular tensions in conviction, and lower levels of knowledge of newer devotees occur, which suggests a concordance with his proposal.

At the second, intermediate level, proposed by Kadama Kanana Swami, is the *spiritual substance* of the institution that continues to consolidate the sense of enduring self through its philosophy, teachings, worship and values. Devotees at this level report a more consistent, focused application to devotional service, and an increase in faith.

The devotee at the third, highest level experiences a feeling of an *active presence of God*, which is the deepest and steadiest level of devotional practice stemming more from internal inspiration. According to Kadamba Kanana Swami, this is a very advanced level of spiritual practice. The data that emerged from the elite informers suggest that they function at the third level. The responses of the elite informers indicated that they were not highly dependent upon the external social manifestations, implies that they have fervently internalized the practices, values, routines and philosophy to such a extent as to make them astute practitioners of *Krishna* consciousness. These devotees regard themselves as eternal servants of a supreme personal God, understanding their nature as a

spirit soul, irrespective of external binaries, a view which coalesces with the idea of the enduring self.

6.2.2 Manifestations of an "Enduring" Self

As my central thesis I argue that although there is an influence of self-reflexivity, as well as context on identity construction, there exists a more internal "enduring" sense of self. The data suggests that the concept of enduring self manifests in prolific ways:

- **Quest for Identity**

This quest derives from personal, contextual and socio-historical factors in the lives of devotees. For most devotees the search for an enduring self was a prominent feature of their lives until they encountered the institution in one of its multifarious features, where the sense of awareness that they could not concretize previously became apparent in that context.

The data suggests that the lives of most devotees were characterized by a sense of awareness or an ecclesiastical impetus which straddle many years, beginning in childhood. This was characterized by a consciousness that they did not "fit" into general society, occupational roles, or other impositions, which resulted in a search for identity. This was evident in personal states of uneasiness about life, particularly dissatisfaction with reductionistic responses to questions of identity, and feelings of an unfulfilled spiritual life within their own ecclesiastical backgrounds.

The socio-historical context, e.g. the hippy era – also created momentum for a search for higher awareness from mundane existence for early devotees. Others also report an involvement or interest in alternative, non-traditional and natural spiritual practices, like yoga, shamanism, belief in reincarnation, as well as personal crises and states of mental and psychological anguish that created an impetus to seek answers.

182

- **The Self as a Possessor, and Constructor of Identity**

Closely linked to the quest for identity that contributed to a sense of "enduring" self is the influence of reflexivity, regarded as increasing *individualization,* not restricted by boundaries of tradition and culture (Giddens, 2002). It was observed that the devotees' personal, contextual and socio-historical impetus for an enduring sense of self beyond the binaries of race, culture and language was a self-reflexive act that led to a concretization of spiritual identity through encountering the ISKCON context. The data indicates that this context, when encountered, allows the devotee to see his "self" as the soul or *atma,* a cognizant individual conceptualizing a temporary identity. In other words, devotees differentiate between the self as *possessor,* and the self as a *constructor* of identity. This suggests a confluence with the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* conception that one's identification as part of a particular tradition, culture, community, nation, or society is limited and external, and can pose a barrier to one's self understanding.

The data further indicates that self-reflexivity continues to be encountered in the devotee's personal practices and individual expression in devotional service, as well as in their socially relevant roles like mother, father, manager, cook, and preacher. This was also noted in the expression of individuality in interests and talents like art and décor, and in higher states of awareness and varied spiritual experiences within the devotees' internal spiritual frames of reference. This observation indicates concordance with Adams (2003) assertion that extended reflexivity is unfounded since thinking is always bounded by the culture and society of which we are part; in the case of the devotees, their self-reflexivity is framed within the spiritual context of ISKCON, which determines how Truth gets analysed, and frames the identity of Self.

6.2.3 Return to the classic Nominalist-Realist Debate

The data suggests that academic enquiry is not discouraged by those following a spiritual mode of inquiry in ISKCON, but in keeping with several academic debates, the elite informers regard truth produced by academic research as limited, and its claims to its

objectivity, debatable. The data further suggests that academic truth is often "socially enacted" or "historically embedded", or context and content-based, and is incomplete. Scientific enquiry which simply relied on analysis and rationality and ignored other equal important modes of human understanding and behaviour was seen, by the elite informers, to lead to a lack of progress in ascertaining the Truth.

The devotees interviewed framed their identity in accordance with Truth as they derived it from the ISKCON devotional process in which they are engaged. Patterns arising from the data indicate that although for some of the resident devotees the concept of self still appeared theoretical, the experience of the elite informers is more qualitative, and based on experience, intuition and judgement, which is likened more to the use of *phronesis* in understanding of Truth as suggested by Flyvbjerg (2001).

The analysis of the data also suggests a return to the classic *nominalist-realist* debate of philosophy of Truth, the epistemological assumptions of this debate framing different types of enquiry. In summary, it can be understood that the *nominalist* idea holds that objects are products of an individuals consciousness and there is no objective reality; the *realist* idea expresses that "objects exist independently of the knower" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 2).[194] The presumption by Jayadavaita Swami, an elite informer, "that there is something deeper that is not subject to that jurisdiction, not socially, psychologically, or intellectually created, that is objectively the fact" concurs with the *realist* view. This objective reality, Jayadvaita Swami implies, is the existence of the *atma*, and God as separate from our thought constructions. The data also suggests that reality is regarded as constructed. Further, individual consciousness is regarded as impacting on understanding the nature of reality, which results from an embodied *atma* that has conditioned perception. This is in keeping with the *nominalist* view.

The elite informers suggested that they can access this objective reality through an understanding and application of scriptural injunctions, within the ISKCON context. Additionally, they suggested, for one who wants to access the Truth as they understand it, certain spiritual "personalities" who practice the instructions of these scriptures should

---

[194] For further discussion see Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000, pages 1-45

be approached. This emphasizes the role of the guru in the life of the devotee practitioner. Thus according to the elite informers, the study of scripture, its application and approach of a guru, are methods by which the devotee practitioner would gain access to spiritual truths. A further theme that emerged was that devotees did not view the organization or themselves as practicing a particular type of religion, but regarded these practices as constitutionally part of their identity as spiritual beings.

From the responses by the elite informers it was further gleaned that Truth may be viewed as periodized, relational and primordial. The data suggests that Truth in the material sphere is seen as *periodized*: having three phases of time: past, present and future, a condition in which any truth generated would be "relative". This revisits the initial academic proposition of the historical embeddedness of Truth in the material world. The elite devotee also alludes to Truth as *relational* – the devotee examines and experiences Truth in relation to God, the rationale provided that everything exists only by connection to Him. Truth is also viewed as *primordial* – creation, existence and dissolution are inextricably linked to the Absolute Truth.

6.2.4   Shifting Worldviews

For all the devotees in my sample, both elite informers and resident, what emerged is an obvious and common pursuit of objectives which define the organization, an acknowledgement of recognized patterns of decision-making and allocation, acceptance of the organizational and scriptural understanding of Absolute Truth, and a concordance with the expected norms of behaviour. Framing their identity as such produced profuse concomitant changes in worldview as well as visible characteristics in attire, diet, mannerisms and etiquettes. For both the elite informers and resident devotees, such changes were visible. The data suggests that the basic shift in identity paradigm occurred when they considered themselves as a spiritual being who is the "servant" of *Krishna*.

In terms of attire and change in diet, the data suggests that while initially causing some discomfort, or being regarded as a feature of Indian culture, they felt the change in attire was essential to their sense of values, their ambassadorial roles, and impact on their identity as devotees. However, one elite informer regarded the pertinence of the external manifestation such as attire to be secondary to the spiritual experience on the level of the "pure" self. As far as diet is concerned the data indicates that devotees accept vegetarianism as act of sanctity having deep philosophical ramifications, particularly about avoiding *karma* for injury to animals.

6.3   Methodological Insights

In methodologically understanding how to respond to a sense of enduring self, I used the concept of *phronesis* as developed by Fryvjberg (2001) to frame my mode of enquiry. This approach strengthened my position as a *deep-insider* through the use of intuition, judgement and experience. Being a deep-insider however, raises its own complexities and particularities, and was not necessarily an easier stance. However, I suggest that the deep-insider position allowed me epistemic access to data thus fulfilling the use of *phronesis* as a methodological approach. This contributed to a "reflective analysis" and discussion of data around "values' and "interests". The data generated reflect responses within the mode of human understanding without overlooking rational enquiry.

6.4   Conclusion

In this study I attempted to understand the institutional identity of ISKCON, resident devotee identity and the interface between institutional and individual identity, with a view to understanding the "enduring" self.

The data suggested that the *institutional identity* of ISKCON is a disseminated process occurring at many sites in the frame of different activities, manifest particularly in its organizational structures, the physical context and cultural context comprising of religious, social and educational features.

- The *Gaudiya Vaisnava* heritage is regarded as the foundation of the ISKCON identity, but the implantation of this culture in the West by Bhaktivedanta Swami, produces its own unique cultural identity. Specific managerial and spiritual requirements for the administration of ISKCON have been stipulated by Bhaktivedanta Swami, yet space is created for the local implementation of particular projects, and other social, cultural and educational activities;

- The institutional requirements of the residents in terms of abiding by specific religious principles; following a regularized, structured, daily temple schedule worship and activities laid down by Bhaktivedanta Swami; and adherence to specific service requirements, creates a rigorous scenario which impacts on devotee identity;

- The physical context, viz. the architecture, and devote accommodation creates an environment particularly conducive to the study of ISKCON scriptures, and practice of spiritual life;

- The cultural context comprising of the religious, social and educational features and activities provide a compelling environment which shapes the devotee identity. This is underscored by a philosophical understanding that specifically frames the devotees' identity as a "servant", whose worship is offered to a personal God called *Krishna*, attainment of whose abode or personal service is the prime motivating factor of the ISKCON devotees. This state begins with accepting the process of chanting the *maha-mantra* and surrender to a guru.

- Its strong outreach or missionary aspirations further define the identity of the institution.

- Although the ISKCON Temple context with it multifarious features produces a compelling environment in which to impact on devotee identity, the seriousness

187

and determination of the devotee's practice is an important intersecting factor in concretizing his enduring identity.

The institutional context (*nominal*) and how the devotee works out his identity (*virtual*) in the context, is the intersecting point of identity, which produces in the practitioner a tangible change of habit, lifestyle, values and understanding of identity.

In terms of the *individual identity*, three views of self identification were derived from the data: the construction of self is subject to psychological and social dynamics; the reflexive self, free from traditional and cultural restraints has increasing autonomy, control, and consequent choices; and that a more "enduring" self characterizes those with a spiritual proclivity. In terms of this "enduring" self, the data indicates that:

- the *Gaudiya Vaisnava* viewpoint, while acknowledging the existence of the *constructed* self, as well as the unrestrained, extended *reflexive* self of postmodernity, regards them as erroneous since both types of "selves" are based on identification that is transitory and material;

- a distinction is drawn between the *conditioned self*, i.e. that "self" as socially constructed, or reflexively determined, and the *individual* or *possessor* of the self, called *atma*.

- for those who became devotees, their lives were characterized by a sense of the "enduring" self, not limited by external binaries of race, culture and language.

- the devotee's enduring sense of self identity is concretized when he is able to identify himself as a *spirit soul,* a conscious living being that is the *possessor* of a particular transitory identity, instead of identifying oneself with a temporary identity.

188

The data generated by this study thus confirms my hypothesis that although there is an influence of self-reflexivity, as well as context on identity, there exists a more internal "enduring" sense of self, beyond external binaries of race, language and culture, which different cultures may describe in different ways, but which enables people from variegated backgrounds to enter into common dialogue as devotees. For individuals who become devotees there is already an intuitive feeling of being more than the external labels ascribed to them by society. A conscious search to discover that identity, which comes to the fore when the spiritual context (in this case the ISKCON context) is encountered, is also confirmed.

- **Limitations of the Study and Future Research Agenda Issues**

Although several significant insights have emerged from this study on the identity of the ISKCON Durban Temple devotees, the coverage of identity issues in this thesis is by no means complete, motivating a suggestion for a future research agenda in the following areas:

Firstly, the reliance of *intuition* in the study as suggested by Fryvjberg, was underplayed. It is suggested that the idea of *intuition* could be pushed further as a methodological and analytical tool of *phronetic* research and is therefore by no means exhaustive.

Secondly, the use of a small sample in this case study may be limited. Given the presence of several ISKCON centres in South Africa, whose features are subject to the same institutional requirements described in this study, it would be of interest to investigate inter-provincially whether similar patterns and themes emerge with the resident devotees of the other centres, as far the "enduring self" is concerned. Such a study could be undertaken internationally as well. This study could also include how members of other faiths develop their identity, as well.

Thirdly, while the data indicated certain tensions of identity between the *temporal* and the *eternal*, my privileged insider status allows me to suggest that further research should

189

examine particular tensions at *micro* levels, viz. personal, in the lives of the devotees, and interpersonal relationships amongst devotees. At the *meso* level – between devotees and management and the institution, and between devotees and general society and other contextual factors; and at the *macro* level – the perception of the institution in general society and the communication with other faiths and organizations. This also suggests that the themes emergent in this study could be investigated on a multi-sectorial level.

In terms of social scientific understanding of cultural phenomena, the literature seems to suggest a particular shift in paradigm towards a more *physio-psychic* realm. Its convergence generally towards more enduring philosophical statements in the realm of traditional wisdom, and more particularly, in the fields of consciousness and identity, having a direct relevance to the vast field of social science identity studies, is worth pursuing.

Having at the outset of this study declared my insider-outsider status, and my commitment to my position as an ethnographic scientist, my concluding reflections focus on the opportunity provided by this academic enquiry to experience and represent more deeply the cultural world of the devotees through their perceptions and feelings. It also provided the opportunity for what Hall (1998) calls a *meta state*: a condition where my own conscious self awareness was allowed to reflect back upon itself. This mirrors Breuer's (2000) search to find methods that could be applied to the "subjective worlds of experience" tending towards a self-reflective stance and the relevancy of my interaction with the field of study. I reflect upon my initial intrigue at the cosmopolitan set of devotees that I first encountered at university more than two decades ago during the apartheid era. The search for unity through the multicultural and non racial models in South Africa, and the challenging of exclusionary sets of norms, makes it reasonable to assume that an individual cannot be reduced to the external body and our differences are literally superficial, and thus makes the notion of the *enduring self* a favourable worldview upon which to base social unity, as well as a viable alternative in the plethora of identity formation studies.

190

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams Matthew (2003): The reflexive self and culture: A critique. The British Journal of Sociology, vol. 54, no. 2. pp. 221-238.

Baars, B J (1996): Understanding Subjectivity: Global Workspace Theory and the Resurrection of the Observing Self. Journal of Consciousness Studies. vol. 3. no. 3. pp. 211-216. http://www.zynet.co.uk/imprint/online/baars.html

Bendle, M F (2002): The 'crisis' of Identity in high modernity. The British Journal of Sociology, vol. 53, no. 1. pp. 1-18.

Bhagavad-gita As It Is (1983): The Disciplic Succession. P34. Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: LA

Bhakti Charu Swami (2003): Srila Prabhupada: Founder Acarya of ISKCON. Seminar at Mayapur Institute of Higher Education, Mayapur, West Bengal: India

Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (2005): About the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust. http://www.krishna.com/main.php?id=22

Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (2005): A Brief History of Back to Godhead Magazine. http://www.krishna.com/main.php?id=198

Bhaktivedanta Journal (2004): Annual Publication of Bhaktivedanta College of Education and Culture: South Africa.

Bhakti Prospectus (2005): Course Information. Bhaktivedanta College of Education and Culture: South Africa.

Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, A. C (1968): The Science of Self Realization. The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, Australia

Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, A. C (1968): Matchless Gifts. The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, Australia

Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, A. C (1968): Chapter 24: Talks with Sarvabhuma Bhattacarya *in* Teachings of Lord Caitanya. Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003) [CD ROM] The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA.

Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, A. C (1969): Room conversation with John Lennon, Yoko Ono and George Harrison – London. Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003) [CD ROM] The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA.

Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, A. C (1970): Chapter 7: On Chanting the Hare Krishna Mantra *in* Hare Krishna Handbook. ISKCON. Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003) [CD ROM] The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA.

Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, A. C (1972): *Bhagavad-gita* As It Is : Purport : Ch. 13. 8-12. Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003) [CD ROM] The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA.

Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, A. C (1974): Concluding Notes. Antya lila. Caitanya Caritamrita. Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003) [CD ROM] The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA.

Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, A. C (1983): *Bhagavad-gita* As It Is. The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, Australia

Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003): Srila Prabhupada Lectures: Srimad Bhagavatam 12.15, Aug 18, 1972. Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003) [CD ROM] The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA.

Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003): Srila Prabhupada Town Hall Lecture: Auckland, 14 April, 1972) [CD ROM] The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA.

Bhurijana Dasa (1996): My Glorious Master: Remembrances of Prabhupada's Mercy on a Fallen Soul. Vaisnava Institute for Higher Education: Vrindavana

Brooks, Charles R (1995): Understanding ISKCON. ISKCON Communications Journal, vol, 3, no. 2. http://www.iskcon.com/icj/3_2/3_2index.html.

Brown, Michael F (2000): The New Age and Related Forms of Contemporary Spirituality *in* Religion and Culture: An Anthropological Focus. Scupin, R. (ed) Prentice-Hall: New Jersey.

Chadotsang, T L and Marshall P C (2004): Culture, Heritage and the Himalayan Dilemma of Identity. Migyul Magazine. vol. 2. http://philipcmarshall.net/migyul/resources/culture/chadotsang_marshall.htm

Chae, M H (2001/2002): Gender and Ethnicity in Identity Formation. The New Jersey Journal of Professional Counseling, vol. 56, no. 2 1. http://www.angelfire.com/journal2/njca.Gender.pdf

Changing Contexts, Shifting Identities: Identity Formation Through the Eyes of Learners at a South African High School. (undated). http://wiserweb.wits.ac.za/PDF%20Files/wirs%20-%20dawson.PDF

Chijioke, Chinezi M (1999): Engaging race: One Friend's Experience: http://www.pendle.org/Lectures%20&%20writings/fall_lectures99_12.htm

Campbell C (1999): The Easternization of the West in <u>New Religious Movements :
Challenge and Response.</u>. Wilson, B and Crosswell, J. (eds) Routledge: London.

Cohen, L; Manion, L and Morrison, K (2001): <u>Research Methods in Education,</u>
Routledge Falmer: London.

Cortazzi, M (1993): <u>Narrative Analysis</u>. Burgess Science Press: Great Britain

Craig Norma (2001): Krsna Culture Kids: Exploring the ISKCON Childhood Experience.
<u>ISKCON Communications Journal</u>, <u>vol. 9, no. 1</u>.
http://www.iskcon.com/icj/9_1/index.html

Cromsby, J (2003): Mind-Body Dualism.
http://www.mhhe.heacademy.ac.uk/casestudies/casestudy2sup2.doc

Daily News (2005): Tension threat to school order. Editorial, 3 August, p. 10

Datey, A (1996): Cultural Production and Identity in Colonial and Post-Colonial Madras,
India. Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture
http://archnet.org/institutions/AKPIA/library/files/file.tcl?file_id=612

Dawson, Lorne. L (undated): Anti-modernism, modernism, and postmodernism:
struggling with the cultural significance of new religious movements.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0SOR/is_n2_v59

Denzin, N K (1989): The Biographical Method <i>in</i> <u>The Research Act: A Theoretical
Introduction to Ecological Methods</u>. Prentice Hall: New Jersey

Denzin, N K and Lincoln, Y S (1998): Chapter 1. Entering the Field of Quantitative
Research <i>in</i> <u>Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry</u>. Denzin N K and Lincoln Y S. (eds) Sage
Publications Inc: USA.

Dhira Govinda Dasa (1998): The Vedic Personality Index in <u>Back To Godhead</u>.
May/June 1998. The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust International: USA.

Drutakarma das (1997): The City of Nine Gates: An allegory from <i>Srimad Bhagavatam</i>
sheds light on the mind/body connection <i>in</i> <u>Back to Godhead</u>, vol. 31. no. 2.
Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA

Drutakarma das, Bhutatma das and Sadaputa das (2003): The Mystery of Consciousness
<i>in</i> <u>Origins: Higher Dimensions in Science</u>. Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003). [CD ROM].
The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA.

Edwards B (1999): Inside the Whale: Deep Insider Research. Paper for AARE
Conference, Melbourne. http://www.aare.edu.au/99pap/edw99006.htm

Eliasmith, C (2004): extract from Dictionary of Philosophy of Mind: Mind-body problem. http://www.artsci.wustl.edu/~philos/MindDict/mindbody.html

Encyclopaedia Brittanica Online (2005): Mind-Body Dualism. Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc. http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9052812

Erasmus, Z (2001): Re-imagining Coloured identities in post-Apartheid South Africa *in* Coloured by History, Shaped by Place. New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town. Erasmus, Z. (ed) Kwela Books: Cape Town.

Erasmus, Z (2005): Race and Identity in the nation *in* State of the Nation: South Africa 2004-2005. Daniel, J; Southall, R and Lutchman J (eds). Human Sciences Research Council: South Africa

Ezzy, D (2005): Qualitative analysis: Practice and Innovation. Taylor and Francis Group: Australia

Fingelkurts, A and Fingelkurts, A (2005): Mind-body problem: Philosophical perspectives. Wikipedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind-body_problem

Food for Life (2003): Articles of Association. Legal document. Ref. 2003/027630/08

Flyvbjerg, B (2001): The Power of Example *in* Making Social Science Matter: Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again. Cambridge University Press: UK

Francis, D A (2005): Between race; Beyond race: The Experience of Self-identification of Indian-White Biracial Young Adults and the Factors Affecting Their Choice of Identity. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Kwa Zulu Natal. Durban

Gleason, P (1983): Identifying Identity: A Semantic History. The Journal of American History, vol 69, no 4. pp 914-915.

Gould, C C (2000): Racism and Democracy Reconsidered. Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture, vol. 6, no. 4. pp. 425-439.

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

Gover, M R (undated) The Narrative Emergence of Identity. http://www.msu.edu/user/govermar/narrate.htm. Michigan State University

Giddens, A (2002): Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age. T.J. International Ltd: Great Britain

Grossberg, L (1996): Identity and Cultural Studies: Is That All There Is? *in* Questions of Cultural Identity. Hall, S and du Gay, P (eds). Sage Publications Ltd: London

Giriraj Swami (2000): Watering the Seed. Mountain King Books. South Africa

Hall W J (1998): Transforming Anger, Fear, Depression Quickly and Thoroughly: Meta-stating. http://www.neursemantics.com/Techniques/Journal1.htm

Hamilton, M (2002): The Easternization Thesis: Critical Reflections. Religion, vol. 32, no. 3. pp. 243-258

Hardiman, R (1994): White Racial Identity Development in the United States *in* Race, Ethnicity and Self: Identity in Multicultural Perspective. Elizabeth P. S and Diane R. K. (eds) NMCI Publications: Washington, DC. Copyright ©2001. Center for the Study of White American Culture, Inc. http://www.euroamerican.org/editorials/quotes.asp

Hari Sauri dasa (1992): A Transcendental Dairy: Travels with His Divine Grace A.C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. November 1975-April 1976. vol. 1. Lotus Imprints: Alachua, Florida

Harro, B (2000): The Cycle of Socialization *in* Readings for Diversity and Social Justice. Adams, M; Blumenfeld, W J; Castaneda, R; Hackman, H W; Peters, M L and Zuniga, X. (eds) Routledge: New York

Harter, Susan (1977): The Personal Self in Social Context: Barriers to Authenticity *in* Self and Identity: Fundamental Issues. (eds) Ashmore, R D and Jussim, L. Oxford University Press: New York

Henning, E; Van Rensburg, W and Smit,B (2004): Finding Your Way to Qualitative Research. Van Sheiks: Pretoria.

Hinduism Today Magazine (1998): Can it Be That the Hare Krishnas Are Not Hindu? http://www.hinduismtoday.com/

Hjelle, L A and Ziegler, D J (1981): Personality Theories. Mc-Graw Hill. Singapore

Hofmeyr, J M (undated): White Afrikaner identity in post-apartheid South Africa. Discerning the spirits with Heinz Kimmerle. http://home.concepts_ict.ml/~kimmerle/cehof.htm

Hood, Ralph W. Jr. (1998): Identity in Encyclopedia of Religion and Society. William H. Swatos, Jr. (ed) Altamira Press. USA http://hirr.hartsem.edu/ency/contrib.htm

Hopkins, T J (1977): Foreword *to* Readings in Vedic Literature: The Tradition Speaks for Itself. Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA

Hopkins, T J (1999): An Addendum to: Why Should ISKCON Study Its Own History? ISKCON Communications Journal, vol. 7, no.1. p 69.

Hoyle, R (undated): Self and Identity in Everyday Life. International Society for Self and Identity. http://www.psych.neu.edu/ISSI/daily.htm

Hridayananda Dasa Goswami (1999): Response to: Why Should ISKCON Study Its Own History? ISKCON Communications Journal, vol. 7, no.1. p 71.

Hridayananda Dasa Goswami (2005): e-mail, 23 January 2005.

Jacobsen, K. A (2004): Establishing Ritual Space in The Hindu Diaspora in Norway in South Asians in the Diaspora: Histories and Religious Traditions. Jacobsen, K.A and Kumar P.P. (eds) Koninklijke Brill: Netherlands.

Jenkins, R (1996): Social Identity. Routledge: London.

Junghare, I. Y (2002): The Hindu Religious Traditions in Minnesota in South Asians in the Diaspora: Histories and Religious Traditions. Jacobsen, K.A and Kumar P.P. (eds) Koninklijke Brill: Netherlands.

Kadamba Kanana Swami (2006): Hearing and Chanting. Seminar conducted for ISKCON members, Alpine Heath, Drakensberg, South Africa. January 4 - 8, 2006.

Kamaras, I (2001): The Value System of the Hungarian Devotees. ISKCON Communications Journal, vol. 8, no. 2. pp. 49-64

Kanpol, B (1997): Reflective Critical Inquiry on Critical Inquiry: A Critical Ethnographer's Dilemma Continued. The Qualitative Report, vol. 3, no. 4. pp. 1-11

Kazlev, M.A (2004): Dualism. http://www.kheper.net/topics/worldviews/dualism.htm

Ketola, K (2002): An Indian Guru and His Western Disciples: Representation and Communication of Charisma in the Hare Krishna Movement. http://ethesis.helsinki.fi/julkaisut/hum/ufkon/vk/ketola

Kerins, L (1998): The Western Kapila. Letter to Back to Godhead. vol. 32. no. 1. BBT: USA

King, A. S (1996): Spirituality: Transformation and Metamorphosis. Religion. vol. 26, no. 4. pp. 343-351

King, A. S (2001): A society in transition: ISKCON's spiritual path in Contemporary Spiritualities: Social and Religious Contexts. Erricker, C and Erricker, J. (eds). TJ International: Great Britain.

196

Kuppan, I (2005): Indian community losing its culture: Christians too westernized, says pastor. Daily News. 10 August, p. 6

Long, D.C (1969): Descartes' Argument for Mind-Body Dualism. The Philosophical Forum, vol 1. no.3. pp 259-273 (New Series)

Mahoney Andrew S (undated): The Gifted Identity Formation Model. http://www.counselingthegifted.com/articles/insearchofID.html#sub4)

Mandala Publishing Group (1997): Prabhupada Saraswati Thakur: The Life and Precepts of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati. Palace Press International: Hong Kong

Mansfield, N (2000): Subjectivity: Theories of Self from Freud to Haraway. New York University Press. New York

Marlin-Curiel, S (2003): Sampling the Past: Sound, Language and Identity in the New South Africa in Shifting Selves: Post-Apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture and Identity. Wasserman, H and Jacobs, S. (eds). Kwela Books: Cape Town

Marschall, S (2001): Negotiating Identity: Urban Community Mural Art in South Africa. Ijele: Art eJournal of the African World.

Mead, G H (1934): "Play, the Game, and the Generalized Other", Section 20 in Mind Self and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviourist. Morris, C W (ed) University of Chicago: Chicago. http://spartan.ac.brocku.ca/~lward/Mead/pubs2/mindself/Mead_1934_20.html

Merudevi Dasi (2001): Religious Freedoms and NRMs in Europe. ISKCON Communications Journal, vol. 8, no. 2. pp. 65-78.

Mhlongo, A (2005): Threats to close school. Daily News. 8 August, p. 3

Morse, J M (1998): Designing Funded Qualitative Research in Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry. Denzin N K and Lincoln Y S. (eds) Sage Publications Inc: USA.

Mouton, J (1990): Value and objectivity in the social sciences in Knowledge and Method in the human sciences. Mouton, J and Joubert, D (eds) Human Sciences Research Council. Guttenberg Book Printers: Pretoria

Mukunda Goswami (1987): No One Should Go Hungry in Back to Godhead Magazine. BBT: Los Angeles

Murji, R and Hébert, Y. M (1999): Collectivized Identity Among Shi'a Imami Isma'ili Muslims of Calgary: Implications for Pluralism and Policy. Paper For The International Conference: Youth in the Plural City: Individualized and Collectivized Identities. Rome, Italy. May 25 - 28, 1999. http://www.international.metropolis.net/events/rome/rome.html

Nandagopal, C (2000): Medieval Indian Temple Architecture- - Synthesis and Digression. www.unesco.org/archi2000/pdf/nandagopal.pdf

Nye, M (1997): ISKCON and Hindus in Britain: Some Thoughts on a Developing Relationship. ISKCON Communications Journal, vol. 5, no. 2. http://www.iskcon.com/icj/5_2/index.html.

O'Connell, L (2001): *Architecture and Identity.* Course outline. http://www.ithaca.edu/faculty/oconnell/identity/archidentitysyll1.htm

Patnaik, S K (undated): The Iconography of Hindu Temple: Idea and Image. orissagov.nic.in/e-magazine/ Srimandir/srimandirenglish/Epdf/Ech7.pdf

Partha Sarathi das (2001): Encounters with a Great Soul: My fond remembrances of Srila Prabhupada. Madhurya Press. RSA

Petersen, R (2005): Mayor must remove Ngoro. Daily News. 5 August, p. 5. Letter to the editor from 'Concerned Cape Clergy".

Philips, M (2005): A lost generation: British teens come first in anti-social behaviour. The Independent on Saturday. 1 January, p. 7.

Ramanujacharya Das (ed) (1999): A Handbook of Vaisnava Songs and Practices. ISKCON Kwa Zulu Natal. Atlas Printers. Durban, SA.

Raphael M (1996): Truth in Flux: Goddess Feminism as a Late Modern Religion. Religion, vol. 26, no. 3. pp. 199-213.

Rauche, G A (1990): The Relationship between science (theory) and morality (practice) *in* Knowledge and Method in the human sciences. Mouton, J and Joubert, D (eds) Human Sciences Research Council. Guttenberg Book Printers: Pretoria

Ravindra Swarup Dasa (1993): Religion ad Religions. ISKCON Communications Journal, vol. 1, no. 1. http://www.iskcon.com/icj/1_1/index.html.

Ravindra Swarup Dasa (1994): Cleaning House and Cleaning Hearts: Reform and Renewal in ISKCON. ISKCON Communications Journal, vol. 2, no. 1. Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003) [CD ROM] The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA.

Ravindra Swarup Dasa (1999): Pillars of Success: The Principles and Practices of Reform in ISKCON. ISKCON Communications Journal, vol. 7, no. 2. http://www.iskcon.com/icj/7_2/index.html

Reams, J (1998): Consciousness and Identity: Who do we think we are? Article adapted from author's address at inaugural meeting of the Society for Multidisciplinary Study of

Consciousness. http://www.fourgateways.com/uversity/Reams.htm. Gonzaga University: USA

Riddha Dasa (1997): <u>Destination South Africa: The Birth of the Hare Krishna Movement in South Africa 1972-1975</u>. Visnu Garuda Books, UK.

Riddha das Adhikari (2003): Introduction *in* <u>Mission in Service of His Divine Grace.</u> Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003) [CD ROM] The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA.

Rochford, Jr. E. Burke (1999): Prabhupada Centennial Survey: A Summary of the Final Report. <u>ISKCON Communications Journal</u>, vol. 7, no. 2. pp. 11-26.

Rochford, Jr. E. Burke (2000): Analysing ISKCON for Twenty Five Years. <u>ISKCON Communications Journal</u>, vol. 8, no. 1. http://www.iskcon.com/icj/8_i/index. html

Rose Kenneth (undated): Has ISKCON Anything to Offer Christianity Theologically? <u>ISKCON Communications Journal</u>, vol. 4, no 2. pp. 39-50.

Rosen, S (1991): Archaelogy and the Vaishnava Tradition *in* <u>Vedic Archaelogy and assorted essays</u>. Folk Books: USA

Ruane (2004): Conventional Wisdom Tells Us….. http://www.pineforge.com/Ruane%20Essay%208%20Final_4041.pdf.

Rupavilasa Dasa (1989): <u>The Seventh Gosvami: A Biography of Srila Bhaktivinode Thakura</u>. New Jaipur Press, USA.

Sadaputa das (1980): The Computerized Mr. Jones: A Non-mechanistic Explanation in Consciousness: The Missing Link. <u>Back to Godhead Magazine</u>. vol 15. no 10. Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003). [CD ROM]. The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA.

Saliba SJ, J. A (undated): Dialogue with ISKCON: A Roman Catholic Perspective. <u>ISKCON Communications Journal</u>, vol. 4, no 2. pp. 1-16.

Salingaros, N (2002): Anti-Architecture and Religion. The Institute for Sacred Architecture. http://www.catholicculture.org/docs/doc_view.cfm?recnum=4736

Samuel, M and Stephens, D (2000): Critical Dialogues with self: developing teacher identities and roles – a case study of South African student teachers. <u>International Journal of Educational Research</u>. vol. 33, pp. 475-491.

Satsvarupa dasa Gosvami (1993): <u>Srila Prabhupada-lilamrta: A Biography of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada</u>. Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, Bombay

Satsvarupa dasa Gosvami (1977): <u>Readings in Vedic Literature: The Tradition Speaks for Itself</u>. Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA

199

Saunaka Rsi Dasa (1999): ISKCON in Relation to People of Faith in God. ISKCON Communications Journal, vol. 7, no. 1. pp. 1-10.

Sayyid, S (undated): Beyond Westphalia: Nations and Diasporas. The Case of the Muslim Umma. http://www.islamic-studies.org/sayyid.html

Scupin, R (2000): The Anthropological Perspective on Religion in Religion and Culture: An Anthropological Focus. Scupin, R (ed). Prentice-Hall Inc. New Jersey.

Segal, R (1997): Postmodernism and the Social Scientific Study of Religion. Religion, vol. 27, no. 2. pp. 139-149.

Sethal S (2005): Life Histories of Teachers in South Africa. Faculty of Education. Unpublished Doctoral thesis, UKZN, Durban

Singh, T D (2004): Vedanta and Science Series: Life and the Origin of the Universe. The Bhaktivedanta Insititute: Kolkatta

Sivarama Swami (1999): The Siksa-guru: Implementing Tradition within ISKCON. Bhaktivedanta Institute: Hungary

Sivarama Swami (1998): The Bhaktivedanta Purports: Perfect Explanation of the Bhagavad-gita. Torchlight Publishing: California, USA

Smith, Simon G (1996): Western Buddhism: Tradition and Modernity. Religion. vol. 26. no. 4. pp. 311-321.

Sooklal, A (1985): A Socio-Religious Study Of The Hare Krishna Movement in South Africa. Unpublished Masters thesis, University of Durban-Westville.

Souvenir Book (1985): From Humble beginnings in Sri-Sri- Radha-Radhanath Temple of Understanding: Grand Opening Brochure. Art Printers: Durban.

Souvenir Book (1985): An Expression of Transcendence: Symbolism in Temple Architecture in Sri-Sri- Radha-Radhanath Temple of Understanding: Grand Opening Brochure. Art Printers: Durban

Srimad Bhagavatam (2003): Canto 3. The Status Quo: Vidura Talks with Maitreya. SB 3.5.51. Purport. Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003). [CD ROM]. The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA.

Srimad Bhagavatam (2003): Canto 4. The Creation of the Fourth Order: Attack of Candavega on the City of Puranjana; the Character of Kalakanya. SB 4.27.24. Purport. Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003). [CD ROM]. The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA

Strauss, A and Corbin, C (1998): Grounded Theory Methodology: An Overview in Research *in* Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry. Denzin N K and Lincoln Y S. (eds) Sage Publications Inc: USA.

Subhananda das (1990): The Spiritual Master and the Disciple. Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: LA.

Sutherland, K (1998): Review Article: The Mirror of Consciousness. Journal of Consciouness Studies, vol. 5. no. 2. pp. 235-244

Tamal Krishna Gosvami (1998): Destiny of the Soul: A Vaisnava Perspective *in* A Hare Krishna at Southern Methodist University: Collected Essays 1995-1997. Pundits Press: USA.

Tamal Krishna Gosvami (1998): The Perils of Succession *in* A Hare Krishna at Southern Methodist University: Collected Essays 1995-1997. Pundits Press: USA.

Tamal Krishna Gosvami (1984): Servant of the Servant. n.p.: by the author: Hong Kong

Tamimi, A (undated): Human Rights and Muslim Identity. 1. http://www.islamic-studies.org/tamim.htm)

Tatum, B D (2000): The Complexity of Identity: "Who Am I" *in* Readings for Diversity and Social Justice. Adams, M; Blumenfeld, W J; Castaneda, R; Hackman, H W; Peters, M L; Zuniga, X (eds). Routledge: New York.

Taylor, B (1997): Earthen Spirituality or Cultural Genocide? : Radical Environmentalism's Appropriation of Native American Spirituality. Religion. vol. 27, no. 2. pp. 183-215.

The future of Islamic architecture (undated): http://www.islamicart.com/main/architecture/future.html

Vaiyasaki dasa (2003): *Caitanya-bhagavata, Antya* 4.126 in Radha Damodara Vilasa. Bhaktivedanta Vedabase (2003) [CD ROM] The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA.

Velmans, M (1996): An Introduction to the Science of Consciousness *in* The Science of Consciousness: Psychological, Neuropsychological and Clinical Research. Velmans, M (ed). Routledge: London. http://cogprints.org/395/00/Definingconsciousness.html

Weiss Arnold, S and Mendoza Richard, H (undated): Effects of Acculturation into the Hare Krishna Movement on Mental Health and Personality. http://www.audarya-fellowship.com/ ubbthreads. php?Cat=&C=) registered on site 2003.

Wolf, D.B (1999): A Psychometric Analysis of the Three Gunas. <u>Psychological Reports</u>. vol. 84, pp. 1379-1390.

Wuthnow, R (undated): Church Realties and the Christian Identity in the 21st Century. http://www.christiancentury.org
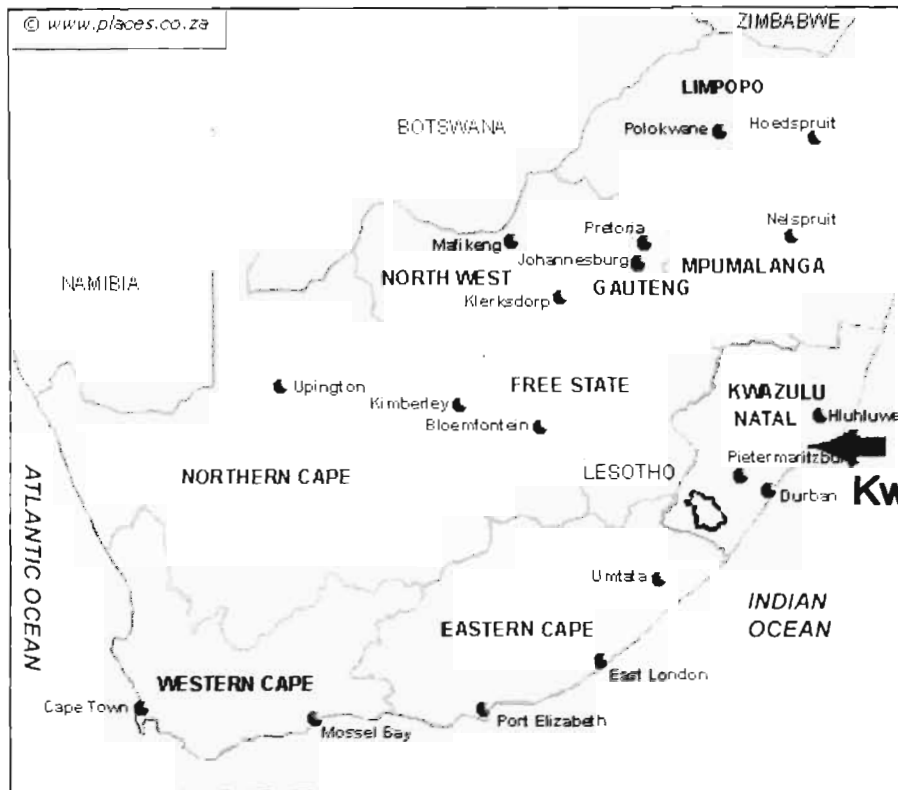
Yadurani devi dasi (1991): Painting for Srila Prabhupada *in* <u>Back to Godhead Magazine.</u> The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust: USA

APPENDIX 1:

MAPS OF

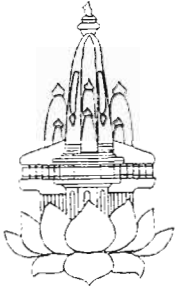## South Africa and Durban

MAP OF SOUTH AFRICA

KWA ZULU NATAL

APPENDIX 2:

PERMISSION FROM ISKCON

International Society For Krishna Consciousness

Founder Acharya: His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

KCON KWAZULU NATAL

ri Sri Radha Radhanath Temple Of Understanding

O. Box 56003, Chatsworth, 4030 / 50 Bhaktivedanta Swami Circle, Chatsworth

эl. (031) 4033328 Fax. (031) 4034429 e-mail: iskcon.kzn@pamho.net

5 January 2004

S.M. Ramson
416 Golden Birches
100 Entabeni Road
Paradise Valley
3610

Sir,

Permission to Conduct Research

Thank you for your letter dated 2 January 2004 in which you request permission to interview six resident devotees.

Permission is granted to you on the following conditions:

1. that you undertake to arrange as suitable time to interview the devotees as they have various duties at the Temple;
2. that the devotees themselves agree to be interviewed;
3. that the confidentiality statement you mentioned will be strictly upheld.

May I request a review of your findings to be sent to me as well when you have completed your research.

Yours in the service of the Supreme Lord

Swarup Damodar das
President: ISKCON KZN

International Society For Krishna Consciousness

Founder Acharya: His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

KCON KWAZULU NATAL

i Sri Radha Radhanath Temple Of Understanding

Box 56003, Chatsworth, 4030 / 50 Bhaktivedanta Swami Circle, Chatsworth

(031) 4033328 Fax. (031) 4034429 e-mail: iskcon.kzn@pamho.net

5 January 2004

S.M. Ramson
416 Golden Birches
100 Entabeni Road
Paradise Valley
3610

Sir,

Permission to Conduct Research

Your letter dated 2 January 2004 refers.

1. Your request for permission is granted. Kindly ensure you make suitable arrangements with the local Temple president and the resident devotees.

2. May I request a copy of your findings when you have completed your research.

Yours in the service of the Supreme Lord

Bhakti Chaitanya Swami
Governing Body Commissioner
ISKCON South Africa

The Governing Body Commissioner
His Holiness Bhakti Caitanya Swami
ISKCON KZN
Sri Sri Radha Radhanath Temple of Understanding
Chatsworth
Durban
4092

2 January 2004

Sir,

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT INTERVIEWS

With reference to my e-mail and discussion with you last month I hereby forward an official request for permission to conduct interviews with at least six resident devotees of your esteemed Temple as part of the requirements for my Masters Degree in Religion and Education.

I have also spoken to the Temple president Swarup Damodar das, and mentioned my proposed research to him. I have forwarded an official letter of request for permission to him.

My research is a socio-religious one, examining how devotees from multicultural, multiracial and multi-linguistic backgrounds are able to come together in a common and shared practice of Krishna consciousness.

I will approach the devotees personally, and set up a suitable time in which to conduct the interviews. Participation is voluntary and I will explain to the devotees that I approach, what is required prior to eliciting their permission.

All information will be held in the strictest of confidence and used for study purposes only.

I humbly request your kind permission in this matter.

Yours faithfully,

S.M. Ramson

Contact details: 416 Golden Birches
100 Entabeni Road
Paradise Valley
Pinetwon
3610

Cel. 084 4020251

The Temple President
Swarup Damodar das
ISKCON KZN
Sri Sri Radha Radhanath Temple of Understanding
Chatsworth
Durban
4092

2 January 2004

Sir,

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT INTERVIEWS

With reference to my verbal request last month I hereby forward an official request for permission to conduct interviews with at least six resident devotees of your esteemed Temple as part of the requirements for my Masters Degree in Religion and Education.

I have also met with your Governing Body Commissioner, His Holiness Bhakti Caitanya Swami, and mentioned my proposed research to him. I am forwarding an official letter of request for permission to him.

My research is a socio-religious one, examining how devotees from multicultural, multiracial and multi-linguistic backgrounds are able to come together in a common and shared practice of Krishna consciousness.

I will approach the devotees personally, and set up a suitable time in which to conduct the interviews. Participation is voluntary and I will explain to the devotees that I approach, what is required prior to eliciting their permission.

All information will be held in the strictest of confidence and used for study purposes only.

I humbly request your kind permission in this matter.

Yours faithfully,

S.M. Ramson

Contact details: 416 Golden Birches
　　　　　　　　　100 Entabeni Road
　　　　　　　　　Paradise Valley
　　　　　　　　　Pinetwon
　　　　　　　　　3610

　　　　　　　　　Cel. 084 4020251

APPENDIX 3:

STATEMENTS OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

3.1

RESIDENT DEVOTEES

3.2

SPIRITUAL MASTERS

3.3

ISKCON SPIRITUAL HEAD (GBC)

3.4

TEMPLE PRESIDENT: ISKCON KZN

ISKCON RESIDENT DEVOTEES

Dear Respondent,

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT STUDY AND CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT
S.M. RAMSON : Student Registration 205519769

1.   I am currently registered for my Master of Arts Degree in Religion and Social
        Transformation at University of KwaZulu Natal, in School of Religion.

2.   The names of my supervisors are:

        Prof. P. Pratap Kumar : UKZN: Howard Campus: Telephone: 031-2607539
        Prof. Reshma Sookrajh: UKZN: Edgewood Campus. Telephone: 031-2607259

3.   The title of my thesis is: *The Enduring Self: Exploring the Identity of Hare Krishna
        devotees beyond Race, Language and Culture.*

4.   The aim of the study is to investigate how individuals of different cultures, languages and
        races create or re-create their identities as devotees, and explore some of the possible
        lifestyle and value changes devotees undergo, and how the context in which they live helps
        to construct their identities as devotees.

5.   I have explained the study to, obtained permission from the Spiritual Head of ISKCON
        South Africa, and the President of ISKCON KZN to approach devotees of this Temple to
        conduct my study. I have expressed to them that I wished to interview 6 devotees
        with more than five years residency at the Temple. This is why you have been identified
        and approached as a potential respondent to the interview.

6.   Through a comprehensive series of interviews I wish to elicit information about your
        personal experiences that made you devotee and as well as your experiences in the Krishna
        Consciousness Movement, particularly those that have to do with how you develop your
        identity as a devotee.

7.   The process will be a semi-structured, semi-formal interview situation, where I ask you to
        respond verbally to a series of questions from an interview schedule that I have already
        drawn up. Our interview will be recorded to enable me to transcribe and analyse the
        information later. Please be assured that all information gathered from the interview, its
        recording and interpretation thereof will be treated with the strictest confidence and used for
        study purposes only. Your names will not be used in the study.

9.   I would like to interview you at least twice, each interview lasting approximately 90
        minutes, and then meet with you once again(or forward you a copy of the transcript) so that
        you can verify the transcript of our interview.

10.   Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the interview at any stage for
        any reason without explanation to me.

Thank you for your kind assistance.

Yours faithfully,

_____   _____
S.M. Ramson   Date

ISKCON SPIRITUAL MASTERS

Dear Respondent,

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT STUDY AND CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

S.M. RAMSON : Student Registration 205519769

1. I am currently registered for my Master of Arts Degree in Religion and Social Transformation at University of KwaZulu Natal, in School of Religion.

2. The names of my supervisors are:

   Prof. P. Pratap Kumar : UKZN: Howard Campus: Telephone: 031-2607539
   Prof. Reshma Sookrajh: UKZN: Edgewood Campus. Telephone: 031-2607259

3. The title of my thesis is: *The Enduring Self: Exploring the Identity of Hare Krishna devotees beyond Race, Language and Culture.*

4. The aim of the study is to investigate how individuals of different cultures, languages and races create or re-create their identities as devotees, and explore some of the possible lifestyle and value changes devotees undergo, and how the context in which they live helps to construct their identities as devotees.

5. I have explained the study to, and obtained permission from the Spiritual Head of ISKCON South Africa, and the President of ISKCON KZN to approach devotees of this Temple to conduct my study, as well as visiting spiritual masters.

6. Through this interview I wish to elicit information about your personal experiences that made you devotee and as well as your experiences in ISKCON, particularly those that have to do with how you develop your identity as a devotee, as well as the notions of Truth in spiritual literature.

7. The process will be a semi-structured, semi-formal interview situation, where I ask you to respond verbally to a series of questions from an interview schedule that I have already drawn up.

8. Our interview will be recorded to enable me to transcribe and analyse the information later. Please be assured that all information gathered from the interview, its recording and interpretation thereof will be treated with the strictest confidence and used for study purposes only. I wish to cite you as an authority in my research.

9. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the interview at any stage for any reason without explanation to me.

Thank you for your kind assistance.

Yours faithfully,

_____   _____
S.M. Ramson   Date

His Holiness Bhakti Caitanya Swami
ISKCON South Africa,

Sir,

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT STUDY AND CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT
S.M. RAMSON : Student Registration 205519769

1. I refer to our earlier correspondence eliciting permission to conduct my research with resident devotees of ISKCON and your response granting such permission.

2. I am currently registered for my Master of Arts Degree in Religion and Social Transformation at University of KwaZulu Natal, in School of Religion.

3. The names of my supervisors are:

    Prof. P. Pratap Kumar : UKZN: Howard Campus: Telephone: 031-2607539
    Prof. Reshma Sookrajh: UKZN: Edgewood Campus. Telephone: 031-2607259

3. The title of my thesis is: *The Enduring Self: Exploring the Identity of Hare Krishna devotees beyond Race, Language and Culture.*

5. The aim of the study is to investigate how individuals of different cultures, languages and races create or re-create their identities as devotees, and explore some of the possible lifestyle and value changes devotees undergo, and how the context in which they live helps to construct their identities as devotees.

6. Through this interview I wish to elicit information about your personal experiences that made you devotee and as well as your experiences in ISKCON, particularly those that have to do with how you develop your identity as a devotee. Furthermore I wish to seek clarification and elaboration about how the context (physical, devotee schedules, spiritual programme) and content (scriptural injunctions, descriptions identity and notions of Truth) creates devotee identity within ISKCON.

7. The process will be a semi-structured, semi-formal interview situation, where I ask you to respond verbally to a series of questions from an interview schedule that I have already drawn up. Our interview will be recorded to enable me to transcribe and analyse the information at a later. Please be assured that all information gathered from the interview, its recording and interpretation thereof will be treated with the strictest confidence and used for study purposes only. I wish to cite you as an authority in my study.

8. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the interview at any stage for any reason without explanation to me.

Thank you for your kind assistance.

Yours faithfully,

_____   _____
S.M. Ramson   Date

His Grace Swarup Damodar das
ISKCON Durban Temple of Understanding, Durban, South Africa,

Sir,

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT STUDY AND CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT
S.M. RAMSON: Student Registration 205519769

1. I refer to our earlier correspondence eliciting permission to conduct my research with resident devotees of ISKCON and your response granting such permission.

2. I am currently registered for my Master of Arts Degree in Religion and Social Transformation at University of KwaZulu Natal, in School of Religion.

3. The names of my supervisors are:

    Prof. P. Pratap Kumar : UKZN: Howard Campus: Telephone: 031-2607539
    Prof. Reshma Sookrajh: UKZN: Edgewood Campus. Telephone: 031-2607259

3. The title of my thesis is: *The Enduring Self: Exploring the Identity of Hare Krishna devotees beyond Race, Language and Culture*

5. The aim of the study is to investigate how individuals of different cultures, languages and races create or re-create their identities as devotees, and explore some of the possible lifestyle and value changes devotees undergo, and how the context in which they live helps to construct their identities as devotees.

6. Through this interview I wish to elicit information about your personal experiences that made you devotee and as well as your experiences in ISKCON, particularly those that have to do with how you develop your identity as a devotee. Furthermore I wish to seek clarification and elaboration about how the context (physical, devotee schedules, spiritual programme) and content (scriptural injunctions, descriptions identity and notions of Truth) creates devotee identity within ISKCON.

7. The process will be a semi-structured, semi-formal interview situation, where I ask you to respond verbally to a series of questions from an interview schedule that I have already drawn up. Our interview will be recorded to enable me to transcribe and analyse the information at a later. Please be assured that all information gathered from the interview, its recording and interpretation thereof will be treated with the strictest confidence and used for study purposes only. I wish to cite you as an authority in my study.

8. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the interview at any stage for any reason without explanation to me.

Thank you for your kind assistance.

Yours faithfully,

_____   _____
S.M. Ramson   Date

APPENDIX 4:

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRES

4.1

RESIDENT DEVOTEES

4.2

VISITING SPIRITUAL MASTERS

4.3

ISKCON SPIRITUAL HEAD(GBC)

4.4

TEMPLE PRESIDENT (ISKCON KZN)

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: RESIDENT DEVOTEES

History

1. When did you first come into contact with the Hare Krishna movement?

2. What was your first impression of that encounter? What did you initially find most attractive in ISKCON?

3. Were you interested in yoga, Eastern or oriental culture, mysticism, or alternate worldviews before you joined?

4. What did you do prior to joining the Temple? (Why did you give that up?)

5. Describe some of your personal thoughts about life and its purpose prior to you becoming a devotee?

6. Was there any crisis in your life preceding your decision to join the Temple?

Culture

7. Are there any similarities to the religion you were practising prior to becoming a devotee and Krishna consciousness? Are there any differences? Please tell me about these also.

8. Do you still practice your traditional cultural activities now that you are a devotee?
If yes, what are they? How do you reconcile them with Krishna consciousness?
If no, why did you give them up?

9. Are your family members devotees?
How do you family members regard your practice of Krishna Consciousness?
What is your relationship with them like?
How do you regard what they do?

10. The dress of a devotee – sari or dhoti and kurta – is peculiar to an Indian culture. Why do you adopt this type of dressing?
Did you ever feel that Krishna consciousness has an Indian identity?

11. How do you relate to that since you are from a different population group/cultural background? *(Note: use if relevant)*

12. Did you accept the teachings of Krishna consciousness immediately or was it gradual?

Identity

13. Prior to becoming a devotee, what were your thoughts about who you really were?

14. What do you understand to be your "true self"?

15. What do you understand to be the real identity of a person?

16. In what ways do you think society / education helped or interfered with your understanding of your true self?

17. What are some of the activities or behaviour that you would regard as being consistent with the true self?

18. Do you feel your behaviour as a devotee is actually in concordance with your true self, or are you simply doing what is expected of you to please others.

Language

19. In ISKCON the songs and prayers and scriptures are mostly in Sanskrit and Bengali. What did you feel when you heard this language for the first time?

20. Is there still a need for your traditional language?

21. When speaking to people from your traditional language or culture, at that moment do you experience yourself as being part of that tradition, or do you still experience yourself as a devotee?

22. How are you able to reconcile the differences between your traditional language and the language you are learning now?

23. How do you relate to the fact that you are given names in Sanskrit or Bengali at the time of your spiritual initiation? In what way does this help your identity as a devotee?

Lifestyle

24. Who is a guru? What is the need for guru?

25. Is there any place for one's individuality in a spiritual movement? How does that individuality express itself? Is the need for a guru and the idea of one's individual self contradictory? How is that resolved?

26. Would you marry? Would you marry a devotee from a different population group? Why/ Why not?

27. Describe some of the changes you have personally undergone since you became a devotee? (food, clothing, attitudes, values)

28. What are some of the religious practices you are now engaged in as a devotee?
Please describe your typical daily devotee schedule?
How do you feel these have contributed to your identity as a devotee?
What are the other factors in your environment that help you identify yourself as a devotee?

29. Do you think that the devotee identity is imposed upon the devotee by external factors just as much as one would develop the identity of another culture by growing up in that culture?

30. If you were to choose one activity/experience within ISKCON that has a deep spiritual significance for you, what would it be? Please describe your feelings/emotions associated with that.

31. What are some of your any doubts at times about being a devotee? Describe your self-doubts or any regrets about joining.

32.   Describe some of your anxieties as a devotee.

33.   Have you ever felt any tensions because of factors of race or language or culture within the Organization? Or gender?

34.   Does Krishna consciousness allow you to truly experience your own feelings about issues? Are your opinions accepted?

35.   What happens when you have some crisis in your life in ISKCON? How would you resolve it?

36.   Have you considered that you could leave the temple in the future? What would you be able to do in such a situation? What would be the impact of that on your identity?

37.   What do you see yourself doing with your life from now onwards?

Conclusion

38.   What do you think are the reasons why people from different cultures, languages or religions can come together to practice Krishna Consciousness?

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE:
VISITING SPIRITUAL MASTERS

(Information to be given to respondents prior to beginning questioning):

The interview schedule is divided into three parts:

1. Issues of self, and identity;
2. Context and Content of Hare Krishna Movement and influence on Identity;
3. Notions of Truth

PART ONE: Issues of Self and Identity

Preamble:

(Note: The highlighted texts are prompts for the interviewer)

The question "Who am I" has permeated and continues to permeate the current psychological and social research on the construction of identity. It has been studied from many perspectives – psychoanalytical, philosophical, phenomenological, sociological, socio-linguistic, anthropological, theological, and educational. Several identity theories - social, race, culture, language, feminism and religious identity have been posited by researchers.

George Herbert Mead, a classic anthropologist stated that a concept of self does not initially exist at birth, but develops only in the process of social relations. His idea was that "self" is a product of group dynamics. In his own words, "The individual possesses a self only in relation to the selves of other members of his social group".

1.   Is the "self" really a product of group dynamics as posited by Mead? What would you

    consider the true nature of the self, in response to what George Herbert Mead proposed?

2.   There is the continuous mind/body debate in issues of identity. How do the concepts of mind and intelligence feature in identity?

3.   **Another set of researchers (Gover and Gavelek), define identity as the idea "that we are a part of something beyond our selves…while at the same time separable from it".**

    They characterize identity as consisting of both *person* and the *self*. The *person* is that which is socially defined, that which is capacitated for public action, and the *self* – the origin of one's perception which is constant, neither of which exist in isolation.

    How do you view this?

4. **Anthony Giddens theorizes that an individual's self-identity is "reflexive". In other words, self-identity is simply what the individual is conscious of.**

   What is your comment on this idea?

5. **In traditional societies, the individual had a fixed, culturally bound identity, but in post traditional settings the individual can consciously choose an identity free from the restraints of tradition and culture. He actually regarded those traditions and cultures as boundaries to options of ones self-understanding.**

   Would you agree with that?

PART TWO: Context and Content of Hare Krishna Movement and influence on Identity

6. Is becoming a devotee a re-socialization process? (e.g. conversion to Christianity). In what ways would this be similar or dissimilar from socialization in other religious/cultural groups?

7. With regards to the context and content of the Hare Krishna Movement, could this not be regarded just as any other culture where the externals impinge upon an individual to shape his identity?

8. What are some of the activities or behaviour that you would regard as being consistent with the true self?

9. What do you construe as your true self?

10. Prior to being a devotee did you engage in a search to find out what you were really meant to do/be? Please describe what form that search took. (Prior to you becoming a devotee what were your personal thoughts about life and its purpose?)

11. What has helped or interfered with your understanding of your true self?

12. Are there multiple selves? Can a devotee have both a devotee identity and also his/her national or cultural identity – e.g. being South African, American or Hungarian, and yet a devotee?

13. Is there any place for one's individuality in this spiritual movement? How does that individuality express itself? Is the need for a guru and the idea of one's individual self, contradictory? How is that resolved?

14. Do you think in following a religious tradition like this, one suspends one's faculties of critical judgement and simply accepts convictions supplied by an authority?

Geographically and historically, arguably, the Movement seems to have an "Indian" appearance.

15. How did you as a person from another culture, view the Hare Krishna Movement when you first encountered it? (Then what made you consider it?)

16. Is there a relationship of this Krishna conscious philosophy to Indian culture?

17. What do you think are the reasons why people from different cultures, languages or religions can come together to practice Krishna Consciousness?

PART THREE: The Notions of Truth

There is an emphasis amongst academic researchers to present the Truth to validate data. The Vedic scriptures also speak of the "Absolute Truth".

18. What is the idea of Truth in the spiritual literature as compared to those of academic research?

19. Is there a point of intersection between how Truth is generated and observed in the spiritual arena and in the empirical world?

20. Several academics like Straus and Corbin, and Denzin regard truth generated by academic research as historically embedded. What is your response to that proposition?

21. How are these spiritual Truths you mention operationalized / managed in the material world?

22. Is there is a relationship between self-identity, and Truth?

Thank you very much.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE:
SPIRITUAL HEAD: GOVERNING BODY COMMISSIONER OF ISKCON SA

(Information to be given to respondents prior to beginning questioning):

The interview schedule is divided into three parts:

1. Issues of self, and identity;
2. Context and Content of Hare Krishna Movement and influence on Identity;
3. Notions of Truth

PART ONE: Issues of Self and Identity

Preamble:

(Note: The highlighted texts are prompts for the interviewer)

The question "Who am I" has permeated and continues to permeate the current psychological and social research on the construction of identity. It has been studied from many perspectives – psychoanalytical, philosophical, phenomenological, sociological, socio-linguistic, anthropological, theological, and educational. Several identity theories - social, race, culture, language, feminism and religious identity have been posited by researchers.

George Herbert Mead, a classic anthropologist stated that a concept of self does not initially exist at birth, but develops only in the process of social relations. His idea was that "self" is a product of group dynamics. In his own words, "The individual possesses a self only in relation to the selves of other members of his social group".

1.   Is the "self" really a product of group dynamics as posited by Mead? What is the influence of a group on the identity of the self?

2.   There is the continuous mind/body debate in issues of identity. How do the concepts of mind and intelligence feature in identity?

Another set of researchers (Gover and Gavelek), define identity as the idea "that we are a part of something beyond our selves...while at the same time separable from it".

They characterize identity as consisting of both *person* and the *self*. The *person* is that which is socially defined, that which is capacitated for public action, and the *self* – the origin of one's perception which is constant, neither of which exist in isolation.

3.   How do you view this?

4. Anthony Giddens theorizes that an individual's self-identity is "reflexive". In other words, self-identity is simply what the individual is conscious of. What is your comment on this idea?

5. In traditional societies, the individual had a fixed, culturally bound identity, but in post traditional settings the individual can consciously choose an identity free from the restraints of tradition and culture. He actually regarded those traditions and cultures as boundaries to options of ones self-understanding. Would you agree with that?

PART TWO: Context and Content of Hare Krishna Movement and influence on Identity

6. Is becoming a devotee a re-socialization process? (e.g. conversion to Christianity). In what ways would this be similar or dissimilar from socialization in other religious/cultural groups?

7. What are some of the activities or behaviour that you would regard as being consistent with the true self?

8. Prior to you becoming a devotee what were your personal thoughts about life and its purpose?

9. What has helped or interfered with your understanding of your true self?

10. Prior to being a devotee did you engage in a search to find out what you were really meant to do/be? Please describe what form that search took.

11. In terms of the actual architecture of the Temple, its interior design, altar, etc, how does that influence devotee identity?

12. Could this not be regarded as just as any other culture where the externals impinge upon an individual to shape his identity?

13. The devotee accommodation is rather simple. Is this a question of self-denial? How does this relate to the practices of devotional service? How will this influence devotee identity?

14. There are several festivities held by the Movement annually. How are these related to the creation of a devotee identity?

15. In the *Caitanya-caritamrta* (*Madhya-lila* 22.128), I have read a statement:

"One should associate with devotees, chant the holy name of the Lord, hear *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, reside at Mathura and worship the Deity with faith and veneration."

219

This seems to summarize both the devotee context and content.
Could you please elaborate on this injunction in terms of how it impinges upon devotee identity in ISKCON.

16. In the South African chapter of ISKCON there are many whites, blacks and Indian and a few coloured devotees.

   I have observed that there is a tendency for each of these population groups to group together even while at the Temple.

16.1. It would seem that a devotee's temporal identity has more prominence. Would you regard this as natural? Is there tension perhaps between a devotee's temporal identity and his true identity?

16.2. Is there any reason why there are fewer devotees from a coloured population group?

17. Are there multiple selves? Can a devotee have both a devotee identity and also his/her national or cultural identity – e.g. being South African, American or Hungarian, and yet a devotee?

18. Is there any place for one's individuality in this spiritual movement? How does that individuality express itself? Is the need for a guru and the idea of one's individual self, contradictory? How is that resolved?

19. Do you think in following a religious tradition like this, one suspends one's faculties of critical judgement and simply accepts convictions supplied by an authority?

Bhagavad-gita mentions that there are four types of persons that take up a spiritual mode, viz. the seeker of wealth, the distressed, the curious and the genuine seeker of knowledge.

20. Which one these categories fits your initial approach to Krishna consciousness?

21. Do the above ways in which people seek God only apply to the Krishna Conscious context?
   What would be the experience of identity for people in each of those different modes of approach?

Geographically and historically, arguably, the Movement seems to have an "Indian" appearance.

22. How did you as a person from another culture, view the Hare Krishna Movement when you first encountered it? (Then what made you consider it?)

23. Is there a relationship of this Krishna conscious philosophy to Indian culture?

24. What do you think are the reasons why people from different cultures, languages or religions can come together to practice Krishna Consciousness?

PART THREE: The Notions of Truth

There is an emphasis amongst academic researchers to present the Truth to validate data. The Vedic scriptures also speak of the "Absolute Truth".

25. What is the idea of Truth in the spiritual literature as compared to those of academic research?

26. Is there a point of intersection between how Truth is generated and observed in the spiritual arena and in the empirical world?

27. How are these spiritual Truths you mention operationalized / managed in the material world?

28. **A quote from the founder A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada: "As far as the identity of The living being as spirit self is concerned, there are a number of speculations and misgivings. The materialist does not believe in the existence of the spirit self, and empiric philosophers believe in the impersonal feature of the whole spirit without individuality of the living beings".**

28.1. What does A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami mean when he refers to "speculations and misgivings?

28.2. Who are the "empiric philosophers" and what is the "impersonal feature of the whole spirit"?

28.3 How does this relate to the question of identity?

28.4 How does this quote relate to the notions of Truth we examined so far?

29. Is there is a relationship between self-identity, and Truth.

Thank you very much

221

4.4

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE:
## TEMPLE PRESIDENT: ISKCON DURBAN, KZN, SA

1. What is the spiritual context of ISKCON Temple of Understanding, Durban?

2. Bhaktivedanta Swami, when first registering ISKCON in 1966, listed seven purposes for the Society. Do you still subscribe to that? How do those purposes manifest themselves in this temple?

3. A researcher, Jenkins states that in organizations "there is a recognized pattern of decision-making and allocation." Could you describe the organizational structure of ISKCON.

4. Jenkins, in his description of organizations mentions that organizations have specific criteria for "identifying, and processes for recruiting members". How does ISKCON identify and recruit members?

5. There are several festivities held by the Movement annually. Could you list some of them? Do these have a role in recruiting members?

6. The devotees follow a daily spiritual programme or rising early at meeting in the Temple at 4.30 am for the first prayer meeting, meditation and worship and spiritual classes until at least 9.00am.

   What is the significance of this for devotee identity? Could this not be regarded as just as any other culture where the externals impinge upon an individual to shape his identity?

7. Is your Movement involved in any social work?

8. This Temple is certainly a large centre in Durban. What is the purpose of the Phoenix Temple which is only approximately 40km away? Are the other projects?

9. How does the institution influence the identity of its resident members?

APPENDIX 5:

PHOTOGRAPHS
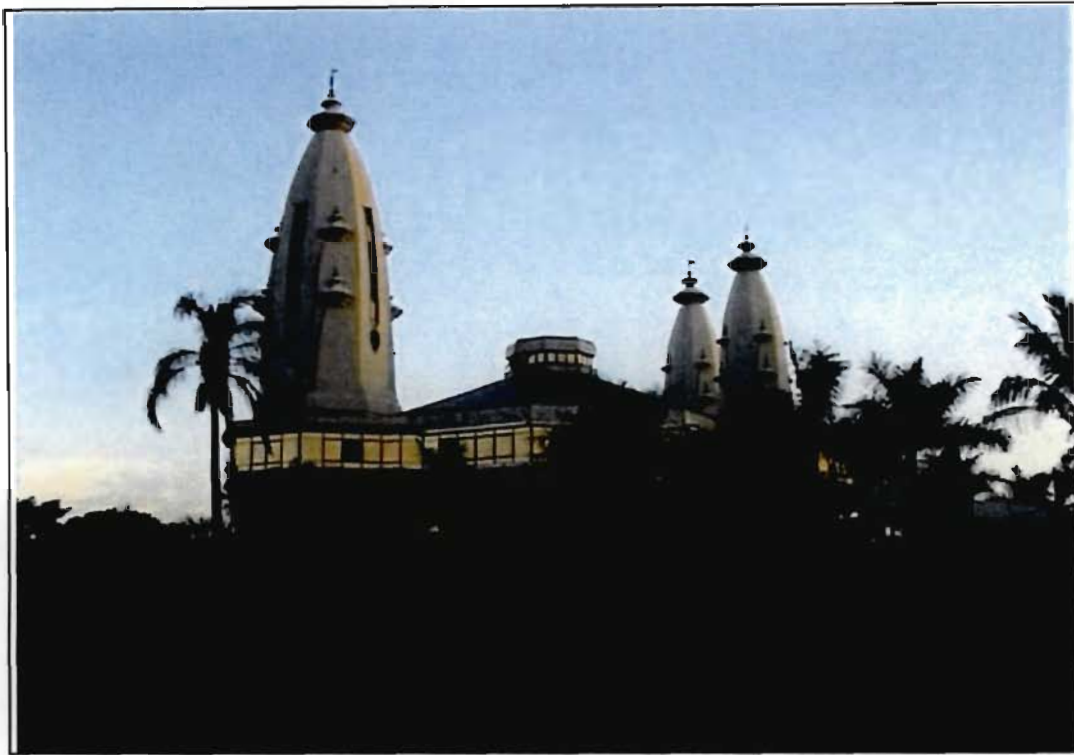
ISKCON Temple of Understanding, Chatsworth, Durban, South Africa.
The largest dome stands above the main altar

A view of the main entrance

The inner sanctorum with the altar at the far end

A closer view of the altar and adorned ceilings

The Book and Gift Shop in the Temple foyer

Part of the moat and gardens

Devotee accommodation