The London School of Economics and Political Science

Everyday play in mothering Krishna;

rethinking devotional *seva* (service) and prayer in the Pushtimarg

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Anthropology of the London School of Economics and Political Science for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

I declare that my thesis consists of 99, 468 words. My work has been professionally proofread by Jonathan Suttcliffe.

Abstract

This thesis is an anthropological study that uses the lens of prayer to explore relationship-building, kinship and play with Krishna in his child form. The ethnographic research took seventeen months with the Pushtimarg (Path of Grace), a transnational Vaishnava *bhakti* (devotional) movement, in Gujarat India, London and Leicester in the UK. The Pushtimarg practice *seva*, a devotional service, to baby Krishna which parallels human behaviour such as waking, feeding, sleeping and playing. *Seva* amongst the Pushtimarg is described as "not quite ritual", and not "service" in a hierarchical show of humility, national pride or humanitarian aid. Prayer, as both a universal analytic and with a particular definition, offers a relational and communicative understanding of worship.

In my interlocutors' terms, *puja* (worship) is aligned with ritual, as more rule-bound, while *seva* is the loving relationship between human and the divine that is unbounded and spontaneous. Indeed, through *seva* Krishna as a cheeky baby or toddler is made relatable, rather than inspiring awe as transcendent. This awakens a devotional love most often performed in the role of a mother or lover. The social and the individual balance in the explorations of the public performance of *seva* that is guru-led, *yatra* (sacred journeys) and connection to land. Yet, the intimacy of the domestic presents a unique perspective into the relationship between human and divine. This thesis suggests that a closer look into the absorptive practices of prayer and *seva* as care for the divine shows how playful worship is relational and offers a (re)framing of mundane life into a wonder-filled otherworldly (*alaukika*) perspective. [260 words]

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For Ba

Vijyaben na Jai Shree Krishna

Acknowledgements

I woke up early one morning worried about how I could possibly thank everyone who supported me over the years in bringing this thesis to life. The thesis is a culmination of the kindness and collaboration of a wide network of people, without whom I could not have written a word.

I would like to thank the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for their generous studentship that financially supported my fieldwork and writing up. The LSE Anthropology Department is an enriching space that challenged helped my grow as an anthropologist. To Yan Hinrichsen, thank you for answering all my many questions, letting me pop in for chats and being the backbone of the department. To my teachers, Mathijs Pelkmans, Michael Scott, Matthew Engelke, Nick Long, Mukulika Banerjee, Gisa Weszkalnys and Alpa Shah for inspiring different questions of anthropology. A special thank you to Catherine Allerton for many discussions on childhood and landscape, and to Hans Steinmüller for drawing out more around play in the third-year review. Thank you to our librarian, Heather Dawson for finding all the texts and books I needed. I am indebted to Chris Fuller for being a reader for the thesis. His excellent and direct way of critique challenged and push me to clarify my thoughts for the readers. The LSE Faith Centre has been an amazing space to collaborate with other departments around similar interests, so I thank James Walters and Manmit Bhambra for creating and encouraging such an opportunity at LSE.

A huge thank you to two people I could not have done this thesis without my supervisors, Fenella Cannell, and Laura Bear. Both incredible writers and role models for how to write elegantly and evocatively. Fenella has been with me since my MSc programme, encouraging me to apply for the PhD, and I would literally not be here without her. Laura Bear shared her enthusiasm, regional knowledge and home, welcoming me into the fold with open arms. Thank you to Laura for including me in the Covid and Care Research Group, where I learnt how applied anthropology takes shape and has a place, but where I survived the tedium of the pandemic and early motherhood. I learnt a lot from amazing collaborations with Nikita Simpson, Becky Bowers, Caroline Bazambanza, Kiran Bhogal, and the rest of the team.

What started off with a quick email to an academic turned into speaking almost every day, meeting a best friend, colleague and cheerleader in Allen Richardson. You have showed me how to write for a

wider audience, encouraged and challenged me and told me what I was doing was great when I needed to hear that so thank you! You have also shown me what kind of teacher I would like to be. Other academics have indulged my emails and calls, so I wish to thank especially Shandip Saha, Emilia Bachrach, and David Haberman, Jack Hawley, Shital Sharma, Peter Bennett, Andre Droogers, Gwilym Beckerlegge and Nicole Karapanagiotis. Thank you to Méadhbh McIvor for starting my academic questioning off in the right way and Geoffrey Hughes for your comments on my envy paper.

When starting a PhD you don't often think you'll meet one of your best friends. Sandhya Fuchs, you are one brilliant anthropologist and fabulous friend. Without our trip to see the elephants, your love of voicenotes, particularly the most recent motivational song, and endless chats over nothing, I would not have been able to do this. Our cohort was an amazing group of academics and I hope we get a chance to meet at the White Horse soon! A special thanks to my 'religion stuff' team, Clayton Goodgame and Miguel Alcalde for reading, ranting and coffees.

From my first day of fieldwork in Ahmedabad, ten days after an announcement of demonetisation that rendered all my rupees pointless, I want to thank the many random strangers for all their kindness who I can never repay, from the taxi driver who took me to every cashpoint until my AirBnB, to my host who paid for all my meals and rickshaws until I found my feet. Thank you to all the members of the Vallabhkhul, who I keep anonymised here, but who assisted me and made me feel welcome in the different Havelis, particularly, Pitashree, Mota Vahuji, Jejeshree and Bhabhishree, and their two rajas.

Thank you to the Haveli community Vanitaben, Minaben, Prafulaben, Kaushikaben and the *phoolghar* ladies, and particularly my adopted family in Raginiben. Raginiben, I can never forget singing our favourite Bollywood songs, your amazing food and our kite-flying adventures together. To the children of the Haveli, especially Isha, I miss hanging out and colouring during a *sapta.* In the UK, I was welcomed to the Haveli by Minaben, Shubashbhai, Vilasben, Varshaben, and a number of other people. Thank you to Vajubhai for his generosity and Krishna Kinkari for her translations of the *vartas* and the time she spent talking to me. A huge amount of gratitude towards Bhagwat and Sujal Shah, who welcomed me into their home. Bhagwat you are so engaging! Thanks to Rishi and Ana too, for your participation in my many questions. Without you all, there would be no story.

I am lucky enough to have a strong support network outside of academia, so thanks to Shraddha Bhogaita, my bestie. Thanks for your morning gossip sessions, it's time to move near me. To Ami Chandarana thanks for always making me feel like I'm doing something cool. Thank you, Harriet and Teresa, for helping me survive the early years of motherhood. Thank you to Nani and Papa, the fieldwork trip to Calcutta reinvigorated my soul. Thank you to all my maternal aunts and uncles for answering my recent calls about Ba and for being a feisty bunch.

I can’t thank my family enough for all they’ve done for me, while not knowing quite what I do. Thank you, Mum, you have shown me how to really care for a family and I hope I am half a good a Mum as you are. Dad, not only have you given me an addiction to travelling and being curious, but you have also shown me that being strong is being loving. Both of you have indulged a pretty adventurous life, thank you for letting all of us be who we want to be. To my besties, my sisters, Taleesha and Eshani, you both inspire me in how talented you are and wind me up at the same time as younger sisters do! Loyalty!

To Kesh, you’ve indulged me long enough – it’s finished, I can’t live the hermit life anymore! Thank you for being by my side, being a weirdo with me and giving me the greatest gift in Kyra. My little one, I love you and you are my world.

A note on language

This thesis transliterates Hindu terms and names following the common convention of anthropologists writing on South Asian religious life to make the text more legible. Diacritical marks are avoided, except in the glossary where alternative spellings can be found too. I have omitted the final 'a' in some words to maintain pronunciation, so for Pushtimarga, I write Pushtimarg, for *anyashraya* I write *anyashray,* for *alaukika* it is *alaukik.* There are vernacular and regional specificities among my Gujarati interlocutors in regard to general pronunciation as above, and also place names, which I retain in the glossary but change in the text in order to facilitate reading from a wider audience. So, while the Sanskrit name of Krishna's birthplace is Braj, and the sacred language Braj Bhasha, my interlocutors would write and pronounce it as Vraj and Vraj Bhasha. I draw on Bennett (1993) and Richardson's (2014) glossary for diacritics, but all mistakes made are my own.

Glossary

Aarti*:* a lit wick offered to the deity

Acharya (acārya): title given meaning teacher or expert

Alaukik (alaukika): spiritual or otherworldly

Anand (ānand): bliss or joy

Anyashray (anyashraya): seeking refuge in others

Apras (aparas): formal ritual cleansing

Avatar (avatār): manifestation of god on earth

Ban yatra (ban yātrā): a forty-day circular pilgrimage

Banias (vaniyās, baniās): merchant caste

Ben: sister, often added to a forename as a sign of respect and kinship in Gujarat

Baithaks (bethak): lit. seat where Vallabhacharya recited scripture. These are Pushtimarg-specific sacred sites around India. There are 84 in total associated with Vallabhacharya.

Bhagavad Gita (Bhagavad Gītā): a part of the Hindu scripture, the Mahabharata

Bhai: brother, often added to a forename as a sign of respect and kinship in Gujarat

Bhaj: to share

Bhakti: devotion related to emotional mood and a range of historical religious movements

Bhava (bhav, bhāva): modes, moods, or attitudes of devotion

Bhet (bhẽṭ) : donations

Bhog: food

Brahmin: high caste related to priests

Brahmsambandh (brambh sambandh, brahmsambandha): an initiation ceremony lit. binding to god

Chalse: a saying in Gujarati meaning “it will do.”

Charnamrut (caraṇāmṛta): soil or dust of Braj in Braj Bhasha. Also called ‘Braj ki raj.’

Chaube: Braj guide that is associated with specialist knowledge

Chitraji: a painted image of Shri Nathji that can be animated

Dana (dāna): donation or gift

Danvath (daṅḍavat) : full-prostration

Darshan (darsana): sight and being seen by the divine

Dāsya bhāva: master-servant devotional mood

Deshbhakti: devotion to the nation

Dharma: a principle of law ordering the universe, often translated as duties or obligations

Dharmshala: religious guesthouse

Dvāpara yuga: third of the cosmological eras when Krishna was on earth as a child, warrior, then king

Gaddī: thrones or 'houses' of the Vallabhacharya lineage

Gaushala: cow shelter

Gopinath (ji): the first son of Vallabhacharya

Gopis: milkmaids from Krishna's youth

Goswamis (gosvāmī): Pushtimarg gurus, also affectionately called Jejes

Grihastha asrama: householder life stage

Guṇas: guiding principles or characteristics which are Tamas (destructive, ignorance), Rajas (self-centred, hyperactive) and Sattva (pure devotion, harmony)

Gupt: hidden or secret

Guru: religious or spiritual teacher or authority, sometimes associated with the divine

Haveli (havelī): lit. mansion but also a Pushtimarg temple that can be a private Vallabhkhul home at the same time

Jhanki (jhānkī): glimpse, tableau, or scene

Jiva: soul

Jnana: knowledge, often spiritual

Kali yuga: Age of Darkness

Kanti (kaṇṭhī): Tulsi seed necklace signifying membership in the Pushtimarg

Karma: path of action, and spiritual principle of cause and effect that influenced reincarnation

Katha: sermon, associated with religious storytelling

Kheltha: play (thing)

Kirtans (kīrtan): songs of devotion

Krupa (kripa, kṛpā): grace, also Pushti means grace

Lalan: a petname for Krishna

Laukik (laukika): reality, worldly, mundane

Lila (līlā): earthly divine play

Loka: sacred place or world

Madhurya bhava (Madhura bhāva): lovers, related to bhava as a mood or emotion

Manasi seva (mānasik sevā): seva of the mind

Mandir: temple

Manorath (manoratha): donation or sponsorship lit. desire or wish

Mantra: chant

Marjadi: strict orthodox

Maryada marg (maryādā mārga): path of restrictions and rules

Maya (māyā): illusion of the world

Misri: sugar crystals offered as a sweet to the divine

Moksha (mokṣa): salvation or liberation

Mukhiyaji (mukhiyā): Pushtimarg priest

Murtis (mūrti): divine images that can be given presence

Nandalay (nandālaya): Nanda's home, Krishna's foster father

Nazar: evil eye

Nidhi swaroops (nidhi swarūp): nine swaroops consecrated by Vallabhacharya imbued with Krishna's animate being

Nirguna (nirguṇa): formless abstract divine being

Pada: poem

Parikrama: circumambulation

Pathshala: children's religious schools

Phoolghar (phūlghar)*:* flower-garland making 'house'. Also refers to a room or section of the Haveli where they are made.

Phul: fruit or reward

Pichwais (pichhavai, pichoi): cloth hangings famed in Nathdwara

Pran pratistha (prāṇ pratiṣṭhā) – life-giving ceremony for a deity's image, called establishment through ritual too

Prarthana: prayer, often petitionary

Prasad (prasād, prasada): blessed leftovers from the divine, not like *jutha* which has a negative connotation

Pravaha: worldly souls

Puja (pūjā): worship of the divine, involving an image of the deity being bathed, fed, anointed, dressed, and played with.

Puranas: religious literature written in narrative form, often sung, or performed

Pushtavela: life-affirmed, animate image of the divine in Braj Bhasha. See *prana pratistha* too

Pushti (puṣṭi): graced souls

Pushtimarg (Pushti Marga, puṣṭimārga): Path of Grace, Path of Nourishment

Pushtimargi (puṣṭimārgi): follower or member of the Pushtimarg

Ras-lila (rāsa-līlā): circular dance with Krishna and gopis

Rag: song

Rajasic*:* hot foods which incites anger or lust

Rasa: taste, nectar

Sadhus (sādhus): ascetics

Saguna (saguṇa): personal divine with attributes

Sakha: male friends

Sakhi: female friends

Sakhya bhava (sakhya bhāva): friendship devotional mood

Samagri (sāmagrī): food before it is prepared as an offering (bhog)

Sampradaya (sampradāya, sampraday): often translated as sect or spiritual tradition, though can be thought of as a community

Sadhana (sādhana): religious discipline

Satsang (satsaṅg): religious discourse or gathering, often related to religious singing

Sattvick: cooling and pure foods

Seva (sevā): selfless service, devotional service

Sevak: servant

Shakti: power, sometimes from the divine

Shaligram (shālagrām): stone that are spontaneous dwellings of the divine

Shanka: doubt or distrust

Shanti: peace

Shri Nathji (Shrī Nāthjī): avatar of Krishna to come to Vallabhacharya in the late fifteenth century

Shringar (shṛingār): adornment

Shruti*:* "what is heard"

Smaran: evoked memory

Smirti*:* "what is remembered"

Sraddha: believe is often translated as faith.

Stridharma: female code of conduct

Sutak: period of pollution from menstruation (more often called pindro), post-partum and grief after death

Swaroops (swarūpa, swarūp, svaroop): continuously animate divine images (Krishna's own form)

Tabla: hand drums

Tamas*:* smelly foods inviting in lethargy or delusion

Tanuja seva (tanujā sevā): bodily or physical seva

Thakorji (Ṭhākurjī): Lord Krishna

Tilkayat (Tilkāyat): first 'house' of the Vallabhkul that runs Nathdwara Haveli in Rajasthan

Tirtha (tīrtha): crossing in a pilgrimage or yatra

Tulsi (tulasi): holy basil plant

Vahuji: Pushtimarg guru's wives

Vaishnavas (Vaiṣṇava): worshippers of avatars of Vishnu of which Krishna is one. For the Pushtimarg, Krishna is the ultimate divine being

Vallabhacharya (Vallabhācarya): founding guru of the Pushtimarg from the late fifteenth century

Vallabhite: followers of the Pushtimarg, named after the founding guru Vallabhacharya

Vallabhkhul: Vallabhacharya's divine lineage

Vārtās: vernacular hagiographies of disciples of Vallabhacharya and his divine lineage

Vastra: clothes often part of the Shringar (adornments) of Krishna

Vatsalya bhava (vātsalya bhāva): parent-child devotional mood

Vedas: body of religious texts, written in Sanskrit

Visarjana: submersion in water

Viswasa: believe translated too as 'confidence' or 'trust'

Vittaja seva (vittajā sevā): financial seva

Vittalnath (ji): the second son of Vallabhacharya

Yatra: pilgrimage or spiritual journey

Introduction

> I am about six years old, just waking up in my grandmother's room covered in a dark brown quilt. As I slowly adjust to the light, fidgeting, Ba sits on the floor at the foot of the bed in her *saree*, already washed and dressed. She is sitting in front of a little wooden cupboard in front of a little baby Krishna (Lalan). Crawling and trailing the quilt with me, my body turns so my face is peering at her from the end of the bed and my feet towards the pillows. She is busy moving things around and rustling with bits and pieces. My blurry and sleepy eyes catch bright details such as orange cloth, glints of gold or spinning tops being spun. She turns to me and gestures for me to look but not touch or come down from the bed just yet. So, I dangle my face at a distance, watching her play with and worship her Lalan.

This was my first memory of meeting someone's Lalan, a pet name for the personal image of baby Krishna in the home. In a home shrine, the image worshipped is often a bronze statue of baby Krishna, crawling, with a butterball in his outstretched hand. I was not allowed down because I had not yet ritually cleansed, so I was an audience to Ba's *seva* (devotional worship or service) and care for her Lalan. Ba, my maternal grandmother, would often let me watch her play with her Lalan as she sang on the floor at the foot of the bed. That moment with my grandmother epitomises the relational expression of religious practice in the Pushtimarg. In her London terraced house, with any number of children or grandchildren running around her shouting and laughing hysterically, she would bustle about, spooning ladles of red bean curry into dishes in the kitchen. In her room, in the calm quiet of early morning, washed and in a saree, she did her *seva* and played with her Lalan. For Ba, perhaps this was her playtime, too, away from the duties of being a matriarch handling her herd.

Born in the 1930s as one of six children, Ba left India, in 1948 for Malawai after marriage. This post-Independence period in India was a time of upheaval for what it meant to be Indian, Hindu, and a citizen. And yet, she came away with a relatively clear idea of what it was to be a traditional Indian woman focused on raising children and running the household. Ba moved to the UK in the late seventies during a wave of South Asian immigration from East Africa. She did not speak much English but found community members attended Havelis and joined *satsangs.* She started her Lalan *seva* in the 1980s. According to two of her daughters, once her nine children were grown up, she could spend time on *seva*. Yet, it was part of Ba's lineage, as her mother performed *seva* too.

Ba was a strong woman who ran a strict, not stern, household with her nine children, expanding to over 20 of us, with partners and children. Her worship was intimate, loving, and peaceful, while her life perhaps seemed chaotic, loud, and boisterous. As she dressed her Lalan with infinite care, you could see in those gestures the same affection she had for us as small children. I never asked much

about what I was allowed to observe. More often than not, future encounters with Hindu divinity were in public at Hindu festivals during my teenage years of boredom and disinterest. Being a part of a devotee's domestic worship or *seva* is not that common, as I would find out many years later during my seventeen months of fieldwork in Gujarat, India and Leicester and London, in the UK.

As I studied anthropology of religion during my MSc at LSE, I noticed an abundance of work on *puja,* and worship of the divine, a recognisable part of Hindu life and my own. I came across countless discussions of ritual life, associated with *puja.* Yet, what Ba, and others, called their worship was *seva.* Sometimes, they did *puja* for other divine beings or in public settings for lifecourse events. Interlocutors explained *seva* as 'emotional', 'more-than', or not 'quite' ritual. These casual musings were concretised into questions during a conference I attended organised by Fenella Cannell on New Directions in the Study of Prayer (NDSP), funded by the Social Science Research Council. The conference mainly centred on prayer experiences in Christianity, stating that "the full range of prayer practices, implications, and effects remains under-studied by scholars and under-covered by journalists"[1]. The moment of challenging the narrow focus on petitionary prayer[2] and the chance to broaden my understanding of this diverse part of religious life felt similar to what I was thinking about *seva*.

I finally started asking questions and discovered Ba was part of the Pushtimarg (the Path of Grace). I was told I was part of it, too, having done the initiation as a child. This was news to me. The Pushtimarg is part of *bhakti* devotion, emphasising loving devotion over action (*karma*) or knowledge (*jnana*). Within *bhakti* devotion, there are numerous schools of thought. The Pushtimarg is a Vaishnava tradition, worshipping Krishna through *bhakti* and *seva*. *Seva* is usually translated as 'selfless service' and consists of daily devotion towards an image of baby Krishna with parallels to human behaviours, such as feeding, bathing, and singing to the deity, just as Ba did every day. Lalan, or BalKrishna (child Krishna), is the image, and animated divine presence, in a devotees' domestic space and public Havelis (Pushtimarg temples). The bronze statue of Lalan ranges from lightweight, as small as the tip of a finger, to a solid five-inch tall, palm-width heavier image. Many Krishna images are worn from consistent *seva,* blurring the contours of his face, hands and feet, replacing the 'new' shiny gloss. When a devotee meets their Lalan, they often describe an initial attraction to one particular image, detailing his expressions, size, and how he feels in their palms. Some prefer a larger image that sits heavy, seeing him as less fragile, while others want him as tiny as possible to care for him as a small baby. Devotees adorn his glossy and smooth body with colourful garments, stick-on jewels and sparkling crowns. The mischievous child-god Krishna is from the Bhagavad Purana

[1] *Reverberations* http://forums.ssrc.org/ndsp/category/prayer-in-wider-perspective/
[2] Ibid.

literature in Canto 10 and lived on earth over 5000 years ago. He is infamous for his mischievous stealing of butter from the local women (*gopis*) in his childhood home of Vraj.

During my Masters I noted that *seva* seemed to share many of the same traits as prayer, even as *prarthana* is a direct translation of prayer in Hindu thought. This little niggling thought turned into a thesis. Why has prayer been largely[3] ignored as an analytical framework for understanding religiosity?[4] Ritual and belief as categories are often applied cross-culturally for comparison, while "prayer" is only briefly mentioned as part of ritual or ignored. Prayer forms a large part of people's religious lives through conversations and practices. This thesis explores the Hindu concept and lived practice of domestic *seva* through the lens of a growing interest in the anthropology of prayer. In particular, this thesis draws on the notion of a playful, caregiving, and communicative prayer activity that leads to a kinship relationship.

An anthropology of prayer

> "Of all religious phenomena, there are few which, even when considered merely from the outside, give such an immediate impression of life, richness and complexity as does the phenomenon of prayer" (Mauss 2003 (1909); 21)

Mauss explored prayer in his unfinished thesis "On Prayer" in 1909. Yet, it has been relatively neglected in the study of the anthropology of religion, leading Mauss to state, "The paucity of scientific literature on a subject of such primordial importance is truly remarkable" (Ibid; 27) and still is. Often prayer is left to theologians, philosophers, or historians of religion (Ibid; 29). Anthropologists, in general, have not focussed on it, bypassing an exploration of prayer in favour of the more observable public and collective rituals.

Mauss aimed to define prayer and follow the evolutionist route in his analysis, the latter of which this thesis does not adopt. However, his discussion points to theories on prayer, its place, and the role of the collective and individual. There are two topics from Mauss I wish to draw out. First is the confluence of prayer, belief, and ritual. He states, "Prayer…where ritual is united in belief" (Ibid; 22), which is where its "power and efficacy" (Ibid) lies. Ritual and myth (combined in prayer) are two sides of the same coin, and only scientific endeavour abstracts them (Ibid; 23). This entanglement of categories reflects much of religious life's synaesthetic and sensory experience. In this thesis, the purpose of a distinction between ritual and prayer is to consciously consider my interlocutors' statements regarding the place of *seva*.

[3] Ibid.
[4] Gheewala Lohiya 2018.

Secondly, Mauss' defines prayer as "a religious rite which is oral and bears directly on the sacred" (2003 [1990]; 58). He goes on to suggest that "The analysis of prayer is, therefore, easier than that of most religious phenomena" (Ibid; 23) due to the element of language that specifies the context of prayer, as opposed to ritual, which can be "vague" (Ibid; 22). The irony of this aside, anthropologists have long been interested in magical and ritual language (Malinowski 2002 (1922), Tambiah 1968) through speech and mantras (Lopez 1990), semiotics (Keane 1997), songs and poetry (Sanford 2008), textual authority (Das 2008) or authority in general (Bloch 1974), and vernacular religions (Gellner 2019) to name a few. The oral is particularly important through the *vartas,* the vernacular hagiographies of disciples of Vallabhacharya and his lineage, and *kirtans,* the songs of devotion that highlight the experience of Krishna's presence. People's intimate conversations about and with their Lalans are essential to devotion, too, though these are not as accessible as textual-based practice.

Mauss sees prayer as "the fruit of the work of centuries. A prayer is not just the effusion of a soul, a cry which expresses a feeling. It is a fragment of a religion…it is the product of the accumulated efforts of men and women over generations" (2003 [1990]; 33). The Pushtimarg certainly use many poems (*padas)* and *kirtans,* particularly the *nam-mantra* (the mantra of Krishna's name), to interact and connect with their Krishnas at home and collectively at events or a Haveli. These 'products' have been extensively studied and discussed by scholars of religion (Kinsley 1979, Lynch 1990, Haberman 1994, Sanford 2008, Hawley 2015, and so on). These studies of *bhakti* language tend to start from poetry as text or sectarian hagiography. Yet, few scholars have combined these academic endeavours with Pushtimarg's everyday life (exceptions include Bachrach & Sharma 2016, Bachrach 2018). Instead, prayer language seems to have been wrapped up in these textual studies as part of ritual. Still, Mauss sees the creative potential of individuals conversing with the divine through prayer (2003 [1990]; 24) as apart from the collective rite.

'To pray' typically, not solely, refers to a petitionary act (requesting) or an act of gratitude (thanking). The Sanskrit word *prarthana,* which usually is compared with prayer, has similar connotations of asking and receiving. I am not suggesting *seva* and *prarthana* are the same. *Prarthana* as petitionary differs from the Pushtimarg notion of *seva* as selfless. This thesis acknowledges that prayer has a Christian etymology, but ritual has an equally loaded meaning not only for schoalrs but for my interlocutors difficulty in explaining *seva*. *Prarthana* and the concept of ritual transaction are connected. However, *seva* fits somewhere in between, echoing Mauss.

Rituals are often related to action, sometimes mechanical or transactional, while prayer is considered a communicative and emotional aspect of religious life. Rather than ask what *seva* does or what it is for, Cannell suggests asking (2007; 106) why ritual matters. In our case, why does the distinction between *puja*-as-ritual and *seva*-as-not matter? This question is not only for scholars of religion who seek to explore the nuances of everyday religious life and accurately represent the lives we explore

but also for my interlocutors. My interlocutors see *seva* as a particularly vibrant and sacred part of everyday life that they identify as distinct from *puja*.

Following another of Cannell's (2013) questions, what counts as prayer? I apply this in my research asking, does *seva* count as prayer? Scholars of Hindu religion do not need to ignore the possible risks of certain universalising terms or the Christian influence on how prayer is commonly understood. If *seva* for my interlocutors is not quite ritual but something else, this leads to an exploration of seva through another lens. Rather than seeing *seva* as devotion, or surrender (both of which are applicable) I explore prayer as an analytical tool for understanding *seva.* This is because my interlocutors' concept of *puja* and *seva* being on opposite ends of the worship spectrum made me wonder why we, as anthropologists of Hindu religions (and indeed others), hesitate to use prayer as a universal comparative category while still acknowledging the word's association with Christianity. My exploration is about opening the terminology of ritual and prayer for cross-cultural understanding of religious experience and practice. As an analytic, prayer is particularly useful for other religious traditions as it allows for a non-petitionary understanding of prayer that encompasses a richness of the relationship between devotees and the divine. For the Pushtimarg, *seva* is not exactly "ritual" but rather relationship-building – much as many Christians understand prayer to be. I am not suggesting in any way that Krishna is a form of Hindu Christian god. *Seva,* in this context, is not part of Christian worship practice. Rather, *seva* can be considered an act of kinship and caregiving and in this sense, it can be regarded as a prayer practice while maintaining a distance from a ritual transaction the Pushtimarg so desire. This sense of prayer is relational, domestic, playful, and unbounded.

Two other themes weave through the thesis: 1) bounded and unbounded presence and 2) transcendence and immanence. These supposed binaries work together in the Pushtimarg philosophy and the devotees' religious lives. The realms of the spiritual (*alaukik*) and mundane or earthly (*laukik*) are not physically separate entities. Instead, through *seva*, whether at home or a Haveli, devotees aim to have an "attitudinal transformation which allows one to perceive and experience everything as *alaukik"* (Karapanagiotis 2004; 35).

Inspired by Mauss and the NSDP, my proposal began with these three questions: 1) How do people learn to pray or do *seva*, collectively and individually? 2) how do people perform prayer or *seva*? and 3) how do people understand the efficacy of prayer or *seva*? These questions will thread through the thesis, yet as I discovered, the Pushtimarg relate their spontaneous (rather than learned) worship to a relationship with the divine. In *seva*, devotees' perspectives shift in relation to their personhood, the sectarian innovative and adaptive religiosity, and the cosmological framework through which they understand the world. In their human-divine kinship connection, which is relational and intimate, their devotion is realised as efficacious.

An overview; *bhakti*, Vaishnavism, and the Pushtimarg

Placing of the Pushtimarg

As part of the religious landscape in India and the diaspora, the Pushtimarg is part of a broad, mostly undefined and diverse range of religious practices under the term Hinduism. The Pushtimarg is further umbrellaed under devotional *bhakti* movements, encompassing many traditions and communities. In the following paragraphs, I situate the movement as an institution under 'umbrella terms' before providing an overview of the origins of the Pushtimarg movement. I then briefly discuss the movement and caste with an eye on the devotees' understanding of caste in my fieldwork.

While Pushtimarg institutions attempt to be a part of a broader idea of Hinduism in today's religious landscape, the movement and devotees balance this with maintaining what is particular about Pushtimarg devotion, *seva*. This redefinition trickles down to Pushtimarg lived religious practice with the emphasis on differentiating between *puja* and *seva*. *Seva* is not unique to the Pushtimarg, yet, for my interlocutors, the way *seva* is performed for Krishna in public and in the domestic sphere makes the movement distinctive.

It is well-known that Hinduism is a social construct (Bloch, Keppens and Hedge 2010) with no single founder, no universal liturgy, and no single leader. I use Hinduism for the universalised understanding of the term as an ethnic and political identity. However, Hinduism historically was defined as someone who maintained an indigenous religion and did not convert to Islam (Fuller 2004 [1992]; 10). So, to encompass the complexities of the term Hindu, I use Hindu-isms to discuss Hindu religiosities as many sets of beliefs.

There is a particular trend in how anthropologists have studied India and its religions by linking Hindu nationalism and discussions of caste to the devotional practices and practitioners of various Hindu religious movements. This trend sometimes leaves the 'religious domain' to theologians and religious historians. For anthropology, the focus on texts and prescribed rules in other Hindu-isms (see Fuller 2004 [1992]; 308) often misses the importance of a non-ideal type of devotion. For Pushtimarg devotees, practice takes priority over textual knowledge. There is often contradiction within and from outside of the community. As Fuller suggests, popular Hinduism, or ordinary living religion (2004 [1992];5), is distinct from textual Hinduism, based on sacred texts (Ibid). Much of the Pushtimargi textual authority comes from hagiographies (*vartas*) that gurus interpret in *saptas*, *kathas* (both types of religious forums) and devotees in *satsangs* or by themselves. These discussions offer anthropologists a unique lens to explore how religious life is performed and lived every day and how these texts and rules are interpreted and debated.

The nineteenth century was a defining historical point for the Pushtimarg and other devotional movements during British colonialism. At this time, colonial attempts to categorise 'Hindus'[5] and reformist Hinduism affected the Pushtimarg movement. However, the nineteenth-century categorisation process produced a form of 'rational' religion, and the Pushtimarg came up against Hindu reformist movements like the Arya Samaj. The movement also became embroiled in scandal with a famous legal case, the Maharaj Libel Case (see chapter 4). The questions of 'are we Hindus?' and 'who is a Hindu?' which were a consistent part of the nineteenth century, are still relevant today, influenced by the idea of a universal Hinduism.

Bhakti is a 'modern' idea situated historically in the early modern period, acknowledging a search for self and nation and a becoming (Hawley 2015; 333) in the elite and popular imaginary (Dwyer 2006; 67). While *bhakti* tends to be translated as personal devotion, it is also used in "highly abstract contexts where the "personal" is not present" (Novetzke 2010; 10). The term has an abundance of meanings; including *bhakti* as a socio-economic reformist movement (Pande 1987), a form of protest (Rajagopalachary & Rao 2016) and a move to democratisation for the oppressed (Guha 1997), spreading messages of an ideal-type of egalitarianism and inclusivity. Religious studies scholars of *bhakti* have studied figures of authority and public memories (Novetzke 2008), poetry and saints (Hawley 2015), and hagiography (from ethnographers Bachrach & Sharma 2016), to name a few. The Pushtimarg sets itself apart from Brahminical and Vedic Hindu-isms as part of the *bhakti* movement.

> "On the one hand, *bhakti* bypassed the hierarchy and ritualism of the Vedic sacrifices, monopolised by Brahmans, and sponsored by their wealthy twice-born patrons, by teaching that salvation was open to all, regardless of caste, wealth, or sex, through the sincere and spontaneous expression of love for the divine. On the other hand, *bhakti* provided a more practicable alternative to the disciplined path followed by the renouncer" (Bennett 1993; 2)

The term comes from the Sanskrit, *bhaj*, which means to share (Hawley 2015). While the idea behind *bhakti* is equality of genders and castes, this often makes invisible divisions embedded within the community (Hawley, Novetzke & Sharma 2019). If we consider bhakti a utopian infrastructure with varying narratives, the narrative becomes malleable. Each *sampradaya* that comes under this vast umbrella of bhakti has a different way of expressing it. From the roots of *bhakti*, around the fifth and sixth centuries, and Weber's definition of *bhakti* as "passionate inward devotion to the redeemer and his grace" (1958; 307) (much influenced by his Protestant Ethic framework) to *bhakti's* transnational homogenising potential (Moore 1995), transforming publics (Richardson 2014) and technological endeavours (Richardson & Gheewala Lohiya forthcoming), *bhakti's* continued and diverse influence

[5] This is not uncommon. Mughal rulers also categorised citizens (Saha personal communication).

remains undeniable. For the Pushtimarg, *bhakti* is a highly personal and intimate devotion, expressed in *seva*, to the divine.

In a Hindu devotional setting, *bhakti* most prominently comes up through the Hindu religious epic, the *Bhagavad Gita* (Brockington 2005; 120-122), a lengthy conversation between the god Krishna and Arjuna. Vaishnavas worship different forms of Vishnu, yet Rama and Krishna are the two most often associated with Vaishnavism. Krishna appears most famously as an adult warrior in the Bhagavad Gita or the handsome lover of countless *gopis* (milkmaids). However, his life as a mischievous, cheeky child is outlined in the *Bhagavata Purana* Sanskrit epic, where the Pushtimarg focuses its attention. Krishna is a playful and joyful avatar of the Supreme Being after Rama, who was dutiful (*dharmic*) and emphasised his kingly responsibilities.

Textual sources point to the sixth century as the period of defining Vaishnava tradition (Ibid; 237). Starting with the 12 Alvars, who were Tamil poet-saints, the four Vaishnava schools of Vedanta diverged through the centuries (Ibid; 246) in syncretictism with Buddhism and mysticism from Islam and Sufism (Ibid; 255).

In Pushtimarg, Krishna is the Ultimate Creator rather than Vishnu. However, there are numerous manifestations of Krishna within the tradition. Shrinathji is the manifestation that appears to Vallabha, a seven-year-old child that emerges from Mount Govardhan in Braj in the fifteenth century. He currently resides in Nathdwara, Rajasthan, with two manifestations called Navneet Priyaji carrying a butterball and Madan Mohanji playing the flute.

Pushtimarg was developed by Vallabha (henceforth Vallabhacharya) in the late fifteenth century (1479–1531 CE). His followers believe him to be an incarnation of Krishna. He did not preach a life of asceticism or renunciation; instead, he focussed on the Supreme Being as personal in the form of Krishna, with the potential of developing a relationship (Sinha 2014; 2-3). Pushtimarg gurus, *goswamis*[6], affectionately known as *Jejes*, as descendants of Vallabhacharya, form a divine lineage system (called the Vallabhkul or the Vallabh Dynasty). In this thesis, when discussing the Pushtimarg as a movement, I refer to the institution rather than the devotees. My interlocutors' stories come through in the ethnography.

Caste or *jati*

While caste inequality is not supposed to exist in devotional movements, Vallabhacharya preached that people must live within the caste structure (Saha 2004; 102) despite the aforementioned equality. However, in sectarian literature, "readers will encounter Brahmins, Muslims, merchants, farmers, thieves, kings, queens, prostitutes, warriors, and widows" (Bachrach 2018). Devotees can come from

[6] This refers to them as masters of cows, gau (cow) becomes go and swami as master or teacher.

any *varnas* (classes) be they Brahman, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, including Harijans (Saha 2006; 112). Embracing Vaishnavism, particularly in Gujarat (Saha 2006; 114, see Dwyer 1994), allows upward social mobility. With tenets such as strict vegetarianism and ostensible adherence to purity and pollution rules, the community has a similar status as brahmins in Gujarati society. While *bhakti* espouses equality, as other authors note, hierarchy is part of Indian society, from a gesture of greeting (*namaskar*) (Fuller 2004 [1992]) to caste divisions. While this thesis focuses on devotion and worship, it acknowledges "the sense in which *bhakti* enters the history of India is not through the private realm, but through the social world of caste, labor, media (both written and non-written), and markets outside the home and the heart of an individual." (Novetzke 2007; 255), including Indian cinema (Dwyer 2006). Gender and caste, rather than dismissed, are enveloped in a transformative identity shift through high-caste *brahmin*-like behaviour tenets (Ibid; 114, Michelutti 2008)[7].

As Fuller suggests, castes often lack "hard and fast boundaries" (2004 [1992];13). Caste discussions were rare in my fieldwork, most probably because my interlocutors were privileged middle-class Hindus. What resonates more with my fieldwork, is *jati,* often translated as caste, is a mode of distinction that encompasses caste, race, class and respectability (Bear 2007; 50) rather than an isolated idea of caste (Ibid; 299n 13). Bear looks at *jati* in her study of railway construction by the East India Railway. Idealised as a site for the dissolution of prejudice (Ibid; 50), the construction process brought to the fore the challenges of public spaces and maintaining social distinction through hierarchies. Social distinction was framed through the lens of purity and pollution boundaries relating to respectability. Respectability and maintaining purity as idioms of *jati* or class took hold in the rising nationalism among the middle-class (Ibid; 56).

Families and kinship relations are implicated in the transmission of identification and *jati* (Bear 2008; 250). Within intimate and public family structures, biomoral transmission of values is called upon by *jati* at varying times and registers as a social mode of distinction. Rather than separate static categories of identity, these are mobile social distinctions. These modes of distinction can be evoked without the mention of caste, class or race, as was the case in my fieldwork. So, shifting to the domestic, as in Bear's research and my own, does not ignore these forms of identification or politics of distinction but explores how these debates, framed as discrete, merge into everyday lived practice.

The banality of nationalism, rather than events of communal violence, shapes identification, as Bénéï suggests (2008). Identification, rather than identity, points to the processual nature of self-formation (Ibid; 3). Banal nationalism not only (re)produces the goddess of the nation (Mother India) for children but generates a form of *deshbhakti* (devotion towards the nation) in varying local registers into the public sphere of nationalism (Bénéï 2008; 56, see Novetzke 2007). The embodied quality of

[7] Saha shows that despite being a supposedly casteless sect, people would continue to live based on caste and class divisions (2004; 102).

deshbhakti in religious and patriotic chants draws on *bhakti's* altering, regional and participatory understandings in the education system. These understandings shapes and are shaped by kinship networks. Public spheres affect notions of class production (Sharma 2013), questions of politics and Politics and for institutional Pushtimarg, what kinds of engagement with the public sphere are acceptable based on historical assumptions and present understandings of religious life.

A radical mode of distinction, drawing on Bear's work, in the Pushtimarg is a theological concept called *anyashray,* which translates to seeking refuge in others. There is a practical tension here in Vallabhacharya's teaching between participation in the world, as the Pushtimarg is a householder (*grihastha*) sect and shifts in perspective to seeing the otherworldly (*alaukik*). It relates to seeking refuge in other gods but also encompasses other worldly attachments, people, things and social situations (Arney 2007;533 n43). According to religious teachings, *anyashray* is one of the greatest obstacles to the Path of Grace (Ibid). Though Vallabha did not use this term, it appears in his successors' literature. *Anyashray* is a marked point of differentiation to Gaudiya Vaishnavism's view of authority and the Pushtimarg emphasises spiritual authority only to the Vallabhkhul lineage (Hawley 2011; 169). The emphasis is on refuge solely in Krishna and is a topic of great discussion among interlocutors. This debate also appears in sectarian literature (see also Bachrach 2014; 223). *Anyashray* offers a radical politics of social and religious differentiation between the movement and others. For my interlocutors, no other spiritual authority or being, such as kin, other religions, gurus or priests, can offer any refuge to devotees apart from Krishna.

Practically, this tension reveals itself in discussions on the worship of other deities, including lifecourse *pujas* such as the Ganesha *puja* before a wedding, visiting other sacred sites of worship such as churches or mosques, and, in an interlocutor's case, doing *seva* for multiple *swaroops* (animate images) of Krishna. However, while interlocutors acknowledged these theological teachings, avoiding a school church service or not sharing sacred space with other *sampradayas* is not always practical. From this tension, we can see the movement and the devotees tackling the question of how much to engage in the world and in what ways Pushtimarg can define itself in relation to other forms of Hindu-isms and a universal idea of Hinduism.

Purity and pollution

A legacy of authors in South Asian anthropology of Hinduism have focussed on priests, temple-based worship, hierarchy, and Brahmin ritual, emphasising purity and pollution rules (e.g. Dumont 1970, Fuller 1979, Parry 1994).

The Pushtimarg movement has a reputation among Hindu communities for rigidity, strictness, and an obsession with purity, alongside the prestige of wealth, elaborate and ostentatious festivals and feasts (Toomey 1994). In Hindu-isms, pollution is transferrable through touch, including state of mind, from

bodily emissions, like blood or waste, to grief after death. Indeed, this separates men from women through menstruation and childbirth, underpinning inequalities between the sexes (Fuller 2004 [1992]). Devotees would tell countless stories about their grandparents' *marjadi* (extremely strict) behaviour regarding ritual bathing and touch during *seva*. Several people said their Pushtimarg grandparents were part of the "Don't touch me! Don't touch that!" movement. Recently, the movement as an institution is shifting its focus from "Don't touch" to a more inclusive way of doing *seva*. Rather than being enforced rules by the institution, purity and pollution are inferior to behaviours motivated by *bhava* (devotional mood) and the relationship between divine and human. The hagiographical literature supports this shift to *bhava*-led *seva* and despite gurus explaining the disciples featured in the *vartas* as exceptional, devotees praise hagiographical figures for following their love for Krishna. Rather than justifying 'bad' behaviour, the *vartas* are examples of emotion being more important than rules and regulations in worshipping the divine. My account of domestic, relational and playful seva shows how individual ideas around caregiving inform worship for most of my interlocutors compared to the rigid rule-following that they are known for and ascribe to *puja*.

Puja vs *seva*

While all the authors I have encountered place *seva* as a type of ritual, most interlocutors would say that *puja* was mechanical and ritualistic, while *seva* is highly personalised loving devotion. *Puja* is a recognisable feature of the global Hindu landscape, while *seva* is underexplored academically by comparison. Devotees think of *bhakti* primarily through the everyday devotional and religious framework. *Seva* in Hindu-isms has different meanings in South Asia, for example Sikh *seva* as a type of community service. The everyday performance of *seva* was the primary concern for most of my interlocutors.

Two strands of thought thread th rough this thesis: academic and universal understandings of Hinduism that tend to incorporate *seva* into *puja* as a type of worship; and the perspective of my interlocutors regarding the difference between *seva* and *puja*. This thesis does not suggest that other definitions of *seva* are invalid nor that *puja* cannot be personalised loving devotion. Instead, a Pushtimarg-focussed approach allows for a distinction to be made visible. By categorising *puja* as mechanical, transactional and more like a ritual, the movement remains on the fence between being part of universal Hinduism and maintaining its uniqueness as a movement. The idea of 'we do *seva*, not *puja'* (Chapter 2) establishes a difference but foregrounds a worship practice that is devotional, relational and based on emotions.

However, the many meanings of *seva* influence how it is explained, not only to those outside the movement but to the flourishing diasporic community. The diaspora's questions, discussions, and debates often use universalised language and categories, particularly framed through "(how) do I

explain what I'm doing [in *seva*] to someone else?". As is evident through my use of kinship studies and prayer, there are strong arguments in favour of an analysis that combines universality and cross-cultural comparison with maintaining particularities.

One way the distinction between *seva* and *puja* moves to rethink ritual (Haeri 2020; 98) is the inherent variability in *seva*. This is a result of the practice being subjective and learnt through kin, public spheres and online spaces. I draw on Haeri's work on women's prayer in Iran to discuss practice as open-ended rather than a repetitive act or by rote (2020; 84). In reference to *namaz*, a supposedly 'dry' Islamic 'ritual' that is required, Haeri points out that "…even with a script, *the reciter cannot know in advance* when she starts the prayer how that performance will turn out" (2020; 83) and the same is true of *seva*. *Namaz,* in her context, is about creating co-presence with the divine in a participatory and contemplative moment (Ibid; 158). She explores *erfan,* or mysticism, in poetry and popular religious life. Rather than being apart from scripture, *erfan* is in constant dialogue in the public, private and everything in-between spheres (Haeri 2020; 10).

Weber's legacy sees mysticism and asceticism as contrasting ideologies (Cannell 2019; 708) rather than as in dialogue. This perceived binary excludes lived practice and experiences of religious life. Arney notes, "for the devotees of Krishna, there are no rigid distinctions between theology and mysticism, or between religious faith and personal experience of the divine" (2007 ; 505). Religious experience leads to an inner transformation, rather than incorporating religious doctrine in their worship This experience is mystical in nature (Ibid). While this thesis does not explore Hindu mysticism, dominant forms of *bhakti* seek to control raptures of ecstatic love between Krishna and his devotees (McDaniel 1989; 19) by regulating and directing emotions through *bhakti yoga,* poetry, song or dance (Ibid; 20), e.g. for Chaitanya Vaishnavism. For the Pushtimarg, mysticism's association with the erotic has had challenges theologically and in the political-legal sphere. Yet, the vocabulary around *rasa* (spiritual nourishment) and *bhava* (devotional mood) describes emotional relationality through mystical experience (Bennet 1990; 194).

Previous studies on the Pushtimarg have come from the fields of history (Saha 2006, Richardson 1979), art (Ambalal et al. 2015), religious studies ethnographers (Richardson 2014) Bachrach 2014, 2016, 2018, Sharma 2013) and sociology (Bennett 1993). In personal conversations with some of these authors, it is clear that there is comparatively less work on the Pushtimarg than on other *bhakti* movements[8]. While the movement gets mentioned in scholarly work (Pocock 1978, Tambs-Lynch 1980, 2011, Fuller 2004 [1992].), this is often brief. Certainly, to my knowledge, there is less engagement with *seva* as a distinct form of worship than *puja* in anthropology[9]. Perhaps, this is due to the Pushtimarg's 'late' entrance into the global religious landscape in the 1990s or their past tendency

[8] Personal communication with Jack Hawley.
[9] Personal communication with Richardson, Saha, Bachrach.

to remain hidden from the public sphere and constant negotiations over their engagement with the world.

However, the institutional side of the movement has now entered the religious landscape under the umbrella of a universalised understanding of Hinduism. This understanding is influenced by a Hindu nationalist government. This thesis brings the Pushtimarg into the anthropological conversation at a particular time of the movement's global emergence. Other authors have focussed on temple-based worship and communities, but this thesis also frames Pushtimarg worship from a relational perspective between devotee and divine in the domestic space. This is not only analytically productive to demonstrate a rule-led temple *seva* compared to a subjective home space but also shows how the public sphere and private familial space influence the nuanced relationship.

This brings us to the idea of *seva's* multitude of meanings, particularly from a secular space where Hindu categories are constantly (re)defined. The variety of meanings highlights the ways in which the political, humanitarian and religious have blurred boundaries. Still, these meanings do not give attention to *seva* as devotional and relational worship practice.

The so-called 'secular' and sacred; public religion in India

For the Pushtimarg *bhakti* movement, how Hindu religiosity has historically played out in Indian public life shapes the understanding of what it means to be Hindu and Pushtimargi. Overall, *bhakti* has been described as a sort of "bridge" (Hawley 2019; 154) of religious life that encompasses rather than eliminates. However, this encompassing does not address the uncertainty in the meaning of *bhakti*. The public sphere shapes a constant (re)definition of what it is to be Pushtimarg but also, at the same time, what is considered a Hindu. It is a tricky balance between *anyashray* (seeking refuge in others) and engaging in public life for many interlocutors.

In academia, the legacy of secularism frames much discussion on what and what is not described as religious, yet as various authors have pointed out, this arises from a specific history of the secular (Pina-Cabral 2001, Asad 2003, Cannell 2010, 2011 cf; Bruce 2002). However, secularism as political doctrine is still "articulated through class, gender and religion" (Asad 2003; 5) (*jati*, too), despite the power of a "project of modernity" that "strips" the "myth, magic, and the sacred" (Ibid).

While India has a secular constitution, there is no denying the pervasive public religiosity within the nation. The secular has its own historical trajectory in stemming from British colonial powers avoiding stepping into religious matters then judging 'rational Hindu' agendas (e.g., the Maharaja Libel case, Aga Khan vs Khojas[10] and other cases see Sen 2010). Under the British Raj from 1858 to

[10] This case was between the Khojas, who did not identify with a singular 'religion', i.e., Muslim or Hindu and would not pay their dues to the Aga Khan. During the Bombay Presidency caste and religious groups were seen

Independence in 1947, questions on the separation between religion and secular took shape through power dynamics. However, slightly different to the 'Western' sense of separation of state and religion, Indian secularism does not mean separation. Instead, the state is expected to show neutrality (Mitra 1991) and even-handedness (Hawley 2015; 292) towards all religions (Dwyer 2006; 134 (cf: Chatterjee 1994).

These debates between the secular and religion have narrowed and allowed rationalisation and the appropriation of the vernacular by nationalist movements, as "religious reform makes certain religious discursive traditions available for nationalist discourse" (Van der Veer 1994; 25). This is partly based on the theoretical battle between Hinduism and science that developed during the nineteenth-century Hindu Renaissance. For the Pushtimarg, this following section sets a brief context for engagement in the public sphere.

Swami Vivekananda brought the concept of modern Hindu religiosity to the global stage in 1893 at the Parliament of World's Religions in Chicago. While this was an act of resistance by Vivekananda against the dominance of Christianity, for the global religious landscape, Vivekananda redefined Hinduism in simple, Western and Orientalist terms (Richardson 2014; 136). This initial attempt into a universal understanding of Hinduism led to debates on practice. Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj in Punjab, defended the purity and sanctity of the Vedas (Nanda 2000; 271). Reformists denigrated image worship and promoted a focus on Vedic textual authority, echoing calls for a 'rational' religion (Van der Veer 1994; 64-65). In contrast, Pushtimarg devotees practice theistic worship relationally through *seva*. Spiritual authority for the Pushtimarg, as mentioned above, comes from gurus, reading *vartas* (hagiographies), *kirtans* (songs), and *padas* (poetry).

The nineteenth century was a period of scandal in the Pushtimarg that culminated in the Maharaj Libel Case in 1862, coming up against reform movements and the British courts attempt to define Hinduism. This case shifts the emphasis of devotion away from a lover's devotion towards motherhood, as we will see later in the thesis. For now, this is an example of when the *vartas* become acknowledged as legal scriptural authority, yet not to the same extent as the Vedas, leading to the courts questioning the movement's representation, definition and leadership.

After Independence, with Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, and the Congress party in power, there was a period of advocating for a rational world order where religion would be part of the personal sphere (Mitra 1991; 766). In addition to Mahatma Gandhi's influence, the idea of private religiosity and public secularism became part of the party's political strategy (Ibid). However, putting the Hindu religion in the private sphere alone by political and state definition does not align with the

as self-governing (Shodhan 1995; 104) and the Khojas during this time, were in the process of being 'defined' through their belief systems, though one was considered by some to be Khoja by birth (Ibid 119). The judgement identified this community as Ismaili Islam through these proceedings.

idea of Hindu-isms as lived practice, in both public and private spheres. While the state defines religion in the private sphere, importantly for Indian society, "religion [is defined as] essentially an attitude of mind that helps the individual order his universe and define his position in it" (Ibid; 775). The Congress party aimed to neutralise religiosity as secularism as a security against the threat of communalism, which is seen as primordial and polemic (Vanaik 1997, Beckerlegge 2000; 62). To stay 'neutral', the state defined religion without comprehending or exploring lived religion in Indian life. This lack of coherence between state and societal understandings of religion gave rise to Hindu nationalism and communalism between communities.

A period of Congress instability in the 1960s, brought forth a significant change in the running of Havelis for the Pushtimarg, with the Nathdwara Temple Act in 1959 allowing state intervention. This Act ended the 300-year-long pattern of patronage for the movement but also allowed precedent for government intervention in temple-management and other religious affairs (Richardson 2014; 98). The fragmentation of the Congress party gave rise to the right-wing religious organisations Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) that mobilise Hindu communities in nationalist pilgrimages that aimed for a common Hindu identity (Vanaik 1997; 47, 44-51). The search for a common Hindu identity is the background of a universalised idea of Hinduism.

The rise of Hindu Nationalism culminated in the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque in 1992, leading to the victory of Narendra Modi and the Hindu right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014 and 2019. The majoritarian nationalist Hindu right is not against state intervention in the debate between religion and public life. For example, the 'common' focus on Vedic authority becomes a way for the right-wing to debate Hinduism and science in India, with a "mantra-like invocation of science-in-the-Vedas" (Nanda 2020; 264) which 'rationalises' religion, making part of a public platform, through the lens of the Hindu right-wing. They place themselves as the preservers of 'national culture' (Chatterjee 1994), a culture which happens to be based on a seemingly-homogenous construction of Hinduism (see Hausner and Gellner 2019; 25-32 for "a unitary religion fallacy" discussion). *Bhakti* in the public sphere changes too. *Bhakti* as a public performance grounds a different sort of *bhakti* as *deshbhakti* (devotion to the nation) (Novetzke 2008; 16). The new political climate of Hindu nationalism seems to allow the Pushtimarg a cautious re-entry into public life, redefining itself as part of the broader understanding of Hindu-isms but still maintaining some social and religious distinctions.

Today, two moments have set up a more adaptive religious landscape for a global Pushtimarg. First, is the reputation of Hindus generally as non-violent and tolerant according to the historical process of (re)definition championed by Gandhi (Richardson 2014; 139). Second, is the influence of Vaishnava traditions that expanded in the diaspora early on, such as the Swaminarayans and Hare Krishna movement. This changing public religious landscape brings up the tension between engagement and

anyashray. The tension of *anyashray* has become the background for how much the movement engages even today.

Seva has its own history of usage that shapes how it is understood by the Pushtimarg community. *Seva* has come to refer to a generic definition related to religiously motivated charitable or humanitarian service (Beckerlegge 2015; 209). This generalisation allows for subsuming the Pushtimarg distinction between *puja* and *seva* within the wider literature on Hindu-isms. Still, for my interlocutors, this also potentially shifts *seva* from being domestic and personal to more outward-facing acts. Some of the current Pushtimarg movement adopts ideas of charity and humanitarianism outside the community. This is distinct from *seva* as a practice understood by previous devotee generations, where *seva* is for Krishna, the gurus, other Vaishnavas, and cows, usually in that order. While my interlocutors did not directly suggest that doing *seva* for others outside of the community was informed by other Hindu movements, devotees discussed how the Swaminarayans, Hare Krishnas and Sikhs did *seva* and charitable acts. We will see that the Pushtimarg goes through processes of disengaging and engaging with the 'outside' world. I suggest this new interest in *seva* as a humanitarian and charitable within the movement is another part of engaging with the world. How *seva* is used in the broader sense has a subtle, if not visible, influence on the movement's redefinition of itself and how it practices in the public sphere.

I wish to focus on three ways *seva* is understood broadly in academia and in the 'public' sphere: through the political, religious, and familial. The scholars cited in the following section have often started with the familial (briefly), offering a religious framework that is 'scaled up' to the political sphere. Instead, this section scales back to the importance of relationships to highlight how a failure to explore kinship denies how people do *seva.*

The politics of *seva*

Seva came to have a more national political understanding through the freedom movement (1857-1947) as a charitable service for the nation and its population (Watt 2005, Srivatsan 2015, Ciotti 2012). The idea of voluntary activism centring on charity and welfare is embedded in political webs, historical usage, power relations and caste dynamics.

The starting point for the secular use of *seva* was the 1909 creation of the Seva Sadan in Poona for widows[11] (Srivatsan 2015; 45). The perception that *seva* is civic action and philanthropy is problematic as its purpose reproduces upper-caste elite hierarchy and 'uplifting' the 'depressed castes' (Watt 2005, Srivatsan 2015). Watt argues that 'narrow' notions of Brahminical *seva* were being redefined as practical social service (2005; 101) rather than individual piety (Ibid). Conceptualised in

[11] This is the pre-Gandhian, pre-Independence secular use of the word.

religious terms, he suggests that *dharma* as duty became the foundation for Indian citizenship defined through social and education service, which also is inherently hierarchical (Ibid). However, the collective political memory of *seva* is one of social reform and colonial critique[12] in the early twentieth century. The *seva* model in terms of civil society is understood as a "historical universal" (Ibid; 24) by Hindu elites at the time. This model was directed at the future well-being of the nation and some form of 'progress' of modernity in relation to caste dynamics (Ibid; 25). However, within this social reform, political *seva* was entangled with the status of scheduled castes, tribes and women (Ciotti 2012, Srivatsan 2015). Therefore, for those considered non-(Hindu)elites, there was conflict over the terms of this national form of engagement.

There was a divergence in the use of *seva* as a model of community politics. One of the critical points of debate comes through the 'Harijan Sevak Sangh' formed in 1932 between Mahatma Gandhi and Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar to fight against untouchability. The disagreement related to HSS' voluntary activities, which highlighted Gandhi's pacifist model of *seva* as compassion or pity for non-caste Hindus, which was inherently hierarchical (Srivastan 2015; 55). Gandhi's ideas on *seva* as constructive social work were based on *karma*, repaying for the sins committed in another life, and Christian notions of neighbourliness (Ibid; 47). The Gandhian religio-ethical models of secular and political *seva* proved more attractive to the elites. Subsequently, the HSS did not allow for the uplift of the Dalits. However, Ambedkar's rejection of *bhakti* alongside Vedic religious practice saw these activities as failing to alleviate the hierarchical structures Dalits were enmeshed in (Hawley, Novetzke & Sharma 2019; 9). Ambedkar's model sought "comradery and mutual respect in a battle" (Ibid; 55) through a radical abolition of the caste system and sharing food to get rid of the rules of purity and pollution governing caste hierarchies (Ciotti 2012; 151).

> "However, *seva* opened out the communicative link between caste-Hindu and the lower castes by fashioning anew the ethics of Hinduism, orienting it to service, reconstruction and reparation. This communicative link was the first instrument through which activities that were otherwise prohibited for a given caste became permissible and were ethically valued by the community." (Srivatsan 2015; 68).

Seva has shifted in meaning, as Ciotti shows through her work on lower-caste women political actors in the Bahujan Samaj Party. Through using *seva* to describe political and social work, her female interlocutors "signal[] a positional shift from their historical role as "receivers" of social service and social work from late colonial India to that of "providers" [of *seva*]" (Ciotti 2012; 154), rather than a re-production of upper caste idioms. This political and activist understanding of *seva* as voluntary

[12] While tracing *seva's* political archival trajectory Srivatsan places importance on the ethical precepts of *seva* as a national discourse on social reform as a nation, rather than direct struggle against colonial rule (Srivatsan 2015; 29).

service to benefit the community and the nation in the face of external powers (colonial, Hindu fundamentalist nationalists or patriarchy) is the foundation for the secular use of the term today.

Watt's 'living traditions' in India were not invented or copied through colonial rule; instead, colonial and global practices find associative culture through Indian agency and the history of Indian practice (see Ciotti 2012). *Seva* as a social service hold currency in Indian society through being associated with pre-existing Indian institutions (Watt 2005). However, *bhakti* gets little mention in Watt or Srivatsan's work. Watt discusses *bhakti* through the Swaminarayan tradition of service to humanity, comparing it to the humanism and Christian pre-modern notions of service that underpin 'Western' ideas of social service. Reducing *seva* as 'just' Brahminical ritual and individualistic modes of worship denies the nuanced view of *seva* as a religious act that builds relationships. The understanding of the 'religious' through Vivekananda's use of *seva* is a nod to the theological underpinnings of the concept by Srivatsan too. However, the Ramakrishna Mission has a specific understanding of *seva.* As we see in the next section, both authors leave out the divine.

The religiosity of *seva*

Below I discuss the Ramakrishna movement that has brought *seva* to the global public sphere. Though this view of *seva* is implicitly about human relationships, *seva* is still framed as service, whether to a guru in terms of devotion, the divine or humanity. The detailed examples below show how *seva,* as an ethic of service to humanity, tends to parallel the idea of 'work' and gain.

Seva, both as a service in a 'secular' political understanding and a religiously-motivated action, is a framework that can be syncretised within other religions and traditions. *Seva,* as humanitarian service enfolded into spirituality, was practised by the Swaminarayan movement in the nineteenth century (Warrier 2005, Watt 2005), the Arya Samaj, among others (Srivatsan 2015) and popularised by Vivekananda (Beckerlegge 2000, 2011, 2016). These reformist Hindu movements influenced the study of *seva* in the religious domain towards the concept of humanitarianism. One of the critical components of *seva* as Pushtimarg worship is the ideal of selflessness, with no expectation of a return. Yet, in my view, this is at odds with *seva* being seen as meritorious for salvation.

Some authors have found ways to stress Western influences, including Christianity, that shaped Vivekananda's understanding of *seva* as service to humanity, despite this being a move against Christianity (Beckerlegge 2000; 45, see 2011, 2016). When Vivekananda brought *seva* to the global religious field at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, the Ramakrishna movement was involved in famine relief efforts. The forming of Vivekananda's perspective on service was shaped by these relief efforts and led to a charitable interpretation of *dharma* and feeding the poor (Beckerlegge 2000; 93). Ramakrishna and Vivekananda's concern with human rights saw *seva* as service to humanity. *Seva* became a type of *sadhana,* or religious discipline in the tradition, though not directly

through Ramakrishna. Therefore, humanity becomes the divine for *seva.* Questions of authenticity were interrelated to service to humanity as well as practice (Ibid; 54). These practices of *seva* continue to be institutionalised through education, poverty alleviation, and donations. However, the Ramakrishnas still see service to humanity as a "' byproduct' of God-realization" (Beckerlegge 2000; 112) based on a life of renunciation.

Beckerlegge focuses on situating *seva* in Hindu religious tradition, concentrating on the Ramakrishna Mission, broadening the notion of *seva* to "deity, *guru,* and devotees", which was "synonymous with *puja"* (Beckerlegge 2011, 2016). In criticizing the older, narrower meaning of *seva,* Beckerlegge groups *puja* and *seva,* despite the different understandings of the two. For the Mata tradition, too, *puja* is understood as the efficacious ritual for spiritual practice. *Seva* is differentiated to some extent, being seen as love and devotion for the guru (as divinity), and still subsumed in discourse on humanitarian efforts and acts of ashram 'work' as spiritual lessons (Lucia 2014).

The ethics of *seva*

As we have seen, *seva* as duty or charity has been studied extensively through the political lens, highlighting inequalities and divisions. However, understanding *seva* as part of (ideal) kinship relations offers other instances where *seva* is not a duty but voluntary and selfless. *Seva,* as an ethical act, can be without guidelines as it is spontaneous; it can be organised through institutions, family gatherings or social media, or an act that organically arises in the moment.

This perspective of *seva's* ethical 'project' becomes complicated when we consider the overarching cosmological human-divine relationship at play. Ethics implies this binary of good and evil, as do some versions of karma if framed through debt and 'repayment'. Heavily criticising Durkheim for his collective notion of morality, Laidlaw's virtue ethics is based on a concept of individual freedom (2002). Looking at Jainism, Laidlaw discusses laypeople's ascetic exercises that are a voluntary ethical project. Involvement in voluntary seva as humanitarian aid, activism or politics shows an exercise of freedom within collective action[13]. Rather than Laidlaw's Jains working towards exemplars and *karma* debts, *bhakti* devotion is embroiled in the layperson in the world interacting with the unpredictable behaviour of a child god.

This brings us back to the selflessness of *seva.* In the cultural and familial contexts, *seva* is an ethical act focused on other people (Warrier 2005; 59). The lack of expectation and personal expectation from the idealised type of anonymised service makes *seva* valuable. The basis of seva as selfless is to remove one's ego and surrender to the divine regarding religious life. This surrendering to the divine

[13] The same designations of voluntary and individual action through the collective space can be compared to the experience of the journey of a yatra (pilgrimage).

is different from concepts of renunciation or asceticism. In *bhakti* devotion, surrendering is often based on love for Krishna.

Lambek shows how ethics can be explored through the religious, of what is good or bad, through the secular law, justice, and humanitarianism. While this thesis is not a study of ethics, *seva* can be understood through Lambek's notion of ordinary ethics which is grounded in unspoken agreements or practice rather than in knowledge (2010). What is right and wrong in *seva* becomes an ethics of parenting framed by the religious understanding of Krishna as divine. This is fuelled by the devotional mood of *seva* (*bhava),* which generates *bhava* logics, i.e. parenting based on emotional attachment to the divine. How *seva* is performed for humans rather than the divine has a hierarchy, with child Krishna first, then immediate family, gurus, Vaishnavas, and then others. Yet, the selflessness of *seva* towards others decategorizes *seva* as a constant ethical choice as it is through emotional attachment and the everyday ethics that guides the way people live their life.

The *phul* (fruit) of *seva*

As part of the *bhakti* movements, the Pushtimarg is a householder *sampradaya* that actively participates in the world as Krishna's *lila,* enjoying and sharing in the abundance of his creation through *seva* practices, such as food and song. The Pushtimarg is not a renouncer movement (cf. Hausner 2007). *Moksha* or liberation is not a goal of seva. The only fruit (*phul*) of seva is more seva. The implied 'goal' of *seva* is a perspective shift from the worldly and otherworldly distinction to seeing the world as otherworldly. More *seva* for most of my interlocutors was firmly placed in this world as Krishna is a material and physical part of family life. This idea of salvation is relational. While I acknowledge that salvation comes from Christian theology, many authors discuss it cross-culturally and in relation to Hinduism (Parry 1985, 1994, Hawley 2011), often tempering its usage with the concept of liberation (Fuller 2004 [1992]). I would argue that the Pushtimarg, rather than salvation or liberation, is about participation in the world but a world understood as *lila.*

This distinction between the worldly and otherworldly needs to be addressed. Vallabhacharya teaches Shuddhadvaita, or pure nondualism, which is the idea that there is one spiritual entity, and everyone and everything is a part of it. The overall structure of the theology is the absorption of the worldly into the otherworldly, dissolving the perceived binary through the medium of *seva*. The mode of this shift in perspective is through *seva* as part of kinship logics and play. In Pushtimarg's radical Krishna-centred approach, not only are all humans at the peripheries but other gods and goddesses are, too, participating and absorbed in Krishna *lila*. As we will see (chapter 3), the overtly masculine divine Lord Shiva surrenders his identity and is absorbed in Krishna's *lila* as a *gopi*.

The conflict between "salvation and society" (Parry 1994; 270) is a consistent paradox in Hinduism, as exemplified by my discussion of Pushtimarg's waves of disengagement and engagement with

public life. The strength of an individual devotional relationship with Krishna is its own merit. What is valued is humility and surrendering everything material, as Krishna's.

The Pushtimarg is a middle-class householder *sampradaya* that happens to attract merchants and businesspeople with a known reputation for Gujarati entrepreneurship and trade, people mistakenly assumed that wealth could accrue some sort of spiritual reward or prestige. Despite some narratives on powerful or authoritative figures such as gurus (or even previous patronage from royalty or political actors), associations with powerful or wealthy figures does not bring devotional prestige. Perhaps this does allow the movement to compete in the global religious landscape with more resources. Hindu devotionalism, as Fuller states, is not a form of Hindu Protestantism (Fuller 2004 [1992]; 158) where wealth (and work) can accrue spiritual reward. In my fieldwork, I never heard anyone mention honour or prestige related to donations. In this typically middle-class religious community, wealth accumulation is not meritorious in a devotional sense, i.e., this does not get you closer to Krishna. However, it is not frowned upon because this wealth is surrendered to Krishna's *seva*. Still, in a sociological and human sense, this wealth can bring forth *nazar* (evil eye), the risk of ego or greed, and accusations of inauthenticity (Chapter 6).

Historically, patronage was not only royal and political but included individual public donations during the Mughal period by Pushtimarg *seths* (*bania* merchant princes) and lay *banias*, as status-producing or honour (*abru*) generating practices (Sharma 2013; 79, Saha 2006; 273). *Abru*, a social reputation and marker of trust and moral distinction, is a chance to generate and display social status (Sharma 2013; 16), and is one reason the householder *sampradaya* attracts wealthy *bania* merchants. *Abru* as respectability hinged on religious patronage is also one reason the Bombay Libel Case had such a damaging effect on the Pushtimarg's reputation. While I never heard anyone discuss *abru* as this is distinct to the personal relationship between divine and devotee in the home sphere. *Abru* or prestige through the patronage of the movement is firmly situated in the worldly sphere.

While, correctly, Sharma suggests that in the domestic sphere, women (re)produce status and class through religious commodities and consumption, which perpetuates an elite class hierarchy (Ibid 241), her understanding of the domestic is still a semi-public space. In her analysis, she looks at group gatherings in the domestic, such as *satsangs* 'kitty parties', *kirtan* lessons and displays of religious commodities in the home space.

Cannell has argued that anthropology, which has a complicated history with Christianity, privileges ascetic and otherworldly assumptions in its discussions of Christianity, ignoring it's complexities (2005; 340). The ascetic model is inspired by a narrow view of Weber's work on a Protestantism that privileged asceticism, which is an aid to capitalism and 'modernity' (see Cannell 2005; 351), but perpetuates in a supposedly 'secular' anthropology. This interpretation of salvation in anthropology

also sidelines worldly kinship logics. Cannell's work on Mormonism shows a perpetuation of kinship ties in heaven, including human births in heaven (Ibid; 343) and the necessity of a material body rather than separation of matter and spirit (Ibid; 344) or ideas of asceticism.

In ascetic forms of Hindu-ism, the 'worldly' is a type of bondage (Parry 1985; 467) that must be renounced to get out of reincarnation. In his work on Banaras, Parry discusses the Aghori, who practice particularly extreme asceticism embracing death and pollution to generate creative power to sustain themselves in the world while at the same time moving towards renunciation (1994; 252-271). The Aghori example takes on nondifferentiation between divine and human as a core belief, devaluing societal hierarchies (Ibid; 262). Still, these practices generate power to live in the world in a state of renunciation. This is not a negotiation of lived religion and theological or sectarian values in a familial or relational capacity. Indeed, the Pushtimarg sectarian literature (*vartas*) often sees the ascetic as a figure of ridicule (Bachrach 2014; 80).

A reading of the Pushtimarg devotional movement as liberation from the cycle of rebirth is possible. Vallabhacharya himself takes vows of asceticism towards the end of his life and is subsumed by divine fire. However, this is not the norm for everyday devotee experience, nor how devotees understand 'liberation'. For the Pushtimarg devotional movement, an immersion in the world through the physical and mental activities of *seva* attains the 'goal' of more *seva* and continued relations with the divine. Like Cannell's Mormons, the focus is on relationality in the present, not a suspension of time like the Aghori or asceticism to leave the rebirth cycle or gain merit in the afterlife.

The domestic plays a part in acts of *seva,* for example, doing domestic work in temples such as sweeping and cooking and volunteering at ashrams. However, the devotee's domestic sphere and personal *seva* is underexplored by scholars thus far. Recognising the domestic does not suggest a separate binary space. The questions on what makes a Hindu and a Pushtimarg Hindu hold relevance for personal worship, as the domestic is not a space apart from mundane life. The domestic is rather axes of different religious activity (Allerton 2013; 8) and a particular kind of intimate place (Ibid; 19).

Seva and kinship

Seva studied through the lens of kinship has rarely been taken seriously by scholars (exceptions include Inden 2005, Kowalski 2016). Yet, as my interlocutors show, through *seva,* kinship ties can be created, consolidated and (re)stored. This section outlines some of the academic literature that deals with kinship, showing how *seva* can be understood as relational in the domestic space. This section follows the idea that religion is about making relations or shaping personhood in nuanced ways and existent webs of relations between humans, divine and nonhumans (Orsi 2005, Lambek 2013, Cannell 2019; 715).

In kinship studies in South Asia, much emphasis has been placed on shared substances (for example food) through hierarchy situated within pollution and purity rules (essentially caste dynamics) (Dumont 1970, Pocock 1973, Dirks 1989, Parkin 1997), including marriage alliances (Selwyn 1979, Dumont 1983) and with gift exchange through *kanyadana* (Parry 1986, Khare 1992). This has been often understood through a systematic review of kinship terminology (Vatuk 1969 a & 1969b, Dumont 1970, Khare 1992), in often rationalised, formal, or institutionalised ways of thinking about kinship.

The anthropological study of kinship has developed beyond biology, marriage, and reproduction as ordering society (e.g., Radcliffe-Brown 1940) and dismissing the study of kinship altogether (Schneider 1984). After Schneider's critique of the meta-narrative of kinship as culture, scholarly interest expanded to understand kinship in new ways, such as relatedness (Carsten 1995), from new perspectives such as childhood (Allerton 2020, DeLoache & Gottleib 2000), through studies of gender (Strathern 1988), and adoption and technical advances in reproduction (Howell 2006). As Cannell and Mckinnon's (2013) edited volume shows, a scholarly and contextually assumptive domain of kinship and religion exists. These domains become subordinate to the nation-state, secularism, and ideas of the modernization myth (Ibid), despite the lack of coherence on what some of these ideas may mean. Kinship has been extensively explored (Schneider 1984; Carsten 2000, Strathern 1988, Sahlins 2011), and I do not attempt to review the literature comprehensively. However, kinship, when separate from religion, can be overstated as 'secular' and apart from capitalist productive power (cf. Bear 2013). Kinship, therefore, is domained to the domestic sphere unless it is related to politics or economics and is understood as separate from religion. One root of this domaining is the perceived contrast between religion and science, between kin-based societies and the modern nation-state (Cannell 2019; 714). Kinship, religion and the nation-state are all interrelated in complex ways. Yet, the 'sense of the state' (Ibid; 721) is part of lived experience and people may be drawn into the political (ibid) in negotiating ways to be (a)part of society while maintaining individual particularities. The modern nation-state can legally control how personhood is defined through marriage, which ignores kinship based on ambiguousness or emotional attachment. While secularism and the modern are often excluded from kinship (Lambek 2013; Cannell 2013), this area of study is still often relegated to the domestic, and often female-dominated, sphere.

Though there has been a 're-enchantment of kinship' (Cannell 2013; 217), religion is still subordinate to kinship in academia (Ibid; 237). Rather than kinship ordering society, kinship becomes linked with science and medicine (Ibid) or ancestry (Cannell 2011). Kinship, then, becomes material in a way that religion is not (Cannell 2013; 237). However, for Bear's shipyard workers in Kolkata, religious ritual and material are integral to labour production, marking a difference in capitalist kinship studies[14].

[14] As Goodgame notes, while the Gens scholarship does seek to bring (back) a feminist perspective on domains of economics, with the understanding of generative powers of capitalism through lenses of kinship, gender race

Rather than maintaining a secular, material economic domaining, she highlights the unbounded framing of everyday life understood through kinship and religious acts. She highlights how the body is given life through Hindu theologies on *shakti* (power), not only the labour of the workers but the ship itself is animated through men's labour and *puja* (Bear 2013).

Lambek's model considers kinship ambiguous and superfluous, because of which bureaucracy cannot pin down as 'rationalised' (2013). Lambek's 'immodern' kinship centres on performative acts rather than symbols of kinship (Ibid; 246). This kinship model is shaped by ethics and enacted through lifecourse rituals that announce, (re)establish, create, and separate people and relationships (Ibid; 249). Kinship can often be mediated through 'publics' such as state bureaucracy, which narrows different forms of personhood. Like Cannell's Mormons, Lambek's model and Bear's shipyard workers, the non-binary understanding of everyday life shows the unbounded nature of relationality. In other words, *seva* is inherently relational through performative acts that build and shape relationships with humans (and nonhumans).

Sahlins writes about the "mutuality of being", where kinship is through those who "are intrinsic to one another's existence" (2013; 2). Sahlins offers this idea of mutuality to avoid a definition of kinship determined by lines of procreation or genealogy. He includes performative or 'made' kinship (that can be 'unmade' too), referring to nonhumans and placing kinship in a realm with magic and witchcraft. In this way, he offers a cross-cultural comparative that allows for the fluidity of kinship[15]. While the devotee cannot claim to have understood the divine, their mutuality of being in *seva* through everyday moments is how a relationship is constructed by acknowledging the limits of mutuality.

Aligned with part of Sahlin's argument is Orsi's work on prayer, presence and the sacred in Catholicism. His emphasis on religion "as a web not of meanings but relationships between heaven and earth" (Orsi 2005; 5) allows for a (limited) cross-cultural comparison in a similar way to mutuality of being. For Orsi, "family dynamics are one spring of sacred presences – the saints and the Mother of God draw on the intimate histories of relationships within family worlds…the saints borrow dimensions of their identities from family members who in turn become associated with particular saints" (Ibid; 13). The presence of Catholic sacred figures in the family network is similar to how a baby Krishna shapes the family structure of a devotee's household. Through practice, Orsi's Mother Mary devotional Catholics show how collective ritual dynamics and individual interactions are at play within the divine and human relationships.

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and inequality, it is only Laura Bear who discusses religion (Bear, Ho, Tsing, Yanagisako; 2015) (Goodgame 2021; forthcoming).

[15] The lack of difference between mutuality and intersubjectivity that Robbins notes (2013) is relevant to the human and divine relationships. Robbins' teasing apart of intersubjectivity that Sahlin uses synonymously with mutuality of being is important. For the Pushtimarg, a devotee cannot share any mental content with the divine as he is unknowable. This does not mean mutuality of being cannot be a cross-cultural or universal kinship definition but rather acknowledges the fluidity of the term paralleling kinship dynamics in general.

For the Bengali kinship system, love is about the body and bodily substances through blood and the heart as the producer of blood (Inden & Nicholas 2005 [1977]; 21). Inden & Nicholas' work sees egalitarian love as fraternal and sibling love (having shared a womb) and conjugal love. *Seva* as a form of hierarchical love is observed with parents (including aunts and uncles) and children, older generations, and concerning wives, understanding their husbands as a form of god. As an ethical, cultural, humanitarian project domained by the secular, *seva* has its grounding in the religious and, importantly, in the relational.

Relationships with the divine baby Krishna

Krishna in the Pushtimarg has many roles: a young baby and playful toddler, a cheeky teenager, divine lover, friend, master and, ultimately, the creator of everything. The devotee also enacts, feels, and lives in various supporting roles for the main actor, Krishna. As Fuller rightly points out, studies must explore both the divine and the people involved, and I would add the interactions and relationships between them (2004 [1992]; 9).

Krishna is a "pan-Indian deity" (Bryant 2007; 3) as well as a recognisable global Hindu god. Most texts agree on his royal lineage and that he had a brother (White 1970; 161), commonly known as Balarama. White outlines a history of the child Krishna from 149-127 B.C.E from the Greeks (1970; 158). Krishna's stories begin with the earlier texts of the RigVeda which make reference to a cowherd and is mentioned by name specifically in the Upanishads (900 – 800 BCE) (Vemsani 2016; xx) but the extensive coverage of Krishna is consolidated through the *Bhagavata-Purana*[16] (3100 BCE).

About 5000 years ago, Krishna was said to have come to earth and begun his earthly play (*lila*). Krishna's evil uncle Kamsa was the brother of Devaki, who is Krishna's birth mother. Kamsa was told by a prophecy that Devaki's eighth son would kill him for his sinful behaviour as the ruler of Mathura. Devaki and her husband, Vasudeva, were imprisoned, and each of her children was killed as they were born. At the time of Krishna's birth, the entire prison was fortified by extra guards, but at the time of birth, only Vasudeva was awake as a divine sleep affected everyone else. Awestruck at the cosmic birth of Krishna, Vasudeva begs him to take on a more approachable appearance so Krishna becomes darker-skinned and a baby (Hawley 1981; 55). Vasudeva frees himself from his shackles and takes Krishna across the river to Gokul. Vasudeva is aided by a multi-headed snake during the monsoon to protect them from the rain. Giving Krishna to his friend, Nanda, Krishna is swapped for Nanda and his wife, Yashoda's baby girl. Because of the mysterious sleep, Yashoda does not know this has taken place, and when Nanda wakes up, he also forgets what happens (Ibid). In this way,

[16] There is controversial scholarship outlining the similarities in Krishna's origin story and Jesus' birth. It important to note that syncretic forms of faith do not deny uniqueness of a specifically Hindu Krishna, nor does it make hierarchical certain influences over *bhakti* faiths or vice versa (White 1970, 160), but rather provides a historical context of the beginnings of a divine narrative.

Krishna can grow up with a human childhood and continue his mischievous play without overwhelming the people around him with his divinity.

Two 'planes' determine how people behave and speak; *alaukik* (spiritual/other-worldly), transcendent, and *laukik* (reality), immanent. Both are present in the everyday lives of these devotees, which seems quite a paradox.

While Krishna has his own genealogy grounded in textual and hagiographical literature, he is simultaneously part of an immediate family network. Krishna is personal with attributes (*saguna*[17]*)* rather than being a formless, abstract divine being (*nirguna).* While the *bhavas*, modes, or moods of devotion, are outlined for formal *seva* and have specific songs, praises and adornments associated with each *bhava* for the average devotee, it is through their emotions that *seva* is carried out. In Krishna's limitless attributes that the individual devotee perceives through their relationship, acts of *seva* are carried out. Through what I call *bhava* logic (inspired by Bear's 2013 kutum logics), Krishna's needs are framed through a devotional lens interpreted by a devotee's relationship with him. The devotee often becomes their Lalan's mother (or lover), and a kinship bond is formed step-by-step. Motherhood is a distinct and individual type of caregiving, and not a collective ritual act implied by worshipping the divine lord, Krishna. For each devotee-mother, Krishna is, at the same time, their baby, depending on them for food, play and to wake up, and the creator of the universe. One person's Krishna may be partial to sweeter foods, or while another's may not enjoy the colour pink as much as other people's Krishna.

However, as we will see throughout the thesis, these devotee-mothers balance both sides of Krishna in their daily activities. Mothers with children were not doing *seva* for their children in the same way as Krishna. *Seva* for Krishna had a pattern through the lifecourse, though this was not 'set' formally. *Seva* was carried out by women, most often with the help of their husbands, and sometimes, whole families were involved. Most often, due to pollution rules around menstruation and childbirth, the ideal time to do more involved *seva* was post-menopause, or for males, after retiring. There are 'stages' to *seva*, from offering *misri* (sugar sweet) and water in the morning, doable for the majority, to *seva* from 4 am to 4 pm. Often, it was 50-somethings, usually women, that often were seen to have the time to dedicate to more *seva* than women with young families and work commitments. Relationships are formed by playing with Krishna, being in his *lila* and perceiving the world through his play.

Play in anthropology

[17] Attributes do not necessarily relate to the human form, and can include wood, stones, and other natural materials. For Krishna, his attributes are distinctly relatable to human attributes, with the overarching frame of his divinity.

Play has often been defined through what it is not, particularly in the Western world (Schwartzman 1976; 4). In academia, this is noticeable in a comparative lack of research into play in anthropology compared to work (Malaby 2009; 206).

Play can hardly be discussed without Huizinga's seminal work Homo Ludens (1949 [1939]), which surveys different purposes of play in the world, suggesting that "play is older than culture" (Ibid; 1). He writes from a perspective of situating play as a feature of civilization that is undervalued, almost as a defence of play (or play-spirit as he says) that is "threatened with extinction" (Ibid; 199), which is still the case today. In Huizinga's study, there is an immediacy to play that "resists all logical interpretation" (Ibid; 3). He outlines three features of play; 1) play as a voluntary activity, 2) play as apart from ordinary life and not serious, and 3) play as restricted to a specific time and place (Ibid 8-9). He also discusses the uselessness of play, forms of secrecy and exclusions, but highlights that the overall mood of play is joy (Ibid; 20). Play in his model may include a sense of pretence (Ibid; 22) and a form of imagination in "actualization by representation" (Ibid; 14). However, there exists tension through ethical values of acting within the rules of play.

Concepts of modernity, progress, work ethic and the dichotomy between childhood and adulthood contribute to the pervasive understanding that play is not work. This distinction has domesticated and infantilised 'play', similar to how kinship and religion have been domained. Recently, against a mechanical way of working, creative play has become a topic of increasing interest for families, including adults (Brand 2020, The Joy Journal), in addition to interest from child psychologists and child-development work (Piaget 1999 [1951]), workplace architecture (Miller 2017), and primatologists (Behncke 2011)[18]. Scholars have focussed on competitive play (Mauss on the Gift, Huizinga 1949; 46-75) and games (Schwartzman 1978, Paugh 2005, Brougere 2006), particularly notions of gaming and technology (Malaby 2009, Helgesen 2015). These works show that play can have a 'purpose'. Yet, perhaps because of the characterisation of play as unproductive (often commodified) entertainment that is not 'serious', which is situated within the domain of childhood, there is still relatively sporadic interest.

A Geertzian analysis of *seva* as deep play would argue that *seva's* meaning is symbolic as an expression of societal phenomena (2005). Geertz suggests that "The culture of people is an ensemble of texts" (Ibid; 86) which anthropologists can analyse to avoid reproducing the reductive formulas of functionalists. There is indeed much meaning and symbolism in *seva*-as-play, and social contexts frame seva as caregiving, which influences how *seva* is performed. However, Geertz's focus on 'deep play' as symbolic estranges the idea of deep play as absorptive and serious. *Seva*-as-play is not a text to be read, as it is personal, spontaneous and intimate. Instead, symbolic readings can be geared

[18]Its transformative potential is being researched by the National Institute of Play (http://www.nifplay.org/) though this is geared towards psychology and animal/evolutionary sciences.

towards the rules of play or the contextual restraints of play. Taking note of acts of play*ing* moves beyond these sorts of constructed boundaries.

The Pushtimarg would not consider *seva*-as-play immaterial. At the very least, devotees engage in material play with *swaroops*. Nor would play be seen as having no moral function, as Huizinga suggests (1949; 6, 213), as *seva* is relational. Morality comes lower in the hierarchy versus Krishna's desires. But Huizinga's grappling with the ambiguity of play highlights how, despite the 'rules of play', playing can be spontaneous, contextual, and relational. Huizinga's analysis includes play and Hindu religion with an analysis of the play in the Mahabharata, as the idea of the world being a game (Ibid; 52), riddle-solving in Vedic ritual (Ibid; 105) and through Hindu ethics and the story of the Pandava brothers (Ibid; 112).

Studies of religion rarely focus on play, with some exceptions (e.g., Pentecostalism Vondey 2018, Droogers [1996] 2011). Play in the Hindu context has been seen through the aesthetics of language, poetry, and religious performances (Hein 1972, Hawley 1981, on *lila* (divine play) Sax 1995). Turner writes about the "Human Seriousness of Play" in ritual and theatre (1982). He moved beyond a work/play binary and shows how work has elements of play. This is specifically in how religions have discussed the 'work' of the gods in myth and ritual, such as the Bhagavad Gita's reference to sacrifice and work for householders (1982; 30).

In an exploratory essay, Turner differentiates the liminal, as betwixt and between stages of ritual and lifecourse structure that builds anonymity in communitas (Ibid; 55). The liminoid is a break from rites and ritual through play. The liminoid is individual, associated with entertainment and more about will and choice (Ibid; 43), is a more 'modern' version of pure liminality (Droogers 2011; 77). Yet, these phases are entangled, where the "liminal [can be] a condition of entrance into the liminoid realm" (Ibid; 55), particularly through the commodification of entertainment and leisure. Huizinga, Turner and Geertz 'read' play as bounded yet grapple with its ambiguity. Play as a concept is not serious, not work, and leisure takes away from its relationship with *communitas,* experience and power. For all these scholars, and for this thesis, play is not to be infantilised or domained as less than work. Childhood is not an independent state and is entangled with ideas of adulthood. The transformative potential of play in adults playing is noteworthy here where in relation to playing, the 'adult' shifts the self towards child-likeness

A Geertzian or Turnerian symbolic analysis can be easily applied to temple-based *seva*. Though worship can be personal and relational in the presence of others (Luhrmann 2012; 4), domestic seva is an intimate time with individual characteristics and acts. Seva at home is different. Observing someone else's *seva* has limits due to what is visible and what is felt. For instance, one person who does *seva* may sing their devotion, pouring a lot of time and energy into learning *kirtans* to please their Krishna as a divine child, but that same person may not sing to their children or grandchildren.

This is not a deep symbolic play that reflects society, though it has contextual influence, but a serious relational mode of play and worship.

So far, play is part of the liminoid realm, creating a time and space for that, without reason, which is set apart from ordinary life (which has relatively recently been framed as opposed to work) though the context has some bearing on the rules or ethics of play. Due to the relative rules and constraints on the performance of *seva* that have been in place for over 500 years, there is an element of unchanging in how *seva* is performed *while people are learning*. Yet, this leaves a static representation of society and play itself. Unless we continuously study games or play and how they change over time, from daily changes to changes which take place over the years, it simply reflects society as it was at the time of fieldwork. This also does not reflect the individuality in play, where people's characters are reflected differently.

According to Droogers, "Play is 'the capacity to deal simultaneously and subjunctively with two or more ways of classifying reality" (Droogers 2011; 75). Droogers' work, first in the Congo on initiation rites and then on Pentecostalism in Brazil, puts play in a position of in-betweenness, between reductionists and religionists, chaos and order, science and religion and so on. The Turnerian liminality/liminoid discussion shows how people can deal with different realities and relationships in play and allows for intersectionality (2011; 24) and neutrality (Ibid; 87, see Huizinga 1949; 213).

However, rather than just commodifying the liminoid resulting in entangled symbols, Droogers shows how power comes into play. The power dimension of play is important, as religion acts as an organising force within power mechanisms, through public performance, temple worship, or guru movements, yet with the potential for play. The domestication of play leads to political power re-defining play 'more seriously' through games (nationalism through the Olympic Games) or economic power capitalising on play through entertainment and leisure (Disney) (Ibid). Play happens within these social constraints, despite the potential to realise individuality through human play (Ibid; 80). Rather than play having its own order, play offers different, parallel realities through human capacity for play.

Droogers offers the most comprehensive framework of religion, power, and play. Yet, this framework does not touch on the affective nature of the act of playing or the emotional relationship building of play as care and kinship. Religion in these studies is institutionalised and structured in a public social space. Play is situated within these structures. However, this thesis discusses a different sort of play, observably aligned with child's play yet not 'domained' to children. It is not that play is infantilised because of the association with children; instead, through Krishna's divine child status, play is an emotional and relatable mode of worship. Playing with Krishna creates the space to develop a human-divine relationship. As an enchanted encounter with the divine, devotees are led to a state of wonder, recognising the world as Krishna's play (*lila*).

Believing in things; or taking the 'belief' question out

> "It is not so much the believer…who affirms his belief as such, it is rather the unbeliever who reduces to mere believing what, for the believer, is more like knowing" (Jean Pouillon 2016 [1982]; 489).

"This is all great… but is it real?" asked a colleague after reading some of my work. This question still astounds me as it would for many scholars who work on religion. Rather than addressing one of life's great mysteries, I now turn to the concept of belief. Many authors who write about belief acknowledge that the very concept of belief is ambiguous, not least because the term inherently implies doubt (Pouillon 2016 [1982], Pelkmans 2013). For some, it has become an invalid category (Blom-Hansen 2009 on conviction). However, to believe in, of and about the divine is part of religious life. Nevertheless, despite its specific history, it has become a presumed universal category in the anthropology of religion.

Ruel (1982) examines the history of the Christian church to question the universality of belief. He identifies four fallacies which result from ignoring the Christian heritage of the term belief; that belief is presumed central to all religions (Ibid; 110); that it foregrounds peoples' behaviours and, therefore, requires less explanation for it; that belief is interior (Ibid; 111) and that "the determination of belief is more important than the determination of the status of what it is that is the object of belief" (Ibid; 112, also see Lopez 1990). For Pouillon, too, belief is predominantly discussed in Abrahamic monotheistic faiths. He points to a separation between Heaven and our world (2016 [1982]; 490), questioning the existence of the supernatural away from the natural world (ours). He concludes that the usage is not easily universal but interestingly suggests that "everything rests on a faith, which is simultaneously a trust and a specific *credo*" (Ibid; 491), but the spirits' existence is taken for granted (Ibid; 490).

Taking note of Mair's[19] plea for specificity of styles of belief in context (2013; 450), I now turn to what belief means in my fieldwork context. Languages in my fieldsite were often merged, or code switched, between four main languages; Gujarati, Hindi, English, and the sacred language of Krishna Braj Basha. Religious terminology often accompanied formal or 'official' events, while English and Gujarati were heard more regularly. Hindi was sprinkled in the conversation when watching television or engaged in other social activities.

There are three main interchangeable terms relating to faith and belief that I came across during my fieldwork: *sraddha*, *viswasa,* and *maanyata.* In Hinduism, and among the Pushtimarg, the more

[19] He talks about Mongolian Buddhists who cultivate belief through actions, where it is about the style of belief not about the content.

formalised word (Rao 1989; 168) *sraddha* is often translated as faith. *Viswasa* means 'confidence' or 'trust' (Rao 1989; 168), while *maanyata* can be translated as 'to believe'. However, it can also mean to acknowledge, to agree and to recognise, suggesting a lack of confidence. Most of the Pushtimarg I met would only use *maanyata* for people who didn't believe fully. My Pushtimarg interlocutors would use *sraddha* or *viswasa* for belief, but nonbelievers or doubters would use the word *maanyata.*

Though Rao points out that "[*Sraddha*] is the opposite of *nastikya*, the rejection of all spiritual concerns" (1989; 169), and that was constantly warned against by interlocutors and spiritual authority. I never really heard the word *shanka* (doubt/distrust) amongst my interlocutors. Though some people used the word 'doubt' in English in the UK, it was never doubt over the existence of divine beings. Instead, incertitude was directed at the practices of the Pushtimarg, gurus, other religions or other Vaishnavas. Pelkmans suggests that "belief without doubt is the same as 'knowledge'" (2013; 4), and the Pushtimarg believe that one cannot know the nature of Krishna, nor is it a stable object that is knowable. You can only be a part of his *seva* and be in bliss (*anand)* in his service. The idea of trust or confidence in *sraddha* and *viswasa* reflects Pouillon's *croire en* perfectly, without the question of existence. For Pushtimarg devotees, while doubt may exist about *the nature* of the divine, the existence of the divine in whatever form[20] was rarely, if at all, questioned. They 'know' that Krishna exists and are on a path they often doubt, change, and return to, to reach and gain his grace.

An anthropologist in the making

As is clear from my opening vignette, my family have been involved in the Pushtimarg way of worship for a long time. While this was not something I was keenly aware of until I began anthropology at university, I did take the initiation (*brahmsambandh* see chapter 2) when I was in my early teens, at the request of my paternal grandmother. She was more aligned with the "don't touch" influence in the movement. It turns out both sides of the family were more or less involved in the Pushtimarg. As a distant memory of a day when I fasted and met a guru, my initiation did not particularly shape and influence my interest in religious life.

Being part of the East African Indian British diaspora and a teenager in the so-called 'model minority' of Asians with relative socio-economic success adapting to British life, the religious side of the family was often put to the side. Yet, this continued to run parallel to my lifecourse. As time went on, Pushtimarg gurus travelled the world, establishing Havelis in Kenya, where I grew up, in the US and the UK. More of my family members became attracted to this form of *bhakti* worship and required attendance at various religious events through the years. As first-generation British Indians, and as

[20] There were debates amongst people about other deities, and how to worship them, if at all. As I was in the company of a religious community, the fact that the existence of the divine was not discussed does not seem that surprising.

younger family members, we used these events to catch up in corridors, sneak out for cheeky French fries from McDonald's and wear our best Indian outfits. My (perhaps) genealogical 'inherited' religious identity that would have been passed down from both sets of grandparents, unnoticed by me, ran parallel to a diasporic sense of 'becoming British Indian'.

Anthropology came to me through my undergraduate academic advisor in a brief conversation on the anthropology of wine. Through my MSc dissertation for Religion in the Contemporary World at the LSE, I (re)discovered and questioned the Pushtimarg and *seva*. As the world is made up of social relationships (Gell 1998; 4), I was fascinated by those existing between heaven and earth (Orsi 2005) through Krishna worship.

As a non-practising Pushtimargi with "shifting identities" (Narayan 1993; 671), I was sometimes an 'outsider' and, at others, an 'insider'. This mostly unhelpful, absolute dichotomy is a legacy of older forms of colonial anthropology. At times, I was an insider, knowing some of the guru lineages and having contacts worldwide who could introduce me to others. Yet, as Narayan shows, the 'native' and the 'real' anthropologist are fluid 'multiplex identities' that are culturally tangled (Ibid; 674). Like Narayan, I had a "preexisting identity defined by kinship [which] subsumed my presence as an ethnographer" (Ibid; 674) though this was often through my diaspora connections. As with Narayan's Swamiji, most people treated me with "a mixture of amusement, dismissal, and sustained kindness" (1989; 3). My Indian heritage enabled easier communication and being a 'foreigner', and I was a guest. Being a young married woman without children (seen as allowed to come on fieldwork by my husband), I had certain freedoms that would not be stereotypically the same for an unmarried (read 'unprotected') Indian woman alone in the city. I travelled around and interviewed 'strangers' from outside the Haveli communities. At the same time, I was being taken care of, protected and enveloped into close-knit family kin networks that continue today. Yet, this distanced me from certain negatively perceived narratives of caste discrimination, scandals, money and so on. The male devotees I interacted with tended to be the husbands of my female friends, often older and 'uncles' rather than peers or *bhais* (brothers). Not having children, I was told I would not understand the ideal type of love for Krishna as a child, yet the 'potential' existed. I was open about not practising *seva* at home and was offered countless 'gifts' of Lalans or the option to adopt one of the many left at Havelis when someone could no longer care for them.

Through some situated knowledge (Narayan 1993; 679) being brought up recognisably Indian, yet 'foreign', my own assumptions were questioned, and 'new' knowledge had to be refigured throughout the PhD process. I acknowledge my limits as an ethnographer as presenting everything about peoples' lives is impossible (Shah 2017; 47). Anthropology's strength is in ethnography, which is achieved through participant observation. Participant observation as a revolutionary praxis (as a methodology rather than through social activism) explores life's interrelations in the ways our

interlocutors present rather than through our own assumptions. In this sense, I sought to radically participate (Maclancy 2002, Nadasdy 2007, Shah 2017) by taking what my interlocutors said seriously rather than as symbolic and taking note of Stoller's "sensuous ethnography" (1997 see 1989) and embodied ethnography.

Through this process, which "requires anthropologists to take absolutely seriously the viewpoints of their informants" (Nadasdy 2007; 36), I started with my interlocutors' difficulty in explaining *seva.* The question of where *seva* situated itself was not one they asked, yet for many, in describing to me what *seva* was and why it was not the same *puja,* they left feeling unsatisfied, and we returned to the discussion many times.

A little self-reflection has its place in this thesis, particularly, as through the PhD process, much interest from peers and professors alike was expressed in my 'nativeness', my religious standpoint and my ability to detach from the connections I had. Reflexive anthropology has its place, and being raised in a 'Hindu' tradition made me more sympathetic to a supposed 'cultural other' (Clough 2006). I aimed to disrupt scholarly detachment by taking the lead of the strangers around me, being taught about the Pushtimarg the way they wanted to teach me and being welcomed into families, 'adopted' as a (grand)daughter and friend through Ahmedabad and the UK. The risk was less that I would be unable to participate and more about how not to produce "a collection of pretty butterflies" (Shah 2017; 54) in the field. Later my fieldwork, I sought different narratives than those presented to me by the official institution by seeking out those who did not go to Havelis and those who moved to other *sampradayas.* Still, while this informed much research on specific topics and allowed unguided dialogues (Clough 2006) and a holistic type of participant observation (Shah 2017), those I was involved with long-term were involved in the social relationships between heaven and earth that I was fascinated by.

Anthropologists are syncretic experiments (Shaw and Stewart 1994; 20). For example, in our methodology, ethnography is reactionary to the context one is in, the person participating, and the community one is learning about. But anthropological 'hegemony' of deconstructing identities and defining categories is outmoded. Instead, through an ontological lens, anthropologists turn to the relational between humans and non-humans. Through what Droogers terms "methodological luddism", ethnography can explore the ambiguity of the discipline and bridge a perceived gap between science and religion (2011; 165). "The ethnographer plays with two realities, is existentially involved, but at the same time is constructing an image of what is actually being experienced." (Ibid; 164).

The varying degrees of intimacy and estrangement Shah (2017; 51) exactly describes the sometimes insider-outsider status Narayan points to, which is particularly poignant through the globalised and virtual world. I spent a total of nine months in India, mainly in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, with three

pilgrimages, following my interlocutors around India, and eight months travelling between Leicester and London in the UK. In Ahmedabad, my research mostly focussed on a specific Haveli (temple) in the city and the community that attended daily. As time progressed, I met a wider range of devotees and spent time at other Havelis. In Leicester, I aimed to focus on the Haveli and its surrounding community. However, as I found out, many public events occur when a guru is present, meaning the attending community expands from London to further afield in Scotland. Most of my time was spent at the Havelis or public events, meeting the regulars and slowly being invited to participate in voluntary activities, mostly cutting fruit or vegetables and, my favourite, joining the flower-garland-making *seva* group.

In Gujarat, I was lucky enough to stay with three devotee families for varying amounts of time and overnight at a few friends' homes while observing and participating in *seva*. In Leicester and London, the urban setting made it relatively difficult to stay with people. In Ahmedabad, I was welcomed as a lone female traveller, and I was taken in almost immediately by the local community, living among families and absorbed into everyday life. My urban ethnography took on more of a 'wayfaring' (Ingold 2007: 80) approach, following various devotees, events, and visiting gurus up and down the motorway. Ingold suggests that movement is often imagined as linear points, with a start and an end, or up a classification level for knowledge transmission in an urban landscape. Wayfaring is instead "*going around* in an environment" in a "meshwork" (Ibid), where lots of points and lines interconnect as I ended up doing. Within this movement, the greatest challenge was waiting and not moving. Gujarati families from Leicester have strong links to families in London, which involves frequent travels up and down the M1. I had the chance to meet two Lalans in the UK, and though I did not stay with the devotees, I was welcomed as a volunteer for all religious activities. As I am from London, the seeming lack of necessity for an overnight stay gave most Pushtimarg urbanites pause. Within two hours of driving along the M1, I had a home and family.

In the globalised and technologically advanced age, conducting urban, middle-class research in a bounded ethnographic space is not easy, as a fixed site does not exist in devotees' reality. Instead, I spent much time in coffee shops (when not in the Haveli), meeting people all over London or Leicester. My grounding 'place' was always the Haveli, and these different trajectories of ethnographic experience stemmed from the conversations and relationships at the Haveli.

A brief note on my interlocutors

During my time in India and the UK, I spent time with various interlocutors. I keep my interlocutors anonymised throughout the thesis, as is standard in anthropology. In this vein, I did not write individual portraits because most interlocutors desired privacy. In the domestic *seva* space that is deeply intimate, this makes sense. In terms of a broader picture, almost all my interlocutors were

Gujarati. Most of my interlocutors would describe themselves as part of the middle class in India and the UK. The middle-class category is conceptually complicated (Donner & De Neve 2011; 3), and the comparison between a UK middle class and an Indian one is beyond the scope of this thesis. In general, it has been noted that there is little anthropological interest in middle-class families and parenting in South Asia (Donner 2008; 33).

In Ahmedabad, I associated most with retired women, usually homemakers, and some of their husbands, often retired professionals. This is partly due to their consistent presence at Havelis, the time they were able to share with me and general accessibility with women as a woman myself. I spent Sundays at the children's religious school (*pathshala*), spending time with children from the age of 4 to 10. Several younger women I was friends with worked in professional fields or helped run family businesses, yet rather than the Haveli, I met them during festivals or social events. In Ahmedabad, the Haveli and social networks between groups of volunteers allowed for greater access to interlocutors and my lack of home. In the UK, many of my interlocutors were relatively well-off through migration, working as professionals or running family businesses. The my interlocutors age range and gender division were more varied in the UK, ranging from university students to retirees, as I had to try and meet people in cafes and restaurants or have discussions at the Haveli rather than staying in their homes. When I joined volunteers in the UK, I mainly spoke to older women who had retired from professional careers or were homemakers.

Situating the thesis, and the Pushtimarg

A more contextual overview of the Pushtimarg will come into the next chapter, while this section highlights the lack of scholarly interest in this movement. The Pushtimarg is underexplored in studies of Hindu-isms with notable exceptions who engage with the movement to varying degrees (Bennett 1993, Haberman 1994, Saha 2004, Dwyer 2013, Richardson 2014, Hawley personal communication) and a rising interest (Sharma 2013, Bachrach 2014, 2018). *Seva* has not had much comparative scholarly interest either (versus *dana* (donation or gift), for example, Beckerlegge 2011). In books about 'Hinduism', there is little mention of *seva* (e.g. in Knott 1998 where *seva* is mentioned as *bhakti yoga* in ISKCON) or of the Pushtimarg at all (as in eds Hawley and Narayanan 2006). There are many possible reasons, and I would like to point out four.

The Pushtimarg ideal *seva* and worship is in the domestic sphere, in an intimate relationship with Krishna. While many authors have focused on temple-based worship (Bennett 1993, Saha 2004, Richardson 2014,) there is a rising interest in the domestic space through interpretations and discussions of hagiography and mantra (Sharma & Bachrach 2016), women in the Pushtimarg (Dalmia 2001, Sharma 2013) and class production and modernity amongst women (Sharma 2013). To my knowledge, this thesis is the first work that explores the intimate relationship of devotees with

their Lalans in their home *seva.* Through the lens of anthropology of prayer, play and kinship, this thesis offers a distinct perspective on the engaging ethnographic and liturgical work of religious studies scholars. Prayer as a lens asks questions and is an open-ended discussion without a fixed category rather than a formula to checklist again.

During much of my fieldwork, people told me stories of Krishna, whether it was his many *lilas* or their Krishna playing a prank at home. Rather than focus on hagiographies and text, I was led by the narratives weaved around me, connecting everyday lives with caregiving for baby Krishna. This thesis draws on a diverse range of topics, encompassing (but not covering in totality) multiple topics, particularly kinship, play, gender, Hindu-isms, ritual and religious experience. This thesis cannot do justice to the extensive debates and excellent scholarship on these subjects. The purpose is to show how lived religious experience is part of everyday life, rather than set apart, highly ritualised and out of reach. Through my wonderful, 'adopted' family in the Pushtimarg, I observed and participated in over ten different home worships, as a regular guest. I was allowed to observe a couple of others one time only. Throughout my fieldwork, I was never *invited* to see someone's Lalan. Instead, permission was sought in a combination of relationship-building and a thorough explanation of my work. This privacy around the domestic, emotional attachment for Krishna was a privilege and one that was given to me through my perceived identity, as discussed above. This thesis focuses on the domestic and intimate, which are intertwined with the personal human-divine relationship. The domestic offers insights into a devotee's life[21]as a spatial category. An example of this is Allerton's work who discusses rooms as social things in Manggarai, Indonesia (2013; 19). These spaces are interactive, imbued with spiritual presence (Ibid; 21), and respected as agentive dwellings for humans and nonhumans. It is not a binary of intimate and public places; the latter can certainly be intimate and subjective, but rather how they interrelate. All these spaces are in their states of becoming shaping and being shaped by personhood.

This thesis comes at a time when the Pushtimarg is starting its own globalised journey, maintaining the reputed orthodoxy that intimidates some people while generating inclusivity and appealing to younger diasporic generations. The multi-sited nature of my research in the UK and India reflects the relatively recent international and diasporic reach of the Pushtimarg community, which I will cover in the next chapter. This *sampradaya* is quite a 'new' one on the global religious landscape. In the 1990s, Pushtimarg gurus began to travel the world to meet the diaspora. Initially called by a few first-generation followers, this international movement has gained followers through the gurus' travels. There are over 500 lineages that stem from Vallabhacharya's divine lineage, and not all travel or agree with this way of 'promoting' the Pushtimarg. There is a sense that the Pushtimarg is a 'minor' *sampradaya* compared with North Indian *bhakti* counterparts such as the Swaminarayan and Hare

[21] Though I do not discuss this here, threads of this sort of attention to domesticity are included in ethnographic examples.

Krishna. Yet, its wealth, reputation and Havelis are extensive across India and worldwide. This study is unique as the exploration of the Pushtimarg spans different countries. Others have focussed on India (Bennett 1993, Sharma 2013, Bachrach 2014, 2018) or the diaspora (Richardson 2014) rather than both. This thesis explores how context influences the way the religious is experienced, understood or practised, and how the boundaries are non-existent through the lens of Krishna's spiritual play. This moves away from a reductionist reading of Pushtimarg practice as rigid and based on purity and pollution which, in turn, shapes caste, nationalism, race and other forms of public sphere engagement, to focus on the domestic and intimate relationship between devotee and playful divine.

Chapter outlines

Chapter 1 outlines the context of being a Gujarati Pushtimargi in India and the diaspora, showing how the history of the *sampradayas* engagement in the public sphere necessitates a consistent redefining of the movement as an institution. Through the frame of a politics of social and religious distinction, rather than a political or nationalist reading of the movement, I explore the 'sense of place' that India inspires among my interlocutors.

Chapter 2 goes back to where I started, to the distinction Pushtimargis make between *seva* and *puja,* centring on the domestic sphere. The domestic sphere is where relational and intimate worship should take place, according to Valalbhacarya's original teachings. Yet, attention to the domestic takes the movement away from the 'Don't touch' orthodox reputation centred around purity and pollution rules. Instead, the domestic centres on relationality in *seva* that, from my interlocutors' perspective, differentiates the Pushtimarg from other North Indian *bhakti* movements. In the domestic, people engage in seva as serious play-ing.

Chapter 3 shows how the theological background of the world as Krishna's divine play (*lila)* is a perspective shift from worldly (*laukik*) to otherworldly (*alaukik*), rather than renouncing the world. Absorptive play-ing as a practice, inspired by the child Krishna, is a participatory and spontaneous surrender to the divine. Attention on a 'mystical sense' of play gets away from the domestication of personal *seva.* Yet, *seva*-as-play is not separate from the public sphere in which devotees live, which can affect how to play in religious life is understood.

Chapter 4 and 5 explore this paradox in relation to Krishna as part of the family, both as a lack of tension between a relatable and transcendent divine in the home sphere and constant switching of registers. These chapters show that the divine is not imitable, despite his relatability in the household. Although kinship and religious life are domained to the female-sphere of domestic, we will see in Chapter 4 that the primary mode of worship is feminine, privileging motherhood over lovers *bhava* (devotion). However, the reversal of gender hierarchy rarely takes shape in familial or public life,

formed by a patriarchal context and historical (mis)understandings of worship in the public sphere. Yet, the domestic space of playful *seva* is informed by individual notions of caregiving for a divine child. Chapter 5 explores the connection between childhood and divine childhood to show how Krishna is an exceptional family member that does not necessarily relate to raising human children. It also sees children as active devotees (potentially) developing their love for Krishna throughout their lives and participating in serious play through the reversal of hierarchy by taking on a parental role for baby Krishna.

Taking a step away from the domestic, Chapter 6 looks at the distinction between the private and public sphere as contested within the Pushtimarg institution through the infamous Nathdwara Temple Act in 1959. The in-betweenness of the Haveli brings about a debate on authenticity through *vittaja* (wealth) *seva* that is most visible in these spaces. Yet, Havelis have the resources to frame Krishna worship through active and participatory *darshan* to an animate. Havelis are seen as a learning centre but, importantly, inspire wonder through different elements of public worship.

Chapter 7 shows how India, as Krishna's playground, is not only a site for *yatra* (sacred journeys) but intertwined with kinship relations, human and nonhuman. While each site has specific ways of experiencing the divine, we return to the point that, for the Pushtimarg and many others, India is not a site of belonging through Hindu nationalism but worship, play and absorption in *lila* in the animate material landscape. Though this thesis does not disregard sites of disconnect such as caste or political difference, the focus is on the idea of a shared Indian, Gujarati and Pushtimargi identity and the divine presence of Krishna that connects the community globally. Elsewhere I discuss the sacred journey (Richardson & Gheewala Lohiya forthcoming); however, I consider the places of pilgrimage in depth rather than the process of the journey. These places in the landscape are part of the divine play of revealing and concealing divine presence as Krishna's transcendence is unknowable. By encountering and experiencing Krishna through the landscape, devotees immerse themselves in Krishna's divine play (*lila*).

The final chapter sees why Kali Yuga (the current Age of Darkness) is not so bad for Pushtimarg devotees, not because of renouncing or asceticism, but in an active mode of wonder. Wonder is generated through the emotional connection between divine and devotee, which is cultivated by *seva*-as-play. This shifts a devotee's perspective to an active and participatory sense of joy, waiting for absorption or immersion and surrendering to divine play *(lila*).

Chapter 1: From the land of Krishna to around the world

Krishna is a global divine figure, recognisable to most and accessible to many. He is a centre, or part, of many international religious movements such as The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON or Hare Krishnas) and the Swaminarayan movement, among many others. In the Pushtimarg, he is the Ultimate Creator and the only god, and the rest of the Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses come after him in the hierarchy. The Pushtimarg are well-connected throughout India and in the diaspora extending to the virtual terrain (Richardson & Gheewala Lohiya; forthcoming). Despite a comparative lack of research into the Pushtimarg, it would be remiss to assume they are a small or a minority movement on a global scale.

The Pushtimarg is embedded in India, through narrative, physicality, cosmology, and imaginary as will be threaded through the thesis. India is not discussed as 'authentic' and the 'rest' as a copy (Vertovec 2000), nor does this mean a form of 'hybridity' (Hutnyk 2010; 60-61). The diaspora and Indian citizens influence each other in the shared globalised space rather than a linear pattern of diasporic influence over India or vice versa. It is by following these lines of connectedness between global, urban, and rural that we can trace the social collectivity of *sampradayas* (sects) in addition to the common scholarly "preoccupation with rural manifestations of inter-caste and intra-caste behaviour" (Bennett 1993; 7).

This chapter is not about global universal connectedness shared by identity or religiosity but about diverse subjectivities that assemble in places across India. The Pushtimarg is not a 'traditional' or 'static' religion but a movement and community with adaptive capacity. *Bhakti*, by nature, is not a static tradition and rather "moves, travels, and develops" (Hawley 2015; 7). Disconnections are equally important, such as questions of Indian identity in the diaspora or gaps in language abilities. However, academics cannot ignore the interconnections between the diaspora and India, imagined or otherwise, as this is how people get a "sense of place" (Basso 1996) that roots them to it differently.

The majority of my interlocutors were Pushtimargi Gujarati and discussed their Pushtimarg identity in two ways; first, in reference to the founding of the movement and hagiographical literature, and second, as proud Gujaratis. Rather than a reading of worship as producing a particular type of Gujarati Hindu nationalism, much of my interlocutors' discussions were a specific reading of the emergence of Gujarat, the state, as a successful model for other states to follow. Being Hindu, Pushtimargi, and Gujarati frames how the institution engages in the public sphere.

Framed through the idea of politics as a point of social and religious distinction, publicness affects lived practice differently. This chapter looks at the movement's institutional historical trajectory from

its origins in the fifteenth century to its slow adaptation to a transnational devotee community. Three trends emerge from this reading.

First, there is a cyclical pattern of being visible in the public sphere to turning inwards as a movement and back again. As a householder sect, for devotees and institutions alike, this raises many tensions about how far to engage with the constantly developing mundane world. This constant tension is between the private and public sphere, which is theologically and philosophically embedded in worship. Intimate domestic worship is part of Vallabha's teachings, condemning *anyashray*. Yet the changes in the world and the householder nature of the sect means participation in the world.

Second, there is a slower adaptation and transition to different periods of public life, perceived in comparison to other North Indian *bhakti* movements such as the Swaminarayan and Hare Krishnas. For example, the latter two movements are heavily involved in transnational religious education. The Pushtimarg, since the 1990s, is now trying to carve out its own space in the global religious landscape. This is why it is so fascinating to observe this transition as it is happening.

Third, though this is common for many religious movements, there is a constant redefinition of who the Pushtimarg are, which affects devotees by creating a widening gap in knowledge of Pushtimargi history and philosophy. This latter point is augmented by the emphasis on *seva* as practice based on devotional mood (*bhava*), highlighting the difference between *seva* and *puja* maintains a sense of particularity about the movement apart from broader Hinduism.

One of the challenges that the Pushtimarg institution faces is the lack of central authority. As a divine lineage with over 500 members who all have their own ways of teaching, there is no one way to explore the Pushtimarg for an academic, let alone for devotees to seek a contextualisation of the movement. In Chapter 6, we saw debates on the public and private spheres with differing opinions among the lineage. This leaves devotees to their own devices to construct a historiography of the movement. While I came across a handful of devotees who were interested in the academic literature on the movement, the majority of our discussions on Pushtimarg history were based on *vartas* (hagiographies), *kathas* and *saptas* (religious speaking events by gurus), *satsang* (community-based forums) and online. Another challenge is a shadow from the nineteenth century that redefines the institution publicly but also as lived practice. In Chapter 4, we see a 'sanitisation' of madhurya-bhava in the public sphere, which leads to an emphasis on *vatsalya*.

Ethnographic evidence shows devotees quoting pan-Hindu concepts. For example, rather than dismissing the Vedas and concepts of duty as *dharma* or the cycle of *karma*, Pushtimarg interlocutors suggest the devotees were part of broader Hindu concepts, but that these were not part of the philosophy. In a close reading of historical records, Hawley writes that certain Vallabhite historians in Pushtimarg history "consolidate what was remembered in rubris of their own construction" (2015; 213, see Hawley 2015; 179-187 for more). Indeed, he suggests that it was not necessarily

Vallabhacharya who set out to consolidate a *sampradaya* but rather his son, Vittalnathji (Ibid; 186). This is complemented by my interlocutors attributing the *sampradaya's* elaborated *seva* practice and garnering wealth to the latter, as we will see in this chapter.

I will first outline a historical reading of Pushtimarg's emergence in Gujarat and subsequent association with this state.

Pushtimarg's rootedness in Gujarat

Vallabhacharya was born in 1478 AD. His father Laksmana Bhatta, a Telugu Brahman, and his wife, Illammagaru, who was eight months pregnant, fled their home in Varanasi from a possible invasion from the Sultan of Delhi at the time (Bennett 1993; 47; Richardson 2014; 19). In the forest of Champaranya (or Camparanya, near modern-day Raipur), Illammagaru gave birth to a stillborn child. In grief, they left the child by a tree and moved to find another town for shelter. In Bennett's account, Laksmana had a dream where Krishna said the child was alive, and in Richardson's, it was Illammagaru who persuaded the others to return to the tree. In any case, the group found the child playing surrounded by a protective ring of fire. Krishna and Radha protected the child, who was both the divine *avatar* of Krishna and his intermediary (Bennett 1993; 47). He was on earth to reunite *pushti* (graced) souls with Krishna. The following story highlights how devotees understand themselves as a tiny part (*ansh*) of Krishna's divine play.

> "Now hear about the divine occurrence that caused Shri Vallabh's appearance. Once Shri Krishna desired to dance with Shri Svamini and when she showed no interest, Shri Krishna, the Master of all things, made another divine creation and danced there. When Shri Svamini saw him dancing without Her, she went to her Beloved and pulled on His necklace. All of the gems from the necklace scattered on the earth. At that moment the Divine Couple realized that the fallen jewels were actually divine souls connected to Them. They immediately felt intense separation from those divine souls and two columns of fire emanated from Their hearts and where they converged, a third form manifested as the Beloved Vallabh.
>
> He was a combination of Shri Krishna and Shri Svamini as well as Their witness. The intensity that issued from Them and created him turned Beloved Vallabh into the divine fire god for he was filled with Their intensity. Beloved Vallabh then appeared on the earth to collect the dispersed divine souls and remind them, "Remember dear soul! You have been separated from Beloved Krishna for thousands of births. You have forgotten the nectar of His union. Do you remember the sweet pangs of His separation?" The search for these divine souls inspired Shri Vallabh to undertake three pilgrimages around the four corners of India." (Nathdwara Temple Board website 2017)

In Braj, on the banks of the Yamuna, Vallabhacharya was given the sacred initiation *mantra* by Krishna: "Whereas in Krishna grace is diffuse, remote, and unchanneled, through Vallabha it becomes concentrated, targeted, and more immediate to the devotee, for Vallabha also has the power to "bestow the gift wherever he pleases" (Bennett 1993; 49). Vallabhacharya had another well-documented encounter with Krishna, telling him to go to Mount Govardhan, where Krishna would be in the form of Shri Nathji. A farmer, Sadu Pandey, along with others in the area, had been worshipping an arm of Shri Nathji by feeding it milk from their cows. By the time of Vallabhacharya's birth, Shri Nathji's face appeared on the mountain. These episodes highlight the importance of the guru as an intermediary, Vallabhacharya's divine lineage as part of Radha and Krishna, and devotees' souls as somehow connected to the divine.

In his youth, he achieved the title of *acharya* (expert or teacher) after winning a formal debate in court (Bennett 1993; 56). Vallabhacharya's journeys around India coincided with political upheavals, which he comments on as the "society's ills" (Saha 2004; 99). His proselytizing attracted many followers. The movement particularly attracted the *banias* (mercantile) as Pushtimarg is a householder sect (not requiring renunciation), and lower-caste agrarian castes, as the Pushtimarg offered social mobility in status. The lack of conflict with Muslim authorities' society along with the political situation at the time (Saha 2004; 115) meant that the sect could flourish alongside householders' practices. However, this would change with Aurangzeb's rule from 1658 to 1707. Mughal rulers tended to leave the sect alone as long as they offered to include prayers for the state alongside their practices (Ibid). While Braj is the central point for Krishna devotion, Gujarat became a powerful community of Pushtimargies.

When Vallabhacharya came to Gujarat, he encountered a well-established, emerging *bania* (merchant) community that was powerful and wealthy. The Gujarati *bania* (merchant) community or bourgeoisie[22] , as Tambs-Lynch (2011) calls them, has a specific history within the state. The *bania* Indian merchants funded Mughal nobility and colonial trading companies in the seventeenth century (Ibid; 335). From a position of trade, they then emerged as politically powerful, particularly in Ahmedabad (Ibid; 336). The Pushtimarg attracted the wealthy *banias* for a number of reasons. Firstly, is an elevated *varna* status through following purity and pollution rules. The *banias* equalled their *varna* status to Brahmins but were also seen as superior to kingly Rajputs (Ibid; 337). and the continuity of being householders rather than renouncers, and the *banias'* accumulated wealth could be displayed (Pocock 1973; 117) during festivals and through offerings. Indeed, bhakti devotionalism became a "viable alternative" (Tambs-Lynch 2011; 342) to Shaktist traditions that dominated among royalty and rural areas. Shakti traditions tended to be concerned with power (Tambs-Lynch 2011; n64), and bhakti devotionalism is concerned with emotion and different forms of purity.

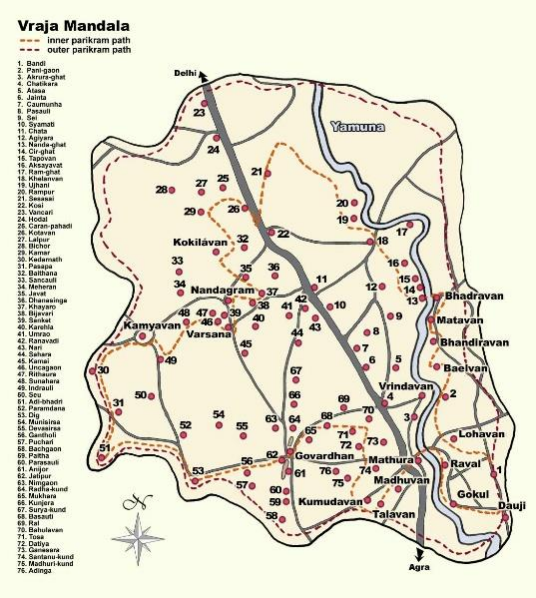
[22] He suggests that middle-class is too vague (Tambs-Lynch 2011; 335).

Vallabhacharya had two sons. Gopinath, the eldest son, passed away with one heir, Purusottam, who was a child at the time. In 1531, Vallabhacharya took his vows of asceticism and withdrew to prepare to submerge himself in the Ganges. There he was subsumed by the divine fire from his birth story. After some disputes and factions within the movement, Purusottam passed away with no heirs leaving Vittalnath, Vallabhacharya's second son (1515-1585), to lead the community. One of the reasons that Vittalnath is claimed to be his father's incarnate and natural successor is that Gopinath was said to be heading towards Maryada Marg (path of restrictions) and pursuing knowledge over bhakti (see Bachrach 2014 63n70, Saha 2021 ECSAS panel).

The more ornate and elaborate forms of Pushtimarg worship are attributed to Vittalnath, under whom Vittalnath, religious touring took on a political aspect by targeting patronage from Mughal officials (Saha 2004; 123). The movement began "borrowing concepts associated with royalty" (Richardson 2014; 24). Different terminology was used, such as the term *gaddi,* meaning throne, for the lineage or 'Haveli' meaning large mansion, rather than *nandalay* (Nanda's home) to refer to Pushtimarg temples (Ibid; 25). Vittalnath consolidated worship of other deities such as Swaminiji (which refers to Radha, Yamuna, and sometimes Yashoda) "to compete with the Gaudiya sampradaya of Chaitanya" (Ibid; 26), another Vaishnava *sampradaya.*

Vittalnath had seven sons, leading to seven 'houses' (*gaddis)* of Pushtimarg gurus. These seven sons shared nine *nidhi swaroops* consecrated by Vallabhacharya, which they installed in separate temples across India (Bennett 1993; 51). Marriage connections within the Vallabhkhul all come from the same caste from which Vallabhacharya was from (*Tailanga* Brahmin) (Ibid; 53). The geographical expansion of the Pushtimarg is not only linked to devotees and the movement of Vallabhkhul lineage but shifts with changes in the houses, and according to competition and consolidation among the *gaddis* (Ibid; 33). Sub-lineages were formed by adopting male heirs from one *gaddi* to another (Bennett 1993; 51), yet, there is still conflict in the establishment of the sixth *gaddi* (see Bachrach 2014; 64n73). The lineage still operates within the structures of the caste system regarding marriage and kinship[23]. Today, there are five to six hundred gurus in the family tree[24].

[23] Bachrach notes that descendants from the maternal line are given the name Vallabh Parivar (Vallabh family), though this difference is not commonly discussed (2014; 8). This note is interesting in the distinction between public and domestic, familial spheres.
[24] Based on personal communication with Hawley, Richardson and various mukhiajis (priests) in Braj during my *yatra.*



(Map 1 of Braj, 135km south away from Delhi and 55km north of Agra[25])

During Aurangzeb's leadership, rebellions led the Pushtimarg community to further separate. The first house of the divine lineage would leave Braj to go to Mewar, modern-day Nathdwara, to protect the divine image of Shri Nathji (Saha 2004; 138).

According to Tambs-Lynch, viability of *bhakti* was further fuelled by the establishment of the Swaminarayans from 1803 (Tambs-Lynch 2011; 342) and an emphasis on one scriptural form of Hinduism (Tambs-Lynch 2011; 344). Pocock suggests that the movement was formed as a corrective to some aspects of the Pushtimarg (1973; 117). Therefore, the Pushtimarg faced competition from the Swaminarayan movement at this time. This competition is still recognised in the global religious landscape today. As part of a non-violent caste that is influenced by devotionalism, purity (Tambs-Lynch 2011;339) becomes the lynchpin to forming the merchant religiosity as superior to meat-eating and violent Rajputs. This ambivalence of purity and pollution in caste behaviour repeatedly crops up when discussing the seventeenth century, after Vallabhacharya's travels and the Krishna worshipping Yadavs of Braj. Tambs-Lynch's argument is based on the Swaminarayan tenets of vegetarianism and non-violence, similar to the Pushtimarg.

However, the main difference in philosophy is that the Swaminarayan movement promotes renunciation. Compared to Pushtimarg's hagiographies and emphasis on *seva* as practice, there is one scriptural authority. These are the seeds of a universalistic Swaminarayan *bhakti* movement that has shaped the understanding of Hinduism as a world religion today in India and the diaspora through education, and political engagement. The popularity of *bhakti* among the merchant classes,

[25] Tattva-darsi das 2010.

nonetheless, is pivotal for the way that Gujarat as a state has become the figurehead for Hindu nationalism, as it is today.

Leadership in the Pushtimarg continuously struggled for stability through the British Raj, which culminated in the divisive controversy of the Maharaja Libel Case in 1861, which was the result of accusations of sexual misconduct and corruption by the gurus of the sect (Bennett 1993; 11,58, see Richardson 2014; 96-99)[26].

This next section moves to India's Independence and explains how interlocutors, particularly in the diaspora, often framed their Gujarati identity as business people and prosperous 'model minorities' post-migration. From my interlocutors' perspective, this identity has further emphasised the success of the Gujarat state model internationally. While there is no outright denial of the violence and inequalities in the state, diasporic interlocutors tended to focus on the elevated image of Hindus and Indians more broadly. A brief summary of Ahmedabad's development over the years since Independence emphasises the perceived success of the Gujarat state model (though this is contested in the broader context). This model is part of the Hindu nationalist movement's foundational support across the Gujarati diaspora.

Global connections

Not only did my interlocutors express pride in their Gujarati identity due to the Gujarat model of entrepreneurship and development, but they overwhelmingly saw Gujarat as a safer state than others, particularly for women, due to the state restrictions on alcohol. From my interlocutors' perspective, the successful image of Gujarat was often attributed to Modi.

As a globally well-connected city throughout India, my fieldwork base, Ahmedabad, is a model of Gujarati cultural identity rather than a sacred site. Contemporary anthropological work on Gujarat tends to be on Hindu-Muslim relations and Hindu nationalism (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012, Jaffrelot 2012), or rural regions of the state (Pocock 1973, Tilche & Simpson 2017), with a few studies on the rising middle class and megacity status of Ahmedabad (Mehta 2016)[27]. Though not a pilgrimage site per se, as a middle-class megacity with global transport links and a centre of religious activities, Ahmedabad is not only an entry point into the state but showcases the success of the Gujarat state model (Mehta 2016; 192).

[26] Many of my interlocutors were not so familiar with a chronological version of events, but rather envisioned the origins of Pushtimarg through a mythological mapping of events throughout the landscape of India (Feldhaus 2003).
[27] Gillion (1969), in the late sixties, suggested that the history of India had not focussed much on Gujarat's urban areas, in comparison with a substantial focus on Bengal and the then Hindustan (now northern Indian states). This focus is partly because British policy was fought out in Bengal and many of India's historians were from Bengal (Ibid).

Influential political figures (namely Mahatma Gandhi and Modi) coming from a successful Gujarat is a particular point of pride for many of my interlocutors. Gandhi, a leader of the nationalist movement against the British, chose Ahmedabad as his home in 1915. The city was a centre for Gujarati culture and language and promised financial support from industrialists, most of whom were *banias* (Gandhi was from the merchant class, too) (Spodek 2012; 751). Gandhi's decision thrust the city into a more political domain where "Ahmedabad became one of the essential hubs for news on India's freedom struggle" (Ibid; 753). From then on, after World War II and India's Independence in 1947, Ahmedabad's global business connections, particularly in textiles, increased (Ibid; 753).

Gujarat was relatively recently established in 1960 (Simpson 2010; 1) when the Bombay State was split into Gujarat and Maharastra based on language. It is now fair to say Ahmedabad is the cultural capital of Gujarat and it is the largest city in the state. The pre-planned city Gandhinagar is the actual capital, but Ahmedabad is an entry point into the state for international visitors, as there are direct flights to the city's Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport, while other Gujarati airports operate domestically. Ahmedabad is famed as a megacity promoting development but also encompasses publicly-promoted messages of neutrality and nostalgia that go beyond the state of Gujarat to the diaspora.

Yet, even with both Hindu and Muslim international connections, Ahmedabad came to be globally recognised and censured as a city associated with religious violence (Ibid; 760). In one of the most violent episodes since the Partition of India, a three-day anti-Muslim mass killing, where and over 2000 Muslims died (Jaffrelot 2012[28]). This riot began after a train returning from the pilgrimage site Ayodhya was burned on 27 February 2002 where 59 Hindu pilgrims were killed.

The city had and still has a reputation as a trade and textile export centre, not a sacred or holy city, yet the violent spectre of the 2002 pogrom perpetually sits in the background. This imagery affects Hindu-Muslim relations in the state, though 'softened' by time, as Ghassem-Fachandi notes (2012). Ghassem-Fachandi talks about the 2002 pogrom as part of a "cyclical pattern of violence with a recurrent rationalization" (2012; 2).

In December 2002, the Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), won the election, with Hindutva's leading proponent, Narendra Modi, securing his position as Prime Minister. Denial of violence, physical or otherwise, and the rationalisation of such, retrospectively, is not uncommon (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012; 9). Memory can be reconstructed when faced with traumatic events, even natural disasters, such as the Kutch earthquake in 2001, which partly helped Modi to power with his

[28] Jaffrelot, C., 2012. *Gujarat 2002: What Justice for the Victims?* https://www.epw.in/journal/2012/08/special-articles/gujarat-2002-what-justice-victims.html

political programme of efficient governance in the post-earthquake reconstruction (Simpson 2020; 787).

In political discourse, Modi began to deemphasise Hindutva and promote Gujarat, particularly Ahmedabad, as a business 'hub'; "He had gotten the message: domestic and international investors were put off by Ahmedabad's communal violence." (Spodek 2012; 761). Big trade fairs, the Sabarmati Riverfront Project, and Bollywood-supported tourism campaigns for the state were put in place, and "They encouraged people inside and outside the city to forget the violence of 2012, to disregard the segregation of communities to which it contributed, and to downplay the problems of the poor" (Ibid). These developmental changes in the city also elevated the status of the 'megacity' of Ahemdabad.

Due to better connections, Ahmedabad houses around five well-known Havelis though others are in the surrounding areas, and more are in construction. The construction of Havelis in the city can be put down to the availability of goods, labour and domestic and international connections. The state of Gujarat has around fifteen Havelis[29]. The oldest is about ninety years old in the old *pols* area, the Doshiwada Haveli. Twenty of the eighty-four *baithaks* (lit. seat, Pushtimarg-specific sacred sites) across India are in Gujarat[30], two within driving distance of Ahmedabad.

Urban diasporic Pushtimarg; Leicester and London

Leicester has two prominent Havelis, which I frequented. The city has a large South Asian population and was historically a site for resettlement for South Asian Commonwealth citizens post-independence in India, and Pakistan and as a refuge from Africanisation policies in Uganda, in East Africa, detailed later in this chapter. The two Havelis are attended daily by a small number of volunteer devotees. Apart from *utsavs* (festivals) and visiting guru events, they usually have a handful of people at *darshan* (sight of the divine). Although my initial fieldwork was in Leicester, many people came from London, primarily for events. So, I also made my way around the capital to visit the Havelis based there. I met several people at cafes, over lunch or coffee breaks, forging connections within the urban landscape of trains, tubes, and cars. At the time of my fieldwork, London had one shared-space Haveli with the bottom floor shared with another *sampradaya*. Another Haveli was in construction (with the possibility of more) and was a prime example of the reach and wealth of the UK Pushtimarg community. The connection to India lies in the religious narrative and imagination of

[29] I visited 6 Havelis in Gujarat, and 5 *baithaks* in the state (many more on *yatra)* though I am under the impression that there were far more Havelis under construction or recently constructed. While I was in the field, two which I visited were under construction outside of Ahmedabad. List of Havelis 2021 Jai Shree Krishna http://shrinathji.net/list-of-haveli/

[30] Shah, B. *Pushti Marg. Net*. http://www.pushti-marg.net/Baithak-details.html

Krishna, having lived in the sacred land of India. However, the global reach is because of people's movement, many of whom were Gujarati Indians, during and after the British Empire. Additionally, since the late 1990s, some gurus have begun to travel to the diaspora from America, Singapore, and parts of East and South Africa (where there is a relatively sizeable Gujarati-origin population).

The South Asian diaspora encompasses five nation-states and at least five world religions (Werbner 2010; 76-77), yet this thesis focuses on the majority of my interlocutors who were Gujarati Pushtimargis. "Wherever Hindus are, India will have a very deep meaning for them" (Vertovec 2000; 161, see Van der Veer 2002). Despite the etymology of 'diaspora' as rooted in the experience of Jews, often transnational and deterritorialised groups will refer to themselves as the diaspora. Vertovec points to three meanings of the term diaspora "*social form…as a type of consciousness…*[and] *as mode of cultural production*" (2000; 142). This thesis presents the idea of a type of consciousness through religiosity that roots the diaspora to India, though the other meanings often interconnect (and disconnect).

Much of the South Asian diaspora in Britain came from Gujarat and Punjab in the 1950s and 60s to fill gaps in industrial labour (Vertovec 2000; 87). At a similar time, there was a large-scale movement from Gujarat to parts of East Africa, during colonial rule. Indians were being brought over as engineers for railway systems or trade purposes more broadly (Dwyer 1994; 179). With increasing Africanization policies in Kenya in the 60s and, later on, a mass expulsion from Uganda in 1972 under the rule of Idi Amin, more East African Indians with British passports migrated to the UK. through the Commonwealth resettlement scheme. There are three points to mention here about this generation's diasporic experience; first, there is a shared history of migration experience from East African South Asians. Second, links to other 'homelands' through kinship, marriage, and nostalgia influence perceptions of a distinct culture from these homelands for many South Asians in my field. For example, a conceived notion of Indian sanskar, or culture, is a meaningful connection and reinforces Gujarati homeland ties (Levitt 2010; 42), including carework within close extended families (Ibid). Distinctions between Gujarati, East African, and Punjabi migration and differentiated categories within these groupings co-exist (Vertovec 2000; 89), particularly in Leicester. The diversity of Hindu-isms within the diaspora indicates a form of adaptive capacity of religiosity that weaves through migration trajectories. Finally, caste identities (and religious identities, though the focus here is on the Pushtimarg) can connect or disconnect communities in the diaspora. An example of this from my field is that people in India would instantly ask for my surname and qualify my caste status within casual interactions or introductions. In the U.K., caste was never mentioned in my fieldwork.

Though Vertovec (2000) suggests that caste identities (as opposed to the caste system) play an essential role in various aspects of life, the overarching *religious* language of *bhakti* (devotion) in the

Pushtimarg and other sects in Britain further complicates this matter. All *pushti* souls have always been part of Krishna, exemplified by the earlier story of the fallen necklace, as one entity "like sparks to a flame" (Saha 2004; 255). However, Pushtimarg laity in the past and present operate, to a degree, in a caste system. Bear's work on *jati* highlights the encompassment of class, race, nation and caste used in varying registers (2007, see Introduction). *Jati* dynamics were, in different registers, coded through neutral interaction (Pinto 2006; 82, see Govindarajan 2018; 138). There is a specific generational discourse on *jati* and migration status (i.e., first-generation, second or from East Africa, and so on) that further diversifies concepts of *jati* in Britain. Much of the younger (largely unmarried) British-born Pushtimarg generation I spoke to did not recognise or align with their isolated caste status. Rather than caste, they pointed to a lack of a conceptual framework that specified Pushtimarg traditions. Instead, they felt the pull of a 'universalised' global version of Hinduism in popular public discourse. For example, in Religious Education (RE) at school, students often learn about Hinduism as one 'major' global religion, "which is oversimplified, over-generalized, and riddled with factual errors" (Vertovec 2000; 103).

A universalised 'global' Hinduism that is furthered by (and often confused with) Hindu nationalism is briefly explored in the next section. The brevity belies a huge body of work on Hindu nationalist organisations abroad.

Politics and politics

The globalised world is the norm, particularly with the rise of technology, yet in terms of Gujarati Hindus, what seems to be most interesting for most academics is the Political (capital 'P') agenda of the migrant religious community. This capital 'P' refers to governance, institutions, voting, elections, and other related spheres of life. In terms of Politics, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) is a prime example of how the nationalist agenda adapts to the sensitivities of the global diaspora. The VHP is a Hindu nationalist movement with an anti-secular and anti-Muslim stance, resisting 'Westernization' and globalisation as "foreign threats to the basic Hindu values of the Indian nation" (Mukta 2000; 99). Their activities in India helped mobilise Hindus in the destruction of the Babri Masjid Mosque in 1992 (Rajagopal 2001). Yet, like Modi's perspectival shift from Hindutva to the economy, the VHP operate slightly differently in the diaspora, emphasising the family due to the fear of children being distant from their parents' Indian cultural heritage, thus adapting to become a "global religious movement" (Van de Veer 2002; 100). Diasporic-facing censorship is important within India, and the narrative shift influences the way Hindu-isms are understood in the UK. Mukta points to the VHP's strong influence in educational structures in the UK., which produces texts for schools, for instance, which universalise Hinduism, but also "[denies] the inequalities inherent in the structures of power within and between the various Hindu communities" (2000; f).

Global connectedness was consolidated with the establishment of a transnational identity for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) in the 1970s. Through this, Indian 'origin' became different from residency or citizenship; "one is of Indian origin if one has held an Indian passport, or if either of one's parents or grandparents was Indian. The wife of a person of Indian origin is held to be of Indian origin too" (Van de Veer 2002; 98). NRIs (Non-Resident Indians) hold political and financial interest in the Hindu national party, particularly the wealthy Hindu middle-class migrant (Van de Veer 2002; 98). The December and January retail season in big Indian cities, dubbed 'NRI season,' entails an influx of wealthy shoppers. This identity marker could indicate a sense of diasporic belonging for the community abroad, appealing to Indian heritage, culture, and identity, such as food and clothes. The benefits for the NRI community are threefold; 1) there is an economic incentive to trade and work with India; 2) money transfer and exchange become easier through opening banks; and 3) with no visa issues, NRIs can stay in India indefinitely (Ibid). The second two points benefit the Pushtimarg community greatly, with the process of *yatras* (pilgrimages) and moving money for donations and religious events made more straightforward. Travelling to India to maintain kinship and marriage networks is part of the story. Still, for the Pushtimarg devotees I worked with, there was the pull of being connected to the land where Krishna is from in Braj, Utter Pradesh.

A large majority of the Hindu Gujarati NRI population in the UK support Narendra Modi, the current leader of the BJP and Prime Minister, and some retain links with political parties in India (Dwyer 1994; 185). Many NRIs celebrated Modi's landslide victory in the 2019 elections with about 300 of 543 seats (BBC News 23 May 2019). There are multiple reasons for Modi's popularity. One is his Gujarati identity. According to my interlocutors, his political project aims to India respected, secure (and not corrupt) and a global economic leader. This is not to say that everyone champions him. His UK visits are greeted by both supporters filling out 50,000 seats at Wembley Stadium in 2018, and protesters. For instance, on April 18th, 2018, protestors waited in Parliament Square, highlighting the (mis)handling of a rape case of an eight-year-old girl from Jammu's Kathua and bringing up other atrocities being committed in India (Khan April 2018, The Wire).

Most of my Leicester interlocutors are Labour supporters, while the Londoners tended to be a mix between Conservatives and Labour. This is not the kind of Politics that affected their daily *religious* life, nor did it come up unless there was an election. However, we can still go back to Mukta's "familiar-familial space" (2000; 455) or the softened Hindu nationalism that comes with time that Ghassem-Fachandi writes about, which could explain the lack of diasporic political engagement with the more hostile side of Hindu nationalism. For religious movements, sectarian leaders are now consistently present in the everyday religious lives of devotees through physical presence and technology in WhatsApp groups, Facebook, and YouTube videos of their sermons. Devotees more frequently go to India for pilgrimages, scattering ashes and other such ritual acts as well as

maintaining kinship ties with their Gujarati families. While these movements potentially legitimize an aggressive Hindutva agenda by bringing it abroad with a multicultural, universalised and altogether 'softer' version of the movement through familial discourse, I question whether they still have an explicit or active pull for all Pushtimarg worshippers. Involvement with Indian Politics, in my research, was limited to the elevated image of India from the diaspora. However, some pervasive Hindutva ideas, such as a perceived Muslim-Hindu divide, continue to exist.

The diaspora syncretises broader Hindu practice with the Pushtimarg-specific practice, visiting other temples or religious institutions with a *chalse* attitude (Gheewala Lohiya; forthcoming), meaning 'it will do' in Gujarati. Because there is an emphasis on home worship and not one leader, there is much scope for individualised relational *seva* within the movement. *Chalse* becomes a means of performing religiosity within the surrounding environment. Yet, in *seva*, this attitude contrasts with the perceived ritual rigidity of *seva*. *Chalse* embodies a fluid and affective adaptive capacity of caregiving for a child, reflecting Krishna's character as a naughty but loveable child (Ibid).

A constant adaptive capacity to move between temple spaces and communities with the background of a universalised understanding of 'Hinduism' creates a bricolage of religiosity in the diaspora. For orthodox Pushtimarg theology, the idea of picking and choosing does not work, as the sect calls for complete devotion to baby Krishna through the teachings of the Vallabhacharya divine lineage. Yet, community belonging may happen in other sectarian spaces, practices, and celebrations for the NRI population. The Pushtimarg lineage did not travel out of India much compared to other North Indian Krishnaite movements such as the Hare Krishnas or Swaminarayans. There is a perceived distance away from the Pushtimarg 'official' religious life felt by the diaspora, which can leave devotees feeling the 'lack of' (or perhaps a freedom from) that kind of spiritual leadership.

In a relatively new development, female Pushtimarg gurus are slowly garnering support, particularly in the diaspora. Indirabetiji, a female guru, chose not to marry to be a guru and was supported by her family. She established one of the largest Havelis in the USA (Richardson 2014). Diaspora engagement with the Pushtimarg seemed to favour some form of female empowerment, or at least leadership, within the 'traditional' male lineage. Rather than women devotees only being able to discuss religiosity with the wives of gurus, female leadership and representation in the movement became a real possibility even for the younger generations of *betijis* (unmarried female children of Vallabhkhul). Many female devotees, particularly the younger generations, seemed geared to questioning certain traditional patriarchal rules within the movement. In some ways, the diaspora potentially has a 'reverse adaptive trend' from devotees to India's divine lineage and spiritual authorities. The diaspora invests through religious events, sponsorship of sacred places through donations (*manoraths*), guru lineages (donations as *bhet*), and other non-religious activities.

Important for the everyday lives of religiously motivated devotees are the flows of syncretism and anti-syncretism that move between the globally connected Pushtimarg community. A discussion of syncretism and anti-syncretism steers away from the Hindu nationalist discourse on universal bhakti traditions being static and 'unchanged' (therefore authentic) against the Mughals (or Muslims in many cases) or British colonials.

Syncretism and anti-syncretism

Pushtimargis in the UK and in India that I spoke delicately to about historical syncretism, often responded with earnest denial or outright anger. Often framed as nostalgia for the Golden Past or India as a motherland (usually from the diaspora) or anti-Muslim and anti-colonial (often framed as Hindu nationalist), many Pushtimargis either gloss over or outright deny these syncretic elements of the movement. They would explain that Hindus would have to hide their religiosity from 'Muslims' and pretend to have given it up (see Gow 2006 on 'rice' Christians') to survive. At the same time, there were many narratives of Akbar and other Muslim leaders offering patronage and respect to Vittalnath (Vallabhacharya's second son). Oral hagiographical accounts suggest that these Muslim leaders worshipped Krishna too. Hawley challenges this by showing *bhakti* as influenced by the movement of people, interchanges between the sexes, and between Muslims and Hindus (2015; 93-98). Though he does not use the term syncretic, this is not a particular avoidance because of its conflictual usage in reference to Christianity (personal communication). The syncretic is also personified in the famous *bhakti* poets such as Kabir. Even in the political arena, Nehru linked Hinduism, the Buddhist emperor Ashoka and Mughal emperor Akbar as part of the Indian way of life (Van de Veer 1994; 189).

As Van de Veer argues, syncretism is not a meta-narrative that should cloud internal debates (1992). In the Pushtimarg, there is a clear influence of syncretism. For example, patronage can be represented in the patterns or materials of *shringar* (adornments) or the movement's co-existence with Sufi mysticism in the Mughal empire. In the Pushtimarg, there are subtleties of "multivocality" (Van de Veer 1992; 548), such as debates on performing public *seva*. In line with Van de Veer (1994; 196), syncretism's use is in the idea of a fluid social life (as opposed to static notions of 'tradition') and as a contextual, analytical framework while taking note of multivocality within movements, much in the same was as ideas on modernity. There is also intentional anti-syncretism at play. This comes in the form of the outright denial I experienced from interlocutors and through the (re) composition of narratives from sectarian historians (Hawley 2015; 179). Yet, *seva* is adaptive to the surrounding environment in the *chalse* attitude that appears in individual *seva*, and it began to strike me as syncretic in itself as an act of worship.

There is merit in understanding syncretism and anti-syncretism as processes and discourse for religious and ritual life (Shaw and Steward 1994) despite scepticism over syncretism. Similar to the criticism of using 'prayer' discussed in the Introduction, this scepticism is partly because of the history of the word and its basis in Christian conversion. Syncretism leads to accusations of inauthenticity (Ibid), away from the 'original,' and to problematic assumptions of secreting away traditional beliefs under official Religion (Robbins 2011 on 'crypto' religion). The acceptance of syncretism is not a denial of the contradictions, conflicts, power dynamics of domination, and unintentional processes that come up when religious worlds meet (Shaw and Stewart 1994; 19) but an acknowledgement that experiences are linked to place and personhood.

Van de Veer points out that syncretism has been about a politics of difference (1994; 185), highlighting the similarities in the ideas behind multiculturalism. Both terms have positivity in unity and negativity in the concept of "loss and contamination" (Ibid; 187), and I would add the debate on (in)authenticity. Part of the discourse on multiculturalism in India relies on the idea of pluralist tolerance (Ibid; 189), which has had conflicting results (e.g., the riots between Hindus and Muslims over the Babri Masjid Mosque in Ayodhya see Van de Veer 1988, Rajagopal 2001, Ghassem-Fachandi 2012). Sufi mysticism through saint worship offers yet another example of co-participation, in diverse ways, in the same space (Van de Veer 1994; 194). This sense of the syncretic is less about conversion or the Muslim and Hindu political identities (Ibid; 195) and more about worship. India participates in global discourses of modernity, secularism, and syncretism as a country and population, and the Pushtimarg is no exception.

Rootedness

> Vaishnavas are the roots of a tree. The leaves shake and fall because they can only hold on by a tiny stalk. But the roots remain steady because the roots of this tree are Krishna.
> [Satsang in a Haveli in Ahmedabad December 2016. Transcribed by me]

Diasporic understanding of identity is entangled with notions of land, particularly national soil, trees, and roots, as in the imagery above (see Malkki 1992, Basu 2007). The Pushtimarg diaspora is rooted in India in two main ways, first and foremost through Krishna and religious belonging and second by identity and the 'elsewhere' (Basu 2007). Vaishnavas in the above metaphor are rooted in Krishna through their love for him. This is what holds them steady instead of a flimsy leaf wavering in a bit of wind. However, apart from attachment to Krishna, this imagery strikes a chord with concepts of kinship and belonging in other ways. It often seems as though the language of belonging is steeped in memory or nostalgia, implying a static place. Yet, places (trees, soil, and stones, among other

environmental features) are animated and changed by people, cultures, human and nonhuman interactions, and ecological shifts.

For the Pushtimarg diaspora I worked with, alongside other narratives, religiosity acts as a binding force of sorts for nostalgic imaginaries for India, as the place where Krishna grew up, a place of family and kin, or a future place of discovering one's identity. As Feldhaus suggests, people care or do not care about places, like or dislike places, and so the affective cannot be separated from a sense of place (2003; 7). Anthropologists have moved beyond the idea of a bounded, static, and 'untouched' field site to focus on the experiences of how people live in, relate to, and experience places. Place is integrated with the experience of the self and "is shaped at every turn by the personal and social biography of the one who sustains it" (Ibid, see Feldhaus 2003). Place and personhood are shaped by narratives formed by religiosity, national perspective, migratory experience, a religious movement's hagiographical account, and personal histories.

The diaspora's identity can be shaped by the 'other landscape' or the "elsewhere" (Basu 2007; viii). This naturalisation of territory and identity is also reflected in kinship terms which are used to describe land, such as Motherland in India, and homeland, or Fatherland in other countries (Malkki 1992; 28). Yet, the perceived movement and fragmentation of the present contrasts with a "nostalgia for the (imagined) stability and coherence of past times and places" (Basu 2007; 7). People's nostalgic rose-tinted glasses allow for imagining places and past times as sedentary. Static and sedentary thinking contrasts with people's constant movement and the fluctuation of their 'roots. For example, a migration story can be perceived as linear. Once Ugandan South Asians were forcibly moved from their 'homeland', they made a new 'home.' Rather, this sidelines the multiple experiences of place and diverse understandings of 'home.' This has a potential effect on the essentialising national discourses of segmentation of identity and land (Malkki 1992; 31). This is comparable to Hindu nationalism abroad, where identity and land have been connected to Hindutva discourse. This points to the concept of the 'timelessness' and 'authenticity' debates on land and religiosity.

Debates on a "sense of place" (Basso 1996) are subjective and often relate to identity or identification. Even seemingly empty places have a sense of subjective place. These 'empty spaces' to one person can be transformed into processes of place-making that can be intentional or organic, and, at times, both. In the Hindu Indian landscape, potentially empty spaces, such as a rock, tree, or river point, can be essential sites marked by material signs of worship. Red powder, wilting flower garlands, and other offerings mark the space as significant for someone. For Weszkalnys (2010), Alexanderplatz in Berlin is a place envisioned differently by everyone who arrives there. Embedded in discourses on West and East Germany's identity, its historical significance and intentional transformation during unification, and the unplanned place-making it encompasses, the city reflects not only a design put forward by planners but is influenced by the subjectivities of people (Ibid; 22). From the different ways of arrival

(car, safe bike path, hasty tram, or busy underground) and as a space of arrival (Ibid; 8) to the seasonal and time differences in experiencing place, Alexanderplatz is assembled (Ibid; 7) and in a constant state of becoming. “Alexanderplatz is a space of watching and gazing, a well-known empty space and simultaneously a feast for the senses, embodied, smelly and noisy” (Ibid; 4). It is not just the visible nor the sensory but the affective too that ‘fill’ a space. Memory and nostalgia also mark the land for the diaspora.

An example of the moving recreation or imagining of a homeland is the portability of Braj as a sacred landscape. In Havelis worldwide, “Life size images of *gopis*, cattle, and depictions of rural, agrarian life frame the darshan. Krishna is awakened, fed, and tends his cattle not in Mumbai, London, or rural Pennsylvania but in a timeless environment, skilfully recreated in each haveli. Within the temple, Braj emerges as a spiritual realm that is not dependent on geography, but instead on a state of awareness that relies on a metaphor of movement in which the god moves through time and space” (Richardson 2014; 28). However, some parts of the sacred landscape are not portable, such as Mount Govardhan in Braj. Temple-based Havelis frame performing *seva* and allowing *darshan* around Krishna’s life based on narratives around his life in Braj. The worship environment is created to motivate devotees ' perspectives, including Krishna playing with his cowherder friends, seducing gopis (milkmaids), and being a cheeky baby stealing butter from his mother. The environment is malleable through the use of painted scenes, images, and other sensory means. Rather than being geographically static or bound, the replication is a means of cultivating a worshipful state of awareness of Krishna’s home. In Chapter 6, we will explore temple architecture and the significance of a Haveli as a home. For now, devotees’ perspective is influenced by the Haveli. Still, it is also shaped by their own lifecourse experiences, particularly noticeable in a home-haveli which is ‘unregulated’ by spiritual authority or public censorship.

Finding home virtually

Hinduism online can be understood as a way for the diaspora to “find home” (Basu 2007; 97) through genealogical stories, tourism directed at searching for roots, and (religious) community identity. Apart from another place to generate generic sacred images, in a ‘desktop deity culture’ (Mallapragada 2010) or a space that repurposes other forms of media to virtual religious experience (see Apolito 2005). This section briefly aims to show how the online world connects (acknowledging disconnection) experience of religiosity online that engages devotees in multiple registers. In this section, understanding connection through the diasporic identity is crucial. I first look at technology more generally before an exploration into how devotees engage with the virtual, firstly as part of religious experience, and secondly as a potential connection to a ‘homeland’ identity.

Rather than religiosity replicated online, a nuanced approach that rejects a binary between online/offline (de Kruif et al. 2016 [2014]) sees religiosity adapted to new virtual places as another form of human mobility. Devotees would say that seva cannot really be performed online, and *darshan* too has received conflictual responses as photographs are not always permitted in public or domestic spaces (see Richardson & Gheewala Lohiya; forthcoming). However, if the world is Krishna's creation, the religious environment in the virtual space can be seen as yet another extension of his play (*lila*).

Narayan, who we will meet again, is a 20something male university student. He learned about the Pushtimarg through YouTube, following a secondary school project on family histories. He watched videos and engaged online with a wide range of *goswamis*, eventually meeting one and taking his initiation to begin *seva* at home. His family were non-practicing Pushtimargis, yet, rather than hereditary learning, as was common, the digital world opened up his family history to him on his own terms. He searched for what he wanted to know, which is especially important in terms of learning to do *seva* without authority or enforced regulations as we will see in the next chapter.

Pushtimarg gurus did not travel overseas until the 1990s, much later than other Vaishnava sampradayas like the Hare Krishna and Swaminarayans. Reasons included adherence to orthodox purity rules for gurus, and the persevering narrative of protection and persecution, with some guru-houses still not venturing abroad. Technological adaption is still in the making though some virtual spaces seem to model on other *sampradaya* examples. The Pushtimarg online space, better funded and managed now than at the start of my fieldwork, offers even more particularities as the hundreds of guru-houses engage with the virtual differently. Indeed, devotee websites or peer-to-peer advice forums are purposely apart from a central authority figure or managed by gurus, despite differences in devotee demographics online or offline (Bachrach 2014). Online forums not only provide connections and relationships for devotees but affect behaviours, from simple seva advice to engaging in inter-sectarian conflict or a 'conversion' into the movement. Through this, online religion becomes part of lived religion (Helland 2005) rather than the virtual being secular, informational, separate or mundane from the physical or interactive.

The diasporic engagement in the Pushtimarg is extremely active, particularly on WhatsApp but increasingly on social media, too (see Scheifinger 2014). Some gurus have personal profiles, and wives and children in the lineage garner their own followings, with people commenting worldwide. A brief scroll on one guru's Instagram page shows family life, festival celebrations and images of places associated with the Pushtimarg. In contrast to the traditionally inaccessible guru, these social media savvy *goswamis* allow devotees a glimpse into the lives of gurus (see Bachrach forthcoming on Instagram gurus), making them more relatable than transcendent. This resonates with Skop's 'thirdspace' of the Internet (2014) between a 'here' and 'there' in a migrant's experience. This is an

alternative identity-creating space that facilitates ties to homelands but allows for a multivocal and multilocal sense of place, apart from lived-in contexts (2014; 82), including a religious sense of place. This is not without its resistance, as devotees in the Pushtimarg do not see *seva* performed online as similar to the synaesthetic experience of *seva* in person. Whether a place to construct or search for personal and collective identity, the virtual is undoubtedly a shifting place.

As Pushtimarg online spaces are somewhat in progress, it is essential to note that some universalisations of what it means to be Hindu or Pushtimarg or India interweave with the virtual religious experience. Technology is not a neutral vessel and is socially constructed. It is also a material 'thing' that can hold power, and websites can be built based on power structures too. Lal argues that Hinduism reflects the playfulness of the Internet with thousands of movements and divine beings, with the Internet's lack of central authority, forms of freedom of speech and search, and "abhorrence of censorship" (2014; 125). While this can potentially allow for multiplicity, as Skop asserts, there are political and national power dynamics on the web and articulations of world religion status. As Lal (2014) points out, the rise of a scientific (echoing the rational religion debate from the Introduction), militant and globalised Hindu nationalist coincides with Hinduism as a world religion in the online space.

Technology can also be scriptive, which can transform personhood and actions (Kivland 2018). Scriptive technology focuses on the material and the use of technology, but also the narratives surrounding the power of technological artefacts. Kivland uses the example of guns which narrate a person's subsequent violent actions as the gun has power over the person. The scriptive potential of the virtual world takes on a more holistic and perhaps vague form, as there are makers and skills involved in technology (Ingold 2000), contextual influences, including power structures, materiality of the artefacts used (i.e., laptop, computer, keyboards), and individual intentional use of the online space.

The ways the Pushtimarg community used the online world changed dramatically over the course of the 2019 Covid pandemic, with an increase in the use of video streaming services, WhatsApp groups, which were already in high usage (some days I woke up to over 300 messages on social media groups), and greater social media presence from guru families on Instagram. This affects both how religious experience is understood, the personal connection to the guru is presented (Scheifinger 2014), and how to navigate a virtual community, particularly exemplified in concepts of place and journeys (Richardson & Gheewala Lohiya; forthcoming). Cheaper internet access, and improved accessibility of smartphones allow for rapid dissemination of messages, including images. These can be affective, ideological, and political. This extends to religious images that can reproduce sites of conflict and offence (Froystad 2019) or concretise right-wing nationalism in the diaspora.

Places in movement

The idea of a place as a site of assembled subjectivities resonates with how devotees I met would talk about India and sites within India associated with the Pushtimarg. Devotees have different levels of attachment to India, and the Indian diaspora is not a single narrative of a journey but rather a multitude of trajectories to the places they are in now. Returning to Basu's work on the Scottish Highlands, he notes that home is situated in movement and stasis (Basu 2007; 8). Not only are the diasporic Scots "more 'Scottish' than the homeland Scots" (2007; 84), similar could be said of the Indian diaspora, but travelling 'back' has different meanings than homelanders. The idea of a return, or a 'homecoming', is a journey of "discovery and part of this process is the acquisition of an increasingly more authentic local knowledge" (Ibid; 93). Where people are now is not a permanent, static, or fixed 'place' as we've said, but is a multilocal and multivocal (Rodman 1992) continuous interchange of peoples. A "sense of place may gather unto itself a potent religious force, especially if one considers the root of the word in religare, which is "to bind or fasten fast" (Basso 1996; 85), where "selfhood and placehood are completely intertwined" (Ibid; 86). This personhood and selfhood are ways of discovering identity. This discovery involves different understandings of the environment through kinship, genealogical, and naturalisation ties (Malkki 1992, Basso 1996), which acts on the land through subjectivities and planning (Weszkalnys 2010) and influences perceptions of land and relationality. From India to the world, back and forth from India, the Pushtimarg *sampradaya* are in constant movement, journeying physically, internally, and through imaginaries of place, specifically India as a physical manifestation of Krishna's playground.

The social politics of distinction that threads through the Pushtimargi narrative in worship hinges on the difference between *puja* and *seva*, which we turn to next.

Chapter 2: "We do *seva* not *puja*"

I wake up in semi-darkness, with a streetlamp shining a tiny light directly into the room. Checking my flashing phone, I see it is 5:30 am. The day in Ahmedabad has begun. There are hushed sounds, water running into plastic buckets for bathing and sarees being swept on. While I am struggling to wake up fully, Aunty and Uncle have already washed, gotten ready, and have begun cleaning the kitchen.

I get ready, wearing a mint green saree that had been newly washed. As Aunty busies herself in the kitchen, Uncle goes out to the flower market to get fresh flowers on his scooter. She has three or four pans on the go, on a gas cooker as *kirtans* (religious songs) play on her old Nokia phone. Dishes are scattered all around; the only obviously organised ones are for Lalan.

As she preps his morning milk, she asks me to watch that it doesn't overboil while putting a CD on in Lalan's room. We chat softly and intermittently while I stand in the washing up gallery, watching the sun rise. People are just heading to work or school while cows stand around piles of rubbish eating leftovers.

"I won't let you just sit; you can also do work!" she laughs, handing me a small cabbage to cut up. She then tells me I can peel off the skin of just boiled potatoes. After wiping it, I sit on the swing in the living room, swaying as I chop and peel.

Uncle reappears in a *dhoti* after returning from the market with fresh flowers and new vegetables, while Aunty mops the floor with a wet cloth. Not much is spoken between them as the everyday routine continues. Gestures, eyes rolling, knowing smiles are all that passes between them as the early preparation goes on.

When Uncle goes into Lalan's room, he rings a tiny bell to announce to Lalan that Uncle is coming in. Lalan hasn't been woken up yet. He prepares Lalan's seat with a change of cloth, which is white with a red satin border. At this point, Uncle is constantly calling out to Aunty, asking where different things are, and she keeps popping in, saying, "Look, there it is!", "It's always there". She gleefully looks at me as she walks in and out, rolling her eyes at all his questions.

Aunty rings the bell again. She brings a steel plate with milk and dried fruit for Lalan's breakfast. She adjusts the seat setting for Lalan, carefully going over each step that Uncle has prepared, tweaking here and there. Uncle gently brings out Lalan's bed, covered with a pink sheet with yellow and green mango designs on it.

> Aunty places her hand on Lalan, who is under the sheet and rests it there gently for a moment. She takes off the top sheet. Lalan sleeps to one side, wearing a long nightcap and gown. She gently lifts Lalan and places him on the throne. He is small, smaller than her palm, making changing his night suit look tricky. This is the first *darshan* we get of Lalan of the day at 8:15 am.

-x-

The vignette above is Aunty and Uncle's home *seva,* which differs from the formal Haveli setting where the guru families and *mukhiyas* (priests) do almost everything in the *seva* process. Home is an unmediated, intimate space that moves away from the Pushtimarg as a rigid orthodox movement (which in worship equates to rule-bound *puja*, perhaps?) to explore the practices of *seva* through the relational mode of worship.

Seva has been described as a form of 'service'. However, my interlocutors did not feel that this translation suited what they were doing as daily worship. One devotee suggested it was "clinical", and another that "[service] was without feeling". As mentioned in the Introduction, the emphasis on a distinction between *seva* and *puja* is specific to the Pushtimarg movement, placing *puja* as part of the *maryada marg* (path of rules). However, this distinction in academic exploration offers us an example of a transnational movement maintaining a particular form of difference yet placing itself in relation to broader understandings of a universal concept of Hinduism.

This chapter explores what counts as *seva* for my interlocutors. Firstly, we look at how devotees have incorporated liturgy or religious texts. Devotees relied on hagiographical literature, peer advice, and personal caregiving contexts to guide daily *seva,* allowing for *seva* based on a personal emotional connection. This is distinct from the rule-bound nature of Vedic orthodoxy, though there are devotees who choose to follow a stricter form of *seva*. We then look at the distinction devotees make between *puja* and *seva,* both forms of recognisable Hindu devotion. *Puja* is seen as a mechanical and transactional part of ritually prescribed behaviour for my interlocutors. *Seva* is 'something else', based on spontaneous, loving devotion. As we will see below, a distinction is made by other North Indian *bhakti* movements, too, yet there are nuanced interpretations of what *seva* and *puja* mean for them, while the Pushtimarg actively put them on opposite ends of the worship spectrum. While much of *seva* has prescribed behaviour associated with its performance, for my interlocutors, many felt that apart from ritual bathing and hygiene rules, *seva* guidelines were suggestions to give structure to start *seva* and build an emotional connection.

The following sections could be loosely read as a 'how to' *seva,* predominantly from the perspective of the domestic sphere. We begin with the initiation that cements membership in the Pushtimarg. Second, we see how an emotional connection is built on worship's devotional mood (bhava). *Seva*

without *bhava* is not true *seva.* Third, we explore of the three tenets of *seva:* singing, feeding, and adorning.

The Liturgical foundations of *seva*

Despite the complex philosophical underpinnings of the *sampradaya*, many of my interlocutors were, by their admission, not well-versed in liturgical texts and relied on the Vallabhkhul (divine lineage of gurus) for their interpretations. Instead, the devotees I spoke to would discuss the *Vartas,* hagiographies of particular devotees. There are two main volumes: the *Chaurasi Vaishnavon ki Varta* and the *Dosau Bhavan Vaishnavon ki Varta*. The former is the hagiography of the first 84 Pushtimarg devotees who followed Vallabhacharya. The latter is the hagiography of the 252 followers of his son, Vittalnathji. *Seva* itself has no ritual manuals attributed to its founders (Saha 2004; 6). There is no real 'formal' work outlined to teach people how to do *seva.* Much of today's practices come from late nineteenth-century manuals (Ibid), interpreted by gurus and devotees. For example, one text, the *Bade Shikshapatra* (The Great Epistles) was written by Hariray (1591-1716) and his brother Gopeshvar (Arney 2007;506), direct descendants of Vallabhacharya.

Vallabhacharya's philosophy is Shuddhadvaita or Pure Non-Dualism. Nondualism centres on one spiritual entity that everything and everyone is a part of. Dualism separates consciousness and matter, or the universe and the spiritual. As part of his philosophy, Vallabhacharya rejected the theory of the world as *maya* (illusion) but understood all the world as part of Krishna's wishes and creation (*lila*). *Maya* as illusion implies the distinction between matter and spiritual. Rather, in Pushtimarg theology, humans are part of Krishna, but they do not realise it. Once a devotee comes to this realisation, the duality between human and spirit does not exist. The soul (*jiva*) does not have the same potency as the divine but is a small part of it. Souls are 'like sparks to a flame' (see Bennett 1993 and Richardson 2014), where Krishna is the flame. It seems as though the sparks participate in and share the flame's dance in some sense, made of similar materials but not quite the same. Perhaps, this metaphor represents the participatory nature of seva as revelling in Krishna's divine play.

Ascetics such as sadhus and other spiritual gurus are often connected to householders through society in shifting moments of relations (Narayan 1995 [1989]; 234). The Pushtimarg, as a householder sect, does not renounce the material world but lives within it. However, devotees surrender the material, their bodies and minds to Krishna in devotion. According to the Pushtimarg religious lifecourse, the householder will eventually reach a stage of renouncing the world, but rather than a *nirguna* (formless) renunciation, devotees enter a state of absorption with Krishna's divine play (see Chapter 3).

Vallabhacharya was a "prolific writer" (Richardson 2014; 23) but most helpful in understanding *seva* is his 16-volume discourse, the *Shodash grantha*[31]. The highest form of *seva* is *manasi seva*, of the mind, which is "constant remembrance" (translation Kinkari 2016; 60) of Krishna *seva. Manasi seva* is considered the most intense form of worship experience (Figure 1 in Appendix). Devotees who engage in *manasi seva* still have a routine of waking up, feeding, bathing and so on, but the real Lalan interacts directly and is manifest in front of the devotee. In this *seva*, "the innermost heart is threaded into the Lord. In order to attain this state, it is necessary to first perform Service with the body and wealth" (Translation Kinkari 2016; 60).

Seva of the body refers to *tanuja seva* (using the body and physicality) and wealth to *vittaja seva* (financial or material). *Tanuja* and *vittaja* go together and are described as straightforward. Essentially, people do physical *seva*, using their wealth to provide for their Lalan. However, there are debates surrounding *vittaja*, wealth and authenticity, exemplified in the Nathdwara Haveli renovation debate in Chapter 6. Those who support wealth *seva* argue that this is a collective and voluntary *seva* that complements domestic seva (Ibid; 178). One of the 'dangers' of the body and wealth seva is an easy slippage into formulaic behaviour (Bachrach 2014; 173), particularly for people with a transactional approach to seva.

In the *Shodash grantha*, Vallabhacharya outlines the three different souls. First, the *pravaha*, or worldly souls, emerge from the divine's mind and are materialistic (Kinkari 2016; 125) and are under the influence of *maya*, the illusion created by Krishna (Ibid; 133). Then come the *maryada* souls, rule-bound souls who follow the Vedas and scriptures. They come from the divine's voice (Ibid). While not 'ungodly' like the *pravaha* souls, they are set within the limits of rules. The highest souls are the *pushti*, grace-filled souls who come from the divine's body (Ibid)[32], who follow the Pushtimarg. As we know, *pushti* souls are a part (ansh) of Krishna that have been separated from Krishna. For *pushti* souls, the reward (*phul*) of *seva* is more *seva*.

Pushti also means grace (Pushtimarg translates to the Path of Grace), highlighting its centrality to the framework of *seva*. However, while people refer to themselves as *pushti* souls (graced souls), more commonly, *krupa* refers to being given grace.

> Pushti souls are a part (*ansh*) of Krishna that has been separated from Krishna. The spiritual story goes that Krishna and his consort/soulmate Swaminiji (also known as Radha) were in *lila* (divine play) when Radha, in a fit of annoyance, pulled at Krishna's pearl necklace.

[31] Also see Shah, B. e-Haveli of Shrinathji http://www.pushti-marg.net/16-granth-intro.htm

[32] However, there are pure Pushti souls and mixed Pushti souls. In the mixed category we have Pushti, Pushti and maryada, and Pushti and *pravaha*. The *maryada* and the *pravaha* also have three types within them. In total there are nine categories of souls (Kinkari 2016; 138). Categories of souls were created in *lila* so that rewards could be appropriately distributed (Ibid; 139) however, in my research, rewards were not discussed often unless the reward was *seva*.

> These pearls fell to the Earth, scattered, and are *pushti* souls, waiting to re-join Krishna in his divine play. Vallabh was sent to Earth to bring these souls back to Krishna.

In translating the Path of Grace, *pushti* is not necessarily a direct translation, as it also means nourishment (Bachrach 2014; 164) or prosperity (wisdomlib 2021[33]). More often, *krupa* was used to frame the gift of grace in the Pushtimarg, while *pushti* was an identity marker of community membership. Though anthropologically under-theorised (Pitt-Rivers 2011, McIvor & Edwards 2021 ASA panel), the etymological meaning of grace is gratitude in Abrahamic theology (Pitt-Rivers 2011; 424). "The only general rule that can be cited is that grace is always something extra, over and above "what counts," what is obligatory or predictable; it belongs on the register of the extraordinary (hence its association with the sacred)." (Ibid; 425). *Seva* is akin to Pitt-River's "reciprocity of the heart" (2011; 427), which is opposed to the presumed principle of law i.e. *puja* (Ibid; 428)[34].

Bachrach's close reading of the *vartas* while engaging with them ethnographically through *satsangs*, discussions with *goswamis* and devotees is a welcome bridge between sectarian literature and the everyday lives of the Pushtimarg (2014). During one *varta satsang* I attended in London, people started discussing purity in relation to Lalan through how they did their *seva.* Rather than focus on the theology behind the act of *seva*, more common was the everyday religiosity of devotees, traversing the boundary of mundane and sacred. One male devotee showered in the mornings and then immediately did *seva*. A female devotee sitting near me cooked everyone breakfast first, had a cup of tea with no food and then showered for her *seva*. My examples show, as Bachrach states, that the *vartas* being discussed through *satsang* offer devotees the chance to become hagiographers in their own right (2018) by weaving the stories into their everyday lives.

The Pushtimarg is a living oral and conversational tradition that has a "negotiable grammar, rather than a fixed grammar, of tradition" (Bachrach 2014; 7). Devotees often use the English term 'biography' to describe these volumes as the stories centre on *bhaktas* (one who practices bhakti) who could see and talk to the avatar of Shri Nathji (Krishna) in *seva*[35]. Readers become and imagine being part of the hagiographical works they are reading (Bachrach 2014). Similarly, devotees see hagiography as guidance on everyday devotee behaviour, raising debates on various topics from gender to temple management and searching for individualised seva of Krishna. Rather than

[33] Pushti, Wisdom Library Glossary (2022) https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/pushti

[34] I appreciate the idea of a will of man and a will of God, which could relate to the perspectival shift from earthly to otherworldly. However, the human will does not 'work with' the will of God, which is associated with power and hierarchy (Ibid; 445), but rather, the *pushti* soul will surrender to the will of Krishna with both transcendent awe and immanent joy.

[35] The use of biography is interesting as it relates to a person's life story, often presumed to be historical, while hagiography implies theology (often lives of saints). These disciples are everyday and relatable humans and form active parts of contemporary religious life through examples either to inspire or at times to justify one's *bhava* or actions.

exemplars such as saints or disciples of high esteem, these biography-hagiographies highlight the everyday nature of devotion (Bachrach 2014; 70). These texts form the basis of many discussions and, importantly, interpretations of how devotees live their religious lives and develop their relationship with Krishna through *satsangs.* These *satsangs* can be as casual as two Vaishnava friends discussing something over a cup of tea or larger and more formally organised gatherings, sometimes led by a guru or a figure(s) of authority (e.g., people who are knowledgeable on the Pushtimarg). The books are not separate canonical objects of worship but living interpretations of stories repeatedly told, construed in unique ways.

Pushtimarg devotees put *seva* and *puja* at different ends of the worship spectrum, relating, respectively, to the Path of Grace (Pushtimarg) and the Path of rules (*maryada marg*). As emphasised throughout this thesis, the Pushtimarg see *seva* as a particular form of worship, while *puja* is a standard form of worship that is pan-Hindu, despite similarities. What was emphasised was this idea that seva was 'set apart' from puja because of the rules and prescriptions that puja implies and the idea of puja as transactional. Puja is important to outline as it seems to be the starting point for most scholarly work on Hindu religious life. However, this overview cannot do justice to the vast amount of work on puja that exists. Broader Hindu-isms often do both *seva* and *puja* and in the next section we will see the ways different *sampradayas* understand the difference. We can then discuss what *seva* is for my interlocutors, how it is practised, and how devotees perceive their worship.

Puja

> "*Puja* is bound by formal rules and regulations whereas *seva* is the spontaneous outflowing of love for Krishna which transcends all concern for proper ceremony. *Puja* makes use of conventional and mechanical formulae (*mantras)* which are normally repeated without understanding of their true meaning: *seva* dispenses with such empty forms. In *puja*, means and ends are not distinguished, it is often performed with the intention of gaining divine favours, *seva* is both a means and an end, the blissful experience of loving Krishna selflessly is its own reward. *Puja* often requires the presence of priestly intermediaries (*pujaris)* who are specialists in ritual techniques. All devotees are qualified to participate in *seva"* (Bennett 1993; 76).

The specific steps of *pujas* are very similar to *seva,* and the motivations behind the steps are to show devotion, respect, and love towards a deity. Scholars have described the purpose or meaning of this form of worship as hospitality towards the divine (Ibid, Eck 1998 (1981)) or acknowledgement of hierarchy (Dirks 2002) in terms of servitude and an acknowledgement of power structure.

Fuller summarises the sixteen main features of a *puja* ritual as follows.

> "First, the deity is invoked (or invited to enter the image) and then installed there (nos. 1-2). Second, water for washing is offered (nos. 3-5). Third - the heart of the ritual - the image is bathed, dressed, adorned, shown incense and a lamp, and offered food (nos. 6-13). Fourth, after a series of gestures of respect, the deity is bidden farewell (nos. 14-16)" (Fuller 2004 (1992); 67).

The similarities to Aunty's *seva* are evident. However, *puja* has a formality and structure as worship unlike Aunty's *seva*; her account of how she learnt *seva* was built loosely on guidelines and then developed relationally. Rather than these sixteen *upcaras* (the above-ordered sequence of ritual) (see Fuller 2004 (1992); 67), the three tenets of Pushtimarg *seva* are highlighted as *rag* (music), *bhog* (food) and *shringar* (adornments), which have guidelines on seasons and festivals but often are adapted based on context. *Puja* has a measure of flexibility. As Fuller notes, "In Hinduism, ritual abbreviation and simplification are ubiquitous procedures that are allowed by the texts themselves" (2004 [1992]; 68). The reproduction of structure, albeit a shorter and simpler structure, that he discusses (Ibid) is nevertheless seen as structured and formalised. For Haveli *seva,* this formalised *seva* may resonate. However, for domestic *seva,* the relational bond between divine and devotee allows *seva* to be impulsive.

The Pushtimarg have a reputation of being particularly strict over purity and pollution, as the "don't touch" *sampradaya*. One interlocutor said, laughingly, that if you are a Pushtimargi, you are always washing your hands. The purity and pollution 'obsession' is perhaps overstated when it comes to domestic *seva* as it is mocked and deemed inauthentic if these purifying acts are not led by emotional attachment. In Haveli (temple) worship, Brahminical rules are strictly adhered to as part of Vallabhacharya's teachings about *seva* (Peabody 1992; 58). Yet, "Orthodox Brahmins in their role as ritual mediators are in fact repeatedly mocked in the narratives" (Bachrach 2014; 73) or hagiographies (*vartas*). However, here too, there is a difference between *seva* and *puja* in the types of priests allowed to perform *seva.* Semantically, *mukhiyas* are priests who perform *seva* in the Pushtimarg, and *pujaris* perform *pujas*. While *mukhiyas* are Brahmins, according to Peabody (1992; 63), in Kota, at least, they are also Gujarati and from the Sanchora caste (*jati*). In my experience, *mukhiyas* were generally thought of as hired help rather than necessarily authentic *sevaks*. People would suggest that engaging in *seva* when you were hired to do it is different, implying inauthenticity or doing *seva* for gain.

On an individual level, *anyashray*, or "taking refuge in another" besides Krishna, is also evoked during practical discussions of pan-Hindu pujas or worship of other divine beings. This exemplifies the paradox of engaging in the world and perceiving the world as *lila*. In several wedding planning discussions I was privy to, a *puja* to Ganesha was considered part of the social protocol necessary at a wedding. Yet, many hesitated and considered it *anyashray* and disloyal to their Lalan. One woman

suggested doing Lalan *seva* first. Another said to let someone else do the Ganesha *puja* at another home. These debates are frequent and show us that *anyashray* does not only shape engagement with public religion or societal norms but also with the ideal devotional relational focus on seva to Krishna. The Pushtimarg centres relationality in and on Krishna, implying that relatedness with another suggests distance and disconnection from Krishna. However, *anyashray* can bring up issues within the complex familial sphere. Many of my interlocutors discussed what to do about *seva* when others in the family were non-*pushtimargi* or followed other *sampradayas*. Devotees have to negotiate the protection of Lalan and maintain the boundaries of *anyashray* by participating in the world and in their own intimate kinship relations (see Bachrach 2014; 227).

Despite the formal similarities in a Haveli between *puja* and *seva* (Peabody 1992; 59) as an initiated devotee, one of the ways this difference is highlighted is the vocabulary used to describe a deity. In *puja,* people will worship a *murti,* an image of the deity where divine presence is called upon for entry into the object. In the Pushtimarg, Lalan is a *swaroop* which is "Krishna's own (*sva)* form (*rupa)*" (Bennett 1993; 90) and, after being given life-breath by a guru, is forever animate. A *murti* can be consecrated into a *swaroop,* but a *swaroop* cannot revert to a *murti* (Bennett 1993; 93). Lalan is a part of the family, understood as continuously present and is never temporary.

In a similar vein, "*Puja,* at its heart, is the worshipers' reception and entertainment of a distinguished and adored *guest*" (Fuller 2004 [1992], my emphasis). For the Pushtimarg, Lalan is not a guest but a family member. Hospitality implies a fleeting, temporary guest at the beck and call of rituals. Theories of hospitality also do not adequately describe the ideal Pushtimarg relationship with the divine through *seva*. However, according to my interlocutors, three official *pujas* can be carried out throughout the year: 1) Govardhan *puja* (in Braj at the mouth of the sacred mountain), 2) Bhakti/Yagna *puja* (a fire puja), and 3) Yamuna *puja* (in Braj at the river Yamuna). Two of these are location-based, worshipping Govardhanathji (the mountain from which Shri Nathji appeared) and the river Yamuna, the manifestation of the goddess on earth. These *pujas* both take place in Braj. The fire *puja* is considered one of the oldest forms of worship in Hinduism, as fire is the essence of creation. When I asked about this apparent contradiction, my interlocutors explained that, while Pushtimarg is the Path of Grace, a broader conception of Hindu dharma (duty) was followed as part of worship. This idea of *dharma* is connected with Ram (the avatar of Vishnu that represents duty) and, in scholarly analysis, with *seva* as a form of work (Watt 2005). These *pujas* were carried out in a group and arranged by institutional Pushtimarg, led by an intermediary, either the guru lineage or a local priest and were a sign of respect at a sacred site for the average devotee. However, this did not necessarily affect *seva* in the domestic sphere. The Pushtimarg carry out other *pujas* as part of the lifecourse considered part of *laukik (*earthly) life, for instance, praying to the elephant-god Ganesha before a wedding for an auspicious day. Instead of personal worship, according to my interlocutors, these

pujas are for a broader social audience. These are considered more like lifecourse *pujas* or specialist rituals in *yatra* (pilgrimage), apart from *seva* considered as care.

While *puja* and *seva* are often two sides of the same coin in broader Hinduism, they are understood differently by different sampradayas. Fuller looks at the Pushtimarg in relation to the Swaminarayan order suggesting that "Pushti Marga worship also develops very fully the homely aspect of puja" (Fuller 2004 [1992]; 170) though this subsumes *seva* into *puja*. The Swaminarayans and the ISKCON (The International Society for Krishna Consciousness) movement are both transnational North Indian *bhakti* traditions, well-established in the British religious landscape. My diasporic interlocutors frequently referred to these two movements in the past and, at present, went to these *mandirs* (temples) saying that the Havelis in the UK were too far and few to reach. This thesis cannot do justice to the excellent in-depth works on these movements. These movements refer to *puja* for worship that is performed for the principal form of divinity. However, briefly, in these two movements, seva is seen as outward-facing voluntary 'work' for the benefit of the community and, in ISKCON, as an opportunity for proselytising.

The Swaminarayan order's roots begin around the eighteenth century and has an entangled history with the Pushtimarg. The Swaminarayans are considered a reformist devotional movement[36] and follow similar rules to Pushtimarg, such as vegetarianism and strict adherence to purity and pollution rules. For the Swaminarayan movement, the principal divine is Swaminarayan, rather than Vishnu or Krishna (Kim 2001; 349, see Fuller 2004 [1992]; 174), while for the Pushtimarg, Krishna is the ultimate divine. Although some consider the divine lineage of gurus forms of Krishna. Swaminarayan gurus, meanwhile, are non-hereditary. There was a split in the Swaminarayan order, the original Satsang and the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) in 1906, and it is the latter to which I mainly refer here. Swaminarayans use both forms of devotional expression: *nitya puja* and *seva*. *Nitya puja* is daily devotional worship (Kim 2013; 127), while *seva* is outward devotional 'work' (Ibid, see also Kim 2001; 85) that is performed with the Lord in mind. While *puja* can be performed for deities such as Ganesha or Lakshmi, this is not part of the *nitya* morning *puja* that is the form of devotional expression in Swaminarayan theology (Kim 2001; 363). *Seva,* though individual in some ways, is directed towards the mandir and the community (*satsang*) and the two in the Swaminarayan order are "synonymous" (Kim 2001; 343).

ISKCON is another Krishnaite transnational *bhakti* movement that involves *seva* as part of devotional expression. Also known as the Hare Krishna movement, this *sampradaya* stems from Gaudiya Vaishnavism founded by Chaitanya at a similar time to the Pushtimarg. At the same time as Vallabhacharya became influential in the West, Chaitanya, a Bengali-born *bhakti* devotee, wandered the East (Pocock 1973; 108). Recall that Chaitanya inspires the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition, the

[36] Though there was a split within the Swaminarayan movement in 1906, the more prominent movement in the British landscape is the transnational Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS).

foundation of the well-known Hare Krishna movement (International Society for Krishna Consciousness). Historical competition exists between these two *sampradayas*, particularly in Braj (Hawley 2015; 179). ISKCON worship both Krishna and Radha, primarily through chanting as the most important form of *seva* (Beck 2004). Unlike the Swaminarayan movement and Pushtimarg, who tend to have a majority Gujarati or Hindu-speaking following, ISKCON has a universal approach with numerous liturgical translations. Therefore, ISKCON has a large 'Western' following (Bryant, Ekstrand et al. 2004, Kim 2001; 96 n38).

ISKCON is a proselytising *bhakti* movement. With an emphasis on chanting and their famous free vegetarian food offerings (*prasadam*), they are a visible presence on the religious landscape in the UK. While *seva* is part of devotional preparations, *puja* is the ritualistic worship of the deity (Schwieg 2004; 15). For example, *seva* is described as preparing food offerings for Krishna and wider society (King 2007; 447). While Valpey (2006) discusses *murti seva* (image worship) as a core of Chaitanya Vaishnavism, and there is a distinction between *puja* and *seva*, this remains ambiguous, or at least not as underlined as in the Pusthimarg, in everyday life, in my reading[37]. *Seva* framed through the mandir, community and missionary activity, dominates the discussion on ISKCON's devotional expression.

Kim notes that a number of transnational Hindu movements build a foundation of *seva* as voluntary work for the cultivation of self and society (2016; 59). While the Pushtimarg is moving forward as a transnational movement, the idea that *seva* could be read as voluntary work is popular in the diaspora. Yet, *seva* still has an overall devotional inward-facing relational purpose between devotee and divine Krishna. *Seva* in the Havelis, in my experience, often feature the divine, the guru lineage and other Vaishnavas rather than numerous charitable, outward community or humanitarian efforts.

Puja is not obligatory for lay devotees, and people can do it daily or occasionally, while *seva* is obligatory once started (Richardson 2014; 38). Though *seva* obligations shift between generations and families, once a person begins *seva*, the implication is that they are obliged to continue. Similarly to other *bhakti sampradayas*, the critical difference that my interlocutors highlighted was the idea of 'selfless service', which is not asking for anything or getting anything in return except the joy of doing more *seva*. The *phul* (lit. fruit) or reward for *seva* is *seva* itself, according to Vallabhacharya's *Shodash grantha*.

While *puja* is ritually prescribed in its sequence of offerings and services (Ibid; 67), and perhaps *seva* could be viewed as part of the sequence, for my interlocutors, there is a notable exclusion of an

[37] Valpey (personal communication) suggests that Gaudiya literature may have negative connotations for puja that are similar to how the Pushtimarg see it. However, overall, he pointed out that puja is the ritual formal worship, while seva is a more general service for the divine, in the temple and at home.

association with *puja*. One difference in my interlocutors' discussions was that anyone could do *puja* without initiation, but in the Pushtimarg, initiation is foundational in its philosophical and liturgical underpinnings[38]. To my knowledge, the distinction between Hindu initiation or *diksha* and the Pushtimarg *brahmsambandh* is semantics. Initiation is understood as *diksha* in broader settings, yet among the sampradaya, people refer to initiation as *brahmsambandh*. I turn to initiation next.

How to get started with *seva*; initiation

Manglaben took her initiation relatively recently, despite coming from a very religious family. She was never really into the religious lifestyle some of her family followed, preferring an active career and social life. Having a cup of masala tea on a Formica dining table in the kitchen in Leicester, we sat discussing how she became involved in Pushtimarg.

> "It's because … it's a kind of connection with... from... Vallabhkul, which is [Vallabhacharya] descendants. They connect you to Thakorji [Krishna as your Lord]. So, they give your hand to Thakorji. That I'm bringing this soul to you… you bless them. Then you have to totally surrender to Thakorji that I am yours. Anything in this material world I am surrendering to you. My… children, my wealth, my, everything I own it is yours, including myself I am yours; I am yours, I am yours. Just guide me through my life.".

She mentioned she decided to do it in order to join in on *seva* at a public event, but emphasised "it was Thakorji's wish… That he came to London, and he came to me. And he says you didn't have to go anywhere. So, I believed in that, so I thought ok let me take *brahmsambandh*, because if he can do all this for me and… and…" she shrugged.

Officially a person can perform *seva* in the Pushtimarg after initiation. The initiation is the manifest, physical action on Earth that connects the devotee to their recognition as part of Krishna as a graced soul. Traditionally, devotees must take initiation with a male member of the Vallabhkul organised by the Haveli. This has been contested by people such as Indira Betiji, an unmarried female member of the Vallabhkul, who initiated devotees during the 1990s. Another example is the controversial lay leader Acharya Bramharushi Pujya Paad Shri Kiritbhai (Bachrach 2014; 63n71). Kiritbhai lives primarily in the UK and has initiated many devotees into the sect (Ibid)[39]. While some devotees did

[38] There are a minority of devotees do not do their initiation and do what they consider to be *seva* for Lalan at home. Some considered that they had been doing it for so long their devotion automatically initiated them into the *sampradaya.* While this is discouraged by the institutionalised Havelis, and many Pushtimargis, there were also those who forgot if they had been initiated at all as they were young when it may have happened. I had heard of re-initiation a couple of times, with a new guru as well. In many ways these journeys were not unheard of and particularly common in the diaspora.

[39] His website, https://www.shrinathdham.com/ (last accessed 16/08/2021) includes a horoscope prediction page, a mantra bank (including a mantra for becoming wealthy among other 'wants'), and a 'sign-up for blessings' link leading to a contact at the Delhi office. He was a businessman embroiled in financial fraud in the

not get initiation before doing *seva*, for the institutional Pushtimarg, it is seen as a prerequisite. Being introduced to one of the divine dynasties often happens through family, friends, networking or marriage.

After finding a guru[40] to perform this initiation rite of *brahmsambandh* (lit. a relationship with God), there are a series of rituals devotees must perform. Devotees have to be in '*apras'* (a ritual state of purity involving ablutions and new clothes), fasting and abstaining from food for a day. Initiation is done by a guru and involves two stages. First, an initiate is given a mantra during the *namanivedana* (name dedication) initiation. The guru gives a devotee the 'Ashtakshar Mantra' (also known as *nam mantra* lit. name mantra), 'Shri Krishna Sharanam Mama'. This is said in a devotee's ear three times. Second, there is the *atmanivedana* (self-dedication) when the devotes give their surrender to Krishna. The *brahmsambandh mantra* verbalises a complete surrender of one's entire being to Krishna, and translates as follows:

> "Om. The Lord Krishna is my refuge. For thousands of years and countless eons I have been lost in pain, grief, and sorrow caused by separation from Krishna. Together with my wife, home, children, elders, and all assets in this world and the next, I dedicate the functions of my body, senses, life, and soul to the Almighty, Lord Krishna. O Krishna, I am your servant. I am your servant! (Arney 2007; 534 n54)

Devotees are then given two *tulsi* (holy basil seed) necklaces (a *kanthi*) as a signifier of Pushtimarg membership and being a graced soul. The necklace is never taken off unless replacing it from old age or after going to a funeral (when it becomes impure).

Returning to the Formica dining table for a moment, joined by another devotee, Sujalben, we can see that a journey narrative rings true for many devotees. Sujalben lives in the UK and is in her 60s. She always wears sarees and tells me that she always has. She and her jolly, chatty husband are regulars at the Haveli. They are both involved in daily *seva*. As with quite a few devotees in the Gujarati diaspora, she was an immigrant from East Africa during the 70s. She maintains strong ties with that identity through language, often joking in Swahili. She is a quiet person and lets everyone have an

1980s. The controversy riled many of the sectarian leaders, not because of his religious sermons (*kathas*) but through the initiation of devotees (Mahurkar 2003)

[40] The different ways that gurus are addressed comes from a long history of the Pushtimarg in general. It started as Maharaja (related to royalty and kings) or Goswami (protector of cows also related to Krishna's love for cows) particularly during the 1600s, then after the scandal of the Maharaja Libel Case, the influence of the guru was played down and the sect disappeared a little from the public scene. With the movement through to the diaspora, often among wealthy Gujaratis, the form of address became Jeje, which is like a pet name, or Bawa (this is a pet name too, and people often use this in reference to a guru being a son of a living patriarch of the lineage though this remained unconfirmed. Both terms of address still denote some form of respect but, as one devotee mentioned, this is part and parcel of a history of making gurus more accessible to a wider audience rather than putting them on a pedestal, like royalty.

input but is a leader of sorts. She encourages religious songs over gossip and often starts singing. Eventually, the rest join in.

> "I think I took *brahmsambandh* when I was about 17 when I went to India. Then my Mummy said that now we are here before we were in Africa and Jeje [the guru] didn't come to Africa then you know?... Mummy said that take the *brahmsambandh* now while we are in India so then it doesn't matter [there will be no problems] with cooking, you know. Because at…Mummy's Papa's house there was full daily *seva*, so from her childhood." She takes a few minutes, hands clasped on her table, covered in a plastic lace-decorated tablecloth.
>
> "Did you know what it meant? Or what it was?" I queried.
>
> "I didn't know anything. No no I didn't know anything. Just that I've got to take *brahmsambandh*"

For Manglaben, her journey was the divine coming to London, while for Sujalben, it begins with her maternal grandmother's house. Though their journeys are different, as we talk about *seva*, both ladies speak over each other, quicker and quicker, in complete agreement.

> Manglaben: Yah and then you have to make sure, you have to think about everything you know life…
>
> Sujalben: if you go on holiday...
>
> Manglaben: if he is cold
>
> Sujalben: yeh if gets cold… everything.
>
> Manglaben: and if you've gone anyway… You can't… You don't leave your children at home when you go on holiday so [Sujalben: yah] you have to take your Lalan with you. You have to do everything what you would for…
>
> Sujalben: your child.

After the chatter dwindles, we come to a natural conclusion when Manglaben says, "so when you take *brahmsambandh* you know nothing. Slowly slow somebody's holding your hand and making you do things. So, it just happens by itself." [both murmur in agreement]...

The initiation mantra is about giving or surrendering to Krishna from the first instance of formally belonging to the group. The Pushtimarg theological standpoint would be that everything is part of Krishna's divine play, therefore, of his creation. Devotees acknowledge that fact and enjoy being a part of this divine play on earth. Most bhakti devotional movements promote ridding oneself of ego and attachments, which is part of surrendering to the divine. This is the only way one can truly

become close to Krishna. Some devotees believe they begin that process immediately after saying the mantra.

The overarching narrative is framed as *pushti* souls having fallen from the pearls of a necklace, in this sense some ways people discuss their identity as Pushtimargi as a natural logic of belonging. Yet, some people take initiation as a prerequisite to marriage or appeasing another family member. For example, very strict Pushtimarg devotees will not eat food cooked by a non-Pushtimargi or even let them into the kitchen. It is not a particularly difficult initiation. One could perform it mechanically to reap the benefits, such as not having to tiptoe around the kitchen in fear of touching the wrong thing or getting married into a family. There are different motives for taking the initiation; for some it is a seriously thought-out decision, others a family decision. Some explained that they did the initiation and returned to the Pushtimarg as a 'real devotee' later in life. However, one must have the right *bhava* and emotional connection to the divine to surrender fully.

Bhava logics at play

My interlocutors had varying degrees of strictness regarding purity and pollution at home, as mentioned above, particularly in food preparation. For some, answering the phone or the door would take them out of a purified state, so they would ignore the mundane life calls, while for others, it was merely a brief interruption to their *seva.* One day, I asked a guru about the need for *apras* (ritual purification) in *seva.* The guru said, "Our action is the development of emotion. We are cleansing our emotion". He suggests that these processes are a cultivation of *bhava* (devotional mood) as an emotional attachment to the divine through action. He continued that *apras* was about *bhava* rather than Lalan's needs. The essential part of bhakti-as-devotion is *bhava*, the loving emotion or mood as an outward expression towards god. As Fuller reminds us, it is not the case that the deities need devotional care in *puja.* Rather, devotees worship "*as if* [deities] had such needs" (Ibid; 70, Eck 1998 [1981]). Pushtimargis emphasise a similar lack of actual divine dependence on humans, stressing that Krishna permits this idea of dependence in *seva* as he appears to devotees as a child as part of his divine play (*lila*) (Fuller 2004 [1992]).

Humans do not affect divinity with impurity. Ritual purity is observed according to the divine *as if* it might affect the divine. Yet, the slight differences in approaching ritual purity are based on individual context, understanding of care, and emotional attachment to a personal divine. One devotional website suggests that the divine also cultivates and manifests differently according to relationships with devotees[41]. As Shri Nathji, the divine was in a "continual state of becoming. He is filled with magical virtues and the bhaktas keep bringing forth His different manifestation according to their personal

[41] Nathdwara Temple Board 2017 nathdwara.in/history.php

sentiments of devotion" (Ibid). Therefore, a devotee cultivates their own *bhava* logics in caring for their Lalan at home. Their Lalan is in a state of becoming while forming a relationship with devotees. *Vartas,* hagiographical stories, offer examples of devotees who circumvent 'proper *seva*' for *bhava* with permission from the divine himself.

Bhava is a slippery concept. It is commonly translated as "emotion", "devotional mood", "mode" or "attitude". While the word *bhava* means one's mood or attitude, this loses the embodied nature and movement of *bhava*, which is transferred through an individual devotee's choice in adornments, clothes, foodstuffs, actions, and even religious artwork. Eck talks about *bhavana,* a similar word that is often translated to the imagination but encompasses a sense of "bringing into being: creating, manifesting; conception, imagination, fancy, thought; feeling of devotion, faith; remembering; and direct knowledge" (Eck 1985; 43). There is a difference between *bhavana* and *bhava* where the latter is the "permanent emotional potentialities in everybody"… "*Bhavana* transforms the latent *bhava* into actual emotional-imaginative experience" (Lynch 1990; 102). While I did not hear much about *bhavana,* the related etymologies and meanings allow for a better understanding of what *bhava* means to my interlocutors. Bennett succinctly describes *bhava* as "a state of mind, an emotional orientation, a mode of feeding and perceiving divinity that is articulated and intensified in conventional acts of devotion" (1990; 191) with a mind to participate in Krishna's divine play (*lila*). From this, in my experience, we can see that devotees manifest and cultivate a perspective shift from mundane (*laukik*) to otherworldly *(alaukik*) with their relationship to an already animate being (Lalan). Both the perspectival shift and the performance of *seva* are related to devotees' *bhava*.

As devotees progress in their *seva,* their love for Krishna develops through performative acts to a fully embodied sense of being while in his presence. This sense of 'being' is in direct relation to Krishna as divine and as a child (or one of his other roles). For the Pushtimarg, an emotionless *seva* would be equivalent to a mechanical ritual as *seva* without *bhava* becomes meaningless. Amongst my interlocutors, there was a common feeling that English did not convey Pushtimarg words adequately, including *seva,* as mentioned above, but particularly *bhava.* People often said it was too difficult to translate. Despite many being able to converse in multiple languages, the majority agreed that these words in English had "less meaning". In an audience with the guru's wife, she laughingly said, "*bhava* as maximum translation can be 'deep feeling'. It's not enough".

There are four main types of *bhavas* in devotional *bhakti: dasya-bhava* (master-servant), *vatsalya-bhava* (parent-child), *sakhya-bhava* (friendship), *madhurya-bhava* (lover-beloved)[42]. Most devotees switch between the *bhavas,* and there are specific seasonal *bhavas* according to the festivities in the

[42] There are other *bhavas* for instance *ver bhava* of animosity towards Krishna (you are still always thinking about him), *shisiya-guru bhava* (that of student and teacher), and *bhakta-bhava* is of an ardent devotee in general (http://www.pushti-marg.net/bhav-samband.htm and personal communications with interlocutors).

Pushtimarg calendar. However, the servant-master relationship is generally in the background of almost all *seva* worship, as there is a constant hierarchy between human and divine interaction. Servant-master *bhava* was less emphasised among my interlocutors as an explicit hierarchy would prevent the intimacy with Krishna desired within the sect. Being Krishna's friend has a risk of presumed equality. The friendship mood is modelled on Krishna's close childhood friendships with cowherders on earth, and again it is not seen as the 'highest' *bhava.* The *bhava* that most of my interlocutors said they sought was the parent-child relationship, embodying Yashoda (Krishna's adoptive mother), cultivating a maternal bond. *Madhurya* is often associated with *gopis* (milkmaids) devoted to Krishna, sometimes in an erotic sense (e.g., King on the Hare Krishna movement 2007; 197).

While *gopi bhava* is often cited as the ideal-type of devotion, it is subject to much controversy and misinterpretation. Vallabhacharya framed much of his writing on *madhurya-bhava* (in his *Subodini*, for example (Bachrach & Sharma 2016; 178). However, the laity focus on the parental relationship, more relatable for most devotees, as *madhurya* was easily misinterpreted among non-advanced devotees and (Sanford 2005). In the past, the Pushtimarg has been critiqued for perceived excess emotionality and sensualism (Ibid; 9, see chapter 4), which colours how this *bhava* is understood. For now, the devotees I worked with rarely talk about this *bhava* and emphasise the *vatsalya* or the parental *bhava.*

Emotion in studies of Hinduism has been explored by a few anthropologists (Lynch 1990), yet there is still some hesitation about the role of emotion more broadly (Karapanagiotis 2004; 8). Anthropology has been more interested in anger, depression and "other dysfunctional feelings" (Lindholm 2006; 8) to have a practical outcome (Ibid). Love is a challenge to research as we can only go by what people say and observe their 'love-practice', by which I mean observable acts of presumed or professed love. *Bhava* can be intensely private, and not everyone is willing to discuss how they feel about their Lalans or Krishna, partly for fear of judgment from fellow Vaishnavas or the wider community. Many conversations I had were within the framework of the four *bhavas.* Yet, the complexity of emotions came through when I was observing *seva,* particularly at home. *Bhava* came through a caress of Lalan's cheek, covering him after bathing to keep him warm, saving money while struggling to give him the best birthday gift, bowing deeply, or walking away without turning your back to Lalan. *Bhava* logics determine behaviours and decisions towards baby Krishna. The emotions and attachment that a devotee feels for Krishna frames how they do *seva* following or despite the guidance given by others.

For the Pushtimarg devotees I worked with, the most important *bhava* to develop was *vatsalya* as a parent. The word vatsalya is based on a Sanskrit word for calf (Hawley 2009; 35), suggesting parental emotion. Parental bhava is aesthetically obvious since Krishna is worshipped as a child. However, despite the potential ease of slipping into a maternal role, it is a feeling that still needs to be learned.

Although devotees often described being overcome with different emotions, it was not that fact that *bhava* had agency, and devotees were helpless in the face of their feelings. Emotion had been learned, cultivated or experienced through other human interactions, becoming part of their personhood (See Mahmood 2005).

While it is true that *bhava* can be seen as socially constructed through the community, the Haveli, learning tools such as manuals or the Internet, and through friends and family, it is an independent understanding of emotional attachment. There are no prescribed acts of emotion that need to be performed. Instead, *seva* has certain caring steps (the relate to caring for a child) that need to be carried out *with* emotion. *Seva* acts are emotion-led rather than repeated and learned emotions to act. *Bhava* has no agency, yet it is directed by and through devotees towards Krishna, at the Haveli or home. Therefore, as Karapanagiotis suggests (2004), emotion in *bhava* is intentionally constructed through individual development and *seva* practice.

Bhava is often developed at home with a Lalan. For many Pushtimargis, their Lalans need to be consecrated in a ceremony that affirms life called a *pushtavela* ceremony, carried out by a guru from the divine lineage.

The responsibility of *pushtavela*

> After inviting Jeje over to make their image *pushtavela*, Geetaben called a friend to get help in preparing for the big day. Her image of Lalan was a *chitraji* (a picture) in a frame, dressed to the nines in his afternoon attire. They had been together for a while. When Jeje came, he said "You can't do the ceremony to this image". She was taken aback, but he continued that only a morning *swaroop* can be given the *pushtavela* ceremony. Because devotees can put adornments and clothes on Lalan as part of *seva*, she could not dress Lalan with this *swaroop* as he was already fully dressed. Jeje did not have much time so Geetaben raced downstairs to the local shop near the Haveli.
>
> The shopkeeper offered her only one image, despite the many other options. Lalan was hand-painted, as was the other one, but in morning attire. "This one will be good for you", he said.
>
> They ran back to Jeje to continue with the ceremony. "That's why I always say that my Lalan makes me run around! He makes me run", she said laughing, remembering how it almost didn't happen.

-x-

People remember the day they did the ceremony very clearly. Geetaben is in her 50s, with one son abroad. She lived in a two bed flat in a middle-class area of Ahmedabad, near the Haveli. She became

one of my closest aunties while in the field. She had a tough life yet was approachable, friendly and loved to laugh and sing. Geetaben had decided to do the life-affirmation ceremony after about five years of being actively involved in the Haveli temple community in Ahmedabad. She and her husband went to the Haveli frequently when they thought about asking Jeje (the guru) to do the ceremony.

Once Geetaben started *seva* to her *pushtavela* Lalan in the form of a *chitraji*, she perceived her worship to have a heightened sense of purpose. She constantly thought about her Lalan and what he may need or require in *seva*, from new seasonal food offerings to new clothes at festivals such as Diwali. A bronze image of Lalan crawling is an older form of Krishna, but later on in Pushtimarg history, a framed painted image of Shrinathji, who came out of Mount Govardhan, was introduced, called a *chitraji*. With a *chitraji* the only difference in seva, according to interlocutors, is the bronze image is younger and requires bathing, while the *chitraji* is a bit older around 5 years old so does not need a bath in *seva*. Some people do, however, give him a wipe with a wet cloth. Some families do *seva* together, and Lalan is passed down from generation to generation. Therefore, not every devotee gets to experience this as their family Lalan is already fully present[43].

The *pushtavela* ceremony is linked to the guru, as spiritual authority, and Haveli. This ceremony involves bathing the image in *panchamrut*, which is a pan-Hindu mixture of five sacred substances (milk, ghee, yoghurt, honey and sugar or jaggery). Without this institutionalised ceremony, some devotees argue that *seva* is 'inauthentic', a sentiment supported by the divine lineage. In the Pushtimarg, a person must get permission from the guru they follow to have a *pushtavela swaroop*. Often in the diaspora, a Haveli will send around a WhatsApp message that a guru is coming. This can be one of the first chances for a diasporic devotee to discuss *seva* with a guru. The guru usually performs the ceremony, depending on their appraisal of a devotee's earthly commitments as a householder and their ability to care for Lalan as he would enjoy. They can suggest other forms of *seva* or a 'lighter' load for those who cannot perform *seva* for a long time. With a *pushtavela* Lalan, one cannot miss one day of *seva*, otherwise, he will be upset and feel neglected, so the decision to do the ceremony is considerable. One example illustrates how deeply devotees feel this responsibility.

> Narayan, a young man in the UK, decided to do *seva* while still at university, though no one in his family did it. His *seva* is not *pushtavela* as he prioritises his studies. While he does *seva* every day, it is short and not exactly what he wants because of his lack of time.

[43] A devotee can 're-do' a *pushtavela* ceremony for a Lalan if he is passed down, or 'adopted' from a Haveli from the ones devotees have left there (see Chapter 8). The 're-do' is not that he is not animate (someone once described him as sleeping until someone came along) but rather for the experience of the ceremony and of life-affirmation to be for the new devotee.

> Sitting in a café, sipping on a latte, he said, "I think if I had been a little older, I would have been more hesitant to take on seva. But I'm glad I wasn't older, and I wasn't hesitant. Because I do see people who are scared of the responsibility as it has to be done every day. You have to take him with you whenever you go. The goal of life changes, it really is that as you develop you literally believe you are to serve him until your very last breath. And the goal of seva is always to increase the seva. It is always… if you take my example I wanted to study, I wanted to get a job and eventually settle down, but I would like to retire as quickly as possible so that I can offer as much as I can to him. And that is sort of the goal of life, that is the purpose. But that develops, these emotions develop as you perform seva"

Again, as a celestial being, humans cannot affect Krishna. The responsibility attached to his care is part of a devotees *bhava* and understanding of the relatable manifested Krishna as their child. Narayan looked far into the future when he thought he would have enough time to offer everything he could to his *seva.* In their twenties and thirties, people would debate *seva* due to starting families and having jobs that would take them away and disrupt their *seva* schedule. There is also often a gender divide, with much of the 'religious' undertaking of the family carried out by women in the early years of *seva.* This is partly due to the significance placed on Yashoda, the ideal-type of mother to Krishna (see Chapter 4). Due to the continued divine presence within the *swaroop,* abandonment is not taken lightly. While the whole life-affirming ceremony would be carried out by one of the divine lineages of Vallabhacharya and facilitated by the Haveli, the focus in the rest of the thesis is an animate Lalan that is cared for at home.

However, though various *seva* manuals give detailed outlines on how to perform *seva* daily, the basics allow devotees some freedom in performing *seva* according to their *bhava.*

The three tenets of *seva*

> "Step-by-step it will happen. Do you know why rag, bhog and shringar are in that order?
>
> *Rag* comes first, you sing with your mouth to see Thakorji [Krishna our Lord] to dance. *Bhog* is made with your hands. [It is] In [this] order because the easiest thing to do is *rag seva*"

The above statement came from one of my friend's sons, who stressed that *rag* (music and poetry) is the simplest way to do *seva* as you always have the right equipment with you, unlike *bhog* (food) and *shringar* (adornment). Many of my interlocutors stressed the importance of *Rag* above the others, as it involved hearing, chanting ('praying' was often said in English to me) and remembering, particularly praising Krishna's *lilas* (divine play).

These stages are not the only way to increase how much *seva* you do; they act as a guideline. The idea of 'steps' is a fluid one. Most people did not describe it hierarchically. Rather, once they started *seva,* some told me that "I could do a little more". Then the next time, they saw something at the Haveli or elsewhere and thought, "I could do something like that". It was this way for Aunty and Uncle above. Uncle's mother did *seva.* When Aunty married into the family, she felt she could not do as much *seva* when her mother-in-law could not continue. They eventually had to leave her mother-in-law's Lalan at a Haveli, but when Aunty got the *bhava* to start *seva,* she found her Lalan and slowly began to do more and more *seva.*

Within the three tenets, some people felt they had fewer 'skills' or 'talents' in singing, *shringar* or food preparations, so they would focus on their skills in *seva* and perform more of it. There is still a difference between worship at a Haveli and home, yet appreciation and absorption of the material, visuals and aesthetics occur in both spaces. The three tenets are the basis for how the human-divine relationship is a shared experience that connects animate things in correspondence with each other in the environment (Ingold 2013; chapters 6 & 7). This brief survey of the tenets cannot do justice to the wealth of scholarly and devotional material available. Yet, it gives a basis to explore the tenets' complexities and the richness of communicative and relational divine worship.

Rag as speaking, listening and remembering

The idea of *rag* is most commonly through *kirtans* (religious songs) and *padas* (poems). Many devotees learn instruments and play them during their *seva,* for instance, *tabla* (hand drums) or harmoniums. Going back to the Haveli for a moment, usually, men perform *kirtans* and *padas*. They sit right in the front of the hall, with harmoniums, *tablas,* and cymbals. I have not seen a woman perform in a formal Haveli setting, though I was told it was possible, but it is a rare occurrence. In a wealthy Haveli, a group would possibly play more frequently. However, in the Havelis I worked in, it was usually every two weeks or at festivals and only in the evening. Otherwise, devotees sing *kirtans* or play songs on a CD player in the furthest corner of the main hall. Again, the Haveli is an inspiration for devotees to practice and perform *rag* in their *seva.*

In the domestic space, *rag* is followed as a personal *bhava*. Rather than perfection, the three tenets are highly emotive and personal in the domestic space. Some devotees would not sing (at least in front of me), while others would go to classes to hone a skill they saw as essential for cultivating *bhava* and performing *seva.* Indeed, this was also a necessary show of humility for those with singing abilities. These talents were seen as part of Krishna's *lila* that he created for shared enjoyment, as a move away from ego.

Songs and poems are assigned to different times of the day. There are morning, afternoon, and night-specific poems and seasonal ones, much like all the 'props' of Haveli and home *seva*[44]. In the domestic sphere, the primarily female devotees I worked with would sing songs from books, with the right *bhava* ascribed to each *kirtan* or sing along to a CD, like Aunty above. Geetaben, who loved *kirtans* and went to a weekly class. I joined her several times, yet the first time I went, it was with some trepidation.

> I headed to my first *kirtan* class with some dread at the idea of singing publicly, somewhat heightened after sharing a hot cup of masala tea with Geetaben, who mentioned the teacher often calls on people to sing. The class was in an office building in a small reception area. We took our shoes off at the door and walked in. Everyone sat on the floor (a few lesser-abled on chairs) in a circle around the room. There were about 15 women (not including the teacher or me), and their ages aged early 50s and upwards, with two women in their early 40s. The class costs 200 rupees for two hours, 3:30-5:30 and is weekly, with events organised throughout the year, including some *yatras* (pilgrimages) to where some of the poets sang and other sites of religious interest.
>
> The teacher sat on a small platform with her harmonium, some modest religious imagery surrounding her. She was a beautiful singer, with a voice that held emotion, despite me hardly understanding the words she sang. The teacher would often make a statement, then allow casual discussion and lots of raucous and giggly laughter as different people chatted. A performer would get people involved in her tasks, a shy one would downplay her ability to sing, and the older women would pass tiny cups of tea to (favoured) people from their Thermos in the corner of the seats.
>
> Each woman was given different scales to practise as homework, and the class ran with one student singing their prepared scale, and then everyone singing a *kirtan* line or two. They were sometimes accompanied by the clash of cymbals (*kartal),* where I felt comfortable participating. After I went through the 'initiation' ordeal of singing a scale, I learned that this teacher discussed the importance of not just the voice but the whole bodily experience of singing.
>
> "Give everything to your *kirtan* involving your whole self. Your body", the teacher said, lifting one hand into the air gently for emphasis.

In *rag*, the synaesthetic experience is not the same as *smaran* (evoking of memory) (Sanford 2008; 28). The stimuli of the poetry through metaphor evokes images of Krishna *lila.* These metaphors take the devotee to the *lila* and, rather than *smaran* being literal or direct memories, these are "remembered

[44] This is where we can potentially situate Mauss' sacred oral part of prayer.

sight[s]" (Ibid). In an earthly sense, and through my fieldwork, this came through memories or imaginations of specific Havelis, *pichwais* and even religious TV serials that show his *lila.*

When Geetaben would talk to me about her Lalan, she would often comment on the *kirtans* of Yashoda *bhava* or motherly attachment. One afternoon when we were watching television, a serialisation of Krishna's stories came on. Krishna was being told off by his foster mother, Yashoda, for some prank or another. The television provided a stimulus for Geetaben's memory of her own Lalan.

The idea of theatre and performance was integral to these classes, where women moved their heads, and hands and lifted their faces ever-so-slightly as they sang and played their cymbals. Yet, more than that, for individuals, it was the cultivation of a whole bodily experience, inhibiting the feeling of *bhava* as *gopis*, mothers and other roles while singing. The reciting, learning, and singing of Krishna lila devotees are transported to praising and thinking about Krishna.

Padas (lit. pace or sung poems) were not imagined pieces, according to the Vallabhites but lived descriptions of Krishna's divine *lilas* by the Ashtachhap Kavis (eight poets). These poets are not Pushtimarg specific, and though some are linked explicitly to Vallabhacharya, many are considered to transcend sectarian boundaries (Sanford 2008; 4). Many of the formal written *padas* are accompanied by a prescribed *raga* (*rag* or melody)[45]. They are spoken, sung, and written in Braj Basha, the sacred language of Krishna and the area of Braj in Utter Pradesh, where Krishna was born.

One of the most famous and well-known of these poets is Sur das[46], who was blind, though little is known about his biography[47]. His poetry is venerated with this identity of the blind poet where "he was never in danger of having his vision of Krishna polluted by what he saw on the earthly plane" (Hawley 2004; 94). The Pushtimarg *sampradaya* tells of Sur das meeting Vallabhacharya, casting aside earlier poetry and speaking in his voice in favour of the poetry of Krishna *lila* most often as a child instead of a warrior (Hawley 2009; 14). His association with Vallabhacharya is disputed by historical accounts of Sur's work (Ibid; 14, Hawley 2004; 95). This "theological artistry" (Hawley 2004; 95) does not only relate to Sur's biography but extends to authorship. As for Hawley's Sur das and Sanford's (2008) work on the poet Paramānanddās, authorship of poetry is probably comprised of

[45] My expertise in music is limited, however, there is a wealth of literature regarding these anthologies (Hawley 2004 and 2009, Ho 2009, Sanford 2008 among others)

[46] The others are Paramānanddās, Nanddās, Kṛṣṇadās, Govindswāmī, Kumbhandās, Chitaswāmī, and Caturbhujdās

[47] "In one version Sūr is granted a vision of Krishna and then requests the deity to remove his faculty of sight so that nothing he might see subsequently could dilute the splendor of what he had witnessed. In another version of the tale, Sūr's blindness is with him from birth" (Hawley 2009; 12). Hawley writes about the ways in which the story of Surdas that is widely accepted, with the influence of the Vallabhite *sampradaya* differs from "historical truth" (Hawley 2009; 14). Hawley rejects the idea of a direct translation between the Bhagavata Purana and Surdas' poetry (Hawley 2009;15) and rather shows that the poetry came through episodes to fit the time of performance and mood.

many poets or follows a tradition of a style of poetry. But as Sanford points out, "As is the case in any religious tradition, the majority of these devotees of Krishna have never studied theology, nor probably do they care to" (2008; 3). This highlights the idea that everyday lived religiosity is influenced by hagiographical literature and spiritual authorities' *kathas* and *saptas,* which can differ from theological or historical textual scholarship. In this case, the vernacular religiosity becomes an essential means of interaction between the divine and devotee.

While hagiography and historical texts are important, for many devotees, these poets are considered participants in and observers of Krishna's *lila.* Poets sing what they see unfolding in his *lila.* Sykes highlights the importance of sound, not just of experience or lyrics of devotion, again pointing to the total shared experience of sound and music (2018). He suggests that there has been a conflation of the relationship between music and the national or ethnic identity of a group or community, which ignores human-divine relations (2018; 5). *Rag* is a fully sensory description forming part of the *saguna* branch of *bhakti* poetry (with attributes instead of formless, i.e. *nirguna*). Though poets can move between moods of *nirguna* and *saguna,* importantly, rather than a sight being the standard of religiosity through inner devotion, the *saguna* poets look to Krishna's playful, amorous, and loveable qualities (Hawley 2004; 92). To see Krishna's otherworldly realm, in this case through poetry, one must be an "ideal listener" (Sanford 2008). The devotee takes this poetry as a guide to seeing Krishna *lila* as an alternate layer of reality or the spiritual perspective, through the lyrics, envisioning what the poets see, but more importantly, developing the *bhava* of that moment in the poem.

The root of *bhakti* (devotion) is from *bhaj,* which means to share, pointing to a "shared relationship between and devotee and a god" (Ibid). Davis points out (1999; 38) that poets take the distance between the devotee and divine as a starting point for much of their poetry. Feeling and acknowledging the pain of separation from the divine is a crucial religious motif in Krishna worship, the *bhavas* and participating in his bliss. As in the previous chapter, the theme of distance is important physically and sensorially in the public Haveli, both at home and through poetry. Many poems describe the sights, sounds and tastes of the *lila,* offering the devotee the stimulus as a full-bodied "gestalt, a total experience" (Sanford 2008; 27). Many of the poems fall under themes similar to Christian's definitions of prayer[48] and are sung at particular times. "The poems of *viniti* (petitioning), *asraya* (shelter), and *mahatmya* (the magnificence of the lord) are not sung during the part of the *seva* when devotees view the image; these poems are either sung before or after *seva* or at *pada-mandalis or bhajan* (devotional singing) sessions" (Sanford 2008; 130). Notably, these are not sung in front of the divine but the moments of away from *seva*. While songs could be in petition or praise, these songs

[48] Christian outlines five types of prayers in his study of Spanish Catholicism. These are generalised affective prayer, prayers for the fulfilment of the annual round, prayers for forgiveness, prayers for salvation and instrumental prayers. Though his focus is not on prayer specifically, his categorisation of types of prayer is a useful framework. All are analysed, quite rightly, from the collective and the individual relations with God (1989; 11).

acknowledge transcendence, while *seva* is a distinctly imminent shared experience. These moments of distance are opportunities for devotees to develop a yearning for the divine, which is joyous, a similar sentiment as in the initiation *mantra*.

Bhog as feeding or "If my kids have Dominos, I have to offer it to my Lalan, no?"

Aunty would prepare food from 4 am until the final meal at 4 pm, having not had a bite herself but immersed in the joy of preparing the offerings. In one of my stays with her, I watched her prepare *boondi,* a dessert made from droplets of fried chickpea flour soaked in hot sweet syrup, in the middle of a still, hot April day with no fan so as not to disturb her cooking. She stood over a burning gas stove, happily listening to her *kirtans* CD, while I fanned myself manically with the ends of my saree in her balcony door. Aunty's absorption in her cooking is part of an observable change in a devotee's perspective to *alaukik*, where the mundane seems irrelevant to the needs and desires of their young Lalan. She would sip tea first thing in the morning, and her tiny frame would buzz around the kitchen the whole day without any drop in energy. She would say that it was because of Thakorji grace (Krishna's *krupa*) that she could do it all. It made her evening meal (and only meal) that much sweeter (*mitti*).

Authors have analysed relationships with food as purity and pollution restrictions that determine hierarchy (Babb 1970) and taboo (Douglas 1966), as transactions relating to caste (Marriot 1968, Parry 1976), and the affective role of food is "gastro-politics" (Appadurai 1981) among others. It is through the shaping of culture, or "gastrosemantics" (Khare 1992; 27), such dynamics of the food system are framed(Khare 1992; 4).

The four categories of offeringsin the Pushtimarg below are guides for devotees on what to offer.

1. Misri

   These are the simplest offerings of sugar candy (*misri)* and, sometimes, water
2. Dudh-ghar

   This is milk, and milk products, dried or fresh fruit and nuts
3. Ansakri

   These are foodstuffs made without salt
4. Sakri

   This is a full meal with salt, including rice (*sakri*, specifically indicating a meal rather than the usual translation *bhat*) [49]

[49] Toomey says the *sakri* level is food cooked in and with water while *ansakri* is without water (1992; 134) however the above is how the majority of my interlocutors understood the categories. For a detailed reading of food offerings in the Pushtimarg see Bennett 1993; p123-147.

Aunty loved doing the full *sakri bhog* and prepared food all day. One time, when she was looking after a cousin's Lalan she struggled with how to care for him. She had to offer him some *sakri bhog,* even though her cousin did not perform that *seva* at home. Once a devotee's Krishna gets used to one type of food *seva,* it does not seem fair to downgrade. She reasoned that he would have to go back to what he was used to. However, when that Lalan was with Aunty's Lalan, he could get upset that he was not getting the same treats. These daily care debates are discussed with vigour among the community. Once a devotee starts any (non-hierarchical) 'level' above simple *misri* they must stick to it.

Levels insinuates some sort of hierarchy, in the sense that there is added responsibility through each level and it is seen as a progression, but it was not that one level was 'better' than the other. The important aspect of any level of food *seva* is the strength of the devotees' *bhava.* This is the transformative element in *bhog* where a simple sugar sweet can be given with the *bhava* of a full meal and received as such. The 'levels' are deemed appropriate by a guru from the lineage, and permission is often sought for anything beyond *misri*. More than one interlocutor suggested that the reason for these food levels was that the more complex the *seva,* the more chances there are for mistakes through losing concentration or focus on Krishna's desires if one is not ready for a higher level. However, as mentioned above, purity and pollution are essential in religious food preparations in understanding these 'levels'. In its natural state, food is resistant to pollution (Bennett 1993; 132). Preparation and cooking leave food vulnerable to pollution.

One difference is that, during cooking, *ansakri* does not add salt as an ingredient (though it can be added after) while *sakri bhog* contains salty items (Toomey 1994; 50). According to Toomey (Ibid) and Bennett (1993; 133), this is to do with the decomposition between different ingredients making *sakri bhog* quicker to rot while *ansakri* lasts longer. While it has been pointed out to me[50] that ito eat someone's salt' has connotations of forming a permanent bond in India, in my fieldsite, rice was more expressive. *Sakri* is another word in the Pushtimarg movement for rice, and sharing rice is considered intimate (see Toomey 1994; 51).

Moving to the other end of the spectrum of offerings, the devotee quoted in the subtitle told me that she would order Dominos for the family but would feel so guilty that she did not first offer it to her Lalan that she would offer it to him. She felt that if she was feeding her children Dominos, it was not fair to leave him out[51]. Opinions on the types of *bhog* and the ways to offer it vary from strict to

[50] Chris Fuller (personal communication).

[51] Again, this renders the hierarchy argument moot for the Pushtimarg, as the different *bhavas,* apart from servant, would not make sense as accepting inferiority. The intimacy of a lover, or the caring devotion of a mother, or the friend who can play with Krishna could are not inferior through the *bhava* (Bennett 1993; 138). While the overarching acknowledgement of Krishna as divine frames devotion, it is the relationship with him as a relatable figure that powers *seva*.

flexible. Censorship comes through spiritual authority figures of the gurus, priests, and other devotees, which deters some devotees from coming to the Havelis or other institutionally run events.

On the scale of bhog offerings, Dominos is remarkably flexible, and many stricter Pushtimargis would be horrified by this. There are two 'issues' in the Dominos scenario for more orthodox devotees. Firstly, the purity/pollution debate comes through questions over who prepares the food and what purification rituals they follow. Strict Pushtimargis do not eat at restaurants at all, and orthodox Pushtimargis will not eat from any other household apart from theirs, where everyone involved in food preparation is ritually purified but also an initiate of the movement[52]. Second, there is a complex question of *bhava* in *seva,* relating again to who made the food and whether *bhava* can 'purify' the offerings of *bhog* not made by a devotee in the place of proper ritual cleansing. Offerings of food which has been lovingly made and prepared for Lalan (at home) or Krishna (at the temple) showcase the elaborate or simple way devotees practice their *seva*.

Protection and purity also extend to smell, words and thoughts. In one household I stayed in, early on in my fieldwork, I commented that the cardamom the devotee was grinding into powder smelled lovely. She sighed, grimaced a smile at me, and started piling it into a different container. We had to keep it for our own use and start again. As I asked what had happened, she said, "Do not worry, but next time do not say anything. Or you can say that Thakorji [our Lord] will enjoy that". I inadvertently enjoyed the material before it was offered, polluting it with my words. In some older Havelis, one interlocutor told me that kitchens were built far away from the main Haveli so that *nazar* (evil eye)[53] or even impure thoughts could not touch, or pollute, the *bhog* before it became *prasad*. Briefly, casting or being a victim of the evil eye does not necessarily equate to intentional envy, as praise could inadvertently cause envy. This was one of the reasons kitchens were protected from others, in case they inadvertently smelled Krishna's meals, enjoying them before him (see McCartney 1981; 9-38, chapter 4). Maloney also points out the link between praise and envy when he suggests "preventing too much self-praise…is explained as suppressing envy" (Maloney 1976 xiv), particularly, because you are drawing attention to enviable things by praising them. In the Pushtimarg, food must be prepared in ritual purity (*apras*) but must first be enjoyed by Krishna. Devotees will not taste, see, touch, or smell the food prepared (though sometimes this seems practically impossible) because they will inadvertently enjoy the offerings before Krishna does. In terms of the senses, devotees will never taste the food and risk it becoming their leftovers through *jutha* (polluted/tainted food), and the ritual purity of the devotee protects the *bhog* from pollution by touch.

[52] It is clear that purity and pollution hierarchical or caste division is still blurred through these feasts and festivals as well as through individual's own *bhava* logics (as opposed to Dumont's categories (1970)).
[53] However, good thoughts can be tinged with envy as well so *nazar* is not always intentional. Touch and *nazar* are related, implying the embodied nature of *nazar* 'touching' food or people.

Substances are absorptive and absorbed in many ways by consuming pure foods. Substance absorption also relates to cultivating cooling thoughts with foods considered cooling towards a 'refinement' of the body away from pollution (Parry 1989), including disconnecting the body from earthly attachments, material and emotional (Lamb 1997). There is a sensory interplay between food and emotion (Stoller and Olkes 1989), or the affective nature of speech (Pinto 2006), and the synaesthetic boundary-crossing of food memory (Osella and Osella 2008), for example, for the diaspora who often recall their Indian ethnicity, identity and origin through local foods[54]. Importantly, food offers us an insight into the emotions and interactions shared between humans and the divine. Each devotee prepares food in anticipation of their Lalan's needs, and offerings are made with Yashoda[55], motherly *bhava*, or sometimes as Vallabhacharya, evoking the care of the *acarya* to the living Shri Nathji.

Food is porous to thoughts and *bhava*, which affect *bhog*. These are not symbolic qualities but tangibly sensuous as taste relates intimately to touch and emotion (Stoller and Olkes 1989; 20-25)[56]. My comment on the smell of the cardamon polluted the food through my words and senses. Bennett discusses "word-contact" as a type of "sense-contact" in Havelis (1993; 139-140). The Pushtimarg devotees protect *bhog* through their vocabulary in "word-sense" contact. Words conceal which foods are being offered by using metonyms (where descriptions refer to the attributes of food, shape, colour etc.) so that the food would not be polluted through speaking or hearing about the food (Ibid).

Food falls into three categories; 1) *sattvick*, cooling, and pure; 2) *rajasik* hot, which incites anger or lust and 3) *tamas*, smelly inviting lethargy or delusion. Devotees can only offer *sattvick* foods to Krishna. 'Hot' foods include garlic and onions, which fall under *rajasik* and *tamas* due to the pungent smells and capability to affect temperament. In addition, carrots, cabbage, tomatoes, and watermelons are prohibited, though the reasons for theis vary considerably. One of the reasons I was given, in alignment with Bennett's (1993; 125) research, was the association of blood with red foods and the idea that these foods were brought into India. Therefore, these were not part of the traditional meals suitable for Krishna. These pan-Hindu food categories show that emotions are affected by the food's qualities or characteristics (gunas) *bhava* in food preparation.

[54] Osella and Osella's work on Keralan foodways reveals much about the unifying and creation of communities, in their analysis of Muslim and Hindu diets (2006; 175). As with the Annakut festival, foodways are also transcendent and remind devotees of *lila* they can imagine, that is not rooted in experience of the time, but experience of the imagined memory (*smaran*).

[55] I had not heard of offerings made with *madhurya-bhava* though the other *bhavas* of servant and friend have been infrequently mentioned. This is not surprising given the longevity of the Maharaja Libel Case and the re-emphasis in the Pushtimarg on mothers as opposed to lovers for Krishna. There is a relationship between consumption and the erotic in Hindu philosophy through the framework of *rasa*. Servant *bhava* was discussed through priests at a Haveli, or 'new' *sevaks* as a way to begin developing the love of a parent.

[56] Stoller & Olkes' work looks at an incident of an interlocutor who makes a 'bad sauce' to convey a message to them of her anger (1989). The cross-cultural point in this is food is an interactive sensuous communicative tool, that affects preparation, consumption, and reception of the substance.

Before the food is offered, it is known as *samagri*, it is then transformed into *bhog* to be presented to the divine, and when the divine has taken the offering, the remainder becomes *prasad* (blessed food, where the divine has taken a "subtle portion" (Davis 1998; 1)[57]. *Prasad* as an "expression of divine grace" (Bennett 1993; 141) suits the concept of *prasad* in the Pushtimarg best.

One devotee would often give me fruit as *prasad* after her morning *seva* or save it for me as an afternoon snack. She would also use the *misri* (sugar candy) and milk as *prasad* to sweeten our morning masala tea every day. *Prasad* in our daily lives became a part of every meal, from a bit of fruit to *misri* dropped into the dal. *Prasad* absorbed in our food served as a reminder of religious life throughout the day, grace by the divine, and nourishment through the divine. The idea was that *prasad* was made sweeter through Krishna's consumption, and devotees would relish it. All food would be *prasad* for devotees who perform the whole day *seva.*

The material offerings of food are 'things' animated with the potential of divinity, leading to an otherworldly experience. This transformative potential from *samagri* to *bhog* to *prasad* comes through food being a vehicle for *rasa* (aesthetics and flavour) and *bhava* (devotional mood) (Khare 1992; 39). As a devotee's *alaukik*, otherworldly perspective takes form, divine food is immersed in all the senses. The transformation is also a biomoral one, where the material prepared takes on these qualities and is transformed by the divine, in turn transforming the devotee who consumes the offerings. The concept of biomorality is essential in South Asia, as it transcends boundaries between materials as 'things', substances, thoughts and words. Pushtimargis tend to be strict teetotal vegetarians, most not consuming hot foods such as onion and garlic.

The biomoral relates to the human social world and hierarchy, with the presumption of constant instability of the body (Appadurai 1981). In relation to human-human relationships and commensality, the orthodox will not eat out, and if they do, it is only at another Vaishnava's house. These eating habits have an an othering effect, in social politics and hierarchy in what Kuroda terms "visceral politics" (2018; 28). One person may eat at a fellow Vaishnava's house only once the food is *prasad*, another may eat at any vegetarian household, and one may not even eat at a Haveli. These are all different registers of understanding the absorption of biomoral food by the body and personhood.

However, while important, the purity and impure model used in anthropology is not the central part of this social dimension of *religious* offerings (Bennett 1993; 141, Fuller 1979; 464). The gods are not actually affected by human pollution, rather it is the *bhava* towards them that directs human action. Any offerings made with the right *bhava* are accepted by Krishna "I accept and relish anything given

[57] Not to be confused with *jutha* the leftovers of a person. This has negative connotations and denotes hierarchy and caste divisions.

to me in the spirit of worship by a person; be it a leaf, a bud, a fruit, or a drink (Gita 9:26)" (in Aklujkar 1992; 96).

Food forms part of human-divine communication and discourse as an "interlocutor between matter and spirit, and body and self" (Khare 1992; 28) [58]. Rather than a disconnect in othering, food in the transcendental relationship is a shared connection [59]. Sharing, commensality, and feasting are important parts of a Pushtimargis devotional life. In the Pushtimarg, commensality only takes place with the divine and other Vaishnavas pointing to a politics of exclusion, unlike other movements like the Jalaram mandirs (Wood 2016). In a temple setting, all food offerings are done elaborately, and the Pushtimarg is known for the skills and variety in foodstuffs offered (Bennett 1990; 182), the reason perhaps why Weber translated the Pushtimarg as the "doctrine of the holy dinner" (1958; 315). "[t]he sect's skill in food arrangement is unsurpassed in Hindu gastronomy" (Toomey 1992; 134). Food preparation, eating and drinking become part of the divine sensory experience in worship, to some extent a shared one, with the divine through *anand* (bliss).

For example, *annakuta* is known as a primary Pushtimarg festival, though many other *sampradayas* celebrate it. *Annakuta* means the Mountain of Food alongside the Govardhan *puja*. It falls the day after Diwali. One of the favoured stories of Krishna is of him lifting Mount Govardhan to protect the villagers of Braj from Indra's wrath. The *annakuta* offerings focus on the hill itself (Toomey 1992; 129). For example, the offering of rice is shaped like a mountain with a sweet pastry (*gunja*) on the top. Recalling the intimacy of rice in the Pushtimarg, the offering as *prasad* takes on a biomoral capacity in the human body consuming Krishna's *prasad*, but, as Toomey shows, Krishna experiences his own bliss with *lila* and shares the devotee's enjoyment. For the *pandas* (priests) in Braj, food is a sensual experience to enjoy, which runs counter to the ascetic in Sanskrit classical tradition (Ibid; 118). The sumptuous foodstuffs in the Pushtimarg (for ISKCON, see King 2012) contrast with the path of ascetics, showcasing the particularities among Vaishnava sects and understandings of worship. Though a transcendent ideal-type egalitarian notion runs through shared *prasad*, it is "imperfectly realized in the everyday world of social reality" (Ibid; 120), where caste relations change the ways people are given *prasad*.

Annakuta is an example of the large-scale *seva* that a Haveli can achieve. However, I experienced *darshan* of *annakuta* with a close friend at her home. The *bhog* was planned and prepared days in advance, with Vaishnava friends roped into helping with exciting new recipes to offer her Lalan. The mountain of food, in her tiny flat in Ahmedabad, was towering in front of her Lalan, sitting on his

[58] Khare looks at Gandhi's fasts that were powered by types of prayer (1992; 32) as two complementary language types, affecting the body, self, and soul (*utman*).
[59] Khare looks at three main discourses "a) worldly life and becoming, b) healing and happiness and c) self-control and salvation" (1992; 8).

throne. From this perspective, it was as large a feast as could be, and following *bhava* logics, the *bhog* was in the spirit of *Annakuta*,which made it as sumptuous and festive as at a Haveli.

As with *rag,* food also brings memories not only of *lila* but of place, myth, and participation at such festivals, such as the mountain-shaped sweet treat offered at *Annakuta* recalling Mount Govardhan. Special foods are offered in Braj, and devotees take much *prasad* with them from their *yatras* (Toomey 1992; 123). In my flower-garland making group, one woman had ordered about five kilos of a type of *laddoo* (sweet dough ball) for all of us there. This *prasad* was a gift of grace from Krishna and the sacred land of Braj, which most often would direct conversations towards yatra or pilgrimages from one's past or future.

The Domino's pizza question would be hotly debated, as food is "an expression of intimacy which should ideally transcend all ceremony" (Bennett 1993; 136) yet still adheres to purity and pollution rules. Another example of a debated *bhog* issue is Vaishnava women who make *bhog* to sell to fellow Vaishnavas during festivals (though this is rare). The commodification of the *bhog* offering is complex as one's *bhava* is interweaved through the *seva* of food preparations. The 'seller' can be seen as an intermediary between the devotee and her Lalan. On the other hand, people reasoned that they needed to earn that little extra to provide their own Lalans with offerings, and those buying wanted the best for their Lalan, so they would be buying it "with *bhava*". Again, though the Pushtimarg consists of various devotees, orthodox and liberal and everything in between, it is through *bhava* logics that decisions in the domestic sphere are made. This differentiates the Haveli as a publicly accountable space from the home worship framed through *bhava.*

Shringar as adorning

> "Shringar is far more than embellishment. It exists for the comfort of the deity and is also connected with the ability of the worshiper to connect form and appearance with inner reality" (Richardson 2014; 41).

Shringar has often been overlooked in the study of the Pushtimarg, apart from the study of 'art'[60] and *pichwais.* Through *shringar,* devotees can touch and adorn their Lalan, offering the rainbow of colours, materials and jewellery with the care and precision a mother may have for their child before they go out. Not only is affection and attachment shown through *shringar,* but these animate things are part of the devotional experience and allow an embodiment of *bhava* in these objects, which also have the potential to elicit more emotions (Bennett 1992). The inner reality here may refer to recognition of the spiritual realm and that everyone is participating in *lila*. In public Havelis, *shringar*

[60] See Pinney on Indian art. From the European influence on art comes "presenting Krishna as a dewy-eyed, gender-bending poster boy" (Packert 2010; 24). See discussion of androgyny in Chapter 3.

is elaborate and follows the *seva* guides though this can be changed through the *bhava* of a presiding guru.

Pushtimargi devotees dress for *seva* with *saris* for women and a *dhoti* suit for men. Orthodox devotees place these clothes separately from daily wear or 'outside' clothes, often offering clothes to Lalan to turn into a form of wearable *prasad* before use. In this sense, *prasad* can be any 'thing', not just foodstuffs. Textiles and material culture in context have a "secret life" (Allerton 2007). Allerton focuses on the sensual, tactile, but daily uses of cloth to show that sarongs' non-ritual and unsaid presence has value. They are designed to be worn, they have a social life and can be considered "super skins" as part of the body (Allerton 2007; 6). According to some interlocutors, as a potential everyday transformative moment (from mundane to spiritual), a *seva* 'uniform' is like this 'super-skin', implying cultivation of *bhava* or preparation of the space to worship and play.

Shringar has a special status, unlike a devotee's saree or *dhoti*. For worship, it is the idea of the social life of the *shringar* that is of interest as, though Krishna wears the cloths and adornments on his body, *shringar* is a shared connection between the dresser and the wearer.

> "Worship during the time of Vallabhacharya seems to have been a relatively simple affair that consisted of the offering of food and flowers to the image. Vitthalnath, however, was intent on transforming the worship into a deeply aesthetic experience for his devotees that was meant to further their own practice of *seva* by aiding them in the visualization of Krsna's divine pastimes." (Saha 2004; 126).

It was at this time that *seva* became the more elaborate form it is today. This extended to festivals where elaborate adornments and artwork decorated public Havelis and shrines (Ibid). One male devotee mentioned that much of the *shringar* at the main temple in Nathdwara reflected royal patronage through colours or materials relating to political moves of the Mughal empire. This aesthetic also reflects court life and attire and can be traced through *pichwais* (cloth hangings) (Ghose 2015; 16-17; 80). Contemporary temple worship, including ornamentation, provides scholars with different visual and cultural literacy (Packert 2010). Though commodification of *shringar* is undoubtedly part of the story, there is much 'unsaid' about the emotion of *shringar,* apart from historic tracing. "Ornamentation on the body of a temple deity is thus the visual equivalent of poetic imagery" (Packert 2010; 15). Through *shringar,* not only is the devotee's love expressed in the material but in temples, aesthetic practices of the *sampradaya* can be observed through *darshan.*

To adorn one's Lalan is to express one's love for him and, in public Havelis, attract the love of devotees Bennett 1993; 119).[61] Each article of *shringar* reflects a specific *bhava*, lover and parental

[61] This is connected to *rasa* and the enjoyment of aesthetics which will come again in Chapter 7.

bhava are dominant in adornment (Bennett 1993; 118). The most basic adornment is a *gunja mala* (a beaded necklace made of seeds)[62] which is essential and reflects *Swaminiji bhava* (that of Radha, Yamuna and Yashoda). Yet, the seeds are a poisonous berry (*Abrus precatorius*) which jewellers used to weigh gold and gems (Sanford 2008; 45). In offering this simple necklace, devotees implicitly praise Krishna (see Allerton 2013 on praising). It is both Krishna's connection to (and perhaps power over) nature, and the idea of treasure and preciousness that is represented in the necklace (Sanford 2008; 45). In poetry, the descriptions of ornaments are an aesthetic pleasure. Each piece of adornment showcases a different facet of Krishna's beauty for devotees and offers a focal point evoking *bhava* (Ibid; 58).

Not only is each *darshan* different, but *shringar* is a visual aesthetic 'prop' to a devotee's perspective shift from worldly to otherworldly. At home, the act of dressing the divine child is never quite the same, as each day, Lalans across the world may want to wear something different. Jayshreeben, a devotee in London, told me that her Lalan decides what he wants to wear in the following story.

> One day, Jayshreeben was following the *seva* manual. It was a day to dress her Lalan in pink. She kept thinking about the colour yellow. It caught her eye as she pulled out the various *shringar*. But the manual said pink, so she dressed him in pink. She got everything ready. She changed the covers for little bolster pillows on the side of his sofa and got a pink square to hang as a background behind him. From her stores of Tupperware filled with tiny clothes, stick on jewellery, crowns, and beaded necklaces, she brought out a complete outfit with matching sticker jewels for him. Still, she felt unsure. When she went out later that day, she found one of Lalan's yellow outfits in her handbag. She rushed home to change him
>
> We continued the discussion and she saing, laughing "See? He wanted yellow!". That was his way of telling her.

This moment is not framed as a miracle or a transcendent experience, but rather Lalan, as Jayshreeben's child, tells her what he wants through his divine play. Though she followed the manual, taking her time to place everything properly, her sensory experience was disrupted with doubt about what her Lalan wanted. Her story ended with relief that she managed to get him dressed in yellow to make him happy.

In the Pushtimarg theory, Krishna takes pleasure in the world that he created for his divine play. Tellingly, after the *shringar,* Lalan is shown his reflection in the mirror to take pleasure in the visual. At home, the devotee takes *darshan* of him, looking at his reflection, to participate in the divine's

[62] An example of the detailed *bhavas* was given by one of the Vahujis (wife of a guru). There are four main colours, and each reflects a *bhava;* 1) the yellow string that is used is in the *bhava* of Swaminiji (Radha, Yamuna and Yashoda). 2) The red part of the bead is Lalita, a *sakhi* and *gopi* or lady-in-waiting for Radha, 3) The white is Chandravali another *gopi* and 4) The black part of the bead is the river goddess Yamunaji.

enjoyment. At a Haveli, this aesthetic appreciation occurs, yet the details of *shringar* can often be missed due to *swaroop* size and distance, though some people take binoculars (Packert 2010; 46, Richardson 2014; 163), if permitted.

While *shringar* is guided by the season, weather, and festivals through *seva* manuals, these are guides rather than rules. People would make their *shringar* if they could, while others shopped around for different outfits. Women in groups often come together to discuss *shringar* and attend workshops on making necklaces or headpieces. Some women create small businesses for themselves by making *shringar* at home to sell to other Vaishnavas. Some Lalans love ornate gold and silver *shringar*, while others feel their Lalan likes a simpler adornment (as otherwise, it would get too heavy for a child, I was told). For some, desiring many adornments, it can be a task to save up enough money to buy all these gold, pearl, and silver pieces. Many of the people I worked with used imitations, but a few saved up for one new piece each year to give to their Lalan. This is not intended to encourage spendthrifts, but; "one was to work to acquire the most wonderful and highest materials possible with the intention of using them to encourage loving but totally selfless devotion to Krsna. Thus, the individual was not to perform service to Krishna with the intent of securing a specific aim, be it spiritual or material" (Saha 2004; 103; see Bennett 1992). It is a show of devotion and *bhava* to use wealth (and skill) for the benefit of your Krishna, though this can cause debate when wealth is used in the public spaces of a Haveli. For now, it suffices to say that a devotee is welcome to gain material wealth with the outcome of giving to Krishna and acknowledging everything is part of his grace. Physical adornments are a "frame" (Davis 1999; 9) of the divine, guiding the "devotional eye" (Ibid; 38, though Davis refers to poetry). These are 'things' of adornment, animated by the *bhava* by association and by the devotee offering the 'thing' to the divine. As with *rag* and *bhog* these offerings communicate devotion and love for the divine in a shared interaction between animate things.

Singing, feeding, and touching Lalan act as communicative tools but, more importantly, reflect and absorb *bhava*, influence the development of a devotee's *bhava* and otherworldly perspective, and their measure of the divine's response. Of course, there is opposition to material worship in the broader range of Hindu-isms that privileges meditation, renunciation and knowledge over theism. Before we move to *manasi seva*, *seva* of the mind, which is one of the ultimate forms of *seva* for devotees, a brief discussion of mental worship more generally follows.

Mental worship in Hinduism

As discussed above, Pushtimarg is a theistic devotional movement embedded in material worship in a non-dualistic framework. An earlier example of nondualism is the Advaita Vedanta school that Sankara founded in the eighth century. Recall that Vallabhacharya's interpretation of nondualism comes centuries after this, in the fifteenth century. The Advaita Vedanta follows that the divine can be

both *saguna* (with qualities or form) or *nirguna* (formless). In this school of thought, the higher form of the divine is without qualities (*nirguna*), while the lower form is with qualities (*saguna*). Those who perceive the divine as *saguna* have a "limited awareness" (Davis 1999 [1997]; 47); therefore, image worship is seen as inferior to mental practice, knowledge and meditation. Eventually, this path leads to renunciation (Richardson 2014; 22). Sankara's teachings suggest that a devotee must move beyond the worship of images or sacrifice, inwards towards a mental practice. This mental practice rids the self of dualities between "self and other, worshiper and worshiped, knower and known" (Davis 1999 [1997]; 48).

In my reading[63], there are three key differences in Pushtimargi mental practice; 1) *manasi seva* is of a specific image of the divine Krishna with qualities (*saguna*), 2) *manasi seva* is not cultivated, particularly in Kali Yuga (the current Age of Darkness) but rather the devotee has sight of the divine bestowed on them that is rare and unexpected, and, 3) this is still a performance of *seva* through *rag, bhog* and *shringar* rather than a turn inwards towards renunciation, which is another way to participate in *seva* with a responsive, independent divine.

Manasi seva, *seva* of the mind

While we have considered *seva* as a physical 'act' that is an action of performing worship, it can also be from the mind. Most interlocutors said this type of *seva* does not exist in our age of Kali Yuga, though there are examples in hagiographical literature.

In the *Dosau Bhavan* hagiography, *varta* 8 on Madhodas illustrates this type of *seva*.

> Madhodas lived in Kabul and had a cloth shop. He wore the same types of clothes as everyone who lived there[64] and was unrecognisable as a Vaishnava. Another disciple[65] of Vitthalnathji (Vallabhacharya's son) came there and tried to find a Vaishnava shop. He saw Madhodas twirling his scarf and stopped there and found out he was celebrating the evening *aarti* (lights) by twirling his scarf. He proceeded to describe all the adornments and clothes Shri Nathji was wearing (though Shri Nathji was in Braj). The disciple wrote all the information down and later checked with the priest with Shri Nathji and the description was the same. Madhodas was blessed with holy sight of Shri Nathji and his *seva.* (adapted from Krishna Kinkari's translation)

Madhodas could not only see *seva* of Shri Nathji but also do his *seva*, for example, through performing *aarti* (a lit wick). In telling me the story, one devotee moved her hands, eyes closed, in the

[63] Which is not as well versed as experts in Advaita Vedanta (see Nelson 2007 for a summary).
[64] Not the traditional Vaishnava outfit of a *dhoti* and *uparna* scarf.
[65] Rupamuraridas from Varta 7 of Dosau Bhavan.

shape the *aarti* takes, perhaps imagining Madhodas in that moment. Recall that the *vartas* and the *padas* were written at a time when people could see the physical form of the avatar of Krishna as Shri Nathji and so positioning oneself in that time through hearing, singing, communicating, and the sensory experience of worship is not uncommon. The point here is that even when a devotee cannot perform, the divine will find a way for them to participate in *seva.* Another example from my fieldwork in Ahmedabad illustrates this.

> During a *yatra,* I met one older man and his wife. We were walking on a dusty road to the main hall where a *katha* (religious storytelling) would take place. As we walked in line, he held out his cane, with one arm being supported by his petite wife, with dyed jet-black hair and a navy saree. He was blind. Once he found out I was researching the Pushtimarg, he invited me to chat with him back in Ahmedabad.
>
> We sat in a white tiled living room with beige and wood detailed sofas when I met him and his family. At least five people wandered in and out of the room while he and his wife sat with me. He told me that he had lost his sight gradually. He had visited almost all the *betakjis* in India after going blind. When I expressed interest in this, he said that his wife described everything she saw, and he imagined it as she described it. She affirmed that from the clothes to the adornments, to the whole Haveli, she would tell him everything in as much detail as she could. He was visualising as she described it.

In this case, the *shringar* is key to visualising *darshan* in his mind. He can hear the place and, eventually, taste the *prasad,* so his wife would focus on observing *shringar* and often would tell him about the expression on the *swaroop's* face. The difference between imagining and seeing is ambiguous. For many people, imagining what their Lalan was doing, seeing, or feeling was familiar before *seva.*

While the second story is of the visualisation of the *seva,* or the *darshan* of the divine, being performed, the *varta* shows acts of *seva* performed by the mind to the *swaroop*, a manifested animate divine in front of the devotee. Luhrmann, a psychological anthropologist of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship in the US, observed that people's experiences of God as real were a process of learning. "[A] committed belief in God was more like learning *to do* something than *to think* something...a theory of attentional learning - that the way you learn to pay attention determines your experience of God" (Luhrmann 2012; xxi). She describes the Church as a 'class', and the use of the Bible to build a relationship with God (Ibid; 6), similar to the way Havelis can be seen as learning centres, and *seva* manuals (and other textual and media sources) are guidelines to develop a relationship with Krishna. The people in the Vineyard Fellowship do this by developing a new theory of mind to recognise and understand God's response in their minds as apart from their thoughts (Ibid; 41). The church tells

congregants to 'pretend' until it becomes a reality (Ibid; 73). This is similar to the idea of *seva* being routine until the moment it becomes an outpouring of devotion that elicits a response. That moment is when devotees begin their relationship with their Lalan's at home. Sometimes people described these moments as Jayshreeben did, through a responsive divine telling her in some way what he wanted.

I met one man in his late eighties in the UK who only does *manasi seva*. Over four long phone calls scheduled between his *seva* and his wife's evening schedule, we discussed how he came to do *seva* of the mind. He studied Pushtimarg texts and histories for years, gathering information in various files and papers littered around his flat in London. When I eventually met him, he mentioned that most people would find it suspect that he claims to do *manasi seva,* but he doesn't often share such information. From 5am to about midday he is in *seva,* after ritually cleansing himself. In his mind, he wakes Lalan up, bathes, dresses, and feeds him. He does not get distracted from his *seva.* "I am too old to do *seva,* but [Lalan] has found a way for me to continue my *seva* with *manasi".* "It is difficult to explain". Lalan is everywhere in all his senses during that time, he says. He was not wary of people not believing him and not interested in trying to convince anyone of his experiences.

For this devotee, his theory of mind is directed to his *seva.* While he did not frame it as a gift, he suggests this is divine intervention in keeping him active in *seva* rather than his intentional cultivation of theory of mind. He pays attention with total 'absorption' to use Luhrmann's terminology, rapt by the *seva* he can perform. However, it was not described as a conversation with the divine (though some devotees do attribute thoughts to Krishna's desires being made clear). The aim of attentional learning and further interaction is the performance of worship through *seva*, not the communicative act of prayer and response. However, the end goal is the human-divine relationship. In *seva,* devotees would carefully observe the divine response, which would inform their worship. As mentioned above, this was not seva of the mind, or constant remembrance, by the very fact of the material. Significantly few people performed this deeply personal and intimate form of seva. In *manasi seva,* as for the *varta* disciple Madhodas, Shri Nathji is in front of him, acting independently of his human thoughts, engaging and responding to *seva.*

Puja is to ritual as *seva* is to prayer?

"If it's God it's prayer but [for the] community it's service". This phrase came from a devotee in a workshop I held in London in June 2017 for young adults. We discussed what *seva* means, and while the English translation is service, the group voiced dissatisfaction with the slightly sterile translation. One young man offered the above interpretation, and if we explore this for a moment, we can see the idea of prayer being included in describing *seva,* as a universal explanation with a particular meaning.

In the community, secular or religious, *seva* to another human is a service as a collective agreement. However, in both the domestic sphere and at the Haveli, individual *seva* is in front of God and is a form of communication, as is prayer. It is a human communicating with the divine without an audience. “A prayer is not just the effusion of a soul, a cry which expresses a feeling. It is a fragment of a religion. In it one can hear the echo of numberless phrases; it is a tiny piece of literature; it is the product of the accumulated efforts of men and women over generations” (Mauss 2003 [1909]; 33). Prayer, then, is the combination of communication, emotional connection, and a socially developed product of religious activity by people. It is not a transactional, mechanical act to receive something in return. A background of mechanical transaction is where *seva* and *puja* differ the most for my interlocutors and I align *seva* closer to prayer in analytical terms. Once a devotee learns the mechanics of *seva,* the real religious learning comes through developing one’s *bhava.* Classifying *seva* as a ritual then de-emphasises the crucial element of *bhava* and emotions. While prayer may not be the correct traditional ‘category’, the prayer practice lens opens up an analytical discussion of *seva* (Haeri 2020).

The Pushtimarg movement’s critical distinction between *seva* and *puja* is a product of history, engagement with the public sphere, theology, and lived practice among other factors, and is also part of maintaining a religious and identification distinction. It is clear that seva is directly related to relationships, putting transactions aside, and is, as Mauss has said for prayer, a “social phenomenon” (2003 (1909); 33). Yet, as a lived practice, *seva* is playful, shown by the *bhava* logics in carrying out the three tenets. The relational, as the next chapter shows, is activated through *seva*-as-play, which is a serious part of religious life.

Chapter 3: "It's like playing with Barbies. But not"; Playful Prayer?

> On a sultry day in Ahmedabad, I sipped my salted almond milk lassi in a café waiting for an acquaintance. One of her close friends has an image of baby Krishna at home. She said, "My friend always tries to explain what he's doing with [baby Krishna]. All the dressing [up] and playing. He says, "it's like playing with Barbies. But not"".

This moment stayed with me not just because of its light-hearted nature but because it describes one of the critical elements of Pushtimargi religious life. People dress up their Lalans, talk and sing to them, and offer delicious, sweet treats, as adults do for their children and children do for their Barbies (or other toys). The 'but not' aspect is that *seva* shapes people's daily religious lives. Lalan is an animate divine child presence that is part of the family and, at the same time, a transcendent being, not a toy. People create this familial relationship through *seva*-as-worship, but importantly, *seva*-as-play.

I focus on two themes in Krishna *lila* that thematically thread through the thesis; 1) reveal and concealment and 2) reversals. Playing with the divine, as a relational act, gets to the crux of *bhakti* as a devotional move away from discussions of Vedic upper-class Brahmin rituals. Without *seva* guidelines or prescribed ways of playing, apart from certain toys that act like 'prompts', *seva*-as-play is unmediated, personal and bodily practice. Play is as slippery a concept as prayer. Play and prayer, as practice, straddle both public and intimate spheres yet are not academically categorised in specific cross-culturally applicable ways. As I said in the Introduction, universalised terms offer the chance to explore the balance between shared understandings and particularities, rather than ignoring unique meanings.

Rather than focussing on play theory or definition (see Schechner 1995), I consider play*ing* to be the most fruitful way of understanding the ambiguity of what counts as play. This concept explores play in and of itself, rather than as a resource to be capitalised on, domesticated or commodified. Playing with children was not something prominent in the families I met. While parenting and childhood experiences are gendered, the overarching stereotypical parenting experience was to raise academically successful and disciplined children. The context between the UK and India and the generational divides were slightly different, with the younger generations leaning toward a more flexible approach to parenting.

In the Introduction, we saw that playing involves different ways of classifying reality (Droogers 2011 [1996]). In an all-encompassing sense, play in the Pushtimarg pervades all parts of earthly and spiritual life, "[e]very play [is] a play within a play" (Hawley 1995; 116). Playing is a part of *seva*, especially as Krishna is a child. Games such as sports or board games (with rules, perhaps?) are

associated with adults, but spontaneous play is associated with children or childhood (Piaget 1982; 89). This is implied in how people describe their role reversal during *seva* from parent to child and vice versa. At times, devotees are the parent when preparing meals and caregiving, and at other times, they are children playing with Krishna and his toys or Krishna's cowherd friends or *gopis*. This play on personhood is another way of playing with Krishna and the self, blurring the boundaries of mundane and sacred.

This chapter lays out how moments of play are joyous and serious practices of worship. Krishna as a child-god, rather than in his warrior or kingly form, allows for care to be regulated by devotees as parents (Pocock 1973; 114). This reversal of authority is part of a role play, as devotees still hold Krishna as transcendent but can relate to him intimately. Misunderstandings arise from the erotic nature of Krishna worship (Chapter 4). Yet, this may be inexplicable to many 'outsiders'. Adults playing with an image in the dominant form of a mother can cause embarrassment, particularly in the UK, as a country shaped by Enlightenment thinking, a privileging of ascetic forms of Christianity and vague ideas of secularism and modernity. Part of taking play seriously in *seva* can be understood as a type of surrender. Surrendering oneself unconsciously is part of the perspective shift away from the mundane (*laukik*), the secular, so-called modern world of work. This form of surrendering can take the form of absorptive play in *seva*.

This mode of play-ing is theologically backgrounded by *lila*, divine play, where the nature of the divine is often as spontaneous and unpredictable as a child in the household.

Play in South Asian religions

Divine play, *lila*, situates human devotion in relation to transcendence as part of the creation of the world for shared enjoyment. *Lila* has been described as god's "amusement" (Fuller (2004 [1992]; 251), sport (Hein 1995; 13), episodes of a god's life (Hawley 1995; 116) or (religious) drama (Sax 1995; 4). In the Vaishnava version of Vishnu's creation of the world, a lotus grows from his navel, forming Brahma, who creates the world. Vishnu sleeps and dreams up the universe as a reflex rather than an intentional amusement or sport (Kinsley 1979; 2). In their heavenly *lokas* (places or worlds), Hindu gods and goddesses are "players, not workers, and in play their essential nature as free, transcendent beings is expressed" (Kinsley 1979; 48).

Lila is both a theory and a practice and acts in three main 'frames' of reference that interrelate. First, through a cosmological frame, second, performative and finally, permeating the boundaries between earthly and spiritual realms. The first, generally, refers to the creation of the world and god's descent to the earth. The second relates to performances of episodes of divine lives, and the third relates to the fluidity of god's movement and presence in and out of the world. For example, a moment when Lalan chooses his own clothes in a devotee's home is said to be his *lila*. According to some scholars, *lila*

becomes ‘doctrine’ through the child-god Krishna (Sax 1995; 14). Though doctrine implies a sense of order and hierarchy which seems at odds with the spontaneous unpredictability of *lila* as god’s divine play. Krishna is the most playful of the divine in South Asian religiosity as a child in his pastoral playground of Braj, rather than the epic warrior figure in Mathura or the king and politician in the kingdom of Dwarka.

Lila has a lot of similarities with miracles. The term miracle has its roots in a Judeo-Christian world (Davis 1998; 4, Wood 2008; 346), and though definitions of the miraculous are not always helpful (Woodward 2001; 22), there are some similar features. Often miracles are relayed through personal private testimony rather than public affairs. They include a form of healing and are connected to prayers or offerings to the divine (Woodward 2001; 365-366), and miracles tend to repeat innovation while imitating previous miracle stories (Ibid; 384). For Woodward, looking cross-culturally, miracles are perceived as “unusual or extraordinary event[s]” (2001; 28) that have no “reasonable explanation” (Ibid). He compares classic miracle stories that inspire awe and worship of a powerful divine or saint with modern miracles framed through the self and a “sign of God within us all” (Ibid; 384). While Woodward looks at Krishna, pointing to the ultimate reality being *lila* itself, there is a lack of acknowledgement for everyday nature of games of reveal and conceal in Krishna theology. *Lila* can perhaps be described as miraculous every day but not a one-type extraordinary event. Rather than seeing the ‘self’, *lila* in *bhakti* is also a perspectival shift into the spiritual and seeing everything, including oneself, as part of *lila.*

Lila assumes that the divine does not carry “’karmic baggage’” (Hausner 2008; 5) and is not motivated to act in a bounded manner. *Lila* includes the harsh nature of play, as relations between humans and the divine can be overwhelming, unpredictable and, sometimes, cruel. In combat or disaster episodes including god’s *lila* the gods are never in danger themselves but showcase the limitless nature of divinity (Kinsley 1979; 49). Restoring moral order is almost a “by-product” (Ibid; 5). Play in this sense is not “dark play”[66] (Schechner 1995; 36). In dark play, the boundaries of play take on a slightly disturbing tone; through, what he calls “‘provisionally’ the unsteadiness, slipperiness, porosity, unreliability, and ontological riskiness of the realities projected or created by playing.” (Ibid; 39).

Schechner discusses *maya-lila* (the illusion of a game), though in the Pushtimarg, *maya* as an illusion is not something to emerge from but rather participate in and enjoy. In this sense, as the “power of the gods *maya* is more than simply a negative concept, more than simply illusion…[it] is the supernatural ability on the part of the gods to extend themselves” (Kinsley 1979; 11). In fact, in its earliest usage,

[66] The features of dark play are outlined as “1 is physically risky; 2 involves intentional confusion or concealment of the frame “‘this is play’”; 3 may continue actions from early childhood; 4 only occasionally demands make believe; 5 plays out alternative selves. The play frame may be so disturbed or disrupted that the players themselves are not sure if they are playing or not—their actions become play retroactively: the events are what they are, but by telling these events, by reperforming them as narratives, they are cast as play” (Schechner 1995; 39).

Kinsley suggests that *maya* was the "wonderful skill of the gods" (Ibid; 12). In comparing *maya* as an illusion to a mask, Kinsley highlights the reveal and conceal play that the divine engages in to extend themselves. Disguising with a mask hides its wearer and displays, captivates, and makes relatable the overpowering awe of gods power, resulting in *maya* being understood as gods *lila* (Ibid; 13).

But as one guru said in a public event, "You can't just give toys to [Krishna] but must play *with* him. He is not just a toy. You need to think about his dignity". In Hindu ontology, the single point (here, Krishna as *brahman* or *atman*) who was alone and, therefore, created a second (Radha) to enjoy *lila* together and enjoy his own bliss (Haberman 1994; 24-25, Sanford 2005; 94). Apart from the private moments, Krishna desires to play *with* hence his creation of a a second. A devotee can enter *lila* as a participant (with his grace (*pushti*, *krupa*). The experiences of *lila*, at home, in Havelis, in moments of life, performance, or pilgrimage, re-frame the devotees' perspective to recognition of the world as *lila*. This is the perspective shift from earthly to spiritual, not rejecting the mundane but re-framing it as sacred play. Accepting that play is part of serious worship makes playfulness in other religious experiences more visible, as I explore in the next section.

Getting to the playful

Seva often begins as routine and a devotee's desire for more seva increases in steps over time. Before Lalan becomes animated through *bhava* or the life-giving ceremony, *seva* to Lalan is like socialisation, learning or routinising (like the *kheltha* Lalan in Chapter 5). Lester writes about the bodily practices of Mexican Catholic nuns that progressively shape their subjective experiences (2005). She talks about seven stages of becoming a nun as; 1) brokenness, 2) belonging, 3) containment, 4) regimentation, 5) self-critique, 6) surrender, and 7) re/collection. The routine bodily experience was crucial in the sisters' transformation, which began by comparing the first ten months of their postulancy to pregnancy. Jesus was gestating in their wombs (Ibid; 5) and as they progressed, they were simultaneously daughters, brides and mothers of Christ (Ibid), in very similar roles to the parental and lover *bhavas* for the Pushtimarg. These practices lead to an absorptive relationship with the divine. While there are clear differences in *seva*, for example, the Pushtimarg do not have prescribed stages of preparation for the formation of personhood; there are stages to *seva*. These stages act as steps to lead to a full surrender to Krishna and *seva* as an absorptive synaesthetic experience. Lester's nuns also show us the bodily understandings of Christ as a part of the feminine self, in similar roles that the Pushtimarg respect.

In an Evangelical Christian context, Luhrmann talks about unlearning (2012; 45). This is similar to Lester's re/collection stage, where there is a break with a past self and active formation of the new. However, unlearning is a break with what Evangelicals thought they knew about god. In order to find a divine response, people have to learn to listen during prayer (Ibid; 47). For Pushtimargi devotees,

there is not a clear 'break' but perhaps more of a process of unlearning what *seva* entails apart from prescribed worship acts. While people eventually see a moment when *seva* changed for them, rather than active progress through the steps, it is described as a holistic transformation that follows the lifecourse.

Eventually, Evangelicals begin recognising and situating God's communication (Ibid; 81) through a ""not-me" experience: a thought of image or sensation that one felt was not one's own" (Ibid; 67). This multiplicity of registers is "real but not real, not real but more than real, absolutely real for all time but just not real in that moment" (Luhrmann 2012; 100). She talks about a play and reality frame that is separate. However, *seva* resembles Lurhmann's evangelicals going on 'date nights' with God, where the play frame is the reality frame (Ibid 99, 320).

As one Pushtimarg devotee suggested, part of their soul went into their Lalan, slowly giving him presence through daily *seva*. In any case, there is no opposition of play and reality frames for devotees with an animate Lalan (whichever way this is understood). I suggest that the *seva*-as-play process is similar to religious conditioning of the body and mind (Lester 2005), an unlearning (Luhrmann 2012; 45), with surrender to unknowing, and perspective shift from *laukik* to *alaukik* (Karapanagiotis 2004).

Play-ing

Recall Geetaben from earlier chapters; her Lalan was given presence by the guru, where there had been a lot of running around. She emphasises her strong maternal love for her Lalan, and how his cheeky side often comes out during *seva*.

> One morning, as I sit in on her *seva*, she explains, "When you wake Thakorji up, you have to place him on your chest, like a hug. How you *valla* (stroke with love/pet) a small child. Then you do *charan sparsh* (touching his feet)".
>
> A piece of *shringar* falls off, and in a slightly sing-song voice, she says to Lalan, "Did the *shringar* fall off, Lala?"
>
> She places him on a seat after saying to Lalan, "Look, Prabhu (God) has already started his *lila*".
>
> After dressing and adorning him with jewellery, she dabs perfume all over, adjusting the *shringar* as she goes. She says, "Still doing *lila*, huh, Prabhu?" because while on her lap, one bit of gold jewellery comes out of place.

Geetaben's Lalan is particularly mischievous and constantly playing. She would always sing for him, speaking to him in an almost musical lilting Gujarati. Geetaben would quite happily run in and out of

seva, forgetting little bits, apologising to her Lalan, but still respecting certain rules of serving him. Just after a cuddle, she touches his feet, encompassing the relatable and transcendent, respectively.

As Geetaben dressed Lalan up and sang to him, I thought of the Barbie comment in the opening once again. Both Lalan as an animate thing and a Barbie can be considered facilitators of play (Brougere 2006; 23). Anything can be a toy, from giving a child some sticks and an acorn to a full train set modelled on the British railway system. Brougere situating the toy within a playset is useful. "The playset becomes a closed and self-sufficient universe, a place for the unfolding of play" (Ibid; 9). Lalan and his 'props' have the potential to offer a sort of playset for devotees to create their ritual shadow world at home and facilitate play.

I attended an exhibition at the Wellcome Collection in London in 2019 entitled "Play Well", which highlighted the seriousness of play. The exhibition's curation was inspired by a 'playscape' designer, Isamu Noguchi, to "provoke a desire to play instead of dictating how you play" (Sharmacharja 16th January 2020, Wellcome Collection Stories). Rather than playsets, playscapes offer a wider lens, spatially, temporally and imaginatively, to situate playing in the Pushtimarg.

In the last chapter, we saw the different tenets of *seva* as song (*rag*), food (*bhog*) and adornments (*shringer*). There are elements of playfulness in all the *seva* tenets, as will thread through my interlocutors' stories. The next sections look at the idea of a 'playscape' through one of the tenets of *rag* that admires *lila* as both divine play and relatable and, then, playfulness in the changing personhood of the devotee.

Speaking and singing

> ""Arise, Gopal, my lovely child,
> My lotus-love, I plead with you to wake
> And move: the waking time as has long since past"
> His hands reached out to grasp the pot
> and down came drops of pearls,
> The curd, which laced across his breast,
> a glittering garland against the black.
> No success – so he tried another game:
> and when his demands for rice weren't met
> He writhed and rolled upon the earth, says Sur,
> his earth, for he holds in his hands the world."
>
> (Sur Das poetry S777 from Hawley 1981; 49).

One of the most famous poets to write about Krishna as a divine child is the sixteenth-century blind poet Surdas through his visions of the butter thief. While Yashoda offers Krishna everything to wake up, it is not until she begins churning butter that Krishna wakes to try and steal it (Hawley 1981; 50). The audience and the poet know this balance between immanence and transcendence, while Yashoda remains absorbed in her parental *bhava*, as he writhes around trying to steal the butter. People fondly recalled Krishna's antics through *smaran*, evoked memory (Sanford 2008; 28), created by visions in poetry and *lila* performance, felt as a synaesthetic experience and embedded within places in Braj.

Part of the affective aesthetic of enchantment is the language of play (Bennet 2001; 154). In the Pushtimarg, there are multiple languages in constant use. In my field there was English, Gujarati, Hindi and Braj Bhasha. People code-switch through the languages, moving into different vernaculars in different spaces and contexts[67]. Braj Bhasha is a dialect of Hindi, which became the dominant literary and poetic expression in the fourteenth century (Richardson 2014; 64). Poems (*padas*) are written in this vernacular. Maintaining Braj Bhasha in the delineated sacred space (time and physical place) is deeply associated with Krishna worship. As the language, Krishna spoke and its widespread understanding as a vernacular (Bennett 1993; 36n12), it became part of a ritual vocabulary (Ibid; 146 n18) and is adopted in poetry (Sanford 2008) and through drama performance of *lilas* (Hein 1972, Hawley 1981). While the language is situated in the physical, accessible relations of being with Krishna in the roles of mother, and lover, aesthetic language leads devotees to the otherworldly experience of worshipping Krishna (Sanford 2008; 9).

Geetaben sings in Braj Bhasha or Hindi to her Lalan (translations of *kirtans* in regional languages are available) yet talks to him in Gujarati. While I am not a linguist, there was definite code-switching in the way she would speak to people and the divine. Gujarati is her mother tongue, which Geetaben uses to speak to her family, her children, and friends at the Haveli, while Hindi is reserved for publics, such as shops, banks, and strangers. She is constantly physically switching between play and reality frames through language and tone. Physically, she moves from stroking his cheek to touching his feet respectfully, switching from an immanent frame to a transcendent one. Braj Bhasha is an enchanted, sacred language and a vernacular everyday speech practice. Gestures and movement are embodied *bhava.* The combination of the physical and speech creates a playscape through sound, perhaps even a soundscape. Within this multilingual context and role-play through *seva,* Braj Bhasha as a language, physical movements and gestures are situated within a play frame that is entangled with a reality frame.

[67] My limited abilities in Braj Bhasha and Hindi prevent me from translating *padas* or picking up on linguistic subtleties within my fieldwork. Similarly, Bennett explains how his language teacher wish to convey not simply language but the emotions and moods behind lyrics (1993; 103).

Multiple personhoods at play

The nature of Krishna *lila* is androgynous (Schweig 2007; 441), where the feminine and masculine energies are often intertwined and interchangeable. While male devotees are male in the earthly sense, they are envisioned as *gopis* in the spiritual and devotional sense because of their *gopi bhava* towards Krishna. Dramatic performances of *lila* most famously take place in and are framed through the physical landscapes of Braj. Brahmin[68] boys play all the roles in the play (Hawley 1981:13–14, Hein 1972; 135). The dramatized transformation of the boys into *gopis* is not just make-up and dresses, but a complete transformation into, not possession by (Hausner 2008), the divine couple where they are worshipped as Radha and Krishna on earth. People touch their feet or the ground they walk on as they go past during a parade towards the *lila* performance or *sapta* event. The transformation of males into *gopis* through performance or *seva* is unproblematic for devotees, as they are not indicators of social equality but ideal types of devotional mood (see Fuller 2004 [1992]; 159)

Lila performance is about divine presence through imitation (Hawley 1995; 117) with the idea of showing Krishna in the world at play and "in Krishna the world plays too" (Ibid; 128). The *raas lila* best symbolises the joyful participatory nature of the *lilas*. Performed as a cultivated and literary play, this includes movement and dance but is overall a dialogue play (Hein 1972; 152) that is constantly changing, as an unpublished and unwritten drama (Ibid; 154) based on poetry.

The youthful (not an infant (Hein 1995; 16)) Krishna's flute, Murali, calls the *gopis* to him in the woods in the middle of the night. They come, abandoning all their responsibilities "at the expense of family shame" (Sanford 2005; 96). Krishna replicates himself so that each *gopi* is dancing with him in a circle. "A true circle, it is purposeless, it points nowhere but to itself, it produces nothing; it is a dance of pure pleasure, love and nothing else" (Hawley 1981; 156). Yet, this is a 'battle' (Ibid) between *kam* (desire or lust) and *prem* (pure love) or spiritual love (*priti*) (See Hein 1995; 17). Desire is situated in the *laukik* (earthly), where the *gopis* have their families and obligations, while pure love is otherworldly, eternal, and distanced from the mundane world in time and space (Ibid; 158).

There are public and private *lilas,* reflecting the reveal and conceal pattern of unknowing in Krishna-*lila.* The *ras lila* is an intimate moment, and this is not the place for *darshan,* sight and experience of *lila*. In the woods, Krishna's erotic play with the gopis is private at night. Here too, Radha and Krishna's love sport is playful, flirtatious and a game (Kinsley 1979; 81), keeping their love removed from the "harsh world of work and worrisome duty" (Ibid; 86). As we have seen, the Pushtimarg predominantly adopts the parental approach in public. Sanford suggests this is due to

[68] Though from my interlocutors' point of view outside of Braj this was changing.

Vallabhacharya's recognition that people would misinterpret the sensual nature of this particular *lila* (2005; 107, see Bachrach & Sharma 2016; 178).

Not only are human devotees transformed into *gopis* in *seva* or the divine couple in *lila* performances, but divine beings too. Shiva, the powerful ascetic deity associated with masculine eroticism, transforms into a *gopi* to join the *ras lila.*

> The Bansi Bat (Flute Tree) in Braj is said to be where the *ras lila* took (and eternally takes) place. Shiva turns his back on desire and focuses on meditation and asceticism. Yet, when he heard Murali, Krishna's flute, he wanted to join the *ras.* He could not cross the river Yamuna to get to the forest and sought the river goddess' help. The Yamuna told him to bathe in the rivers. She dressed him up and did his make up, so he entered Vrindavan (in Braj) as a beautiful *gopi* to be with Krishna.
>
> (fieldwork and Haberman 1994; 22-23)

Shiva does not 'lose' his identity, nor is this a temporary role play. This is a surrendering to the joy of *lila* where Shiva, on the same level as the other *gopis,* comes before Krishna to participate and enjoy. Rather than Shiva's dance that destructs, he is known as Nataraja, the Lord of Dance. He joins in the *ras* in delight.

Lila sets up interactions with the divine on a cosmological level, theologically and aesthetically framed, and then religiously practised in *seva*. This is not always easy for my interlocutors to discuss outside of the movement. There are a few reasons, including embarrassment or and misunderstandings that can arise when discussing love lives of divine and devotee. Yet, there is a sense of religion as a traditional and not modern movement, particularly in the diaspora where Hindu-isms are not as visible in the religious landscape, shaped by a legacy of secularism understood as the separation of state and religion.

"They would not get it."

Narayan is the 20-something university student in the UK who does *seva* before his classes every day. His story begins with YouTube and finding out his family history with the Pushtimarg before meeting a guru and starting *seva*. While his opinions on *seva* at home and public are fluid, he is a devotee. One striking conversation we had was about *seva,* touching on the varying registers of his life. I asked how he explained what *seva* was to other people.

> "I don't talk about it, never. No. Even so obviously, my mother and [sibling] are slowly getting into the faith as well…But apart from that, I wouldn't want to talk about it to anyone.

> Not even extended family, my uncle, my aunt…But if I go down the road and speak to my friends there's a … it's sort of kept to a private sphere…so yeh".

In a later conversation, he described it as awkward to explain it to people who would not 'get it'. Narayan had no peer community, unlike many of my interlocutors attached to a Haveli in the UK or India who could talk to their Vaishnava about their *seva*. In the UK context, some devotees identified a stronger divide between public life, framed through secularism, Christian-dominant discourse, and the vague notion of modernity, which was (allegedly) separate from private, domestic life where religiosity was domained. Narayan made an intentional personal choice not to talk about this part of his life. However, the context is one in which *seva* is as inexplicable to the 'outside world'.

Seva-as-work, *seva*-as-play

Narayan implied both a separation of the private and public sphere, the latter of which relates to the vague sense of modernity associated with his friends. This sense of modernity is defined by the 'now' that is constantly compared to a fixed or outmoded "historicized past" (Huizinga 1949; 195). 'Modernity', while seemingly a universalised 'general' movement globally, is rooted in specificity, place, or context, and refers to the "passage of time" (Latour 1993; 10) and offers a binary narrative of "victors and vanquished" (Ibid) with the vanquished painted as not modern. The modern Indian has been discussed through colonialism as East vs West (Nandy 1988), the shared experience of colonised and coloniser (Van de Veer 1994), caste and power dynamics (Mosse 1994) and Hindu nationalism (Van de Veer 1994, Jaffrelot 2007). Yet, the lack of consensus on what modernity indicates a fluid concept of modernities (Olupona 2004; 1) or a "myth of modernity" (McKinnon and Cannell 2013; 8). Cannell questions, "is modernity above all an idea to which we come to subscribe; a myth or an ideology which – like all ideas – comes to have real effects in the world because we need to believe in it, and act as though it were true and inevitable?" (Cannell 2019; 705).

The construction of 'multiple modernities' by many diasporic Pushtimargis is heavily influenced by nostalgia for a 'simpler' past of Krishna's childhood play or memories of a 'home' (Stock 2010, 24) in India which is shaped and bolstered by global family, friends and Vaishnava networks. The Pushtimarg construction of modernity is a conflictual terrain due to contextual differences, kinship, hereditary inclusion into the movement, and individual opinions and that spiritual authority have differing perspectives, too. This thesis cannot detail all these understandings of alternative Pushtimarg modernities through guru lineages, however, there are ways in which they align. Devotees can engage with the material earthly world if it is all surrendered to Krishna and acknowledged as part of divine play. Devotees aspire to be fully absorbed into Krishna's play, however, there is the threat of the 'modern' age associated with the Kali Yuga (The Age of Darkness), where excessive materialism, greed and ego are rampant.

Pushtimargis in India that I spoke to would talk about how 'modern' they were. Examples included having the latest appliances. As a majority middle-class householder *sampradaya,* Pushtimargis do not 'hate' modern conveniences such as scientific advancements or communication, but rather these are understood as part of Krishna's creation *lila.* As householders, wealth, and the material, if acknowledged as Krishna's, are to be acquired, particularly in the use of *seva*. Those who do not show humility in surrendering all this wealth as Krishna's play are considered worldly souls (*pravaha)* and associated with materialism and ego, regarded by some with whispers of inauthenticity (chapter 6). Rather than abandoning capitalist activity, devotee householders, often men, actively engage with capitalist productive relations with the broader purpose of providing for *seva.*

Much of what was labelled 'modern' concerned kinship relations. This included parents allowing young adult children to date through online apps rather than traditional matchmaking, being happy with 'inter-caste' marriage (to a point) and questioning women's exclusions from *seva* because of pollution rules around childbirth and menstruation. The 'modern' was often indicated by moving away from negative stereotypes of Pushtimarg orthodoxy that excluded people based on pollution. One guru often mentioned the need for the movement to "be with the times" and allow children to observe, from a distance, even if they weren't fully ritually cleansed (*apras*).

In the following section, I do not attempt to outline the trajectory of modernity discourse. I look at Pushtimargi experience to explore the domaining of *seva*-as-play as inexplicable or 'not modern' (Warrier 2005). This is not to reproduce a dominant narrative of modernity versus traditional. Instead, it aims to see how these spheres are permeated through play. However, as we will see, playing, particularly in the domestic sphere, is a way of activating relationality through the medium of *seva* as play. This moves away from a 'flattening' effect of a political reading of the devotional practice.

Ludic relations

> "[play] creates order, *is* order. Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life, it brings a temporary, a limited perfection" (Huizinga 1949; 10)

Play permeates both the global universal perceptions of play and is contextually localised, and, for the Pushtimarg, both theorised and theologised as *lila* and practised through *seva*. My interlocutors described situations in *seva* most often as *lila ,* divine play, or *khel* (play often associated with performance). However, some would say that Lalan was doing mischief (*masti*) or playing (*ramavun*). These two terms are usually used to describe children or juveniles playing. This points to different perceptions of play in the human lifecourse despite the blurred boundaries. While adults did play in *seva*, it was theologically framed as more formal. My interlocutors would follow a certain order in *seva* as play modelled on their lifecourse experience, yet, as play, *seva* is spontaneous and unpredictable in terms of efficacy (*lila).*

Droogers definition of play offers us the most in placing play in religious experience. He defines it as "the capacity to deal simultaneously and subjunctively with two or more ways of classifying reality" (Droogers 2011; 75). He suggests that capacity is dynamic and inclusive of other human capacities such as speech or power instead of a 'mode of being' (Ibid; 75). Subjectively is the 'as if' mode instead of a determined 'is' (Ibid). Simultaneity is the ability to operate from multiple perspectives (Ibid). We can loosely take on this definition when considering *seva*. Interlocutors certainly do *seva* in multiple realities and timelines, from Krishna's past to Lalan's present, while acknowledging an indeterminate 'as if' mode of Krishna *lila* (another form of reality).

All societies start in and with forms of play and as they develop, they lose their origins in play through gaining knowledge and systematisation (Huizinga 1949; 46, 75). As we have seen, *seva* as play starts as routine learning that develops into a relational form of play, almost a reversal of this theory of the evolution of play. Huizinga suggests that the world's 'play-spirit' or play-element is under threat (Ibid; 199) and wants to preserve this sense of play. His work is cross-cultural, spanning the ancient Greeks, Romans, and medieval Europe to the Renaissance and Industrial Revolution. In his work, he uses text sources such as the Mahabharata to examine South Asian play through games with purpose (Ibid; 52) and riddles as a form of knowing in the Vedas (Ibid; 105). This cross-cultural comparison offers a universalised explanation of play. Despite his defence of play, he too forms binaries between play and rules, seriousness, activities, and moral purpose (Ibid; 4-6). Perhaps to preserve play-spirits, he also ends up following the limitations of these binaries.

Rather than an activity that exists in disorder or has a 'civilizing' role (Huizinga 1949), play as disposition (Malaby 2009) aligns closely with *bhava* logics, as affective and emotion-led rather than efficacious. Malaby's three features of play as a disposition are outlined as; 1) unpredictability, 2) readiness *to improvise,* and 3) the actor gains agency with restraints (Ibid; 211). This theory of games applies to the Pushtimarg religious domain. Play is unpredictable, and *seva* is often improvised based on context and person. While agency does not encompass the relational and mutual experience of *seva*, it points to the opportunity to participate as a *pushti* (graced) soul. However, there is a theologically transcendent order to the world, which humans cannot perceive. This is not a game where the maker is known (as an institution, for instance) and modifies on demand once the players get better. Instead, the maker as the world's creator is unknowable, and one can only participate in his play if that fact is acknowledged. *Lila* as the theological foundation for play denies 'make-believe' of a rational concept of play (Handelman 2015) and is about an unknowable truth of the world's creation.

The other way interlocutors would describe *seva* as play to 'outsiders' in English would relate child's play, such as the Barbie comment, or avoiding the discussion entirely. Seeing *seva* as child's play

downplays the seriousness of ludic relations, yet this is how many interlocutors felt they could describe *seva*.

Childish play

> "Really to play, a man must play like a child" (Huizinga 1949; 199 in reference to the card game Bridge)

Play and the time for playing are not only shaped by age but by gender too. Dyson looks at playing in a herding community in the Himalayas (2015), where younger children see herding as a time for fun and play while developing an affective relationship with nature. However, as girls get older in this patriarchal community, they face more pressure to behave like adults for a good reputation pre-marriage rather than playing like boys of a similar age (Ibid; 61, see chapters 4 & 5). Dyson's work also points to how play is domained to childhood as something to be 'left behind'. This may help to explain why Narayan felt uncomfortable discussing *seva* with his friends at university or why Barbie was the most relatable way of playing.

Many interlocutors gave the example of the contrast between Krishna as a playful, mischievous child and Rama, the adult male head of the family, responsible for dharmic duty. Interlocutors often bring up that Krishna came down to earth *to be* the complete opposite of Rama and revel in bliss and joy with devotees and the earth. As a child god, Krishna inspires the desire to play based on the contextual domaining of play into childhood. There are three plays of Krishna that coincide with his lifecourse as a child: unstructured infant play, prankster toddler, child play then youthful games, teasing and rambling in forests (Kinsley 1979; 62). The infant god is absorbed in his own play without the same level of relational playing that the latter two stages have (Ibid; 63).

Scholars interested in play often focus on adult leisure and games despite the connection between childhood and play, while child's play is considered "frivolous" (Schwartzman 1976; 289). Play, in this sense, is seen as a form of make-believe or pretence that immobilises the transition from child to adult (Kinsley 1979; viii). The transition from childhood to adult play is often shaped by increasing structure and rules to games rather than limitless imaginative play. This separation between 'adulthood' and 'childhood' feels superficial, and of course, childhood is a social construction that is different in context (Chapter 5). This reductionist account would identify ludic moments to classify or take play as a metaphor for something else (Schwartzman 1976 also see McKinnon and Cannell on kinship 2013; 23), often socialisation into adulthood.

Yet, play pervades as a symbol of "child-like innocence" (Huizinga 1949; 202) and not a serious one unless referring to a form of institutionalised games (like Bridge above), work, entertainment, and leisure. In childhood, too, play is not trivial. For instance, Friedrich Fröbel opened the first

kindergarten in 1837 and felt that children could learn through play before seven years old (Wellcome Collection "Play Well" 2019), unlike many of his peers. Likewise, Piaget (1982), a psychiatrist specialising in child development, suggested that children build up their own knowledge about their world through different stages of play[69].

For many people in *seva,* there is nothing 'wrong' with associating playing with children or seeing it as child-like. Instead, the issue arises when serious play is seen as something to stop doing, perceived as childish and subordinate to different sorts of productivity that have a visible purpose. Playing allows adult devotees, situated in contexts framed by social conventions, the freedom and surrender of ego in play. Devotees are often adults play*ing* with a child, a reverse hierarchy of 'mature and serious' adulthood over an 'innocent' childhood. Reversals, as well as revealing and concealing, are a common trope in Krishna *lila,* including thwarting conventions and rules, playing pranks and encouraging the *gopis* to abandon society and propriety for the bliss of Krishna's love (see Hein 1995; 16). This child's play is divine and not mimicked by humans and is unbounded by social and moral convention and led by purposeless creative playing.

Once life is affirmed, Lalan is an animate divine thing, alive in his form, not a toy to be discarded and picked up again at will. While play is situated as child-like in nature through Krishna as a child figure and the vague modern context outlined in this chapter, the cultivation of serious *seva*-as-play gives devotees freedom in surrendering to Krishna *lila*. *Seva* gives shape to play, making the transcendent relationship relatable and possible.

Power, work, and play

Whenever the English word 'service' was used in fieldwork in India, it related to a job where someone hired you. Those who had their own businesses would not use 'service', as working for someone else was not as admirable[70]. The pervasiveness of *seva*-as-work estranges *seva* as play and domains it to religion as an institution, backed by theological and scholarly work on *lila*. Despite increasing interest, play is still domesticated into "nonwork" (Malaby 2009; 206), with fewer 'stakes' than what is considered work (Ibid). However, like religion, play has shifted to the 'margins' where innovation tends to flourish (Droogers 2011; 47). This marginality has pushed religious playing,

[69] I am not well versed in psychology or childhood behavioural development studies however, what Piaget shows is that play is part of development and is thought to have a purpose. First is the sensory-motor stage, when children use their movement and senses to explore, yet play and purpose are often entangled (1982; 274). The second is the egocentric representative activity stage, which begins with forming more communicative abilities using signs or language (Ibid; 279). This stage is a preconceptual stage which is the beginnings of conceptual thought. The third stage is the operational representative activity, the first of which is concrete, which leads to logical thought (Ibid; 289). The fourth stage is part of this, but is considered formal representative activity and is more about applying their play to intelligent pursuits and knowledge (Ibid; 290).
[70] This aspirational way of understanding entrepreneurship and 'work' through the English word service deserves much more attention.

controlled by post-colonial capitalist power, towards productivity in education, leisure, entertainment, or the innovative workplace.

Play as liminoid (Turner 1982) and unpredictable, which offers no perceived goal, is opposed to power which has the purpose "to influence other people's behavior and in consequence creates a particular social order" (Droogers 2011; 77). Play is a 'risk', then, to social structure. As Droogers suggests, rules create predictability. So, power institutions use play and sanctions to maintain norms (Ibid). Leisure, a rather vague time to rest or unstructured time, is met with suspicion if not utilised or capitalised upon. For example, nationalism is solidified through sports, such as the Olympics or Football World Cup (Ibid). An example is the proposed Krishna theme park in Braj in Chapter 7, that would attract tourists to the area, moving away from the wilderness of Vrindavan, as Krishna's original playground, into a more domesticated urbanite landscape that brings in revenue. Droogers also notes a similar sense of commodification of ready-made play in corporations like Disney and Hollywood (Ibid) that controls play but creates a sense of economic productivity in employment and monetary exchange.

In the Pushtimarg philosophy, *lila* is not depicted as destructive. However, this is a well-recognised trait of god's play in Hindu-isms. As Droogers points out, play has its own form of power that influences people's lives, even in destructive ways. For now, power comes into religious experience, but not as easily translated into individual devotion, which is domained within the domain of religion as 'popular religion', or 'magic' (Droogers 2011; 84).

As we saw in the introduction, the secular in India, as neutrality or impartiality towards religions, shapes *seva* as a type of social work, through nationalism as a political project. This is linked to an idea of post-colonial Indian secularity that unifies rather than divides. However, in the post-colonial Indian context, the religious is pitted against 'rationality' and a vague notion of 'modernity. Seva-as-work, whether religious, duty or economic, is framed by an understanding of the modern Indian nation as inherently 'rationally religious'. The religiosity of an organised understanding of seva to humanity in the global field comes through Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna movement. Later, a universalised concept of Hinduism, encouraged by Hindu nationalists, once again, places *seva* in the national, economic, and political realms.

Play being employed as a national and economic productive object runs parallel to how rituals can be redirected for similar objectives (Malaby 2009; 216). Though the origins of *bhakti* and *seva* are situated in India, the global diaspora experiences them in a different register. It forms the context for Narayan's problem of ritual, play and what is 'modern'.

Ritual, *seva* and play

> "Ritual grew up in sacred play; poetry was born in play and nourished on play; music and dancing were pure play" (Huizinga 1949; 173).

India's history of religious reform movements creates the space for 'rationalised' religion as productive, which was brought to the UK with the diaspora but consolidated by Hindu nationalist groups such as the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP). Ritual is carried into the narrative of power, for example, nationalism in pilgrimage sites of contention and violent struggles (Van der Veer 1996). Another example is found in ritual nationalist processions created by the VHP, such as the Rath Yatra or Rama's chariot pilgrimage in 1990, culminating in violence in 1992 with the destruction of the Babri Masjid. Rama as a king is imagined as a "celestial nationalist" (Fuller 2004 [1992]; 272) in this *yatra* across India, reaching the hotly contested site of Ayodhya even when they lost their appeal (Ibid; 273). Krishna, too, has been touched by nationalist discourse (Ibid; 275, see Michelutti 2008) as a warrior and king, but not as a cowherder child. In the political sphere, devotion, or *bhakti,* shows its power through languages of protest (Hawley 2015), and this plays out differently as *bhakti* is varied and vast. These global nationalist groups deepen the divides between tradition and 'modern' in the UK's dominant Christian, apparently secular context while encouraging the modern religious nature of Hindu nationalism. In Judeo-Christian traditions, it is not only the Protestant ethic of work nor the Puritan frame of play as idle that are dominant, though these have has pervaded the mainstream in some sense (Kinsley 1979; 264). Religious ritual and play are further domained to the private sphere.

As a first-generation diasporic Hindu Indian, Narayan found it uncomfortable to talk about religiosity to his friends outside of the Pushtimarg. There may be multiple reasons for this, however, what is clear is the conflicting understandings of what is modern and rational and where religiosity sits are part of the discomfort. Playful religiosity adds another complication, where playing with a 'thing' does not seem 'serious'. This is also why the reference to Barbie amused my acquaintance. This light-hearted explanation not only situated his religiosity as playing with a toy and implied this was child-like, but also compared it to a capitalist product that is dressed up and played with but is not perceived to be overtly productive.

Play, in religiosity, is "best appreciated when the definition of the supernatural is unelaborated and has a minimally codified doctrine, when internal leadership and control are weak or in crisis, and when the external social conditions are characterized by a minimal, diverse, and loosely-maintained set of values." (Droogers 2011; 85). In the Pushtimarg, Krishna is not codified but personal, gurus as spiritual authority are plentiful and diverse (not weak or in crisis as such), and the domestic space offers differing values if we think of devotion through care and emotion.

Joy (*anand*) is vital in *seva,* as in play (Huizinga 1949; 20), and often given as the reason and result of doing *seva,* which is connected to heightened emotions yet grounded in relationships. Drawing attention to ludic moments (or *lila* moments) does not ignore the sociality of these realities nor the

seriousness of the religious context (Droogers 2004; 153). The Wagenian initiation ritual in the Congo has a serious and playful side, in creating alternative realities, with a ritual "shadow world" (Ibid; 140). People process realities simultaneously, parallel to a 'normal world' and playfully, whether ritual secularity or religiously or both (Ibid), as discussed above with Drooger's definition. These situations are inherently created and continued for enjoyment (Ibid; 148). In the Wagenia boys' initiation, the ritual shadow world was shaped by social axes based on relationships in society (Droogers 2004; 142), where the rules of personhood are transitioning, humour is employed, and games of revealing and concealing knowledge are played. In the Pushtimarg, the space for acknowledging alternative or ritual shadow worlds set up devotees for absorption into *seva*-as-play. However, *seva* is a tangible and sensory reality rather than a shadow.

Surrender: Absorptive religious play

Active surrender to *lila* and Krishna is a key concept to the Pushtimarg, as we have seen, from the initiation to daily *seva.* Returning to Lester's work with Mexican nuns, there is particularly interesting stage of surrender. The sisters adopt an attitude associated with femininity called entrega, which means something between surrender and sacrifice, but is an active attitude (2005; 193) as these nuns' act in the world rather than renounce it. As a householder sect, the Pushtimarg act in the world too, and they surrender all to Krishna. The cultivation of *entrega* for the nuns is ultimately about humility in your surrender (Ibid; 197) an acceptance that the self cannot change the world, rather, it is for God to decide. This attitude must be practised in their day-to-day activities and is what gives their prayers strength (Ibid; 198). Importantly, prayer is both individual and communal (Ibid) and the attitude of *entrega* is carried through the body in everyday activities. In the Pushtimarg, there is the idea of all the world as *gopis* in relation to the ultimate divine male, Krishna though he is androgynous. Devotees are plac themselves as feminine figures in Krishna *lila* for the absorptive *bhavas* of lover and mother (chapter 4). This is a sign and cultivation of surrender and humility, particularly the latter for some of my male interlocutors.

As a devotee surrenders and experiences synaesthetic absorptive experiences in their relationship with Lalan, their perspective shifts. Absorption is part of *seva*-as-play. Luhmann discusses the relationship between sensory overrides and absorption (2015; 243) that are experienced with more prayer learning. Sensory overrides allow for an experience of things that are not materially, physically of audibly present. For the Pushtimarg, these moments of sensory overrides are Lalan's way of communicating with them. They lead to a more absorptive *seva* that is cultivated over time. Geetaben is early on in her *seva,* in her words, so perhaps she is not quite 'there' in terms of a fully absorptive experience. *Manasi seva* (of the mind) could be considered a fully absorptive form of *seva,* without any material or visible things, yet still follows *seva* patterns.

An example of absorption comes from the female mystical *bhakti* poet Mirabai, who writes,

> "Mira danced with ankle-bells on her feet.
> People said Mira was mad; my mother-in-law said I ruined the family reputation.
> Rana sent me a cup of poison and Mira drank it laughing.
> I dedicated my body and soul at the feet of Hari [Krishna].
> I am thirsty for the nectar of the sight of him." (quoted in Kinsley 1979; 238)

Mirabai's story was one of divine love's potency. She fell in love with Krishna when she was a child, thinking of him as her future husband. Mirabai's story was often repeated and admired by interlocutors. Across India, Mirabai was controversial; she was considered to have *gopi* and *madhurya-bhava,* which is not a model for Pushtimarg devotees to follow in their earthly life. While madness was not something that devotees talked about, merging into seva of the mind (*manasi*) or fully absorbing into *seva* all day was sometimes seen as a bit odd and not to be believed. Still, on a spiritual principle, the full absorption into a limitless attachment with the divine in ecstasy is not denigrated but admired.

The difference between possession and *bhava* relates to various states of absorption. *Bhava* and possession (*avesa*) in the devotional sense are interlinked and "Bhakti poets speak of bhāva, in which the devotee partakes of the nature of the deity, in terms akin to possession, including entry, immersion, ecstasy, insanity, and loss of self-consciousness" (Smith 2006; 355). For Smith, *avesa* is a higher identity-altering state (Ibid; 355) than *bhava,* as anyone can experience *bhava* as an "ordinary relational activity" (Ibid; 356). *Avesa* is outlined by Vallabhacharya, in a fundamental sense, as the absorption of thoughts in Krishna (Ibid; 345). According to Vallabhacharya, "āveśa [possession in bhakti is] in several related senses: the Lord and his attributes entering and pervading a devotee, the devotee entering the Lord or his līlās, or the supreme brahman pervading an individual" (Ibid; 345). This does not mean the potential for an all-encompassing absorption does not exist, but this seems more unattainable, or untenable perhaps, for most devotees I spoke to.

I did not come across possession in the identity-altering sense in my fieldwork. Absorption in *seva* is not like the state of possession in *bhakti* movements of *avesa,* which is a higher identity-altering state. Helgesen writes about children in Norway, engaged in cosplay with a fictional YouTube personality from Japan called Miku (2014). She is ambiguously material as a projected image on stage (Ibid; 538). As a technological being, Helgesen writes, Miku allows children to experiment with different subjectivities in the process of multiple becomings (Ibid; 539) as opposed to the linear child becoming an adult. In the cosplay world, not only does a play frame or playset allow space for playing together but where registers of multiple becomings can take place. For example, the children dressed up as Miku felt Miku's perspective but did not lose sight of themselves dressed up as Miku. They were

straddling multiple identities in the "not me" (Ibid; 545). This is part of the Miku role play, yet it is relational. The subjective and the "not me" are related through the perception and personhood of the player, perhaps, as in Pushtimarg *seva*-as-play.

If play is the communicative part of Pushtimarg *seva,* that is unlearned, spontaneous, surrendered and 'not-me', *seva* can be considered through the lens of playful prayer. In the realm of the mystical (as opposed to ascestic) attention on play in the Pushtimarg makes the playful visible in other religious contexts. Rather than domesticating play or making play productive, this takes play seriously as part of relationship-building and religious life. Lalan's everyday *lila* is the dropped jewellery, which Geetaben recognises as a "not-me" experience. Geetaben lives in the multiple registers of becomings, but, through *seva,* this is directly relational to her Lalan in different moments of absorptive play. Participating in *lila* through *seva* is like recognising a different world, apart from, but that co-exists with, the mundane. To take a turn on Hawley's words (1981), Geetaben is playing (*seva)* within a play (Lalan's *lila* or moments of life) within a play (*lila* as divine creation).

The following two chapters explore Krishna's place in the family and how the kin network centres on him while keeping devotees at the peripheries.

Chapter 4: Krishna as part of the family

"You must always think of Pushtimarg the same as thinking of a child", declared Shrutiben. "*Pushtavela* is like getting a baby – we just get one after nine months usually!"

Shrutiben is a no-nonsense mother of two grown-up sons who constantly runs around doing tasks. She hardly stops to take a breath, doing a wonderfully elaborate *seva*, focused on preparing foodstuffs for her Lalan. While she lives in Ahmedabad, her children live abroad in separate countries, and though they call every day, they see each other rarely. Over time she became a slightly stern but loving mother-like figure to me. Though initially she was abrupt (and is known to be), it was through spending time together that her softer side came out. She married into a Swaminarayan family, but her maternal grandmother used to take her to a Pushtimarg Haveli, and she attributes her natural emotional attachment to those visits.

While I sip masala tea from a saucer on the dining table, she is on the floor preparing her Lalan's thalis for her *seva* dressed in a green and yellow saree, with a long salt-and-pepper braid reaching her waist.

"It's like when you're pregnant. You don't know how to take care of the baby immediately. You listen to all other mothers, and you take your 'precautions' just like before you decide to get [Lalan] *pushtavela*." We discuss what she means by precautions. She says, "If you don't sterilise a milk bottle, you know it might make your child sick, so you have to keep [Lalan's] food in the same way". After a pause, she continues, "Only we can get attachment to recognise when [Lalan] is asking for something – like when you serve your child something."

Spending time with Shrutiben during my fieldwork in Ahmedabad highlighted for me how delicate and diverse the balance between a relatable divine and the human experience could be. Like many others, Shrutiben clearly feels *vatsalya* (parental) *bhava* towards her Lalan in a very explicit way, linking pregnancy and care for a newborn to her *seva*. Yet, it would be wrong to assume the Pushtimarg is a cult of motherhood. Males and females adopt the position of motherhood in relation to Krishna in a particular gendering of devotional energy as female, yet this does not run parallel to the traditional patriarchal sociological gendering authority of men in the family. While I noticed a certain trend in retired men acknowledging that women were the household experts in *seva*, the practice of care and family 'work' remained ambivalent. *Seva* both allows for voicing, perhaps implicitly, the ambivalent position of women in the labour of care in the Indian context and creates the time and space away from such work. There is an ambivalence in giving mothering value, which is made

visible when discussing the labour of care of children and divinity, domained to the domestic and traditionally-female spheres.

Not only does Krishna have his own genealogical origin story that includes a mother, father and brother (and Radha and the *gopis* as lovers), but he has thousands of human families across multiple timelines and cosmologies. They draw on their intersubjective and sensory-tactile experience of kinship to cultivate a familial bond with Lalan. As outlined in the Introduction, the perceived subordinate domains of kinship, religion and the domestic have often gone unnoticed concerning the particularities of Hindu-isms[71]. Anthropology has moved beyond biological kinship (Stone 2004; 338) hence my use of the terms relations or relationality. This thesis draws on kinship as a "mutuality of being" (Sahlins 2013), set apart from biological relationships, and importantly, including "mystical" bonds (Ibid; 2). Mutuality is about sharing and participating in different qualities of life (Ibid; 29). The co-participation in human parallels of caregiving in *seva* cultivates *bhava* (emotion) and the relationship with the divine animate based on mutuality. The devotional side adds to this relationship so I also refer to Orsi's emphasis on religion seen "as a web not of meanings but of relationships between heaven and earth" (Orsi 2005, 5). The presence of Catholic sacred figures in the family network is similar to how Lalan shapes the family structure of a devotee's household. Those who do not practice in the household still acknowledge that for their kin who are devotees, Krishna holds the most special place in their perspective of the household.

In Pushtimarg theology, three leading female figures are attached to Krishna; Yamuna, Radha, and Yashoda (all interchangeably referred to as Swaminiji[72]). Yamuna[73] is the divine gatekeeper and mother of *pushti* souls (chapter 7), Yashoda is the mother figure, and Radha is Krishna's divine consort. Yashoda *bhava* is overtly parental, and the Radha is seen as embodying *madhurya*, that of a lover. Rather than experiences of motherhood (which there are many in the thesis), this outlines the Indian context of mothering. For the Pushtimarg, the making of relations and personhood is inextricable from *seva* to the divine. This can often seem inward-facing due to the differing notions of what *seva* means in the Indian context. However, the domaining of kinship and religion as subordinate to political and economic spheres associated with vague notions of modernity and progress, (Cannell and McKinnon 2013) relates to how much devotees engage with public religion, which is defined by what counts as accepted forms of religious practice. Kinship and religious life are often further domained to the female domestic sphere. The Pushtimarg theology highlights the position of female

[71] Exceptions include Pintchman 2005, Bachrach 2014 and Sharma 2013.
[72] Swaminiji can also Radha and Rukmani (Krishna's wife) as in Vaudeville 1982, though in my experience it was interchangeable with all the female figures. Vallabhacarya is sometimes considered Swaminiji as a divine personage
[73] Yamunaji has three forms; Adhidaivik: the divine form Adhyatmik: the divine attributes attached with it. Adhibhautik: the perceived form. The first form is the divine is as the fourth patarani (queen) of Krishna, the second form is a spiritual form and is the divine water of the river Yamuna in Braj, and the third form is the physical form of a river that starts in Kalindas and ends near Varanasi that humans can see.

energy in relation to Krishna at the centre, privileging mothering devotion (*vatsalya*). The figure of an Indian mother has a history that is entangled with the post- Independence nation-state. In parallel, within the Pusthimarg there is a specific history that resulted in a shift away from the lover *bhava* (*gopi* or *madhurya*) in the nineteenth-century . This is a time period where the Pushtimarg were dealing with legal battles, particularly the Bombay Libel Case 1862, which eventually led to a downplaying of erotic love in the movement. The influence of the nineteenth century trickles down to the individual, so despite the privileging of feminine attributes in a devotional setting, public settings and traditional patriarchal kinship hierarchies are rarely 'reversed'.

Being a relatable divine

> Yashoda, Krishna's foster mother, is in the middle of telling off the naughty young Krishna. Instead of collecting it, he was eating fruit, and his brother, Balarama, was telling Yashoda to make Krishna open his mouth because he was eating mud. When Yashoda looked into his mouth, she saw the entirety of the Universe. Overwhelmed, she felt despair, and Krishna, lovingly, made her forget what she saw so she could continue with Krishna as her son.

According to devotees, Krishna manifests as the roles the devotee needs rather than as awe-inspiring and unattainable. The use of close and relatable kinship terms makes the cosmic idea of Krishna as the Ultimate Divine (the transcendent power that is absolute reality) more manageable. As above, Krishna conceals his identity as divine for the devotee to develop a relational *bhava* towards him and allow emotional attachment to him as a relatable being.

As the son of the house, Krishna is part of the intricate network of the family, shaping the way daily life is carried out, much as a child does. Reflecting on this borrowing of family identities, the Yoruba in West Africa offer a similar example of a human-divine relationship. Here, the Orissa gods are "maintained and kept in existence by the attention of humans" (Barber 1981; 724), not dissimilar to analyses of Hindu images overall (Waghorne 1996)[74]. The caregiving a family or devotee performs for Lalan reflects, in part, their identity (see Orsi 2005; 13). Personhood should not be understood as static but rather in flux, even if it centres on the relationship with Krishna.

Devotees are certainly influenced by who he is as divine and how he appears to the devotee, but how the devotee performs caregiving is deeply personal and also reflects who they are. These personal identities are reflected in the variability of seva-as-care. Shrutiben, above, takes time to perform seva for Lalan through her love of preparing foodstuffs. She would constantly comment on how well I ate and how 'healthy' I was[75] and discuss what her children should eat while living abroad and what they

[74] This does not suggest there are no differences but rather I reflect on the way that personal devotion within a kinship network has cross-cultural resonances (Barber 1981).
[75] This is not always healthy in the sense of being conscious about health but healthy to mean gaining weight.

missed eating at home. Meanwhile, Geetaben, from earlier chapters, who would say that her Lalan keeps her on her toes, would spend a lot of time on kirtans, singing and practising throughout the day, even after Lalan was put to bed. Her singing included popular songs on the radio in the afternoons, and we would laughingly sing to our favourites while I was visiting. The following section deals with the roles of children, mothers, and fathers in a typical Indian Pushtimarg home to contextualise Krishna as a divine child in the home in the next chapter.

"The Indian family"

> Shrutiben's daughter-in-law, Sunita, has a happy-go-lucky attitude. We would often hang out together with a few other young women, in coffee shops or at the Haveli. She had taken Pushtimarg initiation just before getting married, almost as a formality as she did not feel that religious, so it was not that important to her. This is quite common, and as a pattern, it is usually the in-marrying women who have to become initiated rather than young men. She was in the process of learning about *seva* through her mother-in-law, Shrutiben, by attending functions at the Haveli. We became friends due to constantly being at the Haveli, discussing her upcoming wedding or life, in general. She was not keen on starting *seva* for herself at home. "It takes quite a long time, *nahi*? I'm just learning…then when I am older, maybe".

Like other young female friends, Sunita implied that it was not the 'right' time, and perhaps it would never be. Often people would discuss what 'stage' they were in life in relation to starting or progressing in their *seva.* To understand the relationship with Krishna in a Pushtimarg home, it is helpful to first briefly outline how the family is *generally* understood in this context. While this thesis acknowledges diversity in kin structures[76] (Freed 1963, for specifics on gender, see Vatuk 1969), these tropes are well-recognised and illuminate how Lalan is encircled in a generic family model

Formally, the pan-Hindu *asrama* "conditions of life" stages are; childhood from 0-8 years old as someone so young cannot be held accountable for a crime (Karve 1953 [1990]; 60); 8-20 is the stage of celibacy or initiation, and 20+ is that of a householder. The final step is *vanaprastha asrama,* renouncing the world slowly (Ibid; 61). Pushtimarg extends the third stage of the householder as the way to live your life and worship Krishna. Worship of Krishna as a young baby can often follow a pattern paralleling the life course. For example, children do not worship Krishna but play (respectfully) with him. Young women begin *seva* in the family home as a collective before or after marriage, where they are likely to worship alone if not in a joint or a non-Pushtimarg family. Young men are less likely to do *seva* because of the assumption of outside work responsibilities (increasingly, this is the case for women too). As families grow with young children, the focus is on

[76] While a relationship with the divine image may be seen as a form of fictive kinship, this perspective would ignore the real familial bonds between devotee and divine.

caregiving, and the responsibility of Lalan passes to the older generations, though men often join in after retirement. This follows a similar trajectory with the *asrama* stages across Hindu-isms.

Most of my research was among Gujaratis in the UK and India, and family structures followed similar patterns (often found across India). This simplified lifecourse summary cannot cover the complexities of kinship across India and the diasporas. Rather, it serves to depict a *general* trend among South Asian Pushtimargi women around the world. Markedly, for many South Asian women, the stages of being a child, young woman, married, of motherhood, and retirement often determine how they see themselves and others. Despite historically being seen as inauspicious in India, widows were initiated by Vallabhacayra (Bachrach 2014; 78), feature in the *vartas* doing *seva* and continue to perform *seva* today.

Most lived in or were attached to a joint family structure, where the bride moved in with the groom's family[77], though this is often more the case in rural than urban areas. My younger female friends lived alone with their husbands in small city flats yet frequently visited their husbands' families. Traditionally, a groom's family is held in higher regard than the bride's though this may be implicit in the so-called 'modern' families through perceived neutral interaction (Pinto 2006). Marriage was usually desired within the 'community', whether caste-based, Indian in general or Pushtimarg-specific. The bride would often convert to Pushtimarg for the marriage to proceed as with Sunita, while husbands did not. The head of the family is the father figure, while the mother is a homemaker, even if both partners work full-time.

In English, according to Montgomery, "the word "family" almost always implies the presence of children" (2008; 109). In India, the Hindi term '*parivar'* is used similarly to include children but assumes the presence of an extended family, from aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents to great-grandparents. Adoption is not uncommon throughout India, though there is a difference between legal adoptions and adoptions within families. The latter refers to situations where a couple is childless so they adopt the child of a family member, continuing the family line through male sons (Vatuk 190; 77), which happens within the Vallabhkhul to maintain lineage.

Regarding the different childhoods of different genders (Ibid; 93), sons are commonly more desirable than girls though across India, this is slowly changing, and many people I met were hoping for girls. One reason I was given for this change is that girls take more care of their own family and their partners through their perceived empathetic nature. Yet, traditionally and in many cases today, sons take on the family name and responsibilities such as providing financial support for their families. In contrast, daughters take on household responsibilities for their husband's families in addition to

[77] See Allerton on the universal assumptions of what it means to be alone as an unmarried woman (2017). In the context of the Pushtimarg and South Asia, there are many factors that see marriage as part of the female lifecourse.

working if they can. Having a son often elevates the status of a daughter-in-law within the joint family. Sons get treated as young princes within the family and are entitled to education from a young age. There are still examples where the best food is saved for the sons of the house while the daughters are trained to be homemakers, often seen as the future keepers of religious traditions, and serve the men of the house.

A note on the gendering of purity and pollution

In her analysis of Hindu women and *stridharma* (women's code of conduct) in Britain, Knott has noted that the destiny of genders is prescriptive in many scriptures.

> "As Manusmrti and other texts state, the inherent nature of woman, strisvabhava, is one of instability, weakness, fickleness, wickedness and impurity, and the Hindu aim for a female is that her womanly nature should never be allowed to surface. Before the onset of womanhood, she should be married. She should become a perfect wife (dharmapatni or righteous wife, pativrata, devoted to her husband), and—should her husband unfortunately die before her—she should 'choose' either the path of widowhood or sati. At no stage should she be controlled by her own nature; in fact, the solution to the problem of her nature is *stridharma*, the code of conduct or duties of the wife" (Knott 1996; 19).

Though she suggests that *bhakti* provides an alternative path for women bound by the *dharma* discourse, there are differences within Hindu-isms. There are enduring tropes of a polluting female form, the gendered division of labour in the household, and an ideal lifecourse for a woman which have varying degrees of relevance in practice.

Female devotees would talk about when they can do *seva* in their life course. Pan-Hindu purity rules on menstruation and post-partum affect performing and attending rituals and restrict women in many other ways (called *sutak,* which also affects people in grief). It is not uncommon that menstruation is a period of ritual impurity in the broader scope of Hindu-isms when a woman is in a state of uncleanliness for three days and cannot perform religious acts. For stricter devotees, women cannot touch anyone or anything that has not been explicitly kept for that period, such as crockery and clothes. Some must sleep on a grass mat on the floor, sometimes on a balcony, rather than a bed[78]. A devotee can recite holy words on the fourth day but still not perform *seva* until the fifth day. Shrutiben's more elaborate *seva* could only start when her children were older and moved away, and she had gone through menopause. She could then focus her full energies on *seva* without these four-

[78] Though attitudes are slowly changing as shown by popular media. This can be seen in the Bollywood hit "Pad Man" (2018); a story is inspired by social activist Arunachalam Muruganantham, who invented a machine to make sanitary pads more cost-effective as many women across India use rags. Despite receiving much backlash from his community as a male discussing periods, he persevered.

day pauses. For Sunita and others, *seva* was in a distant 'future time' when there was enough time or *bhava* to dedicate. "Why should I do *seva* when for four days a month I am not allowed?" Sunita asked me one day. "How can I leave Lalan for four days without food, water and playing with him just because I have a period?" "I couldn't leave my child like that", said another friend. They asked me to approach the guru nearby and ask these questions. I was told that because of *bhava*, women follow these rules to protect Lalan.

This attitude is surprising. Purity and pollution as a model, where women are polluting, in wider Hindu-isms, is deeply entrenched, underpinning further inequalities between the sexes. However, I encountered many young women in India and the UK on the fence about starting *seva*. The rules during menstruation and postpartum 'pollution' were a large part of our discussions. In India, menstruation has become a site of conflict between women and those in charge of access to Hindu temples (Kumar 2016), challenging the purity and impurity model in practice. However, the guru implied that the *bhava* is based on this understanding of female bodies as polluting, which links to *stridharma* and gendered forms of personhood. *Bhava* for Krishna complicates the idea of scripted personhood, yet, lived practice raises debates among my interlocutors'. Sunita and her friends did not perform *seva* or any religious activities while menstruating, but raising these sorts of questions makes the lifecourse cycle and its relation to *seva* visible and illustrates an ongoing dialogue on gender divisions and purity rules.

The experience of *seva* is shaped by the rules surrounding female personhood while promoting feminine figures as ideal type devotees (i.e., the *gopis* in Gokul who abandon all protocol to be with Krishna). For the Bengalis that Lamb works with, the gendering of society is reflected in their ideas of liberation and how closely women are attached with people and materials (1997). Women's ties are "disjoined then remade, while men's ties are extended and enduring" (Lamb 1997; 290). Here, *maya* (illusion as attachment) builds with age and through the life course, marriage, having children and becoming grandparents. Yet, the older generation spends much of their time trying to rid themselves of *maya* to achieve liberation in their death. *Maya* fluctuates more frequently for women than men because women are more open to substances leaving and entering the body through biological processes (for example, menstruation and childbirth). For the Pushtimarg, *maya* is less relevant, as the devotee wishes to participate in the *lila* rather than emerge from an illusion. However, the idea of a gendered continuity of a person's ties extends to the relationship between female devotee and divine. *Seva* is interrupted monthly by pre-menopausal female caregivers while male devotees continue this cultivation of attachment. This intrusion into relational caregiving is a difficult point to explain for many younger females I encountered. This is an example where the theological understanding of *bhava* for Krishna in the otherworldly allows devotees to break social conventions and roles, yet this does not translate to lived practice.

Being an 'Indian' mother in context

The idea of an 'Indian mother' is situated in a specific culturally determined setting apart from the family structure outlined above. Part of this story is an enduring binary between static notions of what is 'traditional' and what is 'progressive'. Yet, this thesis explores the inherent flux in kinship and varying registers of relationality, which is contextualised in this discourse. As DeLoache & Gottleib state, we must "dispel any assumption of an Everybaby or an Everyparent who somehow exists outside culture" (2000; 5), showing that cultural protocols determine child-rearing to a large extent.

The ideal nationalised mother

Indian motherhood in scholarly literature is frequently in relation to goddess worship in Hinduism and often linked to nationalism and power hierarchies of the household (Donner 2008, Krishnaraj et al. 2010, Aneja & Vaidya 2016). This section aims to outline the socio-political context for Indian mothers.

The rapid rise and continuing popularity of the Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has incited scholarly discourse on the politics of religion and the globalising nature of the 'Hindutva' movement (Rajagopal 2001, Jaffrelot 2009, Ghassem-Fachandi 2010). The contemporary public image of an ideal Indian mother comes, in part, from the colonial period's politicisation of motherhood to rally people around the Independence movement. This discourse can often miss out on the religious experience and how that is shaped by politics (Bear 2013). For instance, in reference to women, Rajagopal demonstrates how Hindu nationalism is shaped through the "dharmic serial" (2001; 92), specifically, the televised Ramayana. While he mentions Mother India as a nationalist image (2001; 59, 61), he comments very little on how the idea of Mother India came into being. The female figure of Sita as the idealised wife in the Ramayana is equally ignored (Aneja & Vaidya 2016; 9). As situated within the nation, the ideal-mother concept takes on a spiritual-religious quality. "[T]he nation is elevated to a realm of spirituality to be protected and worshipped like a goddess by her soldier sons, while women must see themselves as bound by tradition, rising towards an ideal future as mothers of the nation's progeny" (Aneja & Vaidya 2016; 10). The "politics of reproduction" and the maternal body becomes the site where power struggles and identity meet, which infers questioning of what constitutes 'motherhood'. However, in the urban upper-middle class setting in which I was working, both in the UK and India, the situation of motherhood was almost always discussed in relation to *seva* rather than state or nation.

The desexualised ideal Indian mother was, and continues to be, politicised by the right-wing nationalist parties. The effects of patriarchal processes have affected how women have come to be seen as the religious moral compass of the family and the ideal naturally empathetic homemaker.

Shrutiben once told me that once she and her husband had children, they became 'companions', and there was no 'need for other things', highlighting her perspective on her duty of bearing children and the withdrawal from sexual life. Shrutiben highlights two points that emerge from this discussion, the first is a gendered approach to the lifecourse, and the second is the apparent desexuality of mothers. In this supposed 'desexualised' stage of her life, she had more time to dedicate to *seva* as a mother. In a feminist reading, the Indian mother has become a non-erotic entity, emphasising sacrifice and being under a patriarchal "pact" (Ibid; xvi) due to the link with the nation, which elicits specific responsibilities for a mother, such as childcare. Pushtimarg women have a specific history with the regulation of female sexuality that the Bombay Libel Case highlights.

Lovers and goddesses

On October 21st 1860, Karsondas Mulji published an article, "The Primitive Religion of The Hindus, and the Present Heterodox Opinions", in his Gujarati reformist paper *Satya Prakash* (The Light of the Truth (Bennet 1993; 11). Mulji was a former follower of the movement turned reformer through Western education (an Elphinstone graduate). Two main threads in the article come through; first, he denounces the Pushtimarg as "heretical" as it deviated from the Vedas (Haberman 1993, 1994). Second, Mulji accuses the *goswamis* of sexual misconduct with female devotees[79].

The *goswami* Jadunathji Maharaja filed a libel suit because of the article against Mulji which came to the Supreme Court on 26th January 1862, often called the Maharaja or Bombay Libel Case (Bennett 1993, Haberman 1993, Saha 2006, Sharma 2013). Though one judge, Sir Joseph Arnould, found for the defendant, a senior judge overruled him and found Mulji guilty of libel. However, the damage to the Pushtimargi reputation was done, and the initial judgement was widely circulated (Sharma 2013; 104). The colonial courts concluded by judging the nature of Krishna worship: "It is Krishna, the darling of the 16,000 Gopees; Krishna the love-hero – the husband of the 16,000 princesses, who is the paramount object of Vallabhacharya's worship. This tinges the whole system with the stain of carnal sensualism, of strange, transcendental lewdness" (Maharaja Libel Case; 213).

In the context of the British legal system being introduced in India, the Bombay Presidency and after the first Mutiny, where religion was deemed one of the primary causes, this case can be read as a chance for the British reading of textual authority to "undermine established authority" (Haberman 1993; 47). Indeed, the movement was described from the start as a 'new' sect rather than an "ancient ruling sect" (Haberman 1993; 54), setting the tone for a privileging of the Vedic 'golden age', ascestism and a singular understanding of Hinduism based on the authority of the Vedas (Ibid). With this backdrop, religious theology had to 'fit itself in' to the legal sphere, particularly in defining

[79] I am not addressing general allegations against gurus in this thesis (see Copeman & Ikegame 2012).

whether a guru was regarded as a god (Scott 2015, Bennet 1993; 58) and in what sense he had authority. This need for definition related to state and legal intervention into what was "an essential part of religion". This legitimised certain practices while condemning others, shaping a 'high' rationalised Hinduism (Sen 2010, see Fuller 1988) that similarly affected the Nathdwara Temple Act.

Not only does the Pushtimarg movement's reputation deteriorate, but this case also remodels a woman's position to a duty-bound wife (Thakkar 1997). The silence of women throughout the case and in reformist writing implies a passive subject and object controlled by the patriarchy (Shodhan 1997; 130) despite active participation on both sides of the debate (1997;137). Reformers' recommendations required control or exclusion of women's activities from public Havelis, hence the renewed emphasis on the domestic sphere as a site for religious practice (Sharma 2013; 107). As Sharma explores, the home becomes an essential site for producing upper-middle class identities through semi-public events such as *satsangs* (Ibid; 218), consumption of material culture, including ritual accessories (Ibid; 252) and hosting events, from home festivals to sponsoring large scale pilgrimages and *saptas*. A domestic order that centres on women as mothers becomes equated to the social, national (Ibid; 112) and religious-moral order from the libel case legacy, yet middle-class modernities are negotiated in the domestic space too.

The passion of *gopi bhava*

Archaeology has pointed to medieval goddess worship, of, importantly, independent goddesses known for characteristics such as strength (*sakti*) and fertility. These goddesses were slowly attached to male divine beings as consorts, mothers, or wives (Krishnaraj 2010; 17). Recall that Swaminiji encompasses the feminine energies and goddesses including Yashoda, Yamuna, Radha and Krishna's wife, Rukmini. In popular devotion, Radha and Krishna are inseparable, unmarried and engaged in a secret affair (Fuller 2004 [1992]; 157). Radha is a perfect devotee, Krishna's eternal consort and favourite *gopi* in Gokul. Her emergence in the Vaishnava community came in the sixteenth century (Vaudeville 1982; 2) and elaborated in the *Gitagovinda* (Miller 1982; 13). In the Pushtimarg, she is not a focus of worship, unlike in Gaudiya Vaishnavism where the love between Radha and Krishna is the ultimate form of devotion (Dalmia 2001; 206). In this relationship, Radha is proud, jealous and Krishna's equal (Sanford 2008; 128) though this is debated (Fuller 2004 [1992]; 155).

Radha and Krishna are thought to have been married by some devotees I met in a secret wedding when Krishna lived in Gokul, before his wedding to Rukmini. While they were both children and often it was implied as a type of playing, this secret wedding is another aspect of revealing and concealing divine play on earth. While the older Radha has a traditional human husband in much textual authority, Brown suggests that the Purana "rationalises that only an illusory form of Radha is married to the first husband" (Brown 1982; 65). Radha's liminal status between wife and mistress is

ambiguous, and is "something beyond structure" (Hawley 1982; 53), though she "is love objectified… or should we say personified?" (Ibid; 55).

Rasa

During the Bombay Libel case courts struggled with the idea of erotic love in the *bhakti* tradition and how this translated to lived practice. In Krishna devotion, ecstasy, frenzy and even madness are features of devotional detachment to the world and attachment to Krishna through *rasa* (Kinsley 1979; 251) as with Mirabai in Chapter 3. For the sake of brevity for a vast body of work, we can understand *rasa* as the enjoyment and consumption of emotional religious experience in *bhakti*. *Rasa* means flavour, taste, juice/sap, and transcendent emotion (Lynch 1990; 293). *Rasa* and consumption have been discussed concerning blessed food. Yet, *rasa* theory begins as an aesthetic theory, centring on dance, drama, ritual, poetry, and art (Lynch 1990; 17). *Rasa* is different to *bhava* as it is impersonal and transcends ordinary emotion (*bhava*) straight to joy (Kinsley 1979; 151). *Rasa* is like a suspension of the self that does not depend on personal circumstance though it can be evoked by the particular (Kinsley 1979; 153). The connoisseur can taste or relish *rasa* as a universal sentiment through the aesthetic without having the emotional experience of the feeling. For example, an aesthetic connoisseur may relish the *rasa* of sorrow without feeling sorrowful, as joy in *rasa* is the overall experience. *Rasa* is relished in itself. The original scholarly distance of aesthetic theory was made accessible in the emotional interpretation of *rasa,* as love or emotion. The devotional mood (*bhava*) makes human-divine relationships relatable (Lynch 1990; 18).

Rasa as a physical form in poetry appears as liquid, emphasising fluidity and sustenance, particularly in the recurring aesthetic imagery of an "ocean of *rasa*" (Sanford 2008; 84) that overwhelms those in Krishna's presence. *Rasa* as bliss is a bio-moral experience of nourishment, spiritually and physically, that is not only felt in the body but intoxicates. In Ayurveda, *rasa* theory is applied to both the physical and subtle bodies. Both reason and emotion exist in the heart as equals rather than in hierarchy (Lynch 1990; 19). This is distinct from the stereotype of rationality in the mind and emotions from the heart.

Rasa transforms everything into the otherworldly perspective (*alaukik).* The ultimate imagery of *rasa* is performed in the *raas-lila*. While the aesthetic is important to *lila,* it is through participation that devotees experience it. *Rasa* takes us back to the idea of mysticism in Krishna worship (Arney 2007). Haeri's work on mysticism in Iran explores the nuances between ritual acts, historical debates with religious concepts and how that relates to personal devotion (2020; see Introduction). *Hal* is a core concept in *erfan* mysticism, and related to understandings of *rasa* in *bhakti* thought. *Hal* can be "a moment when one feels an overwhelming sense of connection to the divine… a sense of ecstasy, joy, or even deep sorrow" (Haeri 2020; 13) though sorrow is defined through longing in *bhakti* worship. In

contrast to *bhava* in the sense that it cannot be cultivated, *hal* is the unmediated, sincere or 'authentic' relationship between divine and devotee. *Hal* and *rasa* demonstrate how the public voices of authority, state, popular or institutional, aim to shape visible religiosity and grapples with the paradox of acceptable forms of what falls into the unmediated relation with the divine (as part of mysticism). Female mystics, such as Mirabai from Chapter 3, or Radha, the epitome of *rasa* and mystical passion, are emphasised differently by the public perception of ecstatic religious love with Krishna.

We can see this with the sanitisation process and emphasis on the ascetic forms of Hindu-isms post-libel case affecting personal communication with the divine. The sanitisation of the intense, illicit, passionate love that is sung and written about between Radha and Krishna trickles down to lived practice, where *gopi bhava* is not a model for devotees to follow in their earthly relations but rather exemplifies a form of love between divine and devotee. In terms of lived practice, for example, *garbas* and *dhols* associated with eroticism were sidelined as lower class (Sharma 2013; 250), while formal *haveli sangeet* and *kirtans* (see Ho 2013) were encouraged, considered appropriate for educated middle to upper-class women. The female body and behaviour become a public material site for control of female sexuality, which is about *jati*, including idioms of respectability, family morality, nationalism, class, race and caste (see Bear 2007; 61). With this background, it is easier to see how *madhurya* or *gopi bhava* may be misunderstood and misrepresented, therefore sanitised, by focussing on non-erotic poetry or songs, and, in turn, on motherhood.

Mother-divine child relationships

Though uncommon, cross-culturally, and religiously, there are explicitly outlined examples of parent-divine-child relationships. Though by no means are they universal experiences, studies of mother figures related to divinity show, first, the popularity of female figures as mothers (over other roles) (Sered 1991); second, the cultivation of sight or experience to form a relationship with the divine (and reforming of femininity see Lester (2005), and third, female figures seen as mediators, balancing and bearing the load between earthly and divine (Christian 1987, 1997, De la Cruz 2015)

The female mediates between "transcendent male gods and natural human needs" (Ibid; 142). Similarly, Yashoda takes on the human needs of the Pushtimarg, representing the universal or ideal-type mother to Krishna guiding people in their *bhava*. She does not come to people in visions or apparitions but through her representation of parental *bhava.* Yashoda is not a political messenger like some Marian apparitions (Christian 1987), and her representation allows imitation and habituation for the devotees to perceive their *bhava*, echoing how seers in Christianity learn to see and hear Mary. Though not about national politics, there is certainly a reframing of caregiving, its perception, and the roles of female personhood in relation to the divine. However, motherly love in the Pushtimarg is manifested in the acts and items of worship (Bennett 1990; 184).

‘Being Yashoda’; mothering a divine child

Jayshreeben, whose Lalan tells her what he wants to wear, like other devotees, is a foster parent of her Lalan, taking care of him in the same way that Yashoda took care of him as his foster mother.

> Jayshreeben, sitting in her kitchen in London, having handed me platefuls of food, is fussing over me. We are both enjoying cups of black tea, chatting about her *seva*.
>
> We have been talking about how she got into Pushtimarg *seva* as she had only been doing it a few years, despite a strong public presence on the London and Leicester religious scene. She surprises me by telling me that her daughter, Priya, wanted to start *seva* and was given permission by a guru.
>
> “So, then I said, once you are proper settled, I’ll give you Lalan. Let me do it [for now]. So now I do it my way, so I’m so attached to Lalan you know. I can’t think about that one day I have to give it back [to my daughter] … Devaki is Priya and I’m Yashoda! See the same way… Once she’s settled when my Lalan is properly big, I’ll give it to Priya”.

Though she suggests that Priya is like Devaki, the idea of caring for Krishna like Yashoda, as a mother, is more prevalent. Jayshreeben’s *seva* to a divine child was understood and practised through stories of Yashoda’s ideal mothering rather than the spiritual authorities to whom she would go for other types of religious knowledge. Yashoda is the ideal-type mother in the Pushtimarg imagination, rather than Devaki, who had to sacrifice all her children for the greater good. In this section, I look at that mother-child bond that is celebrated rather than her as a figure in the Pushtimarg. Yashoda is rarely discussed as a woman in her own right, but rather as the embodiment of an ideal mother to the divine.

Two threads allow for the relatability of *seva* in the mode of Yashoda. First, she is a foster mother that allows for group mothering beyond biological kinship. Second, her ignorance of Krishna’s transcendence is gleefully enjoyed by devotees as audiences and places her firmly in the parental sphere. “How Yashodha – the foster-mother of Krishna… is rapturously absorbed in her child is told and retold through dance, songs and stories. This is the idealised mother-child relationship” (Krishnaraj 2010; 4 see Krishnan 2010; 141) As a foster mother, who develops an ideal-type bond with her child, we can see the implied notion of “group-mothering [which] gets translated in legends as several mothers having a child in common” (Krishnaraj 2010; 17).

Group-mothering reflects a common practice of living in joint families where caregiving is shared, but, importantly, reflects the idea that everyone can be a mother to Krishna. Mothers of Krishna ask other mothers for help and advice as well as discuss their Lalans development, tastes and other Lalan-centred news, as do mums with newborns. Considering each other friends or *sakhis* as Yashodas

creates a bond in a non-hierarchical co-worshipper collective (Pintchman 2005; 149, 152). This bond is possible because Yashoda is both ignorant to her status as a foster mother from the switch at birth and consumed with parental love (*vatsalya*) that hides Krishna's true transcendence. As Sanford asks, "Without this ignorance, how could Yasoda act as a true mother to Krishna?" (2008; 53).

"Wake up, darling Gopal! I want to see your face.
I'll finish the housework and my daily prayers later.
There is red in the east; night has gone, and the sun has risen.
The bees flew out of the lotus; get up, Bhagavan.
The adoring women stand at the door and sing your praises.
They sing of the passionate mystery of the play of the *avatar*."

(Paramannd's *pada* Sanford 2008, 50)

Vedic, traditional Hindu practice and housework are being ignored to worship Krishna (Gopal). The word Bhagavan (Lord) is deliberately unclear in intent from Yashoda (Sanford 2008; 53). However, it is not uncommon in the cultural context of Indian mothers for sons to be treated as little lords. Yashoda is unaware of Krishna's love games *lila* with the *gopis* at night. Yet, devotees listening to the *pada* understand the 'passionate mystery'. Yashoda cannot move into the *madhurya-bhava* of the *gopis,* though they can show *vatsalya* to Krishna. This is a point of separation between Yashoda and the *gopis.* The audience who know and enjoy the *lila* cannot be Yashoda as a 'true' mother in ignorance but can access all the *bhavas* in relation to Krishna. As when Yashoda sees the universe in Krishna's mouth, the audience straddles the boundaries of transcendence and relatability, seeing Yashoda as a true mother in her ignorance. Her status as a perfect mother rests on her ignorance of Krishna's divinity and models ideal divine motherhood for devotees.

The fact that motherhood is seen as essential for women is a sociological reality in the South Asian community. I was often told I would not fully understand Lalan *seva* until I had children or had done *seva* for 'enough time' to develop parental *bhava*.

> Bhavnaben has a high-powered job in Ahmedabad and has worked hard for it. She is in her 50s and lives in an expensively but minimally decorated two-bed flat with her husband. She takes on the 'women's work' of the house, but her career is her passion. Her family and in-laws all did *seva* though the latter were more orthodox than her family. We often met in a flurry of activity, with her leaving as I came in or vice versa. When she learned of my research, she told me she also had a Lalan at home.
>
> I interviewed her one evening. We turned to discussing how she came to do daily *seva* to her own Lalan. She was looking after her aunt, who had raised her, but she decided to get Lalan animated when her aunt passed away. She says, "I became free".

> "I have a very tiny Lalan. My *seva* takes an hour, and I am done. I do a bath and light *shringar*, but too much variety (*prakar)* is too difficult. Initially, I brought home a *chitraji* [painted image] from Shri Nathji about 30 years ago… I did *seva* for him for years. Then I was in some confusion. I had done *seva* for him for so many years. How could I put him to the side? But everyone said you should have a Lalan at home. Because of my… issue."
>
> Me: What do you mean?
>
> Her: That of children… [silence for a moment] Yeah, so it was like if you have Lalan, he becomes like your child, right? Like he is my baby, my Lala." … "It is like 'my son'".
>
> "I went to three or four different places [to get a *swaroop*] to see where my *bhava* came. I chose a tiny, tiny *swaroop*. There were lots of big ones. So, for us it is like he is still your little baby."

Bhavnaben struggled to talk about not having children, and throughout our conversations over my fieldwork, she did not refer to it again. The size of her Lalan was emphasised often in relation to him being her little forever baby. Her friends and family actively encouraged her to have a Lalan to develop "maternal feelings, " referring to her *bhava*. Though it was not explicitly said, it was implied that having maternal feelings was somehow vital for her as a female.

Parenting a divine child

Guidebooks on parenting are rampant. Concepts of childhood are different around the world, and theories of childcare and caretaking are not universal. Dr Spock's Baby and Childcare, from 1946, is one of the most famous childcare books. Its 10th edition sold over 50 million copies worldwide, also adapted by paediatricians for India (Spock, Needlman and Gori, 2012). For *seva*, there are guidelines in *seva* manuals, spiritual authority, and advice from other Vaishnavas (including online). However, many devotees draw from their own experiences and the experiences of those around them. In this section, I focus on feeding and milk to tease out the importance of the logics of *bhava* as care.

Group mothering and feeding often go together in studies of relationship-making. Puritans would have to choose wet nurses carefully as character could be transferred through breastmilk. The transferal of foodstuffs, particularly breastmilk, can create a bond in kinship such as siblingship (Carsten 1995), influence character (Reese 2000; 42) or create debt or 'milk rights' (Delaney 2000; 135). The story of Putana, the demoness, shows a similar bond is created through Krishna consuming breastmilk.

> Putana was a demoness sent by Krishna's evil uncle Kamsa to kill all the newborns of the kingdom. After hearing about Yashoda and Nanda's newborn, she disguised herself as a

beautiful woman but had filled her breasts with poison from a snake. She went to Yashoda and asked to breastfeed him as a well-wisher.

Krishna fed from her, but instead of dying, he began sucking the life from her, and she could not get away. She died, but as Krishna took her milk, he considered her a mother[80]. (from fieldwork)

Because Krishna had taken her breastmilk as a child, she became another foster mother through a milk bond. The themes of tactility, the body, producing substance and bonding through feeding from the body brings to mind related themes in the Pushtimarg of sharing, commensality, and sensory experience that build relations mediated through the biomoral absorption of personhood within substances. *Bhava* logics, reasoning actions of *seva* through one's *bhava*, are affected by gastro-politics (Appadurai 1981) because of the affective nature of food and the biomoral qualities food can absorb and transmit.

Krishna's childhood trickster characteristics come through in stories of him as the butter thief (Hawley 1979). The typical image of Krishna is of his hands covered in *makan* (the creamier curd of the butter) and Krishna's pastimes are deeply embedded in tending cows and consuming butter. In his earthly mythology, he takes care of cows and, on a cosmological level, in Goloka, Krishna's eternal abode (the world of cows) (King 2012; 183). The consumption of dairy is an act of love from the cow to Krishna as she offers him milk, and he protects her with his love. She represents the concept of motherhood, fertility, and the universe. There is a continued cultural and spiritual conceptual framing of cow's milk, from healing to rituals (King 2012; 182)[81].

Cows are politicised and controversial in India through caste and religious divisions based on beef consumption, animal welfare, charities, and agricultural groups (King 2012). There is a national policy on cow protection, aligned with the right-wing BJP in India and supported by the nationalist Vishwa Hindu Parishad in the diaspora (Ibid, see Korom 2000; 182). Others are often marginalised because of their consumption patterns (Narayanan 2018). However, cow protectionism leads to an interesting example of food as a receptacle for emotion and how *bhava* logics are interpreted for domestic and personal *seva.* During my fieldwork in the UK, I met two vegan devotees who would use plant-based alternatives in their *seva.* While this was usually about purity rules, the exposure of the dairy industry's treatment of cows and the provision of unproductive dairy cows to the meat

[80] This is a common story heard throughout Hindu religions on Krishna's miraculous deeds as a child.
[81] For analysis on the reliance of texts versus non-textual analysis see Korom 2000; 185. He too raises the issues of cow veneration as a possible invention from colonial Indian history, and communal violence through the symbolism of the cow as innocent with Gandhian influence (Ibid; 184-6). However, he is missing out on a key *bhakti* figure from key texts such as the Puranas and the Mahabharata, culminating the in Gita. Just a quick mention of ISCKON is not enough to understand the religious attitudes towards cows, where Krishna represents the importance of butter and love of cows for a large population in India and beyond, through his everyday images, the cosmological *lilas* and the diasporic community.

industry in India (Narayanan 2018) led them to not offer dairy products to their Lalans. One devotee said she would give her Lalan milk in Braj, where she would go every year, because she can see the love for the cows there, where they are taken care of and hand-milked rather than commercialised for profit. For her, the mistreatment of cows in the dairy industry made them feel that the milk offering was replete with emotions of violence, apart from the traditional *seva* guidelines and rich imagery of cows and Krishna.

Bhakti as 'feminine'

That *bhakti* movements often privilege feminine devotional qualities while not discouraging male participation is now clear. This section draws threads from previous chapters to paint a picture of divine femininity in the context of Krishna worship by discussing the Yadavs in Mathura (Michelutti 2008), whose patron god is Krishna. Schweig writes about the divine androgyny of Krishna himself (2007; 441, Chapter 3)[82] saying that Krishna recognises his own feminine qualities, as written in the *Bhagavad Gita* (Ibid; 442). Traditional literature praises Krishna's feminine characteristics more than his masculine qualities, involving in descriptions of his beauty, sweetness and charm (Ibid). While this may be seen as a 'Western' theological assumption of a masculine God (Ibid; 443), this has a theological foundation in the Vaishnava tradition. This idea of a masculine 'West' versus a feminine Hinduism also features in discourses on Hindu nationalism (Hansen 1996). The avatar Rama is the masculine, duty-bound and perfect king that is the hero of Hindu nationalism (Fuller 2004 [1992]; 268). Therefore, modern Hinduism focuses on Rama (Michelutti 2008; 95). Recall that for devotionalist movements, Krishna comes to earth as the opposite of Rama.

For the Yadavs, Krishna, the warrior in the Gita, is worshipped over the lover Krishna of Braj (Michelutti 2008; 81). Krishna, the unpredictable lover, becomes a "quasi ideal king" (Ibid; 96) influenced by Hindu nationalist ideology and Hindu reformist movements, in some ways similar to the renegotiation of Pushtimarg identity after the Bombay Libel case. However, though this "re-fashioning" of status was to compete with the *banias* on similar religious grounds for power (Ibid; 140), *banias* are seen as effeminate while Yadavs are masculine (Ibid; 144), aligning with the context of a 'masculine' Hindu nationalism. This story is one of legitimisation for a share of state resources and shows how universal Hinduism corresponds to social structure, caste (Ibid; 158), *jati* or *varna.* A similar legitimisation narrative can be made about the rationalisation or sanitisation of Pusthimarg's link to the erotic.

[82] This is not unique to Pushtimargi or South Asian families. Walker Bynum writes of Jesus as the Mother. She writes of 12th century Cistercian monks that promote Christ with maternal imagery where Jesus the father is the disciplinarian while Jesus the mother is affective and emotional (1982; Chapter IV pp110 – 166). This stereotype of parenting roles divided by gender is slowly changing among my interlocutors, though in some families and in popular culture this imagery persists.

The Yadavs emphasise their descent from Krishna with genealogical charts of the Yadavs' political genealogy (Ibid; 143) and lineage from Krishna's fathers, Nanda (Vaishya) and Vasudev (Kshatriya). Consolidating identification through genealogical lineage intimately relates to the biomoral transference of substance (see Bear 2007), highlighting how *jati* (caste, race, nationalism and so on) become idioms for social distinction. In the Yadavs' case, this is played out, in the religious landscape, as a distinction from *bhakti* as a 'feminine' practice and in the public sphere as engagement with a powerful upper-middle-class on equal grounds.

Unlike women with a clear relatable link to the female figure of Yashoda, men sometimes found *seva* as emotional care awkward to discuss, preferring to talk to me about the rules or deferring knowledge to their female counterparts. In the Pushtimarg, Krishna worship's link with fatherhood is vague despite Pocock's observation of a Maharaja playing with Krishna as a father (1973; 144). The influence of Hindu nationalism and a pervading sense of 'masculinity' is implied by the role of men in *seva.* However, I note that, as a female anthropologist, my access to Indian male emotions would be more limited than with my female interlocutors.

Fathers, fatherhood, and Krishna

Krishna has two fathers, Vasudeva, his birth father in Mathura, and Nanda, his foster father in Gokul. The Haveli is often called Nandalaya, "the abode of Nanda" (Bennett 1990; 191) at the same time as a "celestial Braj" (Ibid (Braj), yet there is not much focus on the father-figure of Nanda apart from Krishna's origin story. Hawley notes in a description of *Janmasthami* (the birth of Krishna) celebrations in Braj how the father figure is set apart from the mother and son, despite the name of the occasion called a *nandotsav* (Nanda's festival) to celebrate a boy being born in the house (2014; 69). Theologically fatherhood has a limited part in Pushtimargi devotional life. Despite the sociological gendering of everyday life, in the religious sphere the gendering of devotional energy is feminine in relationality to the divine Krishna.

Despite the slow move to more emotionally-open fatherhood (see Sriram 2011) with increasing urbanisation and globalisation, Sriram & Navalkar highlight that "Fatherhood is embedded in the principles of … the householder stage" (2012; 208, Larson, Verma & Dworkin 2001), where fathers are seen as providers of the family. As the Pushtimarg is a householder sect, it stands to reason that many working men I met were usually not as involved in daily *seva* as the female members of the family. However, as Bear shows in her work on shipyard workers in Howrah, India, labour-power in Hindu theologies and kinship works through "kutum logic" (2013; 169), and the material production of life force through labour. A kutum is the extended family circle that extends to friends, reflecting kinship practices for humans and nonhumans. For Pushtimarg men's work outside the home, as a householder *sampradaya* that dedicates everything to Krishna, labour is valued as wealth *seva*

(*vittaja*) and placed within Pusthimarg theologies and contextual kinship structures. As caregivers to Krishna, the theological background of androgyny and multiple personhoods in the Pushtimarg allow for inversions of this gendered social context in *seva* in the intimate domestic spheres in personal *seva*.

Relatable mother, transcendent divine

The way motherhood becomes privileged as the dominant mode of worship maintains the importance of a feminine devotional mood while sidelining *madhurya*, which is embroiled in historical and contextual (mis)understandings. Yet, despite this privileging, the theological underpinning of devotional expression does not affect the lived gendered inequalities in India as a patriarchal society. Theology does not always inform lived experience, as *gopi* bhava is not to be imitated in actuality.

In terms of parental mode, it is not that the devotee is "almost a parent playing with a son at home" [Fuller 2004 [1992]; 170) but that the devotee becomes, and is in a continual state of, becoming a parent to a divine child through a playful *seva* as caregiving. While caregiving is informed by context and personhood, devotees can switch registers in addressing his transcendence by play-ing.

However, Pushtimargi children do not feature in *seva* as much as adults. Adults perform *seva* for Krishna as his parents. Children in stories of Krishna are his friends who play *with* him during his many escapades and heroic deeds. The next chapter explores the role of childhood in Pushtimargi Krishna worship.

Chapter 5: Childhood

> "Don't touch this, don't go there. Wash your hands", lamented one devotee in a *satsang* in London. "When I was growing up, my grandmother would not let me near Lalan."
>
> "Pushtimarg is seen as 'you can't eat this, you can't touch this, you can't do this. You should kick out those who don't know how to do seva'. At school, the teacher spends more time with the weakest students and pushes them up to the front to learn." (guru in a *katha* in India)
>
> "Children need *satsang*, Haveli and community. They don't listen to parents – but making a friends circle…teachers make everyone Vaishnavs again." (guru in a UK *katha*)

The three quotes above tell a story about the generational changes within the Pushtimarg institutional sphere. The perceived 'Don't touch' side of the movement was a dominant narrative, perhaps due to the influence of the nineteenth-century legal cases against the Pushtimarg we discussed in Chapter 4. As in the first quote, many older interlocutors followed a similar trend of being put off by the perceived strict rules surrounding *seva* and being around Krishna. Some people returned to *seva* with a renewed sense of what *seva* was about, taking more control of their relationship with the divine.

We have seen that Krishna has a special place in the family, arguably the most important family member to devotees. Recall that sons are often highly regarded, and Krishna is arguably the ultimate son in the family. Therefore everyone, including children, learns how to relate to him as the centre of daily life, in an elaboration of the specialness of an infant boy in the South Asian sociological context. Children relate to him in particular ways as the family structure is partially reproduced with Krishna as a child. However, as divine, children are also taught that Krishna is not 'like' them. This institutional emphasis on children in the Pushtimarg community shows a shift in the "don't touch" sentiment but also highlights trends within practices towards relationality that is shaped by play and *bhava* logics. This form of relationality, apart from rules, is seen as the authentic relationship with Krishna. Like motherhood, divine childhood does not mirror everyday kinship relations but generates new relationality within families and individuals.

Though a mother's love is a central tenet of the Pushtimarg, a mother as a figure apart from that role can be overlooked. Similarly, a child can often be ignored in studies of a community due to children's supposed "biological immaturity" (Montgomery 2008; 90). I also observed adults more frequently than children (many were in school or doing after-school activities during the week and would not be at the Haveli for long on weekends). Yet, children are a 'social construction in the making' in many ways absorbing their surroundings shaped by adults and, therefore, reflecting values, teachings, and concepts of kinship in their communities. When a child 'becomes' an adult varies cross-culturally,

with a vague definition of puberty or age of 18 when 'adulthood' begins. For many Indian households, it is through a life course that children become adults.

Pritiben, has a 5 year old daughter and is a hospitable and approachable woman. Her journey into the Puhsitmarg is riddled with difficulties. She attributes her status as belonging to the guru's family, who helped her through their challenges. She took me under her wing during many festivals, grouping me with the children. Her story exemplifies the ambivalence between lived practice and theology, but also how Krishna and children relate in the household with the female lifecourse.

> In her three-bed flat with a lovely patio where Manisha would teach me dances she was learning. One afternoon, I asked her about her *seva.* She said that guru *seva* was her only real *seva* at the moment. She had to 'give up' her *seva* after Manisha came along. She told me excitedly that she would be able to get him back after Manisha was older. Manisha knew that her mum had given up her 'proper' *pushtavela* (animate) *seva* but still observed what *seva* she did at the Haveli and at home. Being surrounded by the Haveli community provides some spiritual nourishment it seems, yet there is the lack of *seva* that is notable in the way she speaks of giving her Lalan up. She told me he was beautiful (*sundar*).

Children, like Manisha, accept this ambivalence between childcare and divine childcare. It is not a paradox that causes tension within the family or jealousy between children and parents, though it can be exclusionary towards previous generations and the more orthodox followers of purity and pollution. This chapter shows how nondualism between human and devotee is a constant negotiation, and it does not mean that they are the same at all stages of the lifecourse and afterlife.

After exploring a child's place in the Pushtimarg through my experiences in a *pathshala* (religious school), I turn to the concept of divine childhood. Though there is a lack of research in this area, there are examples of divine children cross-culturally. This comparison shows the difference between a transcendent family member that is not mirrored in human kinship relations.

Pathshala moments

As Manisha, a five-year-old friend, told me, "You can come to our party – it's for children only. No adults!". During my research in India, I was 'betwixt and between' being seen as an adult and a child. Though my married status meant that I was an adult, the fact that I was without my other half, without children or a local household, offered me the chance to attend the weekly *pathshala* (children's religious school) held at a Haveli in Ahmedabad. I discuss the Indian context here, as the *pathshala* in the UK was irregular, and I managed to attend two different ones. Throughout my fieldwork, the importance of sending children to *pathshala* was emphasised in Haveli settings, and they were heralded as the future generations of the Pushtimarg who would carry on *seva* and, explicitly and implicitly, sustain the *sampradaya* around the world in the future. I found that, in some sense, the

pathshala offered a space independent of family influence to observe children's religious learning (though many were not given a choice whether to attend or not).

This carving out of time in the week for religious education is not unusual in religions worldwide (e.g., Peele-Eady 2011). Much work has been done on education more broadly and how it has been shaped by the imperialist legacy of Mughals and the British (Kumar 1988, Bénéï 2008, Mishra 2014). As Bénéï shows, children are not passive recipients of pedagogy, and absorb everyday banal nationalism that shapes education (2008; 16). Rather than overt patriotism, banal nationalism is absorbed by singing and physical education (Ibid; 42) and trickles into the domestic and the family. In the UK, where the *pathshalas* were less established, and without any structure, there was more implied around the topics of Indian identification. The UK landscape is no stranger to the influence of Hindu nationalism in education. For example, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), an arm of the Hindu nationalist movement, which is anti-secular and anti-Muslim in India, in the diaspora takes on a role in education. They provide educational textbooks that universalise Hindu-isms and disregard inherent struggles in power dynamics in different communities (Mukta 2000), including devotional film and privately-circulated media and mediums that VHP disseminates (Dwyer 2006; 95).

In several experimental fieldwork activities (see Appendix) with the children in India, I noted that the casual nature of the *pathshala* as an educational facility was different to what Bénéï observed in her work on schools. There was no mention of Indian identification or any symbolism around nationalism in India. Most children went to Hindi-medium schools (with a significant component of English teaching), though some attended English-medium schools or international schools for the wealthier ones. Here, banal nationalism could very well be visible, trickling into the domestic. The *pathshala* cannot be understood primarily through the prism of nationalism as it is privately-run and voluntary work as *seva* for the children and the Haveli. However, it does show how children are taught to actively relate to Krishna as relational beings rather than citizens or subjects. This is not the place for a full discussion of state involvement in education, merely to acknowledge that education is not distinct from society, culture and state.

Mainly girls attended the *pathshala* and often brought along one or two siblings. Numbers attending varied immensely week-on-week, particularly during the school holidays when there would be a considerable drop in the number of children attending. The classes cost a nominal amount of 300 rupees per child for the year, covering pens, pencils, paper, and small gifts during festival days. Each *pathshala* started with religious songs and chants, with latecomers sliding to the back row.

One Sunday, there were fourteen children present. One girl was complaining about her *tulsi* (holy basil) necklace hurting her when she wore it.

> "Good", said Rekhaben, firmly, "it should. It is a reminder. You remember whose *sevak* (servant of God) you are…You shouldn't wear 'nice-nice' or too smooth ones, or you won't remember".
>
> She continued, after the routine start of mantras and religious songs, with the importance of these songs. "How do you wake [Krishna] up?
>
> [Silence, children, distractedly lolling their gaze around the basement]
>
> ...With love and singing", Rekhaben continues.
>
> "My mum sings to me to wake me up", offered one young child, then there followed a distracted few minutes with all the children contributing stories about how their parents wake them up.

Rekhaben taught the *pathshala*. Rekhaben is in her forties, has the cheekiest smile, and is always mischievous amongst the women devotees. One of the first times I met her, I felt a flurry of petals thrown at me. When I turned to look at her, she laughed and shrugged, pointing to someone else. She is very close to the guru's family, who volunteered her for the job. While she said she did *seva* at home, she gave most of her time to *seva* at the Haveli. She has a son, in his early teens, who hung out at the Haveli whenever his mum was there.

On many Sundays in the *pathshala* in Ahmedabad, I would learn songs about Krishna along with the children, rehearsing them in our spare time and hanging out at the Haveli while the parents were doing other things. In this area, children actively learnt basic *rag,* which they would repeat, memorise, and sing while going about their days. This form of repetition and memorising is not unusual in India's supposed "textbook culture" (Kumar 1988) of teaching. Information is passed from the higher authorities (the guru and his family) through a volunteer teacher in authority (Rekhaben) to children, as the future of the religious community. The 'syllabus' is written and created by the guru's household, carried by Rekhaben in a large ring binder. It is dynamic and changes depending on the feedback of their experience to the guru's family. The educational environment outside of the *pathshala* is differentiated by related, which helps the children situate their religious experiences around the Haveli and can reinforce what they learn as educational.

Not only does Rekhaben insist on repetition in the way she speaks or questions children, but she constantly relates the 'religious' message to their experiences. The first instance is wearing the sacred object of the necklace (*kanti*) as a constant reminder, identifier, and presence, of religious experience. The second is of a relatable everyday moment of waking up. Repetition and memorisation reflects ordinary education in India. In priestly schools, formal learning is by memorisation. Then follows an ideal goal of internalising the texts by body and mind to then recite them with aesthetic ability in rhythm or pitch, though this is not always the case (Fuller 2001; 23). In formal education settings, the

importance of the efficacy of orality (alongside literacy) is shaped further in India by Hindu chants and the association between school, temple (Bénéï 2008; 46) and nation (Ibid; 56).

While it is easy to suggest that this is a simple case of teaching the mechanics of religious behaviour, not only is the Haveli informal, but the Haveli's *pathshala* is overtly about *bhakti* devotion to Krishna. The latter message is about caregiving and reflection on family dynamics in the home. The juxtaposition of Krishna's relatability and his nature as the ultimate being and divinity comes up consistently, as we will recall from earlier chapters, broadly, throughout Pushtimarg's devotional life, starting from the youngest age. Children understood that Krishna was divine and had to be taken care of differently, for instance, only after ritually purifying oneself. But he could be 'like them' because he likes music to wake him up in the morning.

While exploring this macro-process of religious teaching top-down and the different contexts is very productive, this chapter will focus on children's everyday learning. As I suggest, the framework of incorporating religious learning into everyday life from a young age is seen by the guru's household, families, and other devotees to encourage the development of *bhava* and as an opportunity to 'form' the next generation of devotees.

Moving children from the peripheries

The lack of anthropological engagement with children has been critiqued, from the negative associations of children and 'primitive' studies of anthropology past (Hirschfield 2002, Montgomery 2009) to issues of voice and interpretation (James 2007). Studies of children are on the rise (Allerton 2016) and seeing how children are taught religious values, and assimilated into religious membership, reflects a simpler, 'official' version of what is being circulated at the marble steps of the main temple.

In the home sphere, Pushtimarg children can have a *kheltha* Lalan (play Krishna), who is not yet animated, to practice *seva* and build a relationship. Of the forty to fifty children I met in the UK and India, only three under thirteen had a *kheltha* Krishna. A play Lalan seems to sit in a liminal space between an animate thing and an object as a toy. Bloch & Lemish look at the idea of caregiving and the Tamagotchi, a portable virtual pet that was popular in the nineties and early 2000s. Their study suggests that children's relationships with the Tamagotchi can be seen as having a "socialising effect" (1999; 299), implying that it is an instrument in socialising children's behaviour. There are differences between a Lalan and a Tamagotchi. A Lalan is not an instrument for devotees but a living divine child. However, a *kheltha* Lalan can be seen as having the potential to religiously-socialise devotees. The children become the 'parent' to a baby Krishna and must consider his needs before their own.

But suppose we see children simply as 'future' caregivers to Krishna. In that case, however, we miss the care they are currently giving to their respective household Lalans and other (potential) devotees. Garcia-Sanchez (2018) warns us against ignoring children's ability to give care and suggests that in fact children act as brokers of care. Not only as their place as children in the family network, centring caregiving acts towards their needs as dependents, but particularly useful in this emerging literature is the idea that "[children perform] that of facilitating another person's ability to express themselves" (Ibid;174). For Rekhaben, being surrounded by inquisitive children allowed her space to think about basic religious concepts. This took place in spaces other than in front of the guru, or on the marble steps leading to the Haveli, in front of a seemingly learned adult community, where she would perhaps not be able to contemplate not knowing the answers.

As a child, Krishna has a mischievous, adorable, and joyful personality like other children and many stories are told about his pranks on the *gopis.* Often Krishna is described as innocent as a child, relating directly to the contextual idea of childhood in South Asia. Though the children I met were discussed as 'innocent' (Delaney 2000; 137, Reese 2000; 47) in my liminal space as a child-adult, it was easy to observe that some older devotees may not have acknowledged the importance of children's voices as active religious community members. Yet, children often took it upon themselves to instruct me on how to behave, what religious imagery meant and how to approach different people. Particularly in the early stages of fieldwork, where I would often appear lost, I was instructed by the children on how to act in the Haveli. Shuffling over, cross-legged to me, many children would tell me where to sit or what to have *darshan* of, particularly when the festival interested them.

One *darshan* during the kite festival Uttarayan in Ahmedabad, a child, said to me, "Look! Lalan is carrying a kite too", pointing out a tiny piece of *shringar* I had not seen until then. This immersion in Krishna-focussed thinking through the relatable begins the seeds of *bhava* development in children, in the same way, the formal learning for adults would resonate with certain adults. As with adults, some are not interested and are involved because of their families. Yet, their family *seva* may shape their lives unconsciously. Children relay these experiences to others as they share what they know amongst themselves and their families. Manisha, who took me under her wing, often exasperated by my countless questions, would exclaim, "Do I have to teach you everything, Anishkadidi? I do *seva* with my Mum. Come and see, it's easy".

The divine and children

In the Pushtimarg, there is a centring of Krishna as an extra special child in the family that balances the relatability of childhood with the acknowledgement of transcendence. The cross-cultural examples below show a reveal and concealment of power and divinity in a child's body, allowing for relationality that balances the transcendent and relatable through play and worship. Here we see a

similarity with an accepted paradox of Hindu worship: the gods do not need human caretaking but devotees continue *as if* they do. This *as if* takes us back to the idea of play as activation of relationality with the divine.

The boundaries between worldly and otherworldly can be intimately related to childhood (Gottlieb 2004; 87). In Bali, which has much influence from Hindu thought and Indian caste systems (Diener 2000), children are divine for 210 days after birth, and their feet cannot touch the floor (Ibid; 98). That child is "closer to the world of gods than to human world" (Ibid; 105). The child should be "treated as a celestial being" having "just arrived from heaven" (Ibid; 105). This link does not imply spiritual authority linked with divinity (cf. Gupta 2002; 35); however, it exemplifies children's relatability and special place in the family as not-yet adults because of their link to the otherworldly.

Infinite divinity, rather than the temporary, is the crucial distinction between Krishna and human children. Still, the power of the child's image inspires playful worship. The supposed dualism between the otherworld and the worldly assumed in reductionist studies of Christianity (see Introduction), for example, is inverted by play and the connection to the divine. An example is a devotional creativity in worshipping baby Jesus, the son of God in Christianity. In the Catholic Church in Mexico, *Santo Nino Jesus Doctor* is a manifestation of baby Jesus as a doctor. He appears as a child at play, with a doctor's coat, stethoscope, and black doctor's bag (Hughes 2012; 10) appearing after conducting healing miracles (Ibid; 12). Care-giving, too, traverses these supposed boundaries. In the Philippines, an image of Ama (Christ) in the shape of a block of wood is taken care of as a baby, and miraculously, with human guardianship, he eventually took a human form (Cannell 1995).

An alternative example from China, the child-God Nezha, demonstrates the power behind a child-like divinity mediated by human care and play. Krishna and Nezha are interlinked through a Sanskrit epic. A *yaksa* spirit called Nalakubara appears in China "colored in the same captivating hues as Bala-Krsna ("The Child Krishna")" (Shahar 2015; x, see Ibid; 185). Nezha is "offered babyish things" (Shahar 2015; 123)[83] and human caretakers are seen as foster parents (Ibid; 177). Nezha is marginalised as a worship movement, going against Confucian ethics due to the link with spirit mediumship (for *bhakti* spirit possession, see Strange 2019), "The delight of his literature derives from the suspense of concealment; the might of the great god being hidden in a baby's fragrant body." (Ibid; 177). The idea of reversal is a common trope in Krishna *lila.* This inversion through the child's image extends to another family member, a sibling. Recall that children with a *kheltha* or play Lalan do not see him as a younger brother but as a child that needs to be cared for like a parent or related to a friend. In this next section, we briefly explore why there is no place for sibling *bhava* in the Pushtimarg. This emphasises

[83] Though Shahar focuses on the oedipal similarities between them, this is of less interest when thinking about the Pushtimarg form of worship as they focus on the avatar of Shri Nathji.

how kinship with the divine is partially relatable, yet, the themes of reversal and divine play (*lila*) allow for fluid hierarchies in transcendent-human relationships.

Krishna's brother

In asking Vaishnavas around me about sibling *bhava*, I got vague answers about it being absorbed into other *bhavas* like *sakhya* (friendship) or *dasya* (servant-master). One person in the UK had even forgotten that there was a Balarama, grouping him with Krishna's other cowherd friends. Yet, Krishna has an older brother, Balarama, who is a large part of young Krishna's exploits in the Puranas. In Krishna's origin story, Balarama was transferred miraculously to the womb of Vasudeva's second wife as a seventh son, while his uncle Kamsa was told he was aborted (Beck 2005; 8). According to prophecy, Krishna was born as the eighth son, which meant he would kill his uncle. Balarama remains with Krishna throughout his life and dies in the exact location just a little before Krishna does (Beck 2005; 10).

In the South Asian context, the older child, especially the son, is typically higher up the hierarchy. Yet here, the younger sibling is revered. This is in part because Balarama (also called Dauji in Braj Basha, meaning older brother (Sanford 2006; 91) is the character for the *maryada* (rule-bound) and is often associated with the god Rama (Ibid; 93). Balarama means "Rāma the strong"[84]. Often in my fieldwork, people would emphasise that Krishna came to contrast the rule-bound, stern rule of the prior avatar Rama to epitomize spontaneous and overflowing love and devotion (Chapter 4). Krishna leaves Gokul to fight his uncle, deepening the angst and attachment of separation that is part of devotional worship in the Pushtimarg. Yet, Balarama returns as a king, playing with the *gopis* as well (Ibid; 97[85]). In the Braj local traditions of Dauji worshippers, through Holi, the hegemony of Krishna worship is questioned (see Sanford 2005). "While Krishna might be the *rasa-raja* and fulfil devotees' emotional needs, Dauji stands guard and fulfils devotees' essential, worldly needs. Devotees of Dauji assess Balarama's *maryada* characteristics as above, if not equal to, Krishna's qualities of love." (Ibid; 108). For the Pushtimarg, *maryada* is inferior to spontaneous Krishna devotion.

For a human devotee to claim sibling *bhava* could be seen to claim lineage ventured one devotee. Yet,another queried if the lineage could be claimed as a mother. One devotee emailed this in response, surprised at the idea no one had explored this before:

> "If God is our brother, surely that combines sakha [friend] bhav with bhav of a relative. That has the sweetness of being a friend with strength of being related (sabandha) with God. If he

[84] Johnson, W. (2009).
[85] Much of this comes from the text the Balabhadra Mahatmya (Sanford 2006; 96). One of Krishna's famed *lilas* is that of the *rasalila.* However, Balarama had his own *rasalila* with the *gopis* after Krishna's stay in Mathura, which is not as well known (Ibid).

> is our younger brother, its sakha and vatsalya [parental] bhav. If he is our elder brother, it is sakha and reverse vatsalya (God as a parent)..[…]..For ladies, having God as a brother has the additional advantage of being protected by the brother forever! Once we tie the rakhi to HIS hand, how can he abandon us!?! Ladies love their brother and fuss over him with vatsalya bhav."[86]

Krishna has no earthly sister, so perhaps a brother-sister bhava has less theological foundation than other relational bhavas with a genealogy[87]. However, in this email, the thread of fluid relationality in *bhavas* comes through as brothers, friends or parental, as do sisters. In another form of reversals (see Sanfrod 2005) in divine *lila*, this would allow for the traditional contextual hierarchy of an elder brother to be bypassed.

Focussing on the 'child.'

It is clear from the previous chapters and this one that the negotiations between transcendent and immanent further complicate the family structure for the divine. Human children are not seen as divine, yet they are understood to be innocent and playful, often related to the otherworldly. How children relate to Krishna is different from how adults do; they are encouraged to form attachments to him by understanding other children but seeing Krishna as the most special family member. The domestic sphere of *seva* is underrepresented in the literature thus far, and this chapter extends that to the figure of the child.

Children themselves are taught to understand and form an attachment to Krishna in relation to their own experiences but also consider him an exceptional child in the family. In playing with Lalan, they are essentially 'practising *seva'* but actively developing a strong emotional bond with Krishna[88]. Adults reflect on their own childhoods centred around the Pushtimarg as being stringent and inflexible, yet these attitudes within the movement are changing.

While Krishna may be the centre for Pushtimargis, the transcendent cannot be imitated, though relatable. As a child, Krishna is less constrained by social norms by virtue of childhood features of innocence and mischief over misdeeds and responsibility. This is partly seen through the role of Balarama as contrasting to Krishna in local traditions rather than in scholarly and Vaishnava majority

[86] Reproduced with permission from author.
[87] The brother-sister relationship is not given much comment as a sociological and contextual relationship too (Malamoud 2002; 39). While many earthly rituals that emphasise the relationship, such as *rakhi-bandhan* (Ibid), tying a thread of protection on a brother, or Bhai- Dhooj after Diwali, after marriage, traditionally, a sister is part of another family so perhaps this explains the lack of interest.
[88] The play Lalan is not animate through the life-giving ceremony. The practising *seva* can be life-affirming for children as well as adults, as the memories of play Lalans form the foundations of the relationship between a devotee and the divine.

discourse, where the perceived negative qualities of drinking and aggression are downplayed. However, these hegemonic discourses are challenged by work such as Sanford's, which moves the periphery to the centre, in the figure of Balarama. The relationship created with the divine is based on local and contextual understandings of kinship. This shows that hegemonic discourse is different from a lived religious experience in context.

Chapter 6: Going for *darshan* (sight); Going for *seva* (service)?

> As the *darshan* is about to open, sitting cross-legged on an old maroon carpeted floor in the UK Haveli, I shift from my left side to my right, covering myself with a thin saree underneath a winter coat, trying to keep the winter chill away. People have been arriving in dribs and drabs, heavy coats left on, finding the cold metal seats. As the room gradually fills, singing from the front line on the floor gets louder. We face the red velvet drapes, seeing them sway with some activity behind them. We are the audience in a theatre, waiting for it to start, craning our necks to make sure we can get a good view. With a collective intake of breath, we thought it would open, but it didn't.
>
> Finally, the drapes were pushed aside, the red rope binding them, and the doors opened for the morning *darshan.* The singing grew louder, and there was a smattering of clapping. I heard whispers of "The darshan is so sundar [beautiful]". The lady next to me cupped her chin in the tips of her hands, smiling.

Most Havelis have an entrance hall where everyone can sit and have *darshan* once it opens. Behind a curtain and sometimes an internal door is the main shrine (*nijmandir)* where the divine rests, plays and sleeps. There usually is a kitchen around the back or in another outbuilding, specifically for preparing meals for the divine where only priests go, although a few volunteers are perhaps allowed to go just outside or nearby to chop vegetables. There is public *seva*, such as flower-garland making, either in a corner in the entrance hall visible to all, or in a secluded space, for example, a basement or separate storage room. There is often an office near the entrance or outside for administrative teams and usually the guru's or the priest's private quarters upstairs. There are audience areas in the Haveli for the gurus and men and their wives (*vahuji)* to meet with their group of devotees for *seva* and *satsang*. People not in the informal entourage can meet the guru and his family through events or connections within the entourage group of devotees.

A Haveli is not only home to Krishna but to a guru and his family. With its extensive funding, better materials, grand festivals, and learned religious experts, the Haveli is often framed by gurus and some devotees as a learning centre. It has a public purpose allowing people to attend for *darshan* (sight) of the divine at various times of the day that parallel the routine of Krishna as a child. Divine embodiment theorists have given much importance to the concept of *darshan* (sight) through the consecration of an image and as the reciprocal act of seeing and being seen (Eck 1998; 3). There has been an overreliance on *darshan* as an act of worship, a "central occasion of temple life" (Bennett 1993; 78). When discussing a Haveli, *darshan* cannot be ignored, but the sensory (and tactile) nature of Hindu worship is essential (Eck 1998; 11). The purpose of worship is not simply sight of the divine and receiving sight but communication through different acts of worship such as *seva*.

Darshan has always been an active, dynamic and participatory form of worship as part of an interaction with a divine being. This interaction is between an animate 'thing' in the image of the divine, not observing a static object. Animacy and life in an image contextualises *seva* as an authentic relationship and form of worship. That Haveli Shri Nathjis and Lalans are alive makes *darshan* interactive. The ornate *darshan* and chance for elaborate *seva* is an opportunity that cannot be replicated in most homes. *Seva* sets up each moment of *darshan* as an episode or moment of Krishna's life, from waking up in the morning to being put to bed at night. *Seva* materials as animate, active and participatory *darshan*, along with the community, are storytellers about public performance. Storytelling is oral from spiritual authority, speaking events (*kathas* and *saptas*), other Vaishnavas, poetry (*padas*) and devotional songs (*kirtans*). It is also visual, not just from reading scripture or hagiography but from *seva* materials and the public performances of Krishna's life. The idea of storytelling helps show how, rather than formalised school-like learning led by spiritual authority, *darshan* of the public performance of *seva* inspires devotees in their own homes.

This chapter explores the placing of a Haveli in the Pushtimarg community between the blurred definitions of home and a place of public worship. For example, we explore Nathdwara's complex relationship with the public and the private sphere of worship. We then see how devotees gather at a Haveli, partly as recognition of being part of a graced community and providing much-needed support for a Haveli in *seva* and donations. While the three types of *seva* - *manasi* (mind and the highest form of *seva*), *tanuja* (body), and *vittaja* (wealth) - can all be features of Haveli *seva,* it is the latter two that offer any form of prestige or community status. Yet, these are open to critique and accusations of inauthenticity, particularly wealth-related, as *vittaja* can be considered meaningless within the community and in the divine relationship if fuelled by ego. There are differences in how domestic *seva* and Haveli (lit. mansion) *seva* are performed. However, in this chapter, I focus on temple or public *seva,* as many authors have done (Bennett 1993, Karapanagiotis 2004, Richardson 2014). In the rest of the thesis, I recognise that participant observation in domestic seva has the most to offer us to understand how personal and intimate *seva* is performed and perceived.

Recall that the principle of determining how far the Pushtimarg engages in public Hindu religion is balanced with the theological concept of betraying Krishna and maintaining the distinctiveness that is Pushtimargi. In a collective setting, the principle of *anyashray* 'taking refuge in another' is more complex than during domestic *seva*. The balance of separation while maintaining a connection runs through the concept of *anyashray* and collective community Havelis. Orthodox Pushtimarg devotees would not visit other places of worship or other Hindu temples, and for the diaspora, *anyashray* was less emphasised than in my fieldwork in India. Several London Havelis share space with other *sampradayas*. This is a particularly surprising feature of London Havelis but is often a negotiation over correct planning permissions, and also involves council discussions and competition from other religious groups that results in adaptation (Gheewala Lohiya; forthcoming). This exemplifies the idea

of the collective complexities of *anyashray* as opposed to how it plays out in the domestic and intimate sphere.

In appearance, Havelis are often historically plain and, in general, "unimpressive structures" (Bennett 1993; 30). I passed one Haveli in the old part of Ahmedabad about eight times in my first two or three months there, before realising it was a place of worship, noticing the mound of shoes left outside one door. Some were more palatial in style, though these were not common in urban areas. The diaspora has adapted their Havelis to their local environments. For instance, in Pennsylvania, US, Vraj Haveli expands over a striking site of 256 acres, considered the Braj of the Western World[89]. The Havelis in the UK were often smaller, sometimes semi-detached, or detached houses that had been converted for religious use, potentially sharing space with other Hindu sects.

We now turn to Shri Nathji, the first Haveli to be established in Nathdwara, Rajasthan[90]. Shri Nathji is Krishna's avatar who comes out of Mount Govardhan in Braj to meet Vallabhacharya. A temple was built in Braj, completed in 1520 (Bennett 1993; 80), and moved during Aurangzeb's rule to Nathdwara (formerly Mewar). As we will see in Chapter 7, sacred places frame multiple worlds and registers, holding many devotees, leaders, power, and emotions.

Nathdwara

There is apparent entanglement with the legal courts, government, and the religious management of a Haveli (considered the home of the divine and the guru's family) (see Sen 2010). Some have argued that the *swaroops* in Havelis are not 'public' but domestic, for the guru and his family for *ghar-seva* (home *seva*). This places the Haveli between home and public space, both hidden but visible to those who know. This highlights the theme of persecution that stems from the sect's version of their history and current negotiation of how to be Pushtimargi in a Hindu and non-Hindu public. These debates are framed by The Nathdwara Temple Act 1959 (revised in 1973).

This Act highlights a critical legal debate on India's post-Independence state involvement with religion. Post-Independence, religious tolerance was outlined in the Constitution (see Introduction); there was no definition of religion, which left the courts tackling the place of religion in legal cases (Fuller 1988; 227). Therefore, the courts needed to decide what was an "essential part of religion" (Sen 2010) (like the Bombay Libel Case) that allowed for Constitutional protection. This was often based on textual evidence that separated the 'religious' from the 'superstitious' (Fuller 1988; 242, see Derrett 1968; chapter 13). Prior to the Hindu Renaissance of the nineteenth century, the Pushtimarg *sampradaya* had benefited from a long

[89] Pushti Margiya Vaishnav Samaj Of North America (PMVS) http://www.vraj.org/, see Richardson (2014) who writes about the complexity of this diasporic US-based Haveli.
[90] Shri Nathji the Haveli is thought to be the only *mandir* in the Pushtimarg by some.

history of patronage. This 300-year trend ended with government intervention in Nathdwara during strained relations with the Tilkayat and the royals of Udaipur (Richardson 2014; 98, Bennett 1993; 172-174). This led to the creation of the Nathdwara Temple Act in 1959. This was a law passed by the government of India to ensure the better administrative running of the temple housing Shri Nathji (Bennett 1993; 173-175). During this administrative upheaval and restrictions, the Tilkayat was allowed to remove their valuables from state interference. But Shri Nathji's properties were not permitted to be moved (Jindel 1976; 201). The Tilkayat's attempt to remove many valuables coincided with the gradual decline of his authority (Ibid; 202) and unpopularity in disrupting the sanctity of the town (Ibid; 203).

In 1963, in the case of *Tilkayat Shri Govindlalji Maharaj* v. *State of Rajasthan*, the court ruled that Tilkayat's management of the Haveli was part of the religious practice and belief of the sect, taking into account sectarian textual resources as authoritative for the sect (Fuller 1988; 229). The debate was whether the temples of Shri Nathji were the Tilkayat's private property or public, based on a royal endowment from 1934. However, the Supreme Court overruled the decision, stating that the Tilkayat's right of management was not a religious practice, whatever the *sampradayas* perspective may be (Derrett 1968; 480). Therefore, the temple was officially a public temple, not the private temple of the Tilkayat or management.

The Temple Board run the administration and financial side, which separates the 'religious' from the 'secular'. For example, the government classifies Nathdwara as a public temple. The three Havelis in the complex, Shri Nathji, Navneet Priyaji and Madan Mohan (Jindel 1976; 24), are run by a Temple Board, though the Vallakbkhul family perform *seva* of the divine. The state, therefore, takes on the "care" of Shri Nathji's possessions, changing the familial relationship now mediated by the state. While the government seems to understand Shri Nathji as an animate presence with properties, this situation underlines a Pushtimarg theological concept; as the creator of the world, everything belongs to Krishna (as Shri Nathji in this case). Therefore, devotees, including gurus, surrender all material to Krishna. In a theological interpretation, the chaos that the Tilkayat were embroiled in was a matter of the earthly realm, while this household drama merely inconvenienced Shri Nathji.

The temple is now run by a board of initiated Pushtimarg devotees (Bachrach 2017; 21). In the day-to-day functioning of the complex, the Tilkayat, the first family of the Vallabhkhul, run the religious affairs of the Haveli. Therefore, the management of the temple must be nuanced (Bachrach 2017, Bennett 1993; 175). The legal judgement over the public and private nature of Nathdwara and the Tilkayat has many consequences for the *sampradaya* overall, from the establishment of management Trusts for all Havelis to debates on wealth in the movement. As part of a politics of differentiation, in vernacular terms, the *sampradaya* still emphasises a Haveli as a

home (*ghar*). This is exemplified by the words used to discuss the sections of a Haveli. For instance, the *paan-ghar*, where beetle-nut leaves are prepared for the Lord or *phool-ghar*, where garlands are made[91] (see Bennett 1993; 83-85).

Pushtimarg Havelis are modelled on this legacy of a separation of public and domestic and are influenced by other Vaishnava temples, e.g., Swaminarayan, that is only run by Trusts from the beginning, particularly in the diaspora such as Vraj in Pennsylvania. Diaspora trusts have greater control of the day-to-day management of the Haveli (see Sharma 2013, Richardson 2014), though supported by a spiritual figurehead of a member of Vallabhkhul. The Vallabhkhul often visit these Havelis, paid and cared for by devotees and receive donations during festivals or other events. In the UK, Havelis are registered religious charities run by Trusts, with all accounting available online[92].

To set the scene on how *vittaja seva,* the public and private divide emerged, as outlined in other chapters, note that the Pushtimarg enjoyed over 300 years of royal and political patronage (Richardson 2014; 98, Saha 2004; 123) that ended with the Nathdwara Temple Act. Individual patronage accrued community-based *abru* (honour or prestige). In the semi-public sphere of the domestic, prestige and status can be garnered in displays of wealth and markers of class hierarchy (Sharma 2013). In this thesis, the domestic is understood as an intimate worship space, where the devotee and divine form a relationship, rather than the semi-public spaces or group gatherings in the household. Authenticity arises from what is visible rather than the love between devotee and divine, which includes wealth *seva*.

Between home and a public devotional space

Narayan, a university student who we met in earlier chapters, had begun learning about Pushtimarg through YouTube and following a wide range of *goswamis.* Narayan felt that attending public festivals and Haveli events would help him in his worship. Though he had a form of *seva* at home, he thought he could have time for his true devotional practice in his eventual retirement. A year after my fieldwork, Narayan contacted me, somewhat out of the blue, to say he had changed his thought process and wanted to tell me. We met in a chain coffee shop in central London. He told me he had stopped going to Havelis. He had begun to listen to Shyam Manoharji, whose discourse struck a chord with Narayan. A number of devotees would eventually cite Shyam Manoharji as their source (usually online via YouTube) for Pushtimarg *kathas*.

[91] Darji-ghar, where clothes and soft furnishings for the Haveli are stitched. Jal-ghar, from where water is drawn (usually from a deep well). Yamunaji and brought for seva. Saag-ghar, where vegetables are prepared for the bhog of the Lord. Rasoi-ghar, where bhog /prasad is cooked for the Lord.

[92] Charity Commission for england and wales https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/ in a search conducted on 24th September 2020, five charities with Pushti in the title came up for the UK with full financial information, backdated, available to the public.

Shyam Manohar Goswami is a prominent leader based in Mumbai. He is one of the key figures of opposition to the vitality of Haveli *seva.* He regularly discusses this in his kathas[93], using *vartas* as examples, and promoting domestic *seva* as the essence of devotion. He believes that there are some (urban or affluent residents of Gujarat) who prefer *vittaja seva* (financial *seva*) because of its convenience (Bachrach 2017; 27). While financial *seva* is not an issue, it takes the devotee away from their own Lalan where material devotion should be offered to him (Ibid). A student at a Vallabh Vedant course offered in Mumbai run by Shyam Manoharji, suggested that *vittaja* was not the way to worship Krishna following Vallabhacharya's actual teachings. Devotion should be at home, offering or surrendering everything, and totally absorbed in Krishna's care.

A handful of times, I heard people comment that the Haveli was becoming a space of commercialisation for involving tourism, hierarchy through wealth and wealthy donors, and prioritising extravagance in festivals over *seva.* An emphasis on indulgence and hierarchy is attributed to the current Age of Darkness (Kali Yuga), where ego controls people (Chapter 8). Yet, the development of Havelis can be seen as a 'necessary evil', as one devotee put it. Havelis are considered beneficial for other Vaishnavas and bring the Pushtimarg to a wider audience through large-scale events often televised and publicised through social media.

In the South Asian context, theories of the gift look to *dana* (*danadharma* or the law of the gift in religious settings) applying only to Brahmins (Mauss 1954; 53, Parry 1986), centring on human-human relationships. Among Pushtimarg devotees, *dana* takes the form of feeding Brahmins on certain occasions rather than being framed as monetary donations, which I rarely noted through my fieldwork, but this is firmly situated in the earthly realm of gift-giving. As a law of gifting, *dana* is a clear system of reciprocity, which incorporates traversing boundaries from one life to the next through reincarnation (Mauss 1954; 72). *Dana* organises systemised *seva* acts, such as voluntary services, rather than relying on sporadic individual desires (see Heim 2004; 57). For guru *seva,* there is a gift economy and implied debt relation where the guru offers support and spiritual guidance for unpaid labour (Lucia 2014[94])—for instance, washing dishes or cutting vegetables for the guru and his family. While this form of *seva* is not framed as *dana* by interlocutors, nor is the reciprocity ever explicit or demanded, it is a systemised voluntary way of performing guru or Haveli *seva.* True *dan* is given without expectation (perhaps selflessly), though a disinterested desire for this worldly or otherworldly merit is often an ideal-type *dan* (Parry 1989; 120), quite apart from the householder approach of the

[93] Pushtimarg Goswami sri Shyam Manoharji, Keshod 1992 SRINATHJI SARVASVA.MPG (2010) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiFAFRkSixs

[94] Though for the Pushtimarg, the guru is not in a debt relationship and is not obliged to engage in social welfare programmes unlike Lucia's work on the Mata Mission (2014).

Pushtimarg who participate and enjoy the world as *lila*. *Dana* does involve enjoyment (Heim 2004; 140), yet the overarching hierarchical and prescribed form of *dana* is distinct from *seva*[95].

All Havelis depend on devotees' donations (known as *manoraths* (lit. desires) or *bhet* (for the guru). On an earthly or mundane level, these desires are valued and usually run by the Haveli. The price list is usually available at the administration office, ranging from daily meals to sponsoring large festivals. Another example is *bhet* (monetary donation), a direct contribution to a Haveli, laying money at the guru's feet in his presence or in other situations, such as after hosting a *katha*. *Bhet* is based on individual desire, wealth, and habit. Similar to *dakshina*[96] (a payment for priests on top of *dan*), *bhet* seems more like an expression of gratitude (see Eck 2013; 372), due to its association with *seva* (Bennett 1993; 160). For instance, in my fieldwork, one woman who was not well-off would put down 10 rupees every day, many would give 100 rupees or £5 in the UK, while one wealthy devotee gave up to £100-150 a visit (of which there could be a few per week on a bi-annual diaspora tour). There is the possibility of an implicit unprompted exchange for *darshan* or advice, as people stop to ask a question or praise the guru for their words or other acts. Yet, the main point is that this is not a service from the guru to a devotee or the broader public for remuneration. There are instances of unsolicited and systemised peer pressure from other Vaishnavas regarding the 'proper' way to behave by giving *bhet*. The piles of money were quickly spirited away by an entourage member rendering the amount anonymous. Amounts are not announced, and there is no future 'accountability'. Therefore, it may be a type of anonymous donation like Eck's discussion of *gupt* (secret) *dana* (2013; 373).

Manoraths are sponsorships of specific devotional *seva* that are not necessarily part of the devotional calendar but for Lalan's pleasure, such as a swing (*palna*) (Bennett 1993; 162)[97]. These go through the Haveli (Ibid). On a spiritual level, a *manorath* comes from the divine, and a *manorathi* (sponsor) fulfils it[98]. The guru can guide the sponsor to perform a *manorath*, or a concept can come from a devotee. A *manorath* may be anonymised but can be announced. A *manorath* is a visible variation to the day-to-day running of the Haveli (or a large-scale event with special treatment of the donors). This wealth does not accrue prestige or status between divine and devotee, though it frequently does within the local community.

[95] There are gifts in the Havelis that are given for the *seva* of Krishna (Packert 2010; xx). One can interpret this as returning Krishna's gift in a Haveli, where accumulation of gifts allows for a spectacular aesthetic for the enjoyment of devotees and divine alike.

[96] *Dakshina*, ambiguous as it may be, is a sort of supplement fee to consolidate or correct any mistakes given in *dan* (Parry 1989; 130).

[97] Bennett (1993; 163) suggests that *manorath* works as a sort of vow, however, in my fieldwork this was vehemently denied, situated such sorts of vow-making in the profane or *maryada* (path of rules).

[98] There are many other forms of donation. See Bennett 1993; 160-161 for more details on donations.

A different sort of prestige is gained by voluntary Haveli or guru *seva* and garners more authority within the Haveli sphere. Rather than a class or wealth debate embroiled in authenticity discussions, the time people spend volunteering at the Haveli is relational and builds bonds within the community.

Community collective *seva*

I often joined in with the flower-garland making (*phoolghar)* in Ahmedabad, India. The group met every day, from 4:40 pm in the basement of the three-storey Haveli, in a small rectangular room, across a grey slate floor.

> 5:30 pm. As we sat on the floor around the rectangular metal table, filling long needles with flowers, one bloom at a time. My legs went numb from crossing them for so long. Struggling to uncross and re-cross them, I get a little tangled in my light blue stripy saree. I had been threading flowers onto needles for an hour, piercing the leftover stem off with my thumbnail, folding the petals into the centre with the same hand, and then, one by one filling the needle. I was absorbed in my task, doing it rhythmically and instinctively. Once a needle was complete, I put it on the table and was passed another one to get on with.
>
> Recently, there had been a suggestion that devotees gossiped too much rather than keeping their minds on religious activities. A lady put on Jeje's (the guru's) sermon, which she had recorded on her phone. After a slight mouse scare scuttling behind my back, an opportunity presented itself out of the soporific voice from the phone. I ventured a question about how someone gets *bhava* (devotional mood) to do *phoolghar seva*. I figured I could get away with a bit of chatting if it was about the Pushtimarg.
>
> "Poor thing", Aunty giggled, and the entire group laughed, not in an unkind way, never breaking with their needle threading.
>
> "It's Thakorji's (the Lord's) *krupa* (grace), not our own *bhava*. You do it [seva] with *bhava*. I was in a different *seva* then I got garland-making – that's how it is," said another devotee.
>
> "If you don't do it, your day does not feel right. Your soul is in this – waiting for *seva*," said Ba, the oldest lady in the group.

While this was early on in my fieldwork, and I quickly learned *krupa* is the start of a devotee's journey into the Pushtimarg (Chapter 1), *phoolghar* offered an insight into the kind of *seva* that is part of the Haveli but run by volunteers. Guests always must ask the host for permission to do something in their house, a devotee reasoned with me. Therefore, I requested permission from the guru. I was given strict rules such as wearing a saree and dedicating the proper time to the garland-making before being allowed. This *seva* is a tangible, material link to the divine in the

Haveli, as the flowers and work that goes into a garland are a visible thread from volunteer to the divine. After making garlands, priests would place them on the divine behind the curtain, but the group would go up for *darshan* and enjoy the flowers adorning the divine.

Phoolghar gave this group of women a sense of status within the Haveli. Though the authoritative voice trickles down, such as the monitoring of gossip, this is enacted by devotees. Although, the basement is not visible to the public, other Havelis did have *phoolghar* areas set up in the halls like as in the UK but garland-making would take place well before public *darshan* was accessible.

There were usually 10-15 women who did this type of *seva,* usually over the 50s and a majority of them were post-menopausal. Most lived within walking distance and had families who attended the Haveli. Often, these devotees are acquainted with the guru's family beforehand, often through introductions. A reading that implies volunteering is about accrual of status ignores that spiritually, prestige is irrelevant and denies the time spent on volunteering that takes these women away from their everyday lives. Some men I spoke to resented the time these women spent at the Haveli, and a few eventually started coming to chat with other men outside the Haveli. This group highlights the communal participation, rather than wealth, that accrues status within the community that is possible in Haveli *seva.*

The following section, apart from the public/private tensions, focuses on the centre of Haveli life; Krishna as a divine animate that interacts with devotees, not only in *darshan* but in the everyday moments of *seva* in a Haveli.

Performing the stories of Krishna's daily life

"Come and do *darshan,* once, to see *shringar* (ornamentation), then you get an idea of how to do it at home" was a common phrase I would hear over the coming months.

Darshan in a Pushtimarg Haveli happens eight times a day. Though timings may vary slightly, each time has its background relating to Krishna's life as a child. Each time a *darshan* is about to open, varying numbers of people sit on the cold marble in Ahmedabad, or the dark maroon carpet in the UK, waiting for those heavy velvet drapes to slowly drag across the floor to give them a chance to see the divine.

> 6:30: Mangla *darshan*. This is when Krishna is woken up with kirtans and given breakfast before darshan opens, so as not to scare the young child with huge crowds of people. *Aarti* (ritual waving of a flame) is performed at this time by the priest.
>
> 9 am Shringar *darshan*. This is when Krishna is dressed up and shown a mirror to check he is happy with what he is wearing. Before his playtime, he is given a snack of dry fruits.

9:45- 10:30 Gwal *darshan*. This is when Krishna takes his cows to pasture and plays with his cowherd friends.

10:45: Ragbhog *darshan*. This is the day's main meal for Krishna, with aarti performed by the head of the guru family.

After this *darshan*, there is a period of rest called Anavasara, when Krishna naps.

4:15: Uthapan *darshan* when Krishna is woken up from his nap with a conch shell to go back and play again.

Two other darshans are closed: Bhog, where a meal is served to Krishna and Aarti when Krishna returns from playing with his cowherd friends.

The final darshan of the day is Shayan at 6:45 pm, where Krishna is prepared for bedtime by changing his clothes. He is given light snacks.

While Shri Nathji and Lalan are 'set up' for *darshan* once the curtain lifts, the setting up phase is the *seva*. The *darshan* frames not only the divine image, but devotees can place the divine in a certain time of day, season or festival based on the Haveli set-up.

Havelis are seen as learning tools so devotees can see how to perform *seva* in the style of the Haveli or 'properly' (Packert 2010; 98). Haveli *seva* is usually performed by a Brahmin priest, the guru and the males in his family, though volunteers help with preparation. *Seva* is carried out based on the 'right' way, using textual and religious authority from sectarian literature, the guru and his family, and knowledge from the priests (*mukhiyas*). Priests are paid *sevaks* (lit. servants) of Krishna who often join a Haveli based on family or community connections. The irony of paid *sevaks* is not lost on those who debate the selflessness of public and private devotion.

Darshan itself is an act of worship (Eck 1998; 3), yet it is discussed as either an exchange (Ibid), hierarchical and submissive (Babb 1981) or as an "aid" (Ibid; 400) for meditation or internal focus. However, the purpose of *seva* would not be to attract attention from the divine. Indeed, much of *seva* is preparatory before *darshan* when there is no access to the divine. Packert outlines a "*bhakti* tool kit" analogy to understand the cultivation of loving devotion in temple spaces. Though she focuses on Gaudiya Vaishnavism, this toolkit encompasses how public performance of worship in temple spaces aligns with personal devotion. First, temple spaces offer a "Sense of Place" (Braj). As Krishna's birthplace and site for many episodes, Braj is a place that is especially potent (see Chapter 7). The second tool is "an Open Heart" (or loving devotion) (Ibid; 7). Loving devotion is based on the aesthetic and theological theory of *rasa*, which is enjoying emotion as blissful (Chapter 4). Finally, she suggests "an Educated Eye" tool. As she reminds us, *darshan is* active and seeing it as a singular moment of transformative experience ignores other elements of worship (Ibid; 13). Temple settings,

ostentatious ornamentation, the divine form as self-manifested or animate and an already-cultivated devotion background the ability to have an Educated Eye. The tool kit associates "Krishna with a specific place, an appealing theology, and an aesthetically pleasing physical manifestation" (Ibid; 2).

As an audience, the chance to learn is emphasised by gurus in their *kathas.* This was a sentiment often repeated to me as people would describe the *darshan* they saw. Adornments twinkle in the lights in the inner sanctum, hiding and showing his image at various intervals. Part of the experience of *darshan* at the Haveli is the distance between devotee and divine. People are usually around three or four metres away from the small *swaroop* of Lalan, so it is tough to make him out. In some *darshans,* particularly the early morning one, people would bring out mini-binoculars to closely observe the finer details (see Richardson 2014; 163). Binoculars are not allowed in all Havelis, again a feature of the particularities of each Havelis as a home. One person remarked, "If you had someone staring at you constantly through binoculars, would you like it?" she continues, "that's why [the guru] tells *us* not to do that". This is another instance of Krishna's reveal and conceal dynamic. Krishna's human caregiver, the guru, mediates this dynamic in what is accessible in *darshan.*

Despite the fact that there is no ideal-type devotee in hagiographical literature (Bachrach 2014; 70), ideal-type in this thesis refers to the emotional capacity to become centred on devotion to Krishna rather than a specific model to follow. How festivals are celebrated on a grand scale is not always possible at home, yet devotees can adopt certain adornments or clothing at home on a smaller scale. However, people feel joy at the idea that they have done something to contribute to the Haveli's *seva.* For instance, the idea that the Haveli *swaroop* would be enjoying the vegetables that were part of the morning's *seva* gave people joy and a sense of active purpose in the Haveli. The 'stage' of the Haveli sets up the potentially transformative and sensory experience of *darshan,* and at each time of the day, the scene, music and 'props' change to suit the moment of Krishna's life. Haveli darshan is like a theatre of the divine's life, in which people get a glimpse of (*jhanki*) these sacred everyday moments. The glimpse itself is theatrical as "Jhanki literally means "tableau" or "scene" and refers to the scene portrayed during darsan" (Sanford 2008; 27).

Darshan is dependent on divine presence in the image. While the idea of the deity being an 'aid' is a standard theory (Eck 1998; 45)[99] and devotees in home-worship can potentially see their Lalan as a 'training' tool at first, once imbued with divine presence, that image becomes a living child that needs constant care.

[99] For non-dualists like the Pushtimarg, the material and immaterial are manifestations of divinity, not illusions so the separation of material, divine and devotee would not exist once the devotee comes to this realisation of consciousness.

Darshan; Animacy in things

Darshan is interaction with a divine being, which can be in the landscape or as an image. As we have seen, for the Pushtimarg, divine presence is embedded in India's sacred geography and images of Krishna as a child in Havelis and at home. Eck rightly states, "[f]or most ordinary Hindus, the notion of the divine as "invisible" would be foreign" (1998; 10) and, divine presence would be "taken for granted" (Davis 1999; 6).

From a legacy of the nineteenth-century that contrasted 'empiricism', 'science' and 'rationality' with religious experience, magic and animism, studies on religion moved to discussions of symbolism and meaning-making. The transition from embodiment to symbolism ignores the physicality or concreteness of the images themselves (Richardson 2019; 1). This binary between material and spiritual persists in scholarly work on religious experience (Richardson 2019; 3), despite the particularities of religious experience that embraces divine presence. Indeed, it is telling that an entire book entitled "Things. Religion and the Question of Materiality" does not deal with Hindu-isms (Houtman, Meyer et al. 2012). Some Hindu schools of thought, such as Advaita Vedanta, find image worship inferior as a path of knowledge (Davis 1999; 45).

In Pushtimarg theology, as in many other movements, divinity is *saguna* (personal with attributes) rather than *nirguna* (formless). The presence of divinity in a mundane domestic setting is a fact that Hindu devotees live with every day. Yet, the study of religious materials has been associated with now-derogatory terms like "idol" and "fetish" (Pietz 1985, Engelke 2012, Meyer and Houtman 2012). In English, there is little in the word 'statue', 'object' or 'idol' that suggests life (Richardson 2019; 3), though Hindus using these terms convey similar meanings. In Hindu and Gujarati, the word for an object is commonly *vastu,* a visible or tangible entity. Rather than objects, Ingold talks about 'things' as sequences in action (2013). The anxieties that 'things' have created in the study of religion stem from Protestantism as an example of a modern religion, which focuses on concepts of belief and faith over more "thing-friendly religious traditions, such as Catholicism" (Meyer and Houtman 2012; 9). In Engelke's work on Friday apostolic, he suggests that "Thingification… is the process through which the object is divested of an "immateriality" (2012; 61). When a material image goes through the process of "thingification" (Ibid; 60) the lines become blurred in relation to immateriality or presence.

Divine embodiment has long been associated with Hindu temple worship and rituals. For example, the way that Hindu images come alive for devotees happens in many ways, yet officially this is through a life-giving ritual. Often, an image is given 'life-breath' or *prana pratistha* through a series of ritual acts termed 'establishment' (Davis 1999; 33, see Cutler et al. 1996; 168). Ritual action continues to enliven the image (Davis 1999; 6). The term embodiment and subsequent studies on

embodiment imply a divine presence directed by human activity, in and out of 'empty' vessels or objects (Waghorne et al. 1996). This is a bounded and constrained form of presence, with human action controlling divinity's movement. Embodiment does not capture the balance of fluid yet permanent presence in Pushtimarg *seva*. While Fuller suggests that for many Hindus, the gods are both *in* the image and are worshiped *as* an image (1979; 465, see 2004 [1992]; 60-61), this does not quite work for an animate responsive part of the family. The vocabulary of contained and container is applied in Fuller's work, despite acknowledging that divinity is not restricted by an object or thing (2004 [1992]; 61).

In the Pushtimarg, Krishna's image is a *swaroop* and is never empty. For institutional Pushtimarg, human ritual establishes a Lalan for *seva*, while in domestic *seva*, devotees do not always feel the need for establishment[100]. *Swaroops* are all *pushtavela* (continually present). Rather than a life-giving (*pran pratiksha)* ceremony to an image, this is life-affirming, following Ingold's concept of animate things. Recall that the ceremony is done by a lineage guru (not any priest) (Chapter 2). Yet, the public space emphasises the importance of this life-affirming ceremony for individual devotees at home, facilitated by the Haveli. Yet, many people I knew did *seva* to a *swaroop* without having done the ceremony. People suggested that their love for their Krishna meant that he was alive already as they had done *seva* for so long despite accusations of inauthenticity from lineages and peers. In any case, once established or otherwise, Krishna's continual presence is unbounded by human ritual. Indeed, Shri Nathji in Nathdwara and the nine *nidhi swaroops* in the Pushtimarg are *svayambhu* or self-manifested and all the more potent.

Ingold looks at animacy rather than embodiment in his work on making (2013). While he does not discuss Hindu images, Hindu images are frequently understood as embodying divinity (Waghorne et al. 1996) and I use his work to reflect on a specifically Pushtimarg way of thinking about divine images. Animacy over embodiment allows for the Pushtimarg imaginations of the uncontained-ness (and unknowable-ness) of Krishna's divine presence. He thinks of embodiment as "bent on closure" (2013; 94), while animacy is a "tumult of unfolding activity" (Ibid). Meanwhile, he describes porosity as 'leaking' (Ibid; 95), where material flows freely.

Divine animacy corresponds with materials such as stone or clay before they are formed into an image for traditional image-making. *Sthapatis*, or artisans, make a divine image, particularly in temple worship. Modern images may be manufactured rather than artisanally made in domestic worship, though some are antiques handed down from generations. For example, the festival of Ganesha Cathurti in Maharastra explains the temporary ritual cycle of the image. The image of Ganesha is made from clay and worshipped for one to ten days when he is submerged in water (*visarjana*),

[100] Fuller acknowledges that the different with a theistic Hinduism of the gods in a temple, and for ordinary worship, where gods are vitally present and whose existence is hardly ever questioned (1979; 460).

usually the sea, ocean or a river (Courtright 1985). The clay changes and transforms in correspondence with human action (air that can dry the clay out and water that hydrates). Water corresponds with human activity and clay material, from the start of making and disintegrating the figure into liquid at the end. This process rings true for Ingold's "dance of animacy" (2013; 101) rather than agency. Water as an ocean, the sea or a river is not an embodied 'closed' agent but rather a complex of flow and resistance, that corresponds with and transforms the clay.

Rather than ascribing agency to an object (Gell 1998), Ingold wants to remove agency from our vocabulary and talk about humans and nonhumans as possessed by actions (2013; 97). Agency suggests a sense of ego and power, yet, for my interlocutors, shifting attachment from the mundane to Krishna requires surrendering control. Theologically, the surrender to the universe as Krishna's *lila,* playful and unpredictable, moves away from discussions of intentional agency. However, Ingold's argument does not consider divinity the ultimate source of religious vitality[101]. Celestial bodies are not the same as humans, nonhumans or materials. A human cannot affect Krishna on a celestial plane (*alaukik*). *Seva* as an enactment of devotion is for the devotee, as one guru stressed to me. Devotees can feel a part of Krishna in a cosmological essence as *pushti* (graced) souls. Yet, manifested on Earth, divinity interacts and corresponds with things, human, nonhuman and material, in a dance of animacy[102]. The 'set up' in a Haveli is for an active devotional *darshan* in correspondence and interaction with animate life between personhood and thinghood (Bennett 2001).

The identities of images in specific contexts invite distinct perceptions of correspondence, including *darshan* in a museum. Davis explores the appropriation of religious images in medieval India (1999, 51-87). The images' "biographies" (Ibid; 7) and identities shift by journeys to different locations and settings (Ibid; 55). These movements are shaped by, or correspond with, human "intrusion" and "social circumstances" (Ibid; 56). In a museum setting, visual interaction with a thing is informed by aestheticism, historical context and appreciation for making. Rather than Packert's Educated Eye, though similar, Davis uses the phrase "devotional eye" (Ibid; 37) for temple images, emphasising the visual and sensual interaction. There are two ways of exhibiting art in a museum, firstly wonder and the secondly resonance (Ibid; 183). Davis' distinction is that wonder has the power to "stop viewers in the tracks" (Ibid; 183) while objects of resonance sum up history (Ibid). As we will see in chapter 8, wonder is a critical concept in Pushtimargi religious experience. A museum effect (Ibid; 25) animates the image but also the sect's history through visual attentiveness, albeit differently from ritual or *seva*.

[101] Ingold mentions God in the Bible as a sort of creator or inventor, that fashions humans in his image in very Christian terms (2013; 63).
[102] Richardson (2019; 9) notes a generational difference in understanding what he calls Hindu embodiment in images. Some second-generation students suggest Hindu murtis were more symbolic or representative of a Supreme Being as opposed to alive.

Yet, the frame of *darshan* invites a different devotional perspective and an acknowledgement of some form of animacy.

Storytellers

As Narayan suggests, folk narrative and oral tradition are sources for cultural knowledge and transmission (1995 [1989]; 41), and the audience is not there to be entertained (Ibid; 247). An observable storyteller in the Haveli is the guru and his family, who host regular *kathas* (oral sermons) in India and large-scale quarterly to annual events in the diaspora. In Ahmedabad, there was a small *katha* session every Ekadashi, every two weeks on the 11th day corresponding to the Hindu lunar calendar cycle. In the UK, these events were increasing in frequency but were hosted by various gurus every four months or so. Havelis in India were often permanent residences for the guru, while usually, only the priests resided in Havelis there in the diaspora. The latter types of Haveli seemed more like a sacred public space, as the gurus had less involvement in the day-to-day running of the Haveli until they are present and act as spiritual figureheads.

In Hindu storytelling, there are many categories, such as *shruti,* "what is heard", and *smirti,*" what is remembered" (Narayan 1995 [1989]; 43). Both are experiential, based on verbal experience rather than written and not static (Ibid; 44). Pushtimarg *kathas* tend to fall into the latter, as they focus on the liturgy, hagiography and stories of Krishna's escapades to comment on the present time. As we have seen, many interlocutors focus on hagiographies and gurus for devotional guidance and spiritual authority. A *katha* is usually a religious story (rather than *kahani*, a more informal story (see Ibid; 39). These *kathas* are adapted to the context, cross mythological realms and geographies (Ibid; 237) and are everchanging, grounded in some form of religious address. They are performative oral narratives received by an active audience intertwined with relatable contemporary stories.

'Things' can be storytellers too, and the public space of a Haveli invites the devotee to be inspired by subjective material storytelling through worship materials.

Stories in the cloth; *pichwais*

A unique feature of Pushtimarg Havelis is *pichwais* (cloth backdrops) (Krishna 2015; 36), literally "that which hangs at the back" (Nanda 2009; 15). *Pichwais* are used to show Krishna *lilas* or inspire devotees to recall *lilas.* I did not see any elaborate *pichwais* in any Haveli settings, so I went to the Calico Museum in Ahmedabad in search of them. In a purposely cool room, *pichwais* hung from the ceiling in the dark while we quietly walked around, observing the images at a distance demarcated by a barrier. In a museum, the *pichwai* is displaced from its ritual context, yet as we have seen, things can be animated with a visual attentiveness or the devotional, educated eye.

Pichwais would probably have started more seriously with Vallabhacharya's son, Vittalnath (Nanda 2009; 15) though this is debated. These backdrops are both storytellers and decorative. Painters usually come from Nathdwara, meaning Gates of the Lord (Ghose; 2015; 16), though it is difficult to find traditional *pichwais* in the streets. As storytellers, as Ghose has said, these hangings give a "rare insight into this cloistered world" (Ghose 2015; 17) and are also another window into the history of the *sampradaya* (sect) and the tastes of the gurus (Ghose 2015; 17, Ambalal 2015; 26). Indeed, they are also part of the tableau that supports *darshan* in a Haveli. The materials, craftspersonship and decorations related to the patronage of the Pushtimarg by royals based on the prints or materials (Ibid) and the inclusion of supportive patrons within the *pichwais* (Richardson 2014; 95-96). The use of the *pichwai* has changed, perhaps due to the lack of patronage or skilled artisans, but, as things, they are storytellers of Havelis and institutional Pushtimarg in the past. Now, *pichwais* are often block-coloured cloths, with small decorations around a square or rectangle 'frame', around Shri Nathji and Lalan in a Haveli and the domestic space. In some ways, older and elaborate *pichwais* resemble things that are *smirti* "what is remembered". These glimpses into Krishna's life and the sect's history, aided by props such as *pichwais*, created a particular atmosphere for the audience, guiding their eyes to the divine, hinting at his play, and allowing participation by observation.

While traditional *pichwais* are storytellers in exhibitions or sequestered away in Havelis for protection, the white *pichwai* at the 40-day festival of Holi allows devotees to participate in celebrating in temple Holi visually and actively as the *pichwai* changes as part of the divine playtime. The *pichwai* is an ever-changing and active part of the surroundings. A white cloth hangs up, plain and simple. However, during the games of Holi, coloured powder is thrown on it by the gurus or priests as they play in the inner sanctum with Lalan. Each day people note the different patterns and the colours that have been put on, or hit, the cloth. One person commented that they had more 'fun' one day, as the colours struck her as vivid perhaps compared to other days. These cloths are a 'blank slate' rather than imbued with history or *bhava* of the past. This *pichwai* is an example of an animate thing that corresponds with divinity and humans in play in action.

"Krishna is sitting on [Yashoda's] lap not on a pedestal at a distance"

As the complexities of the private and public spheres are blurred with a Haveli, we can see the different levels of access as; 1) the cosmological home of Krishna, 2) a familial home for the presiding Vallabhkhul (and *mukhiyas* in residence, particularly in the diaspora), 3) a graced collective public community, learning and worship space. These boundaries merge and interact to encourage a relationship with the divine through *darshan* and *seva.* Though the domestic is privileged as a *seva*, as highlighted by the quote from a devotee above. Despite criticisms of authenticity, the Haveli certainly has a role to play, particularly in the diaspora community. Acknowledging tensions that exist does not

deny Haveli's ability to be a learning space. The Haveli also allows devotees to participate in a more elaborate, collective *seva* inspiring wonder on a different scale.

The next chapter moves from Krishna's homes (Haveli and domestic) to looking at Krishna's playground during *yatras* (pilgrimages) in India.

Chapter 7: *Yatra*; journeying to feel Krishna's presence

We arrived on the 3rd of April 2017 in Gokul, Krishna's childhood home. After a flight booked online and a slick car trip along a smooth new motorway, the atmosphere was filled with excited tension and anticipation. Arriving through dusty, narrow, windy streets among cows, pedestrians and rickshaws, the pace was slower, bumpier, and quieter. I was with an elderly couple, Dada, a man in his 80s and his wife, Krutiben, in her late 70s, two friends, Anjaliben and Geetaben in their late 50, and Geetaben's Lalan. In the car was our spiritual guide, introduced to me via WhatsApp by some family friends who had been on *yatra* with him many times in Braj.

From the beginning, everyone's Lalan was on their minds. There was a lot of discussion in the lead-up to the trip about whether to take everyone's Lalan, or who should take care of him while we were away. Geetaben was the only one who eventually decided to bring him. As she had not done so in previous *yatras* she felt as though this was her chance. The process of packing for Lalan was longer than for us. I helped with putting his adornments, his toys, and his bedding among other things in a separate bag. Geetaben had spent some time in the days leading up to the trip preparing Lalan by telling him we were going on a trip and her *seva* might look a bit different. On the flight, we could not put him in the overhead luggage compartment as it would be an uncomfortable journey "going this way and that way" and he would be scared, according to Geetaben. Instead, we took turns carrying him on board the flight in his travel bag on our laps.

I had missed one fieldwork opportunity for an organised trip with a guru and his family about a week into my fieldwork in India in 2016. However, through some persistence and lots of group enthusiasm, I had arranged much of the trip. Though it was my first yatra to Braj, everyone else had been before in my group of six. It was all done online, from flights to the guide to the return train journey that went a bit wrong, which will come towards the end of the story.

Yatra: pilgrimage, spiritual journey

We met Geetaben's Lalan, a particularly cheeky child, in Chapter 2. This was not the first time he had come on a *yatra* with us. He had joined in Nathdwara too. In a sense, Geetaban taking along her Lalan shows the portability of the intimate domestic space when framed through a personal relationship with the divine. Caring for him as her child required much planning and consideration, as it did when many

of my interlocutors were travelling. Could someone essentially 'babysit'? Would they perform *seva* as Lalan enjoys? Would he be uncomfortable travelling such a long distance? His portability shows how a 'domestic' sense of place is unbounded, yet, this throws up tensions on relational care and protection that are framed around *bhava* logics. After some debate, he came with us as, for Geetaben, this journey was about sharing the sacred journey with a family member, albeit divine, who would enjoy seeing his own *lila* manifested in the natural environment of his playground.

My *yatra* fieldwork was peppered with memories of the people who journeyed together. The most common words used to describe how people felt at sacred sites were *shanti* (peace) and *anand* (joy, bliss), contrasting the legendary chaos and crowds of Indian pilgrimage sites. Rather than a ritual purification, going on *yatra* was spoken about as a reunion, refreshment, or reconnection with the land and with Krishna's presence[103]. While some of my interlocutors would see this as getting away from the mundane or routine life, this was not the main framework for understanding sacred journeys. Geetaben's Lalan coming with us is a picture apart from a goal of the *yatra* as meritious or imagined as nationalist, though for other *yatras* this may be part of that picture (e.g. Karve 1988). Seeing *yatra* as nationalist restricts the range of meanings a sense of place inspires, reducing personal and relational religious experiences, including that between devotee and divine, to the dominant discourse around a site. The most significant purpose of *yatra* for the Pushtimargis I spoke to was to transform their earthly (*laukik*) perspective into a spiritual one (*alaukik*), through exercising and cultivating their devotional mood while on this experiential journey. As Lynch argues, Pushtimarg *yatra* is not about asceticism and renunciation (though there are moments of this) but cultivating a spiritual perspective and emotional connection to the divine (1988; 190).

Three main threads run through this chapter. First is the transformative potential of the sacred land. The second is understanding a journey as shifting, often circular as opposed to linear. And finally, is the overarching sense of the landscape as sacred and imbued with Krishna and his life. What resonated with my *yatra* group was the feeling of Krishna's animate living presence through the overwhelming sensory impact of sights, smells, sounds, and movement intertwined with the environment across bodies of water, soil, and the earth.

There are two 'parts' to this chapter. First, I explore three main places of Pushtimarg worship: Champaranya, Vallabhacharya's birthplace, the founding guru of the Pushtimarg, then Nathdwara, the home of Shri Nathji and, finally, Braj, the childhood home of Krishna. Champaranya is centred on Vallabhacharya and his hagiography (framed by Krishna) which is very sectarian-specific. Nathdwara centres on Shri Nathji as a divine avatar of Krishna from the 15th century that crosses sectarian boundaries. As one of the wealthiest temples in India (Bennett 1990; 188), the town is a hub of

[103] The Pushtimarg can be translated as the Path of Nourishment as well as Grace. Nourishment can refer to this experience of the sacred journey as spiritual nourishment.

activity, attracting (pilgrim) tourists, businesses, and devotees. Braj is Krishna's childhood home, and playground, overflowing with all the favourite tales of performing *lila* and inspiring devotional attachment, his pranks and tricks, and love from the *gopis* (milkmaids) (Hawley 2014).

My analysis of Braj forms the second 'part' of the chapter. As a place, Braj encompasses sectarian and devotional boundaries, though these are often permeable in everyday devotional practice. Importantly, in Braj, the land, soil, trees, water, stones and so on are touched by the feet of Krishna, where he is still roaming and playing. The land remains animate not only with his presence through his touch, but through the narratives of what took and continues to take place on the land itself. The focus is on the sensory experience of the substances of land in Braj, Krishna's childhood home, that offers physical transformative potential for devotees.

In writing about place, the irony of attempting to encompass many registers and relations to place is not lost on me. Though I only visited the places discussed in this chapter once, they had a distinct impression through conversations prior, during and after my encounter with the landscape. However, this is an attempt to offer an overview of people's senses of place while acknowledging their differences in attachment and how people live in different registers every day. As places move, shift and change, a *yatra* connects the devotee to the landscape and other realms. In all the places I explore in this chapter, there are entanglements with the political, national, technological, and tourism. This may seem obvious, as a place is situated in context. Yet, a devotee's imaginary of sacred sites is embedded in a golden past of Krishna's *lilas.* This traditional versus so-called secular, modern development dichotomy threads through all the places in this chapter. As we have seen, a sense of place (Basso 1996) is not static. In *yatra*, sacred sites are a collision of senses, memories, subjectivities, *communitas* (Turner 1976), perhaps indicated by the descriptors peace and bliss, conflict (Eade and Sallnow 2000) such as the experience of chaos and crowds, and the overlap of the two (Coleman 2002).

Yatra's place

Often religious sites are celebrated by pilgrims as static and timeless places. However, places and *sampradayas* are in movement with diverse narratives and subjectivities and a changing environment, so the experience of place is different each time.

> "Yatra: A Journey, a procession, a pilgrimage, an expression which reflects an ancient Indian tradition that has emerged over millennia. Yatra: an organised and often angry politico-religious march which has an enormous potential for turning incendiary" (Jaffrelot 2009; 1)

A *yatra* or journey is not obligatory for Hindu devotees, nor is it the most recognised *dharma* (duty and virtue) practice. Improved communication and better transport starting from railway construction

in the 1840s have made *yatra* in India more accessible and safer (Fuller 2004 [1992]; 205). *Yatras* do not always have a specific point of destination or goal. For example, there is no endpoint in the circular Ban-yatra in Braj (Haberman 1994). There is no limit, or required time one must spend on a *yatra* as this varies between communities and individuals. Instead, sacred landscape and the experience of a journey are thought to offer a chance for ritual purification and time away from the worries of daily life (Bhardwaj 1973; 3). *Yatra* has been understood as a "mental and moral discipline" (Ibid; 2), without which a physical *yatra* does not have much significance (Ibid). While it is true that, traditionally, pilgrimage involves some hardship and obstacles (see Daniel 1984) as part of the religious experience, a transformation of personhood and a new or renewed connection with sacred land, *yatras* have changed in many ways. For example, as the quote above shows, the political and the traditional affect perspectives of *yatra.* Political involvement in religious sites can lead to adaptation or traditions framed as timeless such as the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad (Maclean 2008). Nationalist instrumentalisation can be both violent and tragic (Rajagopal 2001) but can create spaces of freedom, for example, for women, as in Jaffrelot's work (2009). Yet, these sorts of analyses do not quite go far enough. For instance, Maclean notes the refusal of the British to "take Indian knowledge systems… seriously" (2008; 219) was a huge disadvantage to them. Yet, she expresses a "reluctance to document the religious experience of pilgrims" (Ibid; 15). While she does this "unapologetically" (Ibid; 4) and with different disciplinary goals, devotee experience cannot be sidestepped quite that easily, as it shapes the understandings of *yatras.*

One way to understand *yatra* is through Eck's study of *tirthas* or crossings (1981)[104]. She outlines six significances of *tirtha yatra,* which help to contextualise the journeys people take (1981; 337-341):

1. *Tirthas* are places for performing religious rites, though it is the journey and place that make these rites extraordinary compared to home rituals.
2. A *tirtha* journey is conceived of as performance of a rite itself, with transformative powers, rather than a setting for a rite, "the place *is* the power."
3. The journey is less expensive than elaborate rites and less socially restrictive for lower castes, outcastes, and women (though often this egalitarian sentiment is idealised).
4. The purifying power of place is emphasised through penance for sins or bestowing of blessings.
5. The journey is both an internal and external crossing or transformation.
6. Tirthas hold the potential promise of liberation or *moksha.*

[104] While *tirthas* have been ranked according to the textual authority of the Puranas (Bhardwaj 1973; 97-99) this classification perspective is not reflective of the emotional attachment to land and the experience of the journey. Bhardwaj's table also reflects the diversity of opinions (Ibid; 100).

For Pushtimarg devotees, much of Eck's list is accurate concerning the power of place, the journey as a potential transformative experience internally and externally, and the purifying power of a *tirtha*. Many of my interlocutors had very few social restrictions due to their upper-middle-class status and/or diasporic status. The journeys I participated in were described as freeing and liberating, not as *moksha* that the Pushtimarg eschewed in favour of active *seva*, but as being in the presence of the divine and able to focus and absorb this presence without the usual distractions of the mundane. Considering India as "living geography" (Eck 1981; 336) influenced not only by the features of the natural landscape but also by heroic and divine narratives and pilgrim pathways, means the importance of the divine presence on earth cannot be overstated. The landscape is divine manifestation in rivers, mountains, earth, trees, etc.

While movement in a *yatra* and the journey experience have specific patterns (Daniel 1984), other interactions with the land are shaped by age, gender, and lifecourse (Dyson 2015; 51). One way to understand the idea of places and *yatras* is through Feldhaus' term "connected places", opposed to an objectified set of regional geographical features (2003; 5). Echoing Eck's lived geographies, Feldhaus talks about mythological geography, in which places are marked by the stories people tell about gods, goddesses, and other such figures (see Basso 1996). The richness of religious-geographical sense of place and pilgrimage practices can create political entities (such as founding the State of Maharashtra in 1960) though this reduces the meaning and experience of place to political movement (Ibid; 15). This mythological lived geography extends to the otherworldly embedded in sacred places. In the cosmological sense, a *loka* (world) is considered a sacred place, open to the divine and won by conquest, rites or by "creative capacity of the mind" (Eck 1985; 44). While there is a three-world model (*triloka*) of earth, netherworld and heavens, multiple *loka* spaces exist (Ibid). The boundaries of the *lokas* are porous and potent, entangled with the earth allowing for an everyday experience of divine presence.

Pushtimarg-specific sites are essential to understanding the distinct mythological geography, centred on the presence of the divine lineage of the Vallabhkhul. These are connected to Krishna but specific to Pushtimarg theology. These sites, called *baithaks*, are also an important example of divine play and the reveal and conceal motif manifested physically in the environment.

Baithaks

A *baithak* (or *bethak*, lit. seat) is where Vallabhacharya or his lineage recited and commented on scripture during their travels around India[105] (Figure 1). *Caurasi Baithak Caritra*, a hagiographical scripture written in the nineteenth century (Bachrach 2014; 64), maps out this Pushtimarg sacred

[105] While gurus travelled far and wide, I was often told that this classification is only for if the stay was for a period between three to seven days.

geography based on Vallabhacharya readings. This is a vital example of a 'glocal' viewpoint, accessible globally through local worship channels, e.g., through gurus, specific websites, other devotees, and *baithaks* are Pushtimarg specific. *Baithaks* are revered as sites of revelation and lineage presence. Sectarian debates around where *baithaks* are situated state these places are where souls were in need, while other sources suggest these were sites of upheaval and had "willing converts to a new *sampradaya"* (Bachrach 2014; 66). While both seem to overlap, as upheaval and willing converts can be thought of like souls in need, India has a rich competitive religious landscape. There are significant sacred sites of different religions and sects near each other (Ibid). Competition happens in the Hindu diaspora, with the rapid global development of temples such as ISKCON and Swaminarayan in the UK.

There are eighty-four *baithaks* associated with Vallabhacharya, twenty-eight with Vittalnath and thirty with Vittalnath's seven sons. These seats, often looking like a mound with bolster cushions and a pillow at the back, are worshipped as animate divine beings. Some pilgrims I met would set themselves a goal to have *darshan* at all the sites across India, others would be happy to visit a few, and others regularly go to one nearby. On my first visit to a *baithak* outside of Ahmedabad, I searched for a recognisable image of Krishna. Instead, I saw a *baithak* dressed in a dark green saree that had a glittering gold simple border. Framing the *baithak* was a thick dark hair braid with gold ribbon woven into it. I learned that the seats are clothed and adorned as a divine image and offered *seva* throughout the day[106].

[106] These *baithaks* have no eyes. Eck's and subsequent authors on embodiment place a high importance on the eyes of an image, yet here this is not the case. *Seva* as an active sensory worship is given prominence.

Figure 1: Map of baithaks around India

My edits based on Wikipedia map and pushti-marg.net's map of baithaks. Not to scale

Baithaks bring together different timelines while simultaneously being animate things that are part of the sacred environmental geography of a distinctly Pushtimargi India. "Baithakas, as do all the stations of the pilgrimage, conflate cosmological, historical and present time. They unite the present with the time of Vallabhacharya and ultimately with the *dvapara yuga* (third of the cosmological eras) of Krishna's lilas said to have taken place over 5,000 years ago" (Lynch 1988; 182). In the list of *baithaks*, a number are deemed 'invisible'[107]. These are is also known as '*gupt' baithaks*, which means hidden, guarded, or preserved and are where Vallabhacharya or his lineage stayed to recite scripture. However, there is no Haveli for lack of physical evidence. The evidence for the place-making of the invisible *baithaks* is through hagiographies called the *vartas*[108].

An example of this is the Vyas Ashram *baithak* in Uttarakhand. While this is a hagiographically known site, people have created a *baithak* on a stone for personal *darshan* at an estimated place. Krishna, theologically, conceals and reveals in the play between transcendent and immanent, divine and related. In this example, the sacred place is hidden or preserved and, metaphorically, reflects the mysteries of Krishna's playful world. I am reminded of the oral history of Pushtimarg persecution, the hidden nature of their devotion during the Mughal period and the subduing of their *madhurya-bhava* (lovers' mode) during the colonial period. Concealing seems like a motif in the narrative of the movement's history. These invisible places are concrete and physical examples of the reveal and conceal play and this history. It is not just sight that is important at the estimated *baithaks*, but Vallabhacharya's words and presence animate the land itself.

Yet, the rapidly developing world affects how people access and act at the sites themselves. I first went to Champaranya on a diaspora-sponsored large-scale *katha* event, then to Nathdwara on a personal *yatra* with two friends. I began with my last *yatra* to Braj. I will symbolically end with it in a circular loop with no 'end' destination and emerging questions, as *yatra* is understood as a constant non-linear journey.

[107] From a photo of a pamphlet, I was sent on WhatsApp, there are at least 16 that are associated with Vallabha that are classed as "'invisible'".
[108] Vyas Ashram https://84baithakji.com/en/baithakji/uttarakhand/vyas-ashram/.

Figure 2: Map of India with main sites of yatra fieldwork

Champaranya; "it has changed since I last came."

Champaranya in Chattisgarh is Vallabhacharya's birthplace. One diasporic devotee walked along the mud footpath next to the tarmac road, handing out green leaves to wandering cows bought from a woman on the street as we walked to the main Haveli. She said, "When I was last here, all this [gestures vaguely around] was not here. It was just a village. It has changed since I last came". She had come about seven years earlier, and since then, it seems as though there had been a lot of development. When I was there in December 2018, on my first *yatra* of fieldwork, tour buses emblazoned with tourism stickers arrived each day for a sacred site tour. Signs in English dotted around us said "enjoy your religious tour" or "Have a safe religious tour". The word 'tour' rather than 'pilgrimage' or *yatra* is striking as it demonstrates how much more of a tourist site Champaranya has become in the last ten years. Access is not as much of a hardship as previously understood. Tourism grants are being given to religious sites, developing them for a broader public audience. Many places have become more accessible through lines of transport (Bhardwaj 1973; 5), and the obstacles are less physically enduring with updated accommodation and travel. Nevertheless, some *yatras* involve

camp-style facilities, individuals who do full-prostration circumambulations (*danvathis*) and extended *yatras* such as month-long ones.

Very little has been written on Champaranya apart from stories of Vallabhacharya's birth, though it is in a state of becoming more recognised. Recall that he was born in a ring of fire after his parents believed him dead. Prakatya Baithakji Mandir[109] and the Mool Prakatya (or Chatti Baithak) form the central religious and tourist hub of activity. There were two main types of accommodation for the members of the group (besides individual arrangements); a modern hotel in the city of Raipur and a dharmshala (religious guesthouse) in Champaranya itself. The facilities at the dharmshala were more basic, with shared rooms and bathrooms. This was where I stayed, as it was the main meeting point for all activities, meals and meeting the guru and his family, who had their rooms in a separate quad within the dharmshala. Nearby there was an events hall, where the main speaking event (katha) was held, and a gaushala (cow enclosure).

Many of the people I travelled with were from the diaspora for the five-day *katha* (sermon) led by a guru. According to my rough estimations, there were over 300-400 people each day who travelled domestically, not to mention a large entourage that came with the guru and his family. People paid for a 'package' style deal including preferred accommodation and local forms of transport like a van between Raipur airport and the accommodation. Though many people arrange individually organised *yatras*, in the three I took through my fieldwork, this was the only one that was guru-led and paid for by family in the diaspora. If the guru is present, some devotees said it was a better *yatra* experience as the site becomes a place of learning in the sacred environment. The guru and his family could explain the journey and the experience as it was happening. Often the devotees who expressed this to me came from further away or abroad.

Often *saptas* (seven days or more) or *kathas* (less than seven days) could be arranged at the last minute so people who lived in India could attend many more than those in the diaspora. Sponsorship (*manorath*) is a sizeable amount, including accommodation for the guru, his family and their entourage, food, a live worldwide telecast, local transport, hall hire fees, flowers, drum players on one of the days, reading material and so on. Other people donated large amounts during the event, which were announced at the start of the *katha* in the welcome address (see Chapter 6 on wealth debates). Additionally, several devotees suggested that the diaspora spend more on hosting larger events that attract more people, as the diaspora does not have as many opportunities to perform this sort of public seva.

[109] Note that it is not commonly called a Haveli, unlike usual Pushtimarg Havelis. Devotees on the *yatra* called it a Haveli, yet, perhaps for a broader Hindu or visiting audience the word is *mandir* (temple) for wider understanding.

Seeing the vast numbers of diverse groups, I decided to carry out a survey (Appendix), to get a sense of the scale of the event. I obtained permission from the guru in charge and handed them out before the katha started on the second day[110]. Handing these out near the temple complex entrance or in the more touristy accommodation may have returned different responses. There was a considerable range of how many *yatras* people had experienced. However, the majority said they had been to *yatras* usually related to the Pushtimarg (66 said yes, while 2 said no, and 6 were not answered). The majority had home-havelis (49). They either had a Lalan or a *chitraji* (painting of Shrinathji) at home, and 67 out of 74 had taken the initiation rite into the Pushtimarg.

However, we can draw on the survey results to discuss three main features of the *yatra* experience: the guru-centred community, the familial aspect of the journey, and the diasporic understanding of identity and rootedness. First, the survey indicated that the majority of devotees came from India. This is unsurprising, as the travelling, planning and cost would be lower for domestic travellers. Most people came from Ahmedabad due to the Haveli community centred around the guru. Therefore, reaching out to the community to participate was easier. Most devotees were 60-69 (34 devotees) and 50-59 (17 devotees). Many anecdotal comments suggest that retirement and freedom to travel could be a reason for this. Some responses talked about a return to religious life or a new appreciation of spiritual guidance in older age. There were more female than male devotees in the survey, which parallels my observations of the event. A group of young children from the Haveli in Ahmedabad, aged 4-13, attended as accompanying minors with their families. I interacted with one group of about ten young adults (ages 18-24) from East Africa informally many times. The majority were starting to develop an interest in Pushtimarg due to the building of Havelis near their homes. Their parents would drop into the Havelis regularly, so they often accompanied them and became more interested. A few were 'dragged there' by the family with the promise of a holiday in Goa or Kerala afterwards.

Second, there was a notable emphasis on the familial aspect of *yatra*, with 25 people coming with their spouse and 37 with other family members (including aunts, uncles and in-laws). In answer to one question, "How do you remember your first yatra?" most people recalled the people they were with during their *yatra*. "Going to Nathdwara when we were young along with the grandmother is the best childhood memory. That's how I remember all the yatras, with the people in it with me". Some responses to memories of journeys show a shift or transformed perspective. For instance, "With my mother at the age of 16. Mathura and Shri Nathji. Remember doing rituals which did not have

[110] 74/250 surveys were filled in and returned, 11 were returned blank, 165 were missing. One was returned via email and three were given back in Ahmedabad one month later. I was unwell on the trip so could not participate fully in the whole event. The survey led to some interesting results. 17 people gave me their contact details. I ended up meeting 5 people from those 17.

reasoning. Pushing and shoving. Lots made sense in my later years". The seemingly unpleasant memory of people's first *yatra* of pushing and shoving and no reasoning changed the tone and brought this devotee back on *yatra.*

Finally, as discussed in the previous chapter, there was a focus on identity and rootedness centred on worship, particularly from the diaspora. For example, "India is my motherland and lots of places still I want to visit. All these places take me close to god Krishna". Another said, "The purpose of coming to India for yatra is that India is the root (base) of our religion". One Indian national writes, "India is a holy and historical place…The birthplace of Shri Krishna is beyond our imagination. The mountains of Govardhan and the river Yamuna is worshipped as real God. You cannot find all these except in India". This latter point is poignant and will be explored later in this chapter.

These themes were underlined by the *yatra* organisation as a wide-scale, guru-led glocal community event, appealing to a large group of the diaspora from around the world. In Nathdwara, the home of the divine, on a personally arranged *yatra*, the journey and place offered a different experience without a guru or large community despite being a tourist 'hotspot'. As I discussed the importance of Nathdwara as a site that influenced the history of the Pushtimarg movement, in this section, I focus on how Nathdwara is experienced as a sacred space. Nathdwara is a place centred on Shri Nathji's continued divine animate presence, distinct from the environment or an event at the sacred site.

Nathdwara; the home of Shri Nathji

Nathdwara (meaning Gate to the Lord) is the home of the divine image of Shri Nathji and where the first house of the divine lineage called the Tilkayat lives and manages the temple under a government-appointed temple board. Formerly known as Mewar, Shri Nathji arrived here from Braj in 1672, escaping from fear of attack by Mughal rulers. According to sectarian literature, Shri Nathji's chariot got stuck in the mud, and then Mewar became his home. Since then, it has been a place of attraction for worshippers, Pushtimarg and others alike.

> Geetaben, Ramilaben (Geetaben's neighbour) and I took the bus for Nathdwara at 6:30 am, along with Geetaben's Lalan, alternating on our laps, in February 2017. We were staying in a *dharmshala*, but rather than the traditional idea of a community-based space to stay, this was a paid-per-night cottage that we had booked online via the Nathdwara website. Here, all eight *darshan* times are open (unlike other places which have some closed), and through our online booking, we also got reminders of *darshan* times on our phones. As a religious tourist site, the population fluctuates each week and season. We headed for the 4 pm mealtime Bhog *darshan.*

We walked towards the entrance through a small road that was specifically for *shringar* (adornments). Sequins and mirrorwork reflected the afternoon sun to my face, colours all-around of cloth and a shop full of different-sized eyes staring out into the street.

We sat on the floor in the waiting hall under what seemed like temporary metal sheets as a ceiling with gaps all over, separated from the entrance by a small metal barrier and gate. Groups of women were doing *seva* with fruit and vegetables as we sat huddled next to a storage unit with a line of pumpkins rolling out. Suddenly, there was a rush towards the door from the other room, the VIP room, where people paid for early access. People were pressing up against the door, waiting for it to open. Then a group of men were let in, then a group of women and the same process happened again. Intentionally in the last group, we took some time near a wall where people drew a *swastik* backwards in red powder and offered a coconut up. This is a 'promise' or 'oath' wall where people ask for something and will come back and draw the *swastik* the right way once their wish is fulfilled. Pushtimarg devotees refuse to do it, as Geetaben said, "we don't ask for things".

The darshan was frenetic, with police managing the queue and people hitting you with a cloth to move you along (*jatpuras).* Apparently, it is good luck to be hit, and I was several times.

That evening we came back and double-backed into the mandir again as it closed. In the evening *darshan* (Shayan), a group of 6 or 7 children came out, representing different Krishnas and his plays, dancing to the sound of drums and cymbals. Geetaben pointed out that the door to Shri Nathji was ajar and whispered, "So he can see".

There is a lot I can draw on in this short excerpt from my fieldwork, reflected by what has already been written on Nathdwara. The Nathdwara Haveli extends the spiritual through the whole town as the door between the two realms ("dvara" in the town's name is a gate or door to the divine (Bennet 1993; 82)). Studies examine Nathdwara as a bounded sacred town (Jindel 1976), the famous style of Nathdwara paintings or pichwais (Ambalal et al. 2015, including the changing face of calendar art in the bazaar of image reproduction (Jain 2007), participation in emerging webs of digital religious journeys (Richardson and Gheewala Lohiya; forthcoming), and as a site for government intervention in the seemingly religious and 'domestic' sphere through the Nathdwara Temple Act (Chapter 6, see Richardson 2014, Bachrach 2017).

Almost every moment of activity in the town with Geetaben and Ramilaben is centred on *darshan* (sight) times and their *seva.* Shri Nathji has a special status as the initial avatar of Krishna. Apart from Krishna's original narratives in Braj, Shri Nathji has his own manifested journey on earth. Before settling in Nathdwara, he appeared from Mount Govardhan in the 15th century, travelling with the Vallabhkhul family. He came from the earth, one body part at a time. This imagery is significant in thinking about the relationship between divine, human, and sacred land. Shri Nathji is often painted as

part of Mount Govardhan, with stones and animals surrounding him. According to popular narrative, Shri Nathji slowly stopped communicating with devotees because people's *bhava* (devotional mood) was being compromised. Only those with a spiritual perspective (*alaukik*) can understand his desires. This is the purpose of *yatra*, both to replenish a connection to sacred land and image and, crucially, to transform one's perspective away from the worldly. However, *seva* is directed for a shared sense of pleasure as a living divine presence with his devotees, as with the performance, Geetaben and I saw in the evening. The door was purposely left ajar to give a sense of privacy and include Shri Nathji in the merriment.

Similarly to the experiences of Champaranya, Geetaben and Ramilaben spoke about their previous visits with family and friends. These trips were frequent as Nathdwara was a bus ride away for them. Geetaben mainly spoke about her family visits, and much of the trip was spent pointing out significant places to me. These were not only sacred sites or havelis but where she would have tea with someone or the restaurant she would go to that had changed. The second point to note is that *seva* to Shri Nathji is also an exemplar of *seva* to inspire devotees. After *darshan,* devotees walk along streets lined with numerous speciality *seva* shops, as Nathdwara is renowned for its arts and *seva* articles.

Nathdwara is considered a shelter to Shri Nathji (Jindel 1976; 81), journeying away from intruders (Ibid; 80). Before 1671, there was no town or village under the name of Nathdwara, so Shri Nathji's arrival created the sacred town (Ibid; 18). Rather than rivers, mountains or forests, which are often features of tirthas as sacred sites, the place is Shri Nathji-centred. Movements and infrastructure were built outward into the town from that centre and beyond. The vitality of Nathdwara is the continued living presence of Shri Nathji. His presence shapes the everyday life of the temple complex and its surroundings (along with state perspectives on the place and tourist industries such as hoteliers and shops), and a devotional experience is mediated through the online and offline spheres. Jindel suggests that *darshan* (sight) of Shri Nathji is the only appeal for the town, as there is nothing in the surrounding areas for more extended visits by tourists (Ibid; 92), bypassing other expressions of devotion such as *seva.* This has since been steadily changing, with luxury hotels and lodges being purpose-built for pilgrimage tourism to the town. Within the city, there are bounded spaces defined by what is and is not allowed, such as meat and alcohol, that keep the town's sanctity (Ibid; 3)[111] and perhaps we can include non-digitised spaces as 'pure'. My interlocutors explain part of this as keeping things the same for Shri Nathji. Nathdwara has a strict no phones or cameras policy within the temple. Pilgrims are explicitly or implicitly encouraged to leave behind the mundane world of technology to have the full *darshan* experience. According to my interlocutors, the device ban also helps prevent the

[111] Part of Jindel's implies a Hindu nationalist tone (1976; 38). Yet, this thesis takes on board the more sociological approach in her study.

selling of prints and images of this Shri Nathji[112]. As a child, he would not like all the new gadgets 'in his face', according to one interlocutor. In contrast, the temple management used technology to schedule people's time through WhatsApp and *darshan* reminders.

After our early morning *darshan* on the second day, as we walked the dusty streets, I intently searched for a breakfast of rice flakes and spiced potatoes (*poha*) accompanied by some strongly brewed masala chai. Geetaben was describing Shri Nathji's clothes from the previous day. Recalling a turquoise outfit with some glittering jewels, she and Ramilaben popped into various shops to search for *seva* articles for their Lalans. This draws together the idea of a Haveli as a public learning space, as well as introduces the importance of Nathdwara as a town known for art and *seva* materials. Souvenirs for tourists sit side-by-side with *seva* items, neon and flashing lights surrounding glitzy images of Shri Nathji next to tarp-like tea stalls and shops filled with hundreds of tiny flutes, toys, clothes and, importantly, *pichwais* (traditional backdrops for *seva*). Devotees often come with a list of what they want for their Lalan (sometimes other divine beings too), but also requests from their community at home. Consumerism is not a 'bad thing' in itself in Nathdwara. Nathdwara is renowned for the aesthetic displays that inspire devotion (Packert 2010; 186). The splendour and elegant settings offer devotees creative concepts to take home as inspiration rather than copying, along with the odd 'souvenir' gift for Lalan.

On a street in Nathdwara, this shop in front sells eyes for Lalan and Shri Nathji. Photo taken by author

Both places discussed above are embedded in the imaginations of the Pushtimarg movement through the presence of Vallabhacharya and Shri Nathji, respectively. Champaranya is a Pushtimarg-specific

[112] Given the sheer number of images of Shri Nathji available around the world, physically and virtually, this is an apparent paradox. Geetaben agreed it was strange, yet maintained it was because Shri Nathji is a swaroop, and a living animate presence, it was different to the commercial replications of his figure.

site with less broad appeal. Although it attracts a wide audience, Nathdwara is managed by the Pushtimarg's first lineage, the Tilkayat. Yet, Krishna was born and lived in Braj. For the Pushtimarg, Gokul is his childhood home and is revered the most. In my fieldwork, people compared Braj and Nathdwara, influenced by their experiences.

One devotee described Braj as 'simple' and 'pure', while another suggested Braj "is not as opulent as Nathdwara". Braj, as pure and simple, points to a sense of the 'authentic' or 'untouched' though this is contestable, as we will see. Braj is a sacred space where Krishna walked on the soil and is continually present. The area is host to many *sampradayas* (sects), sectarian pilgrims and residents, and tourist visitors. Braj is understood as a crossing of worlds but of a different kind. Here, the gods are playful, the residents mischievous (*brajvasis*), where pilgrims seek new experiential perspectives (Lynch 1988; 173). In the next section, Braj is discussed through its substances and features of the landscape that are experienced in a sensory manner, connecting pilgrims to the land physically and mentally, inspiring an encounter with an everpresent divine. First, we look at the three main places in Braj. These are explored regarding boundaries, particularly between a wild 'authentic' place of worship, the constant construction as capitalistic, and 'superficial' as a show for tourists than for worshippers.

Braj; Krishna's childhood home

Gokul (lit. herd of cows) (Hawley 2020; 8) is on the east riverbank of the Yamuna, opposite Mathura. In Gokul, Krishna crossed the river from Mathura on a stormy night on the head of his birth father, Vasudeva, to his adoptive parents, Yashoda and Nanda. Here, as a loveable infant, Krishna played out his childhood, tending cow herds and playing pranks on the villagers for butter.

I first headed to Gokul with Dada, his wife Krutiben, and the two friends, Anjaliben and Geetaben on our 9-day Braj *yatra*. Gokul is one of the primary triads of sacred places in Braj, alongside Mathura and Vrindavan. Mathura was the realm of the evil Uncle Kamsa, and, after his eventual defeat, Krishna's adult life was occupied by responsibilities of adulthood and kingship. Mathura is a developed town and a starting point for many pilgrimages (Lynch 1988), including the *ban yatra*, a forty-day circular pilgrimage around Braj (Haberman 1994) or *Braj Chaurasi Kos Yatra*, a 252 km pilgrimage around Braj. Vrindavan completes the core trifecta and means "the basil forest" (vrinda means tulsi, the holy basil plant, while 'van' means forest) (Hawley 2020). Vrindavan is the forest where Krishna played in his childhood and the site for his youthful erotic plays with the *gopis* and his beloved Radha. Among my interlocutors Vrindaban is associated with the Gaudiya Vaishnavas, who worship Radha and Krishna as one entity.

Mathura was always a city connected to Krishna as a responsible king and ruler. Vrindavan is a wild forest, the site of Krishna's play, while Gokul is a little village recognised as his childhood home. The

physical borders between these places are blurry (Hawley 2020; 12), as are those boundaries that are more mythological by nature. However, the continual construction in these already built-up towns contrasts with the imagined freedom and wilderness of Krishna's youth. Hawley points out, "All this was identified as Krishna's forest playground, for sure, but its proximity to worldly Mathura was no accident. A garden is a garden because it is marked off from the byways of ordinary life. A wilderness is a wilderness because it is not owned, not plotted, not a city" (Ibid; 40). Mathura reminds devotees of worldliness as another example of a bustling Indian town despite the sacred places in and around it. Meanwhile, at least in my fieldwork, Vrindavan and Gokul were experienced as somehow untouched and more authentic. For the Pushtimargis, Gokul is the most significant as the place of Krishna's childhood with his mother, Yashoda. Gokul reflects the prominence of the parental *bhava* (*vatsalya*) adopted to perform *seva,* practised by the majority of the community.

In Mathura, after *darshan* at the Dwarkadish temple, we went to Vikram ghat along the bank of the Yamuna to see the *aarti* (offering of flames to the divine). Floodlights lit the river, and a sound system played religious songs into the night as priests waved five wick aarti plates for the Yamuna. My friends were not very happy after this. Their discomfort lay with the changing way of worship. They commented, "They are trying to copy like the Ganges in Benares". One friend, particularly forlornly, said, "Before it was better with one big aarti and no lights. People sang… not on a CD". She reminisced about her past experience of the simplicity of worship. They implied the change in the form of worship was for the economic benefit of the town, and priests, by attracting a bigger spectacle rather than what they seem to consider *seva,* again inferring something inauthentic about the big show.

(Image top left Prem Mandir in Vrindavan; top right effigy of Krishna *lila* with gopis. Bottom right: Krishna lifting Mount Govardhan)

For example, Vrindavan is part of a sweep of development projects (Hawley 2020), not quite the luscious and wild forest as in Krishna's *lilas.* These projects include the lit-up Prem Mandir (not related to the Pushtimarg), with Disneyland-like effigies set up around the surrounding gardens of episodes in Krishna's life. A Krishna-theme park has also been proposed supported by former Bollywood actress Hema Malini (Hawley 2020; 40). In Vrindavan, the forest is marked out by definitions of wild and domestic (or urban), physically and through religious narrative. By taking the uncontrolled 'wild' substance out of the wild, the place becomes domesticated through the processes of capitalism, differing fluctuating values, and human disturbance. It is not only entangled in human relationships with the land, commercial, tourist, resident, and animals but further complicated through the divine presence and body on the land itself. Braj imagined Krishna's playground transforms through these entanglements and boundaries. Indeed, even the monkeys of Vrindavan are known to be 'trained' to harass people for treats by stealing their glasses. After our guide had his glasses taken out of a tiny car window opening, he went to get two cartons of juice to offer a monkey. He explained that if you give one, and he will use his other hand but give two cartons, and he has to use both hands and drop the glasses, seemingly embarrassed that he was caught out. The other explanation was the

monkeys are another form of *brajvasis* (residents of Braj) and are playing pranks on everyone. However, the concept of a domesticated con-artist monkey was specific to Vrindavan. The idea of domestication parallels *seva* as a relational act that can be playful and bounded by context, subjectivities, people and places.

The sacred journey offers a space outside the mundane to experience a 'wild' otherworld of sorts. Govindrajan (2018) talks about an "otherwild" place, a sense of being in-between. Using the example of wild pigs escaping domestication and wreaking havoc on the best vegetables in the garden, yet forming relationships with human caretakers, she shows how humans and non-humans co-exist. However, there are varying degrees of unpredictability and containment. Colonial narratives fixed this opposition between wild and domestic (Ibid; 129), marking off the boundaries even through interactions with the non-human. The 'otherwild' in between creates space for questioning caste, state, and other forms of power, echoing Jaffrelot's freedom in *yatra* for women (2009), but this goes unacknowledged (Govindrajan 2011; 141). Domestication of place certainly relates to power (see Hawley 2020) and reflects the perceived authenticity of worship in that place. In the Prem Mandir, or at the riverbank in Mathura, the group felt the 'showy' public performative aspect of a spectacle, not the reverence they expected and had experienced in the past.

The 'non-human' or other animate being for this *yatra* is, first, the divine, and second, the sacred environment and substances of land that are animated by the presence of the divine. The interaction between humans and non-humans is unpredictable and unknowable, yet, the encounter is relational. Braj's precarity lies in its perceived ruin by capitalism and construction by devotees, but increasingly the effect of pollution and ecological damage, as we will see in the next section.

Preservation of place was intertwined with authenticity of worship. This relates to the prominence of *seva* over *puja*, public performance, private domestic worship, ego, and greed. As my friends said when we went to see the Prem Mandir, "it is mainly a tourist attraction". Another said, "Our Pushtimarg is simple", "What [Vallabhacharya] teaches, we still do it". My friend highlighted a vital debate not only on the (over?)development of sacred sites but the religious preservation of a golden past with a fast-paced capitalist future. Some of the changes in Vrindavan point to subtle changes in a pan-Indian and global attitude, such as loosening hierarchical Brahminical restrictions (Hawley 2020; 51). Another such change is the empowerment of widows in education initiatives and shelter rather than degradation (Ibid; 178). Widows famously settle in Vrindavan when they have been deserted. Yet, these are in their infancy and have yet to become popularised.

Devotees felt Krishna's presence was obscured, at times, when in more city-like places, while it was strongly felt when connecting materially to the land with soil, trees, and mountains. One devotee commented on the tarmac that covered the streets in Mathura, exclaiming she could not walk barefoot there anymore. These changes are not always negative, for example, Dada and his wife were in their

80s, so access to specific sites with a car was a huge benefit. However, the damage to land, over-development and pollution is met with indignation, particularly in Vrindavan, partly because it changes worship patterns. This emotional reaction can only be comprehended through the devotional attachment to the land of Krishna. To better understand the importance of Krishna's presence and movement in India, the following section focuses on the material substances of the land in Krishna worship. By using and consuming these substances through the devotee's body, connections and attachment to the land of Krishna regenerate and grow.

Substances of land

Consumption of material substances of sacred land or from divinity becomes a metaphysical experience for religious devotion through *rasa* (bliss) or consuming *prasad* (blessed leftovers of divinity), commonly explored in Hindu studies (e.g. Khare 1992). In a different sense, the Indian landscape is the origin of home foodstuffs, which nurtures a sense of belonging and communal identity and cultures, such as the 'best ghee' (clarified butter), seasonal vegetables or street food. Sacred sites have their own lauded foodstuffs, such as the *poha* in Nathdwara I searched for or the *ladoos* (sweet dessert ball) in Mathura. As Goodgame writes (Friday seminar), Palestinian Orthodox Christians hold descent through lineage and history as essential to identity. A genealogical and historical connection to the land, church and broader community is made by individuals and families through substances, such as raw green olive oil or Mother's milk yoghurt. Descent is often linked to genealogical lineage in anthropology, but for the Pushtimarg, apart from guru lineages, kinship is not referred to through this form of lineage. Kinship has a holistic, perhaps cosmological, understanding when it comes to the human and divine. Transmission of identity (and I would add potential transformation) through substances is particularly poignant for the Pushtimarg diaspora. However, the potential for transformation of perspective from worldly to spiritual through contact with or consumption of the material is vital. The relational connection to the divine, mediated by features of the land such as soil, water, trees, and stones, is strengthened by an encounter on *yatra* as these features are animated by divine presence.

Charnamrut or the soil of Braj and nectar of his feet

One of the first times I observed someone else's *seva,* I was asked to eat a sandy-coloured powder from a small pot. Left alone to shower and dress in newly washed clean clothes, I took about a teaspoon full and popped it into my mouth, struggling not to wash it out. Bits of grain stuck to my lips, sides of my mouth and tongue. As I spluttered, trying not to choke or spit it out, the devotee came in and laughed, "You are only supposed to have a taste! That's enough to purify you for a lifetime!".

The powder was *charnamrut.* It is a substance that combines the soil of Braj, the soil of Shri Yamunaji and the bathwater of Shri Nathji[113]. The emotion and connection are intimately linked back to the land, the dust of Braj, where Krishna and Radha (his divine consort) walked and played. Devotees taste *charnamrut* on the tip of their tongues to purify themselves internally after *apras* (formal ritual cleansing) externally. One devotee said, "It is addictive to have the dust of land… they eat it "… "It's an addiction to Braj as land". Yet, devotees would emphasise its essential purifying qualities, not the taste, as it was the nectar of Krishna's feet. He is touching the land through his feet, and this sense of touch and consumption is a way to build a relationship with Krishna[114]. Being at the feet of Krishna, specifically the dust of his feet, is a sign of voluntary humility and love for him through the surrender of the human ego.

Feet have a specific meaning in wider Hinduism. As the lowest part of the human body, the feet are also considered the most impure, which has relevance in *varna* and the caste system. In the story of creation from the Rig Veda, Purusha the Man is sacrificed to create the world. From his mouth came the Brahmin, from his arms came warriors, from his thighs the people and from his feet came the servants (Fuller 2004 [1992]; 12). So, submission by prostration or touching feet is, in part, a marker of inequality. For example, a woman touching her husband's feet is an acknowledgement of her submission to his authority. In devotion, this submission is framed differently. Deities feet are part of the most intimate offers of submission, surrender and interaction between devotee and divine (Babb 1981; 395). This act of surrender, according to Babb, "invokes the "glance of compassion"" (Ibid; 396) in an interactive exchange of looking (a form of *darshan*) but also shelter for the devotee. At the feet of Krishna, taking in the nectar of his dust, there is an implicit hierarchy of his transcendence but also sharing in some form of physical matter from the divine (Ibid; 395).

In one *pada* (poem), the author writes, "O, when will I be able to cover my whole body in the dust of the Sri Vrinadavana Forest which has been touched by the Lotus Feet of the Divine Couple Who are my very Life" (translated by Pandit Ghanshyam Das and Krishnaa Kinkari)[115]. Another in the same selection of *padas* writes, "My hearts prayer is that the Dust of the Feet of all the Gopis Who constantly surround Sri Radhakaji will grant me servitude to Sri Acharyajis lotus feet" (Ibid; 414). Humility as love is epitomised by some devotees performing *danvathi* (full-body prostrations) on the land through their *yatra.* In at least one area of the circumambulation around Mount Govardhan, the dirt and soil have been overlaid with tarmac for a smooth road allowing more visitors. Yet, in the

[113] It can refer to a range of elements, such as liquid similar to *panchamrut* (usually five ingredients of milk, ghee, honey, jaggery and curd/yoghurt) that is used in *puja* in wider Hindu-isms, though for the Pushtimarg this is only used on a rare occasion for Krishna's *seva*. Rather, the daily purification was water, sandalwood paste, perhaps saffron or turmeric, but most importantly, the only thing that really makes up *charnamrut* is the soil of Braj.
[114] Touching the feet of Krishna or of the Vallabhkhul is called *charansparsh* and is purifying as we can see through the meaning of *asparsh* which is unpolluting. Thank you to Krishna Kinkari for this note os *asparsh*
[115] Dhanya Vrishabhanu Dulari, 403

blistering sun or chilly winds, devotees continue to lay front first, fully flat on the tarmac, some performing a prostration 108 times at each step.

Geetaben had brought her Lalan with her on the *yatra,* and while we were in Nathdwara. Yet, Gokul inspired more imagination about where he would be. Her Lalan had been on his own journey with us on the flight, yet as soon as Geetaben set up her *seva,* she said, "I wonder where he is going". I looked at her inquisitively. "He will be running around with his friends while we go to *darshan",* she explained. Throughout our trip, she would comment, "He's come to Gokul, so is probably going here and there!" and "Where could he be? How will we ever know?". It is not only that thousands of years ago, Krishna walked around Gokul, but that he is continuously wayfaring (Ingold 2014), roaming and playing on the dust of Braj, "Braj ki raj". As Ingold suggests with his emphasis on wayfaring (rather than a linear journey), this movement is about "going around in an environment" (Ibid; 150). As with *baithaks,* Braj unites historical, cosmological, and present, crossing the so-called boundaries between spiritual and worldly.

Braj and the dust of Krishna's feet are now moving across the globe connecting devotees to the material substances of sacred land. There are Vaishnava's source and sell charnamrut, mainly online shops for those who are not in India. On the site, hindureligiousitems.com, the charnamrut comes in ball shapes in a pack of five for 20 rupees. For the UK, the deliveries come in a courier once every four to six weeks to an outlet where Royal Mail then deliver it around the country for an additional fee. One needs only a taste on the tip of the tongue to purify the body. Sold at 20 rupees (around 20p) for a pack of 5, it seems *charnamrut* does not fit into a discussion of capitalist consumerism. The balls of soil are not quite 'products', as the soil is readily available in Braj. While some may see the patterns of global consumerism at play, value is part of the necessary preparation for loving devotion, unlike the prized mushrooms where capitalist systems generate value by demand. Global movements and access to the soil of Braj allow for a sensory and physical connection through the consumption of *charnamrut* miles away from Braj, which was not possible in previous generations. The everyday consumption of soil is a synaesthetic experience that transports the devotee to Braj, recalling previous *yatras,* or narratives of Krishna's plays, and imagining the sacred landscape.

Water as a living being

Devotees wash before worship and use water throughout their *seva*. For worship, water is purifying. It cleanses the body and the mind in preparation for meeting the divine. In relation to land, sacred places for *yatra* are often along rivers or bathing pools known as *tirthas* and specific water pools (*kundas*). A *tirtha* "is a "crossing place", a "ford", where one may cross over to the far shore of a river or the far shore of the worlds of heaven" (Eck 1981; 323), as discussed above. The difficulty of crossing rivers as *tirthas* as boundaries both metaphorically and physically (Ibid; 40) evokes the story of Krishna's birth swap story. Krishna was carried on Vasudeva's head (his birth father) across the river Yamuna,

protected by a hooded snake, depicted in stormy and rainy weather in the middle of the night. However, it is not just that the divine 'break in on earth' as Eck suggests (1981; 336). Instead, the divine is actively and continuously present on and within the earth, unified and separating from the flows of the environment. *Tirthas* are often considered parts of the body (Feldhaus 2003; 19). This cosmological idea of rivers as human bodies (Ibid; 21) is vital as the goddess Yamuna manifests in and as the Yamuna river (Haberman 2006; 41). She, like the Ganges, is a form of Devi (goddess) (Fuller 2004 [1992]; 40), though the vernacular terms like *mata* or *amma* imply motherhood of the world, as Yamuna is for *pushti* souls. Goddesses' *shakti* (power) is related to fertility; though goddeses are often unmarried and childless, their sexuality is not connected to procreation (Ibid; 46). *Devis* are often connected to the soil and rivers, adding to the productive energies that goddesses provide (Ibid; 47).

Yamuna is the daughter of the Sun and the sister of Yama, the god of Death. In the Pushtimarg, "Shree Yamunaji is the bestower of divine body to pushti-being so as to make it suitable for the seva of Shri Krishna. The touch of Shree Yamunaji's water is *like that* of Lord Shri Krishna" (italics my own)[116], The river, Yamuna and Krishna are intricately and materially connected through bodies, water, human and divine bodies. "She is the pearls of sweat running from his body and the divine words that flow from his mouth" (Lynch 1988; 176). The importance of Yamuna as a mother of all *pushti* souls repeatedly reiterates her animate and relational qualities as a goddess. Feldhaus, who talked about connected places through mythological narrative, looks at rivers as unifying sites as they move between and around places (2003; 18). "Rivers themselves are places too: moving, ever-changing places" (Ibid). As with the soil of Braj and Eck's living geography, the movement of a river is in combination with the movement and connections made by pilgrims themselves (Ibid; 30).

This theological and environmental shift changes the way devotees worship at the river. Some devotees, willingly ignoring the plastic and unidentified debris floating along the river, said, "Drink it…Yamuna is divine. She cleans herself". I did not. Another said, "Humans cannot affect the divine goddess". Others acknowledge this sorry state and drop a bit of water on their heads before sanitising their hands and moving on, yet, some are incensed. "Almost nobody bathes in it these days, and fewer still dare to drink its water. The heartbeat of pilgrimage in Vrindavan is in danger of disappearing entirely" (Hawley 2020; 19).

This landscape is changing, not only through formation and movement of the river but also through the development of the local area and river pollution. Yamuna's waters sustain around sixty million people (Haberman 2006; 4). Her source, and home, is the Yamunotri glacier in Mount Kalinda in the Himalayas. Even at her source, rubbish gathers on the ground, though the water is in its purest form

[116] Shuddh-advaita trutiya gruh of Pushtimarg. http://www.vallabhkankroli.org/basic-elements_shree-yamunaji.htm

(Haberman 2006; 51). Her own journey down to Vrindavan and eventually joining her sister, the Ganges, traces her changing form. Rather than following her natural course from her source, she is being moulded. Initially, "she is transformed from a wild free spirit into a tamed utilitarian channel" (Haberman 2006; 65) by pipelines and tarmac. These developmental processes are cloaked as 'beautification', echoing the concept of domestication and implying control. In Vrindavan, through proposed development projects, such as a riverfront project, the domestication of the wilderness involves reshaping the river itself (Hawley 2020; 57). There are many contrasting opinions on benefits and costs, such as for the latter, the preservation of traditional buildings and the former as economic gains (Hawley 2020; 42).

There is not only an environmental change with development and domestication but also a theological shift (Haberman 2006; 76). Saraswati, Yamuna, and Ganges are rivers and sisters, though Saraswati is invisible, and their waters are widely thought to purify sins. The Yamuna and the Ganges have different tropes, still purifying but related to distinct aspects of the lifecourse. The Yamuna is for "life and sipping" (Lynch 1988; 175) as opposed to the Ganges, which is for death and bathing (Ibid; Haberman 2006; 61). In her current state, the Yamuna is called the "River of Death", a river that is 'dying' (Haberman 2006; 74).

The heart of Yamuna, the goddess, the river and the first queen of Krishna is being damaged by agriculture, industries surrounding the area, and untreated sewage and rubbish from nearby Delhi. In my field site of Leicester, the diasporic wing of the Save the Yamuna campaign, riled by her state, held protests, raised funds, and rallied local political leaders to speak to the media and Parliament[117]. They appealed to members of the Vallabhacharya lineage to make supportive videos to send on WhatsApp and other social media, encouraged by similar campaigns in India (Hawley 2020; 36). Yamuna's presence on the land is continuous and without boundaries between worlds; by earthly standards, she is physically damaged, if not spiritually affected. As a goddess, at the very least, she is being disrespected, and her purifying waters are polluted.

Trees as *gopis*

Vrindavan, the forest in Braj, is one of the most popular tirthas, yet many other forests surround the area. These are associated with Krishna tending to cows and playing his amorous *lilas*. While Vrindavan is associated with Radha and with Caitanya followers (Lynch 1988; 183), the secret nature of his meetings with Radha is discussed by my interlocutors. We visited Seva Kunj and Nidhuban, where Krishna and Radha are in eternal *lila* every night. The entire area is covered in thick trees and shrubs, cooling to walk around in the heat. It was here that Krishna massaged Radha's feet, a reversal

[117] Sanatan Dharma (2017) Keith Vaz member of Parliament for Leicester East https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FuOqWrCtjA

of assumed hierarchy, in *seva* to her so that they could continue their *raas* (circular dance). Again, Krishna reveals and conceals through the forest. In this area, after dark is forbidden to anyone. Only the divine couple is here at night. "Not even ants are allowed here", "They all leave, all the monkeys too," I was told. If anyone stayed and saw any of these *lilas,* they would go blind, crazy or die from the astounding nature of their transcendence.

Trees can be natural embodiments of divinity and devotee exemplars. Haberman writes about tree worship across India, specifically neem trees in Banaras, suggesting that "Tree divinities appear naturally, but divinities within iconic sculptural forms fashioned by humans require ritual procedures to inaugurate their presence" (2017; 484). He highlights a relational attachment to specific trees, which can have certain healing qualities, rather than a general worship of all trees. The trees in the forests of Braj are animate beings that are considered *gopis* (milkmaids) or Vaishnavas as they are in eternal selfless *seva* to everyone (Lynch 1988; 184). Trees have experiences and a form of consciousness "it had a *feeling* of god who did his *lila* before it" (Ibid). The tree in Champaranya, where Vallabhacharya appeared as an infant, is particularly revered for its divine connection. The *Caritra* states that Vallabh's speeches are always under a *sami* or *chonkar* tree, which is said to have cooling properties "to absorb the heat of Vallabhacharya's powerful speech, which is otherwise unbearable to the human ear" (Bachrach 2014; 66).

> Next to the *baithak,* there is a room with a tree growing upwards through an opening in the roof. This is where Vallabhacharya appeared in the ring of fire when his parents came back to get him after they had a vision that he was still alive after a traumatic birth. People leant into the tree, placed their ears on it and listened for the words "Shree Krishna Sharanam Mama" or "Radhe" or light musical notes that devotees who listen closely can hear. I asked one devotee who said, "Oh, I definitely heard something…I don't know what but something. It's like vibrations".

In Champaranya, not only is Vallabhacharya's presence sensed through narrative, a devotee cultivating a spiritual mode of hearing, but a specific tree is actively participating through the experience of his presence. While the vibrations from the *seva* room are physically felt in a bodily sensation, this vibration is a human-to-human experience that is oral. Listening to the tree is an interaction between a human and an animate being.

Personhood and trees are intertwined through the Vivah Khel (Wedding Play) between a tulsi plant (holy basil), the goddess Vrinda, and an image of Krishna[118]. Tulsi, a potted plant, is dressed in wedding attire and brought to her bridegroom Krishna after devotees fulfil the appropriate

[118] Pintchman works with Vaishnava women in Benares celebrating the sacred month of Kartik, falling between the end of the humid rainy season and the cold of December and January, which is associated with Krishna's Ras Lila, a circular dance with all the *gopis* (2005; 45). Rather than an erotic attachment, devotees stress their parental role in the celebration of the marriage (Ibid; 50) as do Pushtimargis.

arrangements for paralleling a human marriage celebration (Pintchman 2005). Vrinda, a goddess, has powers to prolong her husband's life, a demon called Jalandhara. Vishnu breaks Vrinda's chastity by disguising himself as the demon, and she kills herself, cursing Vishnu to become a stone. She is eventually reborn as Tulsi, who weds Vishnu (Ibid). In some retellings of this story, Vrinda does *taap* (a type of penance) in Vrindavan to marry Vishnu and escape her marriage to the demon[119]. As a plant, Tulsi is widely used in the domestic sphere in Indian households, particularly for its healing qualities. While acknowledging Krishna's erotic nature, Tulsi embodies a chaste and proper wife associated with the goddess Lakshmi (Pintchman 2005; 56). There is a competition between Tulsi and Radha, Krishna's consort, pointing to the tension between Krishna and Radha's love as transgressive, and Tulsi and Krishna as *dharma* (duty) bound, paralleling human marriages (Ibid; 58). She is an active and participating goddess, embodied in a plant that expands not only Braj forests but the whole natural world. Tulsi's personhood is temporary for the Vivah Khel. She dwells until animated by the establishment, unlike the continuous, spontaneous animate Krishna as Lalan. Therefore, she is *emblematic* of Krishna's natural world (Packert 2010; 29) and an original form of the world as a whole of nature (Haberman 1994; 14). One could circumambulate a *tulsi* plant as an equivalent to the circular journey around the whole of Braj, the *ban yatra* (Ibid) though it would not be the same sensory experience.

Some Vaishnavas use a *shaligram* for Krishna in the wedding play, a dark stone. These stones are "*svayambhu.* Spontaneous *dwelling* places of Krishna or Vishnu in his various forms" (McDaniel 2005; 37; emphasis my own[120]). Haberman's point that sometimes the aniconic is favoured over iconic images as a "blank slate" (2017; 485) to pursue a variety of emotional attachments is important in understanding Mount Govardhan in Braj.

Can mountains not be moved? Mount Govardhan

When Krishna was a young boy, people in Braj used to offer sacrifices to Lord Indra after the rainy season. Indra is the god of rain, thunder, lightning, and the god of war. Krishna persuaded his father and the other cowherds to prepare offerings for Mount Govardhan as this sustains them as opposed to Indra, who helps farmers. As Lynch notes, Krishna, as a young boy, told the villagers (*brajvasis*) not to make sacrifices at the Mountain for Indra and instead offer food and milk, after which he changed himself into a gigantic form to consume all the offerings (1988; 185). This episode is reflected in the feast of Annakuta, celebrated with mountains of food across Havelis to commemorate this Krishna play, *lila.* Indra takes revenge by unleashing a tremendous storm, but Krishna lifts the mountain and shelters the people from the storm for seven days and seven nights. After that, offerings were made to

[119] A devotee website by Shah explains this here http://www.pushti-marg.net/Prabodhini.htm
[120] The idea of dwelling places implies some sort of temporary presence that comes and goes through rituals.

the mountain, essentially Krishna himself. In the sixteenth century, he eventually appeared as Shri Nathji emerging from that same mountain to meet Vallabhacharya[121].

While in Braj on our *yatra,* while doing our circumambulation (*parikrama*) of the physical Mount Govardhan, I was told by the local religious guide that no one could ever take a piece of it. One day, someone took a bit of it to try and recreate the mountain in their home-haveli, and for days they were plagued with monsoon-like rain despite it being the summer season. Eventually, they had to bring it back. "He will not rest until he finds it, asking, "Who has taken it? Who?" emphasised our guide. 'He' is Giriraji (King of the Mountains), another name for Mount Govardhan. According to my interlocutors, there are places where stones from Mount Govardhan have been taken, but these are sparse and presumed not to be taken by laypeople. Eventually, we came to some sort of conclusion that there must be some way for the Vallabhacharya lineage to enable this. However, other suggestions were that stones were 'made' as replication or perhaps it was an older image from the family.

In many Havelis worldwide, usually outside or in a small shed structure, there will be a mountain representing Mount Govardhan in Braj. Dark polished black rocks made of different materials frame an image of Shri Nathji, and depictions of flowers, rural landscapes and cows decorate the walls or the mountain itself. Devotees will circumambulate the mountain on each Haveli visit, chanting the mantra *shree krishna sharanam mamah* (Shree Krishna is my shelter). While Havelis all around the world create sacred landscapes, rendering these places 'portable' though adapted, Mount Govardhan cannot be moved physically from Braj.

However, Krishna is Mount Govardhan and vice versa, and as Haberman shows, the worship of individual stones of the mountain is relatively common (Haberman 2017; 488). He discusses the idea of 'myness', a sense of ownership (Ibid) where the stone that is worshipped at home is someone's intimate relation. The hesitancy in taking a stone to worship in Pushtimarg theology is perhaps due to this 'myness' that could lead to a heightened sense of ego through ownership. Though it resonates with the cultivation of emotional attachment to the divine in an intimate and personal setting, it moves away from the notion of selflessness that frames *seva.* Another theory from the pilgrim devotees I was with was that parts of Krishna should not be taken away from his home and from his bodily form as Giriraji. This physical connection between Krishna the deity and Krishna as Mount Govardhan is particularly poignant in expressing animate and material divinity in the land.

> On day 3 of the *yatra,* we got ready very early, having ritually cleansed to do the circumambulation of Mount Govardhan. It would be around 15 km (5 kos) and completely barefoot. As it was April, we made the most of the morning coolness, and after offering our

[121] Vaudeville 1980; Bennett 1993; Toomey 1994 for other versions of this story.

> respects to the Mukharvind (the lotus mouth) in Jatipura, we began. This is where we would return for a Govardhan *puja.* At first, sand softened the walk, though sections were filled with small stones, twigs and other debris jutting into the soles of our feet. Geetaben and Anjaliben were with me, while Dada and his wife were not physically able to join us. As we walked, the heat steadily increasing, Geetaben said, "[Krishna] is testing me! But with his grace (*Krupa),* I can do it". By the end, the sand, tarmac, and stony walk left our feet tired, achy, blotchy and discoloured. This was our biggest *yatra* 'test', though we all noted that the hardship was not much compared to the forty-day *yatras* around Braj. Dada and his wife met us back at the Lotus Mouth, and we jostled, with a pot full of milk, to offer it to the Mountain. My friends joyfully poured the creamy milk down the dark stones, saying, "he needs this. He must be hot and thirsty".

The Lotus Mouth is an animate divine being as a part of Krishna, Shri Nathji, and Vallabhacharya, combining the temporal difference between the avatars and the founding lineage of the Pushtimarg. In a continuation of offering food and drink, this animate being is sustained by the devotional mood of devotees, recollecting Krishna's youthful show of strength and Shri Nathji's emergence. Sites around the *parikrama* in Braj were imbued with hagiographical and personal narratives, moving from 5,000 years ago to Geetaben and Anjaliben's memories of previous *parikramas* and the present experience.

Most pilgrims access the circumambulation from the town of Jatipura. The mountain is plateaued and not that high. Locally it is commonly known that at Krishna's time, it was much higher, but due to this Age of Darkness (Kali Yuga), it is sinking into the ground. At the top of Mount Govardhan, visible from certain spots along the path, is Shri Nathji's original Braj temple. As luck, or grace, would have it, a *chaube* (Braj guide) offered us a chance to visit the temple. People had said it was not allowed, yet we were led up a rocky, inaccessible path after asking permission from the Lotus Mouth. According to the guide, you are only allowed to do this once in your life, with permission from Govardhan and with a *chaube.* To go somewhere in Braj where there is no one is quite the exception and crowds frame a lot of the experience of a *yatra* like this, organised in a cross between a tour and pilgrimage, not quite the time commitment of the forty-day *ban yatra*. The temple was a subtle palace style. The front room had *darshan* of Shri Nathji, but the back room had two beds, made up and ready for bedtime. The *mukhiya* (priest) showed us a cave that led to a tunnel to Nathdwara. He said that Thakorji (the Lord) sleeps here at night but travels through the tunnel to spend the day at Nathdwara as Shri Nathji.

Hidden from the view of the mundane, Krishna as Shri Nathji traverses North India through a tunnel, moving between his current home and his childhood one. The tunnel is an epitome of the connection between mythological lived geographies. It is embedded in Pushtimarg's literature and imagination and is also understood as movement that takes place physically on earth. By exploring differing

movements through the sacred landscape, the religious experience of journeying can be understood and even applied to digital journeys (Richardson and Gheewala Lohiya; forthcoming).

Encountering living landscapes

At the beginning of the chapter, I mentioned that the return journey went 'wrong'. In a mishap with ticket booking on the Indian Railways website, I had somehow booked us on a Standby ticket. With my international flight to catch three days later, I was worried. Geetaben said, "We will get there. Krishna wanted us to stay so Lalan could be here!". One of our other friends joked, "He's 'caught' you" (*pakar*). We spent an extra day in Gokul as no seats were available, and comments abounded on how special this was, how it 'felt' like more because of the circumstance and our luck in staying longer as no one really wanted to leave. We ended up squeezed on the next overnight train with me separated from the group, and I made it back to the UK on time. Geetaben's comment reflects that her Lalan wanted to reconnect to the land that was his. Rather than anger that we were 'stranded' in a place and that we had mundane life things to do, my group reversed the narrative to focus on Lalan's desire to be at home in this place. Her imaginary of his roaming around the land while we were there highlights this narrative of the potency of landscape (Allerton 2013), unifies cosmological, present, and historical time and is shaped by divine play. A Pushtimarg *yatra* underlines the personal and relational experience of sacred journeys in the portability of Geetaben's Lalan and nourishment of connecting to Krishna in the landscape as a cultivator of attachment, but also the familial connections of who comes on the journey.

Disconnect is part of the experience, yet, through yatra and sacred encounters, devotees navigate their mundane perspective from a transformative experience rooted and situated in place to a spiritual one. From the examples of Champaranya and Nathdwara, particularly Vrindavan, *yatra* experiences are sometimes shaped by development, tourism, and political entanglement. This can cloud the synaesthetic journey for devotees, but more so, damage the divinely animate places, such as the pollution in the Yamuna. Yet, the family and kinship relationship to Krishna though *seva* binds people to the sacred landscape and can play a part in reversing the idea of caring for the divine as physical manifestations on earth, as with the Save the Yamuna group. Hawley suggests that for Vrindavan's conflict regarding development and pollution of the Yamuna, policies such as an award of a UNESCO heritage label would benefit the area (2020; 278). An eco-theological perspective can be seen as a "reenchantment of the world" (Haberman 2006; 18), and as we will see in the next chapter, wonder and enchantment are interlinked with experiencing the world as *lila*.

Chapter 8; Waiting in the 'wonder'-ful world of *lila*

I once visited a *baithak* (sacred site) outside of Ahmedabad. Walking down a couple of steps into a marble-tiled room, you will see two 'mounds' that are the betakjis. They were dressed in green *vastras* with heavy shringar, in gold, a *mughat* (crown on head) and a *chotli* or braid coming down one side. There were two *baithaks*, Vallabhacharya's and his son's, Vittalnath. Around the back of the main Haveli was a little Mount Govardhan, where people went to circumambulate after visiting the main hall. Flowers were made into an arched stand to frame the *swaroop* of the mountain. They were wilting in the heat, releasing their perfume, as we did *darshan*. We did eight rounds, and I was told to say the mantra Shree Krishna Shararamama throughout.

The mountain was a few inches taller than me. I was visiting with three friends. As one gentleman was in his eighties, we all went at different speeds, on our own paths. Geetaben was with me, the devotee whose Lalan made her run around a lot. Her arm was out, fingers trailing the mountain as she walked. As I looked closely at the grey rocks, many groves were filled with unadorned Lalans, of all shapes and sizes, glinting in the light. Some had dustings of red powder or had been rubbed smooth with worship. Half covered with cloth, three or four peeping out, or in a crawling position staring out with a *ladoo* arm raised. This was another type of *gwal mandali*.

We asked a man who was sitting nearby about them. There Lalans are left here if people cannot or don't want to do *seva* anymore. He explained, "for example, if someone's daughter-in-law doesn't want to do it, she can just leave it here." All the Lalans are presumed to be *pushtavela*. You can "adopt" one, i.e., take one if you get permission from a guru and want to do *seva*. "What you should really do is go to your *guru-ghar* and give it there [not leave him anywhere]", he continued, "In Kaliyuga [the Age of Darkness], this happens".

There are sections in Havelis called *gwal mandalis* (lit. cowherd friend circle) where people can leave their Lalan to be cared for and play with the other Lalans. In Braj, these *mandalis* have wonderfully old *swaroops* on steps looking out onto the entrance halls, though on the sidelines to the main *seva*.

Some people in my fieldwork suggested *mandalis* were like 'orphanages' (in English) for the *swaroops* to play in with their friends. This relates directly to the themes of foster mothers and group caretaking in the movement's worship. Yet, this was considered abandonment in many ways. One must be very wary of causing Lalan any *shram* (labour, exertion, or strain). This is to be avoided at all costs. Therefore, even asking for something accidentally or thinking about something unrelated while performing *seva* means Lalan is obliged to help. This is the antithesis of how Pushtimarg devotees

describe their *seva* as selfless. The crux of the distinction to devotees between seva and puja goes back to the previous chapter.

Though met with disapproval from the man above, there are many reasons, including different *sampradaya,* marriage, or a hereditary *seva* that no one wants to take on. However, this was framed as part of Kali Yuga.

The Pushtimarg, in some sense, 'preserves', or is modelled on, the Dwapara age of Krishna as a challenge to the degenerative cycle of time (Bennett 1993; 13). Vallabhacharya's resistance to impurities, ignorance and ego established the Pushtimarg, relying on Krishna's gift grace (Ibid; 46), which can fully absorb a devotee away from the material evils of Kali Yuga. *Seva*-as-play is a way of appreciating the Kali Yuga as part of Krishna's *lila.* The proximity of Krishna to each devotee only happens in the Kali Yuga, so many devotees think themselves lucky to be alive doing *seva* at this time.

The Kali Yuga

> "You're all lucky because in other *yugas* [Krishna] was for everyone; now he is personal for you" [guru at a *katha* in India].
>
> "To create and destroy is work of God, like a child playing and making a house of cards, then suddenly he will destroy it... Think of Kalki like a superhero". [guru at a children's Q&A in the UK].

Kali Yuga would come up sporadically throughout my fieldwork, often depicted as the ills of the modern world featuring greed, ego, materialism, corruption, and other "ugly" emotions (see Ngai 2007). Kali Yuga is the current Age of Darkness, which will end in a dissolution of the universe (*pralaya*). The Hindu cyclical *Yuga* cycle consists of four ages - *Krita (Satya) Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwapara Yuga* – with Kali Yuga being the last and worst of all the ages. Krishna ended Dwapara by leaving the world. The end of Kali Yuga will come with Kalki, who will defeat the current reign of the demon Kali (not the goddess) and bring a new cycle beginning with Krita (Satya) Yuga (the age of truth). The Satya yuga has been described as "the golden age of original time…immune to the degeneration to which time elsewhere is subject…Time here does not so much run down as stand still" (Parry 1994; 18).

There has been a recurring motif of hiding and protection within the movement during this age, from Shri Nathji's journey to Mewar (Nathdwara) to colonial and reformist interpretations of the sect's religious expressions (e.g., Maharaja Libel Case). The three principal evils were conflicts concerning women, property, and wealth. Kali Yuga also affects the landscape, personhood, and ethical framing

much of Hindu life. Examples of this age include abandoning Lalans in Havelis or the sinking of Shri Nathji's original Haveli in Braj. The human body too is different through the ages, from subsisting on air alone with a lifespan of 100,000 years and asexual reproduction in the Satya Yuga, to the Kali Yuga where the body is ruled by the rules of bio-morality and the maximum age of 125 (Parry 1994; 167). The body is a site for biomoral transformation through the consumption of substances. As an effective absorption, personhood and perspective can be potentially altered through the biomoral.

Pinney writes about life in Kali Yuga as situated in the cosmology of modernity and industrialism in rural India. This means the age of machines with modernity and capitalism are symptoms of this degenerate age (1999;90), leading to a world of calculation and immediate gratification (Ibid; 95). He points to two discourses of Kali Yuga, a refusal of the modern age, the other a balance of entrapment and investment in modernity (Ibid; 93). Like Bear's shipyard workers, labour is framed through shakti the power of the goddess, which fuels modern industry. Machinery and industry are not 'bad' in themselves because of the Kali Yuga but are enmeshed in the visions of a pre-Kali Yuga golden age, where castes and classes are affected differently (Ibid; 104). For most urbanite middle to upper-class Pushtimargis I worked with, the most important was that Kali Yuga was related to the golden age of Krishna's time on earth rather than the Satya Yuga.

The Kali Yuga offers a somewhat fatalistic view of the world, as it ends in chaos and is run by materialism and ego. The ills of modern capitalism have often been discussed in Hindu *sampradayas* (Warrier 2005). While the Pushtimarg is a householder *sampradaya* and does not shy away from wealth, there are conflicts (see Chapter 6). Narayan's Swamiji tells a story of a heaven and hell concluding that both are found on earth (1995 [1989]; 194). The moral of his story is that everyone should be a *sevak* to others to have a sense of shared happiness or joy. This is how renunciants (*sadhus*) must engage with householders through *seva*. While this relates to a humanitarian understanding of *seva,* the inclusion of heaven and hell on earth reflects the narrative of co-participation leading to absorption in *lila.* Through a selfless action (*seva*) shared (with the divine or others), the Kali Yuga is a form of heaven for some and hell for others. It is a perspective shift. However, the devotees I met were not waiting for the world's regeneration.

Enchantment and wonder

While enchantment has a longer history in scholarly discourse, such as Weber's disenchanted modern future led by science, leaving behind an enchanted magical past (1946 [1918]), encounters with the divine through *seva* provoke a state of wonder (Bennet 2001; 5). "To be enchanted, then, is to participate in a momentarily immobilizing encounter; it is to be transfixed, spellbound" (Bennett 2001; 5). Rather than enchantment and disenchantment as a binary enchantment, here is a momentary

episode that leads to a mood or emotion of wonder. This emotion of wonder is a "mood of fullness, plenitude, or liveliness" (Ibid). *Rasa* (Chapter 4) framed as an encounter of enchantment, similarly nourishes the devotee through consumption and playfulness. In Bennett's model, enchantment is attachment to life in "a world without telos" (Ibid; 131). *Seva* is set within the parameters of care and domestic life, not detachment, yet, it has no telos apart from more *seva* to participate and develop a relationship with the divine. This 'purposeless' play leads to joy in and from *seva*-as-play is part of recognising the world as enchanted rather than focusing on that which is disenchanting. There are other emotions in enchantment, such as fear (of the unknown, for instance), as with *lila*, but for Pushtimargis too, this is a "state of interactive fascination, not fall-to-your-knees awe" (Ibid).

I observed Lalan *seva* at people's homes with a sense of wonder. This same sense of wonder kept *seva* absorbing and often delightful. Devotees were absorbed, to different extents, in the seriousness of playing with Krishna through *seva.* As I participated in some *seva*, I would tinker with tiny flutes, choose outfits and adornments smaller than the tips of my fingers, and twirl wooden tops. I once danced a *garba* (traditional Gujarati dance) in a home-haveli with a woman and her husband during the festival season with Lalan and his family[122].

The contemporary study of wonder comes from an ontological lens in anthropology though it has a philosophical basis (Bennett 2001, Scott 2013, 2014; cf Graeber 2015)[123]. Scott describes how scholars have pitted science as knowledge-based and religion as keeping "wonder alive" (2013; 860). He advocates for "relational nondualism" (Ibid; 862) instead of Cartesian dualism. According to him, dualist binary thinking is wonder-occluding (Ibid, Table 1), focussing on difference, while relational nondualism is wonder-sustaining (Ibid). The human and divine are within these webs of relations that are "a continuous flux of transformative becoming" (Ibid; 864).

Graeber looks at the anthropology of wonder a little differently. "Are we unsettling our categories so as (1) to understand better the "radical alterity" of a specific group of people (whoever "we" are here taken to be); or (2) to show that in certain ways, at least, such alterity was not quite as radical as we thought, and we can put those apparently exotic concepts to work to re-examine our own everyday assumptions and to say something new about human beings in general?" (Graeber 2015; 6). Wonder as an emotional state is experienced through playing in *seva* which helps to cultivate a relationship with a divine being that re-frames perspective to see the world as *lila*. Understanding interlocutors through some form of alterity seems the way people conceive of difference. However, alterity as an emotional state differentiates not just "Others" but different selves too. Narayan's assumption of the 'Otherness' of his

[122] Scott calls for anthropologists to participate not *as if* but fully participate in different modalities of wonder (Scott 2014). He argues that "This type of anthropology is not only an aspect of the anthropology *of* religion; is it often also the anthropology of religion *as* religion – a new kind of religious study of religion" (2013; 859).
[123] I cannot claim to be well-versed in the ontological turn in anthropology, yet I continue to be struck by ontological ways of understanding religiosity therefore I explore and borrow from the field.

religiosity does not deny his deeply felt connection to his *seva*. Yet he acknowledges the alterity of his Pushtimarg self with a UK 'rational' or 'modern' self. A study of alterity itself may not be 'radical' but it recognises the interplay of enchantment and disenchantment in everyday life.

Rather than domestication, structure or fixity of ritual, Srinivas sees wonder embedded within ritual innovation and creativity, resisting and appropriating experiences of modern capitalism (2018; 6). She explores rituals in Bangalore, starting with a Ganesha Visarjan. Rather than a focus on the rituals she explores, I draw on how the element of wonder is transformative in ritual processes. She looks at the dialogic recasting of religious experience in what she calls a "rupture-capture process" (Ibid). This process is centred on ritual creativity in the face of modern capitalism and how it engages with modern neoliberal capitalism and, in the process, innovate. Srinivas, like Droogers, draws on subjectivity and simultaneity in making alternative realities (Ibid; 37). While Srinivas relates the evocation of wonder to the ability to endure possibilities in life (Ibid; 59), this is not religion as anthropomorphic nor comfort theory (see Guthrie 1995; 65). Confusion and bewilderment are part of these moments of wonder, plenitude, and liveliness. Perhaps wonder is sustained through a suspension of the self or the ego (as in experiencing *rasa*), which results from an immobilising encounter of enchantment.

Srinivas' discussion is largely based on public ritual. S*eva* is both public and personal. In public *seva* as work or as play, there exists resistance to certain forms of 'capitalism' inherent in cases such as the Nathdwara's Haveli case. Here publics, as devotees, local communities and possibly the divine, and resist forms of governmental control, where at one level capitalism is understood as progress and modern and yet also a threat to *seva* in maintaining strict traditional methods and resisting the Haveli as a tourist site. In smaller Havelis, this is enacted subjectively in ritual, performance, speech and *seva.* As householders, Pushtimarg devotees do not reject neoliberal capitalism entirely. However, *seva* situated in the domestic is caregiving, as I argue in this thesis. Caregiving is an intentional and personally-cultivated everyday encounter of enchantment experienced differently than a publicly officiated ritual through an intermediary. The relationship that is built through emotional attachment cultivates a prolonged state of wonder at the world that is *lila* in the creativity of *seva*-as-play.

Seva, as a process of world-making (Srinivas 2018; 37), or "image-making" (Eck 1985; 41), implies a capacity to reimagine lived and alternative futures. Recall that the universe consists of multiple *lokas* (worlds) within each other that are open-ended with porous boundaries. This image-making ability allows for both a lived and ideal worldview (Eck 1985; 42) in the multiple registers of lived experience. For the Pushtimarg, *seva* and involvement in the movement is not escapism, but wonder-spotting. Playing offers a way of navigating living in a degenerate age and manifesting an alternative perspective (*bhavana* in Eck 1985).

Devotees would suggest that *seva* is the way to avoid being embroiled in the Kali Yuga by finding joy and waiting with longing (*viraha*) and, as I suggest, wonder in their relationship with Lalan.

Longing and waiting

Let me introduce Kishorbhai, a 50-something devotee living in London who knew his love for Krishna from a very young age. His story is centred on his childhood experience, and rather than discussing the very strict nature of his family's worship, he remembers the positive way he was taught about religiosity. Initially, we met through community events, and we got to chatting about my project. I then met him at a café several times, sipping on cappuccinos, asking about his experience with the Pushtimarg and how he became such an ardent follower.

> Kishorbhai: However, I wasn't, well, when I was born, I don't know how things were, but at the age of 4, I know my desire for Krishna was very strong.
>
> Me: So quite young?
>
> Kishorbhai: Very young yes. So, at the age of 4 I was in India with my parents and being a little kid, it's that intimate love relation that just as a 4-year-old wants a toy so I saw this Krishna deity, this [Krishna] *swaroop,* in India. In the shop in [India].
>
> Me: Wow you remember so clearly.
>
> Kishorbhai: In fact, to this day I remember how we bought it from the shop […] So, there was this [Krishna] sitting there and I said, "Oh I want this one". So that's where my first link with [Krishna] started. […]
>
> And I'll share this story. I was probably 8 or 9 years old. So, my Dadima was very into daily *seva* and doing worship of Krishna. And she… this was her way of getting me into it, I guess. And I used to do things and as a child you take it with a bit of … a pinch of salt so you don't become as regular you don't do it routinely. And routine is vital. But at the age of 8 you don't know that.
>
> So, she decided to take my [Krishna]… [we had] the veranda where you have a big tulsi plant, it's a very common thing. So, she one fine day took my [Krishna] in his seat, decorated him and dressed him up and put him under the tulsi plant. So, he no longer was in the *seva* room. So, the next morning when I woke up and I asked, "Ba where is my [Krishna]?", "Oh he has gone away because you don't look after him".
>
> […] So, to me that was a bit of a shock. At the age of 8, I thought my god I've lost something. And I felt bad about it, and she made me feel bad. So now I understand that there is a concept called *viraha bhava*….*viraha* is the mode of separation.

This was a learning moment for Kishorbhai. His grandmother was playing a game of concealment to teach him a lesson about loving Krishna. The relief and joy at finding his Lalan again sparks an

attachment. While this primarily draws on authority figures as teachers (his grandmother, or gurus Havelis, and peers in other cases), it was a type of playing as in the previous chapter. Another male devotee told me that his Lalan used to come to school with him and sit on his desk so he could learn too[124]. Even during the school day, he could not be separated from his best friend.

The theological aesthetic of *viraha* is a mood of separation, represented by longing and waiting. The more painful the separation and agony, the more joyful union with Krishna will be. *Bhakti* poems of longing from *gopis* are oral images of separation. Longing also manifests in visual representations in wall hangings (pichwais) of Krishna's play of concealment. In the hangings of the Monsoon, Krishna hides as a tree (Ambalal et al; 116) as the *gopis* search for him. In another hanging, his presence is part of the *kadamba* tree, hiding after stealing the *gopis* clothes while bathing (Ibid; 105) in his *jala lila* (Water play).

The idea of surrender comes with the hunger for union. Vaishnavas believe hunger (cf Luhrmann 2012; 43) for *rasa* is part of the devotional experience (recall one definition as nectar) and longing (*viraha*) implies this sense of hunger. *Rasa,* as impersonal, creates distance between a thing of admiration and a devotee, despite being connected with individualisation of emotional experience in *bhava*, (McDaniel 1989; 81). In waiting, *seva* offers a daily expression of this future union. Yet, "[t]his impossibility of satiation is an aesthetic point; the mood would be lost of satiation were possible" (Ibid; 57), i.e., an 'advanced' devotee can never get enough of *seva*. *Rasa* is the aesthetic means by which wonder can be articulated (Srinivas 2018; 72). Joy as intense longing has been written about as a form of hope in evangelical Christianity (Luhrmann 2012; 128). Wonder, here, is nourishment for a devotee's relationship with the divine. For example, in poems, the rhetoric of sustenance appears when Krishna speaks. His words are "sweet like honey" (Sanford 2005; 43). While anger and confusion are often evoked in poetry by his games, particularly those of jealous *gopis,* the devotee with the otherworldly perspective sees the games as ways of enhancing their emotional relationship with the divine (Ibid; 47). The intimacy of this attachment is vital in the form of a lover.

"[T]he fantasies associated with intimacy usually end up occupying the space of convention, in practice the drive toward it is a kind of wild thing that is not necessarily organised that way, or any way. It can be portable, unattached to a concrete space: a drive that creates spaces around it through practices. The kinds of connections that impact on people, and on which they depend for living (if not "a life"), do not always respect the predictable forms" (Berlant 1998; 284). The intimate domestic

[124] Though many of my interlocutors were women, it is interesting that there was a pattern of young boys remembering their childhood centred on Krishna. Though this included young girls, there were a large number of women who put the moment of their attachment in relation to marriage, whether it strengthened it being around others who followed different *sampradayas* or because that's when they became Pushtimargi through initiation.

space can seem controllable and "a world built for you" (Berlant 1998; 286). Yet, it represses the institutionalisation of intimacy or the influence of the public. In the public eye, the lover *bhava* is at a distance, yet authority does not control emotions in the intimate sphere of relations.

Waiting has gendered attributes in the South Asian context. Feminine waiting is patient, while masculine waiting can express other *rasic* emotions such as anger (Srinivas 2018; 82 see Jeffrey 2010). Though androgynous in nature, Krishna worship is situated in contexts of class, caste, age, gender and so on. Yet, there is an ideal type of *seva* in the Pushtimarg, as joyous and maternal, evoking the feminine attributes of waiting. Males like Uncle in previous chapters or masculine deities such as Shiva surrender and perform reversals to these ideal types of feminine devotion to play with Krishna. Srinivas also points out that waiting implies subjugation rather than dominance (Ibid). In surrendering the male ego in a dominantly patriarchal society and moving beyond ideas of 'work' versus 'play' or adulthood and childhood, seva-as-play is a process of wonder and self-transformation. Self-transformation does not imply the 'self' as standing alone but in relation to the divine. Instead *seva* is a preparation of the self for everyday, divine encounters with a view to a possible future in the presence of Krishna. The wonder of transcendence threatens to overwhelm, and the balance of immanence in *seva*-as-play creates a space to develop kinship.

Like playing, waiting can inspire innovation and enjoyment. Waiting as a form of anticipation (Mattingly 2019; 17) is understood as 'waiting with' and 'waiting for'. In a sense, *seva* is waiting with Krishna (and other devotees), while the purpose is waiting for him in union. In waiting for death, for example, Mattingly writes, a multiplicity of temporalities is configured through hope (of a cure or miracle intervention, for example) (Ibid; 20). In this sense, time is not necessarily linear. "Krishna's *lila* is not understood as a linear system in which there is a beginning and end"…"Devotees "see" the *lila* within this cyclical structure. Poems as vignettes reflect points or times in these cycles, and each offers access to the "eternally present" *alaukik lila"* (Sanford 2005; 31). Krishna is everywhere in all timeframes, and there is no static 'now'. My interlocutors thought in multiplicities of time, from mundane, such as having to get to work on time or picking up vegetables, to sacred time with Krishna either at home, at the Haveli, in their present or future thoughts of his *lila*. As one interlocutor said, "from being a blade of grass to a drop of dew on that grass, or a hair on a cow's head". Waiting is part of a transformation of perspective.

Gasparini (1995) identifies three 'types' of waiting: waiting as interstitial time (temporary or 'wasted time' at a gap or interval), waiting as rest, and waiting as a meaningful experience (Ibid; 32). Gasparini looks at sacred time in Christianity, which is circular through the celebration of yearly events (for example, Christ's birth) but linear in that each year is heading to the final advent of God (Ibid; 37-38). Similarly, the circular motif comes up again, as with journeys and *ras-lila.* Where the linear sense of waiting has a 'purpose', *seva*-as-play does not have a purpose. Waiting for union is

cultivated through emotion, not expected but desired. Waiting is full of hope (Ibid; 39) though there are other experiences of waiting, such as frustration and distress. Rather than an Indian concept of 'timepass', seen as wasting time, though more often is active waiting (Jeffrey 2010), this is purposeful. Waiting encourages actors' agency and control over uncertainty cultivating the value of patience (Gasparini; 1995; 42). While humans are waiting for these encounters, the divine is also waiting for the right time, human actions and the relational (see Srinivas 2018; 65-69). Waiting is seen as a corrective to the instant gratification of the 'modern' age (Srinivas 2018; 69), where new possibilities, relationships and innovations can flourish. The state of *viraha* characterises the modern age as longing as a human condition intertwined with a theological aesthetic through globalisation and the loneliness of separation, for example, from natal homes (Ibid; 79).

Eternal *lila* in Goloka

Goloka, or Golokdham, is Krishna's world, where he is in eternal *lila* (*nitya lila)* in a beautiful forest, according to one of my interlocutors. I was at a friend's house after flower garland-making in the hot, airless room in the Haveli. As we sat with her family, with some masala chai that made the heat more pronounced, the subject of Golokdham came up.

> "You can be in Golokdham as a flower, a leaf, a milk drop or as the hair of a cow"… "Nikunj *lila* is where Krishna and Swaminji are in eternal *lila.* A Nikunj is like a beautiful forest".

Dham is a place, and as we saw in Chapter 2, living, mythological geography is experienced in physical, spatial, and temporal journeys. Places are sacred through the divine presence and enmeshed in multiple lokas (worlds) manifested in divinity on the landscape. For Krishna worshippers, Braj is in heavenly *lila* with his manifestation on the land at all times while being part of his earthly playground (Hawley 2020). Goloka means cow world or domain (Ibid; 131), connected to his pastoral pastimes as a child and youth. In terms of *lokas,* a heavenly realm is *swarg loka* which can also be understood as a transitory place, then Vaikuntha, where Vishnu lives, and Goloka as the highest in the hierarchy (Ibid; 132). A guru described it to me as like a train carriage.

> "It's like a train carriage that has different classes. You have third class then 2nd class AC [air-conditioning] then first. So Golokdham is the highest class. In other dharmas [paths], people go to [heaven] or [hell] based on their path, then the earth is there…The difference is God is not present there."

Specificity about the Vedic cosmic system can be met with resistance (Ibid) and, as in my fieldwork, a humbled sense of aspiration. Through this, I mean that devotees who talked about Goloka were few and far between. Those who discussed it with me as a place thought of it as aspirational, as a distant

imagined hope, but not expressly desired. This would imply an arrogant desire to get there in Krishna's presence, rendering selflessness and humility inauthentic.

> In response to my musing that this was similar to heaven (*swarg*), the eldest son vehemently denied an end goal for *seva.* Heaven separates the soul from the divine, while Golokdham offers a merging into Krishna's *lila.*
>
> "This eternal *lila* is continuous. This is in Braj and not seen by us. The final stage for us is liberation from reincarnation but… Golokdham is to escape reincarnation". The younger son continued "There is the 'aspiration' to see [Krishna's] *lila*…[the soul] is one ansh, the smallest part of [Krishna]. Like a river flows from the sea, Pushtimarg to Vaishnava will merge himself in [Krishna]".

Other paths follow a karmic cycle of debt and redemption that releases the soul into liberation or salvation (*moksha*). Rather than liberation, entering the Nikunj *lila* is envisioned as merging or absorbing into Krishna.

However, *seva* in Kali Yuga is experienced as good fortune for a devotee on earth. The way people spend time is *seva* rather than preparing for a heavenly union with Krishna. We can find parallels with this in Cannell's work on Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) if we focus on the idea of a union. After ascending to the Celestial Kingdom of heaven, kinship continues and 'forever families' are recognised (2013b). This is recognition of prior premortal belonging and kinship that existed in that otherworldly realm (2013). Yet, this is distinctly material. The forever kinship is understood through the physical matter of the body or "earthly-matter-in-potential" (Ibid; 227). The Pushtimarg in Goloka merges with Krishna, the transcendent, while kinship is relatable on earth to experience *lila* in the mortal existence. The premortal is fully absorbed, participating in *lila,* a non-separated part of Krishna. Those that end up in the mundane world 'fell' to the earth in one of Radha and Krishna's divine plays as pearls from a necklace ripped off in a game of love. In cultivating devotional attachment and a relationship of kinship, devotees are transforming their perspective from mundane to spiritual (*laukik* to *alaukik*) and recognise the world in Kali Yuga as part of Krishna's play. In playing with Krishna, devotees are merging with *lila* on earth by encountering moments of enchantment and meeting them with wonder. The release from the endless cycle of karma and action (*samsara*) is play. As we have seen, play is not causative and has no expectation of reward, much like *seva.*

Kali Yuga is not so bad after all

The world is immersed in chaos and disorder. Rather than being fatalistic, it is navigated through absorption into play. Kali Yuga is seen as positive, the guru in the opening exclaimed, due to Krishna's proximity to devotees. As was commented on by various devotees, even in Dwapara, the age of Krishna's lifecourse on earth, the *gopis* had the pains of separation (*viraha),* and Yashoda only

had her child for several years, while many devotees have Lalan for their whole lives and generations after. Wonder through play "is no mere escapism; escapism suggests a removal from reality, a lack of responsibility. Rather, wonder suggests the hope and possibility of an alternate reality, a better future more conducive to joy and care." (Srinivas 2018; 203). As we have seen, *seva* to an animate divine baby is an immense responsibility that not everyone wants to engage in nor continue to do so. *Seva*-as-play may be read as resistance or adaptation to the alienation of modernity, Hindu nationalism, or a formation of ethical personhood. I cannot say that the devotees I met had a radical social hope for the future through creativity in *seva* nor that ethical personhood was reflected in other contexts apart from in *seva*. In many ways, *seva* in the Pushtimarg can seem orthodox, purity rule-driven and exclusionary in class, gender and caste contexts. However, as this thesis has attempted to show, *seva* cultivates a relationship situated in everyday life contexts. Rather than ritual repair, *seva* domestication of danger or protection work (Srinivas 2018; 203) is absorption into *lila* and play.

Conclusion

An attempt at a nuanced reading into caregiving, play and wonder at a divine child explores the multiple registers people engage in every day through the cultivation of human-divine relations. Rather than defining categories or ascribing characteristics, this thesis aimed to explore the open-ended nature of *seva* through the lens of prayer practices from a Pushtimarg perspective. A Pushtimarg lens does not deny the playful religious practice nor the various meanings of *seva* as worship in other movements. Instead, it seeks to highlight the playfulness of relational worship practices more generally, challenging assumptions on religious life as orthodox or apart from the mundane.

My focus on the domestic is significant as it is the site that absorbs and separates people from tensions in engaging with the public sphere to centre on Krishna as a divine child that needs to be played *with*. Authors have pointed out a need to focus on the "'ordinary'" as opposed to the exemplars, apart from the (often male-dominated) liturgy and particularly in studies of women's worship (Pintchman 2005; 44; Bachrach & Sharma 2016). The intimacy of the domestic allows for the variability of *seva* as a form of care, away from rule-bound orthodoxy. The domestic is a site for generating kinship relationships, reflecting the status of Krishna, not as transcendent but as the most vital member of the family. This seeks to highlight the relational experience of divinity rather than being a reductionist reading of religious life as a form of reproducing nationalism, class or prestige.

The Pushtimarg movement attempts to participate in public as Hindu, Vaishnava, and part of *bhakti* devotion, while maintaining difference, is through the distinction made between *puja* and *seva* (Chapter 2). For my interlocutors, the difference between *seva* and *puja* was not just semantics but opposite ends of the worship spectrum. These are separated by paths chosen, Pushtimarg for the former and *maryada marg* (path of rules or restrictions) for the latter. The only fruit (*phul)* or *seva* is more *seva.* Salvation is not through renunciation or merit but through participation and a perspectival absorption to *lila,* which is the surrender of ego.

In Pushtimarg, ritual was often used to describe *seva* in English as 'like a ritual'. Yet, it was not ritual, which was more associated with rules and *puja* as a mechanical act to gain merit. The pervasiveness of ritual as an analytical description of 'other' contexts is apparent when prayer has been relatively ignored as a similar analytical description. While prayer as a term is entangled with Christian etymology and understandings, ritual too has its own genealogy in similar origins. They are two *different* sides of the same coin (Mauss 2003 (1909); 23). So, analytically, it is still surprising to see that ritual has been used to discuss religious practice while prayer has been ignored. *Seva* as relational is like-ritual as much as it is like-prayer in scholarly discourse.

Part of the story I have told in this thesis can be understood through the distinction Weber made between asceticism and mysticism, the influence of nineteenth-century colonial thought on religion in India. Krishna worship in general (Arney 2007) places *bhakti* in the realm of the mystical. Pushtimarg Krishna worship does not separate theology or liturgy with mysticism, yet the movement privileges the inner transformation that is a shift from worldly to recognising the world as Krishna's *lila*. The mystical is experienced as relational, shaped by how interlocutors understand kinship relationships in context. A Hindu understanding of animate life in images allows this relationship to develop. There is an accepted paradox of gods being taken care of while it does not have an 'effect' on the gods, yet this is part of the play of reversals and reveal and conceal.

The mystical is actualised by a playful *seva* in the household. Yet, Krishna's transcendence and relatability are both epitomised as play (Chapter 3). As Krishna is a child, play-ing is part of *seva* as a relatable image but his theological narrative supports his image as the god of divine play (*lila*), opposing the kingly avatar before him, Rama. The devotee participates in and surrenders to *lila*, which is cultivated by these everyday moments of *seva* and *bhava. Viraha bhava* is a longing for Krishna aesthetically sung and spoke about through songs and poetry, which makes the joy of union in *lila* sweeter for devotees. For my interlocutors, their *seva* was like a union with Krishna in their daily life. These moments inspire a sense of wonder. A framework of wonder and play challenges not only the strict orthodox stereotype of Pushtimarg worship but the fixity of bounded understandings of religious practice. In constant encounters of enchantment, created as a community in Havelis or a *seva* playscape at home, devotees recognise the world as *lila* in a state of wonder. Put another way, devotees' perspectives gradually move from understanding the binaries of spiritual and mundane to seeing the world as Krishna *lila* in the *alaukik* realm (otherworldly). Though mediated and cultivated by *seva* as care, which is informed by kinship in context, this re-framing of perspective is grounded in emotional attachment to the divine and through *seva*-as-play. *Seva*-as-play allows devotees to mediate the Kali Yuga, shifting it from a degenerative age to one that is lucky. Being close to Lalan, caring for him directly and participating in shared enjoyment allows for this Age of Darkness to be seen as part of wonderous *lila.*

Anyashray 'seeking refuge in others' apart from Krishna, as a theological concept, grounds *seva* as a devotional practice away from other forms of *seva* or *puja* to divinity. This relatedness versus disloyalty or risk of disconnect from Krishna highlights the negotiation process that devotees express when engaging with different worship forms within Hindu-isms, not just other religions. This point of differentiation between other 'Hindus' and Pushtimargis extends to public spaces and participating in public or societal norms. Considered as one of the greatest obstacles for the movement (Arney 2007; 533 n43), *anyashray* becomes the root of a radical nature of social and religious differentiation. However, rather than exclusionary, devotees negotiate their participation, particularly in the diaspora, where certain norms cannot be avoided as with shared space in the London Havelis.

For the Pushtimarg as an institution, mystical experience becomes further regulated in the public sphere. Before the nineteenth century as the pivotal point of the Pushtimarg narrative, patronage was a key strategy in religious touring during the Mughal period, where the image of worship was festive and opulent. In the nineteenth-century, the public sphere sought out 'rational' forms of religious life, or the essence of religion (Sen 2010 see Mitra 1991, Van der Veer 1994, Nanda 2020), that had a textual authority based on the Vedas, emphasising ascetic forms of religious life as somehow more authentic. The Puranas, hagiographies and other sectarian literature were acknowledged yet not held in the same regard. This period, particularly the legacy of the Bombay Libel Case and the need to define religion in the colonial legal courts (Chapter 4), caused a retreat of the Pushtimarg from the public sphere. The lover *bhava* (*madhurya*) was deemphasised, privileging motherhood (*vatsalya*).

Chapter 4 showed that though the ideal *bhakti* devotional mood is feminine, the divine is not imitable. Inherently, Krishna is a contrary figure outside the confines of societal rules. Therefore, to fully immerse in his play, the ideal worshippers of the Golden Past, in the form of *gopis* ignore their own earthly responsibilities to be in his presence, as we have seen with Shitalben. This does not relate to the contextually shaped everyday lives of Pushtimarg women. Despite the changing social context, the majority still take on the role of primary caregiver and moral/religious compass in the household. Men are embroiled in this gendering, too, perhaps unable or unwilling to express *bhakti* in more visible ways though this is to the 'public' rather than in the domestic and intimate spheres. From our conversations, it seems that this often restricts them from being the provider of *vitaja seva* (wealth) in the household or focussing on reading sectarian and other religious literature. This gendering is not only societal but was influenced by the Bombay Libel Case, a masculinised of Hindu nationalism based on Rama, and patriarchal society in India more generally, though this is gradually changing. An accepted pattern of how much *seva* is carried out parallels the lifecourse. *Seva* takes more time at a Haveli or home after building families with retirement age and menopause.

The idea of *bhakti* as participation and sharing lends itself to Sahlin's concept of kinship as a "mutuality of being" (2013). As a cheeky child, Krishna inspires such loving devotion, caregiving, joy (*anand*), and playfulness from his devotees. He creates the world to play *with* and devotees to play *with* him as part of mutuality as sharing. Chapter 5 acknowledged children as actively engaged in devotion and community life. It showed how Krishna is the ultimate family member, in relation to his theological genealogy and human family members, similar to Orsi's Catholic saints in the web of kin networks (2005). As an unpredictable divine child, this Krishna, rather than a warrior or king, is intimately related to a childhood seen as innocent and free. Divine children cross-culturally engage in carrying degrees to this image and play in games of reversals. These reversals certainly make inequalities and hierarchies visible but allow for them to be suspended for *seva* and worship.

Bhava logics in domestic and kinship networks illustrate a gradual generational shift away from orthodoxy, encouraged in parallel by the institutional Pushtimarg. Purity and pollution, as axioms of Hindu ritual and social politics of differentiation surrounding *jati* as identification (Bear 2007), as not as rigid as implied by the reputation of an orthodox Pushtimarg and in other forms of Hindu-isms. While rules exist, the idea that *bhava* can subvert these rules highlights the idea of *bhava* logics as influenced by logics of care, variability in performance and subjective emotions. This is supported not only by a more flexible generation of travelling gurus but in the stories of the *vartas* and discussions in *satsangs* about who gives Dominos pizza to their Lalan and who wakes up at 4 am to prepare food for him.

Patronage ended firmly with the Nathdwara Temple Act in 1959. The subsequent state intervention in Havelis after the Act, and dissatisfaction with leadership among some devotees, further caused a retreat from public religious life. Through the Nathdwara Temple Act debate, other tensions with engagement in public are made visible, such as the authenticity of *vittaja seva* (wealth) and the sanitisation of *madhurya-bhava*. Pushtimargis maintain that the Haveli, rather than an explicitly public domain, has always been a home to Krishna and the gurus as part of Vallabhacharya's divine lineage. Indeed, the few interlocutors who discussed that Act suggested that jealousy of the Havelis' wealth caused state intervention. Yet, the main debate with my interlocutors arises from the purpose of a Haveli.

The Haveli is imagined as a learning centre that is experienced with *darshan* as a learning opportunity and an active and participatory observation of specialist and resource-rich *seva.* Community *seva* as an act, as opposed to collective *darshan,* solidifies an albeit fluid, step-by-step process of *seva* and offers the potential for continuous learning. An important difference for Pushtimargis is Lalan's status as a *swaroop,* constantly animate and living, unlike a *murti* which can be emptied of divine presence. The distance of the devotee from the divine in the Haveli and community activity offers examples of a sense of public despite the blurred boundaries of private and public space. At the same time, conflict arises in defining public space and a domestic home in Havelis, as in Nathdwara. Recognising a special status as a *pushti* soul (graced), devotees in the collective develops a community. However, this can be exclusionary and critiqued in the public eye, unlike in the intimacy of home *seva.*

One could read the manuals of *seva* guidelines or guru as teachers as domesticating play. Though not always doctrine in the domestic sphere, the step-by-step process is structured in Havelis, in guidance from spiritual and textual authority, official discourse, and so on, as model sites of learning. Being contained in the mundane context, in the householder stage of life, and Kali Yuga, play then, is not as disordered as a full absorption into the divine like Mirabai, the female devotee poet. This is a mediated play, mediated by personhood, context, history and institution, that allows for spontaneity and creativity that gradually absorbs the devotee. However, the domestic is where these tensions

fluctuate, for individual personhood, family dynamics, understandings of care and childhood among others, that leads to variability in worship practices.

We have seen how in both Havelis and home-havelis, public performance and religious encounters intertwine in a similar way to a theatrical experience of 'stage and props' (Turner 1982). Devotees engage with a sort of '*bhakti* tool kit' of a sense of place, open heart and educated eye (Packert 2010; 2) and becoming an 'ideal listener' (Sanford 2008). The synaesthetic and tactile experience of *seva* through the three tenets of *seva, rag* (song), *bhog* (feeding) and *shringar* (adorning) in the immanent frame is a shared interaction and communication that builds a kinship relationship in the intimacy of the home as a space but also in the personal context of the familial. Personhood in relation to the divine is shared in substances such as food (e.g., Khare 1992, Stoller and Olkes 1989, Osella and Osella 2008), affective speech (Pinto 2006, or word-contact as sense-contact Bennett 1993), which are expressions of devotional emotion. Spiritual sustenance comes in the form of grace (*krupa*) and *rasa* (aesthetic taste or nectar).

Part of playing is the animate thing, the playset, and the play frame or playscape; however, these are all situated in place through these tenets without a 'goal'. For example, the circular journey, the Ban-*yatra* in Braj, has no goal. Here, *lila* is "purposeless play" (Haberman 1994; viii), both in journeys (*yatra*) and *lila,* particularly *raslila,* performances. As in Chapter 7, *yatra* connects devotees to the sacred landscape that is Krishna's playground, not only in Braj, but for the Indian diaspora more broadly. The land is where his play manifests in divine animacy extending the image to trees, soil, mountains and rocks, among other natural features. The sacred journey and landscape are embedded in familial and kinship relations between humans and nonhumans. The imagining of people's Lalans running all over his world and playing with his friends shows the world as *lila,* and the idea of wonder that people express peppers each day of *yatras*. This does not ignore the different spheres that collide in places, yet the sense of place that roots Pushtimarg devotees to India is related to religious and religious community belonging.

If I return now to where we started, in my Ba's home-haveli, face dangling off the side of the bed and watching her do her *seva,* that moment of my childhood takes on a new perspective. This thesis is not about my grandmother. Yet, in reflecting on my fieldwork, she becomes a figure in the redefining process of the Pushtimarg movement and how that affects devotees' relationships with the divine, raising some questions that I started with. What counts as *seva*? How do the different histories and theologies of the movement, India, families, and individual subjectivities shape intimate and domestic worship? In what ways do the Pushtimarg engage with various publics, implicitly or explicitly?

Speaking with my aunts and uncles about this conclusion, they recall Ba sacrificing her life for her children. "Her children were her world", was said multiple times. Concepts of sacrifice and childcare that surround this generation of women are part of the understanding of a woman's place in the

household, informed by a history of patriarchy, Independence and Hindu nationalism, but also the sanitisation of women's emotions not only in the public sphere but in the religious and domestic. For the Pushtimarg, as we have seen, this affects lived practice through the emphasis on motherhood, but this does not suggest this is a motherhood *sampradaya.* Rather, history shapes the current moment of lived practice in what is visible. At different moments in history, whether sectarian, academic or at a national level, varying registers of engagement have amplified different modes of worship[125], such as the emphasis on purity. It was quite unusual for a woman of the Pushtimarg "Don't Touch" generation to let me, and any of her children before, watch her *seva.* Interlocutors in India and in the UK lamented their parents or grandparents 'putting them off' *seva* because of the exclusionary rules surrounding purity and pollution. These rules perhaps have a grounding in the legacy of the nineteenth century. Yet, part of the shift in thinking more flexibility than the institutional Pushtimarg is promoted by gurus who do travel around the world. Still, others seek to maintain certain traditions more closely.

Despite the short physical distance in observing Ba's *seva*, the adaptability and variability of *seva* as a practice in the domestic is clear. Yet, this is also understood in a broader sense, as she formed part of the large Gujarati Hindu diaspora. While in Malawi, the family were distanced from the Pushtimarg institutions, so they engaged with other forms of Hindu religious life. The gurus did not travel outside India until the 1990s, so some devotees say, "Now we know the true Pushtimarg, before we didn't do that". In one sense, this trajectory could be read through longing, *viraha bhava*, where the joy of reuniting with the movement and *seva* is sweeter. Ba and others like her in the diaspora like Manglaben or Sujalben, at the Formica dining table, or even the young Narayan, are examples of a Pushtimargi generation that comes back, albeit variably, from the public retreating of the movement with renewed vigour and a sense of varying degrees of engagement with the public.

Not only was Ba an individual devotee, finding perhaps playful moments in her busy day, but she expressed the shifting and moving contexts of *seva*, globally and locally. The social aspect of prayer is important not only for the individual but for anthropologists, where the practice of prayer could reflect social phenomena within a community. Just as Mauss says [prayer is] "a fragment of a religion" (Mauss 2003 (1909); 33), the acts of *seva* are cultivated through the everchanging social. His analysis expresses the shaping of prayer practice by the social; "Even when prayer is individual and free, even when worshippers choose freely the time and mode of expression, what they say always uses hallowed language and deals with hallowed things, that is, ones endorsed by social tradition" (Ibid). As Haeri notes, even with scripted practices like *namaz*, the devotee cannot know how each performance will turn out (2020; 83). If we, like Haeri (2020), take practice as open-ended, we can still take note of the shifting (not static) context, language, places, and ways to cultivate emotional

[125] Cannell, Richardson, both personal communication.

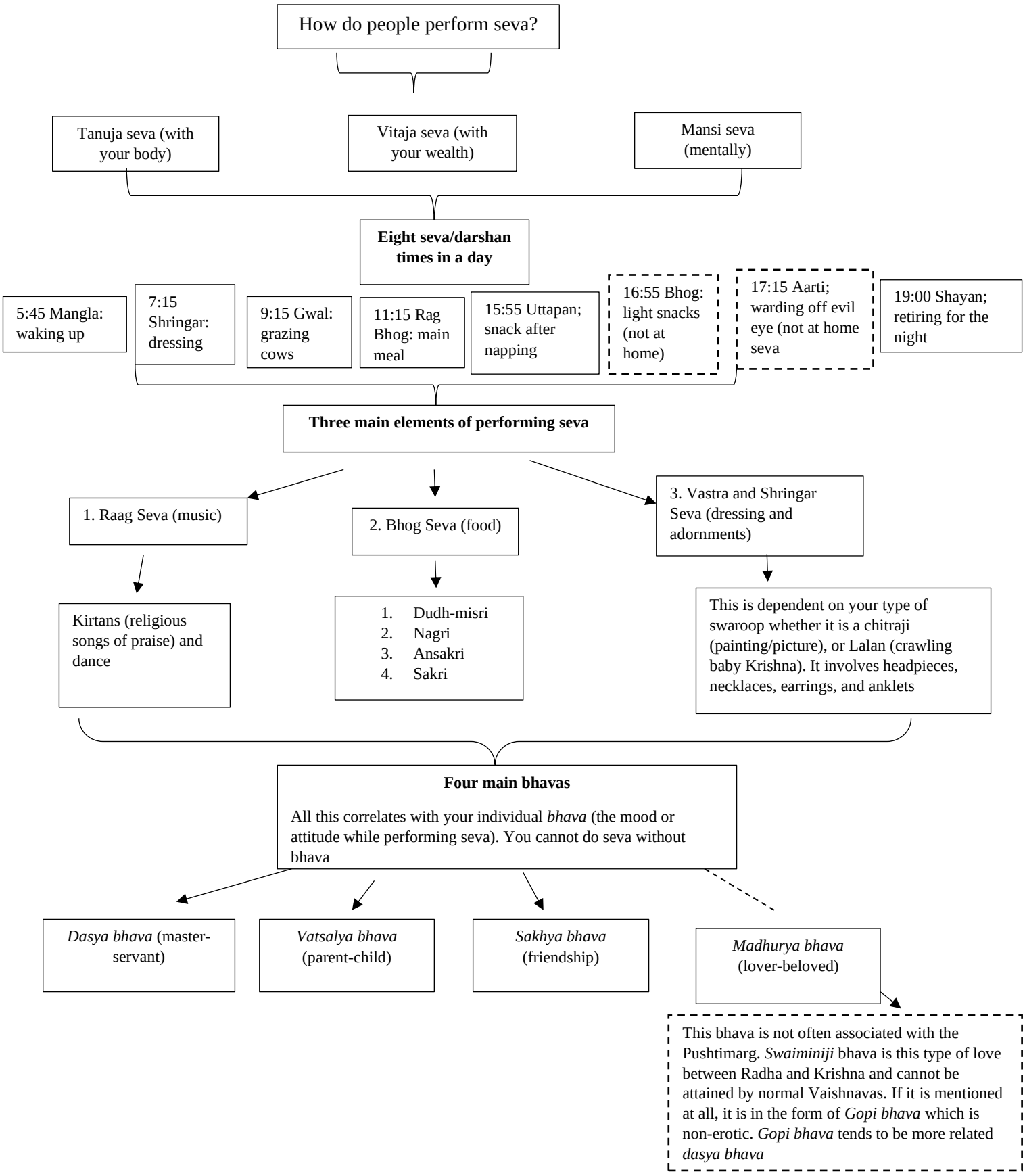
attachment for the divine. Once there is a connection, *seva* is ultimately unstructured when led by emotions (*bhava*), yet the practice can be repetitive to an observer. The gradual inner transformation, or the cultivation of emotion, care informed by relationality or mode of playful worship takes us away from the view of *seva* as rigid actions carried out by routine.

We can continue "wonder-spotting…tracking and identifying new forms and practices of religion in a supposedly disenchanted world" (Scott 2013; 861[126]) in *seva*-as-play. In this sense, *seva*-as-play 'counts' as a prayer practice as it is just as much like-prayer as it is not quite ritual. While the oral aspect of praying is important in social relationships with the divine through *rag*, the tactility of dressing, bathing, and feeding Lalan highlights the experiential and absorptive aspect of caring for the divine. Devotees move towards a different way of seeing and joyfully participating in the world, (re)framing their experience as wonder-ful *lila* by interacting with the divine as part of the family.

[126] This seems to imply 'new' in terms of scholarly research rather than 'new' as existence.

Appendix

Figure 1



Yatra survey Appendix 2

Survey Champaran ચંપારણ મોજણી

Jai shree Krishna. My name is Anishka Lohiya and I have come from London for a few months to research Pushtimarg and Lalan seva for my PhD. With Jejeshree's permission I have written out the following questions which relate to my research. જય શ્રી કૃષ્ણ. મારું નામ Anishka Lohiya છે અને હું થોડા મહિના માટે Londonથી આવી છુ . હું મારા PhD સંશોધન માટે પુષ્ટિ માર્ગ અને લાલન સેવા માટે આવી છુ. Jeje શ્રી ની આજ્ઞા સાથે, હું આ પ્રશ્નો લખેલા છે મારા સંશોધન માટે.

Please note that this is a completely voluntary survey for research purposes only and which remains completely anonymous. આ માત્ર સંશોધનના હેતુઓ માટે એક સ્વૈચ્છિક સર્વેક્ષણ છે અને જે સંપૂર્ણપણે અનામી રહે છે.

1. What is your age? તમારી ઉંમર કેટલી
2. What is your gender? તમારી લિંગ કઈ છે

- Male પુરૂષ
- Female સ્ત્રી

3. Where have you come from for the yatra? તમે ક્યાંથી યાત્રા માટે આવ્યા છો

4. If you are from abroad, is this the only reason you are visiting India? તમે વિદેશથી હોય તો, તમે યાત્રા માટે આવે છે માત્ર?

- Yes હા
- No, I am on a holiday ના, હું રજા પર છું
- This is part of a bigger organised pilgrimage આ એક મોટી સંગઠિત યાત્રા ભાગ છે
- This is part of a personally organised pilgrimage આ એક વ્યક્તિગત આયોજન યાત્રા ભાગ છે
- Other [please describe below] અન્ય [નીચે વર્ણન કરો]

5. Who did you come to the yatra with? Please circle all that apply. કોણ તમારી સાથે યાત્રા માટે આવ્યા છે? જે લાગુ જે સંબંધિત છે વર્તુળ કરો

- Father – પિતા Mother મધર
- Daughter/Son દીકરી / દીકરો
- Grandfather દાદા Grandmother દાદી
- Aunt કાકી Uncle કાકા
- Other relative (please state) અન્ય સંબંધિત (કૃપા કરીને રાજ્ય)
- Friend મિત્ર
- Other (please state) અન્ય (કૃપા કરીને રાજ્ય)

6. How many days are you in Champaran for? કેટલા દિવસ તમે ચંપારણ્ય છો

- Over a week એક અઠવાડિ

- The whole katha programme સમગ્ર કથા ક્રમ
- 4 days, 4 દિવસ
- 3 days, 3 દિવ
- 2 days, 2 દિવ
- 1 day, 1 દિવસ
- A few hours થોડા કલ

7. How many yatras have you been on? કેટલા યાત્રાઓ ગયા છો
- First one પ્રથમ એક
- 2-3
- 4-5
- 6-7
- 8-10
- 10+

8. Are they usually related to the Pushtimarg? તેઓ સામાન્ય રીતે પુષ્ટિ માર્ગ સાથે સંબંધિત છે
- Yes હા
- No નાં

9. If not, which others have you been on? જો નહિં, તો વિગતો લખી

11. How do you remember your first yatra? Please describe. તમે તમારા પ્રથમ યાત્રા કેવી રીતે યાદ છે? વર્ણન કરો.

12. What do you enjoy about going on a yatra? તમે યાત્રા પર જવા વિશે શું આનંદ આવે છે

13. Why is it important for you to go on yatra in India? Please describe. શા માટે તમે ભારતમાં યાત્રા પર જવા માટે મહત્ત્વનું છે? વર્ણન કરો.

15. Do you have Lalan at home and is he pushtavela (given presence in your swaroop)? તમારા ઘરમાં લાલાના છે? અને તે પુષ્ટિાવેલા છે

16. Do you ever imagine yatra when worshipping at home? તમારા ક્યારેય યાત્રાનો કલ્પના કરો જ્યારે ઘરમાં પૂજા?

- Yes હા ☐
- No નાં ☐

17. Have you taken Bramdh-sambandh? તમે બ્રમસંબંધ લીધો છે?

- Yes હા ☐
- No કોઈ ☐
-

18. If not, please describe a reason. જો નહિ, તો એ કારણનું વર્ણન કરો.

Thank you for taking part and helping me on my research. If you would like to talk further on my research, on the Pushtimarg or your experience of Lalan seva please email me on xxx
ભાગ અને મારા સંશોધન પર મને મદદ કરવા માટે આભાર. તમે Pushtimarg અથવા Lalan સેવા તમારા અનુભવ પર, મારા સંશોધન પર વધુ વાત કરવા માંગો છો, તો મને ઇમેઇલ પર કૃપા કરો xxx

Use this space for any additional answers. કોઈપણ વધારાના જવાબો માટે આ જગ્યાનો ઉપયોગ કરવી

Appendix 3 Children's *pathshala* work

For two weeks, I hosted the *pathshala* and asked the children questions, designing activities to see what effect the *pathshala* had for them. Working with children is very different so the results of my activities were varied, however, it was clear that the older children were absorbing the lessons being taught and knew what was expected of them. Some children were bored and did not listen, playing pranks and pretending to fall asleep, as was common each week. I give an example below of one activity where we did a timed drawing exercise, with three sections.

1. Anything you want
2. The Haveli (temple)
3. [Krishna] at your home

For some of the 10 or so drawings, particularly theme one (anything) they have less ethnographic value, and more a methodological purpose in getting the activity started. For instance, one 10 year old girl's detailed drawings of where Krishna is in the home (Figure 1) suggests that she pays close attention to home worship..

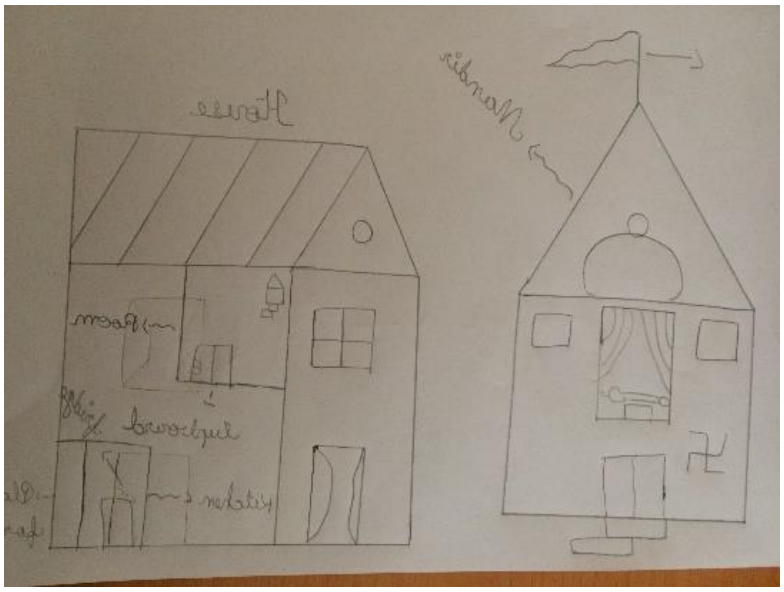


Figure 1

A 6 year old girl (Figure 2) discussed an immense amount of detail the animals that surround Krishna, and the adornments (*shringar*) that they had at home. In the corner, she drew a peacock, cow, and dog for Thakorji to play with. She was a perfectionist and not happy that she didn't have enough time to colour. She waited until after the class to ask for her drawing back so she could finish.

Figure 2

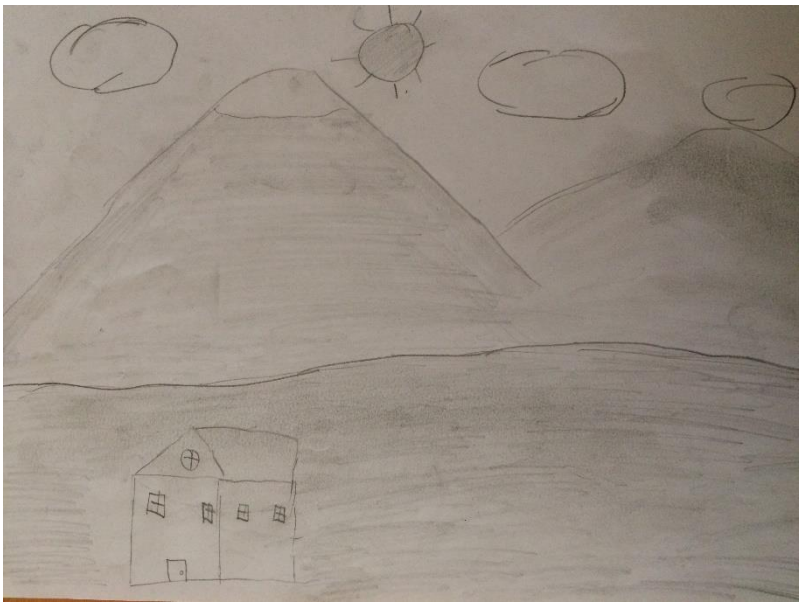


Figure 3

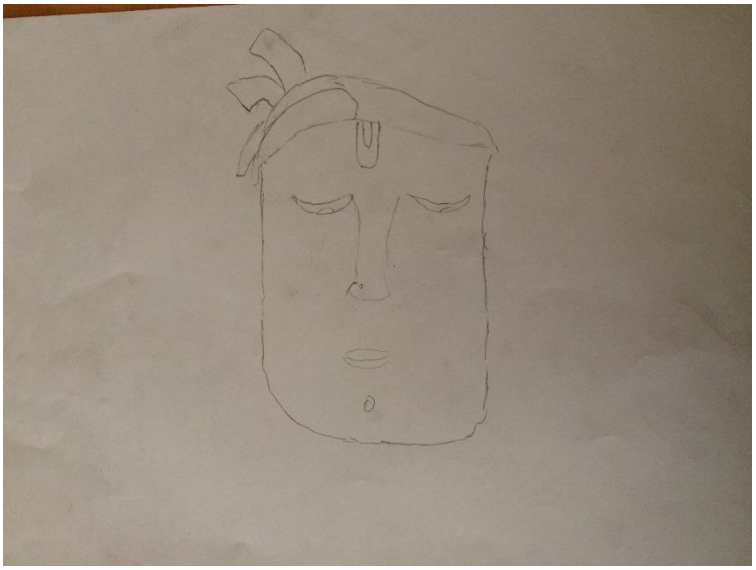


Figure 4

Another week I asked them to fill out a daily diary of what they did at home, including some inclusion of religious activities.

Age
Name

My day

Haveli હવેલી

Breakfast નાસ્તો

Brushing બ્રશ દાંત

Wake up ઉઠો

Mandir at home ઘરે મંદિર

School શાળા

Home ઘર

Eating ખાવા માટે

Playing રમવું

Shower સ્નાન

Saying Jai Shree Krishna જય શ્રી કૃષ્ણ

Charan Sparsh ચરણ સ્પર્શ

TV

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Conference papers

Saha, S. 2021 Retrieving Gopīnāth From the Margins of Puṣṭi Mārga History ECSAS Vienna, Pushtimarg, Past and Present: New Perspectives on a Hindu Sampradaya Monday 26 July 2021

Goodgame, C. 2021 Descendants of Orthodoxy: Palestinian Christians and the claim of continuity LSE Friday seminar Friday, 29 January 2021

Film

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Images

Figure 1 Map of India with yatra fieldwork sites. Shutterstock Item ID: 780199819 illustration of detailed map of India, Asia with all states and country boundary. Edited by A. Gheewala Lohiya. Contributor Vectomart

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