

Reintroducing Hinduism
The Narratives of Shri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi

BY

JENANEE DHEVI RAMACHANDHRAN

B.A., University of Madras, 2006

M.A., University of Madras, 2008

THESIS

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Chicago, 2012

Chicago, Illinois

Defense Committee:

Hui-Ching Chang (Chair)

Patricia Harkin

Andrew Rojecki

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost, I want to thank God and the Sage of Kanchi for their grace and inspiration in the completion of this work.

I sincerely thank my thesis committee – Prof. Hui-Ching Chang, Prof. Patricia Harkin and Prof. Andrew Rojecki for their constant guidance, encouragement and faith in my work. Their support helped me achieve my research goals and thoroughly enjoy exploring an area of great interest to me.

I am extremely grateful to my parents for spending long hours translating lengthy Tamil manuscripts, helping me in all ways possible to achieve my goals and encouraging my passion. I am also grateful to all my colleagues and friends for their goodwill and cheer that kept me going.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
II.	INDIAN LIFE, CASTE, AND CHALLENGES.....	4
A.	India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries	4
B.	Hinduism and its Challenges	6
C.	Caste System of India.....	9
1.	Origin of caste	10
2.	Caste in pre-colonial India	13
3.	Caste in modern India.....	14
4.	A note on the concepts of freedom and equality and the penetration of caste in Indian society.....	19
5.	Key issues/conflicts of the Indian caste system	21
D.	Transmitting Hinduism as Spiritual Communication	21
1.	The concepts of Acharya and Guru	22
2.	The institution of Math.....	23
3.	The Sage of Kanchi and his teachings.....	24
E.	Research Questions	25
III.	METHODS.....	28
A.	Oral Transmission of Ideas and the Role of Stories/Narratives	28
B.	Text to be Analyzed	31
C.	Analytical Framework.....	34
IV.	NARRATIVES ON CASTE SYSTEM.....	38
A.	The Setting.....	39
B.	The Key Theme: Caste as an Operational Model of Division of Labour	40
1.	A meritocracy that benefits all by eliminating negative human traits.....	40
2.	A union that interconnects people by feelings of kinship	41
3.	A system that ensures the continuation of the Vedic religion by providing universal as well as individual codes of conduct.....	42
C.	Causal Relations: Caste in Operation	43
1.	Those responsible for the decay of the caste system.....	43
2.	Why do we need a Brahmin caste?	45
3.	A cure for the decay: cutting off the head is not a cure for headache	49
D.	Temporal Relations: Caste in the Good Old Days.....	50
E.	The Narrator and his Audiences	53
1.	The narrator	53
2.	The audience.....	54

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

F.	Rebuttals to Challenges	57
1.	Is caste a discriminatory system?	57
2.	Don't individual codes of conduct create inequalities among people?	58
3.	Doesn't caste prevent nurturing of individual talents?	59
G.	A Critical Analysis.....	60
1.	Caste as division of labour reconsidered.....	60
2.	Differences as discriminatory.....	63
3.	Brahmin as the solution yet to be realized	64
V.	NARRATIVES ON CHILD MARRIAGE	66
A.	Introduction.....	66
B.	Child Marriage: Practices and Problems	67
C.	Reframing Child Marriage: The Husband as the Guru and the Road to Spiritual Development	68
D.	Arguments against the Social Reformers.....	72
E.	A Spiritual and Emotional Narrative on Womanhood	76
F.	Conclusion	79
VI.	FINAL THOUGHTS	81
	CITED LITERATURE	84
	VITA.....	87

SUMMARY

Scholars credit the historian to be a narrator who rearranges facts in a plot that makes vague facts familiar and removes all conflict. Narratives also play an important role in reframing irrelevant and incomprehensible institutions in societies and making them more relevant and familiar.

In this study, I look at the teachings of the Hindu spiritual Guru Shri Shri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi (1894 – 1994) also known as the Sage of Kanchi and study how his narratives reframe two controversial social institutions in India, caste system and child marriage. Through my thesis, I have analyzed his teachings on these subjects in the book, *Hindu Dharma*, in the analytical framework provided by Sonja Foss in terms of the Setting, Characters, Narrator, Events, Temporal Relations, Causal Relations, Audience, and Theme. I have studied the Acharya's use of various narratives devices such as analogies, comparisons between ancient and modern India, association with modern scientific and economic concepts, examples of successful and celebrated figures from Indian history, chants from the Vedas and so on to explain ancient institutions to modern Hindus.

The Acharya's narratives on caste provide a comprehensive definition of the original purpose of caste and he explains the benefits provided by these two institutions that are regarded as discriminatory and oppressive by modern society. Caste is narrated as an economic system that provided for people's livelihood by eliminating competition and increased specialization and efficiency due to its hereditary nature. It also provided individuals with the opportunity to develop their innate talents and gifts by eliminating the struggle for daily sustenance. Child marriage has also been reconstructed as a beneficial and glorious practice that protects women,

SUMMARY (continued)

empowers them and helps them attain salvation through devotion and dedication to their husband.

This study analyzes how such a reconstruction helps provide a solution, in terms of intellectual or emotional satisfaction, to the conflict faced by modern Hindus who are caught between two worlds – an ancient glorious India whose past achievements has inspired Indians and foreigners for centuries versus a modern developing society whose development is imbalanced and deterred by a long history of colonization and oppression, and the presence of social evils such as caste and child marriage.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nineteenth and twentieth century India was an era of political, social, and cultural revolution. Traditional Hindu society had been significantly influenced by the entry of Islamic and European forces for more than 600 years. An already complex situation was further compounded by the decline of aristocracy and colonization. Indians moved towards a modern era of machines and industries that led them away from their traditional occupations and roles and saw them embrace a western lifestyle in order to earn a livelihood.

One of the most important areas where this revolution had significant consequences was with the religion of its majority – Hinduism. A complex situation arose during this period—studies indicate that the relevance of Hinduism was being questioned and that people could not really understand how this ancient religion fit into the modern era that they were entering into. Vedic Hinduism had divided the entire society according to the caste system which was very rigid and laid emphasis on ascription rather than achievement. Apart from that, numerous caste-related practices such as child marriage, elaborate sacrificial rituals, widow burning, dowry and expensive 5-day marriages seemed quite archaic and backward. The ancient language of its scriptures might only have added to this complexity and prevented many from seeking answers to clear their doubts. Scholars such as Singer (1980), Jha (2009), Ashby (1974) and O'Malley (1970) suggest that this led to a situation where Hindus might have felt that their religion and its traditions and practices no longer served a purpose.

In such a moment of confusion and uncertainty, questions concerning how Hinduism should be positioned aroused multiple voices. On one hand, Western educated Indian intellectuals such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy deemed that Hinduism was once a glorious way of life that had become polluted due to certain practices like caste system, child marriage, sati

(widow immolation), and so on, and that these practices had to be purged in order to restore the religion to its original greatness; On the other hand, there was also the rise of fundamentalist Hindu factions that considered Hinduism to be superior than all the other faiths in India and gave rise to many militant Hindu movements.

One of the ways in which these doubts could possibly be cleared and Hinduism be helped to regain some of its lost significance is through the explanations offered by one who is proficient in the ancient scriptures and an expert on the subject of Hinduism. India has produced many saints and holy men. One of the most revered and popular saints of the 20th century was the head pontiff of the Kanchi Math—Shri Shri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi. Considered an expert not only in the Vedas and Hinduism, but also in living a pious life, he was worshipped by many as a reincarnation of God in these modern times. Shri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi, fondly called as “Paramacharya” or the “Ultimate teacher”, during the period from 1932 to 1973, delivered a lot of lectures, treatises and discussions on Hinduism and its importance and significance in leading a content spiritual life in the modern and so-called materialistic society.

Through this thesis, I seek to analyze the use of narratives by the Paramacharya in his speeches and talks, as recorded in the book *Hindu Dharma*. I follow Hayden White’s definition of narrativity as a tool by which historians rearrange facts into a new plot and thereby, create a new meaning that is more comprehensible to the reader. Accordingly, I explore how the Paramacharya, like a historian, reintroduces Hinduism in the modern scientific era; explains its relevance and necessity in today’s society; and resolves the incomprehensibility created by the ancient language Sanskrit that has restricted the knowledge of Hindu tenets to a few priests.

Specifically, I seek to find out how the following two conflicts have been mediated by the Paramacharya’s narratives: (1) At the macro level, how does he explain the use and advantage of

an institution such as the caste system that has not merely religious, but political and social consequences, in today's society where the goal is equality and freedom for all; and, (2) how does he explain the significance of ancient rituals, traditions and knowledge systems used in everyday life as well as religious practices at the micro-level such as child marriage, astrology, ancestor worship, and so on that might seem to many as mere superstition and lacking any science and reasoning? In this study, the narratives of the Acharya are analyzed along the lines of Foss's framework of narrative criticism by attending to a work's setting, characters, narrator, events, temporal relations, causal relations and the audience (Foss, 1996; White, 1978).

II. INDIAN LIFE, CASTE, AND CHALLENGES

Before analyzing how these conflicts are handled by the Paramacharya, a comprehensive literature review has been undertaken to describe the circumstances in which his discussions and answers found a setting. The review first describes India in the 19th and 20th centuries, and then moves to an analysis of challenges Indians face. I then discuss the origin and development of the caste system, the key institution to Indian cultural and religious life, showing how it serves as a prime example of how Hinduism is to be reintroduced and made sense of by a spiritual leader such as the Acharya of Kanchi.

A. India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Nineteenth century India was a period of political and social reform. India's freedom struggle is deeply rooted in the social and cultural reform movements that were rampant during that period. The Muslim invasion from Persia prior to the entry of the colonial powers also had a profound impact on India's material and normative culture and it was during the 19th century that these influences culminated in the form of a cultural revolution that had various consequences, most of which can be seen even today.

Islamic dynasties, that invaded India in the 13th century, brought with them their religion, political and administrative systems, architecture, food, social customs and values that have alternatively lived in peaceful co-existence and clashed with the prevailing Hindu ideology. Muslims in India also speak a unique language known as Hindustani – a combination of Urdu and Hindi. Hindus and Muslims have lived under great harmony under Muslims rulers such as Akbar, Sher Shah Suri, etc. who worked for the welfare of not one but all communities in India. At the same time, forced conversions into Islam, defacing of Hindu idols, political and cultural

wars between Muslims rulers and Hindu rulers have always created conflict since the times of the earliest Muslim entry into India (Eaton, 1993).

But a distinct Hindu versus Muslim identity was formalized and institutionalized with the entry of a third party in 1498 - the colonial forces of Europe. Many of the European explorers and merchants who came to India saw the country as the “White Man’s Burden” (Singer, 1980, p. 20). To them India was the land of heathens, riddled with superstition that needed to be purged of its sin by the purity of Christianity (Singer, 1980). Along with this goal of moral cleansing, India was also a source of raw materials for European industries. Many westerners were also responsible for translation of Indian scriptures and generation of renewed interest in them that led to development of various modern branches of Hinduism under the leadership of foreigners.

Britain initially came to India to trade and in 1612 established the East India Company in Kolkata. India was a source of raw materials for British industries – their major imports were cotton, indigo, spices, etc. However, slowly Britain got involved with the local politics between Indian rulers due to the rapid decline of Indian aristocracy in the 17th and 18th centuries. By the mid-18th century, Britain had established itself as the most dominant political and military power in India (Singer, 1980). To suit their economic and political goals, Britain adopted a number of beneficial and detrimental policies whose effects are evident till today. The Indian postal system and railways were introduced by the British and continue to connect the country to this day; they introduced Western English education and created a lot of job opportunities in their offices across the country and offered livelihood for educated Indians which were different from those assigned by the caste system that determined occupations till then.

The British also practiced colonial imperialism, racial discrimination, subordination of the natives, and adopted a divide and rule policy between Hindus and Muslims which ultimately

led to the division of the country into two nations called India and Pakistan (Prasad, 1946). Jha (2009) claims that a specific Hindu identity emerged with the entry of foreign forces and he specifically points out to the census of 1872 when the people of India were divided by the British government into the categories of “Hindus” and “Mohammadeans or Muslims”. So the time was ripe during the colonial regime with all these forces for redefining issues of identity, religion, culture, politics and their role in society and lives of people.

B. Hinduism and its Challenges

The socio-cultural revolution that shaped 19th century India, particularly in light of the caste system, created social norms, values and belief systems that are in practice even today and many of these movements have also become the law. This socio-cultural movement also led to the way Indians or rather Hindus view their own religion.

Origins of Hinduism can be traced back to more than a millennium (Levinson, 1998). Hinduism is the one of the few major religions, today, that does not have a known founder. It is an all-pervasive, all-encompassing system that finds a role in every part of a person’s life from the minute he/she wakes up to when he/she goes to sleep. For a very long time people did not think of themselves as being Hindu or otherwise. The practices and beliefs that define them as Hindu would initially not have been thought of as being religious in nature. Young (2006) says that Hinduism refers to all those traditions and beliefs practiced by the people of South Asia that were grounded in the Vedic texts. Similarly, O’Malley (1935) quotes Professor Radhakrishnan and says that Hinduism is more a way of life than a form of thought. An individual is given a lot of freedom when it comes to choosing the particular religious philosophy and practice he/she wants to adhere. So long as a Hindu conforms to the customs and practices of his/her reference group, he/she may believe what he/she likes (Basu, 1894).

As Hindu traditions and beliefs were practiced and embedded within people's everyday life, the chaotic time of the 19th century nevertheless provoked Indians to redefine their religion. It was during this period that the forces of Westernization and the influence of European enlightenment resulted in the development of "liberal Hinduism". Reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and others expressed tradition in a manner that was European in its orientation (Ashby, 1974). They condemned Hindu practices like caste system, Sati (widow self-immolation), and ritualistic polytheism and tried to validate Hindu heritage through accompanying European enlightenment. They were of a mind that Hinduism was not discriminatory to begin with but over a period of time, all these practices crept into it and polluted it.

It was also during this same period that a counter force—Hindu revivalist movements—gained vigor in India. Institutions like the Arya Samaj and spiritual leaders like Vivekananda motivated people to enjoy a certain pride in being a Hindu. Bhatt (2001) says revolutionary freedom fighters portrayed Hinduism "in terms of its glorious archaic past" (p. 26) and as being superior to Christianity and even defended certain traditions and beliefs such as Brahminism (upper caste domination), child marriage, patriarchy, and so on. Apart from that, Muslims were degraded and portrayed as being the "enemy" of Hindu culture and that their entry led to the ruin of Hindu values and beliefs and overall degradation of the nation.

From the 19th century onwards, there was also a revival of intellectual debate on the values of the Ancient Hindu and Vedic traditions. Ashby (1974) and Singer (1980) talk of how westerners like Annie Besant, Madame Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society led to the creation of a renewed sense of pride in Hindu spiritualism. Singer specifically talks of how many Hindus of that era were also of the opinion that their religion might have some merit in it after all

because foreigners seemed to think so. An insider who provided the same feeling of pride is Swami Vivekananda who not only helped restore a sense of pride in the Hindu past but also asserted that the modern Western scientific culture could enrich and not weaken Indian life.

So essentially, this set of circumstances gives rise to a confounding situation for Hindus from both insiders and outsiders. Their own countrymen are divided into two factions – fundamentalists, insisting on celebrating Hinduism's superiority, degrading other religions, and defending traditions such as caste system, child marriage, and patriarchy, and social reformers and educated individuals like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and others, who spoke up against the very same rituals and sought to abolish them. The outsiders in India during that period also contributed to the confusion – on one hand, the cultural domination imposed by Western forces has established the pursuit of a modern scientific life which supported the reforms sought by Indian reformers, and on the other hand there were many foreigners like Annie Besant, Madame Blavatsky who insisted that the Hindu way of life is quite beneficial and meritorious and not riddled with superstition. Added to this already confounding situation, Ashby (1974) says that some of these people in the 19th and 20th century were “more Western than Indian, others ambivalent mixtures and others Indian... but deeply cognizant of the new elements demanding a place within the India of today” (p. 47).

No knowledge, institution or even society remains static; it is dynamic and prone to change. Similarly, Hinduism was not a religion to begin with, but a system of knowledge prescribed by learned men of the past and which continued to be practiced by the people of the Indian subcontinent for centuries. With the entry of foreign forces and the knowledge brought forth by them, slowly over a period of time the indigenous practices came to be identified as Hinduism (Hindu essentially means one who lives beyond the Indus River). In the light of this

new knowledge, Hinduism underwent change. And with change comes conflict. As its adherents started following new practices and adopting a different lifestyle to keep up with the emerging modern, connected, global society, they started questioning the relevance of an ancient and at times, archaic religion and its relevance in their modern lives. The way they perceived and practiced the religion changed and many of its ancient texts and rituals lost their meaning.

But they are also aware of the fact that Hinduism has defined their lives and society for centuries—its great temples, wise men and spirituality, that drew thousands of foreigners to India's shores since time immemorial, continue to be a source of pride and accomplishment. Hinduism is their faith and despite doubts and changes, it cannot be discarded altogether—it is an integral part of their life that has defined not only their spirituality and personal lives, but also their social, cultural, and political systems. So, it leads to a situation of conflict where people participate and even celebrate a religion while questioning its tenets, wisdom and relevance in their lives. It is in such conflicts that spiritual leaders such as Sri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi of the Kanchi Math became especially important in redefining and mediating Hinduism.

C. **Caste System of India**

A study of Indian sociology is considered worthless if it does not include a comprehensive study of the Indian caste system—a traditional system of social stratification that traces its origin to the Vedas. As the key institution to Indian cultural and religious life, the origin and development of the caste system serves as a prime example of how conflicts facing Hinduism have to be reintroduced by a spiritual leader like the Paramacharya.

Traditionally defined as a system which unites people on the basis of their common occupation and customs, today it has been transformed into a politicized classification system

that indicates the social and economic progress of its members and the rights and rewards they are eligible for. There are more than 3000 caste groups in India.

Caste pervades every aspect of Indian life – the macro institutions of religion, politics, education, and business as well as the micro aspects such as family, group affiliations, music, dance, occupation, food, marriage, etc. Caste decides one's occupation, education and political rights; at the same time it determines language, attire, cuisine, worship, festivals as well.

The entire Indian society categorizes itself along the lines of caste which defines individual and group identity as well as status in society. Each Hindu is born into his/her caste; it is an ascribed system of stratification that does not offer any mobility to its members. It has evolved over time and despite its religious origins, has economic, social and political consequences that shape the life and identity of each Indian. Castes are governed primarily by the concepts of purity and pollution. Higher castes are supposed to be ritualistically pure and lower the caste, more the pollution.

1. **Origin of caste**

Srinivas (1962) defines caste as “a hereditary, endogamous, usually localized group, having a traditional association with an occupation, and a particular position in the local hierarchy of castes” (p. 3). If the rules and edicts laid out by the caste are not followed by its members then it has the right to sanction penalties including exclusion against them. Generations of members of one particular caste practiced a specific occupation and married within their own caste (Dutt, 1968). These are the most fundamental rules of membership which can be broken only at the risk of penalty and ostracism. Though a caste group might sound very homogeneous through such definitions, it is actually not so. Castes are divided into sub-castes and each sub-caste is endogamous and occupations, customs, traditions, norms highly vary between sub-castes

as well. Caste can also be characterized by 3 main elements – a) priestly hierarchy b) kinship c) ascetic renunciation and these three elements have helped determine the façade of present day caste (Bayly, 1999; Srinivas, 1962). This idea of caste is unique to India. Today, it is practiced nowhere else in the world despite references to a similar system in various literary texts of other countries (Dutt, 1968).

There are various theories that propound how the present day caste system came about though there has been no consensus on a single theory of origin. Spiritualists and philosophers such as Aurobindo, Vivekananda, etc. say that caste was an arrangement which distributed various functions among the society. Scholars suggest that the modern idea of *caste* originates from the older Vedic concept of *varna*. Varna divided society into 4 groups - Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants and farmers) and Sudras (artisans and servants) and all castes are said to originate from one of these 4 Varnas. Outside these four broad categories are the groups referred to as untouchables and tribals who are placed outside the caste system and the lowest in the hierarchy. Brahmins were meant to educate and contribute to the intellectual development of society, the Kshatriya duty was to protect the country, Vaishyas were meant to amass wealth and the Shudras were to perform duties of service. This is also the most widely accepted and most popular belief among Indians regarding the caste system; that it is a rigid and well-established occupational classification that is based on the Vedic Varna system (Dutt, 1968; Gautier, 2003; Srinivas, 1962). Since the Varna system originated from the Vedas, the stronghold of the Brahmins, some theories suggest that Brahmins manipulated their role as interpreters of the Vedas to gain political power (Sarkin & Koenig, 2011) and “the prestige of the Brahman caste is the corner-stone of the whole organization” (Dutt, 1968, p. 3).

All these explanations are prone to criticism especially the use of Varna theory which is deemed as an over-simplified explanation that takes into account only the ancient Hindu literary texts and does not give due consideration to political and economic factors that determine caste system in India.

However, it is agreed by all that the caste system has survived in Indian whereas similar hierarchical systems and trade guilds in Europe perished and that this occupational character of caste system contains the spirit of feudalism and goes against modern concepts of nation, state, democracy, and so on (Dutt, 1968; Srinivas, 1962).

The theory of Varna is an abstract notion that has been remade and reformed into different systems at various points of time in history (Bayly, 1999). Gautier (2003) quotes Aurobindo who says that it is the nature of human institutions to degenerate and similarly, the caste system which once was based on spiritual qualifications for membership and meant for subordination of materialism came to be dominated by “the spirit of caste arrogance, exclusiveness and superiority, and the change weakened the nation” (p. 16).

And today, lower castes are exploited, abused and denied access to basic rights such as education, employment and in certain extreme cases, even clean drinking water and electricity. Caste politics has become rampant in rural India – politicians use caste groups as vote banks and rival castes are used as pawns in elections and riots. And this has led to most Indians associating caste with a discriminatory system organized to validate and support the superiority of one caste at the cost of another, especially with access to rights and resources.

Though the origin and development of caste system is still a debate among scholars, the development of caste in modern India has been well documented. Caste was a flexible system of categorization that was defined by the needs of the people and society in pre-colonial India; the

system turned a little more rigid and standardized under the Mughal rulers and finally, under the British developed into the political system seen today with its roots extending not only among Hindus, but to other faiths as well. Simply put, caste has changed its form over the past 500 years from being an occupational classification of people to becoming a social system that has become well-integrated with the religious, political and economic institutions of India.

2. **Caste in pre-colonial India**

In the period before the arrival of the British, India's cultural, political, moral and even biological diversity ensured a constant fluidity and oscillation in the way caste was perceived and practiced. Before the entry of foreign powers, the country was divided into a number of small kingdoms each with its own political, economic and social systems. Accordingly, caste was also practiced differently in each of these regions. The caste hierarchy would differ from kingdom to kingdom. There was no uniformity.

It was after the arrival of the Islamic forces from Central Asia, that a certain amount of standardization was introduced to the various political and social institutions. The Islamic rulers first came in contact with the Rajput rulers of western India. That is where they first encountered the caste system. The fluidity and diversity of caste across various kingdoms did not establish itself in the policies followed by the Mughals and they generalized the Rajputian caste ideals to the rest of India and that is why during this period, the warrior castes enjoyed dominance and importance (Bayly, 1999). During this period, there also arose an elite Brahmin group whose proximity to the sacred scriptures placed them at a level above that of even the ruling king. This particular hierarchy somehow came to be followed by all the subsequent rulers of India.

Even this standardization was limited and even the Mughal rulers (most dominant and most illustrious of all the Islamic dynasties) had to contend with independent and organized

smaller caste groupings such as those of arm bearers, peasants, and merchants. Within such a setup, caste hierarchy manifested itself in the following manner:-

Indian society was divided into 2 categories – the elite castes which consisted of the priests, the kings - those with religious and military authority on one side and the farmers, arms bearers, traders and common folk on the other side. It classified people into those “with rank” and those who constitute “the community”. It is to be noted that the only constant characteristic of caste through the ages has been the presence of a subordinated population known as tribals or untouchables or in current post-colonial terminology Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes or Dalits (Bayly, 1999).

3. **Caste in modern India**

The entry of colonial powers had a profound impact on the political and economic system of India. With the introduction of railways, post, telegraphs, paper, etc. the small caste groupings of peasants, arms bearers, merchants, etc. were able to organize themselves more thoroughly due to better transportation and communication (Srinivas, 1962). It was during the British rule in India that more deference was given to priest and the concept of pollution became more rigid and became the “defining feature of everyday caste experience” (Bayly, 1999, p. 27).

The British were astounded by the existence of such a system where one’s lot in life is determined at birth. However, they did not seem to recognize the fact that caste boundaries were fluid in India and differed from time to time and from region to region. They, like the Mughals, served to only standardize the notion of caste. The British also adopted a policy of “divide and rule” both between Hindus and Muslims, and within Hindus as well. They propagated the notion of equality and freedom for all and implemented programs to uplift lower castes. Simultaneously, they employed upper caste educated Hindus in their offices who often served as

intermediaries between the British administrators and the rest of the population. This act managed to legitimize the Brahmin stronghold and helped strengthen the notions of high vs. low, purity and pollution, privileged versus disadvantaged.

This change in circumstances created a massive rift between the lower and higher castes and redefined traditional Indian society. The forward castes especially Brahmins, hugely benefitted from Western education. Being a traditionally literate group, the erstwhile priests and teachers became clerks, lawyers, doctors and government officials. This group would later become the intelligentsia of the Indian society who became nationalists and freedom fighters and came to identify themselves as Hindus, which lent a dent to the proselytizing mission of the Christian missionaries (Bailey, 1957; Ghurye, 1952). On the other hand, the economic benefits conferred on the neglected lower castes enabled them to improve their economic and political status. They came to look up to the British for protection; many even converted to Christianity to escape the rigidity and low status imposed on them by the Hindu caste system.

Towards the end of the 19th century, this rift became more apparent as the British rulers started feeling that the safety of British rule in India was closely related to keeping the Indian people divided on the basis of caste. Finally, from the beginning of the 20th century, various Anti-Brahmin movements gained strength in various parts of India especially in the south. While these movements (popularly called Dravidian movement) started as self-respect and reform movements and proclaimed to fight for self-respect and equality, they slowly turned into something more as its leaders called for Brahmin killings, burning down Brahmin homes and rape of their women (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1969). They became movements meant to deprive the high castes of their traditional ritualistic power at one point rather than aim for the welfare of

lower castes. Added to this volatile situation, the British policy of granting special reservations to various lower castes further deepened the divide between high and low castes.

These revolts and riots were aided by the British who in 1923, prohibited the recruitment of higher castes to certain government positions and created a policy of reservation for lower castes. This helped many castes gain access to resources that were once denied to them, and soon, they started demanding special representation in educational institutions, legislature, public services, and so on. (Ghurye, 1952; Srinivas, 1962). The demand for special representation or reservation continues till this day.

It was not until the 1930s that Mahatma Gandhi became very popular and was able to influence the Indian masses into joining the freedom struggle. Gandhi was a great crusader against untouchability. The Civil Disobedience movement and Salt Satyagraha saw great participation from all communities in India irrespective of caste and creed. Gandhi believed that the caste system must be eradicated because it had failed and was causing more harm than good to the society. His ideology known as Gandhism came to be reflected in the policies adopted by the independent Indian government in 1947 as they strove to create a constitution and democracy that reflected Gandhian values and sought to establish a just nation that treated all its citizens with equality.

During the same period, the formation and organization of various Anti-Brahmin parties and associations all over the country continued to gain strength. These parties and movements were very dominant and persuasive in South India more than any other region. These self-respect movements had other consequences as well. They created changes on the religious and philosophical front, where the Brahmin supremacy in the scriptures helped maintain the caste system and its practices for centuries. Brahmin superiority was countered not only politically, but

also ritualistically by the lower castes through a process known as Sanskritization. M.N. Srinivas (1989) who coined the term defines Sanskritization as “a process by which a ‘low’ caste or tribe or other group takes over the customs, ritual, beliefs, ideology and style of life of a high and, in particular, a twice born (dwija¹) caste” (p. 56).

Since the British, unassumingly, deepened the rift between the upper and lower castes and established the norm that upper castes were more pure and privileged, many low castes started adopting the customs and traditions of upper castes and some castes even adopted the titles of upper castes in order to gain the same ritual sanctity and social status enjoyed by upper castes. While some Sanskritized castes were accepted by the others, some were not. Even though there have been instances to the contrary, Sanskritization normally presupposes an improvement in the economic or political position of the group concerned or a higher group self-consciousness in the traditional Hindu hierarchy.

After India gained independence, the compilers of the Indian constitution laid emphasis on creation of a secular constitution and a “casteless” society. The new constitution continued the British practice of reservation for oppressed castes and sought to formalize and institutionalize this process of upliftment. In doing so, the government had to recognize the existence of “backward” and “untouchable” castes (Bayly, 1999) and segregate them into categories such as backward, most backward, other backward, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and according to their level of development and progress, allocate seats for them in universities, public service institutions, etc. The Indian government established what is termed as “affirmative action or positive discrimination in the West” (Bayly, 1999, p. 270).

Reservation policies and establishment of a secular law has indeed helped many low castes become economically and politically progressive. But critics say that instead of creating a

society where there is no caste, the reservation and upliftment schemes have managed to reaffirm the notions of caste as those seeking aid must declare and proclaim their low status in order to qualify for reservation. Furthermore, it is to be noted that this political and economic leverage has not been distributed evenly and is limited to certain segments of backward castes only (Venkatesan, 2008).

The past century has also seen the rise of a group known as Caste Hindus. Though traditionally these groups do not come under the category of the twice-born castes (Brahmins), due to the equal representation policies followed by the British and the reservation system put in place by the subsequent Indian government, they have achieved a powerful position in society. The Caste Hindus have been able to mobilize themselves in an organized fashion and they are often used by political parties during elections and collective action. Bayly (1999) contends that the aim of these groups is to strip high castes of their power and lobby for economic benefits and extension of reservation to their members rather than devise programs for the welfare of the deprived minority.

Other lower castes such as the untouchables, Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes continue facing discrimination in Indian villages. They have not been able to avail the benefits of the government's affirmative action programs and still perform the traditional duties assigned to them by the conventional "varna" or "jati" conventions. In fact, even in industries and factories, which are supposedly secular, skilled and unskilled labourers and artisans, pursue occupations that still have an indirect connection to their traditional caste occupation (Isaacs, 1965).

Today, the perpetrator is no longer just the Brahmin, but other socially upward caste Hindus have taken on the role of the oppressor. Scheduled castes or Dalits are still forbidden from entering tea stalls, using the village well, unable to attend school, not allowed to participate

in the government and forced to subordinate themselves before the upper castes. If they break any of these rules and demand for rights, they are abused and beaten (Sarkin & Koenig, 2011).

Thus, in post-colonial India, caste probably plays an even bigger role than it did earlier. It has been formalized, institutionalized and politicized and has become an enduring and influential force. While the traditional distinction between “clean” and “unclean” continues, political and economic dimensions have assumed greater importance as seen with the rise of caste-Hindus, reservations, emergence of a creamy layer, electoral lobbies, caste wars, and so on.

The ideal of many reform movements in the 19th and 20th centuries was to create a casteless, egalitarian society, but reality is an entirely different picture. However, Indian scholars such as Bayly, Srinivas, Dutt refuse to define the Indian caste system in monolithic terms. Caste, according to them, is a dynamic system that will continue to be redefined and reorganized with changing circumstances, and changing needs of the people. It cannot be set aside as a static order that is to be taken for granted. It is a reality that is influential, compelling and capable of change.

4. **A note on the concepts of freedom and equality and the penetration of caste in Indian society**

According to the Vedic scriptures, Hindus are divided on the basis of their Varna or occupation. The laws that governed each group were different and this was attributed to the fact that the rules or guidelines for living were different for each Varna and therefore, to judge them along the same lines would be unfair. For example, the Brahmin was the most learned, so punishments met out to him/her would be harsher than the other castes. The use of the term “law” here should not be restricted to the judicial system but also to the traditional religious laws which judge those born to different castes by different laws.

The rights and responsibilities enjoyed by a person also depend entirely on his/her caste. Some examples would be the right to work as priest in a temple, to wear upper garments, right to

wear the sacred thread, and other privileges. Similarly, “freedom” refers to the mobility of an individual or group to move up the caste hierarchy. One did not have the freedom, as per the traditional caste system to change their occupation and thus change their caste or its status in society. If one is born into a caste, they have to enjoy and fulfill the rights and responsibilities respectively, associated with that caste alone. Caste is an ascribed order; achievement is usually not taken into account.

These traditional notions of equality and freedom came to be redefined in the 19th and 20th centuries in India when the Western educated Indian reformers were exposed to the different definitions of equality, freedom, democracy as espoused by the Enlightenment and Renaissance scholars. To Westerners, equality meant existence of a universal law which does not discriminate on the basis of caste or creed. Achievement is valued highly as one is expected to improve and work towards achieving high standards; this contradicts the Indian caste norms which claim that the purpose of one’s life is to fulfill the responsibilities of their caste.

As Hindus started moving away from their traditional occupation, they adopted a more Western way of life, started living in urban centers and as they became exposed to Western ideas through the social reformers and Western education, they started redefining the definitions of equality and freedom. The social reform movements of the 19th and 20th century, rise of fundamentalism, British imperialism, the Indian freedom struggle, the rise of caste groups, research on Hindu scriptures by Indians as well as foreigners such as Max Mueller, Annie Besant, etc. generated multiple viewpoints with the Indian society and made Hindus question the tenets of Hinduism and its relevance in modern times. The conflict is further strengthened in the modern democratic society where according to the constitution of India, equality is defined as

the same law being applicable to all people irrespective of their caste origins. However, traditional law does not follow the same premise.

5. **Key issues/conflicts of the Indian caste system**

As much as caste is a social phenomenon, it is also a religious phenomenon because of its Vedic origins. One of the most stable and recurring themes in caste from the pre-colonial times to the present age is the conflict posed by superior status of the priests or Brahmins, who derive their elite position from their proximity to the Vedic scriptures.

Caste is an all pervasive social and political system that discriminates between a pure elite and a polluted servant. However, some predominant rules are largely associated with the Hindu religion and its numerous scriptures. Therefore, many question the role of a religion which sanctions such an ascribed and discriminatory stratification system that invests a minority to control the lives of the majority on the meager grounds of having been born into an elite/high caste and defy universal principles of freedom and equality.

In order to resolve this conflict the traditional Hindu adherence to a system where each person's occupation and lot in life is pre-determined without any scope for mobility needs to be explained and elaborated. If the earlier Varna system is assumed to be the basis of the present day caste system, then how can such an ascribed/pre-determined categorization of occupations benefit the society and contribute towards material and spiritual development? This is a fundamental challenge facing Hinduism.

D. **Transmitting Hinduism as Spiritual Communication**

Faith has been the starting point of all religions. All religions begin with faith—faith in an object—a prophet and his teachings, a book, an idol or individual, and so on. Religious teaching, from its earliest stages, has also been predominantly oral – if we look at the earliest

teachers of Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism, they all began as words, stories, parables narrated by Prophet Mohammed, Jesus, and Buddha respectively to their followers.

In Hinduism, there is no one such central figure. There are, however, a number of sacred texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, etc. which prescribe religious, social and philosophical norms and values, meant to alleviate human suffering and guide one towards the ultimate goal which, in Hinduism, is salvation or merging with the all-pervasive being known as Brahman.

But a major impediment in benefitting from the knowledge contained in these texts, is that they are mostly written in Sanskrit—a classical language that is not spoken anymore in India. The 2001 Official Census of India recorded 14,135 persons claiming Sanskrit to be their native language, which is a very small number compared to the 1.18 billion total population of the country. If that be the case, then how will the religion and its teachings reach its followers? Hinduism relies on Acharyas (teachers), Gurus (spiritual teachers or guides) and Maths (monastic institutions) to transmit religious and spiritual knowledge.

1. **The concepts of Acharya and Guru**

If the question is raised as to who would be a fitting person or expert to expound on Hinduism, then it has to be one who is revered among them. There are two types of teachers—the Acharya and the Guru. The Acharya is the Sanskrit word for teacher – in the traditional society, one who enquired into the meaning of the scriptures, lived in accordance with them and imparts the knowledge contained in them. He sets an example by living according to the tradition he preaches. Any person with knowledge or expertise in a field of knowledge, which in the case of Hinduism is the Holy Scriptures, is an Acharya.

A Guru on the other hand, is one who is inwardly great. It is not necessary for him to know the scriptures or live according to them or set an example. He is one who has realized the supreme and will guide his/her disciple towards that spiritual enlightenment which according to Hinduism is the ultimate goal of life. Mlecko (1982) says that in all religions importance is given to the teacher for one's spiritual development; this is especially true in the Guru tradition in Hinduism. "He is the personal teacher of spirituality, that is, of the basic, ultimate values perceived within the Hindu tradition. Further, the Guru possesses experiential knowledge, not only intellectual knowledge, of these values" (p. 34). Without the grace or the blessing of the Guru, it is even said that one cannot even think of his/her spiritual progress.

The Guru is given more importance than God in the Hindu scriptures as he is considered to be God on earth. A Sanskrit prayer goes thus –

*Guru Brahma, Guru Vishnuh, Guru Devo Maheshwaraha,
Guru Saakshaath Parambrahma,
Thasmay Shree Gurave Namaha.*

[The Guru is Brahma (God of creation), Guru is Vishnu (God of preservation) and the Guru is Shiva (God of destruction). I bow to my Guru who is the supreme omnipresent being incarnate himself.]

This very popular prayer chanted all over India reveals how important the Guru is. Hindus believe that God reveals himself through the Guru – the Guru's word is God's word.

2. **The institution of Math**

A Math (pronounced Mutt) is a Hindu monastic institution whose primary function is to propagate a particular branch of Hindu philosophy. The same sect of Hindus can have many Maths each with its own head and propagating a different philosophy of Hinduism. These Maths

usually have the dedicated following of the Brahmins, - the priest and scholarly caste. Each head is appointed at a very young age by his predecessor and there is some divine intervention involved, apart from proficiency in Vedas and scriptures, in the selection process.

Maths also serve as schools of knowledge established by saints of the past to spread the teachings of Hinduism. In the olden days, families would send their children to the Maths where they would learn the scriptures from Acharyas. Every once in a while, there would also be men in these Maths, who were Gurus – a spiritual guide who would help followers achieve the ultimate Hindu goal of salvation.

3. **The Sage of Kanchi and his teachings**

One such famous and popular Guru in 20th century India was Shri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi of the Kanchi Kamakoti Math. The records of the Kanchi Kamakoti Math date its history back to the 5 BC and it propagates a Hindu philosophy known as the Advaita philosophy.

Many consider the Sage of Kanchi, Paramacharya Shri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi (1894 – 1994) to be an Acharya as well as a Guru. He not only lived his life according to the Advaita tradition he belonged to, but is considered by many to be their Guru as he was a self-realized soul who has inwardly guided a number of people towards spiritual enlightenment (Ganapathi, 1976, pp. i-viii). As the 69th head of the Kanchi Math, he was called a “Jagadguru” (universal teacher) and “Paramacharya” (supreme teacher) owing to the immense popularity and following he garnered. Paul Brunton, the famous Western philosopher and mystic called him the “only true monk of the 20th century” (SIES, 2001).

He was a saint and a spiritual leader with deep knowledge of the Hindu Vedic scriptures and the simple ascetic life he led made him very popular and many accepted him as their Guru. He was anointed as the head pontiff of the Kanchi Math at the age of 13. He was very well

versed in all the Hindu scriptures, spoke 17 languages which included some foreign languages and twice undertook a pilgrimage on foot from the southernmost tip of India to the Northern plains. Some of his very staunch devotees include many heads of state of India, The King and Queen of Nepal, Queen Mother of Greece, the Dalai Lama, and Paul Brunton (SIES, 2001). The following of all these eminent people added to his popularity and credibility.

He was head of the Math for 87 years and lived to the age of 100. This gave him the opportunity to reach out to 3 generations of followers. The documentary *Sage of Kanchi* (SIES, 2001) says that many prominent Sanskrit priests and scholars of the period consider the Paramcharya's authority on the Vedas to be unsurpassed, and his reliability as a narrator and translator of the Vedas was unquestioned.

The teachings of Shri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi have been well documented in the form of a 7-volume Tamil book named *Deivathin Kural (Voice of God)*, a compilation of speeches and talks given by him from 1932 – 1973, from a decade before India gained independence to 3 decades after. *Deivathin Kural* elaborates on a variety of subjects such as philosophy, science, religion, family, and so on, for over a period of 40 years. The book, *Hindu Dharma: The Universal Way of Life* is the English translation of the first two volumes of *Deivathin Kural* which contain the basic facts about the Hindu way of life and its practice.

E. **Research Questions**

Since Hinduism has existed for thousands of years, many rituals, prayers, social institutions and practices are already in place and have become a part of everyday life of people – it has become entwined with their way of life and many may just follow the rituals without much thought into its purpose. Also, with the advent of Western thought and Western education, there are many who question the logic behind such rituals – elaborate sacrifices, horoscope

matching before fixing a marriage, rituals to pacify ill effects of malefic planets, expensive 5-day Vedic wedding ceremonies, etc. Many deem these to be unnecessary or as mere superstition, and in case of institutions such as the caste system, as exceedingly discriminatory and meant solely for the benefit of the upper castes.

One challenge the Paramacharya faces is to explain ancient rituals, traditions and knowledge systems, passed on from generation to generation, so that the rationale behind them is explicit to readers. This task is made more challenging, as Sanskrit, having acquired the status of a classical language, is no longer a spoken language. Knowledge contained in ancient Vedic texts is no longer easily comprehensible by the masses and the spiritual leader must rely on narratives to remove the incomprehensibility created by the ancient language of Hindu scriptures.

Now, it would be extremely difficult for a common person or follower of the faith to go back to the text and verify their belief system or gain an understanding of why they have been saying those particular prayers, or practicing a set of rituals, or the reason and logic behind certain social institutions such as the caste system which is religious in its origin. The very purpose of the Hindu faith may be in question for many. Here, the Paramacharya refamiliarizes them with the religion by providing more information about it and placing the events or teachings or scriptures into comprehensible thematic structures and schemes and relating it to their everyday life.

What are some narrative devices used to make ancient Vedic knowledge and traditional Hindu beliefs and rituals relevant to the modern lives led by today's Hindus? This leads me to the following two research questions: Caste is an all-encompassing societal structure that determines the social, political, economic and religious lives of Hindus. How does the Paramacharya use narratives to establish the meaning, significance and beneficial use of this

macro-structure which is discriminatory and has led to a number of social evils and problems in India? This thesis also seeks to analyze the redefinition of micro-level issues such as specific practices and traditions that seem to have lost their relevance and usefulness in today's India. Specifically, I seek to understand how the Paramacharya's narratives make the ancient traditions of child marriage more comprehensible and relevant to modern Hindus?

ⁱ Brahmins and other upper castes that adorn a sacred thread are known as *dwija* or twice-born castes. The thread ceremony known as *Upanayanam* is considered a second birth and often, it is the sacred thread that bestows the wearer with the authority to perform the duties of their respective caste.

III. METHODS

In this thesis, the main artifact for analysis is the book *Hindu Dharma* which contains the speeches of the Sage of Kanchi on caste and child marriage. I seek to analyze the use of narrative devices—the narrative tone and structure— of the Paramacharya’s talks to transmit knowledge about Hinduism. In the following, I first explain how oral transmission as a form of spiritual communication helps reinterpret the past; I then present the text analyzed and the analytical framework used for the study.

A. **Oral Transmission of Ideas and the Role of Stories/Narratives**

Oral transmission of ideas has been an inherent part of learning and communication all over the world since time immemorial. Vansina (1985) says that oral traditions, constantly used as source material in the past, were also the fountainhead of many ancient writings of the Mediterranean, India, Japan, China and Europe in the Middle Ages.

Oral traditions serve as historical sources, but of a special type because they are capable of being transmitted orally (Vansina, 1985). When transmitted orally, thoughts gain more expressivity and also due to the element of feedback afforded by face-to-face communication; some amount of clarity can also be attributed to the use of more simple and colloquial language in oral communication. Herman (2009) defines narrative as a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change.

Oral traditions invariably employ the use of stories. Early lessons on moral values, religious teachings came from sources such as Aesop’s fables, mythological stories about gods and demons, and so on. Our lives with stories start early and go on ceaselessly (Bruner, 2002).

Stories help us make sense of the world around us and even distorted or incomplete facts and events become a part of reality.

Almost everyone would remember some childhood story which provided one with an explanation for certain phenomenon which are not very intelligible and needed some explanation. Neumeier (1969) says that “humans have tacit (unarticulated, they don’t know they have it) knowledge that stories do resolve” (p. 515). When put in the form of a story they probably fit into our view of the world and remove the incomprehensibility, doubts and fears associated with it.

White (1978), Collingwood (1956) and Worthington (1996) state that stories or narratives are present in our everyday lives and they help plot incidents, ideas and knowledge into a structure that is comprehensible to us. Hence, it familiarizes the unfamiliar and makes it understandable. When the reader understands the form and structure defined by the narrator, he/she will understand the significance of the events being described in the story (White, 1978). This is how he/she will follow the story, understand it and “get the point” behind it and ultimately, understand the morals, values and meanings that exist behind the characters, events and plots.

White (1978) talks of the importance of the operation of emplotment; he contends that the original mysticism of the events, strangeness or mystery is dispelled and they become part of a familiar configuration. The narrative emplots the events in a structure and makes it more familiar and recognizable, but it need not explain events in details because it must be kept in mind that the members are already familiar with the cultural context or the cultural endowment within which these operations take place and hence, they will also be acquainted with the metanarrative being described.

Following the same line of thought, history can be seen as a narrative created by the historian, which refamiliarizes institutions and social orders that have lost their original function and significance in society (White, 1978). The role of the narrator, or in this case the historian, must also be analyzed – is he/she being an impartial reporter of events or are his/her evaluations and judgments and attitude affecting the narrative as well. For this we have to consider the motive of the narrator – why is he/she creating this narrative in the first place – for what purpose?

Prince (1982) in his work on narratology talks of those words used in narratives which indicate the attitudes and feelings of the narrator toward his/her narration. White (1978) adds to this point by saying that the narrator gives human situations those forms which will establish his/her identity as a “member of one cultural endowment than another”. Here, it is necessary to identify whether the reader is familiar with the cultural endowment of which the story is a part.

Now if we consider this abstract notion in terms of institutions which have lost their significance in society – we can deduce that in a society whose members do not understand the relevance of certain institutions or question its legitimacy and meaning, narrative – especially that created by one in the role of a historian, plays a major role in refamiliarizing the institution to its members and making it more relevant to them and establishing its significance in their lives.

Therefore, we look at Hinduism through White’s explanation of narratives as a device through which the historian translates original historical documents into historical narratives so that they become more relevant to present day living and take on a recognizable structure, defined by an insider familiar with their lifestyle. And so, the Vedas become the original historical documents that form the basic source of knowledge about Hinduism, Shri

Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi, the historian who has a command over the knowledge contained in it, and his speeches and talks to people as the historical narrative which has been recorded in the forms of various magazine articles, press releases, and books such as the Voice of God.

White's concept of the narrator establishing his identity as member of a particular cultural endowment also needs to be specified here because the speeches and talks of the Paramacharya in this book are a compilation of answers to specific questions posed by devotees and followers, articles published in local magazines, etc. The implication that follows is that the communication undertaken by the Paramacharya is for Hindus themselves. It can be defined as an inside expert's explanation to fellow insiders. Even though there are interviews and discussions with foreigners as well, they are given with the assumption that those reading or listening possess prior knowledge about Hinduism. The question as to whether such narratives are faithful in their reproduction of the original Vedas is also not a relevant one because it is the strangeness and non-comprehensibility of the Vedas that has prompted the creation of the narrative – to not view it literally, but to suit it to today's life.

B. **Text to be Analyzed**

Paramacharya's teaching of Hinduism not only transmits but also redefines Hinduism in a time of conflicting values and life styles; he mediates the gap between traditional Indian practices, and modern—usually Western—scientific orientations at both micro and macro levels. For the purpose of this study, an analysis will be done of *Hindu Dharma*, a translation of the first 2 volumes of *Deivathin Kural (Voice of God)* which specifically deal with Hindu religion—its basic teachings, philosophies and concepts.

The original Tamil volume *Deivathin Kural* was compiled by a person named Ra. Ganapathi from a number of sources such as the weekly columns written by Paramacharya in a

local magazine named *Kalki*, official releases and publications of the Kanchi Math, tapes of conversations with devotees and during meetings, gatherings, and interviews (Ganapathi, 1976, pp. iii - viii). In his foreword in the original Tamil book, Ganapathi makes a special mention of 3 sources that provided most of the information in the form of audio tapes of the Paramacharya's speeches namely *Kalki* magazine, Kamakoti Pradeep magazine and M/s P.G.Pal & Company.

Deivathin Kural was published by Vanathi Publishers, Chennai, whose owner had received the blessings and approval of the Paramacharya's successor, Shri Shri Jayendra Saraswathi. There is a notion in Hindu Philosophy that any book or any piece of writing about a great saint cannot be written or published without the explicit blessings or grace of the said saint. So, the permission received from the Paramacharya's successor, according to Ganapathi, was very important in the publication of the book because without it the project might not have been undertaken at all. And that is why it is to be noted that all the books containing the Paramacharya's talks and discussions credit him as the author and the editors or translators consider themselves to be mere instruments through whom the saint got his holy work done. (Ganapathi, 1976, pp. vi–vii).

What could be the reasons which prompted the publishers to compile the Paramacharya's teachings that narrate the basic tenets of Hinduism and its relevance in modern day? The context in which *Deivathin Kural* features is best provided by a line in the Translator's Note in *Hindu Dharma: The Universal Way of Life*, which says "Hindus know less about their religion than Christians or Muslims know about their religions" (Chinnavan, 1995, p. xvii). This refers to the fact that there is a gap in knowledge – Chinnavan, in the translator's note further says that Western education and the modern way of living may have led today's Hindu to feel that he/she

does not know anything about his/her religion or may question its relevance in the modern society.

The English translation has been published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, an educational trust established in 1938 by freedom fighter K. M. Munshi with the intention of revitalizing Indian culture and heritage. They publish in a number of Indian languages and English. The Bharatiya Vidhya Bhavan is well known in India for its publications that seek to present the modern generation with traditional Indian wisdom in English. A typical urban Indian goes to an English medium school and learns his/her mother tongue only as a second language. So, *Hindu Dharma: The Universal Way of Life*, though a translation of speeches delivered 40-50 years ago, would also find its use in the current scenario where urban, educated youngsters are said to have moved away from the traditional occupations of their ancestors and owing to globalization and other factors, would not have much access to the ancient texts and the knowledge contained in them.

To provide answers to the specified questions, I will analyze specific chapters in the book which deal with conflicts concerning caste and affiliated social practices such as child marriage.

Question 1 deals with the need and rationale behind the institution of caste which has had many detrimental consequences for the Indian society. This conflict has been dealt with in a separate section that has been titled *Varna Dharma for Universal Well Being*; In Indian languages, the caste system is called Varnashrama or Varna Dharma. This section consists of 17 chapters that deal with topics such as the notion of caste, equal opportunities in caste, how Brahmins or the priest caste are not the privileged caste and how the lower castes are not without advantages.

Question 2 deals with how the Paramacharya's narratives make ancient beliefs, rituals and traditions, such as child marriage, more relevant to the modern scientific life led by today's Hindus. For the analysis of the conflicts relating to child marriage, I choose to study Part 18 of The Hindu Dharma titled *Marriage*. The Acharya uses 17 chapters to explain the benefits of child marriage – an institution that has been the cause of many social evils such as female infanticide, dowry, widow burning, and so on.

C. **Analytical Framework**

White (1978) adds Levi-Strauss' explanation as to how events in history might not be very comprehensible in isolation, but when integrated into a system, they might gain coherence. This cohesion need not arise from a chronicle which is chronological in nature, because the historian fashions his/her own story of what really happened.

Foss (1996) lays down the sequence for analyzing a narrative artifact. According to Foss (1996), a comprehensive analysis of the narration has to pay attention to the following points: Narrator, Reliability of the Narrator, Events, Temporal Relations, Causal Relations, Audience, and Theme. Text will be analyzed along these main criteria to address the research questions:

- a. Setting – Setting refers to the environment surrounding the narrative. This can be interpreted as the circumstances surrounding the characters and events. An analysis of the setting could help us understand the need for redefinition.
- b. Characters – Does the Acharya's narratives have human characters? If so, what role do they play? What are their characteristics and qualities and how do they help in redefining Hinduism or help in the formation of a new plot?
- c. Narrator –The narrator is the most important aspect of this particular narrative. If Hinduism is seen as history of the people of India - culture, traditions and practices that

are contained in the Vedas and other scriptures, then a spiritual leader would be the historian. He is the historian who analyses and translates the knowledge contained in the Vedas to fit the present lives of Hindus. He is the historian who through his oral narratives – speeches and talks – imparts knowledge about the Hindu way of life to its followers. This section also deals with the narrator’s reliability which is directly related to his credibility as a knowledgeable source. How learned is the narrator? Can his narration be considered to be faithful to the original document? Does the narrator have the capability to undertake the task of translating the original text and interpret it appropriately?

- d. Events – Barthes (1972) talks of how a narrative can be broken down into various functional units and that each one of these functions are inherently significant to the analysis. What are the specific events used by the Paramacharya to explain his standpoint, are there references to certain people or actors that help him achieve his purpose, does he refer to specific stories or instances from the Vedic texts to elaborate his point, does he adopt a question-answer format in his talks? These would constitute the main events that comprise the core of the narrative analysis.
- e. Temporal Relations – Foss (1996) defines temporal relations as “the relationship between natural order of the events as they occurred and the order of their presentation in telling of the narrative” (p. 404). Sandelowski (1991) says that narrative analyses focus on the discourse itself, on the telling themselves and the methods employed by the individuals to make meanings in stories and this, in turn, reveals the discontinuities between the story and the experience. Would the narratives used by the Paramacharya to explain, for example, the caste system, be different from the actual reality of caste as experienced or

perceived by a reader of the book? What time frame does the Acharya impose on his narratives?

- f. Causal Relations – The most important aspect of narrative theory is the establishment of a cause-effect relationship. Foss mentions that an important question to be asked here is whether the cause is presented prior to the effect or after it? This is the analysis that will determine the validity of the arguments put forth by Paramacharya and the logical reasoning behind it. Do the narratives have a logical thread running through them to convince a Western educated Hindu in the language of logical reasoning? White (1978) cites Hegel who says that in fields of study like history where there are no definite terminologies like physics and chemistry, the inherent relationships described by the historian between objects will be those imposed by the historian him-/herself “in the act of identifying and describing the objects that he [*sic*] finds there”. When this analysis is being done, we have to determine whether there arise any ambiguities in his narration and if there are any fallacies that might go against common reasoning. The recognition of these fallacies or discrepancies will reveal the discontinuities between the story and the experience as explained by Sandelowski (1991).
- g. Audience – Foss describes audience in terms of the narrator’s evaluation of the audience’s knowledge, personality and abilities. The book’s preface assumes that an audience who is aware of the world around them, an audience who is acquainted with the world beyond their own and one whose education has led them to question their traditions and seek answers and a logical reasoning behind the practices and prayers in Hinduism. Does this presumption continue in the narratives of the Paramacharya as well? Are the

audience addressed directly? From what standpoint does he look at his reader? Is there a specific audience that he seems to be addressing?

- h. Theme—Does the Paramacharya's narratives on caste and child marriage have common themes that aid in their redefinition? Shri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi was the head pontiff of the Kanchi Math whose aim is to propagate the Advaita philosophy. Advaita philosophy follows the principle that human and divine is one and the same and that there is no difference between one organism and the other as divine exists in everything and hence, to discover one's true divine self is to achieve salvation. Do his talks in any manner propagate this philosophy? Or are there any other themes that dominate his narrative? Also, it can be analyzed if the identification of this theme would help answer questions about the Paramacharya's credibility, his purpose behind the talks, also questions about the audience.

In such a situation where the original has lost relevance and in light of Foss's eight criteria, I attempt to look at the narratives of a spiritual leader belonging to one of the oldest religious establishments in India and analyze his teachings and how through oral communication he tries to establish a connection between an ancient religion and its modern practitioners.

IV. NARRATIVES ON CASTE SYSTEM

The caste system has been held responsible for a number of social evils plaguing the Indian society. Akin to the western feudal order, the caste system stratifies society into a number of groups (jatis) based on occupation. Over time, this system turned discriminatory as notions of purity and pollution were associated with each occupation and certain castes came to be regarded as “pure” and thus, “elite”; while others came to be regarded as “polluted” and subsequently, “untouchable” or “low”.

Those categorized as “low” or “untouchable” also suffered discrimination in a number of ways. They were denied access to education, political rights, jobs, etc. and in certain extreme cases, even denied access to clean drinking water, forced to stay in quarters outside the city, not allowed to touch or come into physical contact with those considered high or pure.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, a number of social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananda Saraswathi, proclaimed that the Indian way of life had become polluted due to factors such as the caste system, untouchability, idol worship, and various other rituals. The Indian society would become modernized and just only if it were rid of such social evils. Such thinking along with increasing religious fundamentalism, influence of Western education and ideas, gradual abandonment of traditional occupations reduced the relevance of the caste system in the modern Hindu’s life and made him/her question its role. Apart from that, gradual politicization of caste issues, continued discrimination against lower castes and the presence of an ancient religious (Vedic) system far removed from the modern scientific life drew criticism from modern day Hindus (Ashby, 1974).

To such a complicated scenario, the Sage of Kanchi, Shri Shri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi introduces caste in a different light and claims that it is not only beneficial for society, but has contributed to the greatness of the Indian society and the survival of Hinduism for over 4000 years. In this chapter I examine the narratives and the narrative devices employed by the Paramacharya in redefining caste by explaining its original purpose and how it is beneficial for society.

A. **The Setting**

The Acharya's narratives are set during the period from 1932 to 1973. The 4 decades represent a period of great change and revolution in India. The British crown by end of the 19th century had complete control over India's administration and economy. It was during this period that the notions of caste became more rigid and the government established reservation and recruitment policies that increased the divide between various castes and religions in India. The Acharya's narratives are set in a period replete with changes in India when a newly independent government was trying to repair the damages caused by 300 years of colonization, when the traditional order fell apart due to the emergence of new employment and educational opportunities and when social reformers were rapidly questioning the older caste hierarchy and trying to bring about changes with political and legislative support.

The Sage of Kanchi was a highly respected spiritual leader and orator considered to be an expert in a number of subjects other than religion and spirituality such as physics, linguistics, astrology, music, history, etc. Through his narratives he tries to redefine and reintroduce the caste system to an audience who could not relate to the older traditional caste order. Most people either performed certain caste related duties out of habit, superstition or they wanted to rid the society of the caste system and establish a casteless and equal society (Ashby, 1974).

B. **The Key Theme: Caste as an Operational Model of Division of Labour**

“Meeting the needs of man entails many types of physical as well as intellectual work...Would it be possible - or practicable - for each one of us to grow rice or wheat, to make salt or to produce clothing and books?” (p. 51). The Acharya starts his explanation by stating that Caste is nothing but Division of Labour. According to him, the concept of division of labour found expression in the Vedic scriptures as the Varna Dharma or the caste system. He redefines caste system as the operational version of the economic concept of division of labour and calls it “an ideal path of happiness for us by creating a system which is to the advantage of all and in which different sections of people are allotted different occupations” (p. 51). The key theme for the Acharya’s narratives on caste is that this division of labor is the best design for individuals to realize their potential in a cooperative, cohesive, and well-functioning society whose welfare will in turn benefit individuals. It is portrayed as a meritocratic society that eliminates jealousy and competition, a union that promotes kinship in society and a system that has led to the continuation of Hinduism for over 5000 years.

1. **A meritocracy that benefits all by eliminating negative human traits**

Why is caste an ideal path? Without the presence of a hereditary system like jati, people want to perform only those jobs that are prestigious and profitable and hence, the welfare of society would suffer. He says that this conflict is resolved in Hinduism where each jati is assigned a particular vocation. Since the system is hereditary in nature, one performs the task with the belief that it has been ordained by God and it is His will.

Caste is said to have helped combat human desires and jealousy, serving the greater good of society, when “people had their own hereditary calling and they were assured of their

livelihood. This meant peace and stability in society...the stability afforded by the system facilitated the birth of countless numbers of individuals who exemplified all that is noble in mankind. In the absence of a similar institution, jealousy and rivalry became disturbing factors in the life of other countries” (p. 65).

2. **A union that interconnects people by feelings of kinship**

Apart from these economic benefits, the Acharya says that in such close-knit societies, caste also performed important social control functions. No external agent of social control such as today’s police existed. He describes each Varna as being “divided into a number of jatis [smaller bundles], with each jati having a headman with the authority to punish offenders” (p. 58). If a deviance was committed by a person, then his/her particular caste elders or leaders will punish him/her by excommunicating them and ex-communication was considered to be a very harsh and humiliating punishment for anyone to endure. He compares this to modern times where people stay attached to their caste only because of the special privileges and opportunities it affords them.

According to the Acharya, this control is not an external mechanism, but an internal mechanism tied to the self-respect and pride exhibited by each caste in being who they were:

Members of each jati considered themselves the supreme authority in managing their affairs. This naturally gave them sense of contentment and satisfaction. If each jati had no respect for itself no one would have taken excommunication to heart. When the entire society was divided into small groups called jatis, not only did one jati have affection for another, each also trusted the other. There was indeed a feeling of kinship among all members of the community. This was the reason why the threat of excommunication was dreaded. (p. 59)

3. **A system that ensures the continuation of the Vedic religion by providing universal as well as individual codes of conduct**

Shri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi attributes the continuity of the 5000 year old Vedic religion to the caste system. He validates this claim by stating that all other religions and societies prescribed only universal codes of conduct without any sociological basis. However in Hinduism, there are two types of codes of conduct - universal codes known as *samanya dharma* were common to all and individual codes were specific to each caste and known as *visesa dharma* based on the nature of their hereditary occupation. In chapter 3, *Unity in Diversity*, the Acharya states that the presence of individual religious codes for each caste were meant to support the special needs of their occupations and lifestyles and hence, made practice of religion a part of everyday life which ensured the longevity of Hinduism. “If the special duties of the various varnas were made common to all a situation would arise in which no one would observe any dharma” (p. 55).

This also seems to give him a premise to situate the existence of varying customs and traditions. They are portrayed not as a means of creating differences between people, but rather as a method of increasing efficiency of work, promoting interdependence and a way to ensure that norms are followed.

That this interdependence makes division of labor a force of success and ensures longevity of Hinduism is further supported by several analogies. First, the Acharya uses the analogy of the ease in tying small bundles of sticks into a larger bundle vs. trying to tie a large number of fire sticks together into one big bundle. The bundle with smaller tied bundles of sticks is better secured than the other. Another example is an airship using many small air bags than just one big gas bag. He uses these 2 examples and compares the single large air bag and large

fire stick bundle to ancient religions that prescribe only universal codes. The one with smaller bundles and smaller air bags is Hinduism which has separate codes for each caste that are translations of the universal codes to fit the occupation and lifestyle of each caste. With these analogies, the economic narrative of division of labour takes on religious significance as it proves the point that the Varna Dharma which originates from the Vedas meant for religious and spiritual development, has also provided solution to an economic issue thereby integrating religion and society into one sphere instead of separating the two and treating them as mutually exclusive.

C. **Causal Relations: Caste in Operation**

Causation is the most primary element of narrativity. And its function is to bring about an effect that would satisfy the reader –emotionally or intellectually – intellectuality being the forte of serious fiction or non-fiction.

The ideal caste system comes down to specific castes, each with its hereditary occupations and performance of specific rituals. Among all castes, the Brahmin forms the central character in much of the Acharya's narratives while he discusses very little concerning untouchability. After the initial redefinition of caste in terms of its 3 main key features, the narratives of the Acharya start focusing on the Brahmin and caste is redefined through the character of the Brahmin.

1. **Those responsible for the decay of the caste system**

The Brahmin in the narratives of the Acharya is portrayed as a fallen hero - one whose existence was for the benefit of the rest of the world, but falls prey to temptation which comes his/her way in the form of Western education, British administrative jobs and modern technology. The Acharya vilifies the Brahmins for causing the decay of the caste system.

The Acharya's narratives on caste in the first 5 chapters deal exclusively with explaining the purpose behind the caste system and the benefits it bestows on society. However, from the 6th chapter titled "Who is responsible for the decay of the Varna Dharma", the Acharya introduces a character into his narratives. He attributes the decay of the caste system to the Brahmin who did and still occupies a high social status in Indian society. He attempts to establish very definitive cause-effect relationships—it is the greed of the Brahmin and his abandonment of traditional occupation that caused the decay of caste system and decline of India's greatness and stability. The villain or rather the anti-hero in Acharya's narrative on caste is the Brahmin. The use of phrases such as "relinquished the duties of his birth", "took to the mundane learning of the West", "fell to the lure of jobs offered by his white master and aped him in dress, manners and attitudes, threw to the winds the noble dharma he had inherited from the Vedic seers" (p. 69) demonstrate how the Brahmin had moved from his noble ways of the past, where he lived a selfless life and was a role model for other jatis.

The Brahmins were among the first to be modernized and westernized. Due to their literate/educated background, they were employed by the British in various capacities in banks, collectorates and various other government offices. Traditionally, the Brahmin who was supposed to live a poor life dedicated to the spiritual development of society was supported by funds provided by other castes that respected him and took care of his needs. But when the Brahmin abandoned his traditional duties and fell slave to money – other groups stopped their support, and he lost his respect in society. Others also followed his example and left their traditional occupations, moved to urban areas in search of jobs offered by the British and consequently, many traditional occupations and handicrafts suffered, leading to unemployment and giving way to feelings of jealousy, ill-will, inequality and discontentment in society. This

ultimately led to the breakdown of the society as well.

The Acharya also attributes part of the blame for the decay of caste on the “white man” and the “lure of modern technology” (p. 70). We could theorize that the antagonist in the Acharya’s narrative on caste – the villain who lured the Brahmin primarily and other castes to abandon their traditional occupations were the British and modern technology. In his narratives, the Acharya mentions that the British propagated the Aryan-Dravidian race theory to divide children born of the same mother. There might be some validity in this statement because the Dravidian parties of Tamilnadu use the same theory to distinguish themselves from Brahmins and portray them as foreigners who invaded and suppressed the original inhabitants of India.

The Paramacharya also criticizes technology and the rapid technological revolution that has transformed the world in past few centuries. He says that while technology does make life and tasks much simpler, it also produces the unwanted desire of sensual gratification which affects the spiritual development of an individual. Apart from that, he says that another product of the white man’s sciences is rationalism “which undermined people's faith in religion and persuaded some to believe that the religious truths that are based on faith and are inwardly experienced are nothing but deception” (p. 70).

2. **Why do we need a Brahmin caste?**

Scholars such as Bayly, Dutt, Sarkin and Koenig agree that since the earliest days of caste, the one constant feature has been existent of an elite Brahmin or priest caste. Typically employed as priests, teachers, scholars, advisors to kings and ministers, the societal position of Brahmins was a privileged one. Their mastery and proximity to the Vedas and other religious scriptures bestowed them with religious privileges not enjoyed by most other castes. The authority and status of the Brahmins has been a debated topic for a long time. Even Buddha is

said to have established Buddhism as a means to provide common men with a simple path of praying and salvation that did not involve use of Sanskrit and ancient texts that required the Brahmin as an interpreter or preceptor.

The exclusive rights of the Brahmin over the Vedas which are the most sacred and basic texts of Hinduism, have often been questioned. Veda schools known as Vedapathashaalas admit only Brahmin boys. During the British period, the notions of purity and pollution became more rigid and certain occupations especially those of the Brahmins were considered to be very pure while those occupations which involve physical work such as tanning, etc. were considered polluted (Bayly, 1999).

Historians refer to the Brahmins as an elite group with high social standing. The Acharya, however, eliminates the notions of privilege and money while redefining the Brahmin. He says that the Brahmin is well-respected in society because he is not in pursuit of money. Living a life of penury, the Brahmins' occupation is to preserve the sound of the Vedas, perform Vedic rituals and sacrifices that inspire positive vibrations in people and inspire spiritual development. Therefore, as a group that lived for the welfare of others without acquiring wealth, the Brahmins were a role model for others. They contributed to the spiritual development of the society and lived in utter penury to exemplify the values of selflessness and detachment from materialism.

The Acharya says that even though the Brahmin in modern times has lost his path and caused the decay of the beneficial caste system, the duty or occupation of the Brahmin is still very essential to society. He explains the need for a Brahmin caste by launching into a metaphysical explanation of the sound of the Vedas that bestow numerous benefits on this world. The metaphysical explanation answers doubts regarding the need for a caste called the Brahmin

and demonstrates the Acharya's attempts to define the Vedas in a scientific language to the modern generation. At the very least, this scientific definition could inculcate within the reader a curiosity to explore the physics and science in Hinduism.

The Acharya accomplishes this by redefining the Vedas in terms of sound, energy and matter. These chapters are a detour from the narrative path established thus far. The Acharya speaks of all creation in this world as "a product of sound" – a concept "substantiated by science itself" and goes on to classify thoughts as a type of creation as well. He says if this be the case, then we could also claim that if certain sounds are produced, then they produce certain thoughts in human beings – good as well as bad. The ancient seers of the past discovered those good sounds which produce good thoughts in human beings. "If we can generate such sounds, good thoughts will permeate the minds of men. The mantras of the Vedas are sounds that have the power to inspire good thoughts in people" (pp. 82-83). The Acharya devotes an entire chapter explaining this in rather scientific terms with use of concepts such as microcosm and macrocosm, and other physics related terms.

The Acharya concludes his scientific explanation by saying that the production of such positive thoughts which lead to material and spiritual development of human beings is the occupation of the Brahmin. He says that like nuclear science or other specialized branches of science, preserving the sound of the Vedas is a very specialized task which is not very important in the material order of things or for everyday functioning of society, which is why a small minority is enough to practice the tradition. The Acharya's explanation might be viewed as answer to those critics who question the exclusive practice of the Vedas and Vedic rituals by Brahmins.

In contrast to such an elaborate explanation on the Brahmin's duty, the Acharya's narratives and explanations dealing with the topic of untouchability are very limited. The Acharya does not talk much of this concept of untouchability, even though it has come to define caste in modern India.

The notion of "untouchability" is a very sensitive yet much debated and discussed issue in India. Various castes, due to the menial nature of their occupations, were classified as untouchables by others and over a period of time, when the notions of purity and pollution became very rigid, these castes were the first ones to be affected as they were banished to live in outskirts, forbidden to enter the main village and in some extreme cases, denied even the most basic rights such as clean drinking water and adorning an upper garment.

"Let us leave aside for the moment the question of untouchability" (p. 66), Acharya says. However, his narratives do include instances of how people accepted this unequal order. The Acharya attempts to redefine this notion of pollution and purity by using sentences such as "If a white man happens to come into physical contact with a black man, the latter is taken to task. But if a priest in our country comes into similar contact with an untouchable, it is he (the priest) who is enjoined to have a bath" (p. 66).

He quotes incidents he "has heard" where Brahmins went to the outskirts to mingle with the so-called untouchables of the village, but even the untouchables protested against such magnanimity or attempts at equality as they understood the need for such physical divisions in society. The untouchable, he says, is not taken to task, but the Brahmin is enjoined to have a bath—that the Brahmin needs to take a bath itself speak of differences. If such differences were necessary, the Acharya does not delve into the details as to why the Brahmin has to be constantly physically pure. It is also interesting to note that the element of hearsay in some form detracts

from the authenticity and credibility of this particular report, implying that such mingling might not have actually happened and thus reinforcing the certainty of division.

3. **A cure for the decay: cutting off the head is not a cure for headache**

The Acharya says that though the caste system has decayed, it is still capable of being revived and he expresses his opinion by stating “Is cutting off the head a cure for headache?” During a time period that was tense with caste violence and clashes and when the government was making all possible strides to ensure equality among all, the above statement describes the sentiments of the Acharya on the issue of caste. He begs to differ from Mahatma Gandhi, who was famous for his fight against untouchability. The Acharya says that while Gandhiji believed that the Varnashrama had decayed beyond repair and must be discarded, the Acharya believes that caste can be revived. He quotes Gandhi to provide validity to his argument that caste is a beneficial organization:

I keep fighting against untouchability because I consider it an evil but I support varnasrama as healthy for society and believe that it is not the product of a narrow mind. This arrangement gives the labourer the same status as it does a great thinker. (p. 95)

The Acharya’s hope stems from people who still value the soul of the caste system – the Vedas. According to him, the Varna system is the backbone of Hinduism, and its essence is contained in the learning of the Vedas, which is still alive and practiced in a number of small Paatashaalas (Veda schools) that follow traditional teaching methods. He says that the commitment of this small group inspires hope in him that the Vedas and Varnashrama can be revived.

Paramacharya’s solution for resolving the conflict posed by the decay of caste is

reviving the learning of the Vedas and hence, he urges Brahmins to return to their traditional occupation. It is to be noted that the very mention of the term “Vedas” restricts the Acharya’s solution to Brahmins alone.

On the same note, he says that he does understand the difficulty faced by Brahmins in abandoning their present jobs. Hence, he urges them to send their children to Veda schools for at least an hour every day after regular school timings for 10 years from the age of 8 to 18, so that they can learn the Vedas and reap its benefits. He asks the Brahmins to take the initiative and rebuild the caste system by maintaining a group of people in society who chant the Vedas and its sound that brings happiness to all living creatures of this world.

The Acharya ends his narratives on caste with a chapter outlining his work in this lifetime, which is to revive the learning of the Vedas and ensure that future generations preserve this tradition which is capable of providing great spiritual and material benefit and he urges the Brahmin community to help him in this mission as it is their traditional caste duty and responsibility – their Dharma to preserve the sound of the Vedas.

D. **Temporal Relations: Caste in the Good Old Days**

One of the most important aspects of a narrative as defined by Foss (1996) is the temporal relations established through the narrative. Temporal relations refer to “the relationship between natural order of the events as they occurred and the order of their presentation in telling of the narrative” (p. 404). Sandelowski (1991) says that narrative analyses focus on the discourse, on the telling itself and the methods employed by the individuals to make meanings in stories and this, in turn, reveals the discontinuities between the story and the experience.

As a narrator the Archarya takes his audience to another age, era or realm. The reader is aware that the book contains lectures, discussions, addresses and discourses spoken and written

by the Acharya from 1932 to 1973; however, the texts by themselves do not contain any explicit hint about the time in which they were spoken or written other than a few subtle hints which might be reflective of the time they belong toⁱⁱ. And this element is what makes the Acharya's talks a narrative rather than an explanation or a lecture. Sandelowski (1991) says that narrative analyses focus on the discourse itself, on the telling themselves and the methods employed by the individuals to make meanings in stories and this, in turn, reveals the discontinuities between the story and the experience.

As mentioned earlier, the institution of caste is not a static entity and the evolution of caste has been well-recorded by historians and social scientists. It has changed and adapted itself to all the changes that have affected the Indian society over the centuries and continues to be a significant institution in the country. Though the origin of the system is still a matter of debate, its development during the past 500 years has been well-documented. Caste system in India is one of the most widely researched topics.

The same cannot be said of the Acharya's talks. When analysed from a temporal dimension, it is to be noted that the Acharya does not give a timeline of caste at all. His references to time are usually in the form of in the olden days, long ago, etc. In the original Tamil transcripts, he uses the words “அந்தக் காலத்தில்” (Antha Kaalathil) which literally means “in those times” or “in the old days”. The lack of reference to a specific time period raises doubts regarding the existence of a time when caste was beneficial to India because most of the scholarly literature on the subject refers to the system as a power structure that divided people along feudal lines.

Little temporal information is needed for readers to evoke a well-established mental time-frame (GroB, 1997). The use of terms such as in the olden days, in those days, or in the ancient

times evoke a sense of past typically associated with folk tales or fairy tales that talk of a time long ago when the norms and mores were different and at times convey a sense of perfection absent in today's world. Talk about sages and seers of the past who compiled the Vedas also reinforce this notion because most Hindus are familiar with ancient seers and sages only through mythological stories. There is also the concept of displacement which gives narrators their "poetic license" so to speak.

According to Aristotle, chronological explanation of events is considered the forte of historians and not narrators. Narrators are supposed to give importance to the plot rather than the chronology or timeline (Zwaan, Madden &, Stanfield, 2001). If analyzed in the light of this statement, then the absence of a specific timeline can be justified; but very little temporal information is required for readers to place a particular narrative in time. The narratives about the ideal practice of caste are located in "those days" that convey a sense of antiquity and past associated with mythology & legends.

However, when explaining the decay of caste system, the Acharya does bring in a timeline to explain the existence of certain factors that caused the decay. The Acharya says that even during the Muslim rule, Hindus managed to practice their traditional occupation, but it was with the entry of the British and the introduction of modern technology that Hindus left their traditional occupations. This paves way for an interpretation that the olden days referred to by the Acharya could very well be the period before British colonization of India. The two distinct periods mentioned in his narratives are the period before British entry when caste was beneficial and the period after British arrival which marked the decay of the Varna system.

This dichotomous timeframe makes the process of change rather dramatic than gradual. It also contradicts the previous research by Bayly (1999) and Srinivas (1962), who suggest that

even during Mughal rule, there was a certain level of administrative and political standardization that must have affected the practice of caste. They make suggestions of elite vs. common folk categorization that was existent during the period. However, such a timeline is absent in the Acharya's narratives.

E. **The Narrator and his Audiences**

1. **The narrator**

Shri Shri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi Swamikal, fondly referred to by his devotees and followers as Maha Periyavaal or simply Periyavaal, is an authoritative voice throughout the narrative who performs the role of a narrator, a teacher, an advocate and a mediator. The Sage of Kanchi was a highly respected spiritual leader and orator considered to be an expert in a number of subjects other than religion and spirituality such as physics, linguistics, astrology, music, history, etc. A reader is astounded by the knowledge possessed by the Guru who makes use of concepts from physics, history, geography, linguistics to prove his point. Despite such established proficiency, a conversational tone is maintained by the Acharya throughout the narrative, ensuring that an explanation is offered to the audience in their own language to facilitate better understanding of concepts.

When defining the Vedas with concepts from physics such as sound, vibrations and creation of matter, the Acharya plays the role of a mediator – a mediator between the past and the present. Such explanations might offer the younger generation with probable proof that Hinduism could have scientific elements and construct it as a way of life rather than superstition. He speaks to the scientific mind with the vocabulary best understood by them. Also, this increases the credibility of the Acharya – it portrays him as a rational teacher/leader rather than a spiritual saint or just the head of a religious institution.

Finally, the Acharya talks about his work and his mission in Chapter 10 titled, “My Work”. He says that his mission is to restore and revive the learning of the Vedas and ensure that it is preserved for future generations. Probably that is the reason that the Acharya concentrates a major portion of his narratives on convincing the Brahmins to make sure that their children learn the Vedas and utilize the knowledge contained in it for welfare of the society. How the Acharya sees himself can be best summarized in his own words, when he tells a Brahmin congregation about his feelings regarding their adherence of his advice:

It was in vain that I had laid down these conditions. Perhaps there was no desire on the part of the Brahmins. I had spoken to change their style of dress or their outlook or perhaps they did not have the courage to do it. But they requested me again and again that I should visit them. Eventually, I reconciled myself to accepting their invitation even though they had not acted on my words. “They still have some respect and affection for me,” I told myself. I will agree to their request and see whether my purpose will be served if I go into their midst and speak to them directly again. After all, what is the Matha for? It is meant for the welfare of the people, to cure them of their ills and turn them to the right path. It is my duty to speak to them again and again- whether or not they like it- about how in my opinion they have gone wrong (p. 105-106).

2. **The audience**

Narratives define not only the narrator, but they also the audience, as the narrator would cater his/her rhetoric according to the needs of his/her listeners. The fact that the Acharya redefines the basic concepts of caste might reflect the fact that his audience had a different concept of caste as being a system meant to hierarchically stratify people as high and low.

It can also be deduced that different portions of the text might seem relevant to different types of audience. The chapters which introduce caste system, its beneficial features for society could be for an audience from any part of the world. But as the Acharya starts addressing how the caste system has been crucial in the longevity of the Vedic religion, the target audience becomes narrower. The use of words such as “our religion”, “Western religions”, comparisons of India with rest of the world suggest that now the Acharya is addressing Indians specifically Hindus with the aim of instilling a sense of pride in them regarding the greatness of their religion.

After that the Acharya launches into a narrative about how the Brahmin caused the decay of the caste system and why society needs a Brahmin caste. Here, the audience includes the same set of Hindus mentioned above, but one can also deduce that the target audience might have been those who questioned Brahmin superiority as well as social reformers and rationalists who questioned the utility and relevance of the Vedas in the modern scientific world. The Acharya also uses these chapters to remind the Brahmins of their duties and criticize their role in the decay of caste.

Finally, when the Acharya talks about himself and his work, he is specifically addressing a Brahmin population requesting them to go back to their traditional occupations and revive the learning of the Vedas. These narratives might have been influenced by the fact that majority of the Math’s followers were Brahmins with the Acharya himself having been born in a Brahmin family. Since the Kanchi Math primarily had a Brahmin following, many of these talks might have been addressed only to Brahmins and regarding issues that they were facing at the time such as the self-respect movement in Tamilnadu in 1925 that evoked many anti-Brahmin sentiments. This movement gained political roots in the 1940s with the formation of various

Dravidian political parties (the party coming to power in 1967) that supported caste-based reservation and incited anti-Brahmin sentiments.

His narrative on caste is ended with a speech delivered by the Acharya on the occasion of 50th anniversary of his appointment as Head of Kanchi Math. He takes this opportunity to say that he has lot of things to tell the other castes, but since the image has been created in society that he is closest to the Brahmin (himself having been born into a Brahmin family) and unless the Brahmins follow the advice given by him, he is not qualified to offer any type of advice to other castes. The Acharya mentions in his speech that he has come to the city on the request of followers of the Math even though he does not prefer it. He also urges the Brahmins to follow his advice as that would give him the authority to provide guidance and advice to other caste groups as well, thereby indicating that most of his interactions and discussions are primarily with Brahmins.

The narrative might produce different effects for different types of audience. If the reader were a Brahmin, this narrative would serve to explain certain crucial factors about the duties of their caste to them. It could serve as a redemptive narrative that would help the Brahmin attain emotional satisfaction regarding their status in society (the elite Brahmin status has been a cause for debate in India, especially in Tamilnadu). It is also quite possible that this narrative maybe rejected by a non-Brahmin as one that justifies and legitimizes the superior status enjoyed by Brahmins in society.

Finally, also absent from the narratives is any specific reference to women and their role in the caste hierarchy. Even among the Brahmins, women are not allowed to be priests and have traditionally only been given domestic duties. The status of women in the traditional caste system still remains to be answered.

F. **Rebuttals to Challenges**

A defining characteristic of the Acharya's narratives is that he often includes audience questions and doubts in his narratives which create a conversational effect. As the book is a collection of speeches, discourses and discussions delivered by the Acharya through various public forums, doubts or possible doubts which might be raised in discussions are answered in a question-answer format.

The following are some such questions which provide a conversational tone to the Acharya's narratives:-

1. **Is caste a discriminatory system?**

The Acharya answers questions regarding the hierarchy created by the caste system by denying its negative impact on people. Caste is considered a discriminatory system today because it stratifies people into high vs. low, pure vs. polluted, right from birth and offers no scope for mobility due to its hereditary nature. The Acharya addresses this issue by saying that the caste system is a beneficial one and that once upon a time, people realized its benefit to the individual and society. He claims that everyone was content with this hierarchical system, as he observed no revolt: "our nation should have witnessed many a revolution if, as claimed by our social reformers, the people were kept suppressed in the varna system...people here never lamented before others that they were kept suppressed" (p. 65). He compares this to the American and French revolutions and validates his conclusion by saying that if people were truly suppressed by the caste system, then India would have seen many such revolts in her past.

That people have not rebelled may be due to many reasons; to conclude that people were satisfied with the caste system can be seen as flawed logical reasoning. But the Acharya substantiates his claim by contending that the reason for this contentment is due to the fact that

people lived for the benefit of the entire society and not just for themselves. He says that people were aware that their occupations not only provided them with a means of livelihood, but also fulfilled the needs of society. Hence, this created an interdependent society and there was no discrimination.

2. **Don't individual codes of conduct create inequalities among people?**

The individual codes of conduct which is much praised by the Acharya as having contributed to the longevity of Hinduism can also be criticized by many as creating differences among people by giving way to notions such as purity & pollution, and untouchability. However, the Acharya rationalizes his explanation by stating that differences in customs and traditions are essential to perform one's occupation efficiently and perfectly.

As an example, Hinduism does not advocate vegetarianism to all people. Traditionally, only the Brahmins are vegetarians and one would find orthodox or strict Brahmins refusing to dine with those consuming meat or in places that cook meat. While this behavior might be construed as a show of superiority, the Acharya offers a different explanation:

Why should there be bad feelings between the two, between the Brahmin and the Ksatriya? Does the Brahmin have to come into physical contact with the Ksatriya to prove that he does not bear any ill-will towards him? If he intertwined with the Ksatriya he would be tempted to taste meat and such a temptation might eventually drag him into doing things that militate against his own duty. (p. 72)

It is the same logic that he applies to explain the existence of different living quarters, streets, etc. for different castes. In Part 20, Chapter 3 titled *Character and Vocation by Birth*, the Acharya explains that separate areas for different castes in the village only served to make each

caste efficient and perfect in their particular occupations as such an environment eliminated distractions and helped each section develop its skills and character.

3. **Doesn't caste prevent nurturing of individual talents?**

A second question that raises its head with a hereditary system of occupation is that of recognition of individual talent and passion. What if the son of a potter was a gifted singer? Would his talent be recognized, would he be allowed to pursue his passion? According to the Sage of Kanchi's narratives, it was possible. The Acharya cites the examples of great kings and ministers born in the 4th Varna (the lowest) and says that because an individual does not have to spend his/her time worrying about acquiring a job or livelihood to take care of self and family, he/she is able to concentrate on developing his/her innate talent and thus, accomplish great things. The caste system, in fact, develops an individual's potential by catering to both "heredity" as well as "environment" – terms used by psychologists. If in the name of equality, each caste mingled with others in all spheres of life, then work would suffer and this would negatively affect the entire society.

While presenting the above explanation, Paramacharya questions modern day society by asking how many people today have jobs that are in line with their passion or even education for that matter. He says that in modern times, most people do not choose jobs that reflect their talent. They adjust themselves to their jobs. "To talk of inborn nature, quality or mental outlook is all bunkum". According to him, today most people just want that job which will ensure maximum pay, but requires minimum work. This is unlike the olden days, the Acharya contends, when division of society into a number of occupational groups assured a steady livelihood and hence, nurtured peace and stability which in turn facilitated the birth of scholars and incomparable achievements generation after generation, often to the envy and admiration of foreigners.

G. A Critical Analysis

The narratives of the 68th head of the Kanchi Mutt very elaborately and clearly redefine the caste system. I use the term “redefinition” because caste today has a very negative connotation in Indian society, and is not merited as having many beneficial attributes. Despite vehement criticism, caste is a force to be dealt with in India. It has become a penetrating institution that has political, economic, religious, and social significance for all Indians despite religious affiliation. The Acharya gives the reader a thorough understanding of why such a system came into being and its benefit to society and the reasons for its decay. However, the Paramacharya’s solution provided to revive the fallen caste system is limited to Brahmins alone.

1. Caste as division of labour reconsidered

The idea of an economic system that eliminates competition, prestige and individualism is indeed intriguing. This explanation reiterates the precedence of group over family in Asian societies. When caste is redefined in terms of a hereditary system of division of labour, it really does bestow many benefits on society. Services and products will be produced without any labour strikes, in a labour-intensive method of production. This gives importance to the worker and his/her skill, helps promote customization & improvisation of products, and works towards developing small-scale industries in society. The definition of the Acharya does succeed in evoking these positive images which complement the images of the ancient past when life was simple and societies were prosperous.

The Acharya weaves an argument driven by logic. Caste system gains legitimacy when it is defined as an operational form of division of labour and the traditional Hindu concept of karma further supports this definition. Karma is the belief that our present is based on our actions in past births. Therefore, if we look at Varna from the narrative plot used by the Acharya, a

person is born into a particular caste which defined his/her life and livelihood, solely due to their past deeds and therefore, one can only blame their karma/fate if they were not happy with their current circumstances. People in the olden days, according to him, accepted their fate and did not rebel.

However, this definitive assertion of the Acharya seems to contradict his claim that all occupations are needed for the effective functioning of the society and that no work is inferior or superior. Two contrasting philosophical statements are put forth here. While the Acharya says that no occupation is inferior or superior and that in the olden days people accepted their birth into a particular group as their karma; he also says that given a choice, people would choose occupations that were prestigious or profitable. Such a statement suggests inequality between occupations and the existence of the elite versus the community in the olden ages. Since the system was hereditary in nature, options for mobility were less. It must also be considered that acceptance of one's fate does not imply happiness or contentment. The Acharya's arguments fail to address this essential contradiction.

The caste system, according to the Acharya's narratives, served to unite the Indian society. As each caste group's services were essential for everyone else's functioning, it created small close-knit groups that were dependent on each other for survival. This is validated in the description of caste in the pre-colonial era by modern sociologists. The constantly changing territorial boundaries (due to the military nature of small kingdoms) made the village the primary unit of society and necessitated the village to be self-sufficient in order to take care of its needs. Such interdependency, according to Paramacharya, leads to caste becoming a social control mechanism and an external social agent such as the police was not needed. Each caste enforced

its rules and norms and punished offenders with excommunication, which was considered extremely severe as people were proud of their caste identity.

This argument fails to take into consideration the fact that being a supreme authority in one's occupation might not naturally lead to contentment or remove the inequalities imposed by the notions of purity and pollution. An occupation considered inferior, need not provide its practitioner with contentment even though he/she might excel in their trade. The Acharya says that no jati thought of itself as inferior and that each individual was truly unparalleled in their inherited occupation. While such reasoning is quite valid, it must also be considered that excommunication was dreaded not out of pride or shame, but simply because such a punishment left one without an occupation or livelihood. If ousted from their caste group, one could not join another group due to the "membership by birth" rule and would have been left without a means of survival. So, there might have been another motivation for them to stay attached to their castes and follow its rules other than just pride and social welfare.

One of the underlying narratives in the Acharya's explanation on caste is the assertion that caste provided everyone with an occupation at birth, eliminated the struggle for bread and butter and hence, encouraged the development of talent and innovation in society. It must be accepted that this argument is validated by the numerous inventions and innovations offered by India to the rest of the world. Theoretically, it can be accepted that talent is much easier to hone when one's daily bread is taken care of. The Acharya blames unemployment and lack of innovation in modern times on the money-mindedness and lazy attitudes of people – his arguments do not acknowledge the economic difficulties faced by people despite working hard in the newly formed democratic India. However, present day unemployment and poverty does

render more credit to the idea that caste system and societal segregation might have contributed to India's past glory.

2. **Differences as discriminatory**

The Acharya's narratives also provide a number of reasons as to why each caste has its own code of conduct. There is immense diversity in India not only in terms of geography, religion and language, but also in terms of the customs practiced by people – their food, houses, dresses, rituals, traditions, etc. Most of these differences arise on caste basis. The Acharya says that these differences were instilled taking into account the nature of occupations and hence, each custom facilitated efficient practice of one's occupation by providing codes of conduct for every aspect of life.

Over time, these differences manifested negative consequences, the most important one being untouchability. Issues regarding untouchability, tangible differences in lifestyle such as food, residing quarters evoke various emotional connotations that defy logic and reason. Doesn't a Brahmin cleansing himself after coming into contact with members of other castes imply superiority? Even if the practice was occupation-related, it might not have been perceived so objectively.

The Acharya's narratives do not mention the rules for interpersonal communication and communion between caste groups. If the caste system makes the society interdependent, would it truly be possible for each caste group to exist exclusively in separate quarters without any interaction at all? True, the Acharya does say that in temple festivals and other such festive occasions, all castes mingled and stood shoulder-to-shoulder, but, doesn't friendship, hospitality, generosity emanate in one's private sphere? Today, Hindus ignore certain strict edicts of

untouchability in order to promote equality and goodwill. The Acharya's narratives do not clarify if it is possible to abolish untouchability and enjoy the benefits of caste system at the same time.

That the Brahmin was well-respected and served as a role model for all, who wanted the Brahmin to practice his notions of purity for the greater good (with reference to the example in the previous section), reinforces the idea of elite vs. community. The examples and explanations defining Brahmins in the olden days do place them on a higher pedestal than the rest of society.

3. **Brahmin as the solution yet to be realized**

The Acharya clearly explains how the caste system fell and places blame on the Brahmin for succumbing to the lure of a Western lifestyle and modern technology. He also blames the Brahmin for giving up his modesty and humility and developing a feeling of superiority.

Historians such as Bayly (1999) mention that it was after the arrival of the British that, notions of purity and pollution became more rigid. This research can be related to the Acharya's narratives where he accuses the Brahmin, after starting work for the British, of developing feelings of superiority and deepening the chasms of inequality. Maybe the change in the attitude of the Brahmin, among other factors, led to Brahmins and other upper castes considering themselves purer and terming others as impure or polluted. Such a vehement statement from the head of a religious institution that has a major following of Brahmins could possibly create an impact on the society's perception of Brahmins as the Brahmin's actions are not justified here, but rather condemned for having caused the downfall of a nation's greatness.

However, if seen in the light of the Acharya's earlier definitions of caste, this explanation for the decay of caste creates a rather contradictory picture. His first argument was that caste divided society into smaller groups much like the airship containing many small air bags instead of just one, so that even if one airbag was deflated, the entire ship won't crash. However, later he

says that the entire caste system was destroyed because the Brahmins strayed from their path – Shouldn't the Brahmin quitting his traditional occupation be just the loss of one airbag on the bigger ship that is caste and not cause the entire ship to crash? Doesn't the argument that the fall of the Brahmin alone caused the destruction of the caste system itself imply the importance and significance of the Brahmin community to the caste system?

The Acharya advocates revival of the learning of Vedas and their preservation. According to his own narratives, preserving the sound of the Vedas is the primary occupation of the minority Brahmin community; The Acharya says that like nuclear science or other specialized branches of science, preserving the sound of the Vedas is a very specialized task which is not very important in the material order of things or for everyday functioning of society, and a small minority is enough to practice the tradition

This solution is limited to a small minority Brahmin community only. He justifies his limited solution by saying that his work in this lifetime is the preservation of the Vedas and that his life is dedicated to that specific purpose only. Also, the Acharya says that since Brahmins are the group that has been deemed by society as being most closely affiliated to him, he would be qualified to offer solutions to others only if the Brahmins follow his advice in the first place. This explanation leaves the Acharya's treatise on caste rather incomplete and one-sided. While it is true that spirituality and religion are highly respected in India and its practitioners treated with great regard, the Acharya's narrative and solution to the problem of caste would have gained more strength had he prescribed solutions for other castes and other occupations as well.

ⁱⁱ From certain narratives that mention the fact that the Brahmin is not well-liked or there are protests against Brahmins, the reader can place such narratives as relating to the period when Anti-Brahmin protests and Dravidian movements were prevalent and active in Tamilnadu.

V. NARRATIVES ON CHILD MARRIAGE

A. Introduction

India is a land where tradition and modernity co-exist. These contradictions are seen in a number of forms in all spheres of Indian life such as a lavish multi-storied mansion situated right next to a slum or a Mercedes Benz sharing space with a bullock cart on the roads. Nowhere are such contradictions more evident than in the realm of religion. The ancient customs and traditions prescribed by the Vedic scriptures often clash with scientific thinking and modern values and ethics. Even though this struggle between the past and the present is very evident today, the origin of such critical thinking towards Hindu customs can be traced back to 19th century India when Western education and modern scientific thinking urged certain sections of the society to question the ancient practices of the past.

The social reformers of 19th and 20th century India such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswathi, and Vivekananda questioned traditional Hindu practices like idol worship, child marriage, widow burning (Sati), untouchability, and so on. They proclaimed that such practices had polluted the essence of the Vedas and were detracting from the glory of the ancient Vedic religion. 19th and 20th century India could be described as a period of cultural renaissance when social reform movements not only tried to change people's thinking and mind-set but was also transformed into legislation and policy.

One of the most controversial topics in India society is child marriage. Child marriage is the practice of marrying children before they reach adulthood. In the olden days, marriage was arranged by parents at birth or when very young; this type of marriage also includes marriage of young girls to much older men as their second or third wives due to various religious and social reasons. In the 1880s, there was much debate on the topic of child marriage thanks to an article

by journalist and social reformer Behramji Malabari, titled “Notes on infant marriage and enforced widowhood” (Anagol-McGinn, 1992).

The Sage of Kanchi has addressed the matter of child marriage in his narratives and constructed it as a positive and advantageous social and spiritual practice. In this chapter, I analyze the Acharya’s narratives on child marriage, using Foss’s framework of the setting, major characters, narrator, events, temporal relations, causal relations, audience and theme.

B. **Child Marriage: Practices and Problems**

Child marriage is attributed to a number of reasons. Traditionally, according to Hindu customs, a couple has to beget a son to light their funeral pyre and perform the rites and rituals that will ensure salvation and safe entry into the after-life; a man gets the right to perform religious rites and rituals only after marriage. As bachelors, men do not have the right to perform or attend important sacrificial duties and marriage is a prerequisite condition to be eligible to perform various religious duties. So, in order to fulfill such religious and spiritual obligations child marriage was practiced. Birth of daughters was frowned upon as they were not vested with the right to perform these liberating rites. Daughters are regarded even today as a burden especially among the lower class uneducated population where child marriage is most prevalent. Also, it is at times a matter of duty and prestige to get one’s daughter married as soon as she hits puberty.

There are also various local beliefs prevalent in the Indian society that an unmarried girl hitting puberty is prone to sexual deprivations, and other superstitions that marrying a young girl can cure sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis, gonorrhoea, etc. Child marriage has thus resulted in high birth rates, malnutrition, low life expectancy and high levels of poverty (Burns, 1998). In the past, many young girls were married to older men who would die within months of

marriage (in certain cases without any progeny) and their wives would become widows at a very young age without any prospect of re-marriage as widow remarriage was frowned upon and discouraged.

Hence, with the spurt of intellectualism and rationalism that arose in 19th century India, social reformers initiated an active debate regarding this major social problem that had religious underpinnings. In 1891, the Age of Consent Act was passed by the British Government whereby the age of consent was raised to 12 years making sexual intercourse with married or unmarried girls below the age of 12, rape and a punishable crime. This act was supposed to have successfully garnered the support of the Indian masses that approved such an affirmative action. In 1929, the famous Child Marriage Restraint Act also called the Sarda Act was passed which fixed the marriageable age of girls at 14 and boys at 18. The act was further amended in 1978 when the marriageable ages were raised to 18 for girls and 21 for boys (Anagol-McGinn, 1998; Gulati, 1976). Even today, there are various regions in rural Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and some other states of India where illegally many child marriages are taking place (Burns, 1998). The reasons for this practice as mentioned earlier are many and there is no clear explanation of its benefits.

C. **Reframing Child Marriage: The Husband as the Guru and the Road to Spiritual Development**

The issue of child marriage has been discussed by the Acharya under Part 18 of the book which consists of 17 chapters dedicated to explaining the purpose of marriage and the roles to be performed by men and women within the institution of marriage. Under this section, the Acharya of Kanchi advocates and supports the practice of child marriage by outlining the benefits that it

offers society. His narratives emerge during the 1930s when social reformers, the government, and women's organizations were proactively working towards abolishing child marriage in India.

In contrast to his narratives on caste, which established material and economic benefits, the narratives on marriage and child marriage establish causal relations based on faith and devotion. Men and women at large—rather boys and girls—form the characters in the Acharya's narratives on child marriage as he redefines the rules of marriage and explains how child marriage benefits the society as both males and females perform their gender-specific duties and responsibilities.

Many social reformers and women's activists have questioned the exclusive rights of men to chant the Vedas. It has often been condemned as a perpetuation of patriarchy as women are not allowed to be priests, teachers or perform any sacrifices. These reformers and their attempts to abolish child marriage become the key target for the Acharya's explanations, and hence play a supporting role in his narratives on child marriage.

The Acharya begins his narrative on child marriage by comparing it to the thread ceremony practiced by the Brahmin community in India. The thread ceremony is a rite of passage ceremony where a boy surrenders completely to his Acharya and progresses materially as well as spiritually. Child marriage is defined by the Acharya as the rite of passage meant for women. The Acharya articulates his key theme that constructs child marriage as the means to attain spiritual realization and salvation: "for women marriage itself is Upanayana. Just as a boy dedicates himself to his Guru, a girl must dedicate herself to her husband from her childhood until the start of their conjugal life and beyond" (p. 566). Quite like his narratives on the caste system, there is the absence of any time frame in the Acharya's narratives while explaining the benefits of child marriage.

Just as a young boy is expected to dedicate himself to his guru at a young age in order to prosper, a young girl should also be married at the same age of 7 and must look upon her husband as her Guru. A boy is initiated into brahmacharya (the student life) in order to prevent him from being distracted by lust and desire and to discipline his mind and similarly, a girl should be married before she experiences the “carnal urge” (p. 566). As per the Acharya, only if a girl is married at such a young age will she be able to surrender herself to her husband wholeheartedly without the development of any egoistic attitudes.

Despite the numerous methods of worship and rites that it prescribes, the ultimate teaching or aim of Hinduism is to detach the individual from worldly desires, relieve them from the cycle of birth and death and attain salvation. According to the Acharya, detachment from worldly desires and materialism requires strict control of the senses and great discipline. However, such austerity is not possible by all human beings. Therefore, if we cannot control our minds then the next best thing would be to focus or dedicate our mind to another person. If this is done, then we would attribute or dedicate all our actions to an external entity and consequently, not suffer from the consequences of our actions. Thereby one would be liberated from the cycle of birth and death.

Ideally, this dedication must be towards God, but all are not inclined to such thinking. Therefore, women are taught to view their husbands as incarnations of God and surrender themselves to their husbands. To aid his argument, the Acharya appeals to Tamil idioms which state that “The husband is the Lord in flesh and blood”, “Even if he be a stone the husband is a husband” (p. 578) and the common Indian sentiment that it is a great honour to die before one’s husband – such women are considered blessed by the South Indian society.

In the same fashion as his narratives on caste, to support his arguments, the Acharya gives various examples of renowned and respected women from history who were considered to be the epitome of chastity and famous for their devotion to their husbands. His examples include the divine consorts of Hindu Gods such as Sita, Mahalakshmi and Sati and chaste women from many Indian literature & mythology such as Kannagi, Vasuki and Savithri whose stories are recited even today to define the ideal of devotion to husband. The use of examples from mythology and literature creates a timeless temporality that reinforces a mythical and idealistic connotation. In the absence of celebrated women from recent history who achieved such immortal status, child marriage is placed in an ambiguous past that cannot be refuted.

Paramacharya also cites various traditions and ceremonies followed by women across India today where they observe fasts and penances for the sake of their husbands and demonstrate their devotion and respect towards their husbands. He proclaims such devotion to husbands to be the unique characteristic of India women who are the only ones to treat their husbands as Gods. Child marriage, he proclaims, is the primary reason for such devotion.

While it is to be noted that women in modern India who did not get married in childhood also follow these customs and practices, the Acharya maintains that such devotion towards husband comes only when the woman is married while still a child. "This faith, formed in her innocence, will take firm root in her mind when she becomes older and begins to understand things" (p. 579). He says that complete surrender helps eradication of ego and makes it very easy for women to achieve salvation. Despite its evils, child marriage is one custom meant for all castes and was practiced by all sections of the Hindu society at one time. Unlike his narratives on caste, the Acharya does not single out a specific caste in his appeal for a solution. He tells that

child marriage was prescribed by the scriptures for all castes and that all the people in the society must keep impressing the teachings in the scriptures on the government.

The Acharya's key themes in his child marriage narratives have been outlined below.

D. **Arguments Against the Social Reformers**

As mentioned earlier, the Sarda Act was passed in 1929 by the British Indian legislation which set the marriageable age of women and men at 14 and 18 respectively. This act was passed due to the relentless efforts of many prominent Indian lawyers, social activists, thinkers and writers since the 1880s. These reformers cited several social, medical and psychological consequences of child marriage on the girl child. The Acharya utilizes various rhetorical strategies to counter each argument cited by the reformers against child marriage in order to establish its merits.

One of the most undesirable effects of child marriage is low life expectancy and poor health owing to a long fertility period. The Acharya rebuffs this argument by simply appealing to ideals and dismissing it as an "empty talk" (p. 580). He says that according to the sastras, even though a girl is to be married at the age of 7, she will be sent to her husband's house for conjugal relations only after she has attained puberty and physical maturity. He also says that there are restrictions laid on the days when intercourse should take place. But nobody follows these rules today because of which various physical and mental problems plague the Indian society.

Another major problem with child marriage is the rise in the number of child widows, which the Acharya denies is a problem. While the Acharya says that it pains him to see a young child living the secluded child of a widow, death of a spouse can occur to anyone at any age; this tragedy is not limited to children alone. And he also claims to have heard that the number of child widows is quite less as the number of boys dying between the ages of 15-25 is rather low.

The next argument that the Acharya counters relates to various feminist concerns that marriage at a very young age stopped women from receiving education, gaining employment and choosing their life partners. For him, this “progress” has exposed women “to the gaze of all and sundry, become mentally and emotionally disturbed and trapped in awkward situations” (p. 580). This so-called “progress”, according to him has also placed the highly-prized Indian value of “chastity” in jeopardy.

Many of the social reformers who fought against child marriage were considered to be experts in the Vedic scriptures and Sanskrit language. These learned Sanskrit scholars claimed that child marriage was a social custom that arose as a response to Islamic invasion, when many unmarried Hindu girls were abducted and dishonored. As married women were spared from such abduction, to protect their children, people got their daughters married at a very young age. Hence, the scholars and social reformers claimed that child marriage originated due to societal need. The reformers also cited specific Vedic chants to support the claim that the Vedic scriptures offered women the right to choose their own partners and get married only when they reached adulthood.

Instead of refuting their expertise, the Acharya appeals to an alternative interpretation of history through a different frame of reference. He says that according to ancient Hindu scriptures, from birth to the time when she is able to dress herself, a girl is ruled by the Moon (Soma) and she is as cool as the moonlight. From the time she is able to dress herself to the time she gains menarche, she is under the rule of the Gandharva (Gandharvas are mythical Hindu celestial beings known for their beauty and playfulness) and likewise, the girl child is very playful and most attractive in this period. After puberty, a girl is said to be ruled by Agni (Fire)

and possesses the fire to kindle the desire of man. The specific marriage mantra that the reformist scholars used as evidence reads

At first Soma had hold on you; then the gandharva became your guardian; thirdly Agni became your master. I, as a human being, have come as the fourth to hold sway over you. Soma passed you on to the gandharva and the gandharva to Agni. Agni has now given you over to me. (p. 570)

This mantra is chanted by the bridegroom at the time of the marriage ceremony and conveys the meaning that the groom is marrying a girl who has passed those stages of life when she was ruled by the Moon (i.e., before she could wear her own clothes), by the Gandharva (i.e., from when she could dress herself to before puberty) and by Agni (that is after attaining puberty). Hence, the groom is marrying a girl who is physically mature and no longer a child. The social reformers reached the conclusion that according to the Vedic scriptures, a girl was married long after she attains puberty and also had the right to choose her own husband.

Shri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi responds to this argument by saying that the Sanskrit scholars have cited the scriptures rather selectively without taking into context the social situation and the audience they were meant for. The Acharya then launches into an elaborate explanation of the 8 types of marriages approved by the Vedic scriptures. The most highly revered among them is the Brahma type of marriage where a girl is married to a young boy before she attains menarche and particularly, the boy's parents have to approach the girl's parents for their daughter's hand in marriage. This type of marriage, he says, has been proclaimed as the most honorable and desired form of marriage.

The Gandharva type of marriage allows girls to choose their own partners and gives importance to mutual consent over other factors. The Acharya says "the gandharva type is the

‘love marriage’ that has such enthusiastic support these days” (p. 573). It was this type of marriage that the Sanskrit scholars referred to when they said that women had the right to choose their own husband. However, this type of marriage was prescribed by the Vedas only for women from noble, warrior families who were physically strong and accustomed to material pleasure. However, the Acharya says, this Gandharva form of marriage says has been taken out of context and used as evidence by scholars against child marriage while the Vedas in reality, endorse the Brahma marriage – that is – marriage in childhood.

He claims that the marriage mantras quoted above have also been interpreted out of context. A girl starts living with her husband only after she has attained puberty, but these mantras are just chanted well in advance at the time of marriage. The Acharya explains his point by referring to the following sacrifice performed by boys called samidadhana.

I will give you an example in this context. When the brahmacharin performs the samidadhana he prays before Agni to grant him good children. How absurd would it be for our reformers to argue, on the basis of this prayer, that a young boy must have children when he is yet a celibate-student and that he may become a householder only later. The point to note is that the boy prays in advance for good children. The Vedic mantras cited by reformers must be seen in the same light. (p. 575).

So, the Acharya says that such out-of-context citations should not be used by scholars as they do not reflect what is prescribed by the Vedic scriptures. He further mentions that the Sarda Act which is proclaimed by historians as having been the first Act to garner mass public support was, in fact, not very popular. The law-making body of India, the Legislative Assembly, was divided on it – 50 percent for and 50 percent against. The British asked one of the nominated

members to vote for the bill in order to pass it. It was done by the British, claims the Acharya, with the notion of “inflicting an injury on the (Hindu) religion” (p. 576). However, the law has been passed and the Acharya says that he cannot ask people to go against the law, but he says people can stay true to the Sastras (scriptures), constantly speak of it and keeping impressing upon the government the Vedic laws and the age at which a girl ought to be married. Acharya addressed people and encouraged them to follow the practice of child marriage by articulating its various benefits and by portraying the British as a villain damaging Hinduism. There is no mention of any concrete solution to the problem that exists today.

E. **A Spiritual and Emotional Narrative on Womanhood**

Foss (1996) says that narratives fill the gaps that exist in our perception or knowledge and provide the reader with either intellectual or emotional satisfaction. Unfamiliar or irrelevant pieces of information gain coherence as a familiar plot places the events in perspective. The Acharya’s narratives seek to contextualize and place ancient traditions and customs in a framework the modern generation is familiar with.

In his narratives on caste, the Acharya offers logical and scientific explanations – clear cause-effect relationships are established to explain the advantages of caste, the reasons for its decay and the solution for the problem. With his narratives on child marriage, the only key causal relations established convey child marriage as the main catalyst that triggers pure and complete devotion in women – an essential characteristic for spiritual liberation.

The Acharya’s argument that child marriage instilled blind devotion and complete surrender towards one’s husband can be viewed as prudent advice to those who were entirely dependent on men. The narratives could be relevant to those Hindu women, who were dependent, initially on their fathers and brothers and eventually on their husbands and sons for

their survival. To such women, who did not have an independent life and were bound by the shackles of patriarchy without education or employment, such a narrative on child marriage might have been liberating.

But, the Acharya does not seem to offer this advice as a means of familial or marital harmony; he defines marriage as a means of attaining salvation – and the most beneficial type of marriage is child marriage. Just as a man surrenders himself to his guru, a woman must surrender herself to her husband for spiritual realization. One might ask – Couldn't a woman also surrender herself to a Guru rather than husband? The answer to the question lies in the practice of patriarchy. The chastity of the Indian woman is very highly prized and the Acharya's narratives too give importance to this chastity as he talks about how independent women of today are exposed unnecessarily to "the gaze of all and sundry" (p. 580). Women were largely restricted to the domestic sphere and being a patriarchal society, few women were educated in the same manner as men. Men had the responsibility to take care of the women in their families. In a society where women accepted such domesticity, the Acharya's narratives might be most applicable and might provide them with marital harmony as well as spiritual progress.

By providing evidence that the scriptures prescribe child marriage, the Acharya demonstrates his proficiency in the Vedas, but at the same time, it might make a reader question the patriarchal underpinnings of the Vedas and Hinduism. Staying true to such Vedic undertones, Paramacharya also does not expound much on the discriminatory practices that have degraded child marriage neither does he address the attitudes of men and other social practices which promote discrimination against women. The Acharya clearly mentions that a young girl should be married to a young boy, one who is studying under the tutelage of a guru. But the prevalent practice in British India was to marry young girls to much older men– in certain

extreme cases, to men who were extremely ill or on their death beds.

The Acharya's explanations become rather incomplete when we compare them to certain ground realities. The Acharya criticizes the modern practice of child marriage only when he observes girls being forced into conjugal relations before attaining maturity and grieves over the plight of young widows. However, his narratives neither criticize superstitious beliefs among men that intercourse with a young girl cures them of sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis, gonorrhoea, and so on, nor do they condemn young girls being married to men on their deathbeds. He simply says that few men die in the robust, young age of 15 – 25 and hence, there cannot be many child widows.

The Acharya's narratives also fail to bridge the gap between the olden days and the modern society. Many modern Indian women are educated and employed – some are in fact the sole earning members of their family due to difficult circumstances. When the ancient caste order became obsolete, the traditional occupations were abandoned and it was no longer possible for many to make ends meet on a single salary. Hence, educating the girl child took priority and many families encouraged this. In such a context, child marriage becomes a social evil as it discouraged women from studying or gaining employment. Apart from this child marriage also brought with it certain evils like dowry & child widowhood that forced many girls to live in oppression from a young age.

These societal changes do not find a place in the Paramacharya's narratives. The lack of any temporal information in the narrative makes the benefits of child marriage sound like a story from a time long ago. The ancient practice of child marriage as seen in the Acharya's narratives bears little resemblance to the child marriage we know today. The absolute lack of any sort of advice to men also tends to lower the credibility of the Acharya as an impartial and enlightened

Guru. While he expounds on marriage and the role of women in a marriage, no rules or norms are prescribed for men. While the Acharya elaborately talks of how child marriage ensures complete devotion of wife towards husband, he does not offer any advice on how men should cherish and work towards maintaining that devotion. Dowry and domestic violence are but some reasons why women might lose devotion towards husband and be forced to become independent. The Acharya's appeal is more sentimental in nature – he uses old Tamil adages such as கல்லானாலும் கணவர் புல்லானாலும் புருஷன் (even if he be stone or grass, a husband is a husband) and கணவனே கண்கண்ட தெய்வம் (Husband is an incarnation of God) to evoke emotional chords, but such adages do not provide sustainable solutions to women who suffer due to the evils of child marriage.

F. Conclusion

The Acharya of Kanchi weaves a spiritual and emotional argument situated within the traditional Indian framework of chastity and devotion towards husband. He also clearly elaborates on the Vedic teachings on marriage and why the scriptures prescribe child marriage. His proficiency in the Vedas is clearly demonstrated when he refutes the arguments of social reformers and establishes the true meaning of the Vedic treatises on marriage.

However, while the Acharya clearly explains how child marriage is beneficial, he does not provide a concrete solution to eradicate the evils being practiced in the name of child marriage. The child marriage described by the Acharya is quite different from the child marriage practiced in India today. Unlike his narratives on caste, the Acharya does not offer an explanation on how the system of child marriage degraded into a discriminatory system in modern times. Also, his insistence on the government following the scriptures and promoting

child marriage seems to express disregard for evils such as marrying young girls to older men and condemning young widows to a life of seclusion.

Some might criticize the Acharya's tendency to preach only women about marriage and devotion, it could also be interpreted that he considered women to reign supreme in the domestic sphere and left it to them to guide their men. The narratives of the Acharya do not offer women a role beyond the realm of their house, but he does portray the Indian woman as supreme and divine whose devotion is irreproachable and whose chastity is the stuff of legends.

The Sage of Kanchi offers a comprehensive understanding of why ancient Indian seers and scholars put into place practices and traditions like the caste system, child marriage, etc. But, people, institutions, and societies evolve and accordingly, beliefs, attitudes and practices must also evolve. The narratives of the Acharya fail to wholly address how this change should occur in order to keep the traditions and the benefits they offer in place and at the same time, cater to the needs and wants of the changing society.

VI. FINAL THOUGHTS

This study examines the narrative devices employed by the head pontiff of the Kanchi Math in redefining ancient teachings and knowledge for a modern Hindu population. Ancient Hindu scriptures address an ancient society of people who did not have to deal with changes and developments brought forth by industrialization, colonization or pursue a western lifestyle to earn their living. Specifically, the narratives of the Sage of Kanchi on caste and its affiliated child marriage offer very interesting and intriguing redefinitions of social institutions in India that have affected people's lives in dramatic ways with long lasting consequences.

The analysis of his narratives was conducted with the premise that narrativity employs incomprehensible and irrelevant facts and institutions into a framework or plot that is relevant and applicable, and therefore, useful. Narrative scholars such as Foss (1996), White (1978), and Jameson (1981) claim that narratives provide solutions - emotional or intellectual satisfaction - which remove conflicts that people might experience with regard to certain issues.

As a well-known expert in Sanskrit and the Vedic scriptures as well as modern subjects such as history, geography, and astronomy, the well-respected Acharya does indeed play the role of White's historian whose narratives make caste and child marriage more understandable and relevant to people. Through the book *Hindu Dharma*, his narratives provide the reader with the original intent behind the establishment of these institutions in society; he offers a clear picture as to why Hinduism prescribes these institutions and how they were beneficial to society.

The narratives of the Acharya affirm the view that Hinduism is a way of life rather than a religion; the Vedas and other scriptures are nothing but rules and guidelines by seers of the past, who could probably be compared to the philosophers, thinkers and scientists of today, who after

much research and study provided the society with laws and theories on how to conduct themselves righteously without ignoring spirituality and religiosity. Therefore, classifying Hinduism as a religion could very well be thought of as a western construction.

The Acharya's narratives on caste provide a comprehensive definition of the original purpose of caste and make the reader look at the institution from a different perspective – one that shows the benefits this system rendered to society a long time ago and how it has contributed to the great accomplishments of ancient India and the longevity of the Vedic religion. Caste is narrated as an economic system that provided for people's livelihood by eliminating competition and increased specialization and efficiency due to its hereditary nature. It also provided individuals with the opportunity to develop their innate talents and gifts by eliminating the struggle for daily sustenance. Inequalities between castes with regard to customs and lifestyle are constructed as a mechanism necessary to provide individuals with an environment that supported their occupation.

The Acharya redefines the understanding of caste and its original purpose while laying emphasis on the certain main themes such as the original purpose and function of caste and reasons for its decay, greatness of Vedas and need for their preservation along with the duties and responsibilities of the Brahmins, and finally, belief in the Almighty and attributing all happenings to Him in order to live for the welfare of the society rather than one's own needs.

These narratives could cause a change in some people's attitude towards caste and probably make them understand the greatness of Hindu religion that merged the mutually exclusive realms of economy and religion. Child marriage has also been similarly reconstructed and the spiritual reasons behind its origin have been very clearly explicated.

The Acharya prescribes a return to the past; however, caste and child marriage have evolved into extremely discriminatory institutions that share little resemblance to their origin and turning back time seems an impossible task. Also, to do so would go against the very principles of Hindu Dharma. The rules about caste, child marriage, etc. are contained in texts known as Dharmasastras which is defined as wisdom passed down by ancient sages to their students in ancient India (Lingat, 1973).

Societies do not remain static. Change is the only permanent aspect and Indian society too has undergone numerous changes since the time these scriptures were written. These scriptures is understood as research conducted by the ancient sages, then it naturally follows that it has to be updated and conducted again in order to keep up with the changes that have occurred in society over the past centuries.

From the Acharya's narratives, one can deduce that over a period of time, this ancient wisdom/research was not updated and came to be considered as unquestionable or written in stone much like the word of God and hence, the rules laid down in them also came to be followed in a strict and rigid manner without taking into account the changes that were taking place in society. The Acharya, elaborately explains the original intent of the caste system and child marriage and the main reasons why they were considered beneficial at some point in India's history, but he does not really redefine them to provide concrete solutions or new rules which would fit modern, post-colonial, developing India.

CITED LITERATURE

- Anagol-McGinn, P. (1992). The age of consent act (1891) reconsidered: Women's perspectives and participation in the child-marriage controversy in India [Electronic Version]. *South Asia Research*, 12, 100-118. London: South Asia Centre, School of Oriental and African Studies.
- Ashby, P.H. (1974). *Modern trends in Hinduism*. New York: Columbia University Press
- Bailey, F.G. (1957). *Caste and the economic frontier: A village in highland Orissa*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Basu, P.N. (1894). *Hindu civilization under British rule* (vol. 1). Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing Company
- Bayly, S. (1999). Caste, society and politics in India from the eighteenth century to the modern age. In G. Johnson (Ed.), *The new Cambridge history of India* (vol. 4). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bharati, A. (1970). The Hindu renaissance and its apologetic patterns. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 29, 267-87. Retrieved April 21, 2011 from JSTOR database.
- Bhatt, C. (2001). *Hindu nationalism: Origins, ideologies and modern myths*. Oxford: Berg
- Bruner, J. (2002). *Making stories: Law, literature, life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Burns, J.F. (1998, May 11). Though illegal, child marriage is popular in part of India. *New York Times*. Retrieved 3 November, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com>
- Chinnavan. (1995). Translator's note. In PujyaSri Chandrasekaredra Saraswati Swami, *Hindu dharma: The universal way of life* (5th ed.) (pp. xvii-xxii). Mumbai: Bhavan's University Press.
- Collingwood, R.G. (1956). *The idea of history*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dutt, N.K. (1968). *Origin and growth of caste in India* (vol. 1). Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay.
- Eaton, R.M. (1993). *The rise of Islam and the Bengal frontier, 1204-1760*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Foss, S.K. (1996). *Rhetorical criticism – Exploration and practice* (second edition). Prospect Heights: Waveland Press Inc.

- Ganapathi, R. (1976). Foreword. In Jagadguru Sri Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati Swami, *Deivathin kural* (pp. i – viii). Madras: Vanathi Patthipakkam.
- Gautier, F. (2003). *Rewriting Indian history*. New Delhi: Indian Research Press.
- Ghurye, G.S. (1952). *Caste and class in India*. Bombay: Popular Book Depot.
- GroB, S. (1996). Narrative time and the reader. In G.F Carr & I. Rauch (Eds.), *Semiotics around the world; synthesis in diversity: Proceedings of the fifth Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies, Berkeley 1994* (Volume I, pp.405-408). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.
- Gulati, L. (1976). Age of marriage of women and population growth: The Kerala experience [Electronic Version]. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 11(31/33), 1225-1234. Bombay: Sameeksha Trust.
- Herman, D. (2009). *Basic elements of narrative*. London: Blackwell Publishing.
- Isaacs, H. R. (1965). *India's ex-untouchables*. New York: John Day Co.
- Jagadguru Sri Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati Swami. (1991). *The guru tradition*. Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan
- Jameson, F. (1981). *Political unconscious*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Jha, D.N. (2009). *Rethinking Hindu identity*. London: Equinox Publishing Ltd.
- Johnsen, L. (2009). *The complete idiot's guide to Hinduism*. New York: Penguin Group USA, Inc.
- Levinson, D. (1998). *Religion: A cross-cultural dictionary*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lingat, R. (1973). *The classical law of India*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mlecko, J.D. (1982). The guru in Hindu tradition. *Numen*, 29(1), 33-61. Retrieved February 1, 2011 from CrossRef database.
- Neumeyer, P.F. (1969). The child as story teller: Teaching literary concepts through tacit knowledge [Electronic Version]. *College English*, 30 (7), 515-517.
- O'Malley, L.S.S. (1935). *Popular Hinduism*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Prasad, A.R.D. (1946). *India divided*. New Delhi: University of Delhi.
- Prince, G. (1982). *Narratology: The form and functioning of narrative*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.

- PujyaSri Chandrasekaredra Saraswati Swami. (2008). *Hindu dharma: The universal way of life* (5th Ed.). Mumbai: Bhavan's University Press.
- Rudolph, L.I., & Rudolph, S.H. (1969). *The modernity of tradition: Political development in India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sandelowski, M. (1991). Telling stories: Narrative approaches in qualitative research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 23(3), 161-166. Retrieved March 15, 2011 from CrossRef Database.
- Sarkin, J., & Koenig, M. (2011). Ending caste discrimination in India: Human rights and the responsibility to protect (r2p) individuals and groups from discrimination at the domestic and international levels. *The George Washington International Law Review*, 41, 541-576.
- Singer, M. (1980). *When a great tradition modernizes – An anthropological approach to Indian civilization*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathy Veda Vidya Pitha, Nerul of the South Indian Educational Society (SIES) (Producer) (2001). *Sage of Kanchi* (Documentary). Nerul. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaZiCdRKxjw>
- Srinivas, M.N. (1962). *Caste in modern India and other essays*. Lucknow: Asia Publishing House.
- Srinivas, M.N. (1989). *The cohesive role of Sanskritization*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Vansina, J. (1985). *Oral tradition as history*. Madison: The University Of Wisconsin Press.
- Venkatesan, J. (2008, April 11). Caste can be the basis to determine backwardness, rules Supreme Court. *The Hindu (Chennai)*. Retrieved July 22, 2011 from <http://www.hindu.com>.
- White, H. (1978). *Tropics of discourse: Essays in cultural criticism*. London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Worthington, K.L. (1996). *Self as narrative (English Monographs Series): Subjectivity and community in contemporary fiction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Young, S. (2007). *Hinduism*. New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation.
- Zwaan, R.A., Madden, C.J., & Stanfield, R.A. (2001). Time in narrative comprehension: A cognitive perspective [Electronic Version]. In D. Schram & G. Steen (Eds.), *The psychology and sociology of literature*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

VITA

NAME	Jenanee Dhevi Ramachandhran
EDUCATION	B.A., Sociology, University of Madras, Chennai, 2006 M.A., Public Relations, University of Madras, 2008 M.A., Communication, University of Illinois, Chicago, 2012
HONORS	Gold Medalist, Public Relations, Stella Maris College, 2008
PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP	Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, UIC Chapter, 2011