DYNAMICS OF SPEAKING AND DOING RELIGION

Editors

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Contents

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Introduction

'Anyone who wants to understand the world today has got to understand religion' – this is how Smith (2017) philosophically opens the introduction to his book 'Religion: What It Is, How It Works, and Why It Matters'. Smith highlights how the feature of religion is different from other 'human doings' in 'its engagement with postulated superhuman powers through complexes of prescribed practices in hopes of realising human goods and avoiding bads, such as receiving blessings, protection and deliverance from troubles both small and immense' (Smith 2017, 77 f.). When it comes to the term 'religion', it is worth underlining three important components. These are: (1) belief in the supernatural and (2) the way people seek to get help and blessings from them and (3) by fulfilling certain prescribed practices. For example, some people regularly visit churches, others conduct daily prayers at home or in mosques and some visit temples or shrines and conduct rituals of worship.

However, religion is not confined to the walls of churches, mosques, temples or other religious buildings. People also engage in many other diverse social practices that are not classified as 'religious' in the first place, but are still crucial, in their view, for supernatural beings to grant what people seek. Consuming halal (for example, in the context of Islam) or vegetarian food (as most Brahman castes do), wearing a certain outfit, speaking in a certain way, providing services and charity for the poor and needy people or observing some social restrictions, such as gender segregation – all these practices are part of social life happening in the social context, but in this view with serious religious connotations. Religion defines, regulates and controls everyday thoughts, actions, interactions, experiences and the way of living of those who practice it. It is tightly intermingled with our mundane life.

Smith further suggests that if one wants to learn about religion and its influence on our societies, then one should not only concentrate on what religion is, but also what religion 'does, involves, produces, and makes possible' (Smith 2017, 81). Similar to Keane's statement (1997), in this paper, too, religion is perceived as a subjective experience, that is belief or faith, which has a very much objective manifestation in terms of action – how it is practiced, how it is communicated and how it is discussed. The current volume aims to understand this process by looking at how **religious speeches** and **preaching** shape and influence our worldview, social interactions, cultural practices and power relations.

The practice of religion usually demands belief and action, more concretely, the fulfilment of prescribed practices, as mentioned earlier. The role of speech is inevitable in this process, because speech, or more concretely words in the form of written texts or an oral speech, is a driving force between belief and practice. As Child (2003) rightly notes, speech is related to both belief and action. It establishes a certain view about religion, helps to gain religious knowledge, communicates feelings and what is appropriate and not according to the respective religion and passes over this knowledge to others.

Religion is very much about communication. On the one hand, religious speech makes communication between human and divine beings possible. This creates, maintains and nourishes the bond between people and the supernatural beings. However, communication is not only a verbal speech where one operates with written texts and spoken words. It also establishes a connection through adherence to expected regulations and fulfilment of certain practices. In this sense, one

can agree with Lambek, who notes in reference to Islam that 'the core of Islam is not a statement of 'belief' but an act, largely through words, of submission' (Lambek 1990a, 27).

On the other hand, communication also takes place in the social realm where religious knowledge is possessed, demonstrated, circulated and people discuss diverse issues related to religion with religious specialists and also among themselves, including believers and non-believers. Thus, even though religious speech is taken as the subject of discussion, the focus in this volume is not on religious speeches *per se*, but on the impact of religious speech and authorities of speakers by which the understanding of what religion is and what it does for people can be formed.

This idea was driven from the project C 04 of the collaborative research centre SFB 1070 RESOURCE-CULTURES,[1] where religious speech is regarded as a resource for religious groups, communities, institutions and practitioners. The project that mainly deals with South and Central Asia emphasises that religious speeches given by religious speakers, authorities and practitioners play a key role in the establishment, maintenance and development of religious institutions and groups. Additionally, the use of religious speeches, in many cases, ensures transformative results on the listeners by removing mental stress, achieving peace of mind, ensuring happiness, as well as forming group solidarity by preaching about religious and ethical interpretations of people's daily lives. The medialisation of religious speeches in the present day, which is also an important aspect of study in this research project, adds value in converting the speeches into material forms and speeches being accessed by larger audiences which results in ensuring economic benefits both for the speakers and institutions as well as listeners.

This volume includes selected papers presented at the international workshop 'Religious Speech and Religious Speakers: Authority and Influence of Word and People' which was held on February 20–21, 2019 at the Goethe University, Frankfurt. It was organised by the project C 04[2] of SFB 1070 RESOURCECULTURES in association with the Humboldt University, the Frobenius Institute and the University of Tübingen. This interdisciplinary workshop brought together scholars from anthropology, theology and culture studies with the focus on exploring ways in which religious speeches have impact specifically as instructive and normative resources. The papers presented at this workshop demonstrated the diversity of issues around the topic of religious speech, starting from the speakers and their authority, medialisation and circulation of religious speeches, up to the reconfiguration of value relations in the context of socio-cultural changes.

The workshop had three panels. The speakers of the first panel 'Speakers, authority and network' discussed the role of religious authorities with the examples of imams, pastors or gurus, who establish religious institutions and influence community life. The papers presented highlighted the importance of religious authorities as a catalyst for bringing socio-cultural changes. Not only the authority of religious speakers or their speeches, but also the way they reach the public is what is important in this process. This issue was considered in the second panel 'Medialization of religious speeches'. The papers presented in this panel dealt with the dissemination of religious speeches through various media used in contemporary times that result in the growing popularisation of speakers and commercialisation of their speeches. The contributions also discussed the positive role of the media towards the revival of religious practices. The third panel 'Reconfiguration of value relations in religious context' focused on the transformation processes in religious as well as socio-cultural contexts brought about by changing roles of religious authorities and increasing role

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1   SFB 1070 RESOURCECULTURES is an interdisciplinary platform of research and scientific knowledge that aims at conducting studies on how societies identify, possess, modify and develop resources. The project C 04 undertakes research with the idea that religious speech plays a central role in establishing, identifying, maintaining, changing and developing the religious speakers and institutions in Central and South Asia. See, <https://uni-tuebingen.de/forschung/forschungsschwerpunkte/sonderforschungsbereiche/sfb-1070/archiv/zweite-foerderphase/forschung/projektbereiche/teilprojekte/c04/> (last access 08.11.2021).

2   The C 04 project team composed of the doctoral and post-doctoral research fellows Sophia Schäfer, Gulniza Taalaibekova and Deepak Kumar Ojha along with the project managers Ruth Conrad and Roland Hardenberg.

of religious institutions in everyday life of people. The presenters of this panel mentioned case studies on how, for example, the revival of Islam in the context of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan or Christian conversion in a southwest Ethiopian community, lead to conflicts in observing their local traditional practices. Another presentation highlighted the changing role of an Indian guru from a traditional yoga teacher to a business entrepreneur of fast-moving consumer goods in India.

In the course of this workshop, it became clear how religious authorities, religious speeches and sacred texts pose an immense transformative effect on their audience and it is not only a one-sided process. The presented papers dealt with diverse socio-cultural contexts and demonstrated the importance of taking a broader approach to understand the effects of religious speeches on communities which are not limited to a religious setting only. In this introduction, first, the concept of religious speech will be elaborated and how it has been approached so far. Then it will be discussed in which way this volume will contribute to the development of the topic of religious speech as an instructive and normative resource. While writing this introduction, the authors have taken an honest stand and admit that this volume deals with only a few small fractions of religious practices such as speeches, discourses and performances that are studied mostly from an anthropological perspective.

Religious Speech and its Constituting Elements

Speech in the context of religion is not only limited to speeches delivered by religious experts. Pernot (2006) highlights speeches about God, of God and on God, which also implies the important role and authority of lay people. For example, people hear and read stories and narratives about God or gods. Sacred texts are believed to be words of God or gods that already extend authority and power on followers (see Watt 1990). And there are also different forms of preaching that invite people to practice religion, lead a certain way of life and adhere to certain rules and restrictions. Smith's view on religion is extended here to religious speech: not what religious speech itself is will be

traced, but rather what speech (that is, speech in the context of religion) 'does, involves, produces and makes possible' (Smith 2017, 81). First, several scholarly works will be discussed in order to demonstrate what has been studied so far on religious speeches.

Austin's (1962) speech act theory on how words not only describe or report but also do things has been considered by many scholars who have written on religious speeches and their effects in diverse religious contexts. Most of these sources took Austin's work on performative act as a point of departure to understand the use of language in terms of not only its meaning but also the effect of utterance that invites further actions and entails consequences on individual as well as community levels. For example, according to Lambek (1990a), the recitation of Quranic texts in Islam delivers a 'meta-message'. In other words, for those who recite, or listen, or even observe, the recitation creates an image of a Muslim identity and Islamic practice. The same can be said about the recitation of a *Shahada* (testimony and one of the five pillars of Islam), which is the most commonly used statement in the practice of Muslims. It is used in daily prayers, its utterance indicates submission to Islam and it is a ritualistic step that indicates a person's formal conversion to this religion.

Taylor's (2015) example of 'Bhāgavata Purāṇa',[3] sacred texts used by the Hare Krishna movement, indicates the power and authority of sacred texts and their 'perlocutionary function'. These texts influence people, even if devotees do not understand Sanskrit and do not get a direct message delivered by these sacred texts. First, people enjoy listening to Sanskrit verses, because, as Taylor (2015, 523) puts it, 'they add color, variety, and beauty to a performance'. Second, these texts are regarded as sacred and true, as Sanskrit is believed to be the language of the gods and therefore is not challenged. Third, even if people do not understand the meaning, they believe that by hearing

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3   'Bhāgavata Purāṇa', also known as 'Srimad Bhāgavatam' is a revered text of Vaishnavism and it is one of the eighteen Purāṇas (books of ancient Indian history, civilisation and mythology) used by believers of Hinduism, see Gupta/Valpey 2013.

the sacred texts devotees will be granted blessings from 'Bhâgavat-ji'[4] and all their wishes will be fulfilled. Finally, the process also enables religious specialists, who are believed to possess this sacred knowledge, to publicly demonstrate their status and establish their authority through these sacred texts.

If other sources on religious speech are to be mentioned, then it would be Tambiah's (1968) emphasis on the power of words in ritual settings; Ray's (1973) performative utterance that questions the effects of words taken alone and in combination with actions; Keane's (1997) language perspective in terms of performance, text and context; Child's (2003) religious texts combined with visualisation techniques; or Pernot's (2006) rhetorical forms of religious expression. Taylor's (2015) and Lambek's (1990a; 1990b; 2016) works, mentioned earlier, extensively deal with the relationship between knowledge, power, textual authority and the authority of religious speakers in the context of Hinduism and Islam, respectively.

A closer look at these sources suggest that one can deal here with the process of unpacking religious texts and speeches. In other words, they define what religious speech is, look at the nature of religious speeches by differentiating them from other speeches and determine the production and importance of such speeches in relation to the content and meaning. Lambek, for example, deals with questions such as: Why and how do words matter to religion? Is 'religious' language different from 'ordinary' language and in what ways (Lambek 2016)? In another work he asks: How is textual knowledge reproduced and circulated? What are the social factors that mediate access to texts? Who is able to read and in what manner? Who has the authority to represent what is written? How are challenges to such authority manifested (Lambek 1990a)?

In short, these sources operate within 'religious' frameworks, such as religious speech, religious speakers, religious texts and religious contexts. First, in this volume, similar issues will be explored by taking into consideration the growing religious knowledge among the mass. However, this will be done in a broader social context that underlines an increasing role of lay people in the religious communication and activities. Second, an opposite direction will be taken with the aim to shift the attention from the question of how religious speech is defined, shaped, framed, or produced to how religious speeches help us define and shape our worldviews, frame our mundane activities, produce knowledge, authority and power, where it is not necessarily religious specialists, but also lay followers who are considered to be active agents. As noted earlier, it is important to understand what religion does in a broader social circle and what else is involved in speaking and doing religion beyond religious contexts.

Beyond Religious Contexts

Turner talks about the tendency of the shift in religion from 'hierarchical ineffable' to 'horizontal effable' form, where religious knowledge in the age of information is not only in the hands of intellectual elite but extended to the mass (Turner 2008). According to him, the sharp distinction between the elite and the mass becomes blurred. This, as he puts it, is due to 'greater literacy, a democratization of knowledge and access to knowledge through the Internet' (Turner 2008, 221). It is observable, for example, in the context of Islam in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, the research area of Tulebaeva. Individual attachment to God is visibly increasing with the revival of Islam in the country. If before (during pre-Soviet and Soviet periods) only religious specialists, such as mullahs and elderly people, who prepared themselves for the 'afterlife', performed daily prayers at home, today it is also the younger generation that actively visit mosques and religious teachings. If before parents consulted religious specialists to heal their children, today, with increasing religious knowledge in the post-Soviet period, these parents open the Quran and perform healing themselves by reading a Fatiha sura (verses from the Quran) and personally address Allah without any intermediaries. One also witnesses how Islamic knowledge is discussed and circulated by lay people through the practices called *daavat* (preaching and calling

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4   'Ji' is a gender-neutral honorific suffix in the Hindi language used to address a person with respect. Here, 'Bhāgavata Purāṇa' as a sacred text is being addressed with respect.

others to follow Islam) or religious lessons called *taalim* that take place every Sunday in the homes of religious laity. These examples clearly demonstrate that religious knowledge does not only belong to religious specialists, but is gained by a broader public.

As there is a strong overlap between religious and social contexts, it would be helpful to understand how this volume approaches religious speech. **Religious speech** is the topic of discussion in all contributions, however, as was already underlined, it is approached not from a religious or sacred text perspective, but from speeches, talks, discussions and discourses on and around religion as part of 'social practice' (see Wuthnow 2011). It is also important to underline that this volume does not represent all religions and religious groups. The selected papers deal with Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. This is mainly due to the framework of project C 04 of the collaborative research centre, where these three religions are the focus of study of the research team. The paragraph below provides a short overview of the chapters in this volume and their approaches to a religious speech.

Pleizier (chapter 1) looks at religious speeches in Protestant preaching and sermons of military chaplains in order to demonstrate different effects these speeches have on listeners. The author highlights several factors that contribute to the way religious speeches are perceived by making an emphasis on listeners and the settings where speeches are delivered. Schäfer (chapter 2) underlines the dilemma of continuity or change in relation to formalised religious speech in the context of Christian converts in India. The author deals with the authority of religious speakers who either need to perform according to the established tradition or make changes in order to attract the interest of listeners. Sommerschuh (chapter 3) examines the role of religious speech in mediating value changes associated with conversion to Christianity. Writing about the Aari people of southwestern Ethiopia, Sommerschuh argues that Christians here strive to overcome a traditional focus on hierarchy and honour by adopting a humble mode of speech. Tripathy's paper (chapter 4) on guru's speech, on the example of Baba Ramdev, indicates the amalgam of religious and secular contexts. The guru Baba Ramdev, whose authority is based on

an old Hindu tradition, employs unique 'secular' strategies to win more followers and clients. Ojha's paper (chapter 5) deals with discourses that link natural disasters in Puri, Odisha, to the supernatural forces that cast punishment to people for their sins. The author's examples show the role of speech and discourses in religious interpretation of disasters as well as coping strategies in the post-disaster period. Taalaibekova (chapter 6) discusses the practice of *dawat*, delivering speeches by lay religious Muslims in Kyrgyzstan in order to correct other's behaviour in accordance with Quranic and prophetic prescriptions. The author examines in which ways the admonishments are taken seriously and when they run the danger of being ignored. Tulebaeva in her paper (chapter 7) highlights the importance of discourses among practicing and non-practicing Muslims that also contribute to the perception, imaginaries and experience of Islam in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan.

What is common in these papers? It is worth highlighting several important and mutually dependent features in the practice of speaking and doing religion that most of the contributions share. These are: (1) contextualisation, (2) language and (3) religious authority and religious knowledge.

Contextualisation

By defining preaching as an 'act of local theology', Conrad and Hardenberg (2020) emphasise the importance of taking a cultural context into consideration when performing preaching. According to them, a good preaching not only requires a certain religious knowledge or good interpretation skills, but it also requires that the message is clearly heard and understood by a diverse audience. They argue, 'Sermons exist only in a plural mode and thus only concretely, namely in relation to a concrete religious community, at a certain place, in a certain time, to certain persons' (Conrad/Hardenberg 2020, 194). In other words, a sermon is not only heard or understood, but it also 'moves' each and every listener in the audience in their own ways (see also Pleizier and Schäfer, this volume). A sermon cannot be considered successful, if it does not touch the feelings of listeners. It will be even 'in vain' (see Conrad/Hardenberg 2020) or

'not completed' (see Taylor 2015) if one does not take into account the acceptance of listeners. A successful 'acceptance' of sermons by listeners very much depends on how well sermons are contextualised.

Religious specialists skilfully operate with what Demmer and Gaenszle (2007, 11) identified as **(en)textualisation** and **contextualisation** processes in order to make an impact on their listeners (see also Taylor 2015). The former means the embeddedness of discourse in textual authority, such as the Quran, Bible, or Vedic texts, which are usually not challenged. The latter – contextualisation – is no less important, because it enables a speaker to address real concerns, usually mundane and current societal needs of the community. Tulebaeva, during her research in Kyrgyzstan, noticed general patterns in the speaking tactics of religious experts as well as religious lay people in Kyrgyzstan. In their speech, both religious specialists and lay practicing Muslims refer to the Quran, *sharia* (Islamic law), *hadith* (what Prophet Muhammad said) and *sunnah* (what Prophet did) and interpreted these sources in connection to current societal issues that concern the mass. One can observe here both (en)textualisation and contextualisation processes. On the one hand, a referral to sacred texts or traditional practices gives people a feeling that what they do according to Islam is a right solution to the concerns and issues that they face. This is because the sacred texts are not challenged. On the other hand, the texts and narratives are the same, but their interpretations, which very much depend on the skills, knowledge, understanding and strategies of speakers, are adjusted and re-adjusted, that is, contextualised, according to the demands of the listeners. By referring to Islamic texts, Lambek notes that 'each reading is actually a reproduction' (Lambek 1990a, 26) and this exactly relates to the process of contextualisation and the use of appropriate language, as discussed below.

Language

This volume approaches language not in terms of content of speech, but in terms of strategy of using a certain language that demonstrates one's religiosity, constructs knowledge, identifies values, or invites an action or reaction. It is important to highlight the specificity of religious language that has a special effect on people. For example, Keane mentions that religious languages based on sacred texts allow subjective experience of divinity, solemnity and holiness (Keane 1997; see also Schmitz 1974). It can be also so, as Ugwueye and Ezenwa-Ohaeto (2011) state, that when a language is linked with religious activities such as sermon or worship, the believers of that religion ascribe virtues to the language and place it in a superior position in comparison to the language of other speeches. This implies that religious language is embedded in human subjective values and assumptions of sacredness, divinity, spirituality and solemnity.

By extending the use of religious language (that is religious by content) into a social context, one can observe how religious terms and concepts are extensively used in daily communication and that people refer to important religious figures or phenomena to justify their actions and social practices. These actions, also utterances as actions, signal certain messages and entail consequences. For example, with the increasing role of Islam in Kyrgyzstan (from Tulebaeva's field experience), many people started to use Arabic terms in their speech. They say Allah when referring to God, while before they would say *kudai* – a Kyrgyz word for God; they also greet in Arabic; respond in Arabic with terms such as *mashallah* or *alhamdulillah* when they want to express their positive reaction. Here one does not talk about a person's religious activities such as a regular visit to a mosque or performance of daily prayers. One can see it already from people's everyday communication, at least these people demonstrate that through these phrases. If every utterance is to be perceived as an act (Austin 1962; see also Lambek 2016), then the way speakers use these Arabic terms demonstrates to others and, in the first place, proves to themselves their religious commitment. Similarly, Sommerschuh (in this volume) demonstrates how among Aari a humble mode of speech serves both to signal religious adherence and to cultivate a humble self.

There are also living religious concepts, historical religious figures or local religious values that

serve as labels that entail certain implications, power and authority. For example, the authority of the guru Ramdev, which is discussed later in this volume by Tripathy, is ingrained in the Indian culture where gurus are equated to the three deities in Hinduism and perceived as an 'ultimate form of God incarnate' (Taylor 2015, 531). This is one side of guru Ramdev's success. Another side is his own strategy of identifying himself with Ayurveda and yoga, both of which constitute the basis of Hinduism. Some religious authorities use local concepts in order to claim authority, as demonstrated by Schäfer in this volume on the example of *parampara*. Similar things can be said in the context of Islam. The act of referring to the *sunnah* – the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad – is usually enough to justify a certain behaviour as expected from pious Muslims. There are also certain concept-labels that discourage people from doing certain acts. Tulebaeva (in this volume) demonstrates how a child-related practice is expected to be abandoned by pious Muslims in Kyrgyzstan for it being labelled as *shirk* (idolatry) or *bidayat* (innovation according to Islam) which already classifies the practice as inappropriate according to Islamic norms. By identifying these practices as *shirk* or *bidayat*, no additional long convincing instructive speech is needed here.

Religious Authority and Religious Knowledge

What is the authority of religious specialists based on? Is it only based on the authority of religious texts or on the possession of sacred knowledge? Who possesses religious knowledge today? As Turner (2008) notes, religious knowledge is becoming more accessible, reachable and understandable to ordinary people. The emergence of new actors who claim religious knowledge leads to the decentralisation of religious power and authority which challenges the authority of religious specialists. At the same time, diverse religious interpretations are coming from different sources and through different channels that lead to more confusion rather than clarity. For example, Taalaibekova (in this volume) mentions pious Muslims, who are actively engaged in spreading Islam in Kyrgyzstan. She underlines that only having

religious knowledge is not sufficient for claiming a religious authority and influencing people; one needs to demonstrate the knowledge.

A religious authority should possess moral character, good conduct and personality as prescribed in different religious scriptures. For example, to many believers of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad is the first and model preacher (*khatib* in Arabic) who acquired specific moral character (see Antoun 2016). The same can be said about Sufi saints (see Ohlander 2009). Thus, a religious preacher's conduct, character, personality and morality along with his or her knowledge and qualification are preferred as essential qualities to claim the position and being accepted by the listeners or followers (Lee 2004).

It is equally important to keep in mind that a religious authority may play multiple roles for the followers in several societies, starting from being a preacher, to medicine man or healer to a consultant who helps the people at the time of difficulties. For instance, Ojha's paper (in this volume) gives insights to the role of Shankaracharya, the head preacher in Govardhan Peetham of Puri, who as a leader also provides social welfare measures to the victims of a natural catastrophe. Similarly, Schäfer's work (in this volume) gives an example of preachers playing the role of a preserver of age-old traditional practices undertaken in the churches of Koraput. This multiple roleplay of a preacher or authority, which is also illustrated in Tripathy's paper (in this volume), shows a linkage to Gaffney's theoretical understanding of tripartite classification of religious speakers. Referring to Max Weber's (1922) influential distinction between the institutional as legal authority, the prophet as charismatic authority and the magician as supply service authority, Gaffney points out the roles of Muslim preachers in Egypt as scholars, saints and moralists or warriors (Gaffney 1994). The above sources and discussions provide an understanding that a religious speech becomes more effective and fruitful depending on the authority of religious speakers who not only carry the knowledge or understanding of religious scriptures, but also maintain an ideal lifestyle by being exemplary men and providing services for the fulfilment of religious and social needs of society.

Structure: Ways of Speaking and Doing Religion

The chapters in this volume start with the paper of Pleizier, which deals with the issue of studying the impact of religious speech cross-disciplinarily. The author states that both theology and anthropology approach the study of religious speech differently. Anthropology looks from community perspective, that is, what religious people do together, how a religious speech shapes community values and group behaviour and traces the relationship within communities. Theology considers the relationships between human and divine beings by making an emphasis on the understanding of sacred texts, convictions concerning gods and the world and communication between gods and people. As a comparison, he explores sermons that are delivered at two different contexts: the first one is the reception of Protestant preaching and the second one is sermons delivered by military chaplains in army base camps. He provides ethnographic examples on how religion is embodied, shaped and experienced in both settings differently. However, in both cases one can see how content and context of speech, speakers and audience are important factors to be considered. By indicating the complexity of religious speech, Pleizier argues for the importance of cooperation between anthropologists and theologians in studying religious phenomena.

Schäfer's work on a Christian community in Odisha, eastern India, deals with a local term called *parampara*. *Parampara* signifies the importance of inheriting, preserving and continuing local, family, community ideas, knowledge, values and practices. In the context of the Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church, which the author studies, *parampara* incorporates the legitimisation of religious and traditional practices, the authority of pastors and elected elderly members of the church and most importantly, the responsibility by the community to follow church rules and regulations. Schäfer's ethnography on *parampara* illustrates a tight link between social and religious life of the local Christians, where lay people are involved in church activities and agenda and deal with social and economic aspects of the community life along with the pastors. One can also learn how ritualised and formalised religious speech-acts at family events, delivered by pastors, are appreciated not as much for their content as for the effect to be personally addressed in a religious speech. The local concept of *parampara* with its demand for the preservation of what one has inherited limits pastors' agency and personal influence for change, even if it is expected and wished by followers. Conflicts with other Pentecostal preachers referring to *parampara* raises a question of to what extent religious practices should discourage or, on the contrary, encourage renewal and change.

Sommerschuh looks at the role of speech in the everyday life of Dell, a rural Aari community in southern Ethiopia, which has recently seen mass conversion to evangelical Christianity. Sommerschuh argues that for evangelicals in Dell, all speech carries religious significance, whether inside or outside of church. Examining modes of speech rather than the content of speeches, Sommerschuh points to the salience of what he calls 'humble speech'. In a cultural setting, where people traditionally strove for honour or 'greatness', humble speech is a form of exemplary conduct through which dedicated evangelicals represent to others what the value of Christian humility looks like in practice. At the same time, humble speech serves as a technology of the self through which Christians cultivate a humble habitus. Since humility is central to Aari Christians' ideas about what is required for human flourishing, Sommerschuh concludes that speech for these Christians is 'an important resource in working towards the good'.

Tripathy's paper looks at the famous guru Baba Ramdev and his success in promoting ideas related to health and well-being that are based on yoga and Ayurveda. The author projects Ramdev as different from other classical gurus in the sense that he advances secular aspects of guruhood and brings faith and science together. Baba Ramdev, as a famous yoga guru and a successful entrepreneur, has association with political parties and promotes local, indigenous, traditional and national values and interests. His performances and activities are legitimised because of their connection to yoga and Ayurveda, both of which are linked to Hinduism and indigenous traditions. However, he takes yoga and Ayurveda beyond institutional Hinduism into the social realm. The author demonstrates that it is not the content of Baba Ramdev's

speech, but his communication and representation strategies that attract the trust of people. He is an exemplary person who demonstrates health through his body, behaviour and lifestyle by devoting himself to the development of the Indian nation.

Ojha introduces the readers to the 2019 natural catastrophe of a summer cyclone that severely affected Puri, where he conducted his ethnographic fieldwork. The cyclone was interpreted by many local people as the divine punishment of the Lord Jagannath for their bad deeds and sins. Ojha extensively deals with secondary sources from other regions or religious contexts that highlight the link between natural disasters and supernatural forces. His ethnographic findings clearly demonstrate how religion plays a core role in people's understanding of and dealing with natural disasters by providing the interpretations, explanations, answers, solutions and coping mechanisms. One can also observe how social behaviour is tightly linked to and regulated through religious values. Additionally, it is interesting to note the responses of religious authorities such as Shankaracharya of Govardhan Peetham and the head of the Ramakrishna Mission in providing support to the cyclone victims as well as consoling them for their losses through religious speeches.

Taalaibekova's paper explores the impact of various forms of religious speeches in the context of Kyrgyzstan. Unlike Friday sermons or Friday lectures, which are usually delivered by religious specialists, the author concentrates on the local practice of *dawat* (locally pronounced as 'daavat') which can be understood as a practice of verbally urging and admonishing by lay people to rectify other people's behaviour in compliance with Islamic prescriptions. By taking Austin's speech act theory as the point of departure, Taalaibekova explores how the force of *dawat* is constituted in the absence of clearly defined conventions and whether it is able to produce changes in other people's lives. Her ethnographic examples reveal that a 'perlocutionary effect' of *dawat*, in Austian sense, is constituted through the demonstration of exemplary behaviour. Without the demonstration of proper and exemplary behaviour that is in accordance with Islamic prescriptions, *dawat* runs the risk of 'being ignored, not taken seriously or

being irritating', as she puts it. This does not only apply to religious speeches of lay people, but also the speeches of famous religious experts.

Tulebaeva raises the issue of conflicts in certain cultural practices that people in Kyrgyzstan face with the revival of Islam in the country after the collapse of the Soviet Union. On the ethnographic example of *tushoo kesüü*, a child-related life-cycle ritual in Kochkor village, she demonstrates the importance of this practice, which started to be abandoned by pious Muslims who now strictly follow Islamic norms. These people justify their decisions to abandon local cultural practices by referring to the norms and regulations mentioned in Islamic texts, which are actively interpreted and promoted by religious experts and practicing Muslims. The paper demonstrates the normative force of Islamic values, which extends the very notion of value to something 'good' (attractive) as well as 'right' (imperative). The author argues that the normativity of Islam creates a parallel tradition and an alternative way of life in Kochkor. Even if this new way of living partially contradicts local tradition, it is religious sources that justify the normativity of changes. The dissemination and circulation of religious knowledge and reactions of people towards novelties and changes brought by the revival of Islam in the country engender intensive discourses. This allows the author to claim that Islam in Kochkor is visible more in discourses rather than in practice.

Conclusion

Religious speeches and religious speakers, being two important elements in religious practices, play key roles in identifying, establishing, modifying and developing religious communities and institutions. They also have a significant impact on the social life of people by encouraging them to follow a prescribed lifestyle, motivating them for a change and consulting as well as supporting them to cope with difficult situations. This introduction has moved around religious speech and religious speakers and discussed their constituting elements such as context, language, religious knowledge and authority from an anthropological and theological perspective.

A religious speech is well understood and has a significant impact only when it is spoken or delivered in a suitable context. The language used in religious speech also has equal importance of its own. Here, the focus is not on the text, syntax or mode of expression used in religious language; but rather on the divinity, value, emotion, solemnity and respect that people attach to a religious language while speaking, listening or using it. The authority and impact of religious speakers are determined not only through their possession of religious knowledge, which is becoming more accessible to the mass, but also by a set of qualities that requires a demonstration of exemplary behaviour in order to be accepted by followers.

The aim of this volume is to show the dynamics of speaking and doing religion, which is extended from a religious to a social context or setting. Even if limited cases and religious groups have been considered in this volume, still this has allowed to go beyond a religious speech and look at any speech in, on and around religion, with the aim to see what else 'a religious speech' can 'do, involve, produce and make possible'. The question, why religious speech is relevant is an important one. It serves more than just communicating the ideas and values mentioned in sacred texts. It aims towards influencing the believers, forming groups and working as a resource for the speakers, listeners and institutions. This point has been discussed with much elaboration in this volume. A socio-cultural approach has been used to understand religious speech, its use and significance not only in leading a religious life, but also in navigating in everyday mundane situations.

New dynamics that are observed on religious speeches and religious speakers in the present day, but which could not get enough space for discussion in this volume, are related to materiality of religion, conversion, commercialisation and dissemination of these speeches through a rapid use of virtual media and involvement of religious speakers beyond the religious sphere such as politics, education and business. These could be the topics of future research where the changing values in relation to religious speech and roles of religious speakers can be critically analysed.

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Theo Pleizier

Impact of Religious Speech

Theological and Anthropological Considerations

Summary

Does religious speech have a specific kind of impact? And if so, what research strategies are needed? This article argues that we need an intradisciplinary approach that integrates anthropological and theological analyses. This approach is illustrated with two different research projects. The first case demonstrates that in the study of sermon reception of Protestant preaching the emerging concept of 'actualisation of faith' (Pleizier 2010, 253–274) indicates a specific impact of religious speech. Impact then refers to the process how hearers of sermons become religiously involved. The second case presents the sermons of military chaplains. The religious qualities of their speeches are very diverse and the impact they aim for differs from the impact of regular congregational preaching. The paper concludes that religious impact should be understood in relation to religious cultures. The impact of religious speech reflects the diversity of religious cultures and thus enriches the understanding of religion as resource in society.

1. Introduction

Speech has impact. So does religious speech. Speech creates, maintains and transforms communities and cultures. How then should we understand the impact of religious speech?

Anthropology and theology answer this question differently. Anthropologically, religious speech creates, maintains and transforms religious communities and religious cultures. It addresses issues like: what do religious people do together and how does religious speech shape their common values and religious attitudes, and what impact does it have on societal and cultural domains? Theologically, however, the issue of impact should first be understood from the inside of a particular religious tradition. A religious tradition can be understood as a – to some extent – coherent whole of understandings of sacred texts, convictions concerning god(s) and the world, and mediating practices that purportedly communicate the presence of god(s) and the exchange between god(s) and people. Religious practices are thus about the 'contact with or access to superhuman powers' and, these practices, according to the sociologist Martin Riesebrodt, can be understood as 'interventionist practices'. They establish, manipulate, activate the access to and the exchange with the divine (Riesebrodt 2010, 75). Speech is one of those practices to interact with the divine. Theologians study the impact of religious speech in its potential and effect to create, maintain and transform the relationship with the divine. Hence, religious speech, understood as interventionist practice, concerns the interaction between believers, both individually and organised in groups, with the divine. Theologians develop concepts and theories to understand and explain the impact of religious speech within the inner dynamics of those interventionist practices that define a religious tradition. The perspectives of anthropology and theology regarding the nature of religious speech thus help to explain the

relationship between the shaping of religious communities (anthropology) and the interaction with the divine (theology).

This essay contributes to the interdisciplinary collaboration between anthropology and theology. This collaboration is based upon the assumption that religious interactions are only to be found in social and psychological phenomena. Speech is permeated by social, psychological and communicative actions, processes, meanings, histories, techniques, convictions, examples of excellence and resources. Within these anthropological aspects, though, religion is embodied, practiced, experienced and constructed. Anthropologists may be more interested in the effects of religious speech on human beings and group behaviour while theologians study the effects of religious speech on the interactions between humans and God. Now, the change from 'god(s)' to 'God' has been made. This essay has been written from a Christian perspective. Hence, theology in this essay means 'Christian theology' and practical theologians are particularly interested in interactions between anthropology and theology within Christian practices. This chapter concerns a specific practical theological sub-discipline, namely the study of Christian preaching (homiletics),[1] which studies religious speech (sermons) and religious speakers (preachers) from a theological perspective. This perspective generates questions such as: how do sermons maintain and transform the relationship between God and humans through speech; how are sacred texts explained in sermons in such a way that their divine authority is communicated well; and how do preachers disclose their own religious personality in their speech in order to both lead and shape a religious community?

This chapter presents two cases of speech in the field of preaching: regular Sunday preaching in Protestant Christianity and sermons by (Protestant) military chaplains in the context of the army. In both cases the religious speaker is an ordained Protestant minister. The comparison of these two cases is relevant for the question how theological and anthropological aspects relate in researching religious speech. After introducing some further complexities with regard to the concept of 'religious impact', the first empirical case of reception of preaching in regular parishes is presented. The outcome of the analysis, the idea of 'actualising faith', is challenged by the second case, religious speech by military chaplains. The question is raised to what extent a conceptualisation of the religious impact of speech that is derived from the study of regular Sunday worship in Protestantism can be applied to the speeches of Protestant chaplains in the context of the military.

The argument develops in four steps. First, the complexity of the concept of 'religious impact' is introduced and a distinction is made between practices of production and practices of reception. Second, one practice of reception of speech is analysed, based upon qualitative interviews with listeners to sermons. The analysis generates the concept of 'actualising faith' to understand religious impact in Protestant preaching. Third, a few methods of generating conceptual ideas will be discussed. How does the concept 'actualising faith' relate to other religious practices? Fourth, in order to answer this question a project is presented that studies the production of religious speech by military chaplains. Generating theological concepts to understand religious impact, it is concluded, is bound to the context in which religious speech occurs. One possible direction for the collaboration between anthropology and theology is indicated.

2. 'Religious Impact', the Complexity of a Concept

Using language is doing something, as philosophers of language such as Austin and Searle have argued convincingly (Austin 1975; Searle 1969). The effects of language are rather complex. The illocutionary effect (for instance: promising something) should be distinguished from the perlocutionary effect (for instance: someone becoming violent after hearing the speech), the latter being

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1   Homiletics is derived from the Greek verb *homilein*, a combination of 'address' and 'conversation', while the Latin word for sermon is *homila*. As an academic discipline 'homiletics' developed during the centuries from 'the art of sacred rhetoric', the rules for communicating theological principles and biblical exegesis in religious discourse, towards a distinct academic discipline during the 19th and 20th cent. AD. Currently the field has its own academic communities (Societas Homiletica; Academy of Homiletics) and journals (Homiletic; International Journal of Homiletics).

an effect that is not necessarily entailed by the locution or the utterance. This rather simple example of the complexity of impact even within one particular perspective can be multiplied when different theoretical perspectives to speech are taken into account.

Communication scholars, psychologists and sociologists, all have their own understanding of the impact of religious speech. The social impact of religious speech, for example might be that groups of people feel motivated to start a war or that a military battalion feels strengthened in the tasks ahead (Hassner 2016). A psychological perspective on religious speech, for instance, studies the impact of speeches on the affective states of mind (Schaap-Jonker 2008). The impact of religious speech can be studied with the help of rhetorical, communication, and cultural concepts. Previous research in sermon reception examined questions like how well are listeners able to reconstruct the message of a sermon after the church service. Other studies inquired how hearers of sermons react to different rhetorical qualities of sermons (McClure et al. 2004). Valuable as they are in themselves, these studies contribute to a larger understanding of impact but do not necessarily clarify the impact of speech within a particular religion. The question what is meant by a 'religious' impact of (religious) speech, therefore, is a theological question.

Further, we have to distinguish between religious impact and other kinds of impact, such as social, psychological or cultural impact. Besides, we also have to distinguish between the different kinds of impact on the one hand and religious or non-religious speech on the other hand. The strategic speech by a military commander and the motivational speech by a politician differ from a religious speech by a religious leader. It may be assumed that religious leaders mainly focus on strengthening the attitudes of the believers towards the object of their religious attention, for instance God. In order to understand the specific religious impact of religious speech, we need a theological approach that helps to explain what is going on in this particular religious tradition. We may miss the specific religious function and meaning of religious speech if we do not take into account that sermons are meant to alter religious relations, that is pertaining the relations between humans and the divine. Religious practices alter social relations (in coming to church, churchgoers meet new people). The altering of religious relations, however, concerns a different type of relationship (in coming to church, churchgoers experience a closeness to God).

Religious practices may have impact on social complexes. For instance, preaching may influence the attitude of civilians in times of political turmoil. Religious speech may motivate people to specific social behaviour and thus regulates social realities, such as speech that motivates to sustain the poor or speech that empowers the sick to put their trust in God at the expense of medical care services. This would count as a social impact of religious speech. On the other hand, social aspects, such as the freedom to assemble, the education of religious leaders, or the access to economic resources, has an impact on the development of religious communities and practices. The social and the religious interact in many ways, but social and religious impacts do not coincide: religious speech binds together believers (social impact); it also directs the mind of individual listeners or the collective attitude of the group towards the divine (religious impact). Experiencing a faith-relationship with God is a specific religious impact of religious speech. The social aspect – doing this together as a group – may strengthen the religious impact; it may even generate the religious impact in the sense that without the social the religious would not happen. The intertwinement of the two, however, does not imply that the religious refers to the same reality as the social.

Another distinction helps to clarify the complexity of the notion 'impact'. Take for instance the difference between religious impact by political speeches and political impact by religious speeches. A recent international research project on preaching during the European refugee crisis in 2015 demonstrates how religious and political impact can be closely related (Deeg 2017; Pleizier/ Kaufmann 2018; Ringgaard Lorensen et al. 2017). The project studies the construction of images of refugees, the relationship of sermons to political discourse and the hermeneutical and homiletical strategies employed by preachers.

Finally, impact should be approached from two angles. The angle of 'production' focuses upon the texts and performance of the sermon. Impact can be reconstructed from the contents, the structure and the environment in which preaching takes place. On the other hand, the angle of 'reception' is about the use of sermons by audiences. The next sections consider both angles. Both perspectives are needed to study the religious impact of religious speech.

3.   Theological Study of Religious Impact: Protestant Preaching

3.1.   The Study of Sermon Reception

Since the 1960s the study of preaching moved into new directions. Empirical research became integrated in homiletical theories. This process is part of growing interest of using empirical methods in practical theology (van der Ven 1993; Swinton/ Mowat 2006; Dinter et al. 2007; Weyel et al. 2013). The turn to the empirical has four – partly overlapping – phases. First, a descriptive perspective was added to a field that was mostly normatively and deductively shaped. The real sermon rather than the ideal sermon became the centre of interest (Pleizier 2017). Second, theories from communication studies – notably during the period in which mass communication both as a phenomenon and as a discipline emerged – were integrated in homiletical thinking, ultimately leading to a rethinking of theological theories of what preaching is about, the result of which can be seen for instance in titles such as 'The Gospel as Information' (Bartholomäus 1972). In the third phase, research in homiletics started to become empirical with a focus upon the production of sermons. The study of the content of sermons is currently the most widely used application of empirical methodology in homiletics. Finally, the empirical study of preaching broadened into other directions, such as reception research. The history of reception research spans for almost four decades and showed a wide variety of methods and approaches, both quantitative and qualitative.

Sermon reception research inquires how listeners of sermons react after hearing a sermon. It has been framed as retention research (how much do listeners actually remember after hearing a sermon?), as evaluation research (how do they value the sermon they just heard?), or as meaning research (what meanings do they attribute to the sermon?). The theological study of sermon reception combines two dimensions, a religious and a communicative dimension. Preaching consists of spoken words, it is a form of interhuman communication. The spoken words articulate religious convictions and shape religious attitudes. Besides all kinds of social and communicative impacts, these theological assumptions and articulations also point to a particular religious impact.

3.2.   Interhuman Communication and Divine-Human Dynamics

How do we study the phenomenon of people sitting in a church building on a regular schedule, say once a week or once a month, while listening to a religious speech? The same question, rephrased within a Protestant articulation of Christian faith, could run like this: how can the phenomenon of a Christian congregation that meets during Sunday worship to hear the divine word in and through preaching be studied? Theologians use two different sets of concepts. First, studying a religious phenomenon involves all kinds of anthropological realities: buildings, peoples, meanings, times, behaviours. Second, to study it as a theologian – that is to understand the inner logic of religious practices, cultures, resources in order to articulate more precise how God interacts with this world – requires a theological conceptualisation.

First, preaching in Protestantism is a case of interhuman communication. Communication science serves as anthropological counterpart to the theological ramifications of religious speech. Communication theories develop perspectives to human interactions, interhuman communicative exchanges and audience behaviour (McQuail 1997; Ruddock 2001). Communication, though, comes in many forms. Anthropologically speaking, preaching can be viewed as persuasion (rhetorical approach), as information (transmission approach), and as interpretation (meaning making approach).

Transmission and rhetorical approaches tend to focus on the speaker; meaning making approaches centre upon the individual listener as interpreting subject. In protestant practice the speaker and the audience relate to each other as preacher and congregation. Preaching is a social act (van Seters 1988). Social interaction leaves space for relationships, histories, communities, embodiments, practices, thoughts, emotions, or meanings.

Speech creates a specific atmosphere in which humans interact. Compared to texts, speech is very direct. Spoken words immediately generate cognitive and emotional responses. Reading allows for breaks to reflect. The speech-context thus provides a more immediate context for impact. In hearing, impact more likely flows from the direct awareness of the listener. As a form of social interaction, interhuman communication involves seeing someone, experiencing the personal presence of the speaker (embodiment of the preacher), and being present in a ritual (liturgical) environment. Thus, impact is less the result of conscious reflection.

Further, a sermon is a form of religious speech. Here, we have to distinguish between context, speaker, and content: is a sermon religious speech because it is communication with a religious community? Is it religious because a religious leader is speaking? Is it religious because the topics concern the Christian religion? A Protestant understanding of preaching entails certain theological convictions to what preaching is. Despite the fact that practical theologians reconstruct these convictions differently this does not rule out that there is a fundamental idea that preaching is 'religion in practice'.

One way of looking at it is through sociological definitions of religion. These definitions usually consist of various aspects, such as a sense of belonging or community; a set of beliefs or values; and specific actions or rituals. Religions bind people together, they express beliefs and they are embodied by certain practices or rituals. This can be applied to preaching: it brings together a group of people, it expresses the beliefs and values of the Christian faith, and it is part of the ritual of worship. Yet a theological analysis contains another aspect, namely that religious practices also regulate the exchange between God and humans. In

Protestantism this is particularly so for preaching. Christian preaching is not only 'about' the divine word, in the sense that sermons are based upon and communicate the Bible as divine revelation. Preaching, with an old Protestant confessional text, counts as 'Word of God'. How this is so and whether this is possible for human speech, is a perpetual discussion among homiletics.

To address this conviction for research purposes, the idea of 'divine-human dynamics' was coined (Pleizier 2010, 57–82). Preaching is a combination of interhuman communication that entails a particular religious dynamic: the divine and human beings interact with each other. This dynamic in the act of preaching assumes a divine presence in the event of preaching. The German practical theologian Rudolf Bohren (1920–2010) explained this with the help of three temporal directions. According to Bohren, God is present, because preaching remembers God's actions in the past; it opens the future of the divine promises and the expectation of a final divine judgement; and it testifies to God's active power in the present through his Spirit (Bohren 1993). These theological statements try to articulate the divine-human dynamic that is effective in preaching.

These theological convictions are not just normative statements or conditions for success. In a sense, they are as empirical as the anthropological aspect of interhuman communication. Though it seems that it is harder to measure 'divine-human dynamics' than 'interhuman communication', it is possible to study the reports of believers, groups of believers, texts of religious speeches and speech environments, to understand how both concepts function in real life situations.

3.3. Experienced, Shaped, and Embodied Religion

Three different dimensions are touched upon in listener's reactions to hearing sermons. Hearing sermons is embodied religion, hearing sermons shapes their religious attitudes, and listeners experience the realities of their Christian religion. These aspects point to an alternative approach to understanding the impact of sermons as religious

speeches: in hearing sermons, the hearer's faith is actualised.[2]

3.3.1. Embodying Religion

Hearing a sermon is not a passive, bodiless event. Hearers are participants in the liturgy. They sing, they pray, they hear. This is most evident when listeners talk about the voice of the preacher and whether they were able to actually hear the preacher: her or his voice may have been too weak or the sound system did not work properly. Embodiment is as concrete as the ears of the listener. Preaching is about actual sounds that need to be heard.

In commenting on the preacher's voice, hearers address the involvement of the preacher: you could hear in his voice that he was really impressed or touched, they hear urgency in the voice of the preacher. In other words, the rhetorical category of 'pathos' counts as an aspect of the embodiment of the sermon. Similarly, listeners report their motivation to go to church or their lack thereof.

The seating arrangement in the building contributes to an intense hearing experience or even helps the listener to hide among the congregation. One striking example in the interviews is of a woman who felt very depressed when she entered the church building. But after the sermon, she exclaimed during the interview, she was really able to sing with her whole heart.

Sitting, listening, singing. The sense of community or lack of it, the ability of paying attention to the preacher's words. These function as indicators for how religion is a bodily phenomenon for listeners.

3.3.2. Shaping Religion

In hearing a sermon, listeners interact with the content of the sermon. The content of a sermon, however, does not consist of neutral ideas that they can think about and reject or accept. Obviously, sometimes listeners strongly disagree or agree with what a preacher says. Yet, these situations – though they may be most apparent – have a deeper, underlying structure that has to do with the motivation to go to church or the expectations that listeners have with regard to hearing sermons. Shana,[3] one of the listeners in my study, says about this: 'You just have to keep going. Sometimes you go praying that there would be only one word for me, one that helps me to go on this week. Something that strengthens me, you know' (Pleizier 2010, 157).

Earlier reception research focussed predominantly on the meaning making abilities of the individual. Sermons, though, have a strong communal impact (Pleizier 2018).

This communal impact is at least twofold. First, sermons create and maintain relationships among the members of the congregations. The contents of the sermon help listeners to relate to each other from the perspective of Christian faith. For instance, though the listener cannot relate to a particular experience that the preacher refers to, she immediately thinks about someone in the congregation who struggles with particular issues in her life and while listening she hopes that this person hears these words of the preacher and feels encouraged. I have called this 'third-person engagement' (Pleizier 2010, 249).

Second, the responses of individual listeners to sermons refer to the commonly shared faith that is expressed in the sermon – or the disappointment that the preacher failed to do this. Sermons have a 'confessional' function. They express what the community of faith believes and gives shape to the religious identity of the community of faith. Thus, preaching is an act of confession of faith, not only by the preacher (Long 2016; Lose 2003), but the whole congregation engages in this act of confession. Sermons have impact as they help listeners to maintain and cultivate their faith. They strengthen them in their religious identity. One of the respondents explains: 'With some sermons you know, you become very much aware of God's love. Yes, he comes closer, you are more directed

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2   For an extensive introduction of the theological concept 'actualising faith' see Pleizier 2010.

3   Names of respondents are fictitious.

to him. It's more like, now I can come through this week. He is my Father. I must be with him' (Pleizier 2010, 260). Sermons provide listeners with a larger, communally shared, religious story.

Protestant preaching shapes the divine-human relationship. Whether a sermon counts as Word of God, does not seem to be primarily determined exegetically (whether it provides the correct explanation of the Biblical texts), nor confessionally (whether it presents the correct dogmatic positions), nor individually (if I hear it as Word of God, then it is Word of God). The sermon puts the listening congregation in the relationship with God. The concept 'divine-human dynamics' points to this specific impact of preaching: the relationship between the divine and human beings is shaped in language, and experienced in hearing the sermon as an expression of God's faithfulness.

3.3.3. Experiencing Religion

Earlier approaches to studying sermon reception mainly focused upon the retention of the sermon or upon the meaning making processes on the part of the listener. Impact of preaching, however, is much more experientially expressed by hearers.[4] In one of the interviews someone said 'I liked the sermon very much, but don't ask me why, not even 'what did you like so much' [...]'. This listener reports an experience and immediately acknowledges his inability to explain the causes of the experience. In the conversations with listeners, aesthetic values appear next to cognitive and moral judgements. They articulate the listening experience in aesthetic language.

The experiential aspect comes in two flavours. Listeners experience the sermon as helpful (for example, 'the sermon helped me to understand or helped me in taking a decision') or as beautiful ('I really enjoyed hearing this sermon'). The aesthetic language that listeners use points to the listening experience as a whole, rather than to separate parts of the sermon that the listener considers to be helpful. The aesthetic approach also fits the experiences of preachers when they greet the congregation after the service. More than occasionally, hearers respond with evaluative, emotional and aesthetic judgements of the service. Listeners respond like: 'it was good service', 'beautifully said in the sermon' or 'it really touched me'. These experiences do not point to specific cognitive contents that they are able to remember. The most natural thing to do for a preacher, but unfortunately also the most ineffective response would be to probe further and ask: 'what did you like, what in the sermon touched you?' The 'what' question probes the cognitive and it invites the hearer to provide a summary of the sermon. Usually, they are not able to do so. 'I liked the sermon very much, but don't ask me anything more, because I can't explain it'. Not everyone is able to explain the experience, but that does not nullify the experience. In the preaching event something happens to listeners that can only be articulated properly with the help of aesthetic or emotional language.

3.4. An Alternative Approach to Impact: Actualising Faith

Hearing sermons is thus about embodying, shaping, and experiencing religion. Stated this way, the terminology is yet rather ambiguous. The analysis of the empirical material needs a theological articulation to be as precise as possible to understand the concrete reports of hearers what happens when they listen to sermons.

Taking the previous idea of 'experiencing religion' as an example, a theological distinction by St. Augustine (354–430) illustrates how a theological rendering of an otherwise anthropological analysis contributes to understanding the complex realities of religious impact(s) of religious speech. In his treatise 'De Doctrina Christiana' Augustine introduces the distinction between *uti* (to use) and *frui* (to enjoy) (Augustine 1996). We use something for the sake of something else. We enjoy something as it is in itself. Use points to extrinsic value (for the sake of something else); enjoyment points to intrinsic value. Augustine uses this distinction in relation to God. We enjoy God, because of who he is. Religious practice such as hearing sermons can be adequately analysed with the help of this distinction. In hearing a sermon listener enjoy the sermon for

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4   This section is based upon Pleizier 2010, chapter 7.

what it is, an act with intrinsic significance. The act of listening becomes an act of devotion. It fits a pattern in the data that listeners express in affective and aesthetic language: '[...] in hearing this sermon, I felt close to God.' Hence, there is something intrinsic to participating in religious practices.

Sermons may inspire people to certain actions. Religious speech influences values and attitudes. Yet there is a kind of impact that specifically concerns the dynamic between God and humans. In the Christian religion this aspect is best captured as 'faith', a lived relationship (Immink 2005). In hearing sermons faith is actualised.

When talking to listeners of sermons, they report experiences that describe how in hearing sermons their faith is actualised. Actualisation of faith seems an apt conceptualisation of the religious impact of preaching in ordinary Protestant congregations. Actualising faith concerns the divine-human relationship. It is awakened, maintained, strengthened, and nourished. There is something about sermons that listeners respond to with utterances like 'yes, this is what I believe', 'I can get through this week' and 'I feel that God is with me and cares for me'. They respond with a whole variety of expressions, in different languages, and with different emphases. In many of their responses, though, they point to the experiential dimension of listening.

So, in hearing sermons the faith of the listeners is actualised. More generally formulated, a theological account of the impact of religious speech concerns a theory how participants in religious practices become religiously involved.

3.5. Preliminary Conclusion

This section provides a threefold answer to the question how the religious impact of religious speech can be studied as a cooperation of anthropology and theology.

First, an intradisciplinary[5] perspective to the field of research entails an intertwinement of theological and anthropological concepts. An intradisciplinary approach moves beyond borrowing concepts from one field into another field but aims at integrating areas of knowledge. Despite the fact that concepts function within larger theoretical wholes, an intradisciplinary approach does not decide which discipline has preference or how concepts are distributed over disciplines. If anthropology studies the human side of religion and theology is interested in referring to God's presence and divine activity, concepts like 'social interaction' and 'divine-human dynamics' point to the overlap between both disciplines. For the study of preaching this means that we can take seriously the Protestant self-understanding that in preaching God's Word is communicated through human speech, both in speaking and hearing.

Second, the analysis of empirical data on sermon reception provides a deeper understanding how religion actually works. A speech event such as preaching embodies religion, such as the building and the seating arrangement, the silence in listening, the sound of the speaker, the attention on the part of the audience, and the relationships between the participants (the community of faith) as well as the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. Religious practices, such as sermonic speech, help to experience religion. In the act of listening, believers 'see' the realities of the Christian faith and they experience the community of faith. Religious speech also shapes religion. Preaching shapes the Protestant religion. The speech event, the interaction of a religious speaker (preacher) and the audience (the congregation) also keeps religion alive. Shaping, embodying and experiencing religion, however, cannot be described adequately without anthropological insights.

Finally, the study of the religious impact of religious speech results in a theological theory. Hence, studying the practice of sermon listening helps to formulate a theory of religious involvement that answers the question how through participating in preaching the faith of the listeners is actualised.

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5   The distinction between 'intra' versus 'inter' (or 'cross') assumes also particular ontological distinction. Theology and anthropology are not just two separate perspectives that provide different 'understandings' (hermeneutically). We need concepts from both disciplines to study a social phenomenon which cannot be described adequately with a set of concepts that is used in either one of these disciplines. An intradisciplinary approach can do justice to a holistic approach to the phenomena rather than carving up social and religious reality into different, incommensurable, sets of meanings.

4. Briefly about Methodology: Where does 'Actualisation of Faith' Come From?

4.1. Qualitative Methodology

The study of sermon listening aims to generate new practical-theological theory. The theological concept 'actualisation of faith' is generated through cycles of generating, comparing and coding incidents in the data (Pleizier 2010, 83–154). These procedures belong to the established research tradition of Grounded Theory and its underlying theory-formation methodology (Glaser 1978; 2002; Charmaz 2014, 123–150).

The initial study is based upon qualitative interviews with hearers from different types of Protestant congregations. The starting question for interviews was: 'what makes a good sermon for you' and a follow up interview, directly after the service, started with the question 'what would you have missed if you had not heard this sermon'. The assumption behind these questions was that personal evaluations (what makes a good sermon), and personal experiences (what would you have missed) are viable indicators to reconstructing the practice of hearing sermons. Data was generated in four cycles of theoretical sampling.

4.2. Theological Coding

Reactions of listeners were coded in three different cycles. Following the standards of Grounded Theory, three coding strategies were used: open coding, selective coding, and theoretical coding (Holton 2007; Charmaz 2014; Glaser/Strauss 1967).[6] All three coding procedures aim for conceptualisation. Open coding requires a fundamental openness of the researcher (the principle of 'staying open'). Coding aims for constructing concepts and properties of concepts as they emerge in the interaction between the researcher and the data.

For a theological study of religious impact, the interest lays specifically in concepts and properties of concepts that capture the religious dimension in the material. The analysis aims for constructing a theological theory. Hence, during open, selective, and theoretical coding, theological concepts and properties of categories were formulated. References in the material that concern the listeners affective and cognitive aspects of the divine-human relationship, were coded with the help of the concept 'faith'. During the cycles of coding, various aspects of 'faith' emerged as concepts or as properties of concepts.

Two central theological concepts thus emerged: 'religious involvement' and 'actualising faith' (Pleizier 2010). The substantive concepts such as 'liturgical listening', 'third person listening' and 'dwelling in the world of faith' were sorted into a theoretical model that describes the basic socio-religious process of getting religiously involved. Sorting the memos into the framework of this process, three stages became most central: opening up to listen, dwelling in the sermon, and actualising faith. Actualisation of faith, it turned out, can be framed into a typology of moments of actualisation, in which the listeners experience challenge or comfort by the preached gospel and the faith of the listener is shaped in relation to this world or the promised world to come (Pleizier 2010, 268–273). Hence, it is the final stage of the socio-religious process of getting religiously involved and describes the religious impact of hearing sermons.

4.3. Comparing Practices

The concept of 'actualising faith' captures the impact of religious speech in the situation of regular Sunday preaching. Yet, what happens when we compare the context of an ordinary Protestant congregation with a different religious context? Would the result of the comparison lead to new properties of actualising faith or should we conclude that we need a different theological theory to understand the religious impact of speech?

In order to address this question, a possible counter-case for the theory of religious involvement and its central idea of actualising faith will

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6   The coding cycles of open, selective, and theoretical coding best fit the approach that nowadays is called 'classic Grounded Theory' (Holton/Walsh 2016). Others use 'initial' for 'open' coding or add 'axial' coding. These involve different methodological choices.

be presented. The case is taken from the context of military chaplaincy. Protestant chaplains serve military units that are religiously very diverse.

5. Preaching by Military Chaplaincy, a Counter Example

5.1. The Case of Speech without Religion?

Congregational preaching represents a case of religious speech, but chaplaincy preaching may be better seen as a case of speech without religion. An illustrative case is taken from chaplaincy in the Dutch armed forces.

The chaplains in the Dutch military represent one out of six different religious denominations.[7] These chaplains, however, serve military personnel of all kinds of religions and views of life. Armies reflect the plurality of the societies they belong to (Brekke/Tikhonov 2017; Hansen 2012). For the Dutch army this implies that even a higher percentage of soldiers does not associate with institutional religions compared to the Dutch society as a whole. This is mainly due to the age bias in the army; soldiers are relatively young, and younger people are more secularised. The fact that many soldiers do not belong to a certain religion, however, does not imply that they are not spiritual. Chaplains tell a different story. They engage with soldiers in moral education, in spiritual care, and in preaching and worship. Though the latter is clearly a situation of speech, we might dispute its religious character.

Hence, the question is asked whether the speeches by military chaplains are religious speeches.

For a project on 'sermons for soldiers', diverse material has been selected from various Protestant military chaplains (Pleizier 2019).[8] In the material three different settings of speech emerge: (1) memorial services; (2) regular worship services

for Christian believers; and (3) services for the entire unit.

These settings are determined by the audiences. Memorial services are formal occasions, usually presided by the commander of the unit. Regular worship services are provided for the military of specific religions. Christian chaplains offer services that resemble the church services that the Christian soldiers are used to attend. Then there are services that are designed for the entire unit. They are organised by the chaplain, but are as inclusive as possible. Besides audiences, there are a few other variables that help to distinguish between these speech situations. First, services are held on the base of the unit, for example memorial services on national remembrance days or special days that are part of the history of this specific regiment, brigade or squadron. Many services, though, are part of regular training camps outside the base or during deployment in an international peacekeeping mission. Second, some services concern the lives of specific soldiers, such as weddings, baptisms, or funerals. Other services are obligatory for the entire unit, for instance services during training camps for recruits. Then there are services that are completely free for the soldiers, usually offered during their spare time. In brief, four aspects are relevant: the audience of the speeches (religious or not religious), the location of the speeches (base or deployment), the initiative for the speeches (intended by the chaplain; organised by the commander), the range for the speeches (individual soldiers versus the entire unit).

Obviously, different kinds of combinations are present in the material: chaplains speak during memorial services for the lives of individual soldiers during deployment (usually this is the case when there is a casualty, a soldier killed in military action); chaplains speak during Christmas services organised by the commander of the unit, though this is originally a Christian occasion to preach; chaplains speak during small events that they organise for soldiers during deployment regardless of the soldiers religious attitude.

These speech situations differ very much according to the religious content, audiences and background. Chaplains are therefore very hesitant to call their speeches 'sermons'. Many of their speeches lack religious references, though they

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7   Currently, the following denominations are represented: Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Humanism, Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam.
8   The material consists of interviews with chaplains, sermon transcripts, a documentary of worship service, participant observation, written reflections by chaplains, both articles and blogs.

deal with all sorts of existential topics in their talks. Their speeches are usually not located in a specific religious motivation and do not intend a religious effect on their audiences. They do, however, speak because of their position in the military: they are chaplains and they are addressed as chaplains. In one way or another, they are considered to be religious leaders, on the battlefield and beyond (Hassner 2016, 95–97). This, and the fact that they deal with existential topics and engage with spirituality, provides an argument for viewing their speeches as 'religious speeches'.

The following sections present some aspects of the religious speeches by military chaplains: spatial, linguistic and personal aspects. The approach is different. The previous case was about sermon reception; this case presents the study of the production of sermons. The analysis provides possible counter evidence for the thesis developed in the previous sections; that religious impact of religious speech can be adequately conceptualised as 'actualising faith'.

5.2. Religious Speech in the Military

5.2.1. Spatial: What Counts as Sacred Space?

Occasionally bases do have chapels. Usually, if there are specific spaces for chaplaincy services at all, they are called silence rooms or they are designed to serve as multi-religious chapel. For example, in the navy base in the north of the Netherlands, there is a large multi-religious chapel. The altar has several drawers in which religious symbols and attributes from various religious backgrounds can be kept. In an army base, somewhere in the centre of the country, on one side of a corridor in the chaplaincy building there is a multi-functional silence room (or: meditation room). Opposite of the silence room, there is a prayer room for Muslim soldiers. In camp Marmal, an international army base in the north of Afghanistan, there are at least two different Christian chapels. One smaller chapel for Orthodox denominations and a larger chapel that is used by German Lutherans.

In many cases, though, chaplains have to create their own sacred spaces. During training

camps and missions abroad, they use tents, dining rooms, and even the back of a truck for their services. They transform the ordinary military environment into a space for practicing spirituality.

For example, in 'Lion's Rock', the leisure room and bar for the Dutch soldiers at the Dutch part of the international camp in Mazar-i-Sharif, the acting chaplain holds weekly services. Every Friday, because this is the day off for the military personnel. To be as inviting as possible, the chaplain uses the living room with the couches and the television set and transforms it into a place for worship. The television is used to stream video-clips of the music that is part of the service and the table in the centre of the living room is filled with candles. The service is open to anyone, believer or not. The rearrangement of ordinary space into liturgical space has consequences for the daily lives of the soldiers. One of the chaplains recalls an incident with a soldier: during the week, the soldier asked him whether it was allowed to use the living room for a meeting. The chaplain was puzzled, as it was not a Friday and he had not booked the living room for one of his services. Yet the fact that the place was being used as sacred space Friday after Friday turned it gradually into a chapel in the minds of the soldier, so they began to ask the chaplain whether it was allowed for them to use the chapel, which was originally meant to be their living room. In fact, some soldiers decided to put a sign on the wall of the living room that says 'Lion's Rock Chapel'.

Religious speech changes the ordinary environment. How chaplains deal with space, seems to change the atmosphere and the awareness of the soldiers. Whether they are believers or not, using ordinary space for religious speech turns this space into something else. It reminds the soldiers of the presence of the divine. The personal presence of the chaplain is very important here. The awareness of the chaplain that services like this 'carry mystery', as one of the chaplains puts it, communicates a similar awareness to the soldiers. The chaplain continues: 'Things that transcend us all are put into words. God is here, with his Word'. Everyday space becomes sacred, by the words that are spoken by the chaplain. Religious speech awakens an attitude of awe.

5.2.2. Linguistic: Not too Explicit

Protestant Military chaplains use a language 'in between'. On the one hand they are ordained ministers in one of the Protestant denominations. They are well versed in the language of their own religious tradition. On the other hand, however, they are part of the military world with its own language, including military abbreviations and metaphors. Hidden codes, that even differ from military unit to military unit. More important though, chaplains are religious experts and speak a religious language. The military is at least very multi-religious with each of the religious traditions having its own language. Yet the military is mostly very secular; many soldiers do not have access to religious vocabulary at all. References to church, God and salvation are for many of them references to a strange world. A world that even increasingly becomes suspicious: for most of the soldiers missions to Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali are permeated with conflicts in which it is not easy to determine whether its source is cultural or religious in nature.

Hence, in their language, in the structure of the meetings and in the type of rituals they use, military chaplains approach the soldiers without much explicit religious language. As one of the chaplains wrote in a self-reflection: 'I am among different people yet they share the same longing for a more beautiful world. They speak a different language yet a language that can be understood.'

Three examples illustrate how they communicate existential topics while drawing implicitly from their religious tradition. The first example is taken from a sermon by a naval chaplain. From a biblical reading taken from the book of Genesis the chaplain talks about sexuality: 'God and good sex are connected', he says. He speaks in a style that is very close to the military world. His language is very explicit and imaginative. He does not shy away from moral intuitions and warns against sexual abuse among the military. Then he talks about God. 'I believe', he says, 'that sex is about one thing: it's about attention. God is attention. Always, everything is attention.' The real issues of the soldiers, months away on a military vessel, are brought into contact with the divine. The chaplain does this very sensitive for the unbeliever. At least, one could get a hint that the things in life that really matter somehow are connected to the God of the Sacred Scriptures.

In another sermon, the same chaplain recalls the experience of the soldiers when they practice a drill that keeps them alive in the ocean when the ship supposedly sunk. The chaplain describes their physical conditions. Floating on a small boat in the ocean: no water, thirsty, tired, your strength is gone. 'From your heart a 'kyrie' ['have mercy'] creeps through your veins. Perhaps a curse-shaped prayer. I think about Psalm 42 in the Hebrew Bible: As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. [...] all your breakers and your waves have gone over me. [...] And then, the helicopter. The angel from another side. The helicopter saviour, from far away. God does not have any other hands than the hands of the saviour from the helicopter. [...] And hanging in the air, you see a ship. The ship that the helicopter takes you to, like Noah's ark, the ark of your salvation. [...] There is lunch and lemonade,[9] bread is broken, lemonade passes around as the cup of the covenant.' The chaplain refers implicitly to many metaphors, stories and songs in the Christian tradition. His main story is about a group of soldiers being rescued from the waters they are likely to drown in, but he tells the story as a story of salvation, with all the Christian symbolism connected to it, including references to the Eucharist. He even uses language that is taken from Christian songs that are probably only known to those soldiers who are very well acquainted with Christianity and its religious sources. His language is profound, but not too explicit when it comes to religious meanings.

A final example is taken from a speech during a Christmas celebration in Afghanistan: 'The Christmas story tells about a God who gives up heaven and radically chooses to be vulnerable. [...] Everything in this story is vulnerable but indestructible. That is a miracle that I can only explain

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9 Here the preacher uses specific military jargon for lunch and lemonade.

by believing that God is behind all this. It awakens in us a belief in soft values, it appeals to our heart. Be inspired, motivated, and take courage from your own vulnerability and the vulnerable Christmas child.' The chaplain appeals to values that seem contrary to military existence: strength versus vulnerability. His belief that God is in all this is expressed in an invitational way towards those who do not confess the Christian faith.

Military chaplains speak with caution. They refer to the sacred scriptures of the Christian faith and they do mention God. They do that in such a way that non-believers feel included, while believers can relate to the implied 'codes' of Christianity. Religious speech, yet not too explicit.

5.2.3. Personal: Witness Style

When military chaplains use religious language and talk about God, they choose a personal style.

In a short meditation, the chaplain tells the story about Jacob who is asleep and dreams about the stairs that reach into the heavens. Then, the chaplain says: 'What are my goals and how do I reach them? Jacob dreams about it. We need that sometimes: to move beyond the ways of seeing and to see that there is another reality. Me and the bigger picture. For Jacob this is about God. He is not alone but fits in God's wider purposes.' Then the preacher continues, 'I recognise that as a believer. For you this may be different. [...] You don't have to rely on your own strength only, we have been given to each other. And, God is also around, I would like to add.'

The personal style in their religious speeches communicates authenticity. They talk about their deepest values and the realities in which they put their trust in. Further, it is invitational. By sharing their deepest existential convictions, they invite their hearers to share their faith but they do so rather casual, open and optional. Thirdly, their personal style is also confessional. They confess their faith, realising that they may be the only one present being a confessing Christian. The role of the preacher can be understood with the help of the image of witness (Long 2016).

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The concept 'actualising faith' as it emerged in the study of regular congregational preaching may not fit the material in the case of military chaplaincy. Whether concepts 'fit' is one criterion for Grounded Theory. Three reasons challenge the use of actualising faith for what happens in the speeches by chaplains. First, their audiences are too diverse to use a theological concept that has been developed through the analysis of a Christian religious practice. Second, we lack responses by soldiers to find out whether actualising faith would be a proper description of the reception of these speeches. Third, the diversity of the speeches does not fit a religious aim for the speeches of the chaplains.

This leads to two conclusions. First, we may need to develop a different conceptualising for the speeches by military chaplains. They do not aim for religious involvement yet their only legitimation for being a speaker at events within the military is derived from their role as chaplain. Second, for a theological study we may need to look into different conceptualisations than actualisation of faith. The witnessing style of many speeches may provide an alternative entrance for a theological conceptualisation. At least, the personal faith of the chaplain is explicitly part of the speech. Therefore, the concept 'invitational faith' may be appropriate to rethink the idea of religious involvement.

Finally, the study of the religious impact of religious speech, including its nuances as provided in the second case, enriches the understanding of religion as possible resource in society. The cases taken from the ecclesial and chaplaincy contexts illustrate that religious speech is a very complex and multi-layered phenomenon. The Christian religious presence in the Military provides a very different picture of religious speech compared to regular parish worship. Similarly, religious impact of religious speech must be understood locally and thus contextually: the situations where religious speech occurs generate their own types of religious impact. These findings do emphasise the importance of cooperation between anthropologists and theologians in the empirical study of religious phenomena.

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Sophia Margarethe Schäfer

Claiming Traditional Authority

Different Interpretations of Indian *Parampara*

Abstract

Parampara is an Indian term to describe a specific, culturally shaped understanding of social, religious and cultural life of societies and their persistence. Even if it is often translated as 'tradition', the English term does not capture the specific understanding of *parampara* and its authority within a society. In the present article, *parampara* and its specific usage will be portrayed, using one example of an empirical study in a Protestant-Christian community in Koraput, Odisha (India). By presenting ethnographic findings from research in different local Protestant-Christian churches, significant usage of the *parampara* term within that strongly religiously shaped society is shown. Specifically, it will be demonstrated how different traditional institutions use *parampara* to claim authority and how other authorities challenge this understanding as the status quo. In a society with competing preachers from different denominational backgrounds, there are different ways for these newly established religious authorities to approach *parampara* and to claim to possess its appropriate understanding. It will be shown how this conflict has different effects on the local society of this social group.

Introduction

This study is located in a Protestant-Christian society in a rural area in the Koraput district in western Odisha in the so-called 'tribal belt of India', where indigenous, traditional social and cultural values and structures strongly influence daily life and its different layers of local meaning. As the understanding of *parampara,* which is a vague term itself, is not easy to capture, this article will begin with a short, highlighting encounter in Koraput town in winter of 2018:

About 20 family members in shiny dresses and saris sat in a living room of their newly constructed building, decorated with ribbons, candles and flowers. The young Lutheran pastor Ashish[1] of the predominant JELC (Jeypore Lutheran Evangelical Church), whose founders created a Christian community in the Koraput area more than 100 years ago (Santosh 2014), was called to bless a new-born baby boy on his 8th day of life. By bike we reached the house on the Mission Compound, a part of Koraput town, where mostly Christians belonging to this church live. 'Isn't it a Jewish custom to celebrate the 8th day of a child?' I asked the ordained pastor, who is working in the small town for four years. 'It's our *parampara.* Biblical tradition', he said and started to greet the family members, prayed for the baby after giving a short speech. He spoke about God's gift of life and blessed the kid by laying his hands on the boy's head and symbolically drawing a small cross on his forehead with his thumb.

Like many other men in Koraput, the boy's father, 33 years old and only a few years younger than the preacher, told me that he also wanted to become a

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pastor. But the long studies that a preacher's education in the Lutheran tradition requires would not be necessary or useful for him: a few weekends in a Bible Seminary would be enough, he said. I (S) asked him (E) about his understanding of belonging to his church and following another path of becoming a pastor:

S: 'So this Bible Seminary is Pentecostal?'
E: 'Yes.'
S: 'But you're JELC member, from the Lutheran church?'
E: 'It doesn't matter. I follow Jesus Christ, not any church.'
S: 'But the theology is very different.'
E: 'Yes, but without miracles and healings you can't convert any Hindu and that's what I want to learn.'
S: 'So, your faith and this practice are matching for you?'
E: 'Yes, for me it's fine. It's all about Jesus and the Bible – how exactly doesn't matter.'
S: 'Then why are you still a JELC member, calling the Lutheran pastor today?'
E: 'The *parampara* demands it. It's our tradition.'

This small illustration shows that the specific religious field (Bourdieu 2000) in that Christian society is not free of conflict. The conversations with a pastor and the baby's father show briefly that *parampara* seems to be an important reference people make to legitimise and generalise certain practices of daily life within the social group they belong to. There, local Christians, who formerly belonged to one Lutheran church and formed one religiously homogeneous community, have started to accept different preachers, their education and new forms of worship as their religious authorities. These new preachers are contesting each other's legitimacy, using the *parampara*-term for their own purposes. Still, the families and individuals call themselves a community referring to the mutual *parampara*, but the focus on one religious institution to shape their Christian understanding is gone. At the same time, the religious affiliation and a specific understanding of the Lutheran church are still part of the *parampara*, which was already seen in the father's statement. How *parampara* is defined

or who is responsible to foster its impact, needs to be explored more.

What is this *parampara* and what do members of the community mean by it? How do Koraputian Christians understand the meaning and importance of *parampara* in their religious life, in their society and its daily-life practices, within their social structures? How do pastors use it and how do preachers gain religious authority referring to *parampara*? And in which sense can we speak about their traditional authority? Specifically, this article argues that *parampara* implies much more than 'doing-what-we-always-did', but has authority itself and is used to legitimise certain religious practices and new authorities, which will be analysed below.

A few preconditions of the author's understanding should be given in this introduction. The article is not supposed to discuss different concepts of 'tradition' (in an academic sense) to understand this diverse and ambivalent phenomenon as such, but to sharpen the understanding of Indian *parampara*, based on an ethnographically studied example. In an Indian traditional society like the one studied here, an understanding of *parampara* is necessary to analyse local social structures. The main thesis of this article will highlight and promote the following statements:

(1) Gaining religious authority based on the argument of *parampara* is a discursive communicative process of claiming and acknowledging authority by leaders and the people led (Radde-Antweiler/Grünenthal 2018; Weber 2000; Lincoln 1994; Popitz 1992, Sofsky/Paris 1991). To understand the local meaning of *parampara*, its significance and different ways how especially religious authorities refer to it, it is first necessary to understand the people's socio-cultural context.

(2) In order to establish, stabilise and transform their religious and social impact, religious authorities use **and** change interpretations of traditional social and religious orders of their respective religious communities. Therefore, different interpretations of traditional texts and forms of worship can be accepted as appropriate in different ways, depending on the society's (different) understanding(s) of *parampara* and how to preserve it. One needs

to understand how religious authority is constructed and understood within a specific society and its socio-cultural framework, based on *parampara* (or a specific understanding of it).

(3) It will be shown how the establishment and legitimation of different religious authorities can be based differently on the argument of a specific understanding, use and self-positioning within *parampara*.

The article will be following this structure: After explaining the research methodology, the term *parampara* will be defined and its use in the Christian Koraputian context will be explained. Then, I will give a glimpse of how this understanding of *parampara* shapes social structures of their local community and is at the same time shaped by them. Finally, this article will show an analysis of different use and interpretations of *parampara* by local competing preachers to legitimise their religious authority.

Methodology and Approach

The present study was developed through my doctoral project within the framework and funding of SFB 1070 RESOURCECULTURES at the Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen. Resources are seen here as socially and culturally productive means (Hardenberg et al. 2017) in material and immaterial forms, which are traded and needed to put further processes into effect, maintain or change them (Scholz et al. 2017). Therefore, anything can **become** a resource by its socio-cultural meaning and usage as well as its produced meaning for a certain social group or society. Religious authority can be understood as such a productive means and therefore as a resource, which this article demonstrates, highlighting *parampara* as its tool. The data obtained in the course of this project is the result of ten months of field research in Koraput, Odisha in 2018 and 2019, where I lived in the Protestant Christian community and visited different churches and their events. There, I was using methods of qualitative empirical socio-cultural research: participant observation, case studies, along with topic-centred and biographical interviews. The findings are used to gain insights that will contribute to the study of contemporary, lived religiosity within a certain

social, religious and culturally-shaped context. Because of its socio-cultural embedding, historical development and present situation, contemporary religiosity is not to be seen as congruent with its theological, liturgical and ecclesiological foundation like so-called dogmas or the church's bylaws. This will be shown by empirical religious research, as for example in this contribution. In the present study, ethnographic material is to be interwoven with practical-theological and religiosity-oriented anthropological questions and their socio-cultural approaches.

Parampara

Parampara is a very old, multivalent term to describe the value and significance of community inheritance, specifically contextualised cultural and social structures, material and immaterial goods, ideas and practices. The term is often used to describe the uninterrupted teacher/student-lineage as *guru-śiṣya-parampara* (Webster 2015, 11) or seen in other word combinations like *sanatana parampara* (referring to Vedic literature) or family *parampara* (Saraswati 2000, 11 f.). A short literature review will show its variety of perspectives of understanding and usage, even though not much has been written explicitly about *parampara*.

According to the historian and Indologist Federico Squarcini, the literal meaning of the feminine noun *parampara* is 'one next to the other' and can be understood as something, which combines unconnected entities and forms in an uninterrupted line, a continuous series or regular succession and transmission in a family lineage (Squarcini 2011, 21). He uses *parampara* in this double perspective: describing a set of content as well as the acknowledgment of its history and stabilising continuity by transmitting social groups. Ganesh N. Devy, who is an Indian cultural activist and expert on literary criticism, enlarges this perspective even more. He indicated that the term is used all over India in a generally similar, yet locally slightly different way. According to him, the word is derived from Sanskrit, then got nativised into many modern Indian languages (Devy 1992, 16). Originally and generally, he says, *parampara* had a different meaning than the English 'tradition'

(Devy 1992, 16). While the English term is used to describe 'experiences and usages of any branch or school of art or literature', which is 'handed down by predecessors and generally followed' (Devy 1992, 16), the Indian term was used differently. It described rather the mandatory continuity of family tradition as a huge and vast stock of knowledge, for example regarding food habits, appropriate behaviour towards other family members or strangers, social and religious values as well as forms of worship and belief systems. This knowledge included general and empirical knowledge, universal and conventional as well as transcendental knowledge. This three-fold perspective 'makes *parampara* a culturally conceivable timeless reality' (Devy 1992, 21). According to Devy, Indian *parampara* classically implied not only the human organisations of cosmologic truth and order (*dharma*), it incorporated 'the entire code of their [human's] behaviour' (Devy 1992, 15).

The anthropologist Baidyanath Saraswati from the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in Delhi studied the socio-cultural understanding of *parampara* and shows a rather transcendental perspective of *parampara*. In contrast to Squarcini, who spoke about formerly unconnected entities, Saraswati speaks about *parampara* as a deposit of knowledge, that 'exists by itself', which communicates 'with the mind and memory of the Earth', involved in the process of structuring reality (Saraswati 2000, 9). In a more general way, and similar to Devy, he states that for (many) Indians the term implied a sacred and holistic comprehensiveness: 'Epistemologically it [*parampara*] refers to a deposit of knowledge to be nourished and to be handed down to posterity' (Saraswati 2000, 9).

Even though these authors' definitions vary slightly, they all agree that a historical perspective as well as its inclusion of continuity are important to understand *parampara*. Devy states that in the subcontinent *parampara* describes an increased 'longevity', an ancient or very old origin and it 'must be perpetuated by continuous family succession' (Devy 1992, 17). Therefore, he says, *parampara* does not describe established and useful conventions, but old, transmitted and continuing knowledge, transmitted through family heritages (Devy 1992, 17). In this sense, the Indian *parampara* term itself is well acknowledged

for its legitimising force to validate a status or certain practices (Squarcini 2011, 23). In other words: there is a broad Indian understanding of *parampara* as following certain rules of living in a certain community which generates stability within families and their societies who respect and reinforce their heritage in the form of its religious and social practices. However, according to linguist Devy, the so-called Western concepts of tradition and culture linked to growth and development influenced the Indian thinking from the 19th cent. onwards, since 1857 the first 'English-type Universities' were founded in India. At least since the deliberation with academic education, Devy writes, the understanding of *parampara* now 'wavers between conformity and change' (Devy 1992, 18). On the other hand, it must be stated that in India, a huge land with a multitude of cultures and religions, their exchange and conflicts have always been phenomena of 'eclecticism, multilingualism and multiculturalism' (Devy 1992, 18).[2] Therefore, *parampara* is and has never been static, and 'each generation reorganises its parampara in a manner which may differ slightly or significantly from the preceding generation. But changes occur within the defined and determined limits' (Saraswati 2000, 20).

According to the Indologist Travis D. Webster, *parampara* is constantly stabilised by traditional institutions. In his studies, Webster focuses on the importance of sacred scriptures and their interpretation by authorised people. Especially, groups, kinship systems and societies which are formed around religious institutions relate their *parampara* to a certain interpretation and selection of holy texts, in Webster's case, the Vedanta (Webster 2015). According to him, traditional institutions ensure formalised initiation rites (Webster 2015, 22)

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2   Even the debate about superior and inferior traditions and cultures is not a recent phenomenon of colonialism and supreme-sublime powers, but already a topic in Vedic literature (Vidyarthi/Rai 1976, 25 f.). The Brahmins split the roots of different tradition visible in India into 'Marg' (Highway or big road) standing for 'metropolitan or mainstream tradition' and 'Desi' (rural path) meaning 'regional and subcultural traditions' as described in Ramayana and Mahabharata (Vidyarthi/Rai 1976, 25 f.). Accordingly, the ambivalent distinction between Great and Little tradition by Redfield and Singer in the 1940s can be traced back to the Brahmin religious authority and their practice of having exclusive access to Holy scriptures, sacred texts, their recitation and their interpretation.

as a part of 'institutionalized communicative resources'. It is therefore necessary to understand the role of religious leaders as traditional authorities within their respective communities in the process of preserving and interpreting *parampara.*

Summing up the earnings from the literature review one can say now*: parampara* is an Indian term to describe a big set of forms and norms on how to live, think and express oneself as part of a family-complex linked to other families within specific socio-cultural context forming a community. Not only its vast content, but also its preservation, stability, longevity and reorganisations are important factors to understand the meaning and impact of *parampara.*

Empirical research shows that every community has its own *parampara,* which its members understand as mutual for their social group – even though every member has its own memories, experiences and different pieces of knowledge. As the term is not stable (as we have just seen), its content must be studied individually in every context. This study enlarges our knowledge and understanding of *parampara* by highlighting its interpretation among Christians in the small town of Koraput. With this method it is not possible to capture the *parampara* term in general to explain different social and religious practices all over India. But it shows insight to a contemporary understanding of a community in western Odisha and its understanding and use of *parampara.*

The following questions will help to gain insights in the Koraputian Protestant Christian society: What exactly do the people there understand as their *parampara,* which needs to be preserved? Does everyone have the same understanding? Who is responsible for the transmission of *parampara*? Who is allowed to transmit it and how?

Lutheran-Christian Community and its Understanding of *Parampara* as well as its Preservation through Religious Authorities in Koraput

The local Lutheran-Christian church congregation of Koraput understands itself as a community with its own *parampara,* separated and differentiated from the rest of the small town in western Odisha, neighbouring their living areas. Apart from living

in the town of Koraput as a requirement for belonging to the community, this social group defines itself firstly by its religious affiliation, then by its membership in the Lutheran church JELC, the knowledge and acknowledgement of its religious texts, forms of celebration, festivals, rituals, beliefs and moral statements, realised in specific social practices (which they call 'Christian lifestyle'). Sacred and profane are highly connected and cannot be differentiated in this holistic society: in the collective consciousness of this society's members these perspectives are interwoven to a fundamental whole of social life. This collective consciousness is consolidated in this specific set of norms and forms, understood as *parampara.* Members of such a community with its specific *parampara* including ideas, practices and material from overlapping traditions as well, know the definitions of belonging and its boundaries, accepted behaviour and taboos.

Usually the elders, the oldest and most experienced members of this society and its families, but also the leaders and respected persons of important social and religious institutions play a vital role in the definition and process of transmission. Following Webster's clue that *parampara* is transmitted through traditional institutions (as explained above), the families and the Lutheran church authorities can locally be called as such representatives. As all Protestant Christian families are also members of the church, these traditional institutions – family and church – are linked to each other, even though not being the same. Acknowledging the value and authority of the church's norms goes along with respecting the church authorities, following their interpretation and implementation of the church's rules and regulations for a proper socio-religious life in the community. That implies paying membership fees, joining community meetings, involving in and supporting public events as well as accepting the Lutheran-Christian worldview and its derived interpretation of life and death. These authorities are the pastors and elected lay-leaders together. More than representing a religious institution only, the church authorities (church elders, locally called *gurus;* Hindi: 'teacher') are elected people from family authorities (family elders) and act together as conservers of the society's *parampara,*

fostering belonging and its boundaries in specific processes. The implementation of all these norms, rules and regulations into the families is usually the responsibility of the family elders. Following the elder's will and the church's rules and regulations means respecting and transmitting the *parampara.*

An example for the combination and implementation of religious, social and moral norms in daily life affairs by different society authorities are wedding rites and the process of arranging marriages between families. A couple in this community is discouraged to marry without the acceptance and arrangement by their families, which includes more than their parents', but also grandparents', uncles and aunts' acknowledgement as being the elders of the clan. The new life partner should benefit the good reputation for the whole family clan and the relationship between the connecting families. Respecting the kinship norms firstly and reporting and involving religious authorities like preachers and church elders secondly in the process of uniting a couple in a ritualised way is necessary to respect the *parampara* and all who follow it, showing its acceptance as their mutual identity or 'cultural marker' (Saraswati 2000, 14). Only after calling the pastor and the church elders, signing to have a marriage according to the rules and regulations of the JELC church, the family will continue the preparations. Then only a betrothal ceremony (*bogdan*), marriage contracts and rituals in church and homes path the proper and appropriate way for a girl leaving her own family to become part of another family. If the pastor did not conduct the marriage or was not informed about the arrangement in his church congregation, the couple would be excluded from rituals, services and cannot call themselves members of the community anymore. In this case, only the pastor can organise public forgiveness ceremonies which allow an excluded couple to beg to become a part of the community again, showing humbleness and devotion towards the *parampara* and the community.

Parampara, understood as the mutual understanding of the society's principles, continues since long time, but also has historical foundations. As stated earlier by Devy, *parampara* is always believed to be old and needs to be preserved,

therefore it always has a historical perspective as well. Accordingly, here in Koraput, the basic knowledge and appreciation for a mutual community history and development is equally important as the acknowledgement of religious, moral and social practices as well as their representative authorities of the local Lutheran-Christian community. Agreeing with Squarcini on the other hand, this paper follows the understanding that formerly unconnected entities can be unified and its process (or actually what is memorised from it) becomes part of the *parampara.* In other words: because the people who now belong to this community were earlier part of different communities, each with their own *parampara,* the foundation and its formation process of this Christian community has become part of its *parampara.* Formerly belonging to different tribes and social groups, mostly the deprived Dombo tribe but also a few members from the Bonda, Kubi/Kuvi Kond, Bhottra, Saura, and also the Paraja[3] tribe, many Koraputians were impressed by the German Christian missionaries from Breklum who started evangelising the local population by the end of the 19th cent. After they reached Koraput 1882, these missionaries had built schools, provided health care for the local population and supported poor farmers in conflicts with their landlords (Waack et al. 1994, 22). Many converted and followed these missionaries who started forming a Christian community around themselves.

Most Christians in Koraput do not have much memory of those days around the year 1906 when the big church was built (Pohl 1936), which is still being in use today, or of the first converts who left their old belief system. Most photographs and artefacts of memory were destroyed by the intense monsoon rains and dry summer heat, as the people in Koraput told me. Due to little preservation facilities, but also due to the lack of awareness of documenting and transmitting historical developments other than orally, related to illiteracy among the

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3   The church-historian Otto Waack and his German as well as Indian colleagues compiled many of the missionary diaries, their publications and a lot of Western biased mission literature of the 20th cent. naming these from his sources (Waack et al.1994, 22 f.). For further research about the predominant Dombo tribe of Koraput see Pfeffer 1997; Hardenberg 2017.

first workers, assistants and witnesses of the early mission work, most indigenous and local perspectives have been silenced throughout time. But still a few visible traces of material heritage are visible and still in use. Firstly, the Bibles and hymn books, which were translated and introduced by 'the missionaries' (as they are usually called nowadays, including all missionaries who ever came and supported the establishing community) along with their liturgy, are still reprinted and generally reinforced by constant usage. Secondly, near the church, some other old mission buildings and the graves of the missionaries who died in Koraput are still visible in the Christian quarter around the church, reminding the people of their heritage, their roots and the foundations of their socio-religious life every day. But they cannot tell personal stories of the early days anymore, which would work as a commonly formed stabilising genesis history, a formation story of the society.

Slowly, as memory and stories of the mission days faded, only a small part of the knowledge about the shared history prevailed and is being uphold within the minds of the community-members: the names of the first missionaries Hermann Bothmann (1856–1920) and Ernst Pohl (1860–1935), who reached Koraput first on May 15th 1882. Even though both of them did not stay in Koraput for long, the names and the death of 'the missionaries'[4] have become a stabilising formation story for this Christian society.

What strikes the Koraputian Christians most today is the imagination of a past, based on collectively told stories about how some people from far away lived in a foreign country for the service of strangers, living a godly life, as they say, selflessly. Still, many people here had tears in their eyes when they reflected on how those men and women left their homes, lived in difficult conditions without their own families, health and economic financial support systems and died without being buried on their own land. Then, only, after these emotional words of acknowledgement, the thankfulness

towards the Christian message of the gospel, health and education facilities, as well as the land the people here received from the missionaries, would be mentioned as the starting point of a society's success story, or at least their interpretation to be one.

The missionaries, along with many of their successors, founded the stabilising factors for the community since the formation of this social group. Until today, all JELC members in the Koraput congregation share baptism and faith confession as Christians, they are residing and living in Koraput, respecting the local church authorities and the church's membership rules, celebrating Christian rituals and festivals according to the missionaries' teachings, giving offerings and living according to their ethical teachings. Following these guidelines means respecting the community's *parampara*. Accordingly in the process of community formation, their communal *parampara* was formed and stabilised, expressed in social hierarchies of respecting family elders and church authorities and a mutual understanding, knowledge and practice of rituals and faith statements.

The Protestant Christian community has its own understanding of *parampara*, stabilised by preservation through families and the local church. As demonstrated, history and its interpretation play a vital role in the formation of *parampara* and how it is used for legitimising religious and traditional authority as well as how it shapes the present daily-life of the community members.

Legitimacy of Religious Authority based on *Parampara*

After comprehending a bit of how *parampara* is formed and stabilised, this paragraph returns to the question who is responsible for its transmission and why: how are the Indian Lutheran pastors today linked to the missionaries and their heritage which formed the communities' foundation and shaped the process of developing its own *parampara*?

The Lutheran pastors who are working in the local church congregation today are all part of the JELC. This Lutheran church was established with the help of 'the missionaries', held its first

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4   As many community members do not exactly know, which missionary worked when, where or how long, most of them integrate all of them into the expression 'the missionaries'.

synod in 1928[5] and gained economic independence in 1989 (according to Waack et al. 1994, 248). They present themselves as the legitimate heirs or inheritors of the missionaries' work. As their church is the social and religious centre of the community, administering religious, social and economic resources, the JELC has become an institution along with its governing bodies. Its legitimacy becomes legal through bylaws and processes of election by the whole community – its socio-religious foundation is based on the historical embedding and its status as legitimate heirs of 'the missionaries'. By repeating and conserving the liturgy, which 'the missionaries' used on Sunday morning in the church they had built, singing the German songs they translated into local language (Odiya), following the same festival calendar and referring to Martin Luther's theology like 'the missionaries' did, these Indian JELC pastors uphold the 'Lutheran identity' of the community which was founded by the German missionaries and the people who followed them. As the first church constitution was composed and agreed on communally, while the missionaries were still active members in all governing bodies of the JELC, this church can still today proudly speak of its accreditation by them.

To ensure the accurate lineage of theology and church practice, the pastors as theological and liturgical professionals have to undergo a certain training in specific theological colleges, pass exams and practical training in church, followed by the ordination by the bishop as the church's highest authority. Afterwards there are regularly regional theological workshops and seminars held to update and reflect among colleagues. In May 2019 for example, a seminar named 'Lutheran identity' was organised for JELC pastors. One of the Koraputian pastors, Gyan, said that the Lutherans understood themselves as orthodox, following the *parampara*, while Hindus were liberal and could do or believe whatever they wanted. 'We also have become too liberal. We need to preserve [...] what was created 500 years back, our Lutheran faith. Don't change anything! If we

don't follow our rules and regulations, this will be poor evangelism'. Educated in a specific theological and denominational tradition, all preachers of JELC churches were taught how to preach, pray and bless according to the rules and regulations of the church, fixed since many years. As inheritors and preservers, being linked to the formation story and the self-understanding of the members being a community because of the mission work, the pastors along with the church authorities have become part of the *parampara* and enjoy traditional authority.

The pastors are not the only religious authorities, functioning as preservers of *parampara* in this Christian community. The church elders were already mentioned, but their position in the church should be elaborated more. Ten gurus are currently working in the church, many of them since decades. They support the liturgy in Sunday services by singing the 'hymns' (as they call the songs being sung in church) loudly into a microphone, assisting the pastors in the Lord's Supper bread and grape-juice distribution as well as collecting and counting the offerings. On these occasions they are dressed in white, liturgical clothes, slightly different from the pastor's, but visibly emphasised from the rest of the community. At the end of the service at the time of public announcements, the gurus comment on people's wrong behaviour if necessary, so that all people present can hear it. For example, at Palm's Sunday, the Sunday before Easter, an elder announced that all couples who were not properly married in church should not join Lord's Supper on Maundy Thursday as it's a church event and should not be disturbed by those who aren't respecting the *parampara*.

While the pastors as preachers are responsible for the proper, educated and scientifically proved interpretation of Biblical texts and their application in people's lives as time-based employed specialists from outside, it is the local church elder's duty to transmit the specific local *parampara* and its boundaries socio-culturally. That is also the reason why they are the ones who preach on betrothal ceremonies (*bogdan*) in people's homes, while the pastors conduct wedding ceremonies in church. Along with an elected group of laymen from the most influential families of the community, the elders and the pastors together decide

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5   See, <https://www.nordkirche-weltweit.de/weltweit-verbunden/indien/> (last access 14.08.2020).

about how the collected money will be used in favour of the community in form of special events, renovations of the buildings or other construction works. Elected as a governing body for two years as a legacy period, they decide how the community will meet, what they will eat and do, sing and hear and pray. They form the preservation and actualisations of *parampara*.

While performing hierarchically structured events of leaders and non-leading members, the elders and the pastors also get acknowledgement from the community regularly. The more than 300 families (about 4000 to 5000 people) in Gyan's and his colleague's local congregation reassure their membership along with their personal belonging to one community, as well as their respect and acknowledgement towards the pastors by attending the church service on Sunday morning. Usually more than 1000 people sing, pray and offer donations every week and listen to Bible recitations and interpretations in their sermons. In these interpretations, actualisations of *parampara* come to birth by explanations of Biblical words and stories used to gain meaning of daily-life situations in the light of past and present.

Preserving and actualising the *parampara* is part of the community members' daily life that shapes the socio-religious Christian society in Koraput. Especially through sermons and other religious speeches by authorised speakers, traditional forms and interpretations of a good Christian life and thinking are transmitted. The preachers use common phrases to begin speeches and transmit conformity with *parampara*, which the listeners expect. Therefore, religious language functions as a ritual (Tambaiah 1986), using formalised phrases and terms. This act of formalisations, as Maurice Bloch described the use of repetitive symbolic language in religious speeches, follows certain 'rules of use', including the education and position of the speaker in the society (Bloch 1975). The speeches are more or less predictable for the frequent listeners, in content, structure and language usage, even though they always vary in application to the individual context in which they are held to interpret the situation in the light of the *parampara*. Therefore, they have a stabilising, comforting and community building effect on the listeners, linking past and present.

Local *Parampara* and its Potential to Develop or Change

In the last paragraph the local concept of *parampara* and its application in daily life of its accepting community was exemplified. This is not always free of conflict. Especially the public role and treatment of differing religious ideas and practices, misbehaving members as well as changes in hierarchical structures show strategies of establishment, definition and preservation of *parampara* and its impact on society. In this paragraph it will be shown how a seemingly stable understanding of *parampara* in the described community is contested and has the potential of development. Is *parampara* itself able to change? Or are there rather changing perspectives on *parampara* that change its concept? Why is there a possibility, even a need for changing perspectives on *parampara*?

Religious forms and rituals in the local Protestant Christian community are fixed and their conformity is so static that stabilisation is not the only effect on the listeners. The normality and predictability of preachers' speeches leaves little possibility for change or progress in their content. In this sense it leads to a certain stability of the community and their stable relation to *parampara* on the one hand. On the other hand, many people already sense a lack of tools to adjust to social, political or religious changes leaving space for other places, occasions and even people to interpret and express renewal and change. These assumptions should be filled with ethnographic findings.

A few weeks earlier than the encounter described at the beginning of this text, I followed another invitation in the railway area of Koraput. Dozens of colourful balloons hung around the stage in a community hall, on which Gyan, the pastor of the local Lutheran church, stood in front of 200 people celebrating the first birthday of a small child. The little boy and his parents sat there on a big rented red sofa with silver feet applications, dressed in trendy clothes, smiling and sweating in the heat of the day, clicking pictures with their phones. 'In the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ I'm greeting you today on this beautiful occasion', the preacher started giving his greetings in a religious speech, which he was asked to give by the

family. Already after these few words the silence in the big, rented community hall was getting disturbed by chatting guests, children playing and running through the building, parents discussing about them and the catering people organising food. The preacher, Gyan, continued to speak more loudly into his microphone, highlighting children as God's gift and society's future. 'What's your plan for your children's spiritual life?', he asked the crowd, explaining the importance of education and the parents' responsibilities within families. Many people were talking, while preaching and speaking became obviously harder and harder due to increasing noise, even in the closing prayer and the blessings given at the end. People who were sitting next to me told me that this ceremony was only one part of the celebration, which would go on for many hours on this hot day. 'I'm sure not many people listened', Gyan told me later, sighing: 'We have become part of the *parampara*'. He ate with the other guests, got served first as a special guest while others waited in line at the buffet, chit-chatted with the parents and family members he knows well from church and left for the next family function.

What did Gyan mean? Had the pastor given up on *parampara* as the source of his traditional authority? Were the people not interested in listening to him anymore? Were they still calling the pastor and accepting his speech as a form of *parampara*-reassurance?

At first, Gyan's statement seemed surprising. As he is a member of the community and *parampara* is precious and valuable to him, it was not expectable to hear him connecting the loss of the listeners' attention and his disappointment to *parampara*. But there is a lot to learn from it. This small example shows that some people in the Lutheran community started losing increased interest in listening to the formalised speeches, which are part of their *parampara*. Some members say, they have lost faith in their preacher's ability to explain contemporary society's situation in the frame of the old forms. These people do not feel personally addressed, only as members of the community. According to their knowledge and experience, they expect only the reassurance of their belonging to the community by following their rituals and repetitions. Therefore, they do not listen and just let the speaker speak. Apart from being necessary to live in the *parampara* by performing the rituals to complete a birthday celebration, there is not much space for interest in other matters or spreading messages. Still and even though the people were not listening to him, the reassurance of membership, belonging to a society and respecting its continuing *parampara* was successful on this day – maybe that was all they wanted from the pastor. For Gyan himself, *parampara* indicated not only his guaranteed, respected position in the society, but also the limits of his influence regarding social, religious or theological change.

Obviously, the preacher himself seemed to be unhappy with what he had to offer to the family of the one year old child. The recognition and appreciation for his service on this day did not go beyond his invitation to speak, pray and bless the family. Realising his limited attention and operational space, Gyan got depressed and felt not recognised enough as a theologian, only as a representative of his institution. His reaction showed his frustration: Gyan minimalised his effort of preaching and started to repeat his speeches' content and forms of its application like using the same examples for illustration on other family events, which obviously intensified the problem.

The understanding of authority within this socio-religious context shows a good example of what Max Weber called *traditionale Herrschaft* (traditional rule) in his post-mortem released main work 'Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft' (2000). Traditional rule is recognised as legitimate, according to Weber, if its foundation is grounded on, rooted in and based on sacred orders and powers existing since long time. The tradition grants obedience to this kind of authorities based on a value and self-evidence they possess on their own through a self-evident piety in a society, transmitted through education in the families and other common institutions of education (Weber 2000, 167 f.). These authorities do not need to gain authority, they have it, possess it and their function is important to stabilise and reassure the validity of tradition, or in the present context: *parampara*. On the other hand, traditional authorities like Gyan lose the opportunity and power to change people's mindsets, create dissent or even having an independent idea

to be discussed: by following the accepted coding, formalisations of speech-acts of traditional authorities, the individual speaker is trapped in (only) affirming conformity, as Maurice Bloch proposed:

'The move towards the formalized therefore becomes a move in the direction of unity. [...] The tendency towards unity via non-specificness means that specific issues cannot efficiently be tackled since if the formalized oratory is a form of social control within a set of fixed norms, it cannot deal with individual (hence divisive) innovative action. [...] It removes the authority and the event from the speaker itself, so that he speaks when using formalisation less and less for himself and more and more for his role. This explains the inability of the speaker to manipulate his power for strictly personal ends' (Bloch 1975, 16).

It is indeed questionable[6] whether every ritualised and formalised speech-act is only done for the sake of reassuring membership and belonging along with reinforcing the *parampara*, or whether rituals also have the function of a support to express existential feelings (or 'religious sensations' [Meyer 2006]) in collective forms and therefore stabilises communities (Widengren 1969). But Bloch's hint to link rituals and formalised language to power and authority structures and the effect of their reciprocal reinforcement should still be taken seriously here. Gyan as a preacher within a powerful institution, understood as inheritor of 'the missionaries' and therefore part of the *parampara*, has the role to reinforce its forms and rituals in order to stabilise the community. As his institution stands for being linked to the local community's *parampara*, it is difficult for him to make an individual statement as an educated theologian, with other goals than what is commonly expected from him in his role as a traditional authority.

So, if every contestation, opposition or attempt of renewal is punished in the background of the supreme *parampara* force, then how can a society renew itself throughout time? Next to the necessity for stability, re-productiveness of community-forms and rituals along with the feeling of belonging, is there also a higher demand for social and religious actualisations tools than the institution of the Lutheran church can provide? Or does the JELC only stand for a certain aspect of *parampara*-transmission, stabilisations and preservation? In the following section it will be demonstrated that the JELC and their leaders are not the only religious authorities claiming legitimacy based on *parampara*.

New Authorities and their Relation to *Parampara*

At the end of this article, a specific challenge to the former stable understanding of *parampara* will be portrayed by introducing a new, exemplary religious authority in the form of another preacher who contests the JELC and its pastors as the legitimate heirs of 'the missionaries'.

'I am the *parampara* breaker! We are the history breaker!' another preacher screams, only a few meters from the JELC church in Koraput, organising a prayer meeting in his cousin's house that about 100 people attended on a Friday afternoon in October 2018. He questions the legitimacy of the pastors as preservers of *parampara*. He stood in front of the big attached room, constructed as a 'prayer tower' for this kind of meetings, funded by donations and offerings. The preacher, calling himself Apostle Vikas, was not from an influential family clan of Koraput, rather from one which was never elected into leading teams, selected for posts or granted access to pastoral training. He was preaching on that day about the Holy Spirit of God that guided the people to come here to overcome evil spirits which were everywhere. Then he jumped, shouted 'Hallelujah!', showed his excitement in songs and energetic moves. Some people in the room started to shiver, raising their arms, dancing, speaking in tongues. While he walked through the listeners, he forcefully put coconut oil with his hand on their heads and some of them fell down, unconsciously. 'This is a living church', the young, self-trained preacher told me afterwards, 'JELC is dead. They live in history while we live in the Holy Spirit'.

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6   Bloch received a lot of criticism for his work, e.g. Durreau 1991; Bourdillon 1978; Parkin 1984, but also praise, e.g. by Gaffney 1994.

Experiencing miracles and God's power (as he says and his followers believe) in his prayer meetings, impressed many people from different communities, including JELC members, and they started to listen to Apostle Vikas. These extraordinary and intense experiences create a feeling of religious self-evidence in many of Vikas' listeners and participants, working as a proof of his teachings being right. Highlighting the need for self-evidence in religious experience by Vikas and his followers on the one hand challenge the socio-culturally developed forms of the Lutheran worship. The way Vikas highlights the problems of leadership and lack of renewal in the Lutheran church or its decreasing representative function in today's changing, pluralising and media-influenced society on the other hand also attracts some JELC members. Especially those who started losing faith in the JELC's proclamation and preservation of their institutionalised, complicated and static forms to represent *parampara* have started to search and find alternative religious offers here. The balance in the relationship of the 'moral-religious imperative' (Bendix 1985, 495) and the collective as well as individual acknowledgement of its legitimate rule has lost its self-evidence and uncontested stability in this community. While some still uphold an unambiguousness of social and religious leadership in the institution of the Lutheran church, a diversion of attention towards different preachers and their interpretations as well as confusions about the right understanding of *parampara* within families is visible every day.

The JELC church is not the only source of information or interpretation of the world as well as the *parampara* anymore. More and more Pentecostal churches, prayer towers and independent, loose home churches have evolved in Koraput for the last 20 to 30 years,[7] not far away from the Lutheran church building in rented houses. It is not easy to recognise them as another and different place for worship in comparison to the institutionalised religious activities, but the knowledge about them and their presence has become a part of daily life. Now there are many independent preachers, who do not follow the traditional path of (first) academic theological education in specific colleges and (second) local Lutheran church education and training to become an ordained pastor as required in the Lutheran JELC church. Also, many of these newly and self-established preachers are not authorised by other institutional authorities like the bishop. Rather they started preaching, teaching, prophesising and conducting prayer meetings following rhetoric styles of preachers the Koraputians earlier knew just from TV, like the successful TV preachers and Pentecostal pastor Paul Dhinakaran.[8] This TV preacher is well-known to the Christian communities of India through his intense media presence and local evangelism initiatives, organising nation-wide big events like 'revival meetings' from time to time, even in the periphery of hinterlands like Koraput. Not only is he very famous as an interpreter of the Bible, but also popular as being rich and a successful 'planter' of prayer towers and Christian educational facilities all over India. Today, Koraputian Christians witness an increasing number of preachers, who, similarly to Paul Dhinakaran, interpret the holy scriptures as well as aesthetics of prayer and worship differently in a 'neo-Pentecostal style' (Klaver 2015). They became an attractive alternative for the local Christians to listen to, because they follow this 'neo-Pentecostal style', but they also have a personal relationship to specific local Lutheran Christian traditions in which they and their families grew up and are living. In this way these new preachers bridge a gap between *parampara* and a trending preaching and worship style.

While there would be a lot to say about the rhetorical and charismatic style of Pentecostal preaching, the focus of this article is on preachers' relation to and use of concepts of *parampara* for their self-legitimisation. How can a relatively new preacher from a family without holding a post in the traditional institution claim to have authority? How can a person denying and even devaluing

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7   For an introduction and overview about Pentecostalism in India, see Bergunder 2005.

8   Paul Dhinakaran is one of the most famous TV preachers in India, having a successful network of local prayer towers all over India as well, see <http://www.prayertoweronline.org/about-us/founders-profile/dr-paul-dhinakaran> (last access 26.03.2020). Especially his preaching style and rhetoric, usually in English language, were compared to famous Pentecostal preachers in the USA (James 2012).

the accepted forms, institutions and expressions of *parampara,* gain and stabilise authority in this community?

Vikas is just one example of about 30 preachers in Koraput, calling themselves pastors with the help of different legitimising arguments. While Vikas publicly uses harsh expressions of demarcation and even diminution as well as dispraise and insults against the Lutheran church, referring to their leadership mistakes and people sleeping in the lengthy church services on Sunday morning, other preachers use more subtle forms of verbalising different approaches to Biblical or local Christian *parampara* and their own relationship to it, even significance in it. The method to create confusion and destabilisations of the established rule by spreading doubts about its legitimacy especially among deprived and less-educated members is common. The own supremacy regarding access to religious powers as well as the proclamation of higher moral or ethical standards are strong arguments especially for poor or disappointed members (for various reasons) of the society.

As these features (access to religious powers, high ethical standards) are linked to a local and therefore relatively closer person in comparison to educated representatives of the authorities of the historical founders, Vikas' personality can excel the normative power of the factual reality (Sofsky/ Paris 1991, 24). The preacher can claim a high degree of authenticity, potential of identification and understanding of the local *parampara*. As a member of the local society, a reader of the scriptures and a brave person with convincing communicative skills, he understands and promotes himself as anti-institutional, led by the Holy Spirit directly and powerful among all who join his proclaimed self-evidence of legitimate self-accreditation in the name of God. In his meetings, the members sing only recently produced Christian songs in local languages which became popular through social media and similar Christian religious prayer meetings and revival events who claim to be 'modern'.

Already in 1992 Popitz noted: 'The self-evidence of institutional authority-entitlement is everywhere endangered or broken' (Popitz 1992, 138). Not only the self-evidence of institutions, but also the faith in the existence and importance to follow a legitimate order, realised and protected by positional authorities, seems to have lost significance (Gebhardt 2019). Deepening the emerging cracks of trust in institutionally authorised traditional authorities, in which the traditionally influential people ensure their own authority and power, preachers like Vikas destabilises further the former close connection between the JELC and the *parampara*. Filling a gap of a needed contemporary religious expression that preachers like him constructed and deepened, Vikas enhances a globally occurring phaenomenon of 'self-accreditation' (Gebhardt 2013) by combining traditional Christian sources (the Bible) and local parts of *parampara* (him being a local as well as singing locally produced songs). Vikas became a local religious authority by self-proclamation and acknowledgement for being anti-institutional and understanding as well as fostering the *parampara* at the same time.

The strategy of self-accreditation that lay preachers like Vikas use, who have no academic or church training from traditional institutions, is common nowadays in the Koraput area. The acknowledgement of his skills and specific religious qualities is created by his outstanding personality and he can therefore be called a personal authority, which can be understood in two different ways. The sociologists Wolfgang Sofsky and Rainer Paris differentiated between the property authority (describing the knowledge and skills of a person) and his or her attitudes and intentions (Sofsky/Paris 1991). The latter becomes an important perspective to answer the question in which sense Vikas' work has also a positive relation towards *parampara*. His aggressive communication structures by devaluing other authorities and revealing their understanding of *parampara* and the derived religious and social practices as 'dead', he does not attack *parampara* as such. Instead, he challenges and scrutinises the relationship and unquestioned link between *parampara* and the church, destabilising its traditional authority and stability.

By his anti-institutional style of preaching, Vikas does not only target the conformity of the JELC church but also the local, regional and state government and their treatment of religious minorities. By addressing and attracting all deprived, poor and helpless parts of the local population towards the Christian faith and the belonging to their community, promising them healing and

drastic changes of their situation, Vikas actively promotes one activity the established churches do not: mission work. He uses an understanding of mission as evangelism, the proclamation and realisations of growth of the community along with church planting (the foundation of new local Christian communities).[9] In a secular state with so-called anti-conversion laws[10] (Bauman 2013), the established churches as institutions can only survive by not doing so, like the JELC, which is focusing on its members only. But by recalling the memory of how 'the missionaries' founded the Christian community by evangelising them, by spreading the gospel and encouraging people to convert to their Christian faith, Vikas claims to accept the **true** heritage of the missionaries – instead of the current Christian institution of JELC. In this sense, even Vikas' anti-traditional and anti-institutional speeches of a new religious authority like him, refer to and rely on *parampara*, as they seem to reveal its true meaning by emphasising one buried part of its content. Especially those who feel buried, deprived and chanceless within or close to the local Christian community and the area of Koraput themselves, accept Vikas' understanding of true *parampara* and follow him as a religious authority, at least as one of many.

Here Squarcini's thesis receives evidence that *parampara* and a plausible use of the term can legitimate power and hierarchical structures. *Parampara* validates certain social and religious practices, even though they were not practiced from the beginning on. A certain use of the term, which is interpreted as appropriate by a growing group of followers within the community, is able to destabilise the whole formerly commonly accepted, homogeneous understanding of *parampara* and its strategies of continuity. Lutheran authorities in the Protestant Christian community will not have the same power and influence as they used to have. The content of legitimate *parampara* depends on its interpretation, shaping

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9   There is not enough room to discuss the topic of conversion here, see Berger/Sahoo 2017.
10   It is more precisely the 'Freedom of Religion Act', which in eight of the 29 Indian states only criminalises explicit acts of forced conversion, i.e. by 'forcible' or 'fraudulent' acts or by 'allurement' or 'inducement' (Government of India 1967, 363 f.).

different places, festivals, forms and occasions for worship, family life and self-assurance of one's belonging and appropriate understanding and implication in daily life.

Conclusion

By evaluating the state of the art in the study of *parampara* as well as including findings from a contemporary empirical research in an exemplary Indian society in western Odisha, this paper tried to shed light on the understanding and different usages of the *parampara* term. Especially the relationship between its usage and historical events, their interpretation and the generation of power through legitimising religious authority was highlighted.

Parampara describes a big set of knowledge, norms, rules and understandings of a society's thinking about social, religious and cultural life and its continuity. The Protestant Christian community's members in the town of Koraput understand *parampara* as a means of preserving their families' *parampara* in the form of respecting the heritage of the missionaries who founded their community with converted families and led to its successful construction and stability. Doing so, the members today remember 'the missionaries' names and respect the church and family authorities as representatives of traditional institutions, responsible to preserve and reinforce *parampara*. In their daily life activities, in their family (or more generally speaking their social) life as well as in their religious practices, they all follow the example of their ancestors and the church authorities' guidance and restrictions.

As more and more self-accredited preachers and religious authorities contest the Lutheran pastors' position to do so, the relationship between the Lutheran church, its religious practices as well as rules for daily life on the one hand and an established understanding of *parampara* on the other hand has become contested as well, which created confusion among the families. These other preachers found a way to legitimise their authority with the help of a different understanding of *parampara*, which is also plausible for some of the community members. Highlighting

'the missionaries'' mission activities to gain new members and enlarge the community instead of reassuring the theological and liturgical traditions, which evolved through their spiritual practice, gives these preachers a new freedom of religious expression while they still claim to be rooted within the *parampara*.

Parampara still is an important foundation, symbolising the creation of stability, continuity and common ground to the Protestant Christians in Koraput. The community members are now in a process of redefining what exactly *parampara* and its continuity mean to them and who is responsible for it. Now, it is difficult to say which role the Lutheran church and its authorities will play in the future, but for the time being they still keep remembering the names of 'the missionaries',

being thankful for their achievements and claiming to continue their work, while many Pentecostal preachers promote mission as evangelism activities as the true heritage to be continued in practice. By this, they started claiming to be a traditional authority, reinforcing, stabilising and continuing *parampara* of a missionaries' church, acting as their heirs.

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Julian Sommerschuh

Speaking Humbly

Values, Speech and Change in Christian Southern Ethiopia

Summary

This chapter examines changes in values associated with conversion to evangelical Christianity and the role of religious speech in mediating these changes. The chapter is based on two years of fieldwork in a majoritarian Christian community in highland southwestern Ethiopia. Here, the main change associated with Christianity relates to the value of humility. Traditionally a lower-level value and demanded only of juniors, Christianity places high value on humility and advocates that seniors too should be humble. After describing this change, the chapter asks how converts come to learn about and subjectively identify with this new value arrangement. I argue that religious speech plays a two-fold role in this process. Religious speech is a form of exemplary conduct through which dedicated evangelicals represent to others what the value of Christian humility looks like. And speech serves as a technology of the self through which Christians cultivate a humble habitus.

Introduction

A key debate in the anthropology of Christianity concerns the question to what extent conversion may be a source of profound cultural change or 'discontinuity' (Robbins 2007; Meyer 1998; Engelke 2010; Chua 2012). Joel Robbins has suggested approaching this question through the theoretical framework of value theory. Following Louis Dumont (1980), Robbins understands values as cultural conceptions of the good, which structure the relations between the elements of a culture (Robbins 2012, 120). From this perspective, change can be defined as having taken place when the relations between existing values have changed or when new values have been introduced to a given value system (Robbins 2009, 66).

Robbins' suggestion to study conversion by looking at changes in values has been taken up by several scholars. We now have a number of excellent studies that document changes in value relations related to the advent of Christianity (Robbins 2004; Eriksen 2008; Kallinen 2014; Howell 2016). There is one question, however, which has not received much attention so far. This is the question how new values take root. We may describe the values promoted by a given church. But this does not tell us anything on how converts to this church come to learn about and subjectively identify with these values. As value theorist Hans Joas (2000, 5) notes, there is '[w]ide ranging agreement [...] that values cannot be produced rationally or disseminated through indoctrination'. It is a question worth asking, then, how converts to Christianity come to identify with Christian values.

In this chapter I would like to take up this question by following the editors' invitation to consider the role of religious speech in processes of change. To this end, I will draw on my ethnography from Dell, a rural community in highland southwestern Ethiopia, where recent decades have seen mass-conversion to evangelical Christianity. I examine what changes in values this has meant and how these changes have been mediated by religious speech. In the first part of the chapter, I offer background information on why

people converted; I also explain how the values of Christianity differ from those of the pre-Christian cultural system. I suggest that the main difference relates to the value of humility. In the pre-Christian cultural system, humility is a lower-level value: only juniors are expected to be humble, and everyone strives to rise in the social hierarchy to positions of 'greatness'. Christianity suggests that humility ought to be a guiding value for everyone: juniors and seniors alike should take as the end-point of their striving not greatness but humility. In the second part of the paper, I examine the role that religious speech plays in mediating this change in value relations. I make two points. Firstly, in Dell religious speech is a form of exemplary conduct through which dedicated evangelicals represent to others what the value of humility looks like in practice. Secondly, I argue that speech here also serves as a technology of the self through which believers cultivate a humble habitus. In conclusion, I suggest that for these Christians, religious speech is a key resource in working toward the good.

Evangelical Christianity in Dell

Dell is a rural *kebele* (the smallest administrative unit of the Ethiopian state) with around 4000 inhabitants. It forms part of the South Omo Zone, which in turn belongs to Ethiopia's Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR). Located at an altitude of 2000 to 2300m, Dell sits on the southern edges of a mountain mass known as the Aari mountains. The parish covers some 20km² of hilly, fertile terrain, some of it forest covered, most of it cultivated. In the western part of Dell, there has recently emerged a small village, featuring government offices, a couple of bars and the houses of the local teachers and health-workers. Apart from those in the village, Dell people all live in scattered homesteads, which are surrounded by fields and often no more than a five-minute walk away from the next neighbour. Farming is the principal source of income. People grow a variety of grain and cash crops, and they raise cattle and sheep. Until recently, Dell was accessible only via a several hours long hike, but in 2014 a road was cleared and the *kebele* can now

also be reached via motorbike from Gob, a small town at the western foot of the Aari mountains.

The people of Dell are ethnic Aari. With around 300,000 members, the Aari are one of the many small ethnic groups populating southwestern Ethiopia (on Aari see Jensen 1959; Naty 1992; Gebre 1995). Many Aari today have some knowledge of Ethiopia's national language, but their native Aari'af remains the language that is used in everyday life. It was in this language that I carried out my fieldwork, which took place over the course of two years between 2015 and 2017.

Evangelical Christianity was first introduced to the Aari region in 1954, when the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) established a mission station at Bako, a one-and-a-half hours walk from Dell (Donham 1999, 82–102; Fargher 1996; Naty 2005). The first people from Dell converted in the mid-1980s, a decade after the missionaries had left. Conversion picked up steam in the late 1990s, and by the time of my fieldwork around 60% of the population were *amain* ('believers'); the remainder followed what people in Dell describe as their 'traditional' culture and religion and which they call *karta*.[1] There were three churches, with approximately 200 to 450 members each. These churches belonged to *Kale Heywot* ('Word of Life'), Ethiopia's largest evangelical church, which has a membership of around seven million, much of it concentrated in the southwestern part of the country. Reflecting the demography of Dell, most of the church members were below 35 or 40 years of age. But there was also a good number of older men and women in the church, and their share of the church membership roughly equalled their share of the total population. With the exception of lineage heads and traditional ritual leaders (see below), Christianity in Dell attracted people from all walks of life.

The main reason for the massive wave of conversion to evangelical Christianity in Dell relates to a quest for 'blessings' (*anje*), meaning good fortune, health and material wellbeing. Almost

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[1]   Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, which is associated with the northern part of Ethiopia, has only very recently come to Dell: since 2010 a few families have converted to Orthodox Christianity and today around 5% of the population profess adherence to this religion.

everyone I spoke to explained that prior to their conversion they had suffered some sort of calamity. Some converts had been ill for a long time and had unsuccessfully tried both traditional and modern biomedical means to get healed. Others had lost a child, seen their cattle die, or lost their property because their hut had burnt down. In their own understanding, people had been afflicted by these problems because they had been cursed by a senior. And they had converted, people explained, because they hoped that this would bring them healing and betterment. Some of the older men in the church suggested that their suffering was due to an ancestor being angry with them; and in this case, too, conversion was thought to break the spell. Apart from describing their personal ailments, converts suggested in more general terms that *karta*, their 'traditional' cultural system, was eminently dangerous and easily conducive to suffering. They suggested that beyond the hope of getting rid of their immediate problem, their conversion had been motivated by the broader aspiration to henceforth lead lives that were more peaceful and richly blessed. All in all, people in Dell conceived of evangelical Christianity as a source of blessings, and they converted *en masse* in order to access these blessings and the prospering and wellbeing associated with them.

Why did Dell people think that evangelical Christianity would provide a better and more secure access to blessings than *karta*? The answer to this question is related to the change in value relations promoted by Christianity.

Blessings and the Place of Humility in *Karta* and Christianity

To see what change Christianity has promoted in Dell and to understand why this change promised to be beneficial in terms of blessings, we first need to know more about the cultural system that people inhabited prior to conversion. How is access to blessings organised in *karta*?

The right starting point for this discussion is the notion of social hierarchy. In Aari, as elsewhere in southern Ethiopia, society has traditionally been conceived as a hierarchy of statuses. At the apex of the hierarchy is the king or 'father' (*babi*).

He is followed by a group of ritual experts (*godmi*), who in turn rank above the commoners (*keysi*). The latter divide into two caste-like groupings called *xantsa* and *manna,* with high-caste *xantsa* accounting for perhaps 85% of the population. Whether *xantsa* or *manna,* every person belongs to a patrilineal descent group (*mata*), which is under the authority of the *toidi* or lineage head. Within descent groups, hierarchy is reckoned in terms of birth order, and hierarchy also exists *vis-à-vis* members of one's mother's clan: a person ranks 'down below' (*shosh tama*) those classified as their father (*babi*), mother (*indi*), mother's brother (*irki*), older sister (*mitshi*), older brother (*ishmi*), or grandparent (*aka*). In turn, a person ranks 'up above' (*pes zerma*) everyone who is classified as their child (*jintsi*), younger brother (*kanni*), younger sister (*inani*) or nephew (*aaksi*). Every person then is senior to some people, and junior to others. I emphasise this to make clear that when I say 'junior' and 'senior', I am not talking about age, but about social positions.

In Dell, as elsewhere in southern Ethiopia, hierarchy rests on the notion that those 'above' have the power to bless (*anj*) or curse (*ash*) those who rank below them (Freeman 2002, 66–71; Donham 1990, 60; see also Hickel/Haynes 2018). In order to be well – to enjoy good health, to have many children, to see your crops grow and cattle multiply – it is essential to treat your seniors with utmost humility and respect. Expressions of humility involve acts like bowing, or kissing a senior's knee, being obedient and fearful, or granting seniors precedence in such matters as eating or speaking. Humility is also conveyed by addressing seniors with honorifics and not raising one's voice when talking to them. If seniors are well pleased, they will pronounce a blessing, or they may spray coffee or saliva over the junior's head, which is also deemed a form of blessing (see Epple 2006, 72; Lydall/Strecker 1979, 118). Contrarily, if someone lacks in humility and acts disrespectfully, seniors get angry and utter a curse. In the traditional understanding, all illness, death and misfortune are the result of such curses.

As many of my interlocutors – evangelicals as well as followers of *karta* – explained, the big problem of the indigenous cultural system was that seniors got angry so very easily. The cultural

emphasis on hierarchy and respect led seniors to be extremely attentive to being treated with utmost respect at all times – and to respond to the slightest sign of disrespect by way of a curse. Moreover, seniors themselves played a part in triggering juniors' disrespect. In relation to their juniors, it was normal for people to be loud and threatening, and to make constant demands for respect. For example, when someone asked their older brother to carry out an important ritual for them, it was not uncommon for the older brother to refuse this at first. The point of this was to get the younger brother to show special respect – to prostrate, to kiss the older brother's knees, to give him gifts and to beg him submissively to carry out the ritual. In other words, seniors commonly exploited their position in order to get more respect from those 'below'. Juniors played along with this for some time. But there often came a point when they felt they were being treated unfairly by their senior, and then they would start to act defiantly.[2] This in turn made seniors angry and led them to utter curses. It was for this reason that converts described their traditional culture as eminently dangerous. This assessment was shared by non-Christians, who acknowledged that Christianity was 'better for blessings'.

So how did evangelical Christianity promise to make it easier to enjoy good health and abundance? Given that the church provides neither medical treatment nor material help to its members, what accounts for people's sense that becoming Christian would mean reduced suffering and better access to blessings? We should begin by noting one way in which this was not achieved. There is an extensive literature on how, among Pentecostals in Africa, healing often involves aggressively 'breaking' with kin (Meyer 1998).

In light of this literature one could ask whether, in Dell, Christianity has de-coupled blessings from respect, in a way that health and wealth can be attained without acting humbly toward others. This is not the case. Wellbeing for evangelicals still depends on being humble and respectful. Seniors may no longer have the power to curse you. But if you lack in humility and respect, God becomes angry and punishes you with illness or some other affliction. In this regard, Christianity echoes traditional understandings: to be blessed, you need to be respectful. The crucial change promoted by Christianity is the trans-valuation of humility from subordinate to supreme value. To describe this change, we may speak of a generalisation of humility since the demand for humility now applies for everyone: it is not only juniors who have to respect seniors, but seniors, too, should be humble and respectful toward juniors. Specifically, Christianity in Dell condemns the pushy and self-aggrandising behaviour that seniors traditionally employed to get respect from their juniors. The theological reason offered for this demand of generalised humility is this: God has created all people in his image, and he dwells in every person. To elevate oneself over others therefore amounts to elevating oneself over God. This, of course, is sin – and God readily punishes seniors who lack in humility toward their juniors. The Christian message of humility carries an immense promise in Dell. As I have said, people here are acutely aware of how their traditional cultural system produces tensions between juniors and seniors. Christianity, by contrast, due to its emphasis on humility, is considered as a way of ending, or at least reducing, the frequency of struggles over precedence. Since it is this kind of struggle that people have long considered the source of all suffering, Christianity is seen as showing the way toward a world with less suffering and a greater abundance of blessings.

For all its attractiveness, however, the Christian gospel of humility is also a deeply challenging one for converts. The notion that seniors should be humble toward juniors simply did not exist in the cultural system they inhabited prior to their conversion. As we have seen, in this system everyone was junior to some people (parents, older siblings, etc.) and senior to others (children,

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2   To give one example of this dynamic: Lummo had repeatedly been asked by his older brother to come and help him plough his field, and he had complied with this demand. Usually, there is an expectation that labour services are exchanged reciprocally. But when Lummo invited his older brother to come and help him in return, the older brother stayed away. Then the older brother once more called Lummo to work for him. This time, Lummo defiantly stayed away, claiming that he was busy. A little later he broke his leg. This was attributed to having disrespected his older brother. He then had to apologise to the latter and to promise to henceforth work for him whenever asked to.

younger siblings, nephews etc.). This means that all converts were brought up in a culture where it was normal and habitual for them to actively seek respect from others. Indeed, being treated with respect was a key value in this cultural system: people worked hard to extract expressions of respect from their juniors, and to ascend to higher social positions so as to have more people from whom they could demand respect. For everyone, then, conversion to Christianity comes with the need for a change in attitude and practice: getting respect from others is no longer a legitimate aim for evangelicals. Instead, they ought to be humble toward each and every person.[3]

Given the novelty of these Christian teachings, how do people learn about the value of generalised humility? How do they learn what being humble toward a junior means in practice? And how do they acquire a disposition for humility – how, that is, do they train themselves to be humble toward those 'below' no less than toward those 'above'? There are several factors that play a role in this process. In the following I focus on religious speech.

Speaking Humbly

One obvious approach to the question of the role of religious speech in promoting the value of humility would be to look at moments of explicit religious instruction such as sermons, collective prayers, or baptismal classes. Doing so would bring to light a good deal of material on how religious leaders in Dell communicate ideas about humility. I could, for instance, tell you about one sermon, which focused on a passage from Ephesians 4:2: 'Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.' I could analyse how the preacher applied this message to domestic life; how he gave a vivid and funny performance of how men often departed from this message, treating their wives in a harsh and short-tempered manner; and I could tell you about how the preacher then skilfully moved on to picture the calmness and beauty of a domestic life marked by mutual respect and humility.

In this chapter, however, I take a different track, focusing on religious speech outside of the narrow context of church services and explicit religious instruction. I do so in order to emphasise that for these Christians – as for a great many others – religious speech is not just what happens in church on Sundays. Speech always and everywhere, and even in its most everyday forms, carries religious importance (Keane 1997). Indeed, the sermon I just alluded to made this very point. Quoting Ephesians 4:29, the preacher urged listeners to not let 'corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.' In other words, all speech is (or ought to be) religious speech. Hence, we can examine the role that everyday forms of religious speech play in promoting the value of humility.

To do so, let me begin by telling you about one observation that repeatedly struck me during my fieldwork. This observation relates to a sub-section of the local evangelicals, whom I will refer to as 'leaders'. By leaders I mean the relatively large group of people who serve in one of the numerous leadership positions offered by their church – be that as a choir leader, a men's, women's or youth leader at the level of the church or of one of its small groups, or as a leader of one of the work groups that aim to raise money for the church. What repeatedly struck me about leaders was that in their everyday interactions with other people they made conspicuous use of a particular speech register, which we can call 'humble speech'.

My friend Betsi serves as an example for what humble speech sounds like. Betsi was a man in his mid- to late-40s, and he had served the church in numerous positions for more than 15 years. At the time of my research, he was one of the main church leaders, and highly respected. Betsi always spoke in an extremely soft voice. At times he talked so quietly that he was barely audible. I also noted that whenever he greeted or addressed others, Betsi lowered his gaze and used honorifics as well as the second person plural. For instance, he would address a man 20 years his junior as

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3   Conversion to Christianity also involves other changes. Converts commit to abstaining from alcohol, traditional rituals, and polygyny, to name only three examples. Having described these changes in detail elsewhere (Sommerschuh 2019, 67–89), I will here focus on what in any case is the most consequential change: the increased focus on humility.

'older brother' or he would call a lower-caste woman 'mother'. Betsi also paid extreme attention never to utter any harsh word or to use any kind of strong language. His speech was full of set phrases conveying his utmost dependence on God. Such and such would only happen 'if God wills'; and whatever his own gifts and achievements, there was really nothing for him to be proud of as 'all things come from God'.

Humble speech was typical for leaders. It stood in some contrast to how ordinary evangelicals spoke. Above all, however, it marked a strong contrast to followers of *karta*. These latter people – and this applies for both men and women – typically spoke in a loud voice when talking to their juniors or when interacting with peers who counted as their equals. It was also customary for them to pepper their speech with swearwords, telling juniors to 'eat earth!', or 'take your face away from this land'. Sometimes they would raise their eyes to the sky and threateningly exclaim the name of an ancestor, which is a common prelude to a curse. Likewise, when juniors greeted them with respectful titles, they would not use an honorific in turn, but would simply address their junior by his or her first name. This difference between the two modes of speech was visible not only to me as an observer, but was remarked on locally. Evangelicals suggested that traditionalists spoke with booming voices and at great length; and this view was shared by the latter. As one of my traditionalist friends said, 'The evangelicals look down to the floor and mumble. But why should I lower my voice? Am I afraid of someone? Do I have something to hide?'

What are we to make of this register of humble speech that Christian leaders in Dell use so conspicuously? Drawing on an article by Joel Robbins, I suggest that we should conceive of it as an exemplary performance, which teaches other evangelicals what the value of humility looks like when it is fully realised in practice.

In a recent piece of the same title, Robbins (2018) asks 'Where in the world are values?'. He raises this question because in anthropology today the idea that values are a part of culture that is automatically transmitted is no longer very convincing. Against this background, and drawing on Caroline Humphrey's (1997) work on exemplars

in Mongolia, Robbins suggests 'that people can sometimes learn their values through encounters […] with exemplary persons who embody them' (Robbins 2018, 181). An exemplary person, in his understanding, is someone who realises a specific value 'to the fullest extent possible' (Robbins 2018, 175). Such people stand out to others and elicit their attention. And not only do they offer a palpable sense of what it would look like to fully realise a certain value. By virtue of their exemplarity, they may also motivate others to strive to do likewise.

This theory about the importance of exemplary persons is particularly suitable for the case of Dell. As is typical of societies featuring divine kingship (Sahlins 1985, 41), the emic understanding in Dell has long been that people orient their actions based on what they see their leaders do. Echoing this understanding, church leaders spoke about their obligation to be exemplars for others. As one of the leaders explained by making reference to Luke 17:2:

'Others look at us [leaders]. If we don't do something, they will ask, 'why should we do it?' This means that it was through us that they were led into sin. But the bible says that the one who causes another person to stumble should have a stone hung around their neck and be thrown into the sea.'

Against this background, we can interpret leaders' conspicuous use of humble speech as part of their quest to be exemplars of humility. Speech is not the only means they have at their disposal. Leaders also convey humility through their dress or by putting other people's interests above their own. But speech is certainly one important and effective means for show-casing humility. It is effective, because it stands in such profound contrast to traditional modes of speaking. For a man to address his wife and children respectfully and without raising his voice, or for someone to address a lower-caste woman as 'mother', departs from traditional usage. It throws into sharp relief the change in attitude and demeanour that Christianity urges people to undergo. My first point, then, is simply this: Speech in Dell is not merely a means of explicit religious instruction. The very mode in

which exemplary persons speak at all times and to everyone – softly, kindly, respectfully – serves to convey the value of humility.

My second point is about speech as a form of self-cultivation. As a way into this argument, let me observe that humble speech ideally should be used by every evangelical, and not just by church leaders. It may be something that feels unfamiliar to recent converts and which they have difficulties adopting at first. But as a key marker of what makes up a good Christian, a humble way of speaking ought eventually to be acquired by everyone. The importance of this form of speech is evidenced by the fact that it is built into evangelical institutions. Let me briefly spell out what I mean by this, to then explain what this has to do with speech as a form of self-cultivation.

The church in Dell offers its own set of institutions for purposes like marrying, solving conflicts or burying the dead. These evangelical institutions differ from traditional ways of doing things. One difference relates to the kind of speech employed in these institutions. Take conflict resolution as an example (see Sommerschuh 2020). In the traditional mode of conflict resolution, it is common for the plaintiff to make a big scene: If Bob's cattle have strayed into Pete's field and damaged Pete's crops, Pete will emphasise the enormity of the damage. He will say that surely his children are going to starve, he will threaten to sue Bob in court, and he will ask compensation many times higher than the actual damage. The point of this performance is to get Bob to humble himself and show Pete special respect. Bob will clutch Pete's knee, put tufts of grass on his head, and beg Pete for mercy. It is only after Bob has begged Pete for a long time that Pete will agree to a more modest settlement or, indeed, will forgive Bob freely. In Protestant conflict resolutions, by contrast, the plaintiff is not allowed to act in this way. Rather, plaintiffs are to speak calmly and in a quiet voice. Indeed, they are even expected to apologise for having taken offence. This is because for these evangelicals, to become angry is no less a sin than to make someone angry. Hence, were Tom's cattle to damage Jack's field, Jack would say something like 'Ah, that's nothing, God will take care of me. May God forgive us'. Rather than to allow for self-aggrandisement,

then, the Protestant mode of conflict resolution requires the plaintiff to speak and act humbly.

The same point can be made about marriage negotiations. In the traditional mode, when there is a joint meeting of the two kin groups that are intermarrying, the wife-givers at first pretend that they will not grant their consent. They will say that the girl is too young, or that the other group is too poor to pay bride-wealth. They will repeatedly threaten to walk away from the negotiations; and all of this is done in a loud and self-assertive way. Again, the aim of this behaviour is to exploit a situation in which one has something others are in need of – a marriageable woman – so as to push them to show respect. And again, the Protestant mode of negotiating marriages differs strongly. Here, the bride's father is expected to humbly assert that he received his daughter as a gift from God, and to grant his consent to the marriage without further ado.

These examples show how humble speech is built into Protestant institutions. The point of noting this is to make clear that while speaking humbly may at first be difficult for converts, they are guided toward speaking in this way by virtue of participating in Christian institutions. I would like to use this observation to argue that humble speech in Dell is not simply a way of indexing humility. It is also a technique through which converts cultivate a humble self in the first place.

My inspiration here comes from Saba Mahmood's work on a women's piety movement in the mosques of Cairo. In particular, I'm referring to Mahmood's analysis of veiling in her well-known article on 'Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent'. In this article, Mahmood (2001, 214) explains that the women she studied, strove to acquire the virtues of shyness and modesty, and that for them the veil was a means to this end. As one woman explained to Mahmood, she had not felt very shy or modest at first; but through the repeated act of veiling she had come to have these qualities. Mahmood therefore suggests that veiling was not so much seen as a symbol of a religious identity or an external marker of an already existent inner quality. Rather, it was through the act of veiling that inner qualities like shyness and modesty were created in the first place. As Mahmood acknowledges (2001, 215), this is an Aristotelian

line of reasoning (but see Laidlaw 2014, 75). We become just by acting in a just way. We become shy and modest by acting as if we already had these qualities.

The same argument can be made for my own case. Humble speech, for Dell evangelicals works in a way similar to how the veil works for Mahmood's women. The crucial thing about registers of speech, after all, is that people confront them as established cultural forms. That is, converts in Dell do not have to think up on their own how a good evangelical ought to speak. In their exemplary church leaders, no less than in the institutions in which they participate, converts find an established way of speaking. They can take up this way of speaking, just as women in Cairo can start wearing the veil. At first, it may be merely an 'outward' act, but through repetition and over time, the performance of humility through speech contributes to the formation of a humble self.

Of course, failure can be a part of this process. I once attended a conflict resolution in which one of the participants was asked by the presiding church leader to repeat his apology. Initially, when apologising to the man he had been at conflict with, he had said: 'If you say I have done wrong, then may God forgive me'. The church leader pointed out how his use of the conditional ('if you say') indexed a lack of repentance and humility. Perhaps it was true that he hadn't done anything wrong, as he had claimed during the earlier discussion. But for a Christian it was mandatory to overcome his vanity and his desire to triumph over a fellow human being. He was to humbly accept that he was seen to be in the wrong, and he was to convey this through the correct language. Hence repeated the man, now without the conditional: 'I have done wrong. May God forgive me.'

In closing, let me emphasise that speech is not the only factor that matters in the formation of humble selves. Nor, indeed, is it the most powerful one. For instance, the experience of illness and its interpretation as divine punishment for a lack of humility, may be much more powerful in leaving people with a profound sense of the need to be humble. However, whereas such experiences are relatively rare, speech occurs on an everyday basis. This, I suggest, is what makes up its particular importance. Humble speech is the constant dripping that wears away the stone of pride.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the role of religious speech in mediating changes in value relations. I began by explaining that evangelical Christianity in Dell places supreme value on humility. This contrasts with traditional understandings of humility as a lower-level value – as something that is only required of juniors. Against the background of this change, I asked how people come to learn about and identify with this new value of generalised humility. I argued that church leaders, through conspicuous use of a register of humble speech, sought to exemplify to others what Christian humility should look like in practice. I also suggested that when converts themselves begin to speak in this way, this contributes to their efforts at cultivating a humble self.

The broader importance of this speech-powered formation of a humble self relates to people's reason for becoming evangelicals in the first place. As I explained, almost everyone converted in response to prolonged suffering and a more general concern that their pre-Christian culture easily led to such suffering. By contrast, Christianity promises a world with less suffering and richer in blessings and respect for everyone – and humility is the capstone for building this world. Speech, in turn, helps people to work toward humility. It is for this reason that we can think of speech as an important resource in working toward the good. Among others, it is through religious speech that Dell Christians strive to produce a social world that is rich in what they regard as essential to leading flourishing lives.

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Jyotirmaya Tripathy

Guru's Words

Baba Ramdev and his Communication Strategies

Summary

Baba Ramdev, synonymous with popular yoga and Ayurveda in contemporary India, is an intriguing prospect for a study in effective communication strategies and their impact in the making of a neo-traditional order. The paper engages with Ramdev's evolution as a yoga guru and entrepreneur and his ability to traverse multiple registers of meaning making around health, tradition and nationalism. While doing so, it grounds itself on the rhetorical and performative practices that Ramdev works around in the name of *swadeshi* (indigenous) and nationalism, something that legitimates his foray into business. If Ramdev promotes individual health and well-being through yoga and Ayurveda, their legitimation springs from their association with the health of the nation. Going beyond his speeches and other oral practices, the paper also highlights Ramdev's potent conversion of his body into a spectacle and a medium through which the materiality of health is established and projected as the reference point of individual desire for a healthy body. This performance is materialised in various yoga camps and television programmes that exhibit Ramdev's body as the ultimate signifier of *swadeshi* economy and the national urge for health. Contextualising Ramdev's appeal around Indian understanding of a guru and its significations in Indian cultural milieu, the paper sees those values as the foundation of Ramdev's success.

Introduction

Sometime in the year 2005, a major controversy erupted involving the Divya Yog Pharmacy, Haridwar in the Indian state of Uttarakhand, when the Pharmacy suspended some of its employees who would later accuse the company of using human and animal parts in its Ayurvedic products. Use of such elements is nothing new for Ayurveda or other Indian medicine systems, but what was significant was the fact that the pharmacy was owned by the famous yoga guru Baba Ramdev, a household name due to his yoga programmes broadcast through his own TV channels and synonymous with modern everyday yoga popular among millions. Not surprisingly, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader and trade unionist Brinda Karat sided with the suspended workers. What followed is a classic case of activism gone overboard and along with that the excesses of modernist discourse, which became the casualty of Ramdev's babaspeak. I use the term 'babaspeak' as a unique communication strategy that brings the language of tradition to be mediated by science, so much so that science as a pursuit of verifiable truths is deployed to validate tradition. The strategy's power can be explained by the exalted position of a guru in Indian society and his association with knowledge that cannot be trifled with. The Ramdev/Karat controversy created an interesting possibility wherein babaspeak co-opted the language of modernity so much so that the anti-traditional (read progressive) discourse championed by communist parties ended up defending Ayurveda.

Karat's flurry of attacks on Ramdev for playing with the trust of people by use of bones in Ayurvedic products was intended to create a sense of outrage among traditional Indians, but mostly vegetarians, that Ramdev is playing with their faith. Ramdev, however, exhibited tremendous tact and responded saying that Karat was protecting the foreign multinational pharmaceutical lobby by delegitimising *swadeshi*[1] and that she has been its agent, contrary to communism's suspicion of foreign private capital. His products on the contrary catered to the common people, being cheaper than most such products owned by foreign companies flooding the Indian market. This rebuttal had the intended traction among people and punctured the avowed communist claim over private capital bashing. A decade later Ramdev reiterated that he got maximum visibility and public sympathy leading to better market share due to Karat's campaign without which he would not have been as successful as he is now.

The aftermath of Karat's accusations was more dramatic. No conclusive evidence was found establishing the presence of animal parts in the medicine samples and investigations by both state and central governments yielded no clear result. Though Ramdev is believed to have thrived under a patronising BJP government, in 2005, the governments in both Uttarakhand and the Centre were run by Congress party and supported by more progressive political parties. Many so-called secular parties (read caste-based or corrupt) and their leaders, such as Sharad Pawar, Mulayam Yadav, Lalu Yadav and others, came out in support of Ramdev and one Uttarakhand minister asked Karat to apologise. The controversy thus brought out the vulnerability of communism discourse about the place of religion in society. Ramdev strategically used the language of communism by turning the table on Karat and was successful in projecting the latter as an agent of multinational companies.

Since then, Patanjali Ayurveda Limited (which runs Divya Yog pharmacy) has ventured into non-medicinal products, such as noodles, honey, toothpaste, soap, edible oil and so on, and into an apparel segment called Patanjali Paridhan. It is this transformation of a yoga guru into an entrepreneur and his rhetorical strategies of creating trust around the language of health and indigenous medicine that the paper seeks to address. It engages with Ramdev's cult-figure like status and his sway over people, disseminated and legitimated through his personal charisma, speeches, yoga programmes and other performatives. Most critical literature on the subject sees Ramdev's influence over people as a kind of manipulation and his mass of followers as non-agentic and gullible (Chakraborty 2006; Khalikova 2017; Pathak-Narain 2017). It neither helps to understand Ramdev, who is much more complex than represented, nor his followers who have their own cultural validity in doing what they do. Tripathy's (2019) contribution to the debate, while locating Ramdev's *swadeshi* project within India's contemporary development discourse, does not engage with the cultural context which conditions people's perception of Ramdev. The inadequacy of such scholarship is due to its inability to grapple with the cultural context in which Ramdev operates and the moral codes his followers participate in. The present intervention sees the issue as deeply imbricated in Indian understanding of guru and his impact on people that goes beyond a clichéd modernity/tradition or science/religion dichotomy.

Some of the questions that the paper will respond to are: what are the significances of a guru in a society such as India and to what extent does Ramdev secularise them? What is the social function of his words and postures, and how do they promise personal fulfilment combined with material consumption? To what extent has the mediation of his message (advertisement, TV programmes etc.) been leveraged to produce *swadeshi* rhetoric and traditional values? Responding to these questions, the first section contextualises the idea of a guru in Hindu cultural and religious beliefs and how Ramdev complements and contests that template. The second section focuses on Ramdev's rhetorical indulgence in babaspeak by drawing from his speeches and performances. Complementing

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1   *Swadeshi* was a movement during India's independence movement to boycott foreign goods. At present, it broadly refers to an economic strategy promoting indigenous technology and domestic production and consumption so as to reduce dependence on other countries.

such language, the third section addresses the corporeal dimension of Ramdev's communication. The conclusion materialises Ramdev's popularity and locates it within the broader political discourses of contemporary times.

The Health Guru

Though today Ramdev is seen as the most successful champion of yoga and Ayurveda, his evolution as a guru and entrepreneur is intriguingly eventful and multi-layered. He almost single-handedly brought yoga to people's homes, went on to found Patanjali Ayurved Limited in 2006 (with his colleague Balakrishna) and converted it into an industrial behemoth in the FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) sector. Born in 1965 as Ram Kisan Yadav in a farmers' family in Haryana, he learnt yoga from guru Karamvir and later took *diksha* (initiation) from Swami Shankar Dev. Though the latter's disappearance remains shrouded in mystery, Ramdev's relocation to Haridwar in Uttarakhand and his ascent to fame as a yoga guru has few parallels. He founded his yoga centre in 1995 and soon became a sensation when his yoga sessions were telecast on the Aastha television channel. His popularity and backward caste were an attractive combination and he was soon wooed by various political parties. Though he has remained steadfastly secular and has made a conscious effort to take yoga and Ayurveda beyond Hinduism, he has not been above doubt in terms of his violation of labour law and outlandish claims over the efficacy of his medicines among others.

Ramdev's foray into business and his transformation into a business icon should not obfuscate our understanding of his success as independent of his earlier avatar of being a yoga guru and the associations of guru in Indian cultural architecture. Much of existing literature on Ramdev, while analysing Ramdev's evolution in an overtly critical (Pathak-Narain 2017) or a celebratory (Deo 2017) way, misses out on the continuation of ideas and attributes associated with a guru that continue to influence the way Indians think of gurus even at a time when modern education has diluted the earlier guru/*shishya* tradition. Before we proceed to see the way Ramdev leveraged those associations

and cultural traces in advancing his business, it is productive to engage with some basic understanding of what guru signifies in Indian life-world and how it helps an idea of India that is both frozen in time and constantly evolving. Ramdev's impact as a successful entrepreneur is not because his products are significantly different from comparable products in the market, nor is it only because of a business environment that is learning to value Ayurveda. Rather it is due to the continuing values of traditional guruhood in India and Ramdev's transformation of that guruhood into a catchword of quality, authenticity, indigeneity and nationalism.

Ramdev's business is predicted on the traditional idea of an individual, who is not a mere carrier of reason or fixated on gratification, but an individual in community whose well-being is linked to that of the society and the nation. This role of tradition takes us to a new mode of seller/buyer relationship where the whole business survives on trust and maintenance of tradition. In the case of Patanjali Ayurved Limited, persuading a consumer to buy a product is operationalised through a guru who not only teaches, but also reveals the meaning of life and its mission. In ancient Indian culture, a guru is the one who leads by example and is a constant source of inspiration (Mlecko 1982, 33). Etymologically speaking, a guru is one who removes (*ru*) ignorance (*gu*). This is beyond the current understanding of a teacher who is a professional service provider. A traditional verse declares that the guru is Brahma, is Vishnu, is Shiva, is Supreme Brahman in visible form (Smith 2003, 170). Unlike conventional understanding in the Western sense, a guru possesses experiential knowledge and not mere intellectual knowledge (Sooklal 1990, 16).

This is something which cannot be captured by modernist vocabulary, because the experience we speak of here is not professional expertise in handling a machine or manufacturing a product, but imparting an inner experience which the guru has undergone after years of practice. Ramdev both borrows from (in terms of commanding adulation and respect) and refutes (by concentrating on the external aspect of life) this understanding. Amongst the most enduring archetypes in India are those with seemingly particular relevance to

the experience of the guru, who helps to express wholeness of the self (Hutchinson 1991, 37). In Indian philosophical traditions, doubts about selfhood are always subsumed under *sabda* (words of scriptures or gurus) that can get the better of *pratyakshya* or sensory perception. The power of *sabda* is exemplified in Ramdev; in line with Indian tradition, his words evoke conformity rather than doubt. This is something, which runs deep in family and society and conditions the way Indians relate to one another. Family relationships are definitionally hierarchical and are characterised by compliance on the part of the younger ones (Kakar/Kakar 2007, 16). This relationship is replicated in guru worship where followers anticipate a guru's wishes and are expected to accept without questioning (Kakar/Kakar 2007, 16).

Swami Sivananda, one of the earliest gurus of the 20th century and founder of the Divine Life Society believed that studying books cannot make one a guru. What is required is knowledge of the Vedas and direct knowledge of *Atman* through *Anubhava* or experience (Sivananda 1998, 1). The difference between material and spiritual pursuits and the inherent hierarchy leads Sivananda argue that the *shiksha* guru who teaches worldly knowledge is inferior to the *diksha* guru, who shows the path of realisation and leads one to *moksha* or liberation from the cycle of rebirth (Sivananda 1998, 4). Though traditionally, spiritual gurus claim to be aiming at a higher truth beyond the material, Ramdev swam against the stream by focusing on external and physical health rather than inner experiences. If the recent expose of some spiritual gurus because of their questionable sexual morality became an issue (such as Asaram, Nityanand or Sarathi), Ramdev's orientation towards health and body immunises him from proximity with devotees and accusations of misconduct. That said, like other spiritual gurus such as Ravishankar or Sadguru, Ramdev too calls his knowledge scientifically verifiable, something which is the new language of legitimacy in the present time. However, unlike inner engineering propagated by Sadguru, which is less verifiable through observation and experiment, Ramdev's science as in his Ayurvedic products can be verified in a lab, which makes him more vulnerable to scientific scrutiny.

Ramdev as a guru is unlike any other gurus. Conventional gurus that we have talked about so far are the ones who promise self-knowledge, realisation and transcendence. This quest for peace, harmony, spirituality is a rare commodity at the time of materialism, economic development, consumerism etc. Ramdev knew that the market of spirituality is already crowded and that there is severe competition among spiritual gurus for market share. Given that he is not a natural orator and also that his lack of English skill will not be sufficient to take his fame beyond North India, his focus on yoga for good health was perhaps a conscious choice. He was not the one who could mesmerise people through his command over language as Ravi Shankar could, nor did he have the aura and flamboyance of Sadguru. He deliberately chose to concentrate on the external, which was his forte that shielded him from competition with other gurus. His unstitched saffron clothes, flowing hair and beard, agile body and earthy sense of humour do not betray any intellectual arrogance.

The idea of Ramdev being a yoga guru means, he is the embodiment of truth and according to Hindu wisdom, a guru is worshipped as deity (Mlecko 1982, 34). In Rig Veda, a guru is the source and inspirer of knowledge of the Self or the essence of reality for the seeker (Mlecko 1982, 35), both *paravidya* and *aparavidya*. In ancient Hindu tradition, as outlined in various 'Upanishads', knowledge can be broadly divided into two types: of the external and material world (*aparavidya*) and of inner and spiritual world (*paravidya*). Though the latter is a higher and transcendent form of knowledge, they are not mutually exclusive; in fact, both are required for realising the nature of reality and Brahman. The teachers themselves learn from their gurus and not by themselves, because there is something more important than factual knowledge that is to be absorbed. The *shishya* has to be with the guru for his daily acts, words, silence, diet, company and so on and has to experience the ways of the guru. It is here that Ramdev's endorsement of Patanjali products strikes a chord with potential buyers; here is a guru who swears by these products and his own health is the best endorsement of his products. Similarly, unlike other gurus, Ramdev transfers his knowledge to practice not to a select

few through *diksha*, but through his programmes. One can be his follower just by sitting in front of the television.

There is a difference between *upadhyaya*, who teaches for livelihood and *acharya*, who is invested in the student and teaches for free. Ramdev's yoga guru avatar is like an *acharya*, though his entrepreneur avatar makes him an *upadhyaya*. In Mahabharata's 'Shanti Parva', respect for father, mother and guru is seen as the greatest of virtues. In Tantric practices too, a guru can be anybody regardless of his caste (unlike Vedas and Puranas); anybody who has mastered the path and is *jivanamukta* (liberated) can be a guru. Ramdev often talks about his life-style of wooden slipper and habit of sleeping on the floor, and also doing business for charity. He claims to be living for others; he is desireless, free from temptation of acquisition. So, when a neo-traditional buyer of Patanjali pays for the good, for him there is an invisible good behind the visible product; it is tradition that the buyer actually pays for. He pays for the invisible service rather than what is material; he is not buying ghee, but Patanjali ghee and a bit of Indian tradition. The symbol of Patanjali or Ramdev in saffron does not testify the quality of the product but is part of the product. That explains why in spite of sustained campaign against Patanjali's poor quality, its sale has not been affected.

The study of gift (as in knowledge of yoga passed on to the followers) is invaluable from the point of view of the social history of an organisation (Heim 2004, 124). That explains the relationship between Ramdev and thousands of people who have benefited from his yoga programmes and feel it is their responsibility to pay back the guru. If Ramdev gave them the secrets of good health through *asana* (yoga postures) and *pranayama* (breathing exercises) rather than vitamins and medicines, it is imperative for the *shishya* (follower) to return the favour in a modest way, that is by buying Patanjali products. Therefore, a complex guru/*shishya* relationship revolves around giving, receiving and returning the gifts. However, buying the products is not a return gift, but a continuation of receiving from the guru, because theoretically Ramdev is supplying the *shishya* with goods that can maintain his healthy

life-style. In an interesting logic, paying back to the guru is actually getting more and more dependent on him. If the guru says, Patanjali products are chemical free and are organic, the guru must be manufacturing all these products to keep his followers healthy. Here, a reference to *sabda pramana* (an evidence based on the words of scriptures or the guru), justifies the truth of the product and no other justification is required. The relation between Ramdev and his followers is a never-ending relation of dependence wherein the follower perpetuates the dependency cycle even while trying to repay.

Yoga and Ayurveda remain at the heart of Ramdev's claim to fame or his sway over his followers. The standard trope in Ramdev's yoga discourse is the force of Western culture, which is out to destroy the organic life-style of Indians. In recent times, yoga and Ayurveda have got an institutional push through the Department of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy), a part of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of the Government of India. Though Ayurveda historically borrowed from medicine practices from both within and outside India, the process of legitimation of a system is strengthened by the language of gurus, which 'often takes a polemical form, with promoters of one system attacking the specific medical practices and truth claims of others' (Weiss 2009, 5). Ramdev cleverly uses the hoariness of Ayurveda, its place in India's past and a pathway for India's difference from Western hegemony, and pits himself as the protagonist in this fight between *desi* (indigenous) and *videshi* (foreign), where *desi* stands for local, authentic, organic, rooted and the latter as external, imposed or fake, something which takes Indians away from their glorious tradition. Knowledge of forests and plants as well as centuries-old wisdom passed down through oral traditions promises a kind of India and a body politic which is both epistemically and experientially free from Western paradigms.

Though Ramdev is very slippery in his political articulations and has been patronised by political parties of all hues, it is after his association with the anti-corruption movement led by Anna Hazare, that he got attracted towards the

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and supported BJP's Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi. His plunge into public life in a much more engaged manner and his support for Modi established that his guruhood was not exclusive of politics. His association with politicians gave him political legitimacy leading to Padma Vibhusan, the second highest civilian award in India. Rai is right when he says, 'this yoga guru did not limit himself to yoga and Ayurveda only. Just like Chanakya established the Maurya Empire and trained its first ruler Chandragupta Maurya, similarly, Swami Ramdev played a similar role in Narendra Modi becoming the Prime Minister' (Rai 2017, 37). Ramdev justifies his political activism saying that spiritual leadership should show the right path to its political leaders. He goes on to canonise himself in the pantheon of famous gurus: 'In our country people like Vishwamitra, Chanakya, Samarth Guru Ramdas, Mahatma Gandhi and Jai Prakash Narayan have tried to clean the politics and society of the country from time to time' (Deo 2017, 347). This is how he took the very idea of guruhood and *aparavidya* to another level.

Guru Language and Babaspeak

The legitimacy of Ramdev's language springs from multiple registers, the most important being health, nationalism and science, and all the three cross-pollinate and complement one another. In a way, Ramdev's language is much more than *sabda pramana* because his authority does not just come from an average guru, but a guru as a scientist. As Alter puts it, 'If there is a single word associated with the development of Yoga in the twentieth century it is the English word 'science' […] it is clear that one of the connotations of science is authority, legitimacy, and power' (Alter 2004, 28). Since Ramdev's deployment of science is indigenous as in Ayurveda and is key to health in an organic way, it establishes the superiority of traditional Indian science over Western ones. And if yoga is the expression of the national urge at the cultural realm and is complemented by Ayurveda, the latter must be promoted through mass production and people should be persuaded to buy such products not just because it secures individual health

but also protects national economy. That means, the Patanjali user is no ordinary consumer; he is a patriot. And taking resort to yoga is not merely to keep tradition alive, but also because it is modern and contemporary.

Babaspeak is not confined to the effort of bridging tradition and modernity as we saw above, but also dovetailing them into nationalism and *swadeshi* that ensures economic surplus generation. Scientification of yoga and economisation of Ayurveda are complementary practices that lead to a condition where science is indigenised and economy is Indianised. The complex web of such collaboration and interlocking cannot be separated from the source of Ramdev's authority – being a guru. But the condition of a guru as entrepreneur is not an evolutionary principle; that would mean guruhood is the prehistory of economy. As science's claim to legitimacy is inside Indian tradition, being an entrepreneur is just another facet of being a guru. Both yoga guru and business guru combine to create a new model wherein nation emerges as the finest expression of the preceding impulses and legitimates both guruhood and business. Borrowing from Aristotle, Mooney locates three kinds of proof in speeches: in the speaker's character, disposition/emotion of the audience and the speech itself (content or argument) corresponding to *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos* (Mooney 2005, 14). In so far as Ramdev's impact is concerned, his character towers over the other two.

Besides the rhetoric of Ayurveda's indigeneity and purity, and *swadeshi* against foreign capital, Ramdev's style is earthy, mannerism rustic and disposition self-deprecating. He speaks of making foreign companies do *sirshasana* (literally a difficult yogic posture, here it implies giving a tough time) and putting Mother India on the throne of the world (Pathak-Narain 2017, 2). Ramdev sees Western capitalism as India's number one enemy and frequently reminds people about the British East India Company's plunder of Mother India. His *swadeshi* repertoire evokes memories of colonialism and presents his business as a noble calling. He often jokingly says that the gate of Colgate will be shut, the pant of Pantene will get wet, the lever of Unilever will break down and the bird in the Nestlé logo will fly away (Pathak-Narain 2017, 6). The threat of Patanjali is so real and the

attraction of Ayurveda is so alluring at a time of neo-traditionalism that many foreign companies operating in India are producing various Ayurvedic and herbal products to stay in business (Colgate's *Swarna Vedshakti* tooth paste is an example). Unlike other advertisements by other companies, Ramdev himself comes on television and endorses his products. When other companies have brand ambassadors, Patanjali has the guarantee from Ramdev. It may be mentioned that Patanjali took a conscious decision of not using women in an instrumental manner because as Ramdev said they do not want to show mothers and sisters in negative light.

But Ramdev's suspicion of the West is not total. If at all, West-bashing is a rhetorical strategy to promote yoga and Ayurveda as escape from the evils of modernity. In the realm of business rhetoric, the West remains the point of departure for Indian values. However, such rhetoric is aimed at legitimating his *swadeshi* products. Like many gurus, who are ambivalent towards the West and betray both suspicion and admiration (Hugh Urban in Warrier 2006, 184), Ramdev does so unabashedly when he promotes both jeans and *longot* (loincloth), jogging shoes and *kathau* (wooden slippers). If Satya Saibaba upheld caste hierarchy and patriarchal values and Amma subverted them (Warrier 2006, 184), Ramdev avoids references to caste and gender and focuses on unifying Indian values. He does not claim any supernatural powers and does not fight against scientific rationality. He openly speaks against *chamatkari babas* who play with people's emotions by promising them miracles; being Arya Samaji, he also speaks against superstitions. That said, he consistently promotes the idea of economic prosperity through tradition and brings faith and science together. As a modern guru, he incorporates scientific language and develops a religiosity that adapts and reinvents yoga for this rising middle class (Waghorne 2014, 284).

Ramdev highlights the West's limited power to capture life in its entirety. Contrary to some scholars seeing him as Hindutva mascot, Ramdev does not consider Muslims as foreigners and hundreds of Muslims attend Ramdev's yoga *shivir*s. He legitimises his products by promoting an Indian way of life and experience as different from the West (his claim is 'ye sadhu santhon ka desh hai' or 'India

is the land of saints'), that Indian economy will benefit from *swadeshi* development rather than transnational capitalism, that he is the example of continuity between ancient wisdom of Ayurveda and its modern manifestation in Patanjali, that anybody can aspire to have a disease-free life if one follows his endorsements and yoga. These logical premises and aspirations can be fulfilled not by sacrificing what is unhealthy, but by using what is *swadeshi*. What is opposed by Ramdev is not consumption *per se*, but consumption of foreign products. This flexibility in working around possible benefits have been adapted by gurus to the circumstances in which they find themselves (Goldberg/Singleton 2014, 2).

To convert yoga as a life-style product, it 'needs to stand out in the marketplace […] that make it seem valuable, accessible, and unique' (Jain 2015, 75 f.). As Chakraborty says, Ramdev's popularity is a response to 'a national and transnational nostalgia for tradition' and his success lies in the 'linking of civic bodies to the national body politic' (Chakraborty 2007, 1174). Ramdev asserts that nation and motherland come before anything else and that everything should be subsumed under nationalism and that he is a *bharatiya* (Indian) before he is a *sanyasi* (hermit). He also imagines a futuristic time when foreigners would come to his *Yogpith* for treatment, the whole world will take up yoga and herbal remedies, and that cow urine (seen as medicinal in Ayurveda) will be exported to the United States. For him yoga and Ayurveda are an antidote to modern lifestyles and a guarantee to resist the degeneration of mind, body and soul. Chakraborty gets it right when she says 'his health/fitness programme extends from recuperating individual health and curing illness to healing modernity itself' and that 'his health/fitness discourse takes on the form of the modern while simultaneously retaining the promise of redemption from the modern' (Chakraborty 2007, 1184).

Ramdev claims to be both karma and yogi, one who does *niskama* karma (selfless action) for the sake of the people and *rashtra* yogi, one who symbolises the national urge. He wears saffron, wooden slippers and sleeps on the floor, enough to evoke emotions of trust that he is doing this not for his own interest but for the prosperity of the nation, health of its people and empowerment of

its farmers. This disavowal of self, his visible yogic renunciation establishes that the wealth of Patanjali is the wealth of the country, and people believe when he says that all profit goes for charity. It may be noted that Ramdev had taken the vow of life-long celibacy and free service to the people, which means he will not accept money in exchange of his teaching or service (Pathak-Narain 2017, 32). Though in earlier times yoga was exclusively based on a very intimate personalised relationship with the guru, today millions of yoga practitioners carry out their practice through television programmes and without ever having had a guru (Goldberg/Singleton 2014, 4). But far from being an indication of the guru's obsolescence, it reconfirms the guru's centrality, though the communication of olden times has been de-territorialised through technology.

If the language of transaction goes beyond profit-making and is directed towards charity, it establishes a new economy that is mediated by non-material discourse of service, tradition, Indianness and so on. It is no surprise that the language of *seva* (service) is a recurring trope in Ramdev's repertoire, wherein the disciple not only obeys the guru, but also offers his *seva*. Pathak-Narain aptly puts it: 'there is a certain guilt he's managed to create about buying from multinational companies, when there is a perfectly good indigenous alternative available' (Pathak-Narain 2017, 190). In the case of Ramdev, *seva* goes beyond the personal or economic, and borders on the belief that *swadeshi* and nation building are paramount. His endorsement does act like a guarantee, much more meaningful than a brand ambassador. Buying Patanjali is unlike any other shopping for gratification or for everyday needs; it is paying back to the guru and the nation. Though Ramdev's practice broadly falls within the framework of the Hindu school of thought, his appeal to yoga and good health operates on secular grounds.

Ramdev's influence on his followers is not really a cult-like framework nor does he use an esoteric other-worldly language to lure and recruit followers, the hall-mark of cult figures who promise a future at the cost of the present, the after-life at the cost of this life and depend on the language of affect rather than reason. Unlike conventional gurus, Ramdev focuses on this life, the present and the language of reason. In that sense he is not *status quoist* but disruptive. Though affect may play an important role for those who blindly follow him, people who use his yoga techniques and buy his products do the same because they are logically convincing. The pre-constituted subject positions of buyers as yoga-practitioners and the popularity of Ramdev contributes to Patanjali's success. Usually, a brand is introduced and then the trust is built, but in the case of Patanjali, the trust is primary and the brand benefits from it (Nayyar 2016). But like a conventional guru/*shishya* relationship, there exists a divine current (Babb in Samanta 1998, 31) and this current flows from the guru to the *shishya*. But Babb's idea that the asymmetric relationship between guru and *shishya* reflects the ideology of caste hierarchy (Babb in Samanta 1998, 32) does not capture Ramdev as he belongs to the backward Yadav caste that endears him to caste based political parties.

Ramdev's cheeky ways of responding to questions from journalists and critics is noteworthy. When asked by Rajat Sharma in the *Aap Ki Adaalat* programme[2] in 2017 as to why a *sanyasi* should sell oil and shampoo, he replied saying that he does it for the country and all the profit goes to charity, and added it is better to sell oil than to sell the country, an apparent dig at the corrupt politicians and business rivals. The *swadeshi* rhetoric found an ideal expression when he said that the country's wealth should stay inside the country and be used for the country's development. When confronted by the anchor that he sells his products in the name of nationalism, he replied that he needs to be prosperous in order to be able to do charity. Though nationalism remains his primary reference point, Ramdev also harbours the desire of going beyond the Indian shores (that would make him a foreign company) and so betrays some sort of ambivalence towards the very foundation of *swadeshi*. But he disavows by saying that his intention is to go to underdeveloped countries and not to transfer profit from those countries.

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[2]   *Aap ki Adaalat* is a television programme anchored by Rajat Sharma. Literally it means 'People's Court' and its set resembles a court room. Leading personalities, politicians and celebrities are invited to the programme to share their thoughts and defend their actions and in the process are subjected to questioning by the host and the audience.

He often says that he is empty from outside as he wears unstitched saffron clothes as well as from inside in the sense that his needs are minimum and that he does not overeat. The symbolic meaning is that he continues to remain a yogi without much interest in worldly accumulations and that his entrepreneurship is for national development and charity.

Corporeal Communication

Besides his *swadeshi* rhetoric about the quality of Patanjali products or the hoariness of yoga and Ayurveda, it is Ramdev's very body and clothing, which act as a meta-language of cultural meanings. This is how it works: the guru speaks nothing but the truth and he is not worldly, but he does not force his followers to be like him in terms of renunciation or a celibate life. Given that he lives in the world, though not worldly, he cannot evade his responsibility to lead people to health and contribute to nation's prosperity. Enjoying life depends on how healthy one is and here comes the guru's Patanjali, which can ensure health. Unlike the commercialised and exaggerated style of brand ambassadors, Ramdev appears in his saffron clothes and just introduces the product without much fuss and without claiming that the products will help the user win girls or in developing six packs. It is plain speaking. This is like parents asking the child to do or not to do something. It is the assurance of someone familiar, someone well-meaning and someone who knows for sure. And his own body under the robes, flexible and toned, is evidence of that confidence. His communication strategy is as much corporeal as it is babaspeak.

Ramdev's speeches and postures are key to his persona and power so much so that Ramdev is seen as metonymic of yoga, not just because he is adept in it, but more so his range of techniques, both oral and physical, combine to make him the most potent symbol of ancient India's gift to humanity. His assertion that he will live for another 50 years or that he will never grow old, though sounds ambitious and often meant as jokes, has a physical dimension and gets established by his eye-dropping fitness and supreme confidence. The three most important *pramanas* such as

pratyaksha (perception), *anumana* (inference) and *sabda* (words) come together in Ramdev's persona and his public performances. If his words on the virtues of Patanjali products show *sabda pramana* at work, his own body and athleticism establish the power of *pratyaksha* wherein the audience can see and believe. In between these two, we have *anumana* when the audience or the followers get convinced that Ramdev's body reflects Patanjali's power. People believe in his words as they would believe the words of scriptures, see him living what he says about Indian life-style and connect Patanjali products with his health. This helps them imagine themselves as probable Ramdevs if they could replicate the same regimen and discipline.

The guru's words get corporealised and are made flesh when Ramdev's body becomes a veritable signifier of good health. Unlike conventional persuasive techniques in advertisements that promise health benefit or taste through professional models who present themselves in Western outfits, Ramdev appears in saffron clothes and wooden slippers, thereby promising health as an Indian condition rooted in tradition. If a professional model shows his flamboyance as a justification for a product's quality, Ramdev speaks in a rustic and unassuming manner and offers his body as a legitimation of the product's quality. His reputation as a yoga guru, his extremely agile body besides his saffron clothes establishes that being healthy is not alien but intrinsic to Indian tradition. He appears on TV shows and challenges young athletic actors such as Ranveer Singh to a dance competition and impresses everybody with his flexibility and various moves defying the idea of a *desi* body being unsuitable for modern sociality. He also fights with wrestlers like Sushil Kumar and impresses all with his strength and endurance. His exuberance, his zest for life and his physical prowess opens up possibilities where tradition can not only match modernity and its associations but can also defeat it. The optics of a *sanyasi* churning his stomach (*nauli kriya*) creates a range of emotions of ancient wisdom for the benefit of modern man.

If the body is the text where tradition establishes its presence or absence, Ramdev offers a radical break with the way the human body is mediated. He does not simply want the body to be healthy; he wants it tamed and disciplined so that

there is complete balance between mind and body. Ramdev creates an idea of a *desi* body of ghee, honey and Ayurvedic supplements. This body does not have to be six-packed or muscular that defines modern day film stars, but slim and fit, agile and rugged, strong and durable for which no special vitamins and muscle building pills are required. Just an organic life-style can ensure that. This type of body also distinguishes itself from bulky, fluffy and heavy bodies. But then, Ramdev's idea of body is not radically different from a body dependent on consumption. Ramdev's products or his own performativity does not take people away from consumption, but only changes the nature of investment. Instead of wasting money on Western products, every Indian should buy *desi* goods, and instead of buying coke or instant health drinks, one has to consume *amla* juice or honey. Ramdev knew that keeping people away from such temptations by inviting them to develop healthy habits won't work, the reason why Patanjali ventured into *desi* noodles and chocolates. What is achieved here is not a suspension of consumption, but an adjustment so that desire can be directed at Patanjali products. Ramdev was successful in creating a class wishing to 'consume a little differently, something that sets them apart, something that creates an impression of having survived the ubiquity of globalization' (Tripathy 2019, 423).

The difference between old *sadhus* or *jivanamukta* ones and Ramdev is evident. If the former stayed away from society and were perhaps frail and emaciated in popular imagination, Ramdev presents himself as extremely fit. In spite of the inherent exhibitionism of his manners, he successfully uses his body as a reference point of Patanjali's validity. It is no surprise that he revels in making himself the point of Patanjali's legitimacy and convinces people that if he can stay fit, others can emulate him by using his products. For other products, persuasion is either emotional (family health) or reason dependent (details of ingredients and scientific formula) that guarantee health. In the case of Patanjali products, there is the extra feature of Ramdev himself whose sheer physicality as well as his assurance can offer that extra layer of confidence. It is no wonder that people often speak of Ramdev's honey or tooth-paste rather than Patanjali's. When he names his product, that naming accumulates mythical proportions and becomes Ayurveda's gift whose power is guaranteed by Ramdev himself. As the promoter of Patanjali, Ramdev projects himself as a symbol of Indian health; it is the Indian body and health built through Indian wisdom against the corrupting and corrosive influence of foreign companies.

While being performative, Ramdev's body is both physical and phantasmatic. It is performative because Ramdev will not be Ramdev without the body's exhibition; its symbolic power makes Ramdev the phenomenon that he is. In fact, his body is the precondition for his aura and legitimation of his claim over Ayurveda's power. When he stands up, exposing his belly and making the muscles dance, he is not just a yoga guru of yore, but a health mascot. In a way Ramdev is the cause and effect of his body. He is the producer of his body because the latter is an effect of his decades of dedication and regimented life-style; at the same time, his aura and impact are significantly dependent on his body's exhibition through which he becomes Ramdev. Thus, his body itself is an advertisement and he is not even required to do anything other than doing some poses and exercises. His saffron clothes and spartan lifestyle act as *pramana* and command a kind of attention among followers that few others can match. This is bolstered by his frequent discussion around *swadeshi*, nationalism, farmers' interest and so on, which makes the idea of a *swadeshi* project such as Patanjali all the more important. His body successfully converts his yoga followers to Patanjali users for the simple reason that the materiality of his body is predicated on some sort of discipline and food habit. If Ramdev is endorsing Patanjali, it must be a gateway to a body like Ramdev's.

Since Ramdev organises hundreds of yoga camps or *shivir*s as they are called, Alter's research (2008) on *shivir* and its social function of compliance is worth mentioning here. They are a disciplinary and regimented space aimed at producing a socialised and ritualised community of practice that is both experiential and exhibitionist. Though the participants follow the instructions of the yoga guru through various poses or *asanas* while sitting on rectangular mattresses, the unequal relation with the guru, who must be obeyed, standing or sitting on an elevated seat is clearly evident,

an exercise not merely to teach the participants, but also to create space for some non-participants to watch so that they can be future participants (Alter 2008, 37). As Alter argues, the event is removed from the instructor, participants, and audience because they are filmed to be broadcast on television and photographed for various media. So *shivirs* are spectacular events and are an illustration of performativity (Alter 2008, 37). The larger the number of people enlisted to participate, the greater is the visibility of the body guaranteeing Ramdev's fame as well as Patanjali's. Therefore, all camps in varying degrees are staged and strategically choreographed performances so that Ramdev's body can be circulated and desired.

While being real and physical, Ramdev's body is also unreal in the sense that it is a representation of an ideal body, a signifier that pits itself somewhere in between a frail or bulky Indian body and a six-pack muscular body popular among youngsters. The signifying body then becomes both a desiring and desired body. Those who follow Ramdev to get an agile body like him desire it; yet Ramdev's body has no significance in itself, unless it creates that desire among others. While being desired by others, his body also desires to produce its doubles which can be made possible by consuming Patanjali products. In its ability to create desire among others as in ideal, Ramdev becomes real. For Singleton, the yoga body facilitates 'the creation and popularization of a new kind of body, culturally located within the Hindu renaissance' (Singleton 2010, 163 f.). This transmission of the desire to be healthy through Ayurveda and yoga is called *sakti sanchara* when a certain spiritual vibration of the guru is actually transferred to the mind of the follower. As Sivananda believed, the guru can transform the disciple by a look, a touch, a thought or a word or willing (Sivananda 1998, 5).

Some critics believe that yoga is an exclusivist space of fit bodies. Though Berila presents yoga as a site of inclusion and exclusion in the West and a space for able-bodied, upper class white, thin, bendy and pretty people and not for black, fat bodies (Berila 2016, 2), in India most people take up yoga not because they are fit but because they wish to be so. Ramdev himself was affected by polio in his childhood and overcame it through yoga, which means yoga cures unhealthy bodies rather

than restricting their access. So, when Ramdev mock-fights with wrestlers on stage and flings them over his shoulder, he establishes the power of an Ayurvedic and yogic body. And he does not miss the opportunity in saying that one can increase stamina by consuming Patanjali products. He also assures actual and potential buyers that he is the guarantee of the quality of these products. For foreign companies, Ramdev argues, India is just a market whereas for Patanjali India is family.

Conclusion

Though Ramdev apparently survives on the rhetoric of East/West, modernity/tradition, *swadeshi*/foreign binaries thereby pitching his disruptive business principle as one of absolute difference, in practice, his pragmatism and market imperative makes him negotiate these dyads and, in the process, create a template where differences are both produced and erased. If the production of difference is the public performance of Ramdev's aura, wilful acknowledgement of sameness between two apparently contradictory principles is the invisible guideline for business success as in the desire to do business in other countries. Even his status as yoga guru tries to balance these competing principles of indigenous authenticity and global media that can make him the world-famous guru that he is. The preceding sections established that Ramdev's guruhood is secular in terms of his focus on physical well-being, while commanding near religious fervour as in allegiance of his followers, and that makes him a guru in the in-between space of the secular and the spiritual. The same hybridity is seen in his deployment of scientific vocabulary to validate the tradition of Indian medicine systems such as Ayurveda. Only Ramdev could have brought the discipline of yoga and drive for consumption together. The *swadeshi*/*videshi* binary, the staple of Ramdev's rhetoric, is after all a business strategy that can rationalise the use of jeans and noodles if they are produced by Patanjali. His response to the idea of foreign is both derivative and resistant and this strategic ambivalence helps him camouflage a profit motif under the discourse of charity.

If *swadeshi* is one site of identity formation that has a problematic relationship with everything foreign in Ramdev's scheme of things and is creatively negotiated, there is another equally potent register that defines yoga and Ayurveda. While being inextricably related to Hindu beliefs and cosmology, during colonialism they had become markers of Indianness in the face of hostile missionary activities. In the postcolonial setup, limiting yoga and Ayurveda to Hinduism would have limited their appeal, the reason why Ramdev went out of the way in secularising them and almost delinking them from institutional Hinduism. Similarly, the guruhood that Ramdev champions is not of a spiritual orientation aiming for inner realisation and oneness with Brahman, but of an external type aimed at creating a healthy body and healthy nation. This reconciliation of opposites and differences, for both rhetorical and strategical purposes, helps Ramdev traverse multiple positions and viewpoints without getting tied to one position. In a way, his focus on the body as gateway to a state of equilibrium and transcendence of binaries may trouble those 'who believe in a sharp division between the religious and the secular' (van der Veer 2007, 316). As Malesevic points out, nationalism and globalism can be complementary (Malesevic 2002, 40), and Ramdev revelled in making binaries crumble and new affiliations emerge.

That is not all. If his spiritual message was communicated through his speeches as well as his body, it was no less mediated by contemporary politics, which created a new framework where the boundaries of yoga and politics can be easily crossed and the exclusivity of each domain strategically transgressed. Ramdev's flirtation with politics is well known; what is less known is his ability to make politics appear like a yogic domain where yogis can contribute and make a difference. That explains his association with various political parties both in conflictual and collaborative mode. Him being a yoga guru was always a given; his conversion to a *rashtra* (nation) guru would not have been possible only through yoga. The latter had to be invested with national meanings with a little help from the political dispensation. This investment was perhaps a response to the rise in a progressive and secular vocabulary that projected Hinduism as a backward faith and traditional practices as false consciousness. It is in the context of rising intolerance of Hindu belief in liberal circles, Ramdev gained traction first among the rural populace and later among the urban middle class. He was helped in no mean measure by the rise of consumer culture and pluralisation of the global market. This market demanded not just Western goods and services but traditional ones as well and Ramdev understood that tradition (as in yoga and Ayurveda) itself can be a consumer good and promised to provide them. Tradition became the modern life-style.

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Deepak Kumar Ojha

Local Perception and Response of Religious Authorities during a Natural Disaster in Puri

Keywords: natural disaster, cyclone Fani, perception, religious response, *satsang*

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'This time, *mahaaprabhu*[1] Lord Jagannath[2] has hit us badly and has warned us. If we won't be disciplined and if we won't rectify our behaviour or life style, this kind of disaster will come again and again. He is the King of Puri and he won't tolerate greediness of any people' (Surya Narayan Rath Sharma[3] in 2019).

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1 Expressions of Odia and Indian origin used in this contribution are presented in italics, except for the names (individual, gods, goddesses, places and festivals). For local terms English synonymous are used. Here, the Odia term *mahaaprabhu* refers to 'God'.
2 Jagannath, literally meaning 'Lord of the universe' is a deity worshipped in regional traditions of Hinduism. The deity has a well-known temple in Puri. To pay respect to the religious sentiments of Odia people, Lord Jagannath is used in the paper as it is named by the local people.
3 Surya Narayan Rath Sharma is a well-known *prabachaka* (religious speaker) of Puri. He made this statement in an interview to an Odia television news channel on May 4th 2019.

Summary

There is a perception among some of the locals of Odisha that disasters are sent by God to punish them for their previously done sins. In addition to this, disaster in a city which is famous for its holiness due to the presence of Lord Jagannath temple is always related to the misdeeds or sins that can be attributed to impurity, immorality, avarice and un-ethical activities undertaken in past. Some of the locals think of disaster as an anger of God, for others it is a warning sign to change their lifestyle. The present paper by focusing on this religious interpretation of disasters highlights the case of cyclone Fani that hit Puri in the first week of May 2019 and caused a lot of devastations for the city. It investigates the post-cyclone discussions and responses made by the locals and heads of two important religious institutions of Puri i.e., Govardhan Peetham and Ramakrishna Mission. Among the responses of the heads of these religious institutions, the religious speech (locally known as *satsang*) and the social welfare measures taken such as relief distribution and free health check-ups have resulted in giving consolation to the disaster victims.

Introduction

On the morning of May 3rd 2019 Fani,[4] the 'rarest of rare summer cyclones' hit the Odisha coast close to Puri, leaving 64 people dead and affecting

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4 The name of cyclone Fani (also pronounced as Foni) was recommended by Bangladesh. The meaning of Fani is 'snake' or 'hood of a snake' (India Today 2019).

another 16.5 million directly (Government of Odisha 2019, xii). According to the situation report of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (Unicef 2019), the cyclone was untimely; the first one of this kind in 43 years which severely affected Puri along with the Khurda, Cuttack, Nayagarh and Jagatsinghpur districts of Odisha (Unicef 2019, 2). Along with several vulnerabilities, the post-cyclone situation also brought into account many reactions of the native people and religious practitioners including the priests of temples as well as leaders of faith-based institutions. The reactions mostly focused on the divine punishment or anger of Lord Jagannath, the reigning deity of Puri city, as the main cause of the cyclone, due to the misdeeds or sins attributed with immorality, avarice, impurity, corruption and un-ethical activities undertaken by the people in the past.

This is not the first case where people have linked disasters with supernatural force or religion. Irrespective of faith, geographic location and socio-cultural background, many people over the world ascribe disasters to a divine or external spiritual force (Paul/Nadiruzzaman 2013, 67). For example, famines which were common in Palestine and Egypt during the pre-Christian era were interpreted by many as weapons of God's armory or as punishments (Middleton/O'Keefe 1998, 20). After Hurricane Katrina damaged the Gulf Coast on August 28th 2005, many religious groups within the United States were convinced to see the hand of God in the disaster (Salkowe et al. 2006, 196). Some fundamentalist Christian Groups claimed that the hurricane was sent to punish New Orleans, a city known for raucous festivals, whereas other groups believed that this disaster was God's punishment of the United States for supporting the removal of Jewish settlers in Gaza Strip (Reuters 2005, 14). A similar interpretation was also advanced after Pakistan experienced the worst floods in its history in 2010 (Shamsie 2010, 5).

These kinds of reactions are also quite common in India. In the aftermath of the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, many Islamic leaders interpreted the disaster as a punishment from God (Reale 2010, 1). Paul and Nadiruzzaman pointed out the believers

of certain faiths who believed 'bad *karma*'[5] to be the main cause of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami in Poducherry (Paul/Nadiruzzaman 2013, 67). Adding to this, Luke Whitmore in his book 'Mountain, Water, Rock, God: Understanding Kedarnath in the Twenty-First Century' described the 2013 flood in Kedarnath as a *Taandava*[6] dance of nature (Whitmore 2018, 168).

Keeping this in mind, the present paper discusses religious responses of local people and religious practitioners on cyclone Fani that hit the holy city of Puri in summer 2019. This paper is an outcome of field-based research that was carried out in Puri from April to September 2019. Tools that were used to gather the ethnographic information were interviews, participant observation and case narrations. During the field work, the author witnessed the pre- and post-cyclone situations and interacted with the local residents of Puri to understand their view or perception towards this disaster. The heads of Govardhan Peetham and Ramakrishna Mission, two important faith-based institutions in Puri, were interviewed to highlight their views on the cause of the cyclone and their responses towards rescue, relief and rehabilitation of the victims.

The paper is divided into four different sections. In the first section, the introductory background as well as the argument of the paper are provided. In the second section, earlier research works focusing on perception of natural disasters are summarised. The third section contains the findings of the author's research based on ethnographic data specially illustrating the post-cyclone interpretations and responses that were made by the local people and religious leaders of Puri. In the fourth and last section, a critical analysis and discussion of the results has been exhibited by pointing at the main argument of the chapter.

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5   In Hinduism, *karma* is the sum of a person's actions in this and previous states of existence, viewed as deciding their fate in future existences (see Kapur 2010).
6   The Sanskrit term *Taandava* means a vigorous dance performed by Lord Shiva. In Hinduism, it is represented as extreme anger of Shiva that leads to destruction.

The Argument

Some people within their religious traditions have their own ways of linking natural disasters to one or more of their basic precepts. These precepts vary with regards to details, but in many religions, the sins or misdeeds of people are interpreted as the causes of disaster (Kapur 2010, 65). People often distinguish natural disasters such as earthquake, cyclone, flood, drought and tsunami, all seen as acts of God, from what they consider to be man-made disasters that include communal violence, riot and terrorism as acts of agencies. The latter may for example be understood as the government, capitalists or political groups of a country. Religious interpretations of the causes of those events often apply to disasters that are considered to be acts of God. With this understanding, the main argument which the paper attempts to make is that people perceive and raise questions on causes of natural disaster in relation to religion. The religious authorities play an important role in finding answers to the queries of people. Thus, the main question which the paper attempts to ask is how religion functions to find the cause of natural disasters and how to deal with or overcome this situation. In addition, the paper also addresses religious speeches and philanthropic works undertaken by the religious authorities immediately after the disaster to understand their role in consoling and helping the affected locals.

Local Perception Backed by Religious Notion for Understanding Disaster

Many scholars including cultural and social anthropologists have shown interest in how people draw upon and alter their religious ideas in efforts to come to terms with events of catastrophic change, violence, loss, resettlement, and even humanitarian relief (Lindstrom 1993, 1). They have long been aware of the culturally distinct long-term social change that can be triggered or induced by natural disasters, precisely because they reshuffle local and regional sociocultural set-ups (Islam 2012, 209). Where archaeologists use the

material record to provide long-term depth for understanding the human/environment relationship in both historical and prehistorical time, cultural and social anthropologists have emphasised people's perception, belief system, values, moral and ethical notions to study disasters (McGuire et al. 2000; Bawden/Reycraft 2001). For instance, Oliver-Smith writes:

'The responses of disaster-stricken people invariably involve the moral and ethical core of the belief system and include a deep delving into concepts of both social and cosmic justice, sin and retribution, causality, the relationship of the secular to the sacred, and the existence and nature of the divine' (Oliver-Smith 1996, 308).

Archaeologists may use flora, fauna and material remains to examine the relationship between contextual variables like the magnitude or speed of a disaster with social variables such as population density, wealth distribution and political complexity, in order to assess how disasters have impacted human response and social adaptation over time. Anthropologists, using different sets of data, have focused on religious interpretation, human behaviour and counting of moral, ethics, sins or bad-deeds by the survivors to understand disasters in a holistic way. For example, Islam (2012, 214) mentions that when people experience that their world collapses, they often turn to religious authorities for both answers and help. This kind of study on local perception towards disaster is termed as 'Hermeneutics of Disaster' by Campbell-Nelson (2008), who takes the example of an earthquake in Indonesia that shook the ground in the Indonesian island of Alor in November 2004. The quake destroyed some 6000 houses, 200 people were wounded, 35 died. He describes how in the weeks following the disaster, various types of explanations were put forward. Some motivated by social tensions, others by religious sentiment or a mixture of both. Interestingly, in the immediate aftermath it was the differential impact of the quake on various sections of the populace that turned out to be a source of explanations, which were subsequently justified by reference to religion:

'[…] the relatively affluent suffered the greatest losses when their brick houses collapsed, whereas the bamboo homes of the poor rarely fell down. In extreme cases, an oppressed group may see disaster for their oppressors as divine deliverance for themselves […]. More than a few Christians in Eastern Indonesia react to the news of a disaster that affects Indonesian Muslims with a thoughtlessly fiendish piece of folk theology: 'See, they burn our churches and murder our pastors, but we don't need to fight back. God is punishing them for us'' (Campbell-Nelson 2008, 13).

The association of religious sentiment with natural disaster gives an illustration of the local's view or perception towards the event. There are several instances of this. Bode's exploration of grief, mourning and meaning formulation after the 1970 Peruvian earthquake for example is embedded in analysis of myths and legends as well as the religious symbols and rituals that sustained individual and cultural identity (Bode 1989). Another example is the work of Chester et al. (2008) in which they argue that the Christian religious attitudes aim at literally protecting people against volcanic eruptions in Italy, particularly at or near the sites of the Vesuvius and Etna Volcanoes. According to them, a wide range of religiously-based responses persist and this involves a large number of people during disasters in southern Italy. They narrate an experience of the local informants during the disaster in the following way:

'We thought the patron saint of our town, S. Leonardo, could have stopped the lava, so some people decided to put the stature of the saint in front of the oncoming lava. They positioned it only 50 meters away hoping it would perform a miracle' (Chester et al. 2008, 224).

This study illustrates the use of religious practice and sentiments as a protective behaviour undertaken by the affected people during or after the disaster. Reale in her article 'Act of God(s): The Role of Religion in Disaster Risk Reduction' argues that in many indigenous traditions, however, humanity is inextricably linked to nature and the so-called 'natural' disasters are seen as the consequences of humans abusing the earth. The earth reacts to these abuses with droughts, floods and similar other disasters (Reale 2010). In such cases, religious leaders often encourage people to think of disasters not as events that can be avoided through mitigation and preparedness, but as a kind of divine retribution. For example, Ensor (2003, 11) writes that both Catholics and Evangelicals in Morolica, Honduras, regarded a devastating flood as a result of Hurricane Mitch as part of God's design or punishment. Despite the fact that the community in question was situated on the flood plains of two rivers, few people conceded that the vulnerable location was a contributing factor, and only a small number saw relocation to a safer site as a priority.

Apart from interpreting disasters as a punishment of God, there are also examples of local perceptions made by the people where they consider religion as a healing instrument to deal with the trauma or vulnerabilities caused by the disasters. Feener and Daly in their paper 'Religion and Reconstruction in the Wake of Disaster' (2016), mention that religion works as a mechanism to overcome the crisis of disaster. They write:

'In post-disaster contexts, 'religion' needs to be appreciated not only as an object to be invoked as an explanatory mechanism by those in crisis, but also as a dynamic category. In post-disaster contexts, the very idea of 'religion' sometimes comes to be rethought by diverse parties who draw selectively on and dynamically interpret canonical texts and traditions as they engage with a host of other ideas and influences that manifest themselves through contemporary humanitarian encounters' (Feener/ Daly 2016, 194).

We often find effective disaster mitigation strategies within the religion and traditions of indigenous communities. The Singas village in Papua New Guinea, for example, often faces flooding (Mercer/Kelman 2008). For generations houses have been built on stilts and emergency crops are grown on the mountainside for usage during floods. Heavy rains and river behaviour are communicated and discussed, dispensing with the need for high-tech warning systems. A worldview that sees water primarily as a source of life, rather than danger, affects the way villagers prepare for

and mitigate against floods. Similar to this context, Fromming (2006, 52) points to the religious taboo on panic reactions when a disaster strikes. This includes the prohibition to turn around while running away from a disaster site. She notes that this rule also exists elsewhere, for example in Tanzania, and that it is mentioned even in the biblical context as a command by angels during the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah. This is also well in tune with modern emergency response guidelines, such as for the channelling of refugee streams away from disaster sites: stampedes triggered by the chaotic movement of people on the run leading to fatal accidents. Supplementing to this evidence, Davis (1992) emphasises religion as a motivating force used by the people to get strength during sufferings. According to him, the suffering involved in a traumatic experience is social. The experience of war, famine and plague is continuous with ordinary social experiences; people place it in their social memory and incorporate it with their accumulated culture. Suffering results not so much from a 'breakdown' in the proper functioning of the social order, but rather is itself a painful part of the social organisation (Davis 1992, 149). This includes the culturally diverse ways that people use to mourn and how they draw upon culturally and religiously defined symbols to find strength (Bode 1989; Hoffman 1995).

This brief summary of the previous research on this subject shows that the local people or populations in many parts of the world relate natural disasters with their faith. Some see disasters as divine retributions caused by rising misdeeds, corruption, unethical behaviours and exploitation of innocents, while others see their faith and religion as a force more powerful than human strength and technology to get rescued from the vulnerabilities. Besides this, the above publications also highlight that religion works as a coping mechanism for many people during disasters. In many cases people search for answers from religion to fight with the natural hazards and to get back to normal. Thus, the local perception of a disaster backed by religious notions helps many researchers to interpret disasters in a better way and to develop indigenous strategies to cope with the disaster and mitigate its negative impact. With this understanding, the author is describing his field-based experience of perception of the inhabitants of Puri of the cyclone Fani as well as the activities undertaken by the heads of two important institutions during this time.

The Cyclone Fani and its Aftermath

The rare summer cyclone named Fani hit the Odisha coast close to Puri on May 3rd 2019 between 08.00 and 10.00 am (Government of Odisha 2019). As reported by the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), the maximum sustained surface wind speed of 175–180km/h gusting to 205km/h was observed during landfall at Satpada (IMD 2019). The 'Damage, Loss and Needs Assessment Report' prepared by the Government of Odisha in collaboration with the United Nations India, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank estimates that cyclone Fani not only killed 64 people but affected about 16.5 million people in over 18,388 villages in 14 of 30 districts in the state. Puri, Khurda, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapara were the five most affected districts. The report also states:

'Due to the cyclone, electric power, telecommunication infrastructure and road services were severely affected. Major roads were blocked due to uprooted trees, road signages and damaged culverts with complete power outage in several parts of the state for almost two days. High wind speed also resulted in catastrophic damage to houses, leaving many homeless. Damage to agriculture, fisheries and livestock has also been considerable. As per the estimate of the Department of Environment and Forestry, 21.9 Lakh trees were uprooted or damaged across the state, including urban and rural areas as well as sanctuaries' (Government of Odisha 2019, xii).

Many residents of Puri faced the problems of no access to drinking water, lack of electricity and telecommunication after the cyclone Fani. The scorching heat combined with the absence of electricity raised the problems of local people, forcing them to spend several sleepless nights. The situation of the homeless and the patients in the hospitals was even worse. This resulted in anger by the local inhabitants who expressed their

Fig. 1.   The image of two news clips published in an Odia daily newspaper on 3rd May, 2019 describing blowing away of Patitapaabana Baana (main flag) from the Jagannath temple on the eve of cyclone Fani (Source: Dharitri, 03.05.2019 <http://dharitriepaper.in/edition/2700/bhubaneswar/page/2> and <http://dharitriepaper.in/edition/2700/bhubaneswar/page/5>).

dissatisfaction towards the district administration and Government authorities.

Perceptions of Locals on Cyclone Fani

While conducting the fieldwork in Puri the author interviewed many survivors of cyclone Fani and they often considered the cyclone as a divine retribution and named it *kopadrusti*[7] of Lord Jagannath. Their explanation was that through this event Lord Jagannath showed his anger against the greediness of people. Some others interpreted the event as Lord Jagannath's test of people's belief in his power while at the same time demonstrating this power to his devotees. The author observed and recorded several events that occurred during this disaster and attempted to understand people's interpretation of it. For instance, neighbours told, that on the eve of cyclone Fani the *Patitapaabana Baana* (the top flag located on pinnacle) of the Jagannath

temple was blown away by the wind and that it fell down on the roof of a person's house. Seeing this, some people in Puri started discussing this event as a symbol of bad things to come and they said that the cyclone, then already expected, would definitely bring devastation to the city. In their interpretation, Lord Jagannath gave them a clear warning through this falling flag. Additionally, a news clip was published on May 3rd 2019 in an Odia daily newspaper named Dharitri, describing this event and highlighting the reactions of local people and their interpretations (*fig. 1*).

Adding to this, some of the local people of Puri also claimed that a description of this cyclone can be found in the 'Mālikā',[8] a book that was written by Achyutananda Das[9] almost 600 years ago (Mukherjee 1981, 85). Bidyut Behera, one of the author's interlocutors in the field mentioned that the cyclone and other bad events are the signs of destruction and these things are already clearly mentioned in the 'Mālikā'. He said:

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7   The Odia word *kopadrusti* is a combination of two words, *kopa* meaning 'anger' and *drusti* meaning 'look'. It means 'looking at somebody in anger'. Here, Lord Jagannath's *kopadrusti* refers to punishment dealt out by him to people for their mistakes.

8   The literal meaning of Mālikā is 'a necklace of beads'. This book is written in form of poems by Achyutananda Das.

9   Achyutananda Das was a 16th cent. AD poet of Vaishnavism in Odisha (see Mukherjee 1981).

'The predictions made in Mālikā are happening in reality. It was mentioned that in *kaliyug*[10] everything will be destroyed. There will be such a cyclone that the top flag of Jagannath temple will be blown away. This will be a sign of destruction and many people will die because of this. See, it happened now. This bad luck brought so many devastations to the entire city' (Author's translation).

In order to understand this local perception better, the Achyutananda Das' prediction on people of Odisha mentioned in his book 'Mālikā' was investigated. Chaini mentions that Achyutananda Das was one of the distinguished figures of the *panchasakha* movement[11] and was born in 1482 AD in a Karana (caste of scribes) family in the village Tilakana on the river bank of Chitrotpala in present-day Cuttack district (Chaini 1983, 50). According to him, Achyutananda Das describes the future of Odisha and he states that the time will come when (I) the Brahmins[12] (scholars and priests) will deteriorate to the level of Sudras (lowest caste), (II) there shall be no castes, all being equal in status, and (III) after many catastrophes there shall be a revival of spirituality under the guidance of a new prophet (Das 2012, 31). In other words, this statement means that when the Brahmins will lose their credibility and will be engaged in sinful acts this will cause many disasters. Only the spirituality and guidance of God will help to revive the society, Achyutananda Das believed.

   This concept found in the 'Mālikā' is related also to another information collected in the author's fieldwork. Some local people of Puri were convinced that the misdeeds undertaken by the priests of the Jagannath temple in the past were a major cause for the cyclone Fani. For example, local interlocutors remembered an incident which occurred in Lord Jagannath's temple during the

so-called *brahma paribartan*[13] on June 15th 2015.[14] Two temple servitors were found guilty of creating chaos in the temple leading to a considerable delay of this highly important ritual. In a similar incidence, two groups of priests, locally known as *pandas*, fought over their share of donations given by the devotees to Lord Jagannath on October 5th 2010.[15] The scuffle was so intense that one of them ended up getting a bloody nose. After the fight, during which blood had splatted on the floor in the holiest part of the temple, purification rituals had to be conducted for the deities. When discussing these past events, Kamal Chandra Mohanty, one of the author's interlocutors and local inhabitant of Puri said:

'Every day we get news that the temple priests who work in the Jagannath temple are involved in corruptions and in many unethical activities. These are unpardonable sins which a normal man always fears to commit. Sometimes they make problems in *brahma paribartan* [ritual of changing the life substance of Lord Jagannath] and sometimes they fight to get the money offered to Lord Jagannath. Because of these sinful acts, Lord Jagannath punished all people of Puri and taught us a lesson' (Author's translation).

These statements about the cyclone Fani provide evidence that according to the people, the sins, misdeeds or bad *karma* were the main causes of this disaster in Puri. Santosh Barik, another interlocutor of the author also proves this point. He said that this cyclone was unique in many respects. Throughout of his lifetime, he said he had never seen a cyclone affecting Puri city so badly. Mostly, he argued, the cyclones happened in the Paradeep, Jagatsinghpur or Gopalpur regions of Odisha. This time it caused a landfall in Puri which

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10   According to the Hindu belief, *kaliyug* is one of the four ages of cycle. It is believed that this *yug* will witness the destruction of earth and human beings.
11   The *panchasakha* movement was flourished in Odisha during 16th cent. AD by five scholars named Balaram Das, Jagannath Das, Yasovanta Das, Ananta Das and Achyutananda Das.
12   The Brahmins or the highest caste people of the Varna system in Hinduism are only designated to work as priests in a temple.

13   *Brahma paribartan* is the most secret and sacred ritual of Lord Jagannath when the selected Daitapati priests transfer *Brahma* (life substance) from old idols to the new ones during the Nabakalebara festival.
14   <https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/priests-suspended-in-jagannath-brahma-paribartan-mismanagement-115062401335_1.html> (last access 07.11.2019).
15   <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Priests-fight-at-Jagannath-Temple-over-donations/articleshow/6692230.cms> (last access 07.11.2019).

gives a strong message that people's burden of sins (*paapabhaara*) has reached the maximum stage. Further, he pointed out that cyclones never happened in summer but this Fani cyclone did and brought so many difficulties for the people.

The author's post-Fani experience and interaction with the inhabitants of Puri provided an insight into how people search for reasons of untimely natural disasters and relate it to the misdeeds undertaken by the Brahmins of the Jagannath temple in Puri. This anti-Brahaminical attitude is quite widespread in the region and is closely linked to the writings of Achyutananda Das. For example, during the author's investigation of recent literature on Das' work, it was found that Achyutananda Das was bitterly critical of the superiority of the Brahmins, whom he blames for eating meat, in the caste system. He compares Brahmins with goats and argues for the significance of the lives of goats as eaters of grasses and the meaninglessness of the lives of Brahmins as the eaters of meat. Thus, he writes about this in one of his poems which Sahoo quotes:

'Brahmins are polluted just by touching a dead body, but they eat meat of goats after they are killed. This animal is so great because he reads vedas and mantras, and that animal is so minor because he eats grasses' (Sahoo 1979, 2; Author's translation).

So far, the views of local inhabitants of Puri who criticised the priests have been presented but what about the priests themselves? How did they perceive the situation? During the author's research, it was also attempted to understand the perceptions of the priests of the Jagannath temple towards the cyclone Fani. Though there was no opportunity to personally interview any priests presently working in the temple, it was possible to get reactions from a few senior ex-priests who were giving service in the past, for example, Chakradhara Sharma, aged 79, who worked as priest in the Jagannath temple for almost 15 years. When asked about his view about the causes of the cyclone Fani in Puri, he blamed it to the changed behaviour of people in modern times, which in his opinion goes against religious prescriptions. He replied:

'The behaviour of people, especially of the youths in the present day, is not acceptable. These are against our religion, culture and tradition. In the name of modernity, people are consuming meat, alcohol and running after money. Many people are getting married out of their own caste and religion, not giving respect to the elders and not obeying the rules mentioned in our religious scriptures. As a result, this kind of cyclone is occurring to teach a lesson to the people so that they correct their behaviour and attitude' (Author's translation).

Through his conversations with Chakradhara Sharma and other ex-priests, the author got the impression that priests and local people mutually blame each other for not behaving properly and thereby causing the cyclone. In other words, there is a similar response to the disaster among the priests and local people, but responsibility is attributed to each other. Both pointed out religion-based guided behaviour that needs to be followed by everyone to maintain peace in the society, punishment for failing to comply with these standards is ensured by god in the form of natural catastrophes.

Perceptions and Responses of Religious Leaders to the Cyclone Fani

Up to this point, the focus layed on religious interpretations of why the cyclone Fani occurred. In the following section, it will be looked at how religious institutions became active in various relief activities. Analysis shows how they interpreted these relief actions within their religious doctrines. The data derives mainly from interviews with the heads of two important religious institutions that function in Puri, first the Shankarcharya of Govardhan Peetham[16] and second the secretary of the Ramakrishna mission. The official website of Govardhan Matha[17] describes it as one of oldest monasteries of Puri which was established 2500 years ago by Adi Shankaracharya.

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16   The complete name of Govardhan Peetham is Poorvamnaya Sri Govardhan Math-Bhogavardhan Peetham and is popularly known as Govardhan Matha in entire Puri.
17   <www.govardhanpeeth.org> (last access 15.08.2019).

The present Shankaracharya of the Govardhan Matha is Nischalananda Saraswati and he organises *satsang*[18] (religious speech and discourse) programmes throughout the year to share his knowledge and expertise on religion with devotees and followers. During one of his *satsang* programmes held on July 28th 2019, Nischalananda Saraswati spoke about the reason of cyclone Fani and how it affected the human life. He said:

'*Karma* (deed) is an unavoidable system that oversees cause and effect as well as action and reaction. The principle of *karma* is that one's actions in past lives will affect one's life today and that one's actions today will touch one's future lives. Whatever happens today is the result of activities done in previous day. So, the cyclone Fani came as a result of our bad *karma* in past life' (Author's translation).

In addition to this, Shankaracharya during his *satsang* programme mentioned that *seva hi maanava dharma* – the English translation of which is service – is the main religion of human beings. By *seva* he meant service to God, mankind, society and animals. He emphasised that each human being should spend some portion of his time, resources and knowledge towards the welfare of needy people and animals. He further emphasised that our duty is to give service for the people who are in need and the situation like this cyclone makes us aware about our *karma* (deed) and *dharma* (religion). At the beginning of every *satsang* programme of *Chaturmaasa*[19] 2019 held by Shankarcharya, he utters a few words in Hindi, which he calls the slogan of every Hindu, describing the ideal *dharma* (religion) of every human being. He says:

'May the religion win, may anything non-religious lose, may there be love and affection between all animals, may there be welfare of the mankind, may the cow mother be blessed, may the cow slaughtering be stopped, may Bharat be undivided and may each Hindu become *sanaatani*'[20] (Author's translation).

In this rhetoric Shankaracharya preaches for welfare of society and praises the welfare activities of human beings. He makes people aware about the ideal activities which will lead to them to the right path. In addition, he stresses the faith in Hinduism which will act as a coping mechanism to deal the pressure of natural disaster.

Quite similar to this, the secretaries of the Ramakrishna Mission of Puri and Bhubaneswar also emphasised right behaviour during their *satsang* programmes. During the author's interview at the beginning of May 2019, Swami Parisuddhananda, the secretary of Puri centre, mentioned that the prime objective of Swami Vivekananda behind founding the Ramakrishna mission was to promote social welfare activities for the needy and poor people of India. While describing the biography of Swami Vivekananda at an evening *satsang* held on May 12th 2019 at the Puri centre, Swami Parisuddhananda mentioned that Swami Vivekananda has always encouraged the youth towards *karma* yoga[21] in which working for the poor and needy people of the society is regarded as the primary duty of human being. He also gave examples of Swami Vivekananda contributing a lot towards relief and restoration works of people affected in natural calamities like flood, cyclone and drought during his stay at West Bengal. He also added that Swami Vivekananda during his visit to Chicago had faced many problems. He had to starve and stay in the road and at that time he had felt the pain of the poor people. From that day onwards, he was committed to work for the welfare of people faced with problems and difficulties like those caused by cyclone Fani.

In another *satsang* programme held on the occasion of Guru Purnima held on July 16th 2019 at the Bhubaneswar centre of the Ramakrishna mission, Swami Sudarsanananda mentioned that like

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18 *Satsang* is a local term being used to define religious speech and discourses in Odisha.
19 The Odia term *Chaturmaasa* literally means 'period of four months'. This is a type of *satsang* programme undertaken by Nischalananda Saraswati in Govardhan Peetham every year.

20 By *sanaatani* Shankaracharya meant true believers of Hinduism.
21 *Karma* yoga is one of the four spiritual paths in Hinduism. The others are *Raja* yoga, *Jnana* yoga and *Bhakti* yoga. To a *Karma* yogi, right work done well is a form of prayer.

the morning dew falls silently at the grasses of a ground, the monks of the mission work silently for the welfare of needy people. When explaining this by giving examples, he recounted that he along with his Guru, Swami Atmaprabhananda, has roamed in the city in the early morning and distributed blankets and clothes to the homeless people who usually sleep on the roadside. This entire act is done silently without the notice of the people and hence no praising is desired for this service.

During the field stay at Govardhan Matha and the Ramakrishna mission of Puri and Bhuabaneswar, the author observed that the heads of these institutions issued notices appealing generous people to donate freely, so that the rescue, relief and restoration of the affected people of the cyclone Fani can be undertaken.

While encouraging people to give donations for the cyclone Fani victims, the heads of Govardhan Matha and the Ramakrishna mission referred to it as *daana*[22] (donations) linking it to the religious concept of the gift. According to them, a true religious person always feels motivated to give *daana.* By giving food, clothes or any other object, a true believer of *Santaana Dharma* gets blessings from God which are called 'merits' (*punya*)[23] by both of the leaders. It was also witnessed that the members of Govardhan Matha and the Ramakrishna mission visited many villages and distributed the relief materials to the cyclone victims. The members of the mission distributed rice, biscuits, candle and blankets to the cyclone affected people of Puri and Bhubaneswar. It was also observed that the monks of the Ramakrishna mission cooked food at the centre and carried it to the cyclone affected villages to distribute it among the people also the *Aditya Bahini,* an association of young volunteers of Govardhan Matha took a leading role in arranging relief materials and distributing it among the affected people of the Satapada and Satyabadipur regions of Puri.

Discussion and Conclusion

These ethnographic examples demonstrate that religious ideas are key forces behind the way this Hindu community in Puri interacts with notions of development or disaster. The analysis of the findings received from the study at Puri evidenced that religious interpretations are highly relevant in understanding a disaster like the cyclone Fani. In the wake of post-disaster, local Hindus not only search answers or causes of this disaster but also look into the strength or coping mechanism underlined in their religion.

Going back to the argument and analysing the findings, the paper describes that many local inhabitants affected by the cyclone Fani interpreted the event as a divine retribution or punishment. They stress that the cyclone Fani was a divine punishment for modern ills and claim that people of Hindu faiths are to blame for not obeying divine commands or laws. This explanation emphasises survivor's guilt and sinfulness, which is to be punished by God. Such a conception of disasters is often associated with fatalistic and submissive attitudes, which generally lead to inappropriate behaviours and the unwillingness of those at risk to mitigate or even react rationally when hazards are imminent. Adding to this, the locals also referred to texts written in the past such as the events mentioned in the 'Mālikā', which contain predictions of mishaps. Thus, the local perception is always guided with the pre-existing ideas and notions that relate to present day events.

The survivors of cyclone Fani interpret events in terms of *karma* (deed), which is understood as a universal, unavoidable system that oversees cause and effect, action and reaction (Falk 2010, 96). The principle of *karma* is that one's actions in past lives will affect one's life today and that one's actions today will touch one's future lives (Stern 2007, 29). Thus, *karma* which draws on the concept of reincarnation is related to past, present and future lives. According to the doctrine of *karma*, there are no innocent victims. It buffers anger against the authority of God and its framework allows the plenitude and perfection of God to remain intact (Kapur 2010, 365). Based on the precepts of *karma*, the locals of Puri hold the view that the cyclone Fani was the outcome of bad *karma* in their

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22 The Odia term *daana* means 'self-less donations'.
23 *Punya* is a term of Sanskrit origin which means 'gain' or 'benefit' in Hindu religion.

past lives. According to this line of thinking, many coastal residents of India blame themselves instead of looking for someone or something else to blame.

Besides blaming *karma* and local gods and goddesses, many in Puri maintained that the cyclone Fani hit the Puri coast because of moral degeneration, political corruption and immorality among its citizens. The fights between priests and their involvement in unethical activities are examples of this.

As noted, the contributions made by the religious based organisations like Govardhan Matha and the Ramakrishna mission during this disaster were remarkable. Through their constant discourses and discussions with local people they convinced the believers that their faith helps them to cope with the extensive destruction of extreme natural events and overcome the effects as quickly as possible. This is a convenient and rational way of dealing with someone or something that is out of people's reach in a context of daily hardship. Adding to that, their leadership in rescue, relief and restoration work for the affected people of the cyclone Fani developed more trust and reliability among the local people. In another way it can also be interpreted in the way that the organisations used this opportunity to show their loyalty to their followers and to advertise their activities in the public.

At last, this paper also emphasises that each disaster is different and should not be treated in the same way. The study of a disaster in Puri is clearly linked to a particular religion, while reactions of other regions may be different. But the paper argues that the local perceptions or native's views about a disaster are helpful in understanding it. In addition to this, while making an impact assessment of the situation like this, the post-situational psycho-social conditions backed by religious belief must be taken into consideration.

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Gulniza Taalaibekova

Force and Effect of Religious Speeches in Kyrgyzstan

Keywords: speech act theory, preaching, *dawat*, religious organisation, Islam, Kyrgyzstan

Summary

Doing *dawat*, that is laypeople's practice of verbally exhorting and admonishing others to rectify their behaviour in compliance to Islamic teachings, has been gaining scope and importance in Kyrgyzstan since the independence of the country in 1991. Yet these exhortations and admonishments run the danger of being ignored, being irritating or backfiring at a person who does them. The current paper addresses the question of *dawat*, a form of religious speech that is accessible to laypeople and suggests viewing it as an act that possesses force and that could bring about irreversible effects in the lives of people at whom it is directed. Furthermore, it maintains that unlike the Friday sermon, *dawat* is a non-conventional perlocutionary speech act, whose force and effect are not inherent but are constituted through the demonstration of exemplary behaviour by the person who does it. Focusing on the activities of Adep Bashaty, a local religious organisation established in 2003, it shows ethnographically how the demonstration of exemplary behaviour constitutes the force of *dawat*.

Introduction

In the summer of 2019, Aidai, Saule[1] – two friends of mine – and I were sitting in the kitchen and drinking tea while having a chat about Friday sermons in mosques in Bishkek.[2] In the middle of our conversation, Saule referred to a 'more religious'[3] common friend of ours and mockingly remarked that he constantly exhorted her to start praying even though he himself regularly oversleeps his morning prayers and sometimes fails to observe other religious prescriptions. I immediately jumped in to defend him saying that although it is easy for people to say things, it is often difficult to do them. She did not argue back, we switched the topic and kept talking about other matters. It was not until I attended an event organised by a religious organisation, Adep Bashaty, on 12th September 2019 that I realised that Saule, like my other

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[1] The names of my interviewees were changed for concerns of anonymity. However, the names of public figures or those who held a speech for large publics remained unchanged.

[2] The topic was taken up because of my regular attendance of Friday ritual prayers at the former central mosque of Bishkek.

[3] Although many people in Kyrgyzstan identify themselves as Muslims, most of them have little formal knowledge about Islam and do not adhere to Quranic and prophetic teachings because of the 'atheist' Soviet rule in the country in 20th cent. AD. Thus, references such as 'more religious' or 'practicing Muslims' refer to people who started adhering to Islamic teachings within the last 20 to 30 years, while a reference such as 'not-so-religious' refers to people who do not do so, even if they identify themselves as Muslims.

interlocutors, did have a point in bringing up this mismatch between a person's practical deeds and her verbal exhortations. In my interlocutors' view, in order to be effective, verbal exhortations had to be grounded in the exemplary behaviour of the person who uttered them.

This short story demonstrates that not only imams in mosques or prominent religious figures preach and exhort people to take up religious practice and correct their behaviour, but also practicing lay Muslims. In Islam, it is considered to be an obligation of every Muslim to exhort others and remind them of religion. What do practicing Muslims exhort each other to do? What do they achieve through their verbal exhortations? Are they successful with their exhortations and admonishments? How do their speeches acquire their force and effect and when do they run short of their force? To answer these questions, in the first part of the paper, I first turn to speech act theory and suggest viewing speeches and religious speeches, in particular, as acts that possess force and that could bring about reversible or irreversible effects. Secondly, maintaining that speeches could be characterised as illocutionary (conventional) and perlocutionary (non-conventional) acts, I contend that their force and effect are not inherent but are constituted.

In the case of an illocutionary speech act, its force and effect are constituted by following the convention, whereas the force and effect of a perlocutionary speech act is constituted by non-conventional means. In the second part, specifically, focusing on *dawat*, a form of religious speech that is available to laypeople and does not follow a particular convention, I argue that force of a *dawat* is constituted by the demonstration of exemplary behaviour, known as *adep-akhlak* in Islamic terms. By comparing *dawat* to the Friday sermon, which follows a strict convention (and therefore has a fixed form) and can be delivered only by an imam, I highlight the role of laypeople in exhorting others and giving religious advice to others. In the third part, focusing on the example of Adep Bashaty, I show how the demonstration of exemplary behaviour constitutes the force of *dawat*. In particular, I focus on a story of how members of Adep Bashaty could induce positive

changes in the behaviour of the students at a school with a criminal reputation by demonstrating an exemplary and desired behaviour of giving.

Theoretical Framework: Force of Speech

The question of how speech and, specifically, religious speech acquires its force and effect on people is unexplored by anthropologists in Kyrgyzstan. This paper, thus, addresses this issue. To do that I build on Austin's (1962) ground-breaking book 'How to Do Things with Words'. To start, Austin's arguments are illuminating in that they encourage viewing speeches as acts and urge us to shift our focus from a symbol, a word and a sentence to an utterance as a unit of communication. For instance, in maintaining his argument that the issuance of an utterance is an act, Austin states the following: 'Once we realize that what we have to study is not the sentence but the issuing of an utterance in a speech situation, there can hardly be any longer a possibility of not seeing that stating is performing an act' (Austin 1962, 139). To put it differently, the issuance of an utterance is an act not because of a mere movement of a tongue or other parts of the body of a person who issues the utterance. Rather it should be regarded as an act through which it produces consequences with the aim of exerting influence and introducing changes in the world.

If the utterance of a symbol, a word, or a sentence is to be considered as an act, then what exact kind of act is being considered? To elaborate more on how a person performs an act in saying something, Austin proposes to distinguish an act performed in saying something into three different acts: 'Thus we distinguished the locutionary act [...] which has a **meaning**, the illocutionary act which has a certain **force** in saying something, and the perlocutionary act which is **the achieving** of certain **effects** by saying something' (Austin 1962, 121. Austin's emphasis). Essentially, a locutionary act is an utterance of a sentence which has a specific meaning. As for illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, an '[...] illocutionary act is a conventional act: an act done as conforming to a convention' (Austin 1962, 105), while a

perlocutionary act is not a conventional act (see Austin 1962, 121 f.).[4]

To make it clearer, a sentence 'one plus one is equal to two' could be understood as a locutionary act for it does not aim at producing a change. As for the illocutionary act, Austin gives an example of christening a ship. He writes: ''I name this ship Queen Elisabeth' has the effect of naming and christening a ship; then certain subsequent acts such as referring to it as the Generalissimo Stalin will be out of order' (Austin 1962, 117). To paraphrase it, the naming of the ship has a convention; the naming of the ship following the convention is an illocutionary act that produces an illocutionary effect of naming the ship only Queen Elisabeth and not otherwise. However, distinguishing a perlocutionary act from an illocutionary act maintaining that the former is not conventional while the latter is a conventional act is difficult. Austin himself points out that 'it is difficult to say where conventions begin and end' (Austin 1962, 119) noting that one way to distinguish a perlocutionary from an illocutionary act could be the fact that it does not have an illocutionary formula like 'I surprise you or upset you or humiliate you [...]' (Austin 1961, 118). According to Sbisa (2007),[5] the distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts has caused much confusion and led to some mis-readings of Austin's work.

In offering her own insights on reading Austin, Sbisa in her article 'How to Read Austin' points out that 'How to Do Things with Words' has had many mis-readings of which the distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts is one. She maintains that 'in fact, the distinction between Illocution and Perlocution is at all possible only if a difference between natural and conventional effects is accepted' (Sbisa 2007, 466).[6]

To clarify, what Sbisa means is that when Austin describes an illocutionary act as a conventional act, it should be understood in regard to 'the conventionality of their effects, rather than [...] the conventionality of the means by which they are performed' (Sbisa 2007, 465). In other words, she proposes that it is not the conventionality of uttered words or sentences that distinguish the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, but the conventionality or non-conventionality of their effects. A conventional effect of an illocutionary act can be null and void under certain conditions, whereas a non-conventional (natural, material) effect of a perlocutionary act can be either produced or not. Going back to the examples of christening a ship and humiliating, seen from Sbisa's perspective, the effect of an illocutionary act of christening a ship could be nullified – it will not be called Queen Elisabeth – if it was christened by a person who did not have the authority to do it. In short, infelicitous conduct of the convention of naming the ship nullifies its effect, while the effect of a perlocutionary act of humiliating somebody cannot be nullified even if it were conducted infelicitously. Sbisa's insights and proposition are illuminating in that they essentially shed light on cancellable and non-cancellable effects of illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. However, her remark 'that appropriate support for Austin's claim that illocutionary acts are conventional should come from the conventionality of their effects, rather than from the conventionality of the means by which they are performed' (Sbisa 2007, 464 f.) is constraining. Rather, the consideration of both conventional

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4   Austin (1962, 147) however reminds to keep in mind that 'in general the locutionary act as much as the illocutionary is an abstraction only: every genuine speech act is both'.

5   Sbisa together with Urmson revised the first edition of Austin's work and introduced changes to its second edition.

6   This misreading might be due to the fact that in the first part of the book, Austin proposes to distinguish between performatives and constatives, where performative utterances indicate the act of doing something in saying something while constatives indicate true or false statements.

Later abandoning the pursuit of performative utterances as distinct from constative statements, and adopting a new paradigm of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, he subsumes the former under the latter (for more details see Austin 1962, 148) claiming that the relations between the former and the latter is comparable to the relations between a 'special theory' and a 'general theory'. In other words, he does not fully abandon his first endeavour of distinguishing performative utterances from constative statements but rather subsumes it under the later development in his book. Thus, what he really argues is not a search for pure performative verbs but rather urges to look at abstractions and distinctions of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. As for the relationship between performative utterances and illocutionary acts, illocutionary acts are equivalent to performative acts (see Austin 1962, 146 for more details).

and non-conventional means and effects allows for a clearer distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

Thus far, following Austin, I adopt his proposition to view speeches as illocutionary (conventional) and perlocutionary (non-conventional) acts, where the first is achieved with conventional and the latter with non-conventional means, both of which possess forces and can introduce effects and produce changes. Sbisa's insight is helpful in highlighting conventionality and non-conventionality of not only means but also effects of illocutionary or perlocutionary acts, where conventional effects are reversible and non-conventional effects are irreversible, respectively.

Besides the means and the effects of illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, another important point to discuss is the importance of context. Although Austin agrees on the importance of the context in securing the effects and consequences of a speech act, he deals with speech acts on the level of a sentence. It means that Austin looked at the force of speech acts that were at most a couple of sentences long and did not account for the details of a context where a speech act takes place.[7] Explaining performativity, a term that derived from Austin's work, Hall (1999, 185) points out how the uptake of Austin's work resulted in a debate whether or not the context of a speech was important.[8] She mentions that Derrida, focusing specifically on literature, in his uptake of Austin's work argues that a text can always be detached from its context, thus, claiming that the context can never be identified. Whereas, Hall continues, linguistic anthropologists insist to study speech acts within a context, 'as ethnographers attempt to define the cultural conventions that make performance, ritual and even everyday conversation felicitous, while at the same time acknowledging the emergent and creative aspects of any speech event' (Hall 1999, 185). This essentially means that different elements of a context provide clues on

the conventionality and non-conventionality of means and effects of speech acts.

In my own uptake of the speech act theory, I also think that the study of speech acts within a particular context provides clues that are not otherwise visible and understood, thus, ensuring a more complete understanding of what forces speech acts have and how they achieve their effects. For instance, a perlocutionary act is a non-conventional act (does not follow any conventions) and has a non-conventional effect which is irreversible even if it is done infelicitously. Whereas an illocutionary act is a conventional act and has the conventional effect which is reversible if done infelicitously. However, although an illocutionary act has an illocutionary effect, it could also have a perlocutionary effect that is achieved without the convention. For instance, Tambiah (1979, 128) writes that 'there are certain constitutive rites in which certain perlocutionary effects are presupposed by the illocutionary force of the acts'. Similarly, Hardenberg (2010), writing about death rituals in Kyrgyzstan, states that they have consequences and effects other than the conventional effects of rituals that are stated openly and expected by the performers.[9] According to Hardenberg, the death ritual is there not only to enable the departure of the soul but also because 'death sets society into motion' (Hardenberg 2010, 37) and 'renews the socio-cosmic order threatened by the death of a member of society' (Hardenberg 2010, 39). In other words, the death rituals in Kyrgyzstan achieve not only the conventional effect of transferring the soul from this world to the other world, which should result from felicitous conduct of the ritual, but also non-conventional effects such as intensifying relationships among people as well as their relationships to spirits of the deceased by renewing the socio-cosmic order. Such nuances are only possible to know because of empirical data which stems from a specific context and, in its turn, only highlights the importance of the context in studying speech acts.

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7   Austin elaborates on six felicity conditions for performatives (illocutionary acts) to function smoothly, yet it does not account for details of the context beyond conventional procedures.
8   According to Hall (1999) performativity is a term that derived from Austin's performatives and was coined by gender theorist Judith Butler.

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9   To note, Hardenberg does not describe a mortuary ritual as illocutionary (conventional) act, its stated and non-stated effects as illocutionary (conventional) and perlocutionary (non-conventional). This is the author's interpretation of his work.

Now coming back to Kyrgyzstan, I contend that the Friday sermon has illocutionary force as it follows a strict convention and has a conventional effect of worshipping God which could turn out to be infelicitous if done incorrectly, while *dawat* has perlocutionary force since it does not have any regulations or conventions to follow and therefore, cannot be done incorrectly or infelicitously and might have a non-conventional irreversible effect on people. Thus, the question of how *dawat* acquires its force and effect is couched in an assumption that it is a non-conventional perlocutionary speech act that could have an irreversible effect by bringing changes into people's lives. In the following, I demonstrate that force and effect of *dawat* is constituted through the demonstration of exemplary behaviour by the speaker in adherence to the Quranic and prophetic teachings. Thus, *dawat* in Kyrgyzstan could be likened to Trobriand spells. Tambiah, alluding to Malinowski's work, mentioned that 'the Trobriand view[ed] that their magical spells (were) [as] 'verbal missiles' launched by man as 'magical power towards entities or forces which they were to affect' (Malinowski 1935, 248 f., cited by Tambiah 1979, 137). Although in the context of Kyrgyzstan, we are not necessarily dealing with magical spells,[10] this analogy between magical spells and religious speeches could be drawn as the description of magical spells launched as verbal missiles to affect entities and other forces captures the goal of religious speeches which follow the aim of introducing changes that adhere to Quranic and prophetic teachings in people's lives and in the society.

Dawat to Inculcate *Adep-Akhlak*

Approaching religious speeches in Kyrgyzstan, one could wonder what religious speech is and how it is different from other kinds of speeches. In the project C 04 'Religious Speech as a Resource in South and Central Asia: Instruction, Medialisation, and Commercialisation' of the collaborative research centre SFB 1070 ResourceCultures, religious speeches 'are [generally] understood to be public oral performances, which mostly refer to sacred texts and have a transformative effect on the listener' (Hardenberg/Conrad 2016, 262). In the context of Kyrgyzstan, and Islam specifically, religious speeches can be understood as inspired by and usually inferred from the Quran, the divine speech of Allah (Watt 1990, 170 f.), and the *hadiths*[11] of the Prophet. Moreover, in my treatment of religious speeches, I distinguish various forms of speeches such as *khutba* (a Friday sermon), *wa'z* (a Friday lecture),[12] *taalim* (a study group), *sabak* (a religious class) among others and refer to them as forms of religious speeches.[13] This paper focuses on one form of religious speech, namely, *dawat.*

Dawat originating from Arabic and also known as *da'wa* 'signifies acts of communication intended to 'call people to the way of the Lord' (Q 16:125) and 'command right and forbid wrong' (Q 3:104)' (Millie 2017, paragraph 1) and encompasses a wide range of activities that a Muslim can undertake to call others to Islam. In Kyrgyzstan, the term *dawat* gained its recognition due to the activities of an international religious movement *Tablighi Jamaat* (Ismailbekova/Nasritdinov 2012; Nasritdinov 2012; Toktogulova 2014; Balci 2015; Hölzchen 2018) locally known as *dawatchylar* (those who do *dawat*). With the activities of the followers of the movement the understanding of *dawat* became democratised as an activity that could be done by anybody and not just by an imam or the religiously educated. Thus, laypeople who recently took up religious and do not have religious education could exhort and admonish people in their own surroundings and neighbourhoods on religious matters.

Some might criticise that the adoption of the term *dawat* to refer to verbal exhortations by laypeople is misleading and that it might be easier to refer to verbal exhortations simply as preaching.

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10 See Tambiah 1979, 176; Hardenberg 2010, 30 on the question whether magic and religion should be opposed and be mutually exclusive.

11 Sayings about or by the Prophet.
12 In Kyrgyzstan, *wa'z* is an additional Friday lecture preceding the call for prayer and the *khutba.*
13 I argue that the form of a speech is constituted by 1) rules that regulate how a speech should be conducted, which in their turn lead to 2) the rigidity of the form leaving little space for individual actions and 3) ensure their repetition and reproducibility across time and space. The concept of a form of a speech is discussed in more detail in my upcoming PhD thesis.

To an extent, the criticism will be just. Many practicing Muslims know that *dawat* is neither limited to speech deliverance nor is it the domain of either the religiously educated or laypeople but refers to a range of activities that are undertaken by anybody to proselytise others. Within the Tablighi Jamaat movement, *dawat* refers to three-day, fifteen-day, forty-day, and four-month long trips to various cities and villages where the followers stay in mosques, learn more about Islam and walk around knocking on people's doors to invite them to the mosque. However, beyond the Tablighi Jamaat movement, it also has a strong connotation of delivering short speeches and verbally exhorting others to take up a religious practice or correct one's behaviour. For instance, when I was interviewing Gulumkan eje,[14] an employee of Mutakalim,[15] in a cafeteria, two women who worked there approached us asking to do *dawat* to them. For them, the fact that Gulumkan eje was veiled was enough to approach her and ask her to do *dawat* to them. Similarly, an elderly woman in one of the religious classes that I had attended told once how her roommates at a health resort, seeing that she was veiled, asked her to do *dawat* to them. As such, although preaching will definitely capture the sense of delivering speeches and exhorting others to correct their behaviour, it is too closely bound to the figure of a preacher. Therefore, by adopting *dawat* and referring to it as a form of religious speech, I want to highlight the role of laypeople in exhorting others and giving religious advice to others. It has a loose form as opposed to the fixed form of the Friday sermon that can be delivered by an imam only and should follow conventions delineated in detail in religious books.

Although doing *dawat* is expected of every Muslim as part of their obligations, generally, it does not have specific rules and a sequence that people have to follow to do *dawat*. An exception are the followers of Tablighi Jamaat, who follow a certain sequence of speech and are allowed to talk on certain topics.[16] In a sense, *dawat* by laypeople can be considered formless as there are no rules regulating its sequence, content, location or time. It may follow the end goal of exhorting others to change their ways in adherence to the Quranic and prophetic teachings. For instance, if someone is drinking a glass of water standing, she could be told to drink it in a sitting position, since there are *hadiths*, according to which the Prophet commanded that people drink water in a seated position.[17] However, there is no specific convention on how to tell that to that person and to correct her behaviour.

To connect the theoretical framework of the paper with *dawat*, the question I am interested in is the following: How is the force of *dawat*, understood as verbal exhortations by laypeople and viewed as a non-conventional perlocutionary speech act, constituted? This question is especially salient considering the fact that the force of conventional illocutionary speeches with fixed form and fixed convention has the illocutionary effect emanating from following the convention. Given that *dawat* by laypeople is not subjected to rules and conventions, what I am interested in is how its force and non-cancellable effect can be constituted. To paraphrase it, how do laypeople bring about changes in people's lives by doing *dawat* to them? When are they successful and when does their *dawat* run short of its force and effect?

By asking my interlocutors if they did *dawat* to their friends, family and colleagues, I expected to hear that they indeed verbally exhorted people in their immediate circles to take up prayer or a veil, for instance. Yet, to my surprise, many were sceptical that dawat alone might have force and effect

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14 'Eje' is a term used to address and refer to a woman who is older than the person who is addressing her.
15 Known as the Public Progressive Association of Women, Mutakalim is a religious organisation that has been operating since 1999.

16 Female followers of the movement organise one-hour-long *taalim* sessions at the weekend, where they read out loud from four religious books. During the last 15 minutes they give a talk that revolves around six principles (*alty sypat*): the declaration of faith, regular prayer, remembrance of God, respect for Muslims, sincerity of intention, and call to Islam, that a Muslim should do. Only women who went on a 15 day long mission trip (*dawat*) are allowed to host a *taalim* session and talk about *alty sypat*. *Taalim* is to be distinguished from *bayan*, a form of speech, that is conducted monthly by a person with extensive experience within the movement, usually a man.
17 This *hadith* is given just as an example. The soundness of the *hadith* can be questioned in light of other similar *hadiths*.

on people. Instead, they pointed at another important aspect of *dawat*: the demonstration of what a person preaches about and advocates in her own behaviour. This scepticism regarding the force and effect of verbal *dawat* alone was well formulated by Arstanbek, a young man who worked for Adep Bashaty, a local religious organisation in Kyrgyzstan:

'Teacher also used to say this: the best *dawat* is your behaviour and not necessarily going to a person and saying, 'Hey, friend. Let us pray (do *namaz*)'. If your behaviour is good, people will see and be influenced by it. This *dawat* is better. Besides, I thought about it: Jack Ma[18] was giving a speech telling secrets and giving advice on how to become rich and successful; then I understood that he used to say all this before he became rich. There are lots of people in the world who can say the same things he said. But somehow no one listens to the other person, no one quotes him and no speech of his gets uploaded to websites. If Jack Ma says [the same things, his speech] gets uploaded. Why? Because he is a person who has achieved a certain result. In such sense, if you as a Muslim have achieved a certain result, if you are successful and people know you, then your words will be easy to digest and convincing. In order to call people to Islam, you should become successful in the first place, and people will listen to you. I understood this: if you want to do *dawat* then change yourself, become better with your behaviour and people will slowly be influenced. I like this idea, and, in my opinion, it is right. Therefore, I support it.'

As Arstanbek points out, Jack Ma has achieved a certain result – not necessarily in the religious sphere – and therefore, whatever he says could easily be perceived as a formula of how to become a business magnate like him. On a deeper level, 'the words that are easy to digest and convincing' should be based on a practical result. To paraphrase Arstanbek, the force and effect of Jack Ma's speech are constituted by his behaviour

and examples. This line of thought was shared by many of my interlocutors, regular laypeople who had to fulfil their religious obligation of doing *dawat* to others. Thus, the force of the *dawat* and its consecutive influence on people, in general, is not given, but rather constituted in the process of delivering and consuming it through the demonstration of exemplary behaviour of the speaker who does *dawat.* Then questions arise: What is an exemplary behaviour and according to what standard is it exemplary? How can the force of *dawat* be constituted through the demonstration of exemplary behaviour?

To answer the first question, in purely Islamic terms, exemplary behaviour could be understood as behaviour that is done in emulating the Quranic and prophetic teachings, usually referred to as *adep-akhlak. Adep-akhlak* is a widely recognised term in Islam consisting of *adep* (manners) and *akhlak* (morals); both of which are cognates of Arabic *adab* and *akhlak.*[19] According to the Encyclopedia of Islam, *adab* refers to a person's manners and *akhlak* refers to a person's character and innate dispositions and their moral and ethical underpinnings stem from their connotation and association with Islam. For example, Hämeen-Anttila (2017) writes that in pre-Islamic and early Islamic use, the meaning of *adab* was synonymous with the Sunnah. However, by the end of the mid-2nd to 8th cent. AD, the Sunnah retained the religious meaning of being a custom of the Prophet while *adab* was reduced to a secular meaning and came to connote civility, courtesy, refinement and erudition. Later, according to Ohlander, in the Sufi literature, the discussions of the concept of *adab* were 'designed to show how the behavioural norms of the Sufis are rooted in perfect adherence to Quranic dictate and the emulation of the exemplary behaviour of the Prophet and the pious forbearers' (Ohlander 2009, 40) and was predicated on the cultivation of proper conduct and provided a framework to *adab* that adhered to the Quran and the Sunnah. As for *akhlak,* according to De Vaux it refers to the 'traits of man's moral character, and the science of the *akhlak* (*ʿilm al-akhlāḳ*) is moral

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18 Jack Ma is a Chinese business magnate, investor, politician and philanthropist. He is considered to be China's richest man.

19 *Akhlak* is a plural from of *khuluk* (Arab.). In Kyrgyz, the equivalent of *khuluk* is 'kulk' which refers to a person's character.

philosophy [....] [that] should not be confounded with what the Arabs call *adab,* good education, refinement of spirit and deportment' (de Vaux 1987, 231 f.). To paraphrase De Vaux, *adab* is a wider and more encompassing concept, while moral philosophy, the science of the *akhlak,* deals with moral virtues of a person more deeply.

As it is illustrated, the meaning and connotations of *adab* and *akhlak* were not static and had different connotations for different communities at different times. In a similar manner, in Kyrgyzstan, *adep-akhlak* could have different meanings and connotations depending on who defines it. This is well illustrated by Tulebaeva's work in Kochkor, a village in Kyrgyzstan, where she carried out fieldwork for her dissertation. She points out that in Kochkor the concept of *adep* was conflated with the concept *yiman* ('belief') and was understood in the setting of public schools as mannerliness and proper discipline such as respecting teachers and elders and giving up a seat in a public transport (Tulebaeva 2017, 245). For my interlocutors in Bishkek, who widely used and referred to the *adep-akhlak,* its meaning and connotation was predominantly tied to the exemplary behaviour of a person in adherence to Quranic and prophetic teachings designated by a Kyrgyz term *jürüsh-turush.* Correspondingly, throughout the paper *adep-akhlak* should be understood as equivalent of exemplary behaviour (*jürüsh-turush*).

For instance, when I asked Gulumkan eje, one of my interlocutors, if she did *dawat* to friends and family, she said:

'Basically, in religion, it is said that it is your obligation to spread what you know. I am not good at it. I console myself with [...] my behaviour (*jürüsh-turush*) [...]. They say that the Prophet invited nine out of ten people to Islam through his behaviour (*jürüsh-turush*) and only one person by preaching (*aityp chakyrgan*). I rely on it. I try so that people learn from my *adep-akhlak* and *jürüsh-turush.* I like to think that I am doing this [preaching through behaviour] [...]. Even when people come home, I do not like [to admonish them verbally]. For example, my husband does so. He starts admonishing right away (*srazu aityp bashtait*). If a person is eating with the left hand, he would tell her to eat with the right hand. If he sees that

something is wrong [...] I cannot tell people: 'Do not do this!' [...] Maybe it is my nature. I cannot tell people how to do things. I do not like it. When my husband starts talking to people, I get worried that people will be fed up with him.'

As pointed out in this example, *dawat* by Gulumkan eje's husband is aimed at correcting and inculcating proper behaviour that is in accordance with Islamic prescriptions. It is a commonly prescribed behaviour in Islam to eat food with the right hand; according to a *hadith*, eating food with the left hand is considered to be undesirable.[20] Thus, by admonishing another person, he wanted to correct a person's behaviour. Contrary to her husband, Gulumkan eje could not admonish others. Instead relying on the *hadith* about how the Prophet invited others to Islam, she believed that she could spread what she knows to others through her behaviour (*jürüsh-turush*). More generally, Gulumkan eje also knew that her *dawat* to change other people's behaviour would be empty if she did not exemplify the changes in her own behaviour. In other words, when laypeople like Gulumkan eje and her husband do *dawat* and exhort others verbally, the force of their *dawat* is acquired through personal demonstration of the behaviour that they preach in others and advocate for. Inability to exemplify such behaviour might rob the speech of its force.

The example above is just one example among many. To illustrate the point that the demonstration of exemplary behaviour constitutes the force of *dawat* ethnographically, in the following section, I turn to Adep Bashaty, a local religious organisation. Specifically, I discuss how they use the demonstration of exemplary behaviour to bring about changes in the lives of students at a local school with a criminal reputation and render *dawat,* a form of religious speech, irrelevant exposing the hierarchical relations between verbal *dawat* and demonstration (*temsil*) of exemplary behaviour in adherence to Quranic and prophetic teachings.

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20 Hadith 2020 from the collection of hadiths Muslim.

Temsil and Adep Bashaty

Adep Bashaty is a religious organisation that was established in Bishkek in 2003 by the Kyrgyzstani graduates of the Al-Azhar University of Cairo, Egypt. Previously, it was registered and known as a Public Progressive Fund, and in January 2019, they re-registered it with the Ministry of Justice as a religious organisation. According to their own website, Adep Bashaty has branches in different regions of Kyrgyzstan and organises a range of activities throughout the country, such as charity events for the Feast of Sacrifice since 2005[21] and the month of Ramadan,[22] annual celebration of the Prophet's birthday known as Mawlid since 2004, courses for imams to increase their level of religious education, summer camps for young children, sports competitions, Quran competitions, courses and seminars for university and school students on moral upbringing.[23] They also give small stipends in the amount of 700 KGS[24] to university students who attend their seminars and courses regularly. Moreover, they run five madrasahs (Islamic schools) and Quran courses in the country and publish religious books and brochures and used to release CD disks. Starting from 2014 they have been organising annual book reading competitions throughout the country to instil reading habits in people.

On 12th September 2019, Adep Bashaty organised an event called 'The heads of regional Adep Bashaty branches meet the youth' that took place in a big conference hall of the City Hotel in Bishkek. It was attended by more than 170 female and male young adults and university students. There, Maksat Talasbaev, the head of the Ysyk-Köl regional branch of Adep Bashaty, narrated a story of how in August 2012, he started working as a supervisor[25] for an Olympic Reserve School in Bishkek to induce changes in students' behaviour.

To specify, the Olympic Reserve School, locally known as *Inkub*, is a sports school that has a criminal reputation in Bishkek. Many students at the Olympic Reserve School are rumoured to become criminals after they graduate and its current students are known for being involved in mass fights with students of nearby public schools.

In narrating the story, Maksat Talasbaev was critical of *dawat* as a form of religious speech employed by laypeople and claimed that: 'today, the society had enough of moral advice and intelligent words and instead needed love and warm words'. In his opinion, moral advice on its own did not solve any problems of the society. In order to solve them, one needed to set examples and create appropriate conditions for their solutions. Maksat Talasbaev's scepticism regarding the efficacy of giving moral advice through preaching as a method of solving societal problems is not only his own but also stems from the teachings of Adep Bashaty in particular and the Gülen movement at large. Adep Bashaty is said to have close ideological ties with the Gülen movement even if it has not acknowledged it publicly. The Gülen movement is an international religious movement which had emerged in Turkey in the 1960s and 1970s, expanded globally in the 1990s and arrived in Kyrgyzstan in 1992 or 1993 (Tittensor 2012; Balci 2003; Ebaugh 2010; Ozdalga 2003).

Maksat Talasbaev's scepticism of the efficacy of *dawat* as a form of religious speech stems from a belief that *temsil*, understood as the demonstration of *adep-akhlak* (proper and exemplary behaviour), is superior to *dawat*, verbal exhortations. From the Turkish language *temsil* is translated as representation or as setting good examples. As part of the teachings of the Gülen movement, it refers to a specific method of engaging with people by displaying and demonstrating an exemplary or desired behaviour. In the literature about the Gülen movement in Turkey and in Central Asia, the focus is mostly on the history, the mission, the structure, the global expansion, and the political implications of the movement. Little attention has been paid to different events, activities and accompanying forms of speeches that are important for the sustenance and expansion of the movement. In their respective works, authors like Tittensor (2012), Balci (2003), Ebaugh (2010) and Ozdalga (2003)

21   Distributing meat of sacrificed animals and food to the needy.
22   Organising dinners to break a fast during the month of Ramadan and delivering food items to the needy.
23   Their website was taken down in the fall of 2019.
24   The exact amount may change, but in 2019, the stipend was 700 KGS, around 9 USD as of April 2020.
25   To clarify: supervisor was translated from *tarbiyachy,* one who gives *tarbiya* that can be loosely translated as 'manners'.

slightly touched the concept of *temsil*. For instance, all of them write that Gülen asks teachers in the schools run by the movement to practice *temsil*, advising them against open proselytism (overt instruction). Those who practice *temsil* should live an Islamic way of life and set good examples instead of preaching about them.

The reason why teachers should practice *temsil* and not overtly preach to students lies in the fact that the educational institutions that the Gülen movement established are said to be secular. For example, Tittensor writes that the movement established more than '1,000 secular educational institutions in more than 100 countries' (Tittensor 2012, 163). In the case of Kyrgyzstan, as of 2014, there were around 18 educational institutions such as Kyrgyz-Turkish high schools, Atatürk-Alatoo University, Silk Road International School and others that were run by followers of the Gülen movement.[26] Besides educational institutions, it is said that the Gülen movement possesses businesses and has close ties with organisations such as Adep Bashaty and the publishing house Dilazyk. Thus, *temsil* is actively practiced by the followers of the Gülen movement and its practice in Kyrgyzstan was brought to my attention by Maksat Talasbaev, who elaborated on how the members of Adep Bashaty employed *temsil* to bring out changes in the behaviour of students studying at the Olympic Reserve School.

Employing Temsil at the Olympic Reserve School

As narrated by Maksat Talasbaev, in August 2012, before the start of the academic year, Maksat Talasbaev along with other supervisors[27] was taken in at the Olympic Reserve School as a supervisor at

the dormitory. As mentioned earlier, the school is known to have a criminal reputation. To describe how things were at the Olympic Reserve School he recounted the situation with the students as follows:

'We observed that the 11th graders were the kings there. Whatever they said was followed unconditionally. The 10th graders, 9th graders and 8th graders obeyed them like they would obey kings and bowed down like daughters-in-law.[28] Oppression, speaking in slang, hazing, was so extreme that the 11th graders did not even need to speak. If they [the 11th graders] looked to the left, they [the students of lower grades] would move to the left, if they looked to the right they would move to the right, and if they looked down, they would sit down. There was no need to talk, hazing was at such a level.'

According to Maksat Talasbaev, besides the hazing culture, the 11th graders had a ceremony called *altyn tayak* (golden stick) that would take place towards the end of an academic year before they graduated. In order to prepare for the ceremony, they would collect 50,000–60,000 KGS[29] and take them to a prison where prisoners would carve out sticks in the shape of cobras with which they would beat up the students of the 10th grade and then give the golden stick to tough boys who would take over their place. The situation was dire at the school, he narrated to the audience.

It was this situation that the supervisors set out to change. They wanted to stop hazing and racketeering among the students and make sure that the 11th graders change their behaviour so that they would not steal and get into trouble after graduating. In order to implement changes, one of the supervisors proposed to change the students with *namaz*[30] saying, 'If we teach them to do *namaz* one by one, they will improve'. But quite soon they

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26 The number is based on a small research I carried out for a coursework paper in 2014 for my Bachelor studies. The result of the research was not published anywhere. The number of educational institutions has changed since then.
27 Besides Maksat Talasbaev, Chyngyz Kumushbekov – one of the four founders of Adep Bashaty, who is now deceased – was also involved in supervising students. As for the names of other supervisors, they are not mentioned for reasons of anonymity.

28 In Kyrgyzstan it is a common practice for brides to bow down to members of the groom's family who are older than the groom. The period for how long this practice should be carried out changes from region to region.
29 As of April 2020, this was around 630–750 USD.
30 *Namaz* is an obligatory prayer for Muslims which should be observed five times a day.

abandoned this idea as they found out that many of the 11th graders went to the Friday prayer and some of them even prayed five times a day. The idea that prayer (*namaz*) will change people's behaviour for the better is based on a *hadith*, according to which people came to the Prophet complaining that a man among them prayed but continued to steal to which the Prophet replied that they should let him be and that the man's prayer will change his behaviour with time.[31] It seemed it was this idea that purported their suggestion of changing their students' behaviour with prayer. Yet, seeing that the students prayed but kept hazing younger students forced the supervisors to consider a different method. Commenting on the situation, Maksat Talasbaev acknowledged their bewilderment:

'Can you imagine? [They] prayed but did not stop [their] oppression. We had such an atmosphere. [... We] said: if we observe, there was no sign of *adep-akhlak* that was left by the Prophet or *adep-akhlak* that is related to our customs. [...] What do we do? Then [...] we have a tactic that we saw from [our teachers]; a tactic that *kyzmat*[32] uses: they do not do *dawat* or give moral advice but give food. Who the food should be given to? Of course, to the kings of that place. The kings are the students of the 11th grade.'

Thus, they decided to treat them with food and found a café called Kyrgyz-Ata[33] in Bishkek with whose owner Maksat Talasbaev was acquainted. The idea was that they would take the students to this café where they could eat food as much as they could. Within two months, the supervisors incurred 87,000 KGS[34] of debt and eventually reaching 120,000 KGS which was to be paid at a later stage. Later on, they switched to an Uighur café in

Madina bazaar that specialized in *lagman* (local pasta). When narrating how after the Kyrgyz-Ata café he approached the owner of a Uighur café, he told the story as the following:

'I went there and found the owner of the café, an Uighur. [...] I told him, 'Uighur brother, we are doing this [service] at school. I have students with broken ears; we need to give them food, we are doing service (*kyzmat*) to them'. He said, 'You do not have to pay for bread and tea, you can only pay for pasta'. There we fed students *lagman* for 50,000 KGS. Can you imagine?'

A tactic of *kyzmat* that the supervisor employed to change the behaviour of the students of the Olympic Reserve School and service that they were doing to them was through *temsil*, setting an example and demonstrating the act of 'giving' to students who got used to taking money from students of lower grades through hazing or from other people through robbing and stealing. The act of giving food was accompanied by tacit and active engagement with the students' misdemeanours not through verbal criticism or moral instruction but through setting examples with their own behaviour, that is taking the students to cafés and giving them food as much as they wanted.

The setting of an example and the demonstration of the act of giving went on for a couple of months. Commenting on the results of their endeavour, Maksat Talasbaev told how one day towards the end of the academic year three boys who studied at the school came over to the supervisors and said that they came to thank them from the bottom of their hearts. Hearing this, Chyngyz Kumushbekov, the older supervisor, apparently asked Maksat Talasbaev and another younger supervisor if they had told the students to thank them. To which both of the younger supervisors answered that they had not. Upon hearing their answer, Chyngyz Kumushbekov told the three students: 'We are not doing this to hear your thanks, do not thank us'. To which the three students replied: 'No, we saw many things, and we saw the supervisors and many good things from you. We want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts'.

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31 Hadith 9486 from the collection of hadiths Musnad Imam Ahmad Bin Hanbal.

32 The Gülen movement is also known as *Hizmet* which translates into the Kyrgyz language as 'kyzmat' and means 'service'.

33 Kyrgyz-Ata *chaikana* was listed as a sponsor for Mawlid celebration organized by Adep-Bashaty in 2015.

34 As of April 2020, 87,000 KGS equalled around 1,100 USD, 120,000 KGS equalled around 1,512 USD, and 50,000 KGS equalled 630 USD.

Here is how the dialogue between them proceeded, as narrated by Maksat Talasbaev:

Chyngyz Kumushbekov: 'Really?'
The boys: 'Really! […].'
Chyngyz Kumushbekov: 'Well, if you really mean it, you will show what you saw from us to the students in the 10th grade […].'
The boys: '[…] it is too much […].'
Chyngyz Kumushbekov: 'Then we do not need your thanks. You can go. We will keep doing this. We do not do this to hear your thanks.'

Thus, the students left and, apparently, came back after few days saying that they really wanted to thank the supervisors and that they would show what they saw from them to the students of the 10th grade.

As it is evident from Chyngyz Kumushbekov's reply to the students, the goal of the supervisors' activities was not an acknowledgment or gratitude but was conditioned on the imitation of *temsil*, the demonstration of the act of giving by those who the effort of demonstration was targeted at. Accordingly, as a condition to accept the students' gratitude, the supervisors required that the 11th graders show the students of lower grades what the supervisors demonstrated to them. Hence, commenting on the changes that took place at the Olympic Reserve School afterwards, Maksat Talasbaev compared the changes to the movement of a hand mill in the opposite direction. If before the 11th graders forcefully took money from the students to collect money for the *altyn tayak* (golden stick) ceremony at the end of the academic year, after the dialogue mentioned above the hand mill started moving in the counter-clockwise direction in that the 11th graders gathered 100 KGS each and served food to show respect to the students of the 10th grade.[35]

Thus, they believed that their demonstration of the act of giving was inculcating *adep-akhlak*, which would help them to rectify and correct the students' behaviour of racketeering and hazing

the students of lower grades and teach them to give. This becomes quite evident when we consider the name of Adep Bashaty which translates as the 'spring of manners ('adep')'[36] and the supervisors' remarks when they said, 'if we observe, there was no sign of *adep-akhlak* that was left by the Prophet or *adep-akhlak* that is related to our customs'. It could be inferred from this that, like with *dawat*, at the core of demonstration of proper and exemplary behaviour lies its inculcation.

Temsil as Constituting the Force and Effect of *Dawat*

In general, the case that Maksat Talasbaev shared is an account of how members of Adep Bashaty could induce positive changes in the behaviour of the students at the Olympic Reserve School through the demonstration of exemplary behaviour of giving expected of the students. Maksat Talasbaev was sure: had they criticised the students' hazing and racketeering activities verbally exhorting and giving them moral advice to change their behaviour, they would not have been able to achieve the results they achieved. Thus, by juxtaposing these two methods, Maksat Talasbaev favours and elevates *temsil* (the demonstration of exemplary behaviour) over *dawat* as a form of religious speech when he claims that the society has had enough of moral advice and intelligent words. This juxtaposition and hierarchisation might be understandable when one considers the fact that Gülen, the ideological leader of the movement, 'considers [*temsil*] the best way of preaching' (Balci 2003, 163) and thus superior to *dawat*, open forms of persuasion and verbal exhortations.

Thus, what the case narrated by Maksat Talasbaev does, is that it renders verbal *dawat* irrelevant and demonstrates that changes in people's behaviour, for instance, could be induced

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35 Another member of Adep Bashaty, whom I interviewed few months prior to the meeting, shortly alluded to the story. In detail, it was told by Maksat Talasbaev in September 2019. It was not covered by any news outlets.

36 For instance, Yanti Hölzchen (2018, 260) writes: 'The name 'Adep Bashaty' is derived from the Kyrgyz words 'adep' – 'morality, mores' and 'bashaty' – 'to begin'; freely translated, the name could be called 'the beginning of morality''. Although Adep Bashaty could be translated as 'the beginning of morality' given the fact that *adep* is oftentimes used together with *akhlak*, I think it is more accurate to translate it as 'the beginning of manners'.

through *temsil* without resorting to speech. The opinion that if a person wants her *dawat* to possess force and produce effect to bring about changes in the society and in people, she needs to also exemplify and demonstrate them herself was quite widespread and taken for granted among my interlocutors beyond the boundaries of Adep Bashaty. For example, Akylai eje, like Gulumkan eje, also works for Mutakalim. Upon being asked whether she did *dawat* to her friends and family, she answered:

Akylai eje: 'I think the best and the most effective method is personal example, demonstrative examples. For instance, if the Prophet invited ten people to Islam, nine out of ten came to religion only seeing his behaviour, only one person asked [questions]: 'what, how, and why' and came through persuasion. Nine people came upon seeing the Prophet. Therefore, I think that instead of talking simply you should show how Muslims should behave in the streets, in the bus so that people are attracted themselves. So, they see and understand, 'This is real religion!' I think this is the most effective, without words and anything. Even in bringing up children, it is said that you do not have to bring them up, behave well and children will learn it from you [laughing] [...]. Secondly, to spread religion all methods are good. Each method will find its consumer.'

Gulniza: 'For you personally, you think your example is ...?'

Akylai eje: 'I think for everyone. For instance, if one religious figure talks and talks. Let us take Chubak ajy [referring to a prominent local religious figure]. If someone sees him behaving badly in public, one will not even want to listen to him. I think it relates to everyone, not only I think this way. I think all Muslims should have ideal behaviour. Then people will see that being a Muslim is good.'

At first glance, this dialogue points out the effectiveness, convenience and supposed superiority of *temsil* when Akylai eje states that the personal example is the most effective method of doing *dawat*, verbally exhorting others to change their ways in line with Islamic teachings. It also gives the impression that, as in the case with Adep Bashaty, only *temsil* is necessary to call for changes and that *dawat* is unnecessary and irrelevant. However, the last part of the quote, where she says 'if someone sees him [Chubak ajy] behaving badly in public, one would not even want to listen to him', illuminates that the demonstration of *adep-akhlak* would be an essential ingredient that strengthens a person's verbal exhortations: her *dawat*. This is all more relevant when one considers the fact that verbal exhortations and preaching have the danger of being ignored, not taken seriously or being irritating.

Going back to the framework of the paper, *dawat* understood as a non-conventional perlocutionary speech act is compared to the Friday sermon that is understood as a conventional illocutionary speech act, which possesses conventional force and effect. To specify, unlike the Friday sermon that follows a strict convention and can be conducted by imams only, *dawat* as a non-conventional speech act does not follow a strict convention and can be done by laypeople as well. As a result, unlike the force and effect of the Friday sermon that are inherent in the felicitous conduct of the convention, force and effect of *dawat* are not inherent but are constituted. Accounts of my interlocutors pointed out that it is done through the demonstration of exemplary behaviour by the person who does *dawat*. In other words, for *dawat* to be influential and effective in bringing about changes in people's lives and in the society, it needs to be grounded in the behaviour of the person who does it.

Conclusion

To conclude, when talking about preaching in Kyrgyzstan, one should be aware that it is not only imams and religious figures who preach to laypeople, but laypeople could also exhort their family members or friends to change their behaviour in adherence to Quranic and prophetic teachings. To account for this practice, I propose to extend the notion of *dawat* to include exhortations by laypeople, since more established religious speech forms such as the Friday sermon or the Friday lecture are traditionally reserved to Islamic

functionaries and are not usually accessible to laypeople.

In comparing *dawat* to the Friday sermon and maintaining that, unlike the latter, *dawat* does not have a fixed and conventional form, *dawat* could be understood as a non-conventional perlocutionary speech act, the force and non-conventional (irreversible) effect of which in 'command[ing] right and forbid[ding] wrong' (Quran 3:104) is not inherently secured. Against the lack of a conventional and fixed form that at least guarantees a conventional effect, I argue that perlocutionary force and effect are constituted by the demonstration (*temsil*) of proper and exemplary behaviour in adherence to Quranic and prophetic teachings. As a consequence, in order to make one's words easy to digest and convincing, to borrow Arstanbek's wording, a person doing *dawat* should be able to show a certain degree of success (be it financial, political, or other) and exhibit an exemplary behaviour.

This endeavour to view speeches and, in particular, religious speeches as acts allows to imagine how various religious figures and laypeople alike are acting on the current Kyrgyzstani society through their regular speech events in their attempts to change it in adherence with Islamic teachings. The accounts given in the paper do not delineate the full extent to which various forms of speeches are able to produce changes in the society, nor do they demonstrate the vastness and salience of the topic. Further research on this topic will help anthropologists interested in Kyrgyzstan to better understand social, cultural and religious changes that are being brought about in the country through religious speeches.

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Baktygül Tulebaeva

Islam as a Parallel Tradition in Kyrgyzstan

Summary

The revival of Islam in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan has led to the evaluation of transformations among Kyrgyz Muslims who had started to heavily engage in practices related to the proper way of living determined by Islamic norms. These transformations have affected people's traditional lifestyle. Many old local Kyrgyz practices are now seen as incompatible, which in turn, have led to intensified discourses on the nature of Islam and what is the 'good' and 'right' way of living. This paper looks at contrasting practices of Kyrgyz Muslims in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan on the example of a ritual which ensures a healthy growth of children. Even if values of raising children healthily are the same, the practices of achieving this goal have diverged with the Re-Islamisation processes in Kyrgyzstan. It is argued that for some devout Muslims the current Islam has been formed into a 'parallel tradition' with new normative values and practices.

Introduction

'What is it to be a Muslim, a proper Muslim?' This identity issue concerned many people in Kochkor, the village in the northern part of Kyrgyzstan, where the author conducted her ethnographic research in 2012 and 2013. Being a Kyrgyz usually means being a Muslim, irrespective of whether one strictly practices Islam or not. Identification of Central Asians, including Kyrgyz people as Muslims, was sharpened during the Soviet time (see Hunter 1996). Even then, being a Muslim was rather a cultural label, without having much

indication to religious practice (see Ruthven 1997). The idea of 'an atheist Muslim' noted by McBrien and Pelkmans (2008) was also mentioned by senior interlocutors in Kochkor, who grew up during the Soviet time. For them being an 'Atheist' and at the same time a 'Muslim' did not have any contrasting connotation. Rather, it indicated the lack of religious knowledge among Soviet Muslims who did not practice Islam.

The revival of Islam after Kyrgyzstan gained independence in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union led to increasing curiosity, knowledge and practice of Islam, the process that can be referred to as 'Re-Islamisation' in Kyrgyzstan. The increasing presence of this religion started to be observable by a growing number of mosques and *madrasas* (religious schools) and people's strict adherence to Islamic tenets, such as praying (which is not necessarily five times a day), fasting, eating halal food,[1] and wearing 'Arabic' outfits. This paper does explore this increasing presence of Islam in Kochkor. However, the emphasis will be on how the Re-Islamisation process is transforming or even eliminating local cultural practices by offering an alternative lifestyle.

Cultural changes and especially abandonment of traditional practices are the processes that usually entail many discussions and debates between proponents and opponents. This has also been the case in Kochkor. The harsher Islamic norms contradict local cultural practices in Kochkor, the more heated are the debates among and between practicing and non-practicing Muslims on the nature of Islam as well as what it means to be Muslim and what kind of lifestyle a proper Muslim should lead. This allows to argue that Islam in

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[1] Halal means 'lawful' and 'permissible' according to Islam.

Kochkor is very much present as a growing practice; however, it should be emphasised that it is even more present in discourses, as this paper will demonstrate.

First, this paper will provide a short overview of Islam in Kochkor and in Kyrgyzstan. After that, it looks into the concept of 'normative values', particularly its **good** and **right** aspects, with the aim to explore the normative force of Islam and its effect on local traditional practices. This will be demonstrated through ethnographic material on one of the child-related life-cycle rituals called *tushoo kesüü,* which has become a target of elimination by some Muslims who started to strictly follow Islam. The next two sections will discuss general changes caused by the Re-Islamisation process in Kochkor, whereby it demonstrates how this form of Islam started to be acknowledged and followed by those devout Muslims as a 'tradition'.

Islam in Kyrgyzstan

Islam as the main religion in the country (with about 90% of the population) does not denote that it is massively and strictly practiced in Kyrgyzstan. Sources suggest that significant conversion of Kyrgyz people to Islam did not take place until the 18th cent. AD (Gunn 2003; Silova et al. 2007). Even then, Kyrgyz people who led a nomadic lifestyle were not much influenced by this religion, in comparison to other Central Asian neighbours who had settled.[2] Later, during Soviet time, the doctrine of atheism was propagated, which led to the destruction of mosques and suppression of religious practices. However, Islam did not totally disappear from people's lives. As one of the interlocutors in Kochkor stated, the Soviet state allowed people to practice their religion, but 'took away mosques'. In this sense, Islam was 'deintellectualised', as Taby-shalieva (2002) puts it. This means that people did not possess Islamic knowledge, but they still followed certain Islamic practices in the private realm as part of their local tradition (Kandiyoti/ Azimova 2004). The interlocutors mentioned how

only at old age, people encountered Islam as religion by taking the Quran, the holy book of Muslims, into their hands and performed *namaz* (daily prayers) at home with the intention 'to prepare themselves for the other world'.

Today, in the context of Kochkor, performing *namaz* is one of the first steps indicating a person's turning to Islam, in other words, being religious. When underlining the religiosity of a devout Muslim neighbour, relative or friend, the interlocutors usually said: 'al namaz okuit' ('s/he performs daily prayers'). Nowadays, daily prayers are performed not only by religious specialists and elderly people, as it used to be, but also by young practicing Muslims. One can observe a visible dominance of the youth visiting mosques, especially the Friday prayer (*juma namaz*) and performing these prayers with increasing curiosity and engagement. By comparing a generational difference in the practice of Islam in Kochkor, several interlocutors stated that the younger generation is turning out to be more religious than the older generation who grew up during Soviet time. Similar statements can be found in other studies (Nasritdinov/ Esenamanova 2014) that included intergenerational differences of religiosity in Kyrgyzstan.

Kochkor is mainly a Kyrgyz settlement with a few Uighurs and Dungans.[3] It is considered more as an 'urban village'[4] with a population of 22.000 people. The village experienced the revival of Islam from 2000 onward. Before that, according to the interlocutors, Islam was present more in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan, where people were close to Uzbeks who are considered 'more religious' in comparison to Kyrgyz people. Religion was more lax in the northern part of the country, including Kochkor. However, nowadays due to internal and external migration, flow of people, and Islamic knowledge such regional differentiation is not applicable.

There is a central mosque called Aisha Mechit not far from the main road of Kochkor. One can also find a girls' *madrasa* in the village

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2   Bacon (1980) and Gunn (2003) also mention the similar view on the level of religiosity between 'settled' versus 'nomadic' people.

3   Dungan is a term used for an ethnic group of Muslim people with Chinese origin who live in the post-USSR territory.
4   In other words: 'settlement' (*ПГТ- посёлок городского типа*).

that accommodates around 80 girls. In 2013, the *madrasa* was about to move to a bigger building next to another bigger mosque in the outskirt of Kochkor that was under construction. There are also halal butcheries and other shops selling Islamic goods, such as Islamic clothing for men and women, books, CDs, rosaries and medicines. On the streets of Kochkor, one can meet women wearing a Kyrgyz version of *hijab*[5] and men wearing a long beard and 'Arabic' clothes.[6] A religious teaching called *taalim* takes place every Sunday, where ordinary lay women and men separately gather in small groups and under a leading person read religious texts and discuss their application in their everyday lives.

As the research project focused on children and the notion of healthy growth, also Muslim families in Kochkor that strictly followed Islam were interviewed. The aim was to explore what practicing Muslims understand by 'healthy development' of children and which practices they follow. In such families, usually fathers, as lay missionaries, do preaching (Kyrg. 'daavat'[7]) by spreading the messages of Islam. Wives of such missionaries usually follow the steps of their husbands, wear the *hijab* and start performing daily prayers, in other words, practice Islam. Their children are taught Islamic values from their early childhood on. They are sent to mosques to pray, at least to learn how to pray, and to *madrasas* to get some religious knowledge. They still get education in secondary schools, as in Kyrgyzstan it is obligatory to attend secular schools until the ninth grade. These practicing Muslims are described as 'din jolundagylar' which means 'those who are on the way to religion'.

On the one hand, the increasing religiosity of people is welcomed in Kochkor first and foremost for supporting Islamic moral values, such as respect for the elderly, good behaviour of the youth, and preservation of family values, which, according to the interlocutors, deteriorated in the last years. Here is what was mentioned:

'We do not have an ideology. Where are people going? At least in mosques children are taught to do good things and be away from bad things. Parents are sending their children to mosques out of despair (Kyrg. 'aila jokton', which means that there is not any alternative). At least they will know that their children can learn something good. They make their children go to a mosque by stating that their neighbour's child visits a mosque and has become well-behaved ('tartiptüü bolup kaldy')' (Japar, 24.02.2013).

In comparison to a strong Soviet ideology of the past, the lack of ideology in Kyrgyzstan today concerns many parents, most of whose childhoods fell in the Soviet period. It should be underlined that when Japar talked about parents who send their children to mosques, he mentioned that they do not have any other choice. Otherwise, their children might be spoiled, he implies. Usually, parents' concerns are heightened due to many outside foreign influences, especially from the West, that can teach things which are not appropriate to the Kyrgyz mentality. In this period of insecurity, mosques give hope that at least children can learn something good and will not do anything bad. As McGlinchey notes, one of the hypotheses in relation to Islamic revivalism in Kyrgyzstan was 'a response to what Muslims perceive as Westerners' excessive moral laxity' (McGlinchey 2009, 21).

As argued elsewhere (Tulebaeva 2017a; 2017b), in the time of economic hardships and social insecurity that people in Kochkor have been experiencing since the beginning of the 1990s, Islam is seen as a source of good life and well-being.[8] Practicing Muslims in Kochkor believe that those who follow Islam will be blessed by Allah and

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5   By Kyrgyz version of *hijab* a long skirt or dress with long sleeves and also a scarf which is tied to the front is meant. This way of wearing a scarf among young women and especially among girls is a new practice.

6   'Arabic' is how people in Kochkor describe the long gowns that devout Muslim men wear.

7   One interlocutor defined *daavat* as 'teaching others and calling them to do good and be away from bad' (*daavat* – 'bashkalarga üirötüü, jakshylykka chakyruu, jamandyktan kaitaruu'). *Daavatchys*, a local term for lay missionaries who preach and spread Islamic messages, are the followers of the transnational Islamic movement named Tablighi Jamaat, which is also actively present in Kyrgyzstan. See Balci (2012); Toktogulova (2014) for a detailed account on this movement in Kyrgyzstan.

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8   For a similar account, see Heyat 2004; Louw 2013; Nasritdinov/Esenamanova 2014.

be awarded with health and economic prosperity and there will be peace in their families. One visible example that one female devout Muslim interlocutor gave was how Allah spreads blessings (Kyrg. 'yrysky'), which means abundance, goodness, success, all good qualities denoting prosperity.

On the other hand, Islam is carefully approached by some interlocutors due to its implanting foreign cultural practices that do not correspond to a local context (see Toktogulova 2014). Non-practicing Muslim interlocutors mentioned that the Kyrgyz youth gets a chance to study abroad at Islamic institutions in Turkey, Saudi Arabia or Egypt. These people return home with a wealth of religious knowledge about Islam. However, they also bring along new and foreign cultural practices defined as 'Islamic' that do not work in Kyrgyzstan. As an example, one can mention the practice of men wearing a long white gown, women 'fully covering themselves' (that is, wearing a *hijab*) or young men wearing a beard, which contradicts Kyrgyz traditional practices.

However, the most often mentioned concern and criticism is related to the fact that some pious Muslims have started to go against certain important local life-cycle rituals (one of which will be discussed later in this paper) by claiming that they contradict Islamic norms and thus should be eliminated. The consequences of such 'extreme cases' (see Murzahalilov et al. 2005; Myrzabaeva 2017) have led to changes in those people's lifestyles and their value perceptions. Such cases are actively discussed in family circle or at social gatherings or in a broader public realm through social media and other channels both by those who promote such ideals as well as those who criticise such extreme cases. In short, Islam generates a heated topic of discussion in Kyrgyzstan.

What are the reasons for lively discourses around Islam in Kyrgyzstan? This can be interpreted with the following two factors: First, Kyrgyz people's experience of Islam as religious practice is relatively new. As noted earlier, in the Soviet atheist past, being a Muslim was rather a cultural identity inherited by parents without any religious knowledge and practice. Only with the revival of Islam in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan did people start to learn about religious and spiritual aspects of Islam. They are still in the process of learning. For example, religious teachings are massively attended and they are also actively transmitted via old and new media, such as TV and radio channels and internet platforms. It should be underlined that the development of information technologies and the increasing use of social media in the dissemination of religious texts, images, audio and video preaching has immensely contributed to the growing religiosity of the public.

'This is how one should live his/her life as a Muslim'. One can hear this phrase many times from religious specialists and lay people in Kochkor who are 'on the way to Islam' as well as from those who do not practice Islam. This statement itself indicates how the gap of 'deintellectualised Islam' noted by Tabyshalieva (2002), is being closed today with more Islamic teachings and discussions. These Islamic teachings usually touch upon different aspects of everyday life, starting with the way one talks by using Islamic words such as Arabic 'inshallah' ('if God wills'), 'mashallah' (an expression for something good or positive), or 'alhamdulillah' ('thank God'), or the way one eats only halal food, wears a proper outfit or organises social events according to Islamic norms.

The second factor for Islam being more present in discourses than in practice is related to the fact that with the increasing knowledge about Islam there is now a greater concern about being a proper Muslim and leading a proper lifestyle, which requires getting rid of local practices incompatible with Islam. This has intensified heated debates among proponents and opponents of the newly practiced Islam on what is appropriate for a good Muslim or for Kyrgyz people. Before going more into detail on this topic, first, the theoretical framework of the anthropology of values will be discussed, which will be helpful to explain the discourses on Islam and its compatibility with local traditions.

Anthropology of Values on the 'Good' and the 'Right'

The discourses in Kochkor caused by the revival of Islam can be explained within the theoretical framework on values and transformation of

values. Kluckhohn[9] defines values as 'a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means, and ends of action' (Kluckhohn 1951, 395, cited in Graeber 2001, 3). Kluckhohn's definition of values has been widely quoted by growing value theorists. In one of the special issues in 'HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory' it is suggested to look at 'how action is informed by values and simultaneously creates value' (Otto/Willerslev 2013, 3). This kind of consideration can be seen as an approach to values from an 'action' perspective.

There is also a 'structure' perspective to values and the main proponent of this approach is Dumont (1970; 1986; 2013). For him, values are an important element of culture that 'shape cultural structures' and 'structure the relations between other elements' (Robbins 2007, 296 f.). A third approach combines both structuralist and action-oriented perspectives mentioned above. According to the third approach, 'one gets some sense as to how values that exist on the cultural level become subjectively attractive' (Robbins/Sommerschuh 2016, 8). All these three perspectives can be used to explain the transformations that are instigated with the Re-Islamisation process in Kochkor that leads to the rejection of old and adoption of new practices. However, it might be more applicable to explain this particular case by extending the discussions of values further in the direction of 'good' and 'right'.

Values have 'attractive' ('good') as well as 'imperative' ('right') aspects (see Larmore 1990). This is clearly indicated by Robbins, who discusses Larmore's work further and frames 'the good' 'in terms of desire, motivation, and goals' and 'the right' 'in terms of obligation, imperative, and rules' (Al-Mohammad et al. 2015, 442). The 'right' emphasizes the normative aspect of values. Does it mean that values and norms are the same? There is a lasting debate on the relationship between values and norms (see Joas 2001; Zimmerman 2015). This paper does not aim to discuss it. It extends values to both 'good' and 'right' in order to explain

the cultural changes caused by the revival of Islam in Kochkor. Particularly, it is helpful to analyse the reasoning behind some pious Muslims who abandoned certain local cultural practices that are perceived as incompatible with Islam. One of such examples is a life-cycle ritual conducted for children which will ethnographically be explored in the next section.

Tushoo Kesüü – the Ritual of 'Opening One's Way'[10]

One afternoon of January 2013, I was at home helping my host mother in the kitchen to prepare our lunch. Anara eje, our neighbour, came and told us that another neighbour of ours, Nurgül eje, would be 'cutting the tushoo' (directly translated as 'cutting a child's hobble') of her grandchild in half an hour ('Neberesinin tushoosun kesip jatyptyr'). This meant that she was organising a *tushoo kesüü* ritual for her grandson. This life-cycle ritual is conducted for a child who is around one year old and is about to walk. In around half an hour, Anara eje and I headed over to the house of Nurgül eje who lived three houses away around the corner.

When we turned into the street where Nurgül eje lived, we could already see several children in front of her house. Those children were waiting to participate in the ritual. Nurgül eje (54), her one-year-old grandson for whom the ritual was about to be conducted and his parents (Nurgül eje's son and daughter-in-law) were also outside waiting for a few more children to join. A couple of young housewife-neighbours also joined with their toddlers. Even some passers-by stopped to watch the event. Nurgül eje's daughter (in her 20's) came out of the house with a big plate full of boorsok, sweets and biscuits. Children were especially happy because they would not only eat these sweets but would take part in a running competition and get presents at the end. Nurgül eje tied a black and white plaited cord around her grandchild's feet,

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9 Kluckhohn led a project on the comparative studies of values of five cultures in North America. His project shows how anthropology itself is the study of values.

10 The ethnographic material of this section originates from the author's PhD dissertation 'Born Kyrgyz, Raised as Russians and Buried as Arabs: Negotiating Childhood and Personhood in Kyrgyzstan' (Tulebaeva 2017b).

while the father of the child was holding him so that he did not fall down. They were preparing the child for a ritual. The cord was made from white and black (or brown) strands on purpose, meaning that life consists of both white (good, in local interpretation) and black (bad) parts. Meanwhile, around eight to ten boys ranging between ages of nine and twelve walked away from the child and waited for the role that they were expected to play in this ritual. At the end of the street, they lined up and waited for the sign to start.

After Nurgül eje had tied the black and white cord around the child's feet, the child's father raised his hand and then dropped it to signal for the children to run. The children ran tooth and nail towards the child and it was Talant who reached the child first. Nurgül eje quickly handed him a knife which was lying in front of the child and Talant used it to easily cut the black and white cord around the child's feet. Talant and two other boys, who came running after him, took the child's hands and helped him to walk a short distance. The child, for whom this ritual was conducted, was crying because of witnessing all this chaos and rough actions. Parents and other people witnessing the conduct of this important ritual were happy.

At the end, Nurgül eje opened the red plastic bag in her hand and distributed presents to the children, including those toddlers who did not participate in the running competition. In addition to his own present, Talant, as a winner, was awarded the knife with which he had cut the child's cord. Keeping the knife, which is a small but very important detail of *tushoo kesüü*, is a ritual ('yrym') that is scrupulously followed. Anara eje, Talant's mother, was very happy and proud of her son.

There are several rituals that people in Kochkor conduct for children such as: *kyrkyn chygaruu* (a celebration of the 40th day of a child), *beshikke saluu* (a ritual of putting a child into a cradle), *tushoo kesüü* (a ritual of opening one's way, the one discussed above) and *oturguzuu* (circumcision, conducted for boys only). With these rituals people 'construct' the child, which affects its health, well-being, character, and future life. The term 'construction' is used in its direct meaning, where parents and the whole community invest in the physical, social and spiritual development

of a child through local practices called *yrym* ('rituals'). Through *yrym* people in Kochkor try to build a strong and healthy body, a moral person, a hard-working person, a wealthy person, and aim to instil other good qualities into their children. It can be argued that a child in Kochkor is indeed constructed and 'made into a person' by such rituals and this is considered as part of healthy upbringing (Tulebaeva 2017b).

Similarly, *tushoo kesüü* has a deep meaning. Cutting the white and black plated thread is the culminating point of this ritual. It implies that after this act a child will not stumble and will start to walk strongly. This is why this ritual is conducted when a child is about to start to walk. Also, in a figurative way, it is believed that a child will not stumble in his life and will develop successfully. The aim of this important ritual is to 'open the child's way' ('jolun achuu') and wish him a good future. As one of the interlocutors said, 'Yrym did not appear on their own, but they were created with a good intention, so that they give a good effect and so that one gets blessings'.[11] This is the 'good' (attractive) side of this ritual. This ritual also has the 'right' (imperative) side.

People in Kochkor conduct this ritual by claiming that it is their tradition which they should also follow. 'Of course we will do. If you are Kyrgyz, you should do it' (Kyrg. 'Kyrgyz bolgondon kiin jasaisyng da'), was what the interlocutors said. Life-cycle rituals are regulated by a local notion of *salt* ('tradition'). People in Kochkor refer to *salt* as coming from their ancestors ('ata-babalarybyzdan kele jatkan salt') or that *salt* is absorbed in their blood ('kanybyzga singip kalgan') which stresses the importance of continuity of this practice. Poliakov (1992) highlights a strong sense of traditionalism of Central Asians, and Kochkorians would not be excluded from this view. This means that when it comes to cultural practices, people's actions are usually regulated by societal norms categorised as 'Kyrgyz tradition'. For example, even if there are undesirable practices, such as slaughtering big animals for funerals or preparing lavish dowry or bride-price, which requires unnecessary

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11 Most of these rituals are followed with blessings, locally known as *bata*.

and exhaustive expenses (which people themselves do not want), they still do those things and justify their actions in reference to local traditions that they have to follow as part of Kyrgyz *salt*.

In addition, as part of Kyrgyz *salt*, rituals are considered not only as a norm or an act to be conducted in a certain way, but they also started to be glorified as traditional knowledge that is transferred from generation to generation both orally and in writing which should be preserved.[12] For example, there are books and websites on Kyrgyz customary practices titled 'Kyrgyzdyn yrym-jyrymdary'[13] ('Kyrgyz Cultural Norms and Practices') emerging after independence. There are many other local centres such as the Kyrgyz Cultural Centre (Kyrgyz Madaniat Borboru) and many online forums and newspaper rubrics, such as 'Morality and Tradition' ('Yiman jana salt'), where Kyrgyz cultural norms and practices are intensively discussed and their importance is highlighted.

Once, one of the schools in Kochkor organised an event on Kyrgyz customary practices. The aim of such events is to teach Kyrgyz traditions and cultural values to children. These cultural practices serve as a marker of Kyrgyz cultural identity. Indeed, to the question: 'What constitutes Kyrgyz tradition?' most of the interlocutors mentioned child-related life-cycle rituals, including the *tushoo kesüü* that has been mentioned above. Nowadays these life-cycle rituals have become so much formalised that they have constituted an inevitable aspect of Kyrgyz childhood.[14] Similar to the immunisation programme that mothers thoroughly follow, these child-related rituals are also conducted for their children's healthy growth at a certain stage of their lives.[15]

Gilman noted that in order to be part of tradition, the practice 'not only has to have the symbolic meanings and values associated with tradition, but it also has to play an important role in

[people's] lives' (Gilman 2004, 34). With the *tushoo kesüü* ritual, an 'important role' perspective of this cultural practice in Kyrgyz people's lives has been demonstrated. It highlights both 'good' and 'right' aspects of this practice. This ritual, however, has lost its value for some devout Muslim interlocutors, who justify their abandonment of this ritual by referring to its incompatibility with Islamic norms. This will be discussed in the following section.

Islam: Between Attractive and Imperative

With the Re-Islamisation process in Kochkor, some devout Muslims started to abandon the *tushoo kesüü* ritual. Not only did this ritual lose its label as healthy and important as described earlier, but ironically, it has even started to be seen unhealthy. The unhealthiness of the aforementioned life-cycle ritual is related to Islamic concepts such as *shirk* ('sin of idolatry') and *bidayat* (Arab. 'bidah', 'innovation') both of which point to impermissibility in Islam. Those people who stopped conducting *tushoo kesüü* stated that 'it [the ritual] does not correspond to religion' (meaning Islam; Kyrg. 'dinge tuura kelbeit'). For example, the practice of tying a white and black thread around a child's feet and cutting it with a strong perception that a child will be successful from that point on, contradicts Islamic norms. This means one relies on used things or symbolic acts and not on Allah. According to devout Muslim interlocutors, it is only Allah who can grant good life to a child and no thread can play any role in the child's healthy development. Those practicing Muslims who abandoned the *tushoo kesüü* ritual admitted that it is a nice ritual with good intention. However, they believe that even if people conduct this ritual, nothing will happen without the wish of Allah.

The analysis of this case within the framework on 'attractive' ('good') and 'imperative' ('right') aspects of values will be particularly helpful to explain the reason for the abandonment of the *tushoo kesüü* ritual. First, those devout Muslims, who stopped performing *tushoo kesüü* for their children, do not see any positive ('good', 'attractive') effect of this ritual. They stated that only Allah can decide whether to grant a child health or

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12 See Humphrey/Sneath 1999 about a similar observation in Mongolia.
13 The last part 'jyrym' of 'yrym-jyrymdary' is a part of a word combination and does not have any meaning on its own in this context.
14 From personal conversations with Roland Hardenberg.
15 Except for the ones who follow Islam strictly and accept such *yrym* as *shirk* ('idolatry') or *bidayat* (Arab. 'bidah' translated as 'innovations', not mentioned in Islamic scriptures).

not. The ritual does not have any effect and therefore, value.

Second, there is even a stronger 'imperative' ('right') aspect in people's justification for abandoning the *tushoo kesüü* ritual. Conducting rituals with elements that contradict Islam is sinful and it leads to serious punishment. The idea of committing sin immediately questions the core Islamic value: one's identity as proper Muslim. If you are a good Muslim, you follow Islamic tenets and you do not conduct things which are against Islam. Therefore, the main reason behind abandoning the *tushoo kesüü* ritual is affected by the normative force that Islam poses. It is feared that breaching Islamic norms leads to punishment by Allah. As discussed elsewhere (Tulebaeva 2017a), some parents fear that their children, wives or close people might become sick, or they can economically be deprived in case they perform practices which contradict Islamic norms. This serves as a reason for why some practicing devout Muslims decide not to follow the tradition of *tushoo kesüü* anymore.

They also mentioned numerous 'attractive' sides of Islam as a justification for their abandonment of old traditions. Mainly, pious Muslims believe that they can secure health and well-being and live a successful life by following Islamic norms and getting Allah's awards in this world and in afterlife. The most dominant idea (among many others which will not be discussed here) was that to those who read *namaz* (perform daily prayer, which is seen as one of the milestones and main characteristics of following Islam), Allah will grant abundance and all possible goodness in this life ('Allah yryskysyn mol chachat') and, most importantly, access to paradise after death.

As already noted earlier, Islam is welcomed in Kyrgyzstan because of bringing morality. As the director of the local *madrasa* mentioned, the *hijab* (veiling) is foreign to Kyrgyz people. Wearing a *hijab*, the practice of fully covering head and neck by young women, is a new practice in Kyrgyzstan. He sadly noted that many parents allow their daughters to wear mini-skirts, but not a *hijab*. There is a highly debated controversy on the topic of the *hijab* in Kyrgyzstan. This will not be discussed in this paper. However, what is worth mentioning here is that for many practicing Muslims, wearing a *hijab* is seen as a sign of a well-behaved woman who respects her husband and elderly people and does not do bad deeds. The girls in the *madrasa* in Kochkor stated that they are considered to be ideal wives and therefore a good target for bride kidnapping, which is, sadly, still practiced as one way of getting married. As further examples of the 'attractive' side of Islam, some interlocutors mentioned how Islam promotes patience (Kyrg. 'sabyr'), respect for the eldery as well as the young, teaches one to be grateful and be satisfied with what is given to them by Allah (Kyrg. 'shügür' or 'toobo').

Based on the discourses about Islam in Kochkor and its 'attractive' aspects, mentioned above, it can be firmly stated that Islam has motivational as well as obligatory dimensions. It poses values that are not only related to the 'good' as 'framed in terms of desire, motivation, and goals', but also the 'right' 'framed in terms of obligation, imperative, and rules' (Al-Mohammad et al. 2015, 442). From what devout Muslim interlocutors stated as part of their reason for abandoning certain Kyrgyz traditional practices, it can be stated that Islam poses some kind of force, the 'normative force', as Zimmerman (2015, 15) terms it, which is both 'attractive' and 'restrictive'. Normativity of Islam can be depicted in a way that whatever people do, their actions will be scanned through the lens of Islamic norms, where the identity of being 'a proper Muslim' is always scrutinised and reaffirmed. Exactly the normativity of Islamic values and practices is what justifies people's desires and actions in favour of changes brought by Islam, even if what they do causes societal discontentment. In the following concluding part, it will be demonstrated that exactly due to a strong normative force that Islam in Kochkor poses, some (not all) practicing Muslims follow an alternative tradition that exists along local traditional practices.

Islam as a Parallel Tradition

The Kyrgyz word for tradition is *salt*. Elsewhere (Tulebaeva 2017a), it was argued that practicing and non-practicing Muslims perceive, follow and interpret the tradition of wearing a beard in two different ways. For example, according to Kyrgyz *salt*, a young man cannot grow a beard, if his

father has not grown a beard (from an interview in Kochkor). However, young devout Muslims in Kochkor do wear a beard, even if their fathers do not. They also claim that it is *salt*. With that they mean Muslim tradition, the tradition coming from the Prophet Muhammad. My interlocutors used the word *sünnöt* (Arab. 'sunnah'), which means that wearing a beard is the tradition of the Prophet, this is why they follow it. They state both 'imperative' and 'attractive' aspects in their decision. Practicing Muslims believe that, as a Muslim, following what is *sünnöt* is a good deed which positively affects them in this life and afterlife.

Remember the case of *tushoo kesüü*. The *tushoo kesüü* ritual is *salt*. As demonstrated earlier in this paper, it is a tradition coming from ancestors ('ata-babalarybyzdan kele jatkan salt'), the tradition that has been 'absorbed in the blood' of Kyrgyz people ('kanybyzga singip kalgan'). 'If you are Kyrgyz, you should do it!', this is how the interlocutors firmly stated. However, they shared that local religious authorities and lay-missionaries try to dissuade them from conducting this ritual. They instruct which rituals should be done for children and which not. When this issue was further discussed with those local religious authorities in Kochkor, one of them said:

'There is no religion after Islam. No prophet will come after Prophet [Muhammad]. There are many nice customary practices [of Kyrgyz people], and we do support those practices, only if they do not contradict Islam'.

Similar to the *tushoo kesüü* ritual, there are other life-cycle rituals which also consist of objects, symbolic acts, and utterances, through which it is believed that a child gains certain qualities such as health, well-being, and success. The intention of people to conduct these rituals is good: everybody wants a healthy development of their children. However, practicing Muslims decided to keep only those rituals which do not contradict Islamic norms. In addition, they have integrated further Islamic practices to local child-related rituals.

Many families stated that when giving a name to their newly born child, they perform *azan* (the Islamic call to prayer) by whispering it to the child's ear. Religious authorities in Kochkor claim that the very first word that a Muslim child should hear is 'Allah'. Also, Altynai eje, a pious Muslim who led religious lessons called *taalim* in Kochkor, stated that the very first word that a child should say is not 'mother' or 'father', but 'Allah'.

The role of religious authorities in the formation of Islam as a parallel tradition is immense. Islamic sources such as the Quran, *sharia* (Islamic law), *hadith* (what the Prophet Muhammad said) and *sunnah* (what the Prophet Muhamad did) are interpreted by influential religious authorities and instructed to be followed. This adds additional weight or value to the normative force of Islam. Now many practicing Muslims turn to religious authorities for guidelines on how to lead a good life according to Islamic norms. Many interlocutors in Kochkor stated that people in Kyrgyzstan turn to these religious specialists because they themselves lack religious knowledge. In Kyrgyzstan, the interest in Islam is growing, and not only among practicing Muslims. Heated debates caused by contradictions between Islamic norms and local traditional practices also raised the interest of non-practicing Muslims in the nature of Islam that is followed in Kyrgyzstan. Here the religious experts play a crucial role in closing this gap and teaching Islamic values to local people as well as in providing clarifications to the public.

A few words should be mentioned about the role and status of religious authorities in Kyrgyzstan. Nowadays, many different terms are used to refer to religious authorities, such as: imam (hatib), ajy, sheikh, and moldo. The first three terms started to be commonly used with the revival of Islam, however the term moldo ('mullah') has a long history in the context of Kyrgyzstan. During the Soviet time, people used to say: 'Follow what a mullah says, but do not follow what he does'.[16] This saying denigrated the status of mullahs by implying that they would preach certain ideas, but they themselves would not follow what they have preached. This version of interpretation still exists. However, other neutral and even positive interpretations of this saying are used today, such as: mullahs preach what is in the Quran or *hadith*,

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16 This saying is interpreted differently, depending on whether a person wants to defend or criticise mullahs.

which should be followed without any doubt, however, mullahs are also human beings who can make mistakes. Another devout Muslim stated that indeed lay people cannot do what mullahs do, such as perform *azan* or funeral prayers. Many people in Kyrgyzstan perceive mullahs very seriously and they consult religious specialists on different issues related to their families and all other aspects of their religious, economic and social life. Religious specialists also demonstrate themselves as exemplary people by a proper outfit and by using Arabic words in their speeches which signifies their possession of real Islamic knowledge.

The authority of mullahs can be demonstrated on the example of the most influential religious figure in Kyrgyzstan: sheikh Chubak ajy Jalilov.[17] Chubak ajy, as he is called, travelled throughout the country, met with people and conducted preaching. He also scheduled his religious teachings for men and women. The main characteristic of his preaching was concluded in a 'question and answer' session, were he read the questions of people and answered them in the presence of a big crowd. Questions were not only about Islam or religious knowledge, but also on everyday social life. They also touched upon conflicting aspects between Islam and local practices. The preaching of Chubak ajy was based on people's concerns and his target was to give moral and spiritual education to the youth.

With technological development one cannot but mention the crucial role of new media in these functions. The speeches of religious experts are transmitted and disseminated through various social media channels. Sheikh Chubak ajy regularly showed up on Maral Radio by giving an opportunity to all Kyrgyzstani people to raise their questions on live sessions. These teaching sessions were further circulated on the Facebook page of Maral FM, published on YouTube and the social platform called Nasaat Media, which can be translated as 'Morality Media' or 'Instructive Media'. In this broadcast, Chubak ajy discussed how one should build a good family, how men and women should behave, how to bring up children, how

people should deal with money, how one should 'cleanse his/her heart' and many other suggestions related to the good and right ways of living. He also gave moral teaching on how to withstand the difficulties of life and shared the secrets of leading a happy life. He was valued, in the first place, for delivering his messages in a simple and digestible language and each of his sessions included actual themes and concerns of the society. The immense importance of this influential figure was clearly felt when he passed away at the age of 45 of COVID-19 in July 2020.

On the Internet, one can come across many videos of Chubak ajy. In one of them he talked about child-related life-cycle rituals. His instructions highlight the Islamic values of bringing up children. For example, as soon as a child is born, *azan* should be uttered, so that the first word that a child hears would be 'Allah'. Chubak ajy underlined that 'hearing the word of 'Allah' should come even before taking a mother's breastmilk'. What he mentioned echoed the statements of devout Muslim interlocutors in Kochkor. More concretely, one can make a strong link between what religious experts say and those who ardently follow those norms. In Chubak ajy's talk (at least in that particular talk) there was no mention of *tushoo kesüü* at all.

The analysis of religious authorities' guidelines and heated debates among practicing and non-practicing Muslims on the abandonment of local traditions (in this case, practices related to children) suggests that child-related rituals have been exposed to cleansing, where only those practices that have been classified as 'right' (permissible) according to Islamic norms are to be preserved, while the practices that contradict Islamic norms should be eliminated. In short, one can witness the birth of a parallel tradition in Kochkor with its own (but not mutually exclusive) norms.

Concluding Remarks

With the growth of religious knowledge in Kochkor, more and more attention is paid to the question of what it is to be a good Muslim. This requires not only the strict adherence to Islamic tenets, such as praying five times a day, fasting,

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17   Ajy, a Kyrgyz word for *haji*. It is one of the titles of a religious specialist.

performing *hajj* or giving alms. This also requires the abandonment of certain local cultural practices which contradict Islamic norms. This has been demonstrated on the example of the *tushoo kesüü* ritual, which some devout Muslims stopped performing despite its 'good' ('attractive') and 'right' ('imperative') aspects.

It has been discussed how those practicing Muslims similarly provide 'good' and 'right' reasoning for abandoning this ritual. These people usually operate with Islamic sources, such as the Quran, *sharia, hadith* and *sunnah*. These sources pose their own normative forces and dictate what is permissible, 'right' and therefore 'good'. This is the reason why it has been argued that the normativity of Islam, which among Muslims promotes a 'good' and 'right' way of leading a lifestyle, offers a parallel tradition for people in Kochkor to follow and justify their contestation over certain local traditional practices.

It should be made clear that with the word 'parallel' the intention is not to demonstrate Islamic tradition as fully exclusive or separate from local tradition. The religious specialist in Kochkor made it clear that there are many nice customary practices of Kyrgyz people which will be supported, as long as they do not contradict Islam. However, the voices of some devout Muslim interlocutors were brought up, who abandoned the *tushoo kesüü* ritual for the sake of leading a good and right way of living as a proper Muslim. Such sharp examples point at the attractive and imperative aspects of Islam that those devout Muslims operate with when going against the local traditions that they abandoned. It should also be mentioned that there are many practicing Muslims who are 'on the way to Islam' and they still practice local rituals even if they contradict Islamic norms. This is an interesting phenomenon that deserves to be developed more in detail as a separate paper.

This paper discussed the incompatibility between Islamic norms and certain local cultural practices based on one example: the *tushoo kesüü* ritual. Similar conflicts caused by Re-Islamisation processes have penetrated other aspects of social life in Kochkor, such as other life-cycle rituals, especially marriage and funeral ceremonies, healing practices, gender issues, education, or child development. More focused ethnographic research is required to grasp what socio-cultural changes are taking place due to the Re-Islamisation processes in Kyrgyzstan. It has also been mentioned how the discourses on Islamic values are promoted by social media platforms. In the light of the increasing role of new media in the practice of religion, it would be similarly interesting to do further research on the intersection of social media and Islam in Kyrgyzstan.

Islam in Kochkor is very much present as a growing practice. However, in this paper, it has been argued that Islam is even more present in discourses than in practice. Discourses on how one should lead his or her life as a proper Muslim are intensified due to the increasing interest in Islam as well as the lack of prior religious knowledge. In addition, the discourses on the nature of Islam are also extended with the inconsistency between Islam and certain local traditional practices that have been demonstrated in this paper. The lively discussions and debates in this regard are not only among practicing Muslims who want to prove the superiority of Islamic values, but also among the supporters of local tradition (Kyrg. 'salt') who react against the abandonment of local cultural practices. The Re-Islamisation process in Kyrgyzstan is in its onset and the process is not complete. The people are still at the stage of teaching, understanding, learning, probing, and disputing.

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DYNAMICS OF SPEAKING AND DOING RELIGION

The aim of this volume is to engage in the dynamics of speaking and doing religion, which extends from a religious to a social context. This volume contains selected papers presented at the interdisciplinary workshop 'Religious Speech and Religious Speakers: Authority and Influence of Word and People' (February 2019), which brought together scholars from anthropology, theology and culture studies with the focus to explore ways in which religious speeches have impact specifically as instructive and normative resources. The contributions demonstrate the diversity of issues around the topic of religious speech within Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. Presented case studies deal with religious specialists and their authority, the authority of lay people, the effects and force of religious speeches and discourses and the role of religious speech in interpreting natural phenomena or mediating value changes. Although religious speech is taken as the subject of discussion, the focus in this volume is not religious speeches *per se*, that is, how religious speech is defined, shaped, framed, or produced, but the social impact of religious speeches and speakers in the ways they shape and influence our worldview, social interactions, cultural practices, and power relations.

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