

#### 4.1.2.2 Caste and Denomination in Andhra Christianity

It is a fact that different denominations or different churches of the same denomination (there are for instance three different Lutheran Churches in Andhra Pradesh) do not join because they fear problems on the basis of caste origin.<sup>366</sup> Especially Malas and Madigas have a deep-rooted hatred against each other.<sup>367</sup>

It seems on the other side, that confessionalism, which is the major reason for the schisms in the Western countries, does not cause the separation between the Indian churches.<sup>368</sup> In Tirupati, e.g., there is a Baptist family which has joined the Lutheran Church as long as they would stay in Tirupati, because there is no Baptist congregation. On the doctrinal basis, there would be no way for the Baptists to join the Lutherans, even temporarily. However, the family participates even in the Holy communion. The same occurs with a family which belongs to the Salvation Army<sup>369</sup>, which has joined the Lutheran community, because there is no community of the Salvation Army found in Tirupati.

The only separation of two different denominations which is even stronger than in Europe is the one between Roman Catholics and Protestants. One reason is found in the history of the missionary work: A strong separatism was kept up by the missionaries already in the beginning. At the time when Western missionaries came to India, Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians did not have any contact with each other in their country of origin.<sup>370</sup>

Another reason appears to be the different approach in missionary work. The Roman Catholic Church does allow the converts to use and to practise some customs which they were following as long as they were Hindus. The Protestant churches, however, are quite strictly prohibiting customs which appear to have a Hindu background.<sup>371</sup>

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366. e.g. the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church counts about 25% Madigas, while the South Andhra Lutheran Church mostly consists of Malas. A merger of these two Lutheran churches in Andhra Pradesh is unlikely, because the Malas of the SALC do not want their property to fall into the hands of Madiga Christians.

367. See M.E. Prabhakar, *Andhra Christians...*, p. 21. He states that the rivalry between Malas and Madigas has assumed unhealthy proportions in the recent years.

368. This becomes obvious in the union of the CSI as well as the CNI. Both unite churches with main differences in their basic doctrines, but the questions most discussed were those concerning authority and leadership. One reason may be the lack of a history of reformation. While in Europe new denominations developed on account of fights over doctrinal differences, the Indian Christianity and especially the Christianity in Andhra Pradesh, where the mission societies of various denominations did not interfere in the other's work and area, did not have any reason to fight over such issues. On the contrary, many a times a Lutheran is ready to visit the worships of an evangelical or any other church (except the Roman Catholic Church), the doctrines of which would not at all meet those of the Lutheran church, be it the Pentecostals, Brethren of Christ or others, and *vice versa*. The most important reason for choosing the worship which one is going to attend is either the social determination by the caste system, or, in case one has a more liberal view of the caste system (which is mostly the case among evangelical Christians), the way how the gospel is preached. Cf. also the section 3.6.3

369. see also the section on the Salvation Army on page 64

370. The attempt of Roman Catholic missionaries to baptize people who had previously been under the care of Protestant missionaries, caused also a deep atrocity between these two Christian factions, which was adopted by the Indian Christians who were baptized in fear of the Roman Catholic missionaries.

371. see chapter 5 on this issue. There, it becomes clear that the prohibition of certain customs does not have much effect on the day-to-day life of the Christians, and it does also not draw any consequences if one follows such customs. In fact, many pastors say that they have to tolerate these customs, because they were common and the Hindu neighbours would be taken aback if they see the Christians completely refrain from any of the

The major reasons for separation between the Christian community into different denominations therefore appear to be the following (in order of importance):

1. the caste background (including the rejection to share the power over church property<sup>372</sup> and church members with Christians of an inferior caste background or the fear to lose power to Christians of a superior caste background)
2. the different approach towards Hindu customs
3. doctrinal differences

#### 4.1.2.3 The Caste System as a Reason for the Conversion to Christianity

To become a Christian meant certainly for many of the former outcastes an improvement in social and economic status, mainly because the missionaries provided jobs and started schools for the converts and their children already in the beginning of their work. The accessibility of schools for the former members of Mala or Madiga caste was entirely new<sup>373</sup> and brought about only by the Christian missionaries. On the other hand, many remained uneducated, especially those who could not afford to spare the time for school.<sup>374</sup>

Importance must be given to the fact that the social structure of the joint family as such plays a vital role in decision making, even in personal matters like faith and religion. If a male decides to become a Christian, it is most likely that his descendants will also embrace Christianity. The god worshipped by the head of the household is the god worshipped by the entire family, or in other words: the "house-god". Thus, it appears that, in most of the villages where Christians are found, these are members of a few families whose ancestors decided to become Christians.<sup>375</sup>

It is natural that, especially when in the beginning members of the outcaste communities had already embraced Christianity, the higher castes were hardly willing to convert to Christianity<sup>376</sup>, because they did not want to be forced to have fellowship with the

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common customs. This is especially applicable to major events to which Hindus are also invited.

372. Church property is generally viewed as a property of the community.

373. The *sudra* "was categorically denied the right of initiation and consequently the first stage of individual life (ashrama) the studentship", G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India*, p. 60. Consequently, the outcastes or *Harijans* to whom the Malas and Madigas belong, did not have the slightest chance to receive education beyond the level which was necessary to pursue their professions, before the Christian missionaries came to India.

374. If they were landless labourers, they were often depending on the work and income brought in by their children. Thus, even if the missionaries gave the education free of cost by establishing boarding homes, it was at most possible for such a family to send only one of their children to the school. Those children who had the chance to receive a sufficient education did generally not take up the same profession as their caste suggests, but were employed by the missionaries or sometimes also in the government. Some of the missions also started to pay some kind of compensation to the Christians who were daily labourers, in order to facilitate them to participate in the common worship.

375. It happens that, when a suitable Christian match for a boy is not found among the same *jati*, a match is chosen from the non-Christian caste of the same level, and often the girl has to receive baptism in such cases, and if not, at least she is required to give up going to the Hindu temple for worship and is requested to worship only Jesus. There are also very rare cases when a Hindu girl marries a Christian boy against the consent of her parents. In such a case she may remain a Hindu, but shows loyalty to her husband's religion.

376. It appears also that, whenever one caste has embraced Christianity, it is extremely hard for the other castes close to the one caste to join the church. Luke and Carmen report that e.g. in one village, where a Mala and a Madiga community of approximately the same

Christians of a lower caste background. Again and again, reports are given that members of higher castes would have been willing to become Christians, if only they would have been allowed to maintain the caste distinction. However, most Protestant missionaries in Andhra Pradesh categorically refused any kind of caste distinction in the church. Yet, it was not possible for them to eradicate the existing caste-consciousness, prevailing even among the Malas and Madigas, from the church.

#### 4.1.2.4 The Caste System in Andhra Churches Today

Even today, caste differences within a church cause many problems. E.g. the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church witnesses struggles between Malas and Madigas every time when elections for a new leadership draw near.<sup>377</sup> Even if there is practically only one caste within one church, there are subgroups down to the level of the joint family which again may cause trouble and problems between each other.

The reason for such trouble is generally the quest for power. Since Christianity does not accept the view, that one social group is superior to another, minority groups ask for the right of power, especially if they, viewed from the caste division, are subordinate to the majority.<sup>378</sup> Elections for the church administration<sup>379</sup> in the established churches are preceded by the fight for certain posts, which are then promised to the people whose support is most needed by the one or the other party. Parties are normally formed according to the caste or sub-caste to which one belongs. Since the members of economically less developed *jatis* or joint families do not have the financial resources to enter the election campaign, they are generally not represented in the church administration and do also not express any interest in the elections.<sup>380</sup>

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strength exists, the Malas won't become Christians after the Madigas had converted to Christianity. (P.Y. Luke/J.B. Carmen, *Village Christians and Hindu Culture*, p. 65-66)

377. A system provided by the AELC legislation, which classifies parishes with a few Madiga members as "Minority Parishes", allows the Madiga community to have some power and influence on the decisions taken by election. Cf. M.E. Prabhakar, *Castes in Andhra Churches*, p. 42
378. E.g. in the South Andhra Lutheran Church, there is at present, i.e. in 1991/92, a church leadership from a subcaste of the Malas which is inferior to the so called *dasari* group (about the *dasaris* see the page 42). The present leadership, which has been in power for about ten years, tries with all its strength to remain in power, while *dasaris* have taken over the lead of the opposition which tries to make an end to that leadership. It is, if all circumstances are considered, necessary to mention that the present leadership has to some extent misused its power to support the own families, and therefore the desire to change the leadership is justified without any reference to the caste membership. The desire of the opposition is mainly to develop the church and to stop illegal practices. The element which makes this fight worth mentioning is that the opposition is led by *dasaris*, while the present leadership has its support from its own subcaste only which is inferior to the *dasaris*.
379. The problem of elections does not arise in the Roman Catholic Church, which has a clear hierarchical structure, in which the highest authority is the Pope in Rome. This authority appoints bishops and archbishops, who in turn appoint all pastors. In the evangelical churches, the leadership is generally not such an important question, because the congregations are decentralized and the administration of the property is in their own hand. When a leader or leaders have to be chosen, it is mostly done after a time of prayer, in which, according to their statements, God shows them the suitable person.
380. It may be worth mentioning that generally the right to vote is given only if one has paid the regular church support, which is calculated differently by the various churches. This support is often not paid by the members of economically less developed *jatis* or joint families, because they do not see a good reason for paying it, if they cannot participate in the leadership anyhow. The only way for them to share the leadership is mostly to become a pastor.

Where Christians of different caste background belong to the same denomination<sup>381</sup>, the caste discrimination generally continues. A pastor who is of a lower caste origin than members of his parish is treated by them accordingly like a person of inferior status, although he is supposed to be their spiritual leader.<sup>382</sup> The Roman Catholic Church and the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church provide separate places of worship at several towns and villages in Andhra Pradesh, allowing the caste distinction and even untouchability to continue.<sup>383</sup> Priests are preferably not installed in parishes where there are Christians of a higher caste origin than his own. Especially members of higher castes keep their caste surnames in order to be easily distinguished from the “ordinary” Christians.<sup>384</sup> In the church buildings, there are different sections for the members of different castes, and the members of lower castes have generally to sit on the floor, while the member of higher castes share the benches and chairs.<sup>385</sup>

Some Indian Christians of all denominations in Andhra Pradesh nowadays occupy posts in various public and private institutions, professions and skills. They are even bank managers or occupy other responsible positions. It is hardly possible to tell their caste background from their profession. However, as already mentioned, they know their own caste background very well and thus often still keep alive old caste practices, especially separatistic tendencies.<sup>386</sup> On the other hand, the Christian community as such has gained respect in many ways in the face of the Hindu community. Mainly in town areas the caste origin is no longer regarded a bar to communicate with Christians and to work together with them. However, this may be a phenomenon that occurs due to growing secularism in the Indian towns and cities and can be observed also among the Hindu community. It does not take into account the situation in the rural area.<sup>387</sup> It is obvious already if one takes into account the location of various hamlets of an Indian village, that the caste system is still alive in all walks of life and gives the major basis for a peaceful and safe, but unjust society.<sup>388</sup>

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381. like in the Roman Catholic Church and a few Protestant churches

382. M.E. Prabhakar, *Caste in Andhra Churches*, p. 40

383. This is not necessarily the case in all parishes with members of different caste background, but common enough to be mentioned here. See also M.E. Prabhakar, *op.cit.*, p. 41f. There may also be other churches where this is the case. It depends mainly on the existence of various castes within one parish rather than on the denomination.

384. C.P. Thangaraj, *Whither Indian Christianity*, p. 23-26

385. Many more examples are given in M.E. Prabhakar's article *Caste in Andhra Churches*, p. 43-46 and have also been witnessed during the field work. Prabhakar quotes also a longer section of Fr. P.A. Augustine's book *Andhra Church: The Caste Factor*, which is a book on the casteism in the Roman Catholic Church in Andhra Pradesh.

386. Those persons who have gained influence and power within the church often use their power to support their own family (in the sense of a joint family) by giving posts to their own relatives, awarding contracts to them or by allowing them to use church property. Thus, they do much to uplift their own sub-caste, but often deny the same advantages to members of other sub-castes within the church

387. This statement shall not give the impression that in towns and cities there would be no more caste distinction. In the personal life of a family, i.e. regarding marriage, regular contacts and communion when taking food, caste laws are still observed. However, in the public life, caste distinction often is fading, also due to the reservation policy of the government. Thus, members of higher castes are generally forced to come into contact with members of those Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. On the other side, the reservation policy has not much effected the private life in Indian society, and in fact, one now is eager to be recognized as a member of this Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (G. Dietrich, *Culture, Religion and Development*, p. 37)

388. It may be mentioned here, that attempts are made by Christian theologians to raise the issue of injustice brought upon the churches by the caste system. The so called “dalit theology” may be called the Indian liberation theology, which encourages all attempts

## 4.2 The Social Position of Women

Even in a patriarchal society, women have an important role to play in the day-to-day life. Their role is, like that of man, determined by various factors, among them rules laid down in the religious scriptures. In this section, the position of women in the Hindu and Christian scriptures, and their actual position in the Indian Hindu and Christian societies in Andhra Pradesh, is described.

### 4.2.1 The Woman in Indian Hindu Society and in the Hindu Scriptures

The position of women in the Hindu society varies with the educational and social level. If she belongs to one of the higher castes, she may have a number of responsibilities in the home, which give her also some rights with regard to decision making. Yet, her duty in the first place is to serve her husband. In the families of lower castes, the place of a woman is inferior, and the aspect of being the servant to her husband is widened by making every female a servant to the male members of the family. Already as a child, the female members of the family have to take care of the household and are deprived of the right to education. She has no rights and no responsibilities within the family setup, except to keep the household clean and to cook the food for the family members. Sometimes, she also has to go to work and earn in addition to the income of her husband. There, in spite of equal qualification, women get generally less salary than men.<sup>389</sup>

#### 4.2.1.1 Women in the Hindu Scriptures

In the earliest stages of Indian history, women played a vital role in the social and political affairs.<sup>390</sup> She was the partner of her husband “in managing the affairs during *grihasta*, *vanaprasta* and *sanyasa ashramas*” and “consequently must have enjoyed a quality of life comparable to that of the man” during the Vedic period<sup>391</sup>. She partook in the religious sacrifices which were performed together with her husband, according to the *Rigveda*.<sup>392</sup>

An important source and inspiration for the concept of womanhood of the first millennium B.C. is Sita, the wife of Rama, who says that the wife has to bear and to share the fate of her husband.<sup>393</sup> The *Mahabharata* contains passages in which it is said that the woman shall be honoured and respected by man generally, without distinction. This view bases on the

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made by the Dalit community for a just society on the basis of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Obviously, the dalit theology has not yet gained much impact on the leadership of the various churches.

389. The state and central governments, during the past years, have passed or amended numerous acts in order to protect women and to ensure their right of equality. These acts, however, fail to be enforced properly, due to several reasons. (see K. Hingorani, *Legal Struggle for Women*, p. 82-85)

390. Luther W. Meinzen, *India- Challenge to Love*, p. 47

391. K.V.K. Thampuran, *Hinduism and its Impact on Women*, p. 18

392. P.H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*, p. 257f. Prabhu also quotes the story of Brihaspati, who wants to perform penance without his wife. The gods let him know that it is improper to perform penances without the wife (*Rig. X*, 109). Similar in the *Satapatha Brahmana*.

393. Other ideals of womanhood are Ahalya, Draupadi, Tara and Mandodari, who have shown exemplary conduct as wives and taken moral responsibility for failures for which they were actually not responsible, but which were caused to them from outside. P.H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*, p. 263f

presumption that a woman is weak and unable to resist temptations, thus she cannot be made responsible for her sins like man. This view gives women some kind of protection against adultery, because in these passages also the man is held responsible in such cases. The *Mahabharata* also knows that to marry a woman to a man whom she dislikes brings sin and disgrace<sup>394</sup>.

However, this changed with the advent of the laws or Code of *Manu*, in which he said that a woman has no freedom and should be completely devoted to fulfil the duty towards her husband, else she would enter the womb of a jackal and be tormented by diseases.<sup>395</sup> With this, he only wrote down what had slowly developed since 1000 B.C.<sup>396</sup>: that a woman should remain in an inferior status to man. *Manu* says:

By a young girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house.

In childhood a female must be subject to her father; in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons. A woman never must be independent<sup>397</sup>

Her husband is deemed to be her god, whom she has to obey perfectly<sup>398</sup>, irrespective of his quality and conduct.<sup>399</sup>

Marriage became obligatory for women in that time, and an unmarried woman would not be respected in society and would be deemed as a burden to her parents.

Women are to get children to their husbands in order to secure the heritage, as A. Mahadeva Sastri explains in his book *The Vedic Law of Marriage*. He rejects the view that marriage would not be compulsory for a woman, and states that “her function” is to bear children from her (first and only) husband.<sup>400</sup> Remarriage of a widow is generally despised, as the remarried widow (*punarbhū*) “has no social status”<sup>401</sup>, and her husband shall not enjoy respect by his fellow beings.<sup>402</sup>

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394. according to P.H. Prabhu, *ibid.*, p. 268

395. *Manu* V, 165, quoted from Ranjana Kumari, *Femaleness: The Hindu Perspective*, p.7

396. We find already remarks about the woman’s inferiority to man in the *Satapatha Brahmana* iii, 2,4,2-6.

397. *Manu*, V,145 quoted from Ranjana Kumari: *Femaleness: The Hindu Perspective*, p. 8

398. “To a woman, her husband constitutes her God. The husband is as pure as the Gods, and represents all virtues.” (*Brahma Vaivarta, Krishna Janma Khanda*, 57.15-25; Sen,II,329) and: “The sacred and imperative duty of a wife is to carry out the commands of her husband, and to live in perfect obedience to his wishes.” (*Garuda Purana*, 95; Dutt, 270); both quotations taken from Ranjana Kumari, *Femaleness: The Hindu Perspective*, p. 10

399. *Manu* V,154. There are of course also other passages which give a higher value to the woman, but a short look at the present Indian society shows clearly that the few precautionary statements made in the *Manu smṛiti* in favour of women are completely forgotten.

400. *op. cit.* p. 61: “Not even the widow who has failed to fulfil her function (as laid down by *Manu* IX.96) – by not bearing children before the death of her husband – is allowed to remarry with a view to get offspring”

401. P.H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*, p. 277

402. The issue of widow remarriage is mainly an issue of the higher castes. Remarriage of widows does occur in many Harijan castes, but not quite often, because it is believed that a woman is responsible for the death of her husband, especially if he did not die on account of old age. If a widow is remarried, then mostly to a much older man.

The *ashrama* for a woman is the household. Though, in the early writings, evidence is there that women partook in the 4 *ashramas* to some extent, the *dharmasastras* do exclude women from the *vanaprastha ashrama* and the *sannyasa ashrama*, and there are only a few authorities which permit women to undergo the *brahmacharya ashrama*, and if she shall learn something, then only at home as a student of her husband.

Another impact from that time of the *dharmasastras* is that a girl should be married in an age which is not suitable both, in physical and psychical terms.<sup>403</sup> The girl will have no chance to ever develop her own personality, since she will be guided and formed only by her husband, after she had been well trained by her mother in the household work. This results in the often made observation that the Indian woman appears to be an obedient servant to her husband, even to that extent that she does not eat together with her husband because she has to serve him the meal.<sup>404</sup> Though Manu states that a girl should not be married to a man whom she dislikes, there are many other statements which say that a woman must not take any decision on her own.<sup>405</sup>

During menstruation period and after confinement, the woman is regarded impure until the period is over and she has taken a purifying bath. This impurity is actually an untouchability. The man who touches a woman during her menstruation becomes himself untouchable.<sup>406</sup>

#### 4.2.1.2 Women in Indian Hindu Society in Andhra Pradesh

The demand for dowry at the time of marriage<sup>407</sup> is an important factor to the position of women in the present Indian society. The parents of the girl have to offer gifts to the family of the bridegroom as well as to pay a high amount for the fact that the family of the bridegroom is in future taking care of the girl. Dowry is sometimes called the worst evil of Indian society, because it often leads women to either suicide or at least permanent pressure from the side of the in-laws. Repeated reports are there about so called "dowry-deaths"<sup>408</sup>.

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403. A. Mahadevi Sastri, *op.cit.*, p. 62f: The most suitable age, according to Manu-smriti IX,88.89 and 93 is the age between 8 and 12 or even earlier. Cf. P.H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*, p. 269f

404. However, it must be admitted that these rules are laid down for the members of the high castes. The customs among lower castes are not entirely determined by the Code of Manu, although they may be followed among them, as an attempt to gain respect from the side of the higher castes.

405. v, 147-148 and others; cf. P.H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*, footnote 70 on page 270

406. P.H. Prabhu, *ibid.*, p. 271f; he also mentions that there are some statements which opposed the untouchability of women during the menstrual period, especially from Yajnavalkya. This impurity is not a feature unique to Hinduism. It is found among many religions. However, the impurity imposed on women in Hinduism extends further than in other religions, where it is only related to religious rituals.

407. see also page 123

408. Many cases are reported in which a housewife has been burnt. The official version usually is that the sari of the woman caught fire in the kerosene stove. However, as has been found out after investigation, many such deaths were caused by the in-laws of the woman, because they wanted to have a higher dowry than was given to them by the woman's parents at the time of marriage. Some figures are found in the study report from the Centre for Peace and Justice, Kanyakumari: *Rights of Women and the Menace of Dowry*, p. 6. See also G. V. Lobo, *Women's Rights and Reproductive Technologies*, p. 24, and J. Mary/K.J. Prasad, *An Assessment from Hyderabad*. According to THE HINDU (21.9.92, p. 3), 136 dowry deaths have been registered in Andhra Pradesh during the first half of 1992 (January to June), and in addition to that, 36 dowry murders were reported during the same period.

Due to the high costs incurring to the parents of a girl child, female infanticide takes also place, or abortion is performed in case of a female embryo.<sup>409</sup>

In the present Indian society, women obviously play an inferior role compared to men. Although there are a few women successfully engaged in politics and another few in the industrial sector at leading posts, the majority still remains at home, determined to be a wife and mother without any or with very limited possibilities to develop her own talents and abilities except within the frame of the household of her husband, or she has to do hard work for which she receives less salary than a man for the same work.<sup>410</sup> Girls and women of an inferior caste are employed by economically sound families as servant maids, often receiving only food and a small amount, insufficient to maintain even a single person, as salary.<sup>411</sup>

Education of women has become more common, but still there is a wide gap between the education of women and that of men.<sup>412</sup> Especially in urban areas and from richer families<sup>413</sup>, women are seen occupying posts in various capacities, often in the newly developed electronic business. In rural areas, where the majority of the Indian population lives, the situation of women has scarcely improved. Girls, if at all, are sent to school for only a short time (normally less than 4 years<sup>414</sup>), and then they have to join work in the fields or in the household. Generally, they have to serve the brother beside the work in the household. Boys receive a better education especially in rural areas.<sup>415</sup>

In spite of the manifold discrimination women experience within the Indian society, it is observed that women are the custodians of religious believes and practices, which is mainly the case in the high caste families.<sup>416</sup> Women are the ones who know how to perform certain rituals which are conducted within the family, and they will prepare everything in proper manner for a celebration of a special rite performed by a priest. However, it is also true and still upheld that women who are menstruating are considered to be impure, making them unable to perform or to participate in any religious rite.

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409. cf. G.V. Lobo, *Women's Rights and Reproductive Technologies*. India has an average sex-ratio below 930 women per one thousand men (1991 census), while the world sex-ratio is above 1000. This difference "cannot be blamed on economic realities in the country. We cannot argue that women's health is better in the affluent areas and not so where poverty is rampant. In Kerala, for instance, the sex ratio is favourable to women (1032), while in the Punjab, one of India's most affluent states, it is below the national average (879)." *Health for the Millions*, Vol XVIII, No. 1&2, p. 37

410. s. Stella Faria in the introduction to *The Emerging Christian Woman*, p. v to xvii

411. Most of the people interviewed, both Christian and Hindus, answered to the question why they employ girl children as servant maids, that the girl would be obedient, did not want to go to school, and that they intend to help her by giving her a regular work, for which she is given food, shelter and clothing.

412. cf. the table about the literacy-rate in India on page 91. The total literacy rate of women in India is approximately half as high as that of men.

413. Such families have usually female servants, often still girls, to do the household work

414. Primary education is received by about 51% of girls, and the middle level of education is reached only by 29 %, compared to 76% boys enrolled in primary schools and 53.4 % in the middle schools. See J. Desrochers, *Education for Social Change*, p. 96

415. In this context, it is also necessary to note that there is a wide variation in the quality of the schools. While the public schools, which are more or less free, are often, especially in the rural area, of a very poor quality, the private schools which demand relatively high fees, have a better quality. Since Parents are preferably willing to spend more on the education of boys, boys are often sent to the better private schools, while the girls have to go to the public schools.

416. The position of women is also much better in the northern parts of India than in the south.



## 4.2.2 The Woman in Christianity

According to the *teachings of Jesus*, women have the same status as men. Although he gathered 12 disciples, who were males, around him, there are different narrations in the New Testament which show that also women are among the close followers of Christ, and they had key positions in the life of Christ.<sup>417</sup> Also, Christ defended a woman who was caught in adultery by saying to those men who wanted to put her to death, that the one who has no sin shall throw the first stone to kill her.<sup>418</sup> However, it may be the gender bias of the authors of the gospels of the New Testament, or their desire to express certain views and doctrines in a symbolic manner<sup>419</sup>, that there is not much room for a group of female disciples around Jesus in their narrations.<sup>420</sup>

According to the *letters of Paul*, which contribute the basic theological doctrine of Christianity in the frame of the New Testament, the relation between man and woman is ambivalent. On the one side he states that “there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ”<sup>421</sup>, and on the other side he says that the wife should obey her husband or that the husband is the head of the wife.<sup>422</sup> He goes even further by ordering the women to “learn in silence with all submissiveness”.<sup>423</sup>

Paul encourages a young widow to remarry, to get children and to keep the household.<sup>424</sup> Older widows above 60 years shall be taken special care of by the Christian community.

It is obvious that Paul’s teaching is not in the line of Jesus’ teaching, who did not at any place demand the subordination of the wife to her husband. Paul certainly has been influenced by the prevailing social patterns of his time, which can be seen in many parallels to the demands and statements by the Jewish authorities and the Old Testament scriptures.<sup>425</sup>

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417. Cf. P. Drego, *The Feminist Viewpoint*, p. 42-43. The most important role is that it were the women who were close to Jesus, who discovered that he was risen from death, and thus women became the first propagators of this news which is fundamental to Christian faith. (Mk 16,1-8)

418. Gospel according to St. John, 8,1-11

419. For instance, the number 12 which is the number of the disciples around Jesus, symbolizes the fullness of the people of Israel, which consists of 12 tribes. The head of a tribe is, in the Jewish patriarchal society, naturally a male person.

420. In fact, it seems to be taken for granted that women were also with Jesus, in the same way like the 12 disciples were. See for instance Lk 8,2-3

421. Gal 3,28

422. Col 3,18; 1 Cor 11,3

423. 1 Tim 2,11

424. 1 Tim 5,14

425. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate the full extent of the influence of Jewish customs and beliefs on Paul’s theology. See in this regard e.g. Doris Franklin, *Impact of Christianity on the Status of Woman...*, especially pages 45-46, and P. Drego, *The Feminist Viewpoint*, p. 43-45

### 4.2.3 The Woman in Indian Christianity in Andhra Pradesh

The attitude towards women in India seems not to have changed much with the advent of the Christian missionaries from the West. This is not surprising if one considers that in the 19th century the position of women in the western Christianity followed more or less the same rules which had been laid down by Paul.<sup>426</sup> The Indian Christian woman is responsible for the household, she has to serve her husband and to be loyal to him.

Until now, Christian women are only seldom admitted for theological training, and ordination of women for religious services within the church was quite rare, if not impossible.<sup>427</sup> Men are not willing to work under the leadership of women, who are assigned posts in the church administration only at a lower level.<sup>428</sup> The Lutheran churches refused to ordain women for church ministry until 1991, when the first woman was ordained by the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of India<sup>429</sup>, while there are only a few ordained women in the Church of South India and the Methodist Church in India. This is in spite of the fact that many Western churches for long have supported women's ordination<sup>430</sup>. There is, however, the movement of bible women or a so called "women *samaj*" (women group), which is actively involved in the propagation of the gospel. They meet once a week in different houses, where they hold a bible study and prayer. Often, they do also social service, like visiting sick people and prisoners. From the administration's point of view, they are independent.<sup>431</sup>

The practice of child marriage in Andhra Christianity is deteriorating. Luke and Carmen report that in most marriages in the villages, the girls are below the age of 15 years at the time of marriage, but the findings are certainly no longer valid to that extent.<sup>432</sup> Now, especially in urban areas, a tendency towards late marriage, in concurrence with the level of education, is witnessed.<sup>433</sup>

The practice of negotiating dowry at the time of match finding is common among the Christians, even though officially, on the level of the church administration, dowry is condemned. However, "dowry in cash and/or kind has become a status symbol among middle class families, and it is discreetly, but widely practised in the Christian community."<sup>434</sup>

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426. It is only during the recent decades, that a so called feminist theology has developed, which attempts to remove or at least to re-interpret the patriarchal elements from the biblical statements which refer to women.

427. Only a few women are ordained in the Methodist Church, the CSI and the Church of North India.

428. see e.g. B.V. Subbamma, *Women in Mission:...*, p. 97

429. The United Evangelical Lutheran Church of India is actually not a church in so far, as it does not have congregations on its own. It is a union of Lutheran churches, which keep their independence with regard to administrative and doctrinal matters. Decisions taken by the executive council of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of India, in which all member churches are represented, can, however, be binding to all member churches, if declared so.

430. In 1980, Dr. Marjorie Mathews became the first female bishop of the Methodist Church in America

431. These groups were begun mostly by the foreign missionaries as an effort to reach the *zenanas*.

432. *op.cit.*, p. 192

433. Unfortunately, no church came forward with detailed figures on this question. The information collected during the field work is, however, a clear indication that, with increasing education, the age at the time of marriage goes up as well.

434. M.E. Prabhakar, *Caste-Class and Status in Andhra Churches...*, p. 21

Therefore, to avoid discrepancies with the teachings of the church, the “dowry” is generally called a voluntary gift.

Christian women are marked as married by the signs commonly used also in Hinduism: they wear the *tali*<sup>435</sup> and they have silver rings around their second toes. The married man usually lacks any sign of his married state. The evangelical churches however have adopted the western method of exchanging rings (usually made of gold and to be worn at the fourth finger of the right hand).<sup>436</sup> The Christian wife is generally expected to serve her husband, even if she has to go to work as well. Only seldom her husband will also help in the household work. Like in the Hindu family, she will follow her husband’s advice and let him take the decision in family affairs.

A remarriage of widows is normally not practised, but occurs, if the widow is young. For older widows, the churches provide widow homes, where those Christian widows are admitted, who are unable to maintain themselves and who have no family to support them.

In some parishes, at least one woman is elected into the Parish Church Council<sup>437</sup>, and sometimes a woman is in charge of a hostel or educational institution (if it is a girls’ school or hostel). In this capacity, she will be responsible to an administrative body, but is independent in all administrative matters.

### 4.3 Poverty and Wealth

In Indian Society, about 30% of the people live below the poverty line (see table 4.1).<sup>438</sup> Numerous efforts of the state and central governments to encounter this phenomenon have failed. In spite of a rising Gross Net Product, the percentage of the poor declines very slowly. Instead, the gap between those living in wealth and those living in poverty becomes wider and wider. In fact, the absolute number of people living below the poverty line increases.<sup>439</sup>

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435. see figure 5.1 on page 126. On marriage, see also section 5.4 beginning on page 122

436. It may be interesting to note that in the CSI, the order of service for marriage does have a section in which a bride may give a ring to the bridegroom, but this section “may be omitted at the discretion of the minister”. It is also noted that the statement to be given by the woman shall only be made if she puts the ring on the finger of the bridegroom (*Book of Common Worship*, p. 142). The *tali* (here called *mangalasutra*) is interpreted here as a token of “constant faith and abiding love”. (*ibid.*)

437. Certainly she has to be married

438. The data given here may vary due to different basic presumptions of evaluation. While one accepts that the basic needs are fulfilled if a person can purchase enough food equivalent to the amount in calories which are necessary for a person to survive, the other may also take into account the fact that, for a healthy life, it is essential to have a balanced diet which requires vegetables and fruits, which are generally more costly. The figures given in table 4.1 are the official figures

439. These statements do not base on the official figures given in table 4.1, but on the assumption that, for a healthy development, it is not enough to take into account the amount of calories one is able to consume. There is certainly a need and a right for proper nourishment, beside the need for a life in dignity, for instance proper housing. See also Kirtee Shah, *Urban Poverty: A Problem Whose Time Has Come*, p. 69-71

**Table 4.1:** Population in India living below the poverty line

Period	Rural		Urban		Total	
	mn.	%	mn.	%	mn.	%
1981-3	225.9	42.7	56.1	37.2	282.0	41.5
1983-4	221.5	40.4	49.5	28.1	271.0	37.4
1984-5	222.2	39.9	50.5	27.7	272.7	36.9 <sup>440</sup>
1987-8						29.2 <sup>441</sup>

One of the many reasons for the poverty prevailing in the Indian nation is also the method of employment. Working on a non-wage basis, i.e. depending on daily employment, means an inevitable decrease in regular income and overall safety.<sup>442</sup> The non-wage employment has increased and is now over 50%, while the employment on a regular wage basis is decreasing and now at less than 50% of the total employment in urban(!) areas.<sup>443</sup>

### 4.3.1 Poverty and Wealth in Hinduism

Begging has been religiously sanctioned already very early with the introduction of the *varnashrama*-system. The fourth stage, i.e. the *sannyasashrama*, requires from the *sannyasa* to beg for his food.<sup>444</sup> The Hindu faith does include alms-giving (*dana*) as one of the duties of each Hindu in order to gain good karma, and those who are poor are considered to be unable to perform worship, according to the Mahabharata.<sup>445</sup> This view should encourage the Hindus to provide means to all who live in poverty to come out of their misery. It has, however, led to the assumption that giving alms to the begging people would be sufficient both, for the

440. J. Desrochers/G. Joseph: *India Today*, p. 70. The data reflects the estimation given by the planning commission for the respective year

441. *Health for the Millions*, Vol. XVIII, 1&2, p.8

442. Sickness, for instance, means the loss of daily income, thus the working member of the family has to go for work even in times of sickness. The death of the working member of a family, often caused because of such extreme situations, means a steep decrease in the already low quality of life of the family.

443. cf. Kirtee Shah, *Urban Poverty...*, p.72 footnotes 5 and 6. Compared to the price developments, the actual income of agricultural labourers, who work on daily wages, is decreasing. J. Desrochers/G. Joseph, *India Today*, p. 112-116

444. P.H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*, p. 91

445. XII.8

beggars as well as for the person who gives the alms. This attitude has led to the development of beggar castes in almost all towns and cities.

The number of beggars increases in spite of the efforts by the Indian government to help the handicapped and socially outcaste people to become self-sufficient in the sense that they are trained in professions which are suitable for them to earn their livelihood. Even children are forced by their parents to go begging, and it occurs as well that limbs of the children are cut off<sup>446</sup> in order to rouse the pity of the people. This happens more often with girls than with boys.

In spite of these developments, the people are willing to give some alms either to gain good karma for themselves or only because they feel pity with the begging person, or to get rid of the beggar who insists, by making much noise with simple instruments, on getting at least a small *dana*.

### **4.3.2 Poverty and Wealth in Christianity in Andhra Pradesh**

When the foreign missionaries came to India, they found that the poorest of the poor and the socially outcast people were most ready to receive the gospel and to embrace Christianity. Their social and economic situation was extremely grim, and thus the missionaries felt the necessity to do the most needful to develop the converts both, economically and socially. The biggest impact in this regard had the introduction of schools, which had been so far inaccessible to the converts.

Yet, most of the Christians nowadays belong to the poor sections, living on or below the poverty line. There is not much concern for these sections even among the Christian leadership. The only but important measure taken is the construction and management of hostels and schools, to which children of a poor economic background are admitted free of cost and have the opportunity to get a better education. Most of these hostels are financed

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446. e.g. the tongue or a hand is cut off soon after the birth of a child.

partly or completely with donations from abroad.<sup>447</sup> A few industrial schools do also exist, and emergency help is provided in some cases. Widow homes are maintained at a few places.<sup>448</sup>

It has already been mentioned that the urban Christian population increased from about 20% to 30%, which is the result of movements from the rural to the urban areas. While a number of those Christians find jobs in different organizations, most of them become casual labourers, coolies or rickshaw pullers. They dwell in slums under insalubrious conditions.

The remaining 70% live in rural areas, where they mainly belong to the lower social section. They are landless labourers, often under extreme economic pressure from indebtedness, under-employment, illiteracy and so on.<sup>449</sup>

In spite of these facts, in most of the Christian churches in Andhra Pradesh, there are no or only little efforts seen to develop their downtrodden and suppressed members. In fact, the leadership of the churches may also originate from the same caste, but has gained a middle class status, and with this also some middle class attitudes towards the low class members of their respective churches. As they control the material resources of the church, they are not willing to give these resources freely for the development of the church members in the rural areas. Instead, they use them to develop the urban properties of the church and for administration purposes.<sup>450</sup>

Begging is generally discouraged. Christians are taught to live on their own income, provided to them by their work. Yet, there are Christian preachers wandering around and begging for their livelihood, like the Hindu *sannyasin*. The attitude towards beggars is similar

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447. One major institution which provides and maintains a wide network of hostels, which are under the management of the local churches, is the *Kindernothilfe*, a German organization which is represented in India by the CSI Council of Child Care in Bangalore.

448. see the data provided in the chapter 3

449. M.E. Prabhakar, *Andhra Christians – Some Demographic and Ecclesial Issues*, p. 24

450. M.E. Prabhakar, *Caste-Class and Status in Andhra Churches...*, p. 19f. There are also cases in which the resources are misused for the development of the own family.

to that of the Hindu: to give a donation to a beggar or to an institution which provides help to poor people is considered meritorious and thus normally done.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CUSTOMS OF CHRISTIANS AND HINDUS IN**

### **ANDHRA PRADESH**



In this chapter, a survey and description of certain practices and customs as they are observed among Christians and Hindus in Andhra Pradesh at certain events and in the day-to-day life, is provided. Here, customs are described which relate to events which are found in many societies, like marriage, burial or the dealing with spirits. First, the Hindu practices will be explained and then a description of the corresponding Christian custom follows. A restriction was necessary to major customs which are encountered all over Andhra Pradesh. There are numerous minor rites performed at many more occasions, both among Hindus as well as among Christians, than mentioned in this chapter.

With regard to customs, a deeper separation exists between the members of established churches and the members of the evangelical communities. Generally, in the evangelical communities the customs which derive from the Hindu background<sup>451</sup> are rejected. In order to help to identify the customs which should not be followed, a limit is set between so called "Hindu customs" and "Indian customs".<sup>452</sup> Since in a number of cases, parallels are found in the Bible, mainly in the Old Testament<sup>453</sup>, it is not always that easy to distinguish between Hindu and Indian custom.

## 5.1 Birth of a Child

The birth of a child is normally viewed as the fulfilment of marriage. According to the respective hereditary rules, there is also the desire that the first-born or at least one child should be either male or female, depending on the basic form of the society.<sup>454</sup> According to these desires, many rites and customs are followed in order to ensure their fulfilment.

### 5.1.1 Customs Related to a Child's Birth in Hinduism

Customs related to the child's birth form a chain of rites which are designed to protect the foetus right from the conception. As it is the religious duty of a Hindu to continue the family line, the major purpose of marriage is to beget children. For this purpose, a foetus-laying ceremony (*garbhadhana*) is performed at the consummation of the marriage.

Then, when the wife is pregnant, a ceremony designed to ensure a male child is performed in the third month of pregnancy: the *pumsavana samskara*. This is important since only a male descendant can perform the religious rites which are to be performed in veneration of the ancestors, and only a male descendant can continue and inherit the family's social and economic status.<sup>455</sup>

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451. e.g. the tying of the *tali* at the time of marriage

452. This distinction is also made among the members of established churches, where the tendency goes towards an integration of more Hindu customs under the label of being "Indian customs".

453. a few customs are also found in the New Testament, among them restrictions set up for women with regard to religious practices

454. in patriarchal societies generally the first-born is desired to be a boy, while in matriarchal societies the desire is for a girl.

455. It is also worth to be mentioned that a marriage can be dissolved if no boy child is born to the couple. In some of the Andhra villages, it occurs that a man whose wife does not give birth to at least one male child can take a second wife in order to fulfil this obligation.

It is customary to take a vow especially at the time of the first pregnancy. In some cases, the vow is taken before the confinement because of prolonged childlessness. The vow is either materialistic, i.e. some gift will be presented to the local deity, or the child is sometimes also dedicated to God's service.<sup>456</sup>

The *jata karma* is the next important rite, performed at the birth of the child. "The father touches and smells (*avaghranam*) the child and utters beneficial *mantras* into its ears, expressing his wish that it may be endowed with long life (*ayus*) and intelligence (*medha*)." After this, the child receives honey mixed with butter and is then fed by the mother. Only after these initial ceremonies, the umbilical cord is cut.<sup>457</sup>

There is a period of impurity for all who live in the house where the birth took place, and they should not have any intercourse with anyone. After this period, which continues for ten days from the confinement, the house is purified with certain rituals performed by a priest, and all things and clothes used during this period are cleaned thoroughly.<sup>458</sup>

### 5.1.2 Customs Related to a Child's Birth in Andhra Christianity

Since childlessness among the Indian Christians is not desired, and in rural areas often considered a punishment by God, prayers are held at the time of marriage in order to ensure offspring for the couple.

Before the birth of the first child, the young mother will go to her parents' home for the delivery. Customarily, she will stay with them for 3 months. The parents of the girl have to bear all the expenditures related to the birth, another burden imposed on them as parents of a girl child. Although this practice is discriminatory, it is generally followed by the Christians.<sup>459</sup>

Often, especially before the first child is born, the parents take a vow in order to receive a male child, or just for a safe delivery and a healthy child. The vow is either in some material form (to give a donation or to construct something which is for the benefit of the church), or they promise to dedicate a male child to God's service, i.e. they will let him become a pastor or priest.

While no common ceremonies are observed in relation to the birth of a child<sup>460</sup>, prayer

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456. Since members of the untouchable castes cannot become priests, this practice became a way to secure temple servants. The *devadasis* are often girls dedicated to a deity on account of a vow. Cf. the book of the Joint Women's Programme: *Banhi. Prostitution With Religious Sanction*, p. 49-61, and *The Basavi Cult* in the same book. In these chapters, case studies are provided as well as an investigation of reasons for the *devadasi* system in Andhra Pradesh.

457. P.H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*, p. 219)

458. A. Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, p. 155. It appears that, among the *dasaris* in South Andhra, the child is not fed by the mother for two to three days, because of her impurity

459. In some cases, the in-laws of the girl, who want to be sure of a safe delivery, demand that the delivery should be taken care of in an expensive hospital, thus forcing the parents to take up a loan for this purpose.

460. There are, of course, a number of ceremonies observed. These, however, vary in the different parts of Andhra Pradesh, and it will be therefore inappropriate to list a few of them here. One custom which is quite common and found all over Andhra Pradesh is the tying of a thread (*mekhala*), the colour of which designates the caste to which the child belongs, around the waist of the child on the fifth or ninth day. All these customs originate from the

meetings are commonly held on the occasion of the birth of a child after ten days.

The mother is supposed not to leave the house after the confinement and not to see anyone except her relatives during the first ten days, because she is considered to be impure. Then she will take a purifying bath, and no more restrictions are imposed on her. This day is marked with a prayer meeting.<sup>461</sup> On the following Sunday, the mother during the common worship often goes forward with her child in order to submit the donation which the parents had vowed to give as a thank offering, and to receive the blessing from the pastor.

After birth, the mother stays for 2 or 3 months at the home of her parents. Then she returns to her husband, but after 9 months she is supposed to come again to the place where she delivered the child, together with the child.

## 5.2 Name-Giving Ceremony

Names give individuality to a person. To choose the name for a child is therefore an important decision. In India, the names often contain a number of different information: the place of origin, the father's family name, the caste to which one belongs, the personal name, and also sometimes an indication under which planetary constellation one was born.

### 5.2.1 The *Nama-Karma* in Hinduism

In Hinduism, the so called *nama-dheya* or *nama-karma* ceremony is celebrated on the tenth or twelfth day after birth. It is a great feast to which all relatives and friends are invited. Usually, the father will perform this ceremony and the mother does not appear, because she is believed to be unclean for one month. In this ceremony, the name is called out by the father with a loud voice for three times. The name generally should refer to the *jati* of the child's family in order to enable everyone who knows its name to know its origin.<sup>462</sup>

### 5.2.2 The Baptism in Andhra Christianity

The baptism is in Christianity the counterpart to the name-giving ceremony, since during baptism the name is publicly exclaimed for the first time. From the theological point of view, the baptism is the act in which a person is symbolically cleansed from his or her sin, and is declared a member of the Christian congregation. With the baptism, which is considered a sacrament in almost all denominations, the baptized person partakes in the sacrificial death of Jesus (the baptism symbolizes in the submersion under water that the old man dies and after that the new man, entirely cleansed, emerges) and becomes thus a member of the Christian community. The baptism is therefore by most churches understood as an act which cannot be repeated, but which is unique like the sacrificial death of Jesus is unique.

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practices followed in the villages and have no biblical basis, although in some cases biblical texts are applied as substantiation for those practices.

461. In southern areas of Andhra Pradesh it has also been observed among the *dasaris* that the mother is fed only with bread and water for the first three days.

462. P.H. Prabhu: *Hindu Social Organization*, p. 219f, and Dubois: *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, p. 156

There are generally two different types of baptism, the one being the so called child baptism and the other the adult baptism. The main difference is, as the terms already imply, that in the one case a child and in the other an adult is baptized. Even though there are a few differences in the way of baptism as well, the main difference lies mainly in the general understanding of the baptism. In the following sections it will be shown that the child baptism has a few parallels to the Hindu practice of giving a name to a child (*nama-karma*).

The baptism of children is common among most of the established churches.<sup>463</sup> However, the baptism of adults is not forbidden, and churches which have developed out of Indian missionary efforts often prefer the adult baptism. Not rare is also the baptism of a whole family.<sup>464</sup>

### 5.2.2.1 The Child Baptism

While the adult baptism takes place only after the person has expressed his faith in Jesus Christ and his will to become a Christian<sup>465</sup>, the child baptism takes place on the wish of the parents. It is common that children of Christian parents are baptized. Usually, the date of baptism will be chosen within one of the odd months after the birth, which is believed to be an auspicious period. This has its background in the common believe of the Hindu people.<sup>466</sup>

The main act of the child's baptism is the giving of a name during the sprinkling of water on the head of the child.

Among Andhra Christians, the name is often chosen by one of the grandparents of the child.<sup>467</sup> Parents usually don't call the child with its name until it is baptized, and they also won't tell others about their choice before the baptism, either because they were not told the name by their parents, which is the most stated reason, or because it is believed that the use of the name could harm the child before it is baptized. The name chosen always has a certain meaning, and often parents use it as an indication of their own expectations towards their child. Mostly, at least two names are given: one Indian name and one Christian name.<sup>468</sup> Often, parents then decide to call their child by the Indian name, which may be more

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463. The Baptist Churches accept and practise only the adult baptism

464. Due to the strength of the solidarity within a joint family, which extends also to religious issues, the decision to take baptism is commonly only taken if the entire family is willing to become baptized. This is normally the case, when the head of the family decides to become a Christian, while the decision to become a Christian of a female member of the family, or of one of the offspring, may lead to the expulsion of the one who is desirous to become a Christian. Cf. also the section 4.1.2.3 on page 102

465. Normally, before baptism, the ten commandments, the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer are taught to the aspirant; in the Lutheran Churches the teaching is usually based on Martin Luther's Small Catechism

466. See also section 5.6.2

467. Often, but not always, the mother of the child's mother will choose the name.

468. The Indian name generally is chosen from the wide range of names which do not relate to any of the Hindu gods or goddesses, e.g. *Priyakumar*, *Premakumar*, *Syamala*, *Shanti*, *Udayakumar* and so on. They often reflect the experiences which the parents made with the new-born baby. The Christian name mostly is taken from the bible, like *David*, *John*, *Paul*, but sometimes is also an indigenized form like *Yesudhas* (servant of Jesus) and others. Names of well known Christians are also chosen, like names of the missionaries who worked in that area, or famous evangelists (quite common in Andhra is e.g. the name *Wesley* or *John Wesley*).

meaningful to them. Sometimes, they continue to use the nickname which they used before the baptism took place, because they don't like the choice of their parents.<sup>469</sup>

The baptism ceremony is performed by the pastor or priest in the name of the triune God<sup>470</sup> during a common worship. Here, the name is called out loud, often for the first time, by the pastor. After the ceremony is over, the parents or the mother of the child will give a donation to the pastor as a kind of thank offering.

On the occasion of baptism, valuable presents are given to the child by the relatives and godparents<sup>471</sup> (even silver or gold ornaments). Most common presents are waist belts made of silver or golden rings, as well as a cradle. Like at the *nama-karma* ceremony, relatives and friends are invited for a great feast which follows the baptism.<sup>472</sup>

In some areas, even the laying of the child into the cradle for the first time is a special event accompanied by a prayer. This might reflect to some extent that there is a believe that even things like a cradle may have a spirit which is to be appeased by such a prayer. However, the prayer is not directed towards this spirit but to God, who shall grant protection, good health and prosperity to the child.

### 5.2.2.2 Adult Baptism

The adult baptism is commonly followed in the evangelical churches, which believe that only the one who is able and willing to confess his faith in Jesus should receive baptism.<sup>473</sup> Baptism in this context receives a stronger emphasis on the forgiveness of the previous sins. Thus, baptism is considered to be a purifying bath rather than the symbolic act which shall represent the acceptance of the baptized person by God. That is why often the adult's baptism is done by submerging the individual under the waters of a river, and not just by sprinkling water on the head of the person as it is commonly done at the child's baptism. There is no new name given to the baptized person, if he or she is a child of Christian parents who have already given a Christian name.

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469. In rural areas, elements of the *nama-karma* may be performed among Christians shortly after the birth. Then a regular Hindu name is given. If the relation to the village deity has not been entirely broken, which is often not the case among Christians in the first generation, they will give a name related to the deity. Luke and Carmen report that Christians even give thank offerings to the Hindu deity. (*op.cit.*, page 190-191) To which extent the worshipping of the village deity is still prevailing among the Christian community in the rural areas, could not be established firmly during the research work, but was also not witnessed. The existence of Hindu names referring to deities among Christians was, however, recorded, but was mainly due to the fact that the person came from a Hindu family and converted to Christianity only later.

470. The following words, generally in Telugu, are spoken at the time of baptism: *N.N., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and that of the Son, and that of the Holy Ghost.* (N.N. is the name of the child)

471. Godparents are friends or relatives of the parents who shall assist the parents in the religious education of the child. The practice to appoint godparents is not very old and has been brought by the missionaries to India. It is obvious that many Christian parents in Andhra Pradesh do not know about the reason for this practice, and they simply do not choose any godparent. A major duty of one of the godparents is to hold the child during the baptismal service and to carry it then towards the baptismal font.

472. An important difference to the Hindu ceremony however is, that the baptism takes place in the church, while the *nama-karma* ceremony takes place at the father's house.

473. In the Pentecostal Churches, however, there is also a ceremony in which a child will be dedicated to God 10 or 15 days after it is born. This dedication can not be compared to the baptism, because the baptism remains a pre-condition for the child to become a member of the congregation.

The adult baptism is also common in new developing Christian communities, where adults embrace Christianity. Here, like in the child baptism, a new name is given to the baptized person, which may be used from the time of baptism onwards instead of the Indian name. However, mostly these people will be called by their original Hindu name, even if it refers to a Hindu god.

### 5.3 Tonsuring children

The *chuda-karma* is one of the *samskaras* which have to be performed during the course of life according to the *dharmasastra*. In this ceremony, the hair of the child at the age of one or three years<sup>474</sup> is entirely removed. The purpose of this custom is not clearly stated, and special religious observations are not followed at the ceremony. P.H. Prabhu says that this custom may be “to celebrate the child’s introduction in the rules of bodily hygiene”.<sup>475</sup>

Christians also often remove the hair of their children at the age of one year and sometimes also at the age of three years. Reasons stated for this are either that it is an Indian custom (10%), or that the hair would grow better (70%), or just that it is done as a matter of hygiene (20%).<sup>476</sup>

### 5.4 Marriage in India

Marriage is one of the most important elements in the development of society. It means on the one side the creation of the smallest social entity, and on the other side, it means the connection of two larger social units.

In the various societies, the importance of marriage varies according to the emphasis laid on either of the two effects marriage has on the social order. If the emphasis lies on the formation of a new social entity, the opinion of the two concerned has higher relevance than the opinion of the parents. If the emphasis lies on the connection of two larger social groups, i.e. families, then usually the parents will arrange the marriages in order to avoid undesired connections.<sup>477</sup> In both cases, the other element does also exist and may influence the decisions taken.

In India, even today under the influence of urbanization and secularization, and the cinemas flooded with love films, the *arranged marriages* are still very common. I.e. the parents of the bride go, first by requesting a relative to take up this duty<sup>478</sup>, in search for a suitable match for their daughter, or (sometimes) vice versa. A suitable match normally means

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474. “or at any age according to the tradition of the family”; P.H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*, p. 220

475. *op. cit.*, p. 221. It does not surprise that, at Tirumala, where most of the pilgrims offer their hair to the Lord Venkateswara, the *chuda-karma* is often performed.

476. The percentage given in brackets is the percentage of total answers given to the question why the hair of the child is shaved off. On the question why this was done on the first birthday, all replies were that it was a common custom.

477. Here, the question of succession plays often a vital role. The property of the one family should not be inherited by a strange family.

478. Often, the duty is recognized by the relative without being asked to do it, and he approaches a family which seems suitable to him. If they are inclined to consider a proposal, the relative informs the girl’s parents, and they may enter into the negotiations.

a member of the same caste and the same educational level. Not seldom, the marriage is arranged between closely related families.<sup>479</sup> There is a strong feeling among Hindus that a marriage outside of their own caste will bring evil and bad luck to the family, besides the problem that the family property will not remain within the family. That is why inter-caste marriages are usually strongly objected by the parents and even more by the caste members.<sup>480</sup>

In case the family cannot find a match for their child within their own caste but outside their own clan (within which marriage usually is forbidden), they have to choose a match from within their own clan.

In Hinduism, marriage is considered to be the duty (*dharma*) of a person. However, an unmarried girl has more problems than an unmarried man. She would be treated as a burden to her parents in many cases, and it may be rumoured that she is a girl of loose character, in spite of lack of evidence.<sup>481</sup>

#### 5.4.1 The Hindu Way of Marriage in Andhra Pradesh

As already mentioned in the introductory note of this section, marriages are usually arranged by the parents of the children<sup>482</sup>. Normally, the boy's parents will go in search for a suitable spouse with the help of a relative.<sup>483</sup> It is not uncommon that boy and girl who are to marry even don't know each other until they are led together in the betrothal.<sup>484</sup>

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479. Cousin-marriages are not rare, although not desired, and take place because of the lack of a suitable partner in a more distant family. It happens that the blood-relationship causes deformations to the offspring of the new couple. Quite often the teeth are in disorder, growing straight forward or even across. Sometimes, children are born with 6 fingers at each hand or 6 toes at each foot. cf. on endogamy J.A. Fonseca, *Marriage in India in a Christian Perspective*, p. 119-120. Since the problem of endogamy and exogamy has been investigated and discussed at length in various publications, this is only discussed here to the extent which is necessary to pursue the scope of this study.

480. In March 1991, an incident occurred about 100 km westwards from New Delhi, in which a caste girl and two Harijan boys were hanged by their own fathers, following the sentence of the village *panchayat*. The girl and one of the boys desired to marry each other, and the other boy had helped them to flee from the village. But they returned, which was rewarded by the caste members, who had the saying in the *panchayat*, with the death sentence (according to INDIA TODAY, 30.4.91)

481. This rumour occurs because the only barrier to marry a girl, except the lack of a suitable match, is that she was involved in a love affair. If a girl can not be married, it may also happen that she is devoted to god's service as a *devadasi*, or some girl traders come forward with a marriage proposal to finally force the girl into prostitution. Cf. Joint Women's Programme (ed.), *Banhi. Prostitution With Religious Sanction*, p. 16-17

482. In this arrangement, the dowry is fixed after the astrological support for the alliance has been established by a Brahmin priest.

483. Generally, the parents of the boy won't meet the parents of the girl before the chances for fixing the marriage are clear. A suitable spouse must be of the same caste, of a similar economic status, well educated and of good conduct. Often, the consolidation and extension of the family property plays an important role in the search for a spouse. See also J.A. Fonseca, *Marriage in India in a Christian Perspective*, p. 116f

484. V.V. Prakasa Rao/V. Nandini Rao: *Marriage, the Family and Women in India*, p. 15. The prevalence of this custom of arranged marriages is viewed differently by the youth and especially in urban areas a change is desired, but the majority does still accept the choice of the parents as the best for themselves. In Andhra Pradesh the custom to arrange marriages is very much alive. The study of V.V. Prakasa Rao and V. Nandini Rao reveals that in 1972 between 40% and 55% of 182 questioned students in Hyderabad would prefer to make their own choice, but between 7% and 28% of the same students would probably

The betrothal is the ceremony of handing over the dowry, which had been fixed already before, to the groom's family. There is no basis for dowry in the Vedic literature or in the *smritis*<sup>485</sup>, and it is interesting to note in this context that a bride price (*sulka*) is "emphatically denounced" in the Hindu scriptures, because the girl should not be treated like a good that can be sold. There are also indications that, when the dowry practice came into existence, the dowry initially was some kind of compensation for the denial of legal inheritance and thus given to the bride and not to the groom's family. This intention, however, is no longer visible today.<sup>486</sup>

With the betrothal ceremony, the contract of marriage is actually accepted by both the parties. It is a public ceremony celebrated at the bridegroom's parents' house. The relatives and friends of the family who have been invited are also witnesses to this contract which is normally indissoluble after the ceremony. However, it appears that, if a more attractive offer has been made to the groom's parents, they may accept that offer and pay back the gifts which they have already received. The dissolution of a marriage contract generally "devalues" the girl and can make it impossible to marry her.

The matrimonial ceremony<sup>487</sup> which is also called with the Sanskrit term *vivaha* takes place either at a temple or at the home of the bride's family or in a marriage hall, depending on the status and wealth of the families involved.<sup>488</sup> A *brahmin* will generally solemnize marriages of the *dvijas*, but he would normally not preside over a marriage of a *sudra* or outcaste family. For these families, *pujaris*<sup>489</sup> would preside, or a very simple ceremony without any religious authority is performed by the elders of the community.<sup>490</sup>

The ritual itself takes place in front of the sacred fire, and begins with the *kanya dana*. Here the bride's father declares that "he is willing to offer his daughter as a *dana*, a bridal gift, accompanied by *dakshina*, a dowry."<sup>491</sup> Then, under the recitation of *mantras* from the *vivaha sukta*, oblations are offered to the fire.

The *vivaha homa* is then offered by the groom under the assistance of the bride, symbolizing their common responsibility in the performance of religious rites.

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leave the matter to their parents and only 2% to 10% of all questioned students believed that they would have an ultimate power in choosing their spouse. (*op.cit.*, p. 22-30).

485. J.A. Fonseca, *Marriage in India...*, p. 124. Cf. P.H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*, p. 179. The dowry has nowadays "the effect of status-raising through the males, in exchange for the goods provided by the female." (J.A. Fonseca, *ibid.*)

486. J.A. Fonseca, *ibid.*, p. 124f. See also page 107

487. In this context only the major parts of the proper Hindu ceremony can be described. This limitation is necessary because there are many differences with regard to details in the ceremony, and for the purpose of comparison only the common elements of the ceremony are important.

488. The expenses are normally borne by the bride's family.

489. In case of the Mala community these would be the *dasarīs*

490. In this case, the major part of the ceremony is the garlanding of each other or the tying of the *tali* in the presence of the public, and forms the official marriage act. Often, some rituals are observed which are according to local customs and also some elements of the *brahmanical* ritual are copied.

491. J.A. Fonseca, *Marriage in India...*, p.135. A more detailed description of the ceremonies performed during the *vivaha* is found in P.H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*, p. 163-173. The rites are prescribed in the *Grihyasutras* with variations, depending on the religious background of those performing the rites



Now, in the *panigrahana*, the groom takes the bride's hand<sup>492</sup>, often under assistance by her father, who places the hand of his daughter into the hand of his son-in-law. Then, the hands are tied together to symbolize the indissoluble union between the couple. More offerings follow under the recitation of *mantras*, including the *laja homa* which is offered by the bride to the gods *Aryaman*, *Varuma* and *Pushan* through *Agni*, which shall release her from the bonds by which she was bound to them.

Then, the *tali*<sup>493</sup> is tied by the bridegroom around the neck of the bride with three knots. During this act, the musicians will play as loud as possible, in order to drive away any evil spirit who still might have been present.<sup>494</sup>

After this, the couple will walk three times around the sacrificial fire, the groom reciting the following *mantra*:

This I am  
That art thou;  
–That indeed, art thou,  
This, yea, this I am.  
I the heaven,  
Thou, the earth;  
I the *saman*<sup>495</sup>,  
Thou, then, the *rik*<sup>496</sup>,  
Let us marry,  
Let us marry here.  
Let us join together,  
And beget our little ones.  
Loving each other,  
Desirous of moral splendour (or spotless career),  
With genial minds and hearts,  
Thus, yea thus,  
May we live  
Through a hundred autumns.<sup>497</sup>

The last, sociologically most important part of the marriage in Hinduism is the taking of seven steps (*saptapadi*) in northerly direction, which would symbolize the bride leaving her family's home and joining the family of her husband. During this, a *mantra* is recited by the

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492. This is generally the first physical contact and has thus some significance: depending on how the groom takes the hand of the bride, he expresses also which gender he desires for his children: if he holds only the thumb, he desires male offspring; if he holds only the fingers without the thumb, he desires female children; if he holds her entire hand, he desires both, female and male offspring. cf. P.H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social...*, footnote 88 on page 165

493. the *tali* is mostly a piece of gold in the size of a one rupee coin. It is fixed at a yellow thread, which is specially made for the purpose of marriage. See also figure 5.1. Often, the Hindu woman refers to her husband as to her *tali*, which indicates that the *tali* shall represent the husband to the wife when he is not physically with her. During the research work, women who were asked why they would not do a certain thing often showed their *tali* as a reply: her husband wouldn't allow.

494. The musical band is an indispensable part of the marriages in South India and accompanies the marriage ceremony uninterruptedly from its beginning until the tying of the *tali*, and even beyond.

495. *saman* means music, song or rhythm

496. *rik* means poetry or verse

497. quoted from P.H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*, p. 166f

bridegroom which interprets the seven steps as the life of marriage. With this ceremony, the marriage is completed and legally valid.<sup>498</sup>

After this, the couple will move to the bridegroom's house, accompanied with the nuptial fire and by certain rituals. This procession is also taken as the public announcement of the marriage. Then the groom leads her into his or his parents' house where her parents-in-law welcome her.

The nuptial fire is established at a proper place, and the newly wed couple offers the first oblation there. For the next three nights, the couple shall restrain from sexual intercourse (i.e. to observe *brahmacharya*) and eat together only food without salt. They shall sleep on the floor and pay due respect to the relatives.<sup>499</sup>

**Figure 5.1:** Christian and Hindu Talis Commonly Used in Andhra Pradesh

## 5.4.2 The Christian Way of Marriage in Andhra Pradesh

Christian Marriage, which is also called *vivahamu* among the Telugu Christians, has taken up many elements, mainly related to the social aspects, which are common among the Hindus. The arranged marriage is commonplace, while love marriages are as rare as in the Hindu community. Parents look for a suitable match<sup>500</sup> with regard to education rather than social status.<sup>501</sup> Dowry is not necessarily demanded, but generally the parents of the girl will have to pay the marriage expenses, which include valuable gifts to the future in-laws of the

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498. The understanding in this ceremony is that the bride is actually handed over by the gods to the bridegroom. The bride has been first the wife of three gods, and the fourth in the line is her human husband.

499. This period of continence is viewed differently by the authorities, and can be even longer. The purpose is not purely ascetic, as the couple is advised to enjoy each other and to enjoy music and entertainment.

500. Also among Christians, this task is often fulfilled by a relative and not by the parents.

501. Since education and profession of a person in India does very much depend on one's social status, this does not mean that inter caste marriages were normal among Christians, but they certainly occur. On the other hand, there are numerous reports where a Christian father refuses to marry his daughter to a boy of a lower subcaste.

girl. In families of higher education, these gifts are often viewed as status symbols, and thus, because the parents of the girl do not want to appear stingy, these so called “gifts” usually overburden the girl’s parents with debts.

The gifts are presented to the boy’s parents at the betrothal, when often bride and bridegroom meet for the first time. Here, the pastor will ask the bride and the groom if they have any objection against the marriage, and only if this is not the case<sup>502</sup>, the betrothal can continue with the promise made by the parents of the bride that they are willing and ready to give away their daughter to the family of the bridegroom.

A few days later (or on the following day, depending on the convenience of the relatives), the marriage will take place. Often, the time chosen for the solemnization is clearly fixed<sup>503</sup>, and in order to stay within the auspicious time, the order of the marriage service is often changed.<sup>504</sup>

Three days before the marriage, the couple is prepared for the marriage by a certain custom (*nalugu*) at which only the relatives participate and which is done at the respective homes of the bride and the bridegroom. There, the bride/groom is placed on a stool which has been put down in the frame of a chalk painting. His/her feet rest in a steel bowl. Then, he/she is smeared by the mother with a paste made of sandalwood and Turmeric powder on the arms, the feet and the face, and finally, after having put some oil on his/her head, rice is sprinkled over his/her head. This is then symbolically repeated by all members of the family. This ceremony turns out to be a joyful event, but is started with a prayer and singing of hymns.

Like in the Hindu marriage, the couple brings some gifts for the pastor, normally rice with a coconut, bananas and betel leaves<sup>505</sup>, on a steel tray. On top of the plate on which these things are handed over to the pastor, the *tali* is laid. Customs vary very much in the different regions, but common is that the marriage act is actually performed when the *tali* is tied around the neck of the bride by the bridegroom. In many churches, yellow rice (rice mixed with Turmeric powder) is thrown over the couple during this act, and the congregation sings loudly a special marriage hymn. Following this, the pastor winds his stole around the joint hands of

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502. Though this act shows some respect towards the individual personality of the bride and the bridegroom, it can generally be anticipated that the reply won’t be negative, because the subordination of the children under the parents’ wish is still a matter of course.

503. It happens, especially in rural areas, but also in towns, that the Christian parents of the bride and bridegroom consult a *brahmin* astrologer or the *pujari* in order to find out that both match and when is the best time to perform the marriage. Generally, this time will be in the early morning hours. One major reason given for finding out the auspicious time is, that the Hindu neighbours would be angry if they would marry at an inauspicious time, and would make them responsible for any calamity. Cf. also P.Y. Luke/J.B. Carmen, *op.cit.* p. 192

504. Usually, the solemnization takes place after the sermon (in the Lutheran churches). In the CSI, the solemnization takes place before the sermon, or no sermon at all is given. Since the sermon often takes quite long (about half an hour or even more), parents press the pastor, when the service started late, to do the solemnization first and then the sermon. One informant told that this change in the order of service is only because the attendants want to witness the solemnization at the earliest, but this statement does not satisfy since the order of the marriage service has also doctrinal reasons which are disregarded due to the anticipation of the solemnization. During the field work, one of the marriages witnessed took place in a village near Puttur in the Chittoor district. There, the marriage was solemnized by an unlicensed evangelist (according to the Christian Marriage Act, Christian marriage must be solemnized by a pastor who has been licensed by the Indian government), because the pastor who had been called for the marriage was not there in time due to a break down. People believed that the marriage would be cursed, if it would not have been solemnized during the auspicious time. When the pastor arrived, he accepted the report of the evangelist and registered the marriage without performing the solemnization anew.

505. This custom derives from the practice to give the priest who is from a higher caste his food separately, since he could not be expected to eat together with the members of the lower castes

the couple, announces that the marriage is now legalized and prays for the couple by laying his hand on their joint hands.

In the rural areas, the marriages among Christians often take place following completely the traditional customs. The solemnization, however, should be performed by a licensed pastor. But it can be assumed that a number of marriages take place without the knowledge of the pastor, especially when the rules and regulations, as e.g. the minimum age, are not met with by the parties.<sup>506</sup> This is especially likely among those who have become Christians but never received proper education in the Christian faith and doctrines, and who are economically backward.

In the evangelical churches, the position of women conforms more or less to the Pauline concept, as shown above on page 109. The practice of *dowry* is not common, but “gifts of love” are presented to the bridegroom (and *vice versa*). Marriages are arranged according to the will of god, which is revealed to a member of the congregation, who then talks to the concerned persons.<sup>507</sup> Both, man and woman, will then pray separately and await a signal from God that it is really his will to marry the other. Only if the proposal is confirmed to both of them by God, they will enter into marriage.

## 5.5 Rites Related to the Death of a Person

### 5.5.1 Hindu Rites Related to Death

Before a Hindu dies, the relatives put water (possibly from the Ganges) into the dying person’s mouth, which is both, a physical as well as a spiritual relief. Vedic *mantras* are recited by the priest who is called, and after the death of the person, which is certified by the priest, the body is washed, anointed, and dressed anew.<sup>508</sup>

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506. see Luke/Carmen, *op.cit.*, p. 192ff. There a distinction is made with regard to Christian marriages in rural areas between four different degrees of acceptance of traditional customs:

1. The caste leader conducts the entire ceremony, following traditional rules, without the knowledge of the church authorities.
2. The caste leader conducts the marriage according to traditional rules, but the evangelist prays for the couple before or after the wedding.
3. The evangelist takes part in the entire ceremony, which includes only a few traditional customs, and his solemnization is the major part of the marriage
4. There are no non-Christian rites in the marriage, but only the prayers and solemnization performed by the evangelist.

In all cases, there is no pastor involved but only the evangelist who serves the particular village. He will then also register the marriage, since he is licensed to solemnize and to register the marriage. This is the case only in the CSI. In other churches, where there are no licensed evangelists, if the marriage shall be registered, it has to be performed by a pastor. The number of unregistered Christian marriages which follow one of the first two patterns is not known, but estimated as at least 50%.

507. The concerned persons can be either the parents of the boy and girl, or the boy and girl themselves, or both.

508. K. Kramer, *The Sacred Art of Dying*, p. 38f

Then<sup>509</sup> the body, decorated with flowers and clad in a white blanket, is taken on a stretcher in a procession to the funeral ground. On the way of the procession, flowers are thrown into the air and on the dead body, and crackers are exploded in front of the procession, in order to chase away or to distract the evil spirits who could do harm to the spirit of the deceased. Also, drums are beaten and two or three men dance in front of the procession.

Then the body is cremated on the pyre which is lit by the eldest son or another male relative. Hindus believe that the *atman* can be best released by burning the dead body, because it would remain attached to the body as long as it is physically existing. Also, the belief that Agni may carry the soul straight into heaven is present.

The ashes are taken home and later under additional ceremonies disposed of at a sacred place or into a sacred river.

After ten days, the *sapindi karana*, a rite to appease the spirit of the deceased and to speed up his release from the *karma samsara*, is performed, usually by the eldest son. During this ceremony, food and water is offered to the spirit of the deceased and then to *Yama* and to the crows. If the crows come immediately to pick up the food, it is considered an auspicious sign. Afterwards, the mourners remove their hair, take bath, put on new garments and clean the house, because the period of impurity is over.<sup>510</sup>

A widow is supposed not to wear glass bangles (they are broken either on the day of the death of her husband, as a sign of grieve, or by other women of the community on the ninth day in a small ceremony), to remove the *tali*, not to wear flowers in her hair and to dress herself in white clothes.<sup>511</sup> To dress in a white *sari* is nowadays only followed by the members of the higher castes, and among them this obligation is no longer observed strictly. However, it is still followed by most widows that they do not wear flowers in their hair and glass bangles on the arms, and also that they remove the *tali* and other signs of marriage. The widow is expected not to appear on public, unless it is unavoidable.

### 5.5.2 Rites Related to Death in Andhra Christianity

Generally speaking, the corps of a dead person in Indian Christianity will not be burned, but buried.<sup>512</sup>

The burial of a person will take place immediately after his or her demise, as soon as the relatives have arrived and the coffin is ready. The corps, which had been washed and dressed anew, is placed in the coffin under a word of prayer and then carried to the church, where the coffin is left open. The relatives and close friends will then garland the dead person in the coffin, and the burial service will be held while the coffin is still open. After the service, which consists of hymns, prayers and a sermon which shall comfort the bereaved, the coffin is

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509. The following description is according to the observations made by the author during the field work

510. T. Pereira, *Towards an Indian Christian Funeral Rite*, p. 159

511. This was required when the belief developed that the encounter with a widow on the beginning of a major undertaking was inauspicious. See also page 106

512. It has been observed that it is quite important for many people that they are not burnt, but buried. In a village in Khammam district, a widow who had become a Christian only recently was willing to hand over her small piece of land to the church under the condition that it will be used for a burial ground and that she will be buried and not burnt, after her death. It happened in another village in the same district, that a boy, who had been killed by a bullock cart and whose parents had become Christians only recently (but the boy was not yet baptized), was buried after a heavy fight between the parents and the Hindu community who demanded the boy to be burnt according to Hindu customs.

closed<sup>513</sup> and carried in a procession under singing hymns to the usually nearby burial ground. There, at the open grave, the burial service is finished with prayers and hymns and the coffin lowered into the grave. Then the mourning family and those who attended the service will disperse.

After the death of a person, a prayer meeting is held generally within ten days, but if possible it will be the fifth or the ninth day after the death.<sup>514</sup> During that prayer meeting, which is generally held in the evening time after sunset, the life of the deceased person is remembered and prayers are held. Sometimes, a picture of the deceased is already unveiled at this prayer meeting.<sup>515</sup> Afterwards, those who have gathered are invited for a dinner.

In case of the death of a married man whose wife is still alive, the widow is generally visited by other women of the congregation after nine or eleven days, but before the prayer meeting takes place. Then her *tali*, the silver rings at the second toes and glass bangles as well as flowers will be taken from her, and in a few cases she will also be dressed with a white sari as the sign of her widowhood.<sup>516</sup> The widow is considered unclean at least until the day when she has taken off the signs of a married woman, and she must not leave the house for this period.

Normally, one year after the demise, i.e. on the first death anniversary, the close relatives will visit the burial place in the morning and offer flowers, light a candle and place some food close to the grave.<sup>517</sup> It is also sometimes the occasion for a dedication of an epitaph. In the evening, a prayer meeting will be arranged by the relatives, in which a picture of the deceased is unveiled and garlanded.<sup>518</sup> The picture thus unveiled is later regularly, or at least yearly on the occasion of the death anniversary and of the birthday, garlanded by the close relatives, and it finds a place central in the house.

In rural areas, it appears among the Christians that food is set aside for the deceased and prayers for the soul are held regularly at least for one year.

The death-anniversaries are observed normally at least among the close relatives with a small ceremony.

## 5.6 The Day-to-Day Life in Popular Hinduism in Andhra Pradesh

In the day-to-day life of the people in Andhra Pradesh, many traditions which have been brought upon them mingle together. Their origin is not always clear, and often they appear meaningless to those who don't know them, while those who practise them fear bad consequences if they don't continue to follow them. With the enlightenment, many such

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513. The lid of the coffin is normally decorated with flowers

514. Sometimes, practical considerations play an important role, e.g. when the relatives have come from far for the burial and cannot be kept waiting for the prayer meeting for too long.

515. If this is not done at this occasion, it will be done on the first death anniversary.

516. One of the interviewed pastors said that he would encourage the widow to take off the ornaments immediately after the demise of her husband, since she were a widow right from the time of her husband's death. With no word did he question the practice of marking a woman as widow in such a way. See also the section on page 129. The white dress for Christian widows is not so common.

517. Such a ritual is also performed ten days after the death, in rural areas

518. Sometimes, this takes already place during the prayer meeting which is held a few days after the burial

traditions have been done away with in the western countries. In India, age old traditions are still alive especially in the rural areas, where secularism and industrialization have not yet reached. In this section, a few of those traditions which are commonly followed among the people in Andhra Pradesh are described.

### 5.6.1 Spirits

In popular Hinduism<sup>519</sup>, especially in the rural areas, the belief in spirits is quite common and the belief in evil spirits supersedes the believe in good spirits.

Demons may take possession of a person<sup>520</sup> or bring disease over someone or over the cattle. They are also responsible for the destruction of the crops. There is the belief that humans who did not die under normal circumstances, i.e. due to high age, would continue to live among the people as a spirit. Depending on his or her character during the lifetime and on the type of death which the person suffered, certain characteristics will be attributed to the spirit.

Different measures are taken to keep the evil spirits away from the place where one stays and works. The most obvious measure to prevent spirits from entering one's house is the painting of symmetric lines which are crossing each other many times and do have neither a beginning nor an end.<sup>521</sup> When coming to these lines, the evil spirit is believed to be confused and unable to find the way into the house. This type of protection against evil spirits is not restricted to rural areas, but found also in the towns. An other measure is, e.g., the presence of margosa leaves, which shall repulse the evil spirits.

#### 5.6.1.1 Village Deities

As it is believed that a village is always surrounded by evil spirits who want "to inflict diseases and misfortunes of all kinds on the unhappy villagers"<sup>522</sup>, another common measure to keep away the evil spirits is the worship of the village deity<sup>523</sup>, who is to protect the village

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519. When we talk about popular Hinduism, the religious practices and beliefs on the grassroot-level are meant. Often these practices do not originate from the Vedic religion, but were common before the Aryans arrived in South India. Most of these religious cults are therefore also called "Dravidian Cults" according to the people who are the original inhabitants of South India. The Dravidian cults have been influenced by the Brahmanic tradition to some extent, but, mainly in the rural areas, many non-Brahmanical elements are still found.

520. It is believed that children and women are especially susceptible to the influence of evil spirits

521. These paintings are done by the housewives and appear like small pieces of art.

522. H. Whitehead, *Village Gods of South India*, p. 42

523. A village deity is also called *grama devata*. Telugu names would be *uramma* or *peddamma*. However, a long list of personal names could be given to here, which would reflect that there is no uniformity regarding the name. It occurs that two villages, only a few kilometres apart from each other, would not recognize the name of the deity of the other village. The deity is strongly connected to the day-to-day life of the farming inhabitants of the village, thus being actually counterparts to the gods of Vedic Hinduism, who are strongly connected to the warrior caste, the *kshatriyas*. While the gods Vishnu and Shiva are related to the extensive philosophical reflections represented in the *Brahmanas*, the *Upanishads* and the following religious Scriptures, the *grama devata* is related only to the forces directly experienced by the village inhabitants, i.e. illness or other natural calamities. They are often also responsible for successful farming and fertility, and therefore the gender of the deity is generally female. The deity does not dwell in a big temple, but in a very small enclosure and is represented only by a few stones. Her character is generally benevolent in contrast to the *shaktis* who live outside the village. H. Whitehead, *The Village Gods of South India*, p. 14-28

against the influence of evil spirits and natural disasters. However, if the worship, which often is in form of animal sacrifices<sup>524</sup> and performed only by *pujaris*, who do not come from the caste of the *brahmins*, is neglected by the people, the village goddess herself may cause destruction to the villagers, beside her being ignorant towards the entering of the evil spirits and the devastation caused by them.<sup>525</sup>

In Andhra Pradesh, *Potu-Raju* is worshipped as the brother or husband of the village goddess in his function as the night watchman of the village. He is represented only by a little stone or/and a wooden stake.<sup>526</sup>

There is no uniform calendar of festivals or worships, because the village deity is mostly addressed only when there is some danger approaching the village. Public festivals are organized always when an epidemic breaks out.

In addition to this, individuals or families would approach the village deity for help in certain matters (e.g. to get a male child) and take a vow which they would fulfil if the deity grants what they desire.

#### 5.6.1.2 The Evil Eye

In all walks of life in Andhra Pradesh, the belief in the *evil eye* is strongly prevailing and causes different preventive measures. Particularly “children are supposed to be highly susceptible to the influence of the evil-eye”<sup>527</sup>, and very often they are “decorated” with a large black spot on the cheek to distract the *evil-eye* from the child’s eyes in order to avoid blindness caused by it. Fields are surrounded with pumpkins on which ugly faces are painted, and the same is seen at construction sites and houses. During the erection of a new house, usually on top of it there is a straw puppet fixed in order to distract the *evil-eye*.

### **5.6.2 Auspicious Times**

In Hinduism, certain times are referred to as auspicious, while others are deemed to be inauspicious. To decide which times belong to the auspicious times, certain rules have been laid down according to the cosmic order.<sup>528</sup> In addition, if one wants to take up a new venture, he will consult a *brahmin* who is well versed in reading the horoscope, according to which the *brahmin* will tell the individual’s auspicious times, and at which time it is best to start what was intended.

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524. Nowadays, the animal sacrifice is not done so often, and *puja* to the village deity includes sacrifices of the fruits of the agricultural labour as some sort of thanksgiving. Cf. the section about Dravidian sacrifices on page 138

525. These evil spirits are also worshipped, but outside the village. They are believed to be the rivals of the village deity, seeking to cause harm to the village out of envy or jealousy. They are commonly called *shakti* and bear sometimes the name of the wife of Vishnu or Shiva. (R.J. Sampath, *The Dravidian Cults in the Light of the Christian Gospel*, p. 8)

526. It is important to note that it is not believed that the stones or other material used as objects of worship are living objects, but they are only the abode of the spirit for the time of worship. The spirit itself is formless and cannot be disposed of by removing the stones or image which were seemingly the object of worship.

527. P.V. Jagadisa Ayyar, *South Indian Customs*, p. 4

528. see also the section 6.4 beginning on page 195, and particularly page 196



The accuracy with which the auspicious and inauspicious times are defined, and the faithfulness with which many Hindus plan their daily work according to these times, are certainly unmatched in the world.<sup>529</sup>

### 5.6.3 Omens and Talismans

A Hindu normally looks out for a good omen (*sakunam*) when he is going to start a journey or a new business or any other undertaking which he desires to come out successfully. If a certain bird's cry is heard, it is interpreted accordingly either as a good or as a bad omen, depending on the particular situation.<sup>530</sup> While the *sight* of certain animals is a good omen, their *cry* may be a bad omen (and *vice versa*). Even the direction, from where they pass one's path, is interpreted as being auspicious or inauspicious.<sup>531</sup>

Hindus normally wear some kind of a talisman, i.e. a small copper coin with a picture of the preferred god or goddess imprinted, or a small stick made of special material, or some other items.<sup>532</sup> The talisman generally has been blessed before by the priest, and is sometimes made of special material. It shall protect the person who wears it from evil influences, like the evil eye, and evil spirits.

### 5.6.4 Vows

In popular Hinduism and as an effect of the doctrine of the *bhakti marga*, vows have become very important. In case of calamities or certain desires, the devotee turns to his god and takes the vow to perform a certain ritual or to make a certain offering, if the god would grant him the required favour. To remind oneself of the vow, a (usually black) thread with a small image imprinted on a copper coin (like the talismans) is tied around one's wrist. It is believed that, if the vow is not fulfilled, the God will punish the devotee severely.<sup>533</sup>

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529. A striking example is the indication of the time of a marriage on the invitation. There, not the beginning of the marriage ceremony, but the time during which the solemnization shall take place, i.e. the auspicious time, is mentioned. Often, this is only a span of half an hour. Certain days of the week are excluded for the purpose of travelling by many Hindus, because they are believed to be inauspicious. Some months are generally considered inauspicious, and no major undertakings will be started during these months. Cf. for instance M. Krishnamachariar, *Hindu Religion*, p. 87, and P.V. Jagadisa Ayyar, *South Indian Customs*, particularly p. 168-169

530. The chirping of a lizard, for instance, is awaited before the discussion about a marriage alliance can begin.

531. P.V. Jagadisa Ayyar, *South Indian Customs*, p. 95-99

532. Women wear the talisman usually together with their *tali* at the same chain or thread. The talisman is also sometimes tied around the upper arm. Normally, the talisman is worn at a thread around the neck.

533. For instance the temple on Tirumala near Tirupati attracts thousands of people, who want to take a vow, every day, because it is believed that Lord Venkateswara would grant any favour that one wishes. When the desire has been fulfilled, or the help has been granted, the person will return to Tirumala and get his head shaved completely as a fulfilment of his/her vow.

## 5.7 The Day-to-Day Life in Andhra Christianity

For all Christians in the rural areas, it can be said that they follow the practices and customs which they observed as Hindus, except for *pujas* at the Hindu temple. Also the understanding of religious acts may not change due to the lack of proper education in the Christian doctrines, although the God they worship is now Jesus Christ. Thus, for instance, it occurs that people have a painting of Jesus in their homes which they garland and worship with incense sticks in the same manner as Hindus do with the pictures of their gods. The presence of the picture guarantees the presence of Christ himself within the house.<sup>534</sup> The presence of the Bible as a Holy Book (*parasuddha grandhamu*) is believed to help to overcome sickness and diseases.

### 5.7.1 Spirits

At least with regard to the children, it seems that Christians in Andhra Pradesh do not want to take the risk of them being harmed by the *evil-eye*. Among them it is quite common that children below one year of age carry the black spot on one cheek, which shall distract the evil eye. In villages, it appears also sometimes that Christian houses are decorated with pumpkins or earthen vessels on which an ugly looking face is painted, which shall also distract the evil eye. The geometric paintings in front of the house, used to confuse the evil spirits, are often refreshed daily.

The belief in the existence of evil spirits is very strong among the Christian villagers. Sometimes, such spirits take also possession either of women or children, who fall into a trance, their body shaking or crying aloud during the common worship. While the foreign missionaries, who had no experience with such phenomena, tried to explain them away, now the Indian pastors often deal with them in the same way like the Hindu priests do: they attempt to drive the spirit away with constant prayers.<sup>535</sup> The belief that sickness is caused by a spirit rather than a virus or other physical causes, is also very common among the Christians in the village areas. They often request the pastor to bless some oil which is kept like a medicine for the time of disease.<sup>536</sup>

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534. Biblical doctrine forbids to make an image of God (Ex 20,4; Rom 1,23) and expects the Christians to worship God "in Spirit and in truth" (John 4,24)

535. This is the only means to deal with the spirits used by the pastors in Andhra Christianity. There are no special medicines or spells involved. That is also why many village Christians, if the prayer is not successful, visit the Hindu priest, who may have more means at hand to deal with the spirit. It seems that, among the educated Christians, the encounter with such spirits is viewed as a disturbance, which does not fit into the Christian faith. It belongs to the era of polytheism, from which one has turned away when he became a Christian. However, the New Testament does not deny the existence of spirits, but shows the power of Christ overcoming the power of the spirits. Thus, who believes in Christ is protected against spirits through Christ. Because of the several reports about the exorcism of spirits in the New Testament, the evangelical churches generally accept the existence of evil spirits and drive them away with prayer.

536. If the pastor or evangelist, who has to take care of the village, does refuse to do so, which might happen sometimes, then they will go to a so called evangelist who travels from village to village and sells oil blessed by him. Such evangelists also come often regularly to certain places for some time (usually as long as the faith of the people in his healing power exists), where the sick people are brought and prayed for. On the usage of oil, see also footnote 542 on page 136.

## 5.7.2 The Importance and Meaning of Prayer

The prayer plays an important role in the day-to-day life of the Christians in Andhra Pradesh. Most events which occur in the day-to-day life are often preceded by a prayer. Food is not taken before having prayed and thanked for, and a journey never is started without a prayer for protection. Also events which have a technical nature will be “sanctioned” with prayers and blessings. Building a house, taking a new vehicle into use as well as digging a bore-well for water are started with a prayer. The day-to-day life is a spiritual experience, and any action or event is interpreted spiritually. To some major occasions, the pastor or evangelist is invited to perform the required prayer.

The ritual prayer has often replaced the minor rites which were performed at certain events before the conversion to Christianity. E.g. during pregnancy, the rites performed among the Hindus to obtain a male child are replaced by a prayer meeting during which it is prayed for the protection of the child and the mother, and for a safe delivery. The desire for a male child is, especially among educated Christians, suppressed or even entirely given up. The construction of a house includes certain ritual prayers as replacement of the rites which are commonly followed among the Hindu population.<sup>537</sup>

It occurs also that, especially in rural areas, the prayer is believed to have some magical powers<sup>538</sup>, if the person who prays is blessed by God and full of devotion. The quality of a prayer is believed to be higher when it is long, intensive and emotional. The prayer of a pastor is generally believed to be of a higher efficiency than the prayer of a lay man. Thus, if a pastor is not available, village Christians do, if need arises, also go to the village priest, who performs the appropriate Hindu rites and recites the *mantras*, which shall invoke the help of the respective deity.

Since women are often regarded the custodians of religious house and family observances, their piety and devotion plays a vital role for the family life, and women with the reputation of being a sincere *bhakta*, are also called in matters which concern only women.<sup>539</sup>

Sickness, which is experienced either as a punishment by God or as the influence of an evil spirit, is dealt with accordingly. If it is understood as a punishment from God, prayers are held and offerings given in order to appease God’s anger. If it is believed to be the influence of an evil spirit, the Bible and a cross are usually placed close to the sick person in order to frighten the evil spirit away.<sup>540</sup> Educated Christians will go to the physician in order to cure the disease, beside the measures they have taken on the religious side. If these measures are

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537. For instance, when the frame of the door is fixed, the Hindus will call a priest to perform a small *puja* which shall protect the house against the entrance of evil spirits. Among the Christians in Andhra Pradesh, a prayer is held at this occasion for the protection of the construction.

538. Since the outcastes are not authorized to perform any act of penance for their own liberation, but are made to rely on the help of a priest, they developed the belief that the priest would have the power to release them from the influence of evil spirits and other forces by means of *mantras* which he uses during the *puja*. The Christians, who mostly come from this background, believe that a “properly performed” prayer has a similar power like the *mantra* (see also section 2.1.7 on the *tantra* system). But unlike the *mantra*, the prayer need not to be in a prescribed form.

539. The development and strength of the women *samajs* among the Christian communities (see also section 4.2.3 on page 110) is a sign of the continuation of the spiritual duties of women among Indian Christianity

540. Among educated families, the former interpretation will normally be accepted, while mainly in village areas, any disease is viewed as the result of an evil spirit’s influence. Often, both interpretations mingle together.

not successful, help will be sought from a Christian who is well versed in the Ayurvedic doctrines.<sup>541</sup>

### 5.7.3 Auspicious Times, Omens and Talismans

Instead of the Hindu talismans, the cross is commonly used and is given similar importance as the talisman among the Hindus. Thus, people request the pastor to bless the cross, before it is put around the neck of a child. Women wear the cross along with their *tali* at the same cord or chain.<sup>542</sup> A cross is also often painted in red colour over the entrance of a house.<sup>543</sup>

It appears that omens are sometimes followed. Mainly in the village areas, Christians will look for such omens, as their Hindu fellows do. Auspicious times are observed at least with regard to major events, like marriage. This is the case in both, villages and towns, but in towns the practice to observe auspicious times slowly disappears.

### 5.7.4 Vows

The taking of vows is also common among the Christian community and is done irrespective of the economic and social background.<sup>544</sup> Vows are taken by Christians in order to get a boon granted from God. Unlike the Hindus, Christians won't tie a thread round their wrist, but use other methods to remind themselves of the vow which they had taken.

## 5.8 Worship

Worship, in each religion, is the way to establish contact between the worshipper and God, between the material and the transcendental world. There are numerous ways of worship in Hinduism, according to the various schools. In Christianity, the worship's highest significance lies in the experience of community with each other and with God. There is a certain uniformity with the Christian worship in all denominations.

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541. This is rarely the case and found only when a Christian family is there from a *brahmin* background.

542. There is in some areas also the practice to use oil as a medium of blessing and protection, maybe because this is occasionally mentioned in the bible as an element which is used when a sick person is prayed for (James 5,13-15). The oil is taken to the pastor and he is requested to anoint the person with the same oil, or to say a beneficial prayer over the oil so that it can be used at home.

543. see also Luke/Carmen, *Village Christians...*, p. 184

544. For instance, a pastor in a small town in South Andhra Pradesh said that he had taken a vow that, if his first child was a son, he would "dedicate him for God's service", which means that his son (his first-born child is a son) will become a pastor.

### 5.8.1 The Hindu Way of Worship

In Hinduism, the way to salvation is called *marga*, which means “way” or “path”. There are the following *margas*<sup>545</sup> observed among Hindus:

<i>yoga marga</i>	leads to salvation by controlling the body with physical exercises
<i>jnana marga</i>	leads to salvation by seeking the knowledge of the ultimate reality and by consciousness-raising of the presence of the ultimate being within oneself and within the world
<i>karma marga</i>	leads to salvation by appropriate actions, which are determined by one’s <i>dharma</i>
<i>bhakti marga</i>	leads to salvation by expressing love and affection towards God, e.g. through <i>puja</i> , affection, devotion and similar means

Thus, worship has no uniform appearance in Hinduism, but is quite diverse. There are *yogis* who have learnt through *yoga marga* the complete control of their body, thus experiencing the presence of the ultimate. There are *sannyasis*, who by meditation have gained *jnana* and thus unity with God, and are now completely free from any desire.

But for the most Hindus in Andhra Pradesh, either *karma marga* or *bhakti marga* which are described more detailed in the section 6.2.1.2 from page 179 onwards, are preferred and commonly followed. In these, the temple worship plays a vital role, but does not provide the only means to gain salvation. In this section, the temple worship together with a few other practices which are followed by the majority of the Hindu devotees are described.

Hinduism, strictly speaking, is an individualistic religion which aims at the salvation of the individual rather than the salvation of all mankind or, even more, the whole world. Although there are myths and believes among the different sects that the particular God would one day restore the original, i.e. divine nature of *all* beings, generally salvation is sought only by individual means which are manifold.<sup>546</sup> Even though it is often stated that Hinduism has social elements in it, these have generally the purpose of supporting the individual in his attempts to be liberated from the *karma samsara*.<sup>547</sup>

The temple is the public place of worship in the Hindu religion. There, the priest (*pujari*) performs the rituals (*pujas*) as prescribed in the sacred books in order to treat the God who is represented by the image as required at certain times of the day.<sup>548</sup> The temple always provides room in front of the sanctuary, i.e. the place where the idol is located, for all devotees to witness these *pujas* and to enter into a silent communication with their Lord. Besides these regular *pujas*, the priest is ready to offer to the God whatever has been brought by individuals to the sanctuary.

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545. see also the section 6.2.1.2 on salvation in Hinduism, from page 179 onwards

546. This is for instance supported by Swami Nikhilananda in his book “Hinduism” on page 182, where he states that “Hinduism makes the realisation of God ... the central fact of life” and that, for this cause, “Thousands of Hindus are willing ... to renounce everything – even the world itself – to experience the reality of God”.

547. *cf.* also the section 4.3.1 on page 112

548. These rituals include the washing and feeding of the deity, and the dressing and garlanding of the idol with flowers and other things. *Cf.* the footnote 60 on page 19. The *puja* to the village deity is generally different (see section 5.8.2.1 beginning on page 138).

It is most common that people visit the temple (or temples) of their respective God and offer prayers and a sacrifice<sup>549</sup> which is taken by the priest who performs a *puja* by reciting *mantras* from the sacred scriptures and by using appropriate gestures.<sup>550</sup> The half of the sacrificial material is then returned to the devotee.

In this sacrificial *puja*, the priest actually worships the God on behalf of the devotee. This type of worship is purely individual, as it effects only the particular person who is offering the sacrifice. Though, in many cases, a family will go and worship the God as a small community, this cannot be called a common worship, because the union of the joint family<sup>551</sup> can be deemed to be so strong that there is no true individuality within its frame.<sup>552</sup>

## 5.8.2 Sacrifice in Hinduism

Sacrifice is a major part in Hindu spirituality. The entire life of a Hindu is actually required to be a life of sacrifice. In South India, there are two varieties of sacrifices prevailing, the one being the Dravidian type of sacrifice, which includes animal sacrifices, and the other is the brahmanical type of sacrifice. Although it is obvious that the influence of Brahminism is growing in the villages and thus changing also the way of worship among the villagers with Dravidian background, the two different types shall be shortly described in the following sections.

### 5.8.2.1 Dravidian Sacrifices

Dravidians<sup>553</sup> generally have a village deity, which very often is female.<sup>554</sup> The village deity has to protect the villagers against evil spirits and against bad luck. The help is sought mainly in case of natural disasters like epidemics and drought. Sacrifices given to them are often animal sacrifices, if not in public (which is prohibited by law in many areas) then in the homes, when the goddess has to be appeased.<sup>555</sup> For the sacrifice, a person who is well versed in the rules of the sacrifice is to be called. This is in case of the Dravidian village deities

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549. This is mostly consisting of one coconut, flowers and Bethel-leaves

550. One important part of the *puja* is the *arati* or *dipa*, i.e. the circular waving of burning camphor in front of the deity. The light is believed to burn away all evil which had been done in the devotee's life, and to relieve the devotee from ignorance

551. see page 98

552. "True individuality" means in this context: the full right of self determination in all respects, i.e. social, economical and spiritual.

553. Dravidians are the original population of South India. Their cultural and religious heritage has been preserved mainly in the rural areas in spite of the influence of the Aryan emperors. It has been found that many of the elements found in Dravidian culture have infiltrated Hinduism

554. This is an important distinction to the mostly male gods of Aryan religion who may have female consorts of inferior status. Names of the village deities are e.g. Kali, Mariamma, Minakshiamman, Ekshi, Mohini, Esaki, Kauri, Gangamma, Yellamma and so on. Often they are called by more than one name. Cf. the section 5.6.1.1 on village deities on page 131. (G. Slater, *The Dravidian Element...*, p. 91-92)

555. As the spirits are believed to be bloodthirsty, the animal sacrifices do still occur, but are dying out mainly under the influence of Brahminism.

generally not a *brahmin*, who would never perform an animal sacrifice, but a priest (*pujari*) from the village community.<sup>556</sup>

It is also believed that of whatever has been produced, the first part shall be given to the deity. If this is not done, the anger of the deity arouses and may cause severe damage to the entire village population.

Thus, the main object in Dravidian sacrifice is to propitiate the god and to live in peace and friendship with the deity.<sup>557</sup> Worship to the village deity is not performed regularly like the *puja* in the Hindu temples, but only when need arises. However, the entire life of the villagers is dominated by the fear of the deity, and whenever something happens which indicates that the benevolence of the deity decreases, sacrifices are performed or festivals arranged. The villager, when he leaves or enters the village, will, with an appropriate gesture, show his subordination to the deity, the shrine of which is placed near the entrance of the village.

Another form of worship, which plays a vital role in the rural life in South India, is the worshipping of ancestors and heroes, where also oblations<sup>558</sup> are offered to the deceased ancestors on the occasion of the death anniversary.<sup>559</sup> A picture of the deceased is located at an appropriate place and garlanded or decorated with flowers regularly.

### 5.8.2.2 Sacrifice in Popular Hinduism

As far as conservative Hindus who belong to the higher castes are concerned who follow all the rites prescribed in the Vedas and in the *dharmasastras*, they perform also daily sacrifices in order to make sure that the spirits of the ancestors are friendly and no danger awaits them during the day.

Most Hindus will, at least on special occasions, but often also regularly, go to the nearby temple and let perform a *puja*<sup>560</sup> for themselves which shall protect them or invoke the blessings of the particular god on them. The philosophical concept behind the worship of idols in the temples<sup>561</sup> is rarely understood in its full meaning. Instead, many (but of course not all) who undertake pilgrimage to certain sanctuaries expect that the respective god will reward them for the action which they are doing, and the purpose for undertaking the pilgrimage is not solely for the sake of the God, but to receive also certain benefits from him.<sup>562</sup>

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556. The outcastes were formerly not allowed to visit the Hindu temples, which were accessible only for the caste members. Thus, they had their own shrines and priests, which were normally offspring of a family which belongs to the same community. Like in the caste system, the family which had been chosen in early times to take care of the priestly duties for the community, had segregated from the remaining part of the community and deems itself to be of higher status than the others. For the Malas in Andhra Pradesh, these are the *dasaris*.

557. S. Amirtham, *The Value of the Category of Sacrifice in Christian Preaching in India*, p. 8-12

558. These are, beside the normal oblations like bananas, flowers and the like, also new clothes and food which was preferred by the ancestor.

559. R.J. Sampath, *The Dravidian Cults in the Light of the Christian Gospel*, p. 12f

560. *Puja* is the most common expression for worship and is explained in section 5.8.1 on page 137

561. I.e. to enter into unity with the respective god, who is represented by the idol

562. A study undertaken in Chirakkal, North Malabar, which is of course not representative for this study, but a useful addition to it, shows that the desires or purposes of those going to the temple are manifold, not only being requests for certain things, but also the search for rest of mind, the blessings of God as a necessity to pursue life or the simple desire for peace of the mind. A.M. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, *The Sacred in Popular Hinduism*, p.106-109

### 5.8.3 The Christian Way of Worship

The Christian worship differs from the Hindu type of worship in several aspects.

Generally speaking, there is no individual worship among the Christians as it is among the Hindus. Though there is the provision for personal prayer and the understanding of an individual relationship with God, the communion between the Christians is always emphasized especially on the religious side.<sup>563</sup>

The place which is used for common worship in Andhra Pradesh, called church, has in many places been constructed by European or American missionaries, who normally used the patterns known to them from their home countries: a big hall, directed towards the rising sun, with the entrance at the opposite side, and a huge tower which shall mark this place as a place of worship. Often, in such a tower a bell was also fixed in order to call the Christians for the common worship.<sup>564</sup> A few attempts have been made later to build churches which incorporate elements of the Indian architecture, and some of these attempts certainly have been successful. In Andhra Pradesh, there are however not many such churches.<sup>565</sup> Most worshipping places in India and particularly in Andhra Pradesh, which have incorporated elements of Indian architecture, are from the Roman Catholic Church. They often resemble a shrine (and are also called as such), in which a statue of Mary, the mother of Jesus, or of another saint is placed behind a lattice. People can come at any time and worship there, offer flowers or candles (and even coconuts) on a small platform in front of the shrine, but there will be no priest to mediate.<sup>566</sup> On the other side, the Roman Catholic Church has also huge church buildings which resemble the Romanesque or Gothic style.

For the Christian community, there is no need for any kind of sacrifice for the purpose of reparation, because the required sacrifice has been performed by Jesus Christ himself, “once for all”.<sup>567</sup> The remembrance of this sacrifice by the Holy Communion has, however, been interpreted at least by the Roman Catholic Church as some kind of a sacrifice, although this idea is completely rejected by all Protestant churches.

The Holy Communion, which is part of the common worship, is only occasionally under certain conditions celebrated by the priest or pastor at the home of a family.<sup>568</sup> Under normal circumstances, it is celebrated during the common worship. The Holy Communion consists of a more or less short ritual with prayers and recitation of biblical verses and the eating of a piece of bread and the drinking of a sip of wine by members of the congregation. Both, the bread and the wine, are – in the Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches – believed to represent or to be the body and the blood of Jesus Christ. Thus, when the Christian eats these elements, he eats a part of the sacrifice which had been offered on behalf of him through

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563. The Christian community is for instance viewed as a body, the head of which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor 12)

564. The construction of the tower often created problems with the neighbouring Hindu communities, who did not want the church tower to be higher than the highest *gopuram* found in the town.

565. cf. John F. Butler, *Christian Art in India*

566. It is common that the church buildings of the Protestant churches are locked when no worship takes place, and it has been witnessed during the field work, that sometimes people kneel down in front of the door and offer their prayers in direction to the altar which they can not see.

567. see section 6.2.2.2 from page 187 onwards.

568. Most commonly when the person is sick or unable to attend the worship in the church



Jesus<sup>569</sup>, in order to let him live in a life according to the will of God. It is a common belief that this symbolic meal is a matter of communal celebration and should not be celebrated by the priest or pastor without any participant.<sup>570</sup>

While for many centuries and in the Roman Catholic Church till today the Holy Communion is celebrated at least once in a week, the Protestant Churches in Andhra Pradesh have reduced the performance of this ritual, because they believe that this ritual is the most sacred sacrament which one should not take too often as it would lose its sacredness. It appears, however, that the salutary effect of the Holy Communion is obviously not understood by most Christians. It begins with the fact that participation in the Holy Communion depends on one being confirmed.<sup>571</sup> Confirmation is, however, not sought by all members, because of several reasons.<sup>572</sup> Further, there is often no proper understanding of the Holy Communion by the pastors and evangelists themselves, let alone the members of the congregation. For them, the Holy Communion is one religious ritual among others<sup>573</sup>, without salvific significance.<sup>574</sup> During the field work, it was observed in one town parish in South Andhra Pradesh with rural characteristics, that the celebration of the Holy Communion was cancelled. The reason was that, a function was to be held to honour a special guest after the service, and time was already late.<sup>575</sup>

The main and usual worship is the common worship which is celebrated weekly, i.e. every Sunday. On this occasion, most members of the Christian congregation will gather in the church and celebrate together by singing, praying and listening to the words of the Bible as well as to a sermon on a biblical text. Depending on the denomination to which one belongs, the Holy Communion is celebrated every Sunday, or once in a month, or even less often.

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569. This has also a special relation to the Passover sacrifice which has been performed by the Jewish people: The lamb which was brought by the Jewish family to the temple in Jerusalem for being sacrificed was given back to the family, and it was then eaten in a ritualistic meal at the homes or at the place where the family stayed. In the same way, the "lamb" Jesus which was sacrificed as a Passover-lamb has been returned to the Christian in the Holy Communion to let them have a physical communion with their Lord.

570. The use of the Holy Communion and the interpretation of the meaning of bread and wine in this ritual has been the cause for schisms within the Christianity throughout the centuries, the biggest causing the emergence of the Protestant Churches in the 16th century.

571. The confirmation is an act in which baptized members are admitted into "communicant membership" and thus also admitted to the elections for office bearers in the administration of the church. It is preceded by a more or less intensive instruction in the basic doctrines of Christianity.

572. In the villages, one reason is that there is no provision for confirmation class, because there is no evangelist to take care of the village. Another reason is that the students in the confirmation classes are required to read the bible (one of the major reasons why missionaries have opened schools so early!), and this is generally not possible for most villagers. One more reason is that among villagers there is not such a desire to become a communicant member, because they are interested neither in the church administrative affairs nor in taking the Holy Communion.

573. the prayers for individuals are more important. With regard to the Holy Communion, only the question, who is to be admitted and who is not, remains to be answered.

574. This may be due to the different understanding of sin (see also section 6.1.3.2 on page 176), which does not see man's inability to reconcile with God. There is also little thought given to the Holy Communion by the Indian theologians: P. Chenchiah, for instance, sees the Holy Communion as unnecessary and in fact "a barrier to the believer's direct relationship with Christ". (Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, p. 161) See also Robin Boyd, *op.cit.*, p. 247-249

575. This might have been an individual case, but another, similar situation did not arise during the research work. The incident reflects, however, the level of importance attached to the Holy Communion.

While in the beginning of the missionary work most of the hymns sung during worship were translations of the hymns which were known to the missionaries from their own home countries, with the passage of time some Indian Christian lyric writers and composers came up and wrote hymns and *bhajans* which are partly in common use among all Telugu Christians today. The style for the melodies is mainly adopted from the Carnatic music.<sup>576</sup> In these hymns, often elements of Hindu philosophy appear with the attempt to make apparent the manifold aspects of God to the singer as well as to the listener. To make clear the authority of God over the entire creation, the *trimurty* concept is used which says that the three Gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are the creator, the preserver and the destroyer of the world respectively, and thus it is shown that the world is entirely in the hands of God.<sup>577</sup>

The Telugu hymns written by Indian authors often carry the idea of *bhakti marga* very clearly as a means to approach Jesus. Thus, the one who sings these hymns could also be called *bhakta*.<sup>578</sup>

In the Roman Catholic Church, it is noted that idols play a vital role in the worship of its members. Since idols are common and well known to the Hindu environment, it is hard for the Protestant Christians to do away with them.<sup>579</sup> Since in the Roman Catholic Church the existence of statues as representations of the respective saint or of Jesus was not prohibited, the Roman Catholic Churches are also more attractive to many Hindus, who visit the Catholic shrines like their own temples.

It is also interesting to note that the veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus, is very common among the Catholic Christians, and special festivals related to her are celebrated regularly.<sup>580</sup> The acceptance of Mary as the central figure in the Roman Catholic worship in Andhra Pradesh and other states in South India is certainly due to the fact that the village deities are generally female. Her protection and support is sought in the same way as it had been sought previously from the village deity, by offering sacrifices to her, wearing her image or naming a girl child after her.

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576. Some of well known composers and lyric writers are:  
Chetti Bhanamurthi (late)  
A.B. Masilamani (a disciple of Bhanamurthi)  
Tuluri Cornelius (late)  
Gurram Joshua (late)  
Purushotham Chowdhari (late)  
and many others

577. R.R. Sundara Rao, *Bhakti Theology in the Telugu Hymnal*, p. 84f. Sundara Rao points out that Christian doctrine does not have such an element that thinks of God as the destroyer. The trinity which is part of Christian doctrine sees the unity of God in a threefold way, i.e. as Father (creator), Son (redeemer) and Holy Spirit (uniter, guide). In this, there is no element of destruction.

578. cf. the extensive study of R.R. Sundara Rao, *Bhakti Theology in the Telugu Hymnal*

579. With the reformation, there was a move to destroy all the statues and pictures of saints, because the accusation that the Roman Catholic Church would practice idolatry was one of the major reasons for the reformation movement. In India, this reformed tradition of keeping pictures of Jesus out of the church was imposed on the Protestant Christians by the missionaries, because they believed that any pictures or statues would result in a reversion to the Hindu "idolatry". While in most cases pictures of Jesus were banned from inside the Protestant church buildings, in the homes there are generally pictures of Jesus fixed at the wall or at a place where regularly a private worship is held. It is interesting that, generally, among the Christians in Andhra Pradesh, a picture of Jesus is preferred to a cross, while the cross is generally used during worship in the Protestant churches in the Western countries as the only symbol.

580. see also section 5.9.1

### 5.8.4 Sacrifices and Offerings in Andhra Christianity

When going to the common worship, Christians usually don't take any offerings with them<sup>581</sup> like it is observed among the Hindus when they go to the temple. But still there is a collection of thank offerings, usually after the sermon, at which two or three men or women collect money from the worshippers in a small sack of cloth. This money will be used for the financing of the church administration and institutions as well as of congregational affairs.

The sharpest difference to the offerings given by Hindus at a Hindu temple is that, the Christian thank offering, according to the New Testament, is a matter of the entire community for the community, and not an individual sacrifice for an individual's improvement or for the propitiation of God.

In rural areas, also goods are offered or given separately to the pastor. These include rice, chicken (living), coconuts and other fruits or vegetables, generally part of which was put aside at the beginning of the harvest as the first harvested part. Also, the first born of the cattle sometimes is "sacrificed" to God, which means it is given to the pastor. This habit occurs more often in villages, where the income of the people consists mainly of the fruits and vegetables harvested on the acres, than in town parishes. The pastor offers a prayer of thanks for the blessings which the particular individual had received. Usually, the goods thus offered are used by the pastor for his family's livelihood.

This kind of offerings is based on biblical grounds, where it is stated at several places in the Old Testament that one tenth (a tithe) of the harvest should be given to the temple<sup>582</sup> and that the first part of the harvest or the first born should be sacrificed or, in case of a human, dedicated to God.<sup>583</sup>

This dedication of a male child to God's service has some background in the Hindu practice of dedicating a child to the respective god. Hindus cannot in all cases vow that the child shall become a priest, because this depends on the caste. But yet there are numerous other ways to dedicate a child to God, including to make it a temple dancer (*devadasi*) in the case of female children, or to let it become a musician or let it work in the temple vicinity as cleaner or sweeper.

A special offering is given after the general collection by a few individuals who come forward in order to let the pastor pray for them and to receive his blessings.<sup>584</sup> After the pastor or priest has prayed for these individuals, they will give a special offering in the form of money or goods, whatever they can give. This individual prayers during the common worship has no equivalent in the churches in the Western countries. Since the regular type of worship among the Hindus follows the same pattern, it can be deemed to be an influence of the Hindu way of worship.

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581. See also page 192

582. Meant is the temple in Jerusalem, and this rule applies to the people of Israel. In the New Testament, thank offerings are common but do not have any effect on the relation between the offerer and God. Even in Europe the offering of the tenth part of the income is still in practice among a few people and especially in some of the evangelical churches, and sacrificing the first part of the harvest is observed in some agricultural areas as well even today.

583. It is interesting to note that in some cases, the first born of a Christian family, if the child is a male child, will be dedicated to God's service right from its birth. This is sometimes done in connection with a vow that was given before the birth of the child, that, if the child is a male child, it will be dedicated to God. Usually, the child then becomes a priest or a pastor.

584. This practice has been witnessed at many places in Andhra Pradesh, but is not followed in all churches.

In the Roman Catholic Church, offerings are more often given in the sense of sacrifice.<sup>585</sup> Catholic Christians offer something and expect something in return, for instance health or good results in an examination. To take a vow is commonplace among them. At certain pilgrimage centres, sacrifices are given in the same form as in the Hindu temples.<sup>586</sup>

## 5.9 Festivals

There are numerous festivals in Hinduism which are described at length in various publications and need not to be redescribed here. The Christians in the villages sometimes do participate in such festivals, because they do not want to be accused of spoiling the celebrations.<sup>587</sup> Sometimes, if the festival is related to social or economical issues<sup>588</sup>, they will also participate in such festivals in order to make sure that they have done the needful, and because the village community would certainly hold them responsible for the calamity if they would not participate. The participation in Hindu festivals is often understood by the Christians as a means to enjoy themselves and to maintain a good relationship to the non-Christian villagers.

Because it would go beyond the scope of this study to describe the festivals commonly celebrated by the Hindu community, only the most important festivals which are celebrated among the Christians in Andhra Pradesh are described here, and elements which are related to the Hindu festivals are pointed out.

### 5.9.1 Festivals in the Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church has adopted many elements of the Hindu way of celebrating religious festivals. This is also possible, because the Roman Catholic Church has a number of festivals which are not commonly celebrated among the Protestant Churches. Mainly festivals of the saints are added to the common Christian festival calendar.

Because each church building or congregation has its own patron saint, the day which is consigned to him or her is celebrated with a big festival.

The festival is prepared during a period which lasts nine days (*novena*). In this period, a flag is hoisted carrying the symbol of the patron. Some of the Christians observe certain customs, like fasting and regular prayers. Every evening, the image of the saint is carried around the church in a procession<sup>589</sup>, during which the rosary<sup>590</sup> is prayed with some other

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585. This is not only the case in the Roman Catholic Church, but here, the practice of offering or sacrifice is officially accepted, while it is officially rejected in the Protestant Churches. This is why the sacrifice given in the Roman Catholic Church is commonly tolerated.

586. They mostly consist of a coconut, flowers and betel leaves. Priests or Deacons will accept these offerings and present them to the statue which represents one of the saints, the mother of Jesus, Mary, or Jesus.

587. This is the only reason stated by those who were asked about the participation of Christians in Hindu festivals which base on the Hindu mythology.

588. Such festivals would be mainly festivals for the village deity in order to avert a natural calamity, like drought or flood.

589. It should be noted here that a procession is nothing strange to the Roman Catholic Church. Over centuries, the Roman Catholic Church observes one day in the year, the *Corpus Christi* Day, as the procession day, during which a piece of bread which had been consecrated in the Holy Mass ("Holy Mass" is the expression for the celebration of the Holy Communion normally used by the Roman Catholic Christians) and thus turned into the

prayers which are specially addressed to the saint. Then, a brief sermon is given, explaining the significance of the saint for the day-to-day life of the Christians. During these days, or on the last day, when the festival itself takes place, many of the Christians also fulfil certain vows which they had given during the last year, by giving thank-offerings or by observing special restrictions which they impose on themselves.

On the ninth day, the procession, under certain prayers and singing hymns, goes through the village or the main streets of the town, and since it is a joyous event, crackers and rockets are also detonated.<sup>591</sup>

The festival of the patron of a church does, in some places, also attract visitors from the surrounding congregations. Depending on the powers reported about the particular patron, the festival will attract more and more pilgrims, thus making the place a pilgrimage centre. There, arrangements are made for the pilgrims to fulfil their vows, which they had taken during the last year, or to perform sacrifices in order to invoke the support of the saint.<sup>592</sup>

Ash Wednesday is a day of special significance for all Christians throughout the world. It is the first day of the fasting season, which is the period of forty days before Easter.<sup>593</sup> Only in the Roman Catholic Church, the custom of marking one's head with ash on this particular day has remained till today and gains new importance in the Hindu environment, where the use of *vibuthi* as the sacred ash is quite common. On this day, Catholic and also some Protestant Christians enter into a season during which they observe special rituals and customs, including restrictions in the diet.

Catholic churches generally provide holy water at the entrance of the church, into which a Catholic Christians dips with three fingers and then makes the sign of the cross over his/her chest. This is believed to be a blessing, as the water had been consecrated earlier by the priest. This resembles to some extent the holy water used during the *puja* in the Hindu temple, although there are no other ingredients except water. It has become common that the Catholic Christians attempt to take some of this Holy Water with them as a protection against evil spirits or as a cure against diseases.

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body of Christ, is presented to all the people on the streets and shall actually bring the blessings of Jesus over the entire town. Cf. the section on the Holy Communion on page 194

590. The rosary is a chain of pearls or small balls made of different material, like wood, ivory or plastic. The rosary is blessed in a mass before it is taken into use by the individual. It is used to count the prayers which have been prayed in veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus. These prayers are texts taken from the New Testament.

591. This is not common at all places, particularly not where the Hindu community is very strong. The question whether this practice relates to a fear of the influence of evil spirits, was not answered positively.

592. It has been noticed that such pilgrimage centres have usually Mary, the mother of Jesus, as their patron. This indicates again that especially the villagers are more susceptible to a female goddess, because they are used to the goddess worship and have no problems to accept a different goddess, if only she proves her power over the evil spirits.

593. The period of forty days shall commemorate Jesus' own complete fasting which he took up at the beginning of his public work.

## 5.9.2 Festivals in the Church of South India

In the Medak Diocese of the CSI, i.e. in the Northern parts of Andhra Pradesh, the festival form of *jatra*<sup>594</sup> has been adopted by the Christians for their own festivals. It has been told by old evangelists, that the missionaries in the 1920s and 1930s have advised the Christians to have their own *jatras*, but the first *jatra* was organized only on the occasion of Church dedications. When a Church was dedicated at Easter time, a *Christu Punaruddhana Jatra* was performed, and thus the *Christu Punaruddhana Jatra* at Lakshettipet came into existence and is attracting more and more people. Another form of Christian *jatra* is the *Christu Jayanti Jatra*, which is celebrated at the time of the Christmas season in the same area.

Not all Church leaders, however, support the *jatras*, as they are borrowed from the Hindu customs and thus not a true Christian way of worshipping Christ, according to their view.<sup>595</sup>

This type of festival is mainly celebrated in the north of Andhra Pradesh.

## 5.9.3 The *Christu Punaruddhana Jatra* in the Medak Diocese of the CSI

The *Christu Punaruddhana Jatra* is a Christian festival in northern Andhra Pradesh which has been strongly influenced by Hindu rituals. It is celebrated annually at Lakshettipet in Adilabad district, as well as in other places in that area, to commemorate the resurrection of Christ.

It begins with a great procession<sup>596</sup> to a hill on which a cross is erected. During the procession, Easter hymns are sung. They reach the hill at evening time.

The Christians of the villages are gathered village-wise, carrying a banner with their village's name and the verse "Jesus is risen". Then, led by the Bishop of the diocese, the whole crowd performs *pradakshina* to the cross. Then they gather around the cross, women forming a circle with lights in their hands. Then a message is given that Jesus, the light of the world, has risen from death, and while a song is sung, a lamp is lit. The women walk around the cross three times, and put their lights around and on the cross. After this formal part is over, many people come to fulfil their personal vows either by performing *pradakshina*, offering jaggery, lighting the cross, breaking coconuts or offering money. Then a worship is held by the Bishop according to the third order of worship in the AELC-hymnal.<sup>597</sup>

After a dinner offered to all pilgrims, a play is staged to visualize the message of the resurrection of Christ and the message of his cross.

The next day begins with a worship including the Holy Communion, and many pilgrims understand the elements of the Holy Communion as Divine *prasada*. Even Non-Christians participate in this Communion.<sup>598</sup> After the Communion Service, thank offerings are received

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594. *jatra* is a form of religious fair, where in connection with a religious festival, a fair is organized. The participants come to the festival as pilgrims.

595. Vasanta Rao Chilkuri, *A Phenomenological Study...*, p. 90-92

596. participants are Christians from the Mala and Madiga caste background as well as tribal Christians, together with Hindus from different castes. It happens that Hindus have given a vow to the "God at Lakshettipet", and at the time of this *jatra*, they fulfil their vows.

597. This order of worship uses indigenized tunes and *bhajans*, while the order itself is following the common pattern, but without Holy Communion.

598. It happens that objections are raised by the Church elders or Presbyters, however the Hindus claim to be worshippers of Christ and thus demand to be admitted.

in the church by the Presbyters of the respective villages. The pilgrims in return receive a *prasada*.<sup>599</sup>

At the occasion of the festival, children are baptized, and in some cases, the birth hair of the baby is also removed by the Presbyter.<sup>600</sup>

Outside the church, other pilgrims break coconuts, praying to Jesus, and hand over a part of the coconut to one of the evangelists or women who are appointed for this purpose. Many of the pilgrims wash their feet first and touch the steps of the church with their hands. Non-Christians who are coming at that time give in their thank offerings and receive the *prasada*. Some have also taken a bath in the nearby Godavari, calling it the ritual *Ganga snana* (bath in the Ganga).

There is also a *mela* (fair) organized. Many pilgrims buy eatables in order to distribute them at their respective homes as the *prasada* from the *jatra* of Jesus Christ at Lakshettipet. A number of them then leave the place by the afternoon, returning home, while others, mainly Christians, stay for the evening service. Some of the pilgrims had also begun a fast from the previous morning, which now is ended.<sup>601</sup>

In connection with the festival a fowl or goat is slaughtered and distributed either among the family or the village members. This is generally done on the Passover Sunday as a remembrance of the Passover sacrifice, which is performed by the Jews yearly on Good Friday.<sup>602</sup>

There are similarities to the *Yedu-Payala Jatra* which is celebrated in the same area in honour of the goddess *Durga*. Originally, this Hindu festival was also a pilgrimage festival where the representatives of the respective villages came to offer their thank offerings and to receive *prasada* and blessings from the goddess for their village.

One major goal of the pilgrimage is to have *darshana* of the goddess. The image of the goddess is greeted<sup>603</sup>, while the following *darshana* is actually the view of the goddess residing in the idol. In the same way, the cross in the Christu Punaruddhana Jatra has become the symbol for *darshana*, to which the pilgrims are attracted.<sup>604</sup> While the pilgrims to the *Yedu-Payala Jatra* receive sacred water (*tirtha-jalam*), the Christians at the *Christu Punaruddhana Jatra* receive the holy bread and wine from the Holy Communion. Then Coconut and jaggery are given in both festivals as *prasada* from the deity.

Hindu pilgrims who come to the *Yedu-Payala Jatra* as well as to the *Christu Punaruddhana Jatra* consider it meritorious to keep vigil (*jagarana*) during the first night of the *jatra*. Also some Christians at the *Christu Punaruddhana Jatra* observe such a vigil.

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599. Here an attempt is made to include the giving of a *prasada* after a *puja*, a common practice in Hinduism, into the Christian festival. As has been seen earlier, to give this *prasada* after the actual service is not accepted by many Hindus, who want to take the bread and wine of the Holy Communion which they believe is the real *prasada*.

600. Actually, the Presbyter performs only the first cuts "in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit". This symbolic act is, in orthodox Hinduism, performed by the father of the child. Then a barber who has normally been brought by the family cuts the remaining hair of the baby. Vasanta Rao Chilukuri, *A Phenomenological Study...*, p. 101

601. Cf. Vasanta Rao Chilukuri, *A Phenomenological Study ...*, p. 83-90

602. The actual understanding of this sacrifice among the villagers is not clear. Most probably, elements of the original sacrifice to the village deity are also conceived, i.e. the aim to appease God and to cause his blessings upon themselves. Cf. Luke/Carmen, *Village Christians...*, p. 170-171

603. This is done by laying the hands together before the chest and bowing towards the deity.

604. It appears that many pilgrims call the pilgrimage *siluva jatra*, which means "pilgrimage of the cross". (Vasanta Rao Chilukuri, *A Phenomenological Study...*, p. 96)

The taking of a holy bath, which is a common practice in all Hindu festivals, does slowly gain ground also in the *Christu Punaruddhana Jatra*. However, it is not very common among the Christians. But it can be said that, since taking bath for a Hindu means to get cleansed of his sins, the performance of baptism during the *Christu Punaruddhana Jatra* is an adaptation of this holy bath, as the baptism is the symbolic act of cleansing one from his sins.<sup>605</sup>

Also the ritual of shaving the hair (*kesha kandana*) is common in *Yedu-Payala Jatra*. In the *Christu Punaruddhana Jatra*, this practice is not yet so common but takes place in growing number.

*Arpana*, which means the breaking of coconut and offering of incense sticks, is for a Hindu the least offering he can give and has also been admitted as an offering in the *Christu Punaruddhana Jatra*. The breaking of the coconut, however, is done outside the church, which shall support the conception that this is not a sacrifice, but a thank offering.

Both, *Yedu-Payala Jatra* and *Christu Punaruddhana Jatra* have the *bandi pradakshina*, which is a procession of bullock carts. This is unique to the *Yedu-Payala Jatra* among the Hindu *jatras*, and thus it can be said that the existence of this procession also in the *Christu Punaruddhana Jatra* is a true adoption of the custom in the Hindu *jatra*.<sup>606</sup>

#### 5.9.4 Other Festivals in Andhra Christianity

The festivals common to the world-wide Christianity are Christmas, Epiphany, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension of Christ and Pentecost or Whit Sunday. Some of these festivals are also specially celebrated by the Christians in Andhra Pradesh, while others are not. Some of the festivals are described, as they are generally (but not necessarily everywhere) celebrated, in the following sections, put in order according to the importance given to them.

##### 5.9.4.1 Good Friday

The Good Friday appears to be the most important of all Christian festivals among the South Indian Christianity. This day commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus, and is marked by a common worship (without Holy Communion) which is held during the afternoon and is supposed to finish at about three o'clock, the time when Jesus died at the cross. Many Protestant churches will include a series of sermons on the seven sayings of Jesus at the cross, each held by one of the elder members of the parish (or by members of the Parish Church Council, or both).<sup>607</sup> Normally, there is no other festivity on this day, and many Christians, especially Roman Catholics, observe a complete fast. There may be in some places processions, in front of which a cross is carried, or a worship at a place where a big wooden cross is mounted. There are only very few elements which could be traced back to Hindu traditions.<sup>608</sup>

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605. One significant difference which has already been explained on page 119 is that the baptism is a purification once and for all, while the ritual bath of a Hindu has to be repeated.

606. Vasanta Rao Chilkuri, *A Phenomenological Study...*, p. 102. However, some Christians say that this custom has been adopted from the Jewish custom when king David made such a procession when the temple was built.

607. This service usually lasts about three to four hours, sometimes five hours.

608. It may happen that vows are taken on Good Friday, but there was no report on that. Cf. however the section 5.9.3 on page 146ff.



#### 5.9.4.2 Christmas

Another festival of major importance is Christmas. This festival, celebrated on the 25th of December, is a festival of great joy and commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ.

On the 24th of December, Christians clean and decorate their houses. Often, some kind of a Christmas tree is also placed somewhere in the house at a location which is accessible to all. In the evening at about 6 p.m., worships start in a fully decorated church. After this service, the families have a celebration at home, during which also family members receive new clothes from their relatives.

On the next day, the 25th of December, Christians gather again for worship which will include the Holy Communion. After the worship, families gather for a joint lunch and guests are invited.

The Christmas festival resembles to some extent the Hindu festival *Deepavali*, because it is also the festival of light<sup>609</sup>, and it remembers the victory of God over the evil forces.

#### 5.9.4.3 Easter

The Easter festival<sup>610</sup> is celebrated on a day fixed according to the lunar calendar. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ and is also a festival of joy. It seems, however, to be of less importance than the immediately preceding Good Friday and the Christmas festival.

On Easter, in the early morning hours a worship is celebrated at the grave yard, which is normally attended by some elders and by members of a family in which a person had died during the past year. Graves are decorated with flowers on this day.

Later, at the normal hour, the Easter worship takes place, which includes the Holy Communion. There are no other outstanding festivities, except that the food taken may be different on this day.

## 5.10 Ashrams

Ashrams are part of the Hindu spiritual life. In the beginnings, the ashram<sup>611</sup> was a forest settlement in which the couples lived together<sup>612</sup> during the third stage of the *varnashramas*, the *vanaprastha ashrama*. They lived there as simple as possible, living only on the fruits which were provided by the trees and bushes in the forest. Ashrams became places of peace and meditation, where also disciples were admitted to learn from the *guru*, the teacher, the meaning of life.

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609. Jesus, according to the gospel of John, has entered this world as the light which overcomes the powers of darkness. This resemblance is, however, rejected by the educated Christians who generally object any kind of comparison of the Christian practices with Hindu practices.

610. see also the section 5.9.3, in which the way of celebrating the Easter festival in the Adilabad district is described.

611. the term *ashram* means shelter, refuge or retreat.

612. the wife went with her husband in order to serve him, to clean the house, provide food and so on

Ashrams of this sort became extinct after the medieval times, and ashrams in a new but similar sense were established during the 19th and 20th century.<sup>613</sup>

### 5.10.1 Ashrams in Hinduism

There are famous ashrams in the recent history of India, e.g. the Satyagraha Ashram of Mahathma Gandhi, in which the ideals which Gandhi taught were practised among all those who lived there. It's major object was therefore to proclaim and support the nationalistic movement through cottage industry.<sup>614</sup> Other modern ashrams are the *Santiniketan*, developed by Rabindranath Tagore, and Ramana Maharshi Ashram at Tiruvannamalai, which emphasizes meditation and silence<sup>615</sup>. The Sri Aurobindo Ashram has its own characteristics, being well known to many foreigners who decide to live there for a longer period.

### 5.10.2 Ashrams in Christianity

While there are more than one hundred Christian ashrams in India, Andhra Pradesh counts only a few of them which are located at several places, both in towns and in forests.<sup>616</sup> They unite Christians of different denominations and different social backgrounds. Even Hindus are permitted into the Christian ashrams. In those ashrams, a way of expressing Christian faith in an Indian way is sought.

Dr. B.V. Subbamma, who founded most of the ashrams in the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church, did this with the aim to overcome the prevailing caste consciousness of the Christians and to develop opportunities for Christian women to serve in the Christian ministry.<sup>617</sup> She, being a convert from the *Kamma* caste, started to conduct ashrams for short

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613. cf. F. Melzer, *Christliche Ashrams in Südindien*, p. 15-20

614. Mandapaty Abraham Lincoln, *The Study of the Ashrams in the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church...*, p. 8

615. *ibid.*, p. 8

616. Most ashrams have been founded by B.V. Subbamma in the AELC and are ashrams for women

617. B.V. Subbamma, *Women in Mission:...*, p. 94-95. The lady evangelists are called *paricharikas*. Dr. Subbamma chose women for the work in the ashrams and in the surrounding villages, because women have free access to the houses. M.E. Prabhakar accuses Miss Subbamma of supporting the caste system:

...Dr. Miss Subbamma, a Kamma Christian convert herself, from Bodipalem, and who is an ardent advocate of the 'Church growth' theory, says that insisting on integration of the 'Harijans and caste-Hindus' is both a self-defeating policy and not required by Biblical faith. She writes, '...the real problem facing the churches in Andhra is how to bring Hindus to Christ. Many want to come; but they also want to worship Him in their own localities. The spread of the Church into Hindu localities will eventually work for brotherhood. Church growth theory says that the greatest step towards brotherhood is to bring the segments (the homogeneous units) of society to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ'. (Subbamma, B.V. *New Patterns for Disciplining Hindus*, William Carey Library, South Pasadena, California, 1970, p. 61) She recommends house-churches or separate congregations for caste converts 'to be Christians in their own culture and to retain their culture to the extent that it does not come into conflict with the gospel'. (*ibid.*, Ch. 5)

periods in the late 1960s. Then she developed Ashrams with permanent occupation.<sup>618</sup> Teachers of different professions are there to train the ashramites in proclaiming the gospel in various ways.

The ashrams generally offer several types of Christian worship in order to suit the needs of the devotees who come from different backgrounds. Emphasis is laid on indigenous elements which are more acceptable to most Hindus than many of the Western elements which are still prevailing in many churches. The sermon which is generally part of the worship as an explanation of the Scriptures, is sometimes done in a dialogue form. Then, the Scriptures are not explained by talking and keeping the audience listeners, but by guiding the audience to respond to comments and statements and to find their own understanding of the subject, basing on the scriptures. However, since this method requires extensive knowledge of both, Christian and Hindu Scriptures, and also the capability of responding appropriately to the statements made by the audience, not many are able to follow this method efficiently.<sup>619</sup>

The ashrams have become also a ground for making available the drama as a means to propagate the stories which are told in the Bible. Ashramites are taught different dramas which base on biblical stories and which are then displayed in the villages.

Another method of propagating any message in India is the *burrakatha*. Three persons, the leader in the middle, present the message. The leader will first sing or tell a part of his message, which is accompanied by the two other members of the group, who then repeat the part of the message, thus making the message clearer to the audience. Alternately, those who are talking or singing will move into the front, while the other(s) move to the back.

Other forms are the *katha-kalakshepam*, where a story is told by a head singer who is accompanied by an orchestra and, sometimes, by a choir, and the *bhajans*, which is the singing of a poem by a group under the guidance of a leader or chief singer.

The ashrams established in Andhra Pradesh train the ashramites in all or some of these old Indian arts. Besides, yearly once a festival called Christian Pilgrimage is organized to which the people are invited from far away places. The pilgrims come and stay in the ashram for five days, participating in the different programs offered during this festival.<sup>620</sup>

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618. In these Ashrams, at least one person lives permanently. There is an Ashram at *Rajahmundry*, which has been established purely for women and which trains women for Christian leadership. A school for children and a health clinic had been established there mainly for poor people, beside courses in different professions (sewing, typewriting, agricultural work). Another ashram is located at *Peddapuram* in East Godavari District, which is also for women. Others are at *Kakinada* (East Godavari District), *Eluru*, *Bhimavaram* (West Godavari District), *Vadali* (West Godavari District), *Mandapeta* (East Godavari District), *Guntur* (Guntur District), *Narsaraopet*, *Vijayawada* (Krishna District) and *Chirala*. All these Ashrams are involved in evangelistic work with indigenous methods, besides training and educating of young women in different handicraft and household professions. Mandapaty Abraham Lincoln, *The Study of the Ashrams in the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church...*, p. 19-27.

619. M.A. Lincoln, *The Study of the Ashrams...*, p. 30-33

620. B.V. Subbamma, *Women in Mission:...*, p. 96

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCEPTUAL INFLUENCES**

In this chapter, some concepts which have a strong impact on the day-to-day life in the Indian society are presented from their scriptural basis in both, Hinduism and Christianity. Then, a comparison of the same concepts, as they exist in Indian Christianity, with their scriptural basis and with the Hindu concepts is undertaken.

Whenever the Indian Christianity is referred to, generally the Protestant Christians who belong to the established churches, i.e. which have a history that begins before this century and which form about two thirds of the total Christian population in Andhra Pradesh<sup>621</sup>, are meant. The Roman Catholic Church is referred to separately, whenever it is necessary and appropriate.

The Evangelical Churches and Communities are considered only partially, because they are theologically very much influenced by the Evangelical movements in the West. How far Hinduism (together with the already established churches) gains influence on these Evangelical communities which came into existence mainly during the last three or four decades, remains to be seen and should therefore be the subject of a later study.

## 6.1 The Concept of Man

In every religion, the question rises about the origin of man and his destination, since man does differ extremely from all other beings by his capability of reasoning. Man is always viewed in relation to the transcendent world, and the discrepancy between the different qualities of life are often explained as caused by the transcendent power, which is usually called God. The unjust reality, in which the wicked enjoys all prosperity, while the just and pious man suffers all pains, leads to justifying concepts, because it is believed that the ultimate force cannot be unjust, but provides a perpetual balance of all forces.

### 6.1.1 The Concept of Man in Hinduism

The concept of man in Hinduism has developed through the millennia to a very complex system, which has been also modified by different philosophical schools.<sup>622</sup> In the following sections, the major concepts of man in Hinduism, basing on the Vedic scriptures and the relevant philosophical schools, are discussed.

#### 6.1.1.1 Man in the Scriptures of Hinduism

Already in the Vedas, an idea of an immortal soul has been established. This soul is believed to ascend into heaven but also to return to the earth (either to enter another body, as in *Rigveda* X, 58.1-2, or without specification of the purpose of this return, as in *Rigveda* I, 164.31). The *Atharvaveda* elaborates this view by adding that the soul of the deceased would meet the souls of his or her friends and relatives.<sup>623</sup>

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621. cf. figure 3.2 on page 89

622. These various philosophical schools can be discussed here only partially, as far as it is of concern for the comparative study.

623. *Atharvaveda* XII, 3.17. It may also be noted that there is a sacrifice called *sarvatanuh* mentioned in the Vedas, which allows the performer of the sacrifice to be reborn with his entire body in the next world. See P.H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*, p.18f

In the *Brahmanas*, this view is extended to the point that the one who practices penances will retain in heaven all his bodily functions. The idea of *karma*<sup>624</sup> is taken up for the first time in *Satapatha Brahmana* XII,9.1.1, where *Bhrigu* says that “Whatever food a man eats in this world, by that same again is he eaten in the next”.<sup>625</sup> Other stories refer to this principle that one reaps after death the fruits of his deeds in this world.

In the *Upanishads*, the idea of rebirth is fully developed. The *Katha Upanishad* e.g. retells the story of *Nachiketas* who visits *Yama*<sup>626</sup>. Their dialogue provides a complete philosophy of human existence. Man, according to the narration of *Yama*, is nothing but *atman*. Therefore, the only goal of human life is to realize *atman*, which is obtained only by the will of *atman*. *Atman*, the absolute and ultimate being, is realized only by a few people, because its existence cannot be learnt by reading books or listening to a teacher. Only the one who, animated by an intuitive kind of understanding, withdraws his mind from sensible objects and reaches beyond joy and grief, can actually realize *atman*.<sup>627</sup> The world is called *maya*<sup>628</sup>, distracting man’s desire towards unreal things, which forces him to be reborn again.<sup>629</sup>

In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* it is said that the *karma*, accumulated by a person during his lifetime, accompanies his soul after his death as *karmasaya* and determines in which form the following birth takes place.<sup>630</sup> Getting free from all desire is the only way to break out of this cycle of rebirths.

The idea of *karma* and man’s attachment to it is elaborately explained in the *Mahabharata*, where it is said that past *karma* determines the present life of a person. A man of merit and high reputation may suffer many failures and disappointments because of his past *karma*. In the same way, a wicked man may live a life in wealth and prosperity, because he had earned positive *karma* in a previous life.<sup>631</sup>

To fulfil one’s *dharma* is the best way to avoid the accumulation of *karma*, and thus helps to enjoy a better life in the next rebirth. The story of the hunter who explains to the Brahmana the meaning of *dharma* shows that to fulfil one’s *dharma* should be the first priority of every person, because *karma* which is created by the fulfilment of one’s *dharma* will not be attached to the individual *atman*. The most striking example in this story is the hunter himself: by killing animals, he performs a great sin in the view of a brahmin. For the hunter, it is no sin but the fulfilment of his *dharma*.

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624. The term means “action”, “duty”, “performance”, and gained its meaning as the fruit of one’s action most probably because it was initially used only to denote ritual action, i.e. the performance of sacrifices, which was to yield certain fruits (*karmaphalam*). *Karma* has later received the meaning of creative impulse (cf. *Bhagavadgita* 8,3: “The offering which causes the origin of beings is called *karma*”) which leads to the conclusion that the world is actually caused by *karma* and exists as long as *karma* is produced.

625. Quotation taken from P.H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*, p.19

626. see also section 6.2.1.1 on page 178

627. V.H. Date, *Upanishads Retold*, Vol I, p. 63-64

628. *maya* is one of the most important concepts in the *advaita vedanta*. *Maya* is the creation of *atman* (or of the Lord, as the *Bhagavadgita* puts it), the world of action and multiplicity, which causes ignorance to the *atma*.

629. *Katha Upanishad*, II, 1-4

630. e.g. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* III, 2,13; IV, 4,2-6

631. On the other side, of course, his wickedness will yield again bad *karma*. *Mahabharata*, Varnaparva 208, 9-12

In the *Manusmriti*, punishment after death by *Yama* for wicked deeds, followed by the rebirth of the soul in another body according to his *karma*, is mentioned.<sup>632</sup> The only way to escape the cycle of rebirths is the *atma-jnana*, the knowledge of the self. Accumulation of positive *karma* cannot help to reach *moksha*, but only the *atma-jnana*. The way to *atma-jnana* is the extinction of passion (*sama*) and desires and the pursuance of the study of the Veda.<sup>633</sup> To recognize the self and to be just and equable in behaviour to all and everyone is the real *dharma* of every person. *Dharma* must be preserved in order to protect a person, else it will destroy the one who violates it.<sup>634</sup>

*Dharma*, in the first instance, is the order according to which the whole cosmos is established. In the *Manusmriti*, *dharma* is also identified with the *sadacara*, i.e. the “correct conduct”, and includes rules and laws for all walks of life for the four different *varnas*.

Yajnavalkya, according to Vijnaneshvara, has divided *dharma* into six different groups:

1. *varna-dharma*, i.e. the *dharma* related to the respective *varnas* or social classes
2. *ashrama-dharma*, i.e. the *dharma* related to the four *ashramas* in the lifetime of man
3. *varnashrama-dharma*, i.e. the *dharma* related to *varnas* and the *ashramas* at the same time
4. *guna-dharma*, i.e. the *dharma* related to the specific characteristics (*gunas*) of a person
5. *nimitta-dharma*, i.e. the *dharma* related to special occasions or in cases of emergency
6. *sadharana-dharma*, i.e. the *dharma* which is common to all human beings, irrespective of gender or caste.

For him, as for *Manu*, the *atma-jnana* is the most important goal of all *dharmas*.

In the *Sukra-Niti*, fate or destiny (*daiva*) is also said to be one of the influencing factors, beside *karma*, of a future birth. However, the *daiva* does not determine the life of the person totally, in which case a fatalistic standpoint would certainly develop. On the contrary: *daiva* can be influenced by one’s own deeds in the present birth.<sup>635</sup> Yajnavalkya says in his *smriti* that “destiny is the manifestation of the human effort of the past life” and therefore has an impact on human efforts.<sup>636</sup>

According to the *Bhagavadgita*, life is just a transition. The soul (*atma*) cannot die and has to be reborn as long as *mukti* (salvation) has not been obtained. This goal can only be reached by discontinuing the accumulation of *karma* which seems to be impossible if the following verse is considered:

None can ever remain really actionless even for a moment; for everyone is helplessly driven to action by the *gunas*, born of *Prakriti*.<sup>637</sup>

In addition, the previously accumulated *karma* forces man to do things against his own will:

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632. *Manu* XII, 17-22

633. *Manu* XII, 92-93

634. *Manu* XII, 125; IV, 243; VII, 15

635. P.H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*, p. 36-37

636. Yajnavalkya *Smriti*, I, 349-351

637. *Bhagavadgita* III, 5 (transl. Swami Chidbhavananda)

Bound by your own *karma* born of your nature, that which from delusion you wish not to do, even that you shall do helplessly against your will, O Kaunteya.<sup>638</sup>

These statements seem to imply that it is impossible not to accumulate new *karma*, except by complete renunciation of any action, which is said to be not within the reach of man. However, the verse does not state that one will always accumulate *karma*, but only that one is always driven to action. The direction of the action and its cause are of utmost importance for its result. Any action should be carried out without any attachment to it (*nishkamakarma*):

The wise, imbued with evenness of mind, renouncing the fruits of their actions, freed from the fetters of births, verily go to the stainless state.<sup>639</sup>

But he excels, O Arjuna, who, restraining the senses by the mind, unattached, directs his organs of action to the path of work.<sup>640</sup>

The only way to gain *mukti* is, following these statements of Krishna, unattached action, but not the renunciation of any action which would mean the death of the individual.<sup>641</sup> These statements now take the edge off the verses which have been quoted above: It is true that, as long as man lives, he is unable to be without action – but this does not mean that he will accumulate *karma* for ever. On the contrary: if he restrains his senses completely when performing any action he can avoid the accumulation of *karma*. But this is not enough: not every action done by complete detachment will yield positive results, but only the action which is in accordance with his own *dharma*:

One's own *dharma*, though imperfect, is better than the *dharma* of another well discharged. Better death in one's own *dharma* (*svadharma*); the *dharma* of another is full of fear.<sup>642</sup>

The law of *dharma* can be said to be the essence of Hinduism. As S. Radhakrishnan says:

The religion of the Hindus is not so much a theology as a scheme of life. Whether one is an orthodox Hindu or not depends, not on whether one believes this or that view of God, but on whether one accepts or rejects the *dharma*.<sup>643</sup>

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638. *Bhagavadgita* XVIII, 60 (transl. Swami Chidbhavananda)

639. *Bhagavadgita* II, 51 (transl. Swami Chidbhavananda)

640. *Bhagavadgita* III, 7 (transl. Swami Chidbhavananda)

641. Krishna says:

Verily, the abandonment of any obligatory duty is not proper; such abandonment out of ignorance is declared to be *Tamasika*. (*Bhagavadgita*, XVIII, 7 – transl. Swami Chidbhavananda)

642. *Bhagavadgita* III, 35 (transl. Swami Chidbhavananda)

643. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Religions*, p. 76



Hindus themselves understand Hinduism as a *dharma*.<sup>644</sup> This observation leads to the conclusion that “Hinduism is primarily a *samaj dharma*, a social code”<sup>645</sup>, while the *sadhana dharma*<sup>646</sup> is left to one’s own choice.<sup>647</sup>

### 6.1.1.2 The Concept of Soul in Hinduism

While the *Rigveda* uses the term *atman* in the meaning of breath or vital air, gradually this word acquired the meaning of soul or “Self”.

In the *Chandogya Upanishad* we find a number of speculations about *atman*. The main idea expressed is that only the formless matter is real, while the individual matter is unreal. The soul or *atma*, as it is also called, is not actually a part of the *atman* which is the cause and source of all beings and to which all being ultimately will return, but it *is* the *atman*.

The father Uddalaka asks his son Svetaketu to put a small quantity of salt in water. Later, he tells him to get the salt back, but his son is unable to recover it. So he shall taste the water and by this realize the presence of the salt. In the same way, the *atman*, like the salt, is omnipresent but invisible, it is the essence of all that exists, “that art thou”.<sup>648</sup>

In the two major philosophical schools, this *Upanishadic* view of the actual unity of the individual’s soul and the ultimate being has either been emphasized or contradicted. The monistic *advaita vedanta*, as it has been explained by Sankara<sup>649</sup>, identifies the *atma* with *atman*. The world is *maya* and as such basically unreal. The *atma*, however, believes that the world is real because of its ignorance (*avidya*) about its identity with *atman*. The *atman* cannot be described with words or action, because it is without any qualities. It is “not this, not this (*neti, neti*)”.<sup>650</sup>

The qualified monism (*visishtadvaita*) of Ramanuja<sup>651</sup> holds that there must be some kind of duality in order to enable devotion and worship. These schools go to the extent to say that *atma* is a part of the *atman*. In fact, the *atma* is entirely dependent on God (*Isvara*) and thus also inseparable. However, the soul is not the supreme being, and God is the Lord over the law of *karma*, while the *atma* or *cit*, as Ramanuja also calls the soul, is subject to it and suffers due to unfulfilled desires.

The soul according to Ramanuja, has certain qualities. It is and has knowledge, and it contains the notion of ‘I’ (*ahankara*). Besides, consciousness and bliss are important qualities, which the individual soul shares with the *brahman*. With these qualities, the individual’s soul can not be equalized to the supreme Lord.

The doctrine of *karma samsara* is maintained by Ramanuja, but the salvation is not the unification with the *atman*, but the liberation from bondage and thus the permanent relation with God in the shape of the master-servant relationship.

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644. This fact must not lead to the conclusion that *dharma* means “religion”. On the contrary: Hinduism should be viewed as a *dharma* and not, as it is often done especially in the Western countries, as a religion.

645. Hans Staffner, *Jesus Christ and the Hindu Community*, p. 89

646. i.e. the way how to reach *mukti*

647. Hans Staffner, *op.cit.*,p. 90

648. *Chandogya Upanishad* 6.13.1-3

649. see also section 2.1.9 on page 21

650. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* V, 15

651. see also the section 2.1.2 on page 15

According to the *dvaita vedanta* of Madhvacharya, the individual soul receives its own form and body. The soul (*jiva*) is subordinated to the *brahman*. The qualities of bliss and consciousness, which are attributed to the individual soul and viewed as the same for *brahman* and *atma* in the *visishtadvaita*, are believed to be distinct and separate from these qualities of *brahman*. The number of souls is infinite.<sup>652</sup>

While especially for the *bhakti yoga* the schools of Ramanuja and Madhvacharya have some importance, Sankaras *advaita vedanta* is undoubtedly the school with the greatest influence on the Hindu population in India.<sup>653</sup> On the other side, it is also obvious that the *advaita vedanta* did not have this strong impact on the rural population, which still forms the majority of Indian society and follows, in the southern parts, more or less the Dravidian system.<sup>654</sup>

### 6.1.1.3 Man and His Relation to God in the Hindu Scriptures

In the Vedic Scriptures, the relation between God and man is basically depending on the benevolence of the gods. Their attitude towards man can be influenced by the performance of sacrifices. As explained elsewhere<sup>655</sup>, man is able to gain a godlike status when performing sacrifices.

With the *Upanishads*, in which the idea of the identity of *brahman* and *atma* is fully developed, God becomes impersonal, which makes it difficult to talk about a relation between God and man. The major aspect here is the *avidya* (ignorance) of man about his souls divine nature. As long as man has not realized the ultimate reality, there cannot be a relation between God and man, because God as the ultimate reality is not actually known to man. And when man has realized the ultimate reality and thus gained *moksha*, there is no relation between God and man, because man has become God (if one is to speak of God in this context).

The monistic concept has been upheld till today. Only Ramanujas qualified monism<sup>656</sup> and the less followed dualistic systems of Madhvacharya and others permit the development of some kind of relationship between God and man by means of *bhakti yoga*. *Atma*, the soul of man, is a part of the *brahman*, having its own identity. The ideal relation of man to God is one of devotion, which can, like in the monistic concept, be reached only by overcoming the own ignorance.

### 6.1.1.4 Man and His Relation to Man in the Hindu Scriptures

Hinduism has always been accused of being a purely individualistic religion. This opinion, mainly expressed by Western scholars like Max Weber or H. von Stietencron among many others, is not entirely baseless, because the concept of man and the world view in *advaita vedanta* is fundamentally asocial. The existence of the world is no reality, thus there is no need for any social concern.

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652. S.P. Dubey, *The Concept of Soul in Hinduism*, p. 24-27

653. This is not obvious to the foreign observer, since most Hindus are used to worship their favourite deities in the respective temples, which suggests the idea of the prevalence of dualism, if not polytheism. However, even Sankara admits that the worship of idols is a way to come to the stage of liberation, because it helps to realize the ultimate supremacy of *atman*.

654. see also the section 5.6.1.1 on page 131

655. see page 14 and section 6.3.1.1 on page 191

656. see also the section 2.1.10 on page 21

But this is only a partial view. It neglects elements in the Hindu doctrine of *dharma* which are very well expressing social concern and reflect the responsibility of the individual towards his fellow beings.

There is the concept of *rina* already established in the Vedas. The term *rina* actually means "debt" and designates in the first instance the indebtedness of man to the gods, to the *rishis* and to the ancestors (in some cases, a fourth debt to men is also included). These debts he pays back by the performance of sacrifice (*yajna*, which pays back the debt to the Gods), by begetting a son (which pays back the debt to the ancestors) and by learning the Vedas (which pays back the debt to the sages). Entertaining and accommodating guests pays back the debt to men.<sup>657</sup>

*Dana* (alms-giving) and *daya* (compassion) are indispensable parts of man's *dharma* and thus connected with the goal to gain *moksha*. The *Bhagavadgita* gives a clear idea of a non-individualistic concept: man is to give up his *ego* and to direct all his thoughts and actions towards the Lord. The actions would be directed towards the welfare of *all* beings. By gaining this attitude, man would properly discharge his *dharma*.

The concern for each other within a *jati*<sup>658</sup> is extraordinary<sup>659</sup> and bases firmly on the concept of *dharma*. The *jati* is clearly organized and rules exist which determine each member's responsibilities, duties and rights in the relation to his fellow beings. As long as one obeys to these rules, he will be securely protected and guarded by the other members of the *jati*.

The caste system, which is prevailing in the Indian society and is most probably the profoundest expression of the Hindu concept of the relation of man to man, is discussed more detailed in the section 4.1.1 beginning on page 97.

#### 6.1.1.5 The Concept of Sin in Hinduism

In the Vedic scriptures, there is only a vague idea of sin. It is not only related to moral issues. Even a falsely executed sacrifice is a sin as big as any moral sin. Sin can be removed by the performance of certain sacrifices or rituals, which are also described in the Vedas. However, sin is not based on man's own will, but has been imposed on him by other things or forces. Thus, man can actually not be held responsible for his sin.<sup>660</sup>

In modern Hinduism, the orthodox Hindu begins his day with a ritual bath which he takes at the tank which belongs to the temple. There he prays:

I am about to perform morning ablution in this sacred stream in the presence of the gods and Brahmins with a view to the removal of guilt resulting from act, speech, thought, from what has been touched and not touched, known and unknown, eaten and not eaten, drunk and not drunk.<sup>661</sup>

Here, sin is viewed as an offence against ritual prescriptions as well as moral failures. The ritual bath cleanses the *dvija* from his sins.

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657. Ishanand Vempeny, *Krishna and Christ*, p. 205f and 413. This explanation follows the *Satapatha Brahmana*

658. see the section on the caste system on page 97ff.

659. Some people claim that the deterioration of the caste system caused by foreign influence is the only reason for the present misery of so many Indians

660. S. Amirtham, *The Value of the Category of Sacrifice in Christian Preaching in India*, p. 6-7

661. Monier Williams, *Brahminism and Hinduism*, p. 399; quoted from S. Amirtham, *The Value of the Category of Sacrifice in Christian Preaching in India*, p. 13

In Vaishnavism, sin is the result of *ajnana*, i.e. nescience. The *Bhagavadgita* explains in its 16th chapter the differences between an evil and a good person. The evil man is attributed numerous demonic qualities, which all together can be named as sin. The evil people are not able to distinguish between good and evil.<sup>662</sup> They are full of pride, intoxicated with wealth, addicted to lust and live in the delusion that they themselves are of divine nature.<sup>663</sup> These evil-doers will become demons, for ever unable to reach liberation.<sup>664</sup> Only the one who refrains from lust, anger and greed, which are the three “gates of hell”, and practises what is laid down in the scriptures, will finally reach liberation.<sup>665</sup>

Accordingly, the chief sins are on the spiritual side not to recognize *brahman* as the ultimate being and, on the worldly side, anger, greed and desire. In addition to these, sins are mentioned more specifically in various scriptures.

Sin is also understood as the action which is not in accordance with one’s *dharma*. In this context the *dharma*, as it is found in the laws of Manu, still has greater importance than the *dharma* as it is explained in the *Bhagavadgita*.<sup>666</sup> The villagers in northern Andhra Pradesh see, according to Luke/Carmen, the greatest sins (*papam*) in “caste pollution, murder, adultery outside the caste, and not performing the prescribed rites”.<sup>667</sup>

Sin does, however, not have such an impact on the individual’s future, as it can have in Christianity, because sin is only considered to be a failure on one’s way to self-realization and not, as understood in Christianity, the transgression against the commandment of God, which basically can not be revoked, except through faith in Jesus Christ. Man, according to Hinduism, has the chance to make good his failures in a future life. It is believed that finally every *atma* will return to *atman*, i.e. to a state of complete detachment.

The concept of *karma* is an attempt to deal with sin and to evaluate it. Whatever a person does, it produces *karma* of different quality, depending on the quality of the action performed. This *karma* is attached to the *atma* and causes the rebirth of the individual. Only if *karma* is completely destroyed, the *atma* reaches the reunification with *brahman*.<sup>668</sup>

## 6.1.2 The Concept of Man in Christianity

As Christianity extracts its theology from the Bible, we first have to understand how man is viewed in this book. For this purpose it is important to recognize that the Bible consists actually of two parts, which are called the Old and the New Testament. The Old Testament is at the same time the holy scripture of the Jewish people till today and forms the major part (about three fourth) of the Bible. The New Testament is the specific Christian part<sup>669</sup>,

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662. XVI, 7

663. XVI, 11-17

664. XVI, 19-20

665. XVI, 21-25

666. See also the explanation found on page 156

667. *Village Christians...*, p. 31. The cause of the murder of Harijans by higher caste members in Tsundoor was, according to some informants, caste pollution. This indicates that caste pollution continues to be understood as a major sin not only in the northern area of rural Andhra Pradesh, but also elsewhere.

668. On the term *karma* see also footnote 624 on page 154

669. It could be said to be some kind of appendix. Jesus, himself being a Jew, did not actually think of creating a new religion, but was interpreting the holy scripture of his own people. This is why the Christian community, when considering the extent of their holy scripture,

containing the gospels which tell about Jesus' life, speeches and deeds, and a collection of letters written by some of the apostles<sup>670</sup> to the early Christian congregations on certain theological questions. Because of this division into two parts, and because the Christian religion many times refers to and relies on the Old Testament, the exploration of the Christian concept of man can be done only after the concept of man in the Old Testament has been duly investigated.

It is also important to note that there is no systematic anthropology found in the bible. Man is always viewed in his relation to other beings and to God, but is never the subject of lengthy discussions about his physical and spiritual nature. These topics are only introduced by different narrations and reflected in some of the psalms. In this section, we will first recollect some of the most important narrations, in which reference is made to the nature of man. Then, a more detailed exposition of the biblical concept of man is made.

### 6.1.2.1 Relevant Narrations About Man in the Old Testament

The Old Testament tells two stories about the creation of man: one says that God creates man as an image of himself, and the other, which is of older origin, tells that man has been created out of dust. The latter has gained more importance in the Jewish religion and in Christianity, emphasizing the dualistic relationship between God and man, while the former has led to the assumption that man has the right to exploit the earth and all its creatures for his own benefit.

According to the story found in the book of Genesis chapter two and three, God created man out of dust and breathed into his nose his own breath, which is carrying the life.<sup>671</sup> Thus, man has been enlivened by God.<sup>672</sup>

After the act of creation, God gave man the freedom to move wherever he wanted in the garden of Eden<sup>673</sup> and to do whatever he liked, but restricted him only not to eat the fruit of the "tree of knowledge" in the middle of the garden, which would make man like God. Man was, however, unable to withstand the desire to taste the fruits of this tree, and was thus expelled from paradise. Therefore, the practically unrestricted relation between God and man was destroyed, and man became responsible to maintain and to take care of himself on his own.

The following stories, then, show that mankind became wicked and godless:

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.<sup>674</sup>

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included the Jewish scripture as the basis of their own religion. The term "New Covenant" (= New Testament) has been used in connection with the Holy Communion (see page 140) already by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11, 25)

670. Apostles are the disciples of Jesus Christ

671. This view is quite common in many religions, since a person stops to breathe when he is dead

672. This has never been the impetus to develop a monistic theology. Instead, this life-giving breath is understood as the manifestation of God's creative power, and man is not more and not less than a creation of God.

673. The garden of Eden, also called the paradise, may be interpreted as the symbol for the undisturbed relationship between God and man. The story narrates that God and man shared this garden as their environment.

674. Gen 6,5-6 (transl. Revised Standard Version)

God decided to destroy the entire creation, except Noah who survived in an arc which accommodated his family together with at least one couple of all animals.

The new beginning after the devastating flood is marked by God's promise not to destroy again the mankind on account of its wickedness. Instead, he chose the people of Israel as *his* people, whom he guided and punished according to their obedience to his laws.

All following narrations in the Old Testament, after a set of stories which deal with the whole mankind and its sin against God and the consequent punishment, reflect the relation between the people of Israel, who have been chosen by God as *his* people, and God. This relation is a dualistic one, man being a creation of God and thus bound to be obedient to him. The red thread through all stories is man's obedience or disobedience to God's law and advice, and the consequent punishment imposed on an individual or on the entire people by God.<sup>675</sup>

Central to the narrations in the Old Testament is man's sin<sup>676</sup> and its effects on his relation to God.

### 6.1.2.2 Man in the New Testament

Man in the New Testament is always, like in the Old Testament, viewed in his relation to God. The New Testament does not deviate from the concept that man is a creature, equipped with a unique individuality which is determined by his soul. There are, however, certain changes because of the special role Jesus plays within the Christian religion.

The New Testament and especially the letters emphasize the equality of all men. All men are equal in the face of God, and there is no difference to be upheld once they become Christians.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Jesus.<sup>677</sup>

With this statement, Paul makes clear that the differences based on the social position of a person have no meaning in the face of God.<sup>678</sup> In addition, he wants to emphasize that those who are of Jewish origin are in no way better Christians than those who are of Greek (or any other) origin.

While the gospels do not reflect much about the concept of man, except with regard to his relation to God<sup>679</sup>, the Pauline letters do elaborate on this question.<sup>680</sup> According to Paul, man is basically sinful and unable to get rid of his sin. There is no way to find salvation, because God had put the whole mankind under the power of the sin.<sup>681</sup> There is no possibility to escape the power of sin, except through the faith in Jesus. The reason for this statement is

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675. In some occasions, the punishment also turns out to be a renewal of the relationship between God and man.

676. see section 6.1.2.6 on page 168

677. Gal 3,28

678. The statement that "you are all one in Jesus" does not imply the idea of monism. The individuality of man and his being a creature is the basis for all other concepts developed by Paul.

679. see the sections below

680. the letter to the Romans is the most important source

681. Rom 3,9; the entire section Rom 1,18 to 3,20 deals with the power of sin over mankind and includes both, Jews and non-Jews

given by a typological description: like the sin of Adam was the cause for the sinfulness of the entire mankind (man inherited the sin of the first man), the complete justice of Jesus has brought justification to those who are born from him.<sup>682</sup> Thus, man is determined not by his own action, but by the action of Adam which was the original sin of disobedience to God and of the desire to be like God, or by the action of Jesus, who could be sinless only because Jesus is the son of God.

### 6.1.2.3 The Concept of Man in the Bible

In the Bible, reference is made to man in different ways, using many different terms, among which are terms like *soul*, *flesh*, *heart*, *spirit* and *body*. These are to be understood as different aspects of man, not as separate elements which constitute man and disintegrate once the person dies. Man in the biblical sense is whole only as long as he is alive.

According to this understanding, the terms refer to the following aspects of man<sup>683</sup>:

<i>soul</i>	The term (Greek: ψυχη) denotes a living being, but particularly man (while it can also refer to other living creatures). The soul is not the life-giving power which makes the body alive. It needs a body to express itself and therefore assumes a waiting state after the body has died. <sup>684</sup>
<i>flesh</i>	The term (Greek: σαρξ) denotes the external aspects of man. It is the body of man, but not a mere accommodation of the soul which is captured within this frame of flesh, but on the contrary the essential means which makes man, together with the soul, complete and able to become a living creature.
<i>body</i>	The term “body” (Greek: σωμα) becomes distinct from the term “flesh” only in the New Testament. Body means here the full person, binding together soul and flesh. Flesh, then, is the transient part of man, which gains control over the body together with the sin. The result is the reduction of the body to a lowly state against the initial intention of the creator. In Christianity, it is believed that every individual will rise from death by receiving a new, spiritual body <sup>685</sup> which is not infected by sin.
<i>heart</i>	This term is used for the place where feelings, memories, ideas and plans are located. It is the location of mind and intellect and also the source of his conscious. In the heart “man meets God”. <sup>686</sup>
<i>spirit</i>	beside many other diverse meanings not directly related to the concept of man, denotes the term “spirit” (Greek: πνευμα) the source of life which is given by God. By the power of the spirit man can live, without the spirit he expires. The spirit can not be mastered by man. <sup>687</sup>

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682. Rom 5,18; cf. the section on sin from page 170 onwards.

683. see also the regarding articles in Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*

684. cf. the section on page 174

685. 1 Cor. 15,44

686. Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 228

687. The term spirit is used also in connection with God as the “spirit of God”, especially in the New Testament. It would be interesting to investigate the meaning of the term as it is used in the gospel according to John, where the statement is found: “God is spirit” (*John 4,24*), because this comes very close to the concept of God in Hinduism and would make it easier

The Bible characterizes man as a creature among other creatures made by God. This creature consists of a body and a soul, which form a unity and thus bring man into existence. Body and soul are not actually different elements, but depend on each other.<sup>688</sup> Only in this unity, man would be able to fulfil his vocation, which is to protect and to make use of the entire creation. This double aspect of man's vocation is quite important, as it shows on the one side the responsibility for the environment including all fellow-beings, and on the other side the difference between man and other creatures as being subordinated to man. Man would, however, not realize his responsibility, if he would not realize his dependence on God. He is dust, and to dust he shall return<sup>689</sup>, which means: man is like any other creature.<sup>690</sup> It is the spirit of God which gives man his unique position and the power to fulfil his responsibilities. The spirit of God makes man different from other creatures and gives him his humanity.

#### 6.1.2.4 Man and His Relation to God in the Bible

The relation between God and man in the Old Testament is depending on the degree of obedience of the individual and of the people of Israel to the laws which have been established by God.

The failure to fulfil the laws<sup>691</sup> requires sacrifices, which are described detailed in the book of Leviticus, in order to make good the disobedience of the people.<sup>692</sup> These sacrifices were, as long as the people of Israel were a nomadic people, performed in the "tent of meeting" or the "tent of the Lord's presence"<sup>693</sup>, and later, when the people settled in the area which is now called Israel or Palestine, sacrifices were exclusively performed at the temple which was erected in Jerusalem.

Because the place of sacrifice was immovable after the settlement of the Jewish people, sacrifice could not become as important as in Hinduism for the establishment and maintenance of man's relationship with God. Instead, the study of the Holy Scriptures which forms the basis of the day-to-day life was much emphasized, because the scriptures reflect the will of God and are believed to be revealed by God himself. Assemblies are held every week in synagogues, in which the holy scriptures are recited and interpreted, prayers offered and hymns sung.

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to bridge the gap between the Hindu and the Christian concept of man. However, to deduct from these Johannine statement that ultimately man and God are the same, would be a wrong conclusion, because it would neglect the other aspects, as mentioned above, which are still relevant for the concept of man even in the Johannine gospel.

688. The Old Testament uses the terms body and soul (*basar* and *nephesh*) never as the designation for absolute and independent elements, but always under the presumption that the whole of man, i.e. body and soul together, is meant. Cf. Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Biblical Understanding: A Mediating Body for the Spirit*, p. 7-8

689. This is the consequence of the disobedience of Adam and Eve; see Gen 3, 19b

690. This is also underlined by the fact that in the narration of the creation which is found in the very beginning of the bible, man is created on the same day like the animals (Gen 1,24-31)

691. The Jewish people keep the Old Testament (to which they do not refer as the Old Testament, but as the "Law and the Prophets") as a collection of books which had been revealed to human beings by God. Thus, copies of this book, which are usually handwritten, have to be verified carefully, and old scrolls which can no longer be used in the service are not simply disposed of, but carefully buried.

692. see section 6.3.2 on page 192 for more details

693. The tent of meeting was a tent which was to accommodate the so called "ark of the testimony" and to perform sacrifices. It is narrated that God came down on the tent of meeting whenever it was erected. Moses was the only person allowed to approach the tent when God was dwelling inside. (cf. Ex 40)



After the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem, sacrifice was abandoned, and the only rite in the Jewish life which resembles a sacrifice to some extent is the Passover, which has become a meal of community and remembrance of the liberation of the people of Israel from the bondage and slavery in Egypt.<sup>694</sup>

The Old Testament shows a tendency that God would punish those who did not obey his commandments. The punishment appears to be in form of sickness, poverty or other calamities. However, the problem of the justice of God is felt when those who are obedient to God and following his law do not prosper, but suffer a lot. This problem is discussed at length in the book of Job<sup>695</sup> in the Old Testament, and the final conclusion is that it is God's freedom to impose bad luck on whoever he wants.<sup>696</sup>

The New Testament and especially Paul views the relationship between God and man basing on the stories of creation and developments in the Old Testament.<sup>697</sup> Man is sinful down to the bottom of his heart, and he cannot escape this fact even if he would try it with all efforts, because he inherits the "original sin" which has been performed by the first man in the garden of Eden, where he disobeyed the command of God.<sup>698</sup>

The concept of the original sin is an attempt to explain the seeming unjust treatment that man receives from God. Because every man is basically a sinner and cannot claim complete righteousness, it is the freedom of God to grant favour or to impose punishment without considering the merit of a person, because man has merited nothing in the face of God.<sup>699</sup>

According to Paul, the basic sinfulness of man has been removed through Jesus Christ, provided the individual accepts this fact through faith. He regains righteousness not by his own efforts, but by the efforts made by God himself. Thus, God restores the initial relation between himself and man. It is an act of grace. On the basis of the restored relationship, man is also enabled to lead a life in accordance to the will of God. His failures in doing so are no

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694. cf. Ex 12. Initially, the Passover was also marked by sacrifices of lambs on the particular day, which were brought to Jerusalem by the Jewish families and afterwards prepared and eaten by them.

695. Job is a very pious man, following God's law without fail. He is caused to suffer by Satan, an angel of God, who wants to prove that man, when being suffering without reason, would forsake God on account of his sufferings.

696. Another conclusion in the book of Job is, however, more in the line of the belief that God cannot be unjust: Job receives all what he has lost during his severe sufferings, because he did not forsake God on account of it.

697. cf. page 160

698. Paul writes in this regard in the letter to the Romans, chapter five:

Therefore, as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned – sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. (*Rom 5,12f*)

This statement presumes that death is the capital punishment imposed on man when he trespassed the limits set to him by God in the garden of Eden. God said then to Adam, the first man:

In the sweat of your face you shall eat your bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return. (*Gen 3,19*)

699. The concept of the original sin is, however, not an attempt to justify the performance of sin in the sense of immoral acts or disobedience against God. The sin which is performed by an individual during his or her life is to be viewed separately. The attempt of a person to fulfil God's will can invoke God's graceful act upon him.

longer made good by sacrifices, but by the faith in the effects of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.<sup>700</sup>

#### 6.1.2.5 Man and His Relation to Man in the Bible

The social concern is in the Old Testament at least of the same importance – if not more – like the concern for the relation with God, since a good relation with God was depending on the concern of the individual for his fellow-beings. Unique among all religions is the year of restoration<sup>701</sup>:

You shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants; it shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his family.<sup>702</sup>

At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release. And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbour; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, his brother, because the Lord's release has been proclaimed.<sup>703</sup>

Although the benefits of the year of restoration may be extended to people who do not belong to the Jewish people, there is however the permission to exclude the strangers<sup>704</sup> from them. Thus, while a Jewish slave must be released in the year of restoration, the foreign slave may be kept.

With this kind of unconditional cancellation of all obligations which could be harmful to a person's individuality and prosperity, the Bible provides a regular means of re-establishing social and economic equality at least among the people of Israel.

Beside the year of restoration, there are more rules for a just society laid down in the Bible. One example is found in the book of *Exodus*:

You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you do afflict them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be to him as a creditor, and you shall not exact interest from him.

If ever you take your neighbour's garment in pledge, you shall restore it to him before the sun goes down; for that is the only covering, it is his mantle for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.<sup>705</sup>

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700. For Paul, faith is the major and only means to regain righteousness in the face of God. This faith cannot be measured by man, it cannot be expressed in words, but it is finally judged by God on the day of judgement, on which also Jesus Christ will return in order to establish the kingdom of God.

701. It is not known whether this practice has ever been followed completely; it is, however, remarkable that such a rule exists in the Holy Scriptures of the people of Israel

702. *Lev.* 25,10

703. *Dtn.* 15, 1-2

704. i.e. all who do not belong to the people of Israel

705. *Ex* 20, 21-27 (transl. Revised Standard Version)

Although many times the foreigners or strangers are exempted from the social concern expressed in the laws, there are also protective statements for the strangers who live among the Jewish people:

He [God] executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner therefore; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.<sup>706</sup>

It is important to note that the concern is first shown by God himself, and God's concern shall be the cause for the concern of the people. Thus, the action of God causes man to act, and not, as in the *bhakti marga*, the action of man causes God to act.

However, the power of the priestly tribe grew and with it some kind of ritualism which minimized the need for social concern. God was reduced to a sacrifice demanding transcendent being which dwells in the temple in Jerusalem or in his heavenly abode. In the wake of this development, prophets began to revive the demand for social justice and called the concern for the oppressed groups in society the proper worship of God:

Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet;  
declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins.

...

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?  
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

...

If you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,  
if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.<sup>707</sup>

These and other verses reflect the idea that man is not in the first instance required to re-establish his relationship with God by means of rituals and sacrifices, but by realizing his responsibilities towards his fellow beings, which means: not to exploit anyone, but to give support to those who need it, irrespective of their social background. This was actually a reply to the increasing ritualization of the day-to-day life which didn't leave much room for spontaneous action as the situation requires.

Jesus picks up the thread of the prophets' demand for social concern by binding together the most important law of the Jewish people with another law which does not directly appear in the so called Decalogue<sup>708</sup>, when he replies to the question what the most important law is:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: you shall love your neighbour as yourself.<sup>709</sup>

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706. *Dtn* 10,18f

707. *Isaiah* 58, 1.6-7.9b-10 (transl. Revised Standard Version)

708. see the section 6.1.2.6 on page 168

709. *Mt* 22, 37-39 (transl. Revised Standard Version). The first commandment is quoted by Jesus from *Dtn* 6,5, while the second commandment is quoted from *Lev* 19,18

In his view, man is sinful because of his selfishness and disregard for his fellow-beings. The attempts of the Jewish religious sects who emphasize the need of ritualistic accuracy in order to become free from sin, are sinful in the eyes of Jesus because they do not care for the people in need. He challenges the group of the Pharisees<sup>710</sup> several times by healing a person on the Sabbath. As the “keeping of the Sabbath”<sup>711</sup> was most important in the eyes of the Pharisees, the action of Jesus was in their eyes an offence against the will of God. Jesus however replies that it is more important to help man than to keep the Sabbath (or to perform any other ritual duty).

Jesus quotes another section of the Old Testament, when he is asked whether he is the Messiah:

Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.<sup>712</sup>

This statement gains importance when viewed under the aspect of how the group of people mentioned here have been looked at by the Pharisees. In their eyes, the disabled and also the poor persons were unable to perform the religious duties and thus sinners on account of their physical disability. Jesus has restored their dignity as human beings in the face of God.

#### 6.1.2.6 The Concept of Sin in the Bible

Sin is, in the Old Testament, defined as the transgression of God’s laws which have been laid down in the biblical books of the law and are condensed in the so called Decalogue, a list of the ten commandments.<sup>713</sup> It contains four commandments regarding the relation between God and man, and 6 commandments regarding the relation between man and man, and comprises all elements of social and religious life. Again a condensation of these ten commandments is found in *Dtn.* 6, 4f:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

As the concern of God is especially for the downtrodden and suppressed people (see the section 6.1.2.5) this commandment to love God is indirectly also a commandment to love one’s fellow-beings.

There were means to make good the transgressions of man by sacrifices, which are prescribed for certain occasions. However, the Old Testament also knows the idea that man is sinful and unable to live a sinless life by his own effort, because there are sins which are performed unknowingly and which therefore are irreparable.

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710. The Pharisees were a group of people who originated from all walks of life and were emphasizing the importance of the biblical law. They believed that the Messiah (the Messiah is the king who shall lead Israel to its previous glory) would come only if they would follow the law strictly and in absolute obedience. They separated themselves publicly from those whom they regarded as sinners.

711. The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week and equals the Saturday of the week, as it is known today. The story of creation tells that God rested on the seventh day, after he had created the entire world. The demand of the Old Testament to observe this day as the day of rest and worship has led to the conclusion by the Pharisees that only very few things may be performed on such a day. “To keep the Sabbath” means to abide by these restrictions

712. Lk 7,22; Jesus actually quotes from the Old Testament (*Is* 35,5-6)

713. This list is found in *Ex* 20, 2-17, and *Dtn* 5,6-21.

Often sin is also viewed as a corporate sin which has been done by the entire people of Israel, or a clan, even if it is obvious that only a few had caused the other people to commit the sin. The exile in the land of Babylon is, for instance, understood as the punishment from God for the continuous disobedience of the people of Israel.

In the New Testament, the concept of sin as it is established in the Old Testament is carried on with a few modifications which are discussed below.

Sin is understood as the only cause for man's separation from God, and in the gospels there is also no elaboration of the concept of the original sin, as it is found in the letters of Paul.<sup>714</sup> Jesus actually turns to the sinners and invites them to have communion with him. On the other side, those who believe that they haven't committed any sin, are addressed by Jesus as people who do not need him, because they are fine with themselves.<sup>715</sup> This is, however, only an ironic statement, with which Jesus points to the selfishness of those who believe that they have done everything that God demands from them.<sup>716</sup>

Even though there is no explicit mentioning of the concept of the original sin, Jesus indirectly points to the original sin when he, in the sermon on the mount, demands from the people to be perfect like God in heaven.<sup>717</sup> He says:

Think not I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>718</sup>

Following this, he interprets some of the major commandments concerning the relation between man and man and points out that it is not enough just to do or to avoid things exactly according to what the commandment says, but to act according to the principle that lies behind the commandments:

You have heard that it was said to the men of old, "You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgement." But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, "You fool!" shall be liable to the hell of fire... You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery." But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.<sup>719</sup>

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714. see also page 165

715. When the question is raised by the Pharisees: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?", Jesus answers: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mk 2,15-17)

716. see also page 167, where Jesus' standpoint towards the group of Pharisees is explained

717. The *sermon on the mount* comprises the chapters 5 to 7 of the gospel according to Matthew and is most probably a collection of Jesus' statements on the (Jewish) law and on other aspects of life. Mahatma Gandhi referred to the sermon on the mount as the essence of Christian teaching several times.

718. Mt 5, 17-20; transl. Revised Standard Version

719. Mt 5,21-22,27-28; transl. Revised Standard Version

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust... You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.<sup>720</sup>

Sin, therefore, begins already when a person develops negative emotions against anyone, even against his worst enemy. Since it is virtually impossible for a person who lives within a community to control his feelings to such an extent, the conclusion may be drawn that the idea of an original sin exists also in the gospels.

Like it is done in the gospels at several places, Paul also gives a list of sinful acts. It is up to the individual to avoid these sinful acts, and it is up to the community to punish a person who has been convicted of such an act.

In addition to these sinful acts, Paul, especially in his letter to the Romans, explains that every man is basically sinful because of the sin committed by the first man, Adam.<sup>721</sup> This original sin<sup>722</sup> influences man to the extent that he becomes unable to perform any good thing, in spite of his desire to do so:

I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me.<sup>723</sup>

This concept taken alone would surely result in some kind of fatalism, because man feels helpless in his attempts to avoid sin, or it would lead to libertinism, because if nothing can avoid sin, then there is also no need to attempt to avoid sin. However, Paul emphasizes this absolute sinfulness of man only to make clear that redemption from this power is possible exclusively through the grace of God.

As one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men.<sup>724</sup>

Jesus is called the true righteous man because of his complete obedience to the will of the father in heaven, God. Those who have faith in Christ and are baptized into his death<sup>725</sup>, have died to sin and are reborn to a new life in slavery to righteousness instead of the previous life in slavery to sin.<sup>726</sup> Thus, for the faithful Christian the power of the original sin is no more, but for those who do not believe in Jesus Christ. This also explains the need for man to proclaim the gospel in order to release all mankind from the bondage of sin.

Jesus says:

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720. Mt 5,43-45.48; transl. Revised Standard Version

721. see also the section 6.1.2.1 on page 161, where a description is given on how Adam sinned against the will of God.

722. see also page 165ff.

723. Rom 7, 18-20; transl. Revised Standard Version

724. Rom 5,18; transl. Revised Standard Version

725. Rom 6,3

726. Rom 6, 16-18

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under the foot by men.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.<sup>727</sup>

With this statement, Jesus makes clear that his followers have to act and to live within the world and among the people. They must not hide themselves by renouncing the world, but they shall step forth in order to proclaim and to fulfil the will of God.

### 6.1.3 The Influence of the Hindu Concept of Man on Indian Christianity in Andhra Pradesh

When the missionaries entered Andhra Pradesh<sup>728</sup> during the British period, they did not pay much attention to the world view of the people whom they were attempting to convert to Christianity. Although some of them studied the various schools of Hinduism very well, most of them observed only the rituals and customs followed by the Hindus which led them to the conclusion that Hinduism is a superstitious and polytheistic religion. Thus, their preaching was directed towards abandoning the practices related to the Hindu religion, because these practices appeared to the missionary like plain idolatry which is one of the major sins fought against in the Bible and particularly in the Old Testament.

Emphasis was also laid on the general sinfulness of man<sup>729</sup>, thus attracting only those who had the feeling that their social and economic situation was based on their own sins. With this attitude, Christian missionaries could reach only the suppressed groups in Indian society, who had been taught for centuries that their present status is due to the sins which they had committed in their previous lives. The promise of a new life free from all sin led to the acceptance of the Christian faith especially by these groups.<sup>730</sup>

It is also a fact that most of those who embraced Christianity came from a background in which they didn't ever receive education about the philosophical basis of Hinduism.<sup>731</sup> For them, God manifested himself in the idol which was worshipped regularly, or as the *grama devata*, and they as worshippers were subject to this God who would unveil his anger whenever he (or she) felt neglected by the village people.

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727. Mt 5, 13-16; transl. Revised Standard Version

728. The following statements base on the material collected during the research work in Andhra Pradesh. It is likely that similar observations can be made in other states of South India, especially Tamil Nadu.

729. Basing on the doctrine of the original sin; see above the section on page 170

730. Often, the Christian missionaries are accused of using material support as means for the conversion of the Hindus. This is true to some extent, but not entirely. It must be acknowledged that this accusation was already made when the first missionaries were active in India, which caused them to be cautious when one desired to become a Christian and to investigate sincerely the motives of a person. This was necessary not only because of the accusations made, but also because, according to Christianity, the quality of faith is the major element in a Christian's life, not his being a baptized member of the church. Cf. also the chapters 2 and 3

731. Most of the converts are from the Dravidian background

There are attempts by some Indian Christian theologians to develop a concept of man by taking into account both, the biblical as well as elements of the Hindu concept. Most of these didn't have much effect on the Christianity in South India, and what is more, these attempts have not reached the Christian communities at the grass-root level, where elements of the Hindu concept of man are still, though generally involuntary, prevailing.<sup>732</sup>

Observations and discussions made during the research work show clearly that to be a Christian among most Christians in Andhra Pradesh is not so much a matter of faith, but a matter of social affiliation. The social entity to which one belongs determines by way of *samaj dharma* the behaviour of the individual, his position within the social unit and the relation to other social entities. Thus, the conclusion can be drawn that a major element of the Hindu concept of man which is continued in the mind of most Indian Christians in Andhra Pradesh is the idea of *dharma*.<sup>733</sup>

The *dharma* of the outcaste and untouchable has been replaced by the *dharma* of the Christian, which has been considered an improvement against the previous status. Although the concept of *dharma* as such is not familiar to many of the Christians, it has become a way of life over the centuries and determines the social behaviour of the individual.<sup>734</sup>

It has been noticed during the field work that the Christian communities have accepted some rules which belong to the *dharma* of higher castes, and have created subdivisions within their own community on the basis of occupation. Especially with regard to purity and pollution, it has been found that works which previously had been done by the Christians who had now obtained leading positions in the Christian community, are now considered by them to be polluting. Many who have reached a higher economic status within the community employ servants and treat them like untouchables. Religious leaders reach a status which is similar to the status of *brahmins* among the higher caste Hindus: their authority with regard to the scriptures is generally unquestioned<sup>735</sup>, and their blessing is sought in all walks of life, because it is believed that only their blessing is genuine and most powerful.<sup>736</sup>

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732. It must be mentioned that it was difficult to obtain definite statements from any Indian Christian on this issue. Nobody wanted to admit that his concept of man was in any way influenced by the Hindu philosophy, but was also unable to deny it, because there are no clear terms of what is man in Indian Christianity. This is also reflected in the fact that the most famous Indian Christian theologians begin their anthropological expositions from the Hindu understanding of man in order to find a starting-point for their own theological concepts. The statements made here are conclusions drawn from discussions with Indian Christians on several issues concerning their life, mostly without directly referring to any Hindu terminology.

733. About the meaning of *dharma*, see also page 154

734. Although the doctrine of *dharma* (the *sadhana dharma*) gives some freedom to the individual, this freedom would only be in the reach of the members of the higher castes, who are the only ones familiar with the complex theory of *dharma*. The outcastes and untouchables, however, did not have such a freedom. For them, the *dharma* was nothing more than the rule of subordination to the higher castes, as well as the *samaj-dharma*, which are the rules and laws for the community within which one lives.

735. Only in extreme situations criticism may be raised; the motive for this criticism, however, is often not on the theological basis, but bases on economic and social interests, like e.g. when the pastor comes from an inferior caste than most of the members of the congregation

736. The special treatment of the religious leaders is in sharp contrast to the concept found in the New Testament, where the performance of the religious leader is subject to the criticism of the community (Paul's letters, for instance, are to a great extent defending his own performance as religious leader against accusations raised by various parties). It is also stated that all Christians belong to God's priesthood (1 Peter 2,9). Only in the Old Testament a similar concept of priesthood like the one which is prevailing in the Hindu society, is found.



The determination caused by *dharma*, as it is understood and followed by the Christians, extends also to the religion of the individual.<sup>737</sup> Accordingly, to be a Christian is not considered to be the free decision of a person, which actually would be the fulfilment of the basic principle of Christianity, but the determination by the *samaj dharma* of the *jati*.<sup>738</sup> On this basis, the liberating elements in Christianity lose their impetus, sin is no longer every action that would possibly harm the fellow-being and consequently the relation between God and man, but sin is reduced to the non-fulfilment of the “Christian” *dharma*.

This “Christian” *dharma* includes protective mechanisms, like the loyalty to the *jati* or the demand for *dana*, which are upheld in most Christian communities, but are now interpreted as elements of the Christian religion. It is, however, obvious that the Christian doctrine of equality of *all* people in the face of God does not receive much attention. To obtain a position of leadership within the Christian community automatically includes some kind of superiority irrespective of the person’s performance, which is acknowledged by most of the members.<sup>739</sup>

The status of a family, which may have been developed by one of the ancestors and is then enjoyed or called for by his descendants, has a very high importance.<sup>740</sup> In this view, the qualities and merits of a person are applied to his relatives, as if they had achieved the same things. This reflects clearly the importance of the joint family within the Christian community.

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737. This is different to Hinduism, where basically an individual is free to choose any subject within the wide frame of Hinduism. However, even within the Christian community, one is free to visit any Christian denomination, provided it does not interfere with the interests of the *jati*.

738. see also the section 6.2.2.2 on page 187. The freedom in Hinduism to choose the God whom one would prefer to worship can not be interpreted as real religious freedom. The decision to become a Christian or a Muslim and to receive the initiation rite from the respective community has in almost all cases led to the expulsion from the Hindu community on account of the law of *dharma*. In this connection it might be interesting to mention how spiritual leaders are chosen from the Christian community. Generally, the parents decide whether the (new-born) child shall become a pastor. It occurs not seldom that the son of a pastor is determined to become a pastor in succession of his father. There is no room for him to take a diverse decision. This practice stands in sharp contrast to the biblical practice where a person is either called directly by God into the leadership (the most popular example may be Paul, cf. Acts 1,1-19) or chosen by lot (cf. Acts 1, 21-26). Very rarely, other people, after they had a vision from God, call a person into the leadership on behalf of God. These will generally not be the parents of the particular person.

739. The pattern for the election of leaders is on all levels more or less the same. The community chooses among the seniors (seniors are those who have served for a minimum period of ten years or more in the church) the “suitable” person(s), who then decides (in concurrence with the governing body) which person shall take other posts of leadership. The leadership consisting of the senior pastor and a committee or council set up of both, clergy and laymen, functions in a similar way like the *panchayat*, taking disciplinary action against members or workers who have failed to obey to the prevailing rules, and taking decisions on the property of the church and on current affairs.

740. There would be many examples. For instance, members of the family of a person who had a post in the church of some influence demand from the church leadership that they may continue to live in the house provided to the person when he was in that post on account of his merits. This is then called the “moral obligation” of the church leadership towards the family of the church worker.

It is quite interesting that nowadays, after the Indian churches became independent and to some extent self-supporting, there is no actual increase in the membership<sup>741</sup>. The Indian Christian community in Andhra Pradesh has lost its attraction because of the lack of the liberating power which originally inherits the Christian message.<sup>742</sup>

These patterns of behaviour appear to base on the idea of *dharmā* and are found among the Christian communities of the established churches. The evangelical communities, however, do follow the biblical pattern more strictly.<sup>743</sup> It is not yet clearly visible, to which extent some of the patterns followed by the evangelical churches do also base on the idea of *dharmā*.<sup>744</sup>

### 6.1.3.1 The Understanding of Soul in Christian Telugu Terminology

In the Telugu translations of Christian literature, there is no strict distinction between soul and spirit, as it would have been appropriate according to the biblical concept. For both, often the term *atma* is used.

The invocation which is said by the pastor in the beginning of the worship and other gatherings goes as follows:

*tandryokkayu, kumaaruniyokkayu,  
parisuddhatmayokkayu namamuna.*<sup>745</sup>

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741. cf. the table on page 86

742. cf. Dr. K. Wilson in his book *The Twice Alienated*, who writes:

The gospel of Jesus was heard in India since A.D. 52 and more importantly for the last three or four centuries. But it is vexatious to see that even today Indian religious Christians do not appear to have recognized Christianity as a humanizing movement. It is understood either as a gospel of salvation or a gospel of sin...The poor Christians in India are subjected to the same kind of hardships as the suffering Hindu Dalits and the other downtrodden communities. (p. 67)

This statement is to be understood in the context of his book, in which he points out that the Christian missions have robbed the Dalits of their cultural heritage with the promise of heaven after death and left them with this indefinite hope. Dr. Wilson accuses the Indian church-leaders that they have taken over from the foreign missions and have continued this method by using the material resources built up by the foreign missionaries for their own purposes and by continuing to preach the reward in heaven to those who have to live in permanent poverty and social suppression.

743. Election of office bearers and leaders is a matter of prayer and of a revelation made by God. Often, one person will point to another person and state that this person has been shown to him by God for the particular post. This pattern is also followed in other areas, e.g. with regard to marriage, where one person may say that he or she has been shown that man and woman to become a couple. The marriage, then, will take place however only after both have received the confirmation in their own prayer and meditation on the matter. The problem remains that such "revelations" could as well be caused by a person's imagination.

744. To be a Christian is, among the evangelical communities, certainly more a matter of personal conviction, than a matter of social affiliation. However, it appears that the children of evangelical Christians are expected by their parents to "accept Christ as their personal saviour". This is a tendency also observed in other countries among evangelical Christians, and can at present not be attributed to the concept of *dharmā*.

745. Transl.: In the name of the father, and of the son, and of the holy spirit (*parisuddhatmayokkayu*). The word *parisuddhatma* is used commonly among the Christians to designate the Holy Spirit of God.

Here, the spirit of God is meant, but the term generally used for the individual's soul is in use. In several hymns which are found in the hymnals of the Telugu Christians, the term *atma* is used now denoting the individual's soul:

*prabhava syaktulukalgina raju nuthinpu  
oh! na priyatmato! korutsureni snarinpu...<sup>746</sup>  
nadu priyatma! prabhun stutinpu...<sup>747</sup>*

There are also sections where the term *atma* is used as translation where the Greek word πνευμα as the "spirit of man" is used:

*atmavipayamai dinulainawaaru dhanyulu...<sup>748</sup>*

There are also hymns in which the term *atma* is used for the "spirit" or "ghost" of Christ or of God:

*kantinitsu divyatma, nantsu veligintsuma...<sup>749</sup>*

The above examples<sup>750</sup> may show that the different terms used in the bible to denote different aspects of the human being and of God, has been replaced in the Telugu literature by the one term commonly used in the Hindu literature for the individual's soul and as such also for the ultimate being, *atman*. There was obviously no attempt by the missionaries, who translated the texts, to make a clear differentiation with regard to the terminology between the individual's soul and the spirit of God. This is certainly due to the lack of proper terms for these elements in the Hindu scriptures. All the terms which would come into consideration are short of the meanings implied with the biblical terms.

There appears, however, the term *pranama* as a translation for the term "spirit". In these cases, it is normally used only for the spirit of man, but not for the spirit of God.<sup>751</sup>

The observations made above with regard to the terminology in Telugu Christian literature lead to the conclusion that the lack of clear terminological distinction between the spirit of God and the soul of man has made it easier for the Andhra Christians to retain the idea of a separate body and soul. The soul has the status of an individual and independent being, while the body is merely a cover for the soul.<sup>752</sup>

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746. Hymn-book of the SALC, Hymn No. 17, 1; transl.:  
Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the king of creation!  
O my soul praise him, for he is thy health and salvation!

747. Hymn-book of the SALC, Hymn No. 12, 1; transl.:  
Praise the Almighty, my soul, adore him!

748. Mt 5,3; transl.: "Blessed are the poor in spirit..."

749. Hymn-book of the SALC, No. 170, 1; transl.:  
Holy Ghost with light divine shine upon this heart of mine...

750. more could be given. For example *yesu, yatma priyuda...*(AELC Hymnal, No. 408,1; transl.:  
Jesus, lover of my soul...

751. for instance Ps 103, 1-3

752. This understanding is also reflected in the rites related to death and performed in remembrance of a person; see section 5.5.2 on page 129. A monistic tendency, however, has not been observed among the Andhra Christians, which is due to the fact that the Christians have mainly the Dravidian background which does not support monism, and that most villagers in Andhra Pradesh have been influenced by the *bhakti* tradition, which is basing on a more or less dualistic philosophy.

### 6.1.3.2 The Concept of Sin in Andhra Christianity

The concept of an original sin, as has been explained by Paul<sup>753</sup>, is strange to the Hindu philosophies and therefore also to the Christians in Andhra Pradesh. There cannot be a sin which is not caused by the individual himself, and the view that an individual is sinful from the very beginning of his existence, cannot be held in Hinduism where the self of the individual is believed to be the supreme being. Thus, when sin is talked about, an Indian would more easily have the idea of *karma* in his mind, which determines his life and which is influenced by his actions.

In Indian Christianity, where there is no belief in the *karma samsara*, it would, however, be inappropriate to exchange the term “sin” with the term “*karma*”. *Karma* would not have the same meaning to the Christian as to the Hindu, because there is no way to talk about *karma* as being accumulated in a previous life. Thus, when a Christian is born, he would be born without *karma*, which is to be shaped during his lifetime. Because of the old tradition of the *karma* theory and the lack in Hindu philosophies of a doctrine of sin in the biblical sense, it was not achieved by the missionaries and even later by Indian theologians to give the required importance to sin as it would be necessary from the biblical point of view.<sup>754</sup>

Therefore, when talking about sin, Indian Christians often do not primarily have the biblical concept of sin, i.e. the disobedience to God, which occurs in all walks of life and which is inherent in every man, in their mind. Instead, sin is primarily the disobedience to the rules of the community<sup>755</sup>, which may be in concord with the rules set up in the bible, but often are not. Sin is, in other words, the non-performance of *dharma* rather than the transgression against the will of God.

It appears that the understanding of sin (*papam*) among the Christians in Andhra Pradesh is in the line as it has been just explained.<sup>756</sup> There seem to be two different categories of sin. The one refers to the relation between man and man, while the other refers to the relation between man and God. Of the two, the former has a higher value than the latter, and the latter is normally also correlated with the former.

The importance of the community rules may be illustrated with the following example: In case of a quarrel between two individuals who are leading members of different families, in which they insulted each other (or one at least felt insulted by the other), all the respective members of the clan are forced to bear the consequences and to avoid any contact with any of the members of the other family. There may be an attempt for reconciliation only by a mediator, but not by the two individuals who have separated over the dispute.<sup>757</sup>

The bible, in contrast to this practice, demands from those who are in anger, to reconcile with each other at the earliest and not to let the sun go down on one's anger (Eph 4, 28).

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753. see page 170

754. cf. Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, p. 243-245

755. Community should be understood in the sense of *jati*, as it has been described in the section 4.1.1

756. See also Carmen/Luke, *Village Christians...*, p. 31, where they point out that the Christian villagers understand sin as that what is shameful, which has a bad effect on oneself, or as adultery, stealing and lying. In general, sin is not understood as being inherent in man.

757. This pattern of behaviour very much conforms to the pattern of the *jati* order; see J.A. Fonseca, *Marriage in India...*, p. 70

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.<sup>758</sup>

In the above example which describes a common pattern of behaviour among Andhra Christians, not only the dispute is not settled immediately or at least as early as possible, but also loyalty from all family members, who are actually not concerned with the matter, is demanded in a way which does not at all conform to the biblical doctrines.

However, this kind of sin<sup>759</sup> does, in the view of the Andhra Christian, not affect the relation of the individual to God, because it is no sin in the view of the individual, but the fulfilment of his or her duty according to the communal rules, i.e. according to the *samaj dharma*. To fulfil these rules is the first priority.<sup>760</sup>

On the religious side, the performance and fulfilment of the religious duties, like the regular visit of the worships, the participation in other activities<sup>761</sup> and the preparedness to share one's wealth with other needy people is the only requirement. To do the contrary would be considered a sin, which may also fall back on the entire family of the individual.

It is also a common aspect that sin can be made good by means of offerings and prayer. As it is believed that sickness and other kind of suffering is brought upon by the sin committed by a member of the family, attempts are made by the Andhra Christians to appease God by giving special offerings, requesting special prayers and the like.

## 6.2 Suffering, Death and Salvation

It is a human desire to avoid all suffering and to live a life without any pains and distress. However, reality is different, which is one reason why religions exist. The question why one has to suffer and why the other one is spared, is a matter of continued discussion in all religions. Generally, the suffering is interpreted as a punishment, while the well-being is interpreted as a reward from God. This is, however, not sufficient, because often people who are of good character and conduct, are suffering more than the wicked people.

Death, experienced as an inevitable break after which nothing can be done to change one's life, is also a vital part of the discussions in all religions. Is there nothing after death? Will there be a judgement? Will there be a chance to do good what has been done wrong during lifetime? Why does death come so sudden and sometimes so slow? Why does death hit the good person earlier than the wicked person?

Salvation is, in all religions, related to suffering and death. Salvation means to become free from any kind of suffering and actually also from death.

Hinduism and Christianity have different approaches towards suffering, death and salvation. In this section, first the respective doctrines are described and then the opinion among and interpretation by the Christians in Andhra Pradesh will be discussed.

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758. Eph 4, 31-32

759. i.e. the being unwilling to reconcile with the other or to obey to the communal rule not to have contact with members of the other family

760. cf. Luke/Carmen, *Village Christians...*, p. 203

761. The regular participation in the common worship and in other activities is not only a matter of the individual. The Christian expresses also his loyalty to the Christian community by participating in those activities.

## 6.2.1 The Hindu View of Suffering, Death and Salvation

### 6.2.1.1 Suffering and Death

In the *Katha Upanishad*, there is the story of the Brahmin Nachiketas who visits the Lord of the dead, Yama, in order to explore the meaning of death. He found Yama's house empty and waited patiently for three days without taking any food. Yama then grants Nachiketas 3 boons, the third one being the reply to the question of what survives when a man dies. Yama explains:

This wise one is not born nor dies;  
From nowhere has He [sprung] nor has He anyone become;  
Unborn is He, eternal, everlasting and primeval, –  
He is not slain when the body is slain.  
Should the killer think 'I kill',  
Or the killed 'I have been killed',  
Both these have no [right] knowledge:  
He kills not, is not killed.  
More Subtile than the subtile (sic), greater than the great,  
The Self (*atman*) is hidden in the heart of creatures [here]:  
The man without desire [all] sorrow spent, beholds It,  
The majesty of the Self (*atman*), by the grace of the Ordainer.<sup>762</sup>

Then, Yama explains the *karma samsara*<sup>763</sup>, according to which *atma* will be reborn following the individual's actions (*karma*).

According to these explanations, death is considered to be only a break in the cycle of rebirths, the *samsara*. The eternal part of man is the soul or *atma*<sup>764</sup> which attaches itself to the body in order to gain positive *karma*. However, when it is attached to the body, it will believe to be identical with the body, due to *avidya*, the ignorance or lack of knowledge of the ultimate truth.<sup>765</sup> This belief that *atman* and body are one unit causes the suffering to the *atman*, because it will endure all pains caused to the body as if they were caused to the *atman*. However the truth is, according to the Hindu teachings, that the body is only a physical frame or home of the soul, which will be left by the soul after due course of time.

Death is nothing else than "the disintegration of the physical form" and suffering is nothing else than the result of the illusion that body and *atman* were one unit.<sup>766</sup> The body will perish, but the soul remains immortal.

In accordance to this view, physical pains and needs are only felt by the soul because of its *avidya*. If the individual would realize the actual independence or freedom of the *atman* from the body, he would be liberated from the bodily suffering as well, including death which would not occur to the *atman*.

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762. *Katha Upanishad* II, 18-20; cited from K. Kramer, *The Sacred Art of Dying*, p. 29f

763. *Katha Upanishad* V, 6-18

764. For further details on *atma* see also page 157

765. J.M. Sharma, *The Social Aspect of the Problem of Death and Suffering in Hinduism*, in: McMullen, C.O.(ed.): *The Problem of Death and Suffering in Indian Religions*, p.14f

766. V.C.Pandey, *Problems of Death and Individual Suffering in Hindu Religion*, in: McMullen, C.O.(ed.): *The Problem of Death and Suffering in Indian Religions*, p. 8f

Generally, one belonging to a lower caste has so much bad *karma* accumulated during previous lives that he is unable to get rid of it during his present life time. In addition, in all castes the possibility exists that one does not fulfil his *dharma*, i.e. his duties, and therefore accumulates more negative *karma*. Thus, even the idea of a hell in which a person is punished and tortured according to his *karma* appears in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.<sup>767</sup> An idea of the existence of some kind of a hell is also already found in the *Atharvaveda*.<sup>768</sup>

The hell or heaven, to which the *jivatman* descends or ascends, appears to be only a temporary stage either of pain or bliss respectively. The *atma* will re-enter this world after the fruits of its *karma* are exhausted. Then it will be reborn in the shape which it deserves according to its *karma*. Death, as long as the liberation has not been achieved, is most painful to the soul. "When the prana leaves the body and when the vital parts are being torn and destroyed, the soul cries bitterly with grief."<sup>769</sup> Only those who obtain *jivanmukti*, which is exclusively possible only for Brahmins<sup>770</sup>, will be redeemed from the cycle of rebirth and actually from the experience of death.<sup>771</sup>

The *Bhagavadgita* emphasizes that death is unavoidable but not real, since *atman* cannot die.<sup>772</sup> Suffering is not real, because any pain is caused only to the body, but not to the *atman*. The *Bhagavadgita* does not further reflect on the status of the soul after death.

While Yama in the *Katha Upanishad* did not give a clue how to obtain the knowledge of the mystery of death except by a certain mode of sacrifice (which he calls *Nachiketas* sacrifice), Krishna explains in the *Bhagavadgita* the three ways, i.e. *jnana marga*, *karma marga* and *bhakti marga*<sup>773</sup> as means to realize the true nature of oneself, the *atman*.

#### 6.2.1.2 Salvation

Salvation (*moksha* or *mukti*<sup>774</sup>) in Hinduism means the release from the *karma samsara*, the cycle of rebirths, or the liberation of the *atman* from all bondage. The bondage is the *karma* which has been accumulated in previous lives and is updated by the action performed during the present life. It is, therefore, more appropriate to speak of liberation instead of salvation.

Independent from the different *margas* which are described below, there exist three levels of liberation<sup>775</sup>, called

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767. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 4.4.5; cf. A.T.Khoury, P. Hünermann (ed.): *Weiterleben – nach dem Tode? Die Antwort der Weltreligionen*, p. 41

768. T. Pereira, *Towards an Indian Christian Funeral Rite*, p. 33. There also the special position of the Brahmins is supported in a way that those who oppressed Brahmins receive special kind of punishment

769. V.H. Date, *Upanishads Retold*, 1979, p. 311

770. U. Schneider, *Einführung in den Hinduismus*, p. 80

771. The *atma* of the person who has obtained *jivanmukti* is believed to be completely detached from the body. The body may die, but this does not have any effect on the *atma* in this case.

772. *Bhagavadgita* II, 19-22

773. see the more detailed description of the *jnana marga* and *bhakti marga* in the section 6.2.1.2. The *karma marga*, as explained in the *Bhagavadgita*, is also discussed on page 180

774. The term *moksha* as well as the term *mukti* derive from the same root and mean liberation, deliverance etc. (I. Vempeny, *Krishna and Christ*, p. 166)

775. following R.D. Ranade according to I. Vempeny, *ibid.* p. 167

<i>jivanmukti</i>	the liberation before death, the realization of the supreme being within oneself
<i>videhamukti</i>	the liberation at death
<i>kramamukti</i>	the liberation from life to life or from deity to deity, i.e. an improvement in the cycle of rebirths

The *Bhagavadgita*, when Krishna speaks about *moksha*, usually uses the term in the meaning of *jivanmukti*. *Moksha*, then, is the liberation from the *samsara*, the cycle of rebirth, obtained through permanent renunciation or better detachment, which does not mean a mere actlessness, but doing ones duty “in a detached spirit”.<sup>776</sup> The devotee experiences his liberation already in his lifetime.

In the earlier scriptures, the possibility to reach one of these levels depends basically on one’s present status in the *karma samsara*, or: on his/her *karma*. *Moksha* in the meaning of *jivanmukti* can be obtained only by those belonging to the highest caste, i.e. the *brahmins*. They are the only ones who are born with so little negative *karma* that they are able to get rid of it by leading a life according to the *varnashramas*. The next caste, the *kshatriyas*, may obtain *videhamukti* when fulfilling the duty as *kshatriya*. To be killed in a battle will result in liberation. For the common man, however, there are numerous barriers towards the liberation of his soul, mainly caused by the *karma* which he had collected in his previous and present lives and which he has to bring to a balance by his actions. The only way to get rid of this *karma* is, as already seen, the consequent fulfilment of one’s *dharma*.

As a consequence of the view that the accumulated *karma* is the cause for the present situation, a certain fatalism exists among the Hindus which is based on the believe that the present situation of one’s own life cannot be changed, except by following the rules and orders (*dharma*) which are given to the person and his community or caste. Suffering is a result of previous acts, and therefore it cannot be avoided. Liberation during lifetime (*jivanmukti*) can only be obtained by those who have already gained a higher status of life.<sup>777</sup>

The Hindu philosophy offers different ways, through which the *atman* will be liberated from its bondage to *karma*, and finally obtain *moksha*. Often, these ways are not followed strictly, but elements of the various *margas* (ways) which are most suitable are chosen to achieve the final goal. The major three ways<sup>778</sup> which are shortly explained below, are:

- *karma marga*
- *jnana marga*
- *bhakti marga*

To get rid of *karma*<sup>779</sup> is, following the *karma marga*, possible only by action without attachment (*nishkamakarma*), and not by renouncing any action, because that would actually mean the death of the individual. Thus, the *Bhagavadgita* considers man to be determined by two forces: one is his own *karma* that remains attached to his *atma* after death and determines

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776. Jagat Guru, *Bhagavadgita – Nectar of Life* p. 144

777. There are, of course, exceptions mentioned in various scriptures. However, the possibility of a *sudra* or *Harijan* to become liberated in the sense of *mukti* is so vague, that it is no topic in the day-to-day life of these communities. Cf. also Subhash Anand, *The Spirituality of the Bhagavata Purana*, p. 461, who refers to P.V. Kanes *History of Dharmasastra* I, p. 163 and 422-424. See also the section 5.8.1 on page 137

778. These three ways appear also in the *Bhagavadgita* as complementary to each other. Most philosophers who developed and emphasized the superiority of one of these three ways when interpreting the *Bhagavadgita*, admit that the other ways are at least supporting in the efforts to achieve the goal of liberation.

779. see the definition in footnote 624 on page 154



the state of rebirth, the other is his *dharma*. This combination of both forces is most important, as *mukti* can be obtained only by fulfilling one's *dharma* by detached action (*nishkamakarma*). Krishna says to Arjuna:

Seek to perform your duty; but lay not claim to its fruits. Be you not the producer of the fruits of karma; neither shall you lean towards inaction.<sup>780</sup>

He who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, he is wise among men, he is a yogi and accomplisher of everything.<sup>781</sup>

Only then, when the individual does not claim the fruit of his action, the action will not result in the accumulation of new *karma*.<sup>782</sup> To act with this attitude can be called *akarma* (inaction), the opposite of *karma*.

*Karma* becomes a *yajna* (sacrifice), which is offered to God. This is expressed by the following verse:

He from whom is the evolution of all beings, by whom all this is pervaded, worshipping Him with his own duty, man attains perfection.<sup>783</sup>

The *karma marga* does not teach that there is any help from any side to the individual. The responsibility lies entirely with him. According to the *karma* theory, man shapes his own future, and the present state has been shaped by himself in a previous life.<sup>784</sup> The goal of *karma marga* is to achieve unity in action with the ultimate reality. If this goal is reached, there will be "no attachment with any other finite creature".<sup>785</sup> To achieve this goal, various yogic practices are suggested in order to control the mind.

Another way to gain salvation is the *jnana marga*, the way of knowledge. *Jnana*, which is here normally translated as "knowledge", must not be understood in the scientific meaning. *Jnana* is existential and empirical, it means the recognition of the ultimate truth in the individual's life.<sup>786</sup> The *Bhagavadgita* puts it like this:

Humility, modesty, non-injury, forbearance, uprightness, service of the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self-control; dispassion towards the objects of the senses, and also absence of egoism; perception of evil in birth, death, old age, sickness and pain; unattachment, non-identification of self with son, wife, home, and the like, and constant equanimity in the occurrence of the desirable and the undesirable; unswerving devotion to Me in yoga of non-separation, resort to sequestered places, distaste for the society of men; constancy in Self-knowledge, perception of the end of the knowledge of Truth; this is declared to be knowledge [*jnana*], and what is opposed to it is ignorance.<sup>787</sup>

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780. II,47; transl. Swami Chidbhavananda

781. IV, 18; transl. by Swami Chidbhavananda

782. See also above page 154

783. XVIII, 46; transl. Swami Chidbhavananda

784. P.H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organization*, p. 49f.

785. I. Vempeny, *Krishna and Christ*, p. 203

786. I. Vempeny, *Krishna and Christ*, p. 208-209

787. XIII, 7-11; transl. Swami Chidbhavananda

With this definition of *jnana*, it becomes clear that knowledge is not just to be understood as the accumulation or storage of scientific facts in one's mind – it is the experience of the truth and the action attuned to the ultimate truth.

Krishna says further in the Bhagavadgita:

Nor do actions taint Me, nor is the fruit of action desired by Me. He who thus knows Me is not bound by action.<sup>788</sup>

Here, *jnana* becomes the means to get rid of the bondage of *karma*. It remains important to detach oneself from all desires, as it has already been seen with regard to *karma marga*:

Whose doings are all devoid of design and desire for results, and whose actions are all burnt by the fire of knowledge, him, the sages call wise.<sup>789</sup>

*Jnana* appears to be the power which burns away the accumulated *karma*, but it is also understood as action at the same time, however the most appropriate and comprehensive action one can perform. Even the most wicked man may overcome all his sin by *jnana*:

Even if you be the most sinful of all sinners, yet shall you cross over all sin by the raft of knowledge.<sup>790</sup>

As we have seen so far, it is the knowledge of the *atman* which brings relief from *karma samsara*. This knowledge seems to be difficult to perceive, and thus Krishna points out that this knowledge can be attained by devotion (*bhakti*):

By devotion [*bhakti*] he knows Me in truth, what and who I am; then having known Me in truth, he forthwith enters into me.<sup>791</sup>

In *karma marga* as well as in *jnana marga* God remains impersonal as the ultimate reality, a goal which is to be reached by man, but which does not reach man. The concept of the *bhakti marga* thus complements the two ways described above, as it bases on the idea that liberation is achieved by the devotion and love of the devotee to God.<sup>792</sup> God, in return, reveals himself as graceful and affectionate to his devotees.<sup>793</sup>

In the *Bhagavadgita*, in which Krishna talks to Arjunan, the personal relation of the devotee to Krishna as the supreme Lord is the essence of *bhakti*:

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788. *Bhagavadgita* IV,14; transl Swami Chidbhavananda

789. *Bhagavadgita* IV,19; transl. Swami Chidbhavananda

790. *Bhagavadgita* IV,36; transl. Swami Chidbhavananda

791. *Bhagavadgita* XVIII,55; transl. Swami Chidbhavananda

792. The term *bhakti* is a derivation of the Sanskrit root *bhaj* which means "to serve", "to honour", "to love" and "to adore", among others. R.R. Sundara Rao, *Bhakti Theology in the Telugu Hymnal*, p. 20

793. This is also the consequence drawn in the *Bhagavata Purana*. See Subhash Anand, *The Spirituality of the Bhagavata Purana*, p. 464-465

“Whose minds are fixed on Me, I immediately redeem them from the ocean of birth and death. Therefore, fix your mind in Me alone. Let thy consciousness dwell in Me. Thereafter you shall live in Me alone. There is no doubt about it.”<sup>794</sup>

According to this statement, it is the individual’s devotion and love shown towards God which causes God to act and to redeem him. Here, God becomes a personal God who responds to the action of man, a fact which is not found in *karma marga* or in *jnana marga*, where God would remain impersonal.

The *bhakti* philosophy has no root in the Vedic philosophy. It appears for the first time clearly in the *Bhagavadgita*, where Krishna also says to Arjuna: “You are beloved of me” or “You are dear to me”.<sup>795</sup> These statements make clear that there is not only an affection from the side of the devotee, but also from the side of God. That the devotee is dear to God reveals a mutual relationship between God and his admirer.

In the *Bhagavata Purana*<sup>796</sup>, *bhakti* is described as follows:

When all the energies of the mind, including those of the organs of knowledge and of action, become concentrated as a unified mental mode directed to the Supreme Being, spontaneous like an instinct and devoid of any extraneous motives, the resulting state of mind is called *Bhakti*. It is superior even to *Mukti*. Like fire it burns up the soul’s sheath of ignorance.<sup>797</sup>

According to this statement, *bhakti* would not necessarily need the personification of the Supreme Being. The *avidya* is removed by *bhakti*, which is actually the absorption of the mind in the impersonal supreme being. As this can happen in full devotion as well as in full antagonism, *bhakti* according to the *Bhagavata Purana* does not necessarily imply the loving devotion of an individual.<sup>798</sup>

The *Bhagavata Purana* distinguishes three different levels of *bhakti*:

The *Bhagavatottama* (the highest type of devotee) is one who sees the glory of *Bhagavan* reflected in all beings, high and low, and also perceives all beings as dwelling in Him. The second-rate devotee is one who makes a distinction between God, His devotees, common people and evil-minded ones, and maintains towards them attitudes of reverential love, friendship, pity and avoidance respectively. And one who worships images of God with great devotion but has no regard for His devotees and no consideration for others, is the most inferior type of a devotee.<sup>799</sup>

Although it has been seen earlier that the personification of God would not necessarily be required, even in the *Bhagavata Purana*, the personal relationship between the *bhakta* and *Isvara* is central as it tells about Krishna and his relationship to various people on the basis of their devotion to him.

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794. XII,7+8, according to Jagat Guru, *Bhagavad Gita – Nectar of Life*, p. 251

795. XVIII, 64+65

796. cf. also the section 2.1.6 on the *Puranas* from page 18 onwards

797. *Bhagavata* 3.25.32-33; in: Vishnu Puri, *Bhakti Ratnavali*, p. 49

798. cf. Vishnu Puri, *Bhakti Ratnavali*, p. 50-51; here, reference is made to the demons (“Titanic souls”) who, previously being servants of God, were to be full of hatred against God and killed in the battle against him three times. The killing washed them of all their sins, the absorbing power was not love, but hatred.

799. *Bhagavata* 11.2.45-47; in Vishnu Puri, *Bhakti Ratnavali*, p. 54

The *bhakti marga* is followed by many people, because it does not require extensive study of the Vedic scriptures or any kind of asceticism, although the *bhakti* philosophy does not promise salvation to those who do not pay their complete love and devotion towards God. The most important point is the fact that there is no limitation set by the caste or the social status of a person. As already mentioned, even the wicked would be able to achieve liberation if only he directs his mind in devotion to the Lord. Everyone is promised to be redeemed only on account of his or her devotion and love towards God, which must, of course, be reflected in one's actions.<sup>800</sup>

It can be said that the three ways, i.e. *jnana marga*, *karma marga* and *bhakti marga* seem to be depending on each other not in a certain hierarchy, but in accordance with the emphasis laid on one of them by the individual. The one who emphasizes *jnana marga*, will at the same time perform the most appropriate action, i.e. *jnana yajna*, and thus follow *karma marga* as well. Those who emphasize *bhakti marga* will, due to his devotion, be following *karma marga* by being equable and without discrimination towards all his fellow beings. The one who performs *karma marga* will go all the three ways, because he will be devoted to God when performing his *svadharma*, and will seek the knowledge of the ultimate by way of *karma*. Often it is also admitted by supporters of the one way that the other ways are preparatory and supporting for the performance of this way.<sup>801</sup>

In popular Hinduism in Andhra Pradesh, the *bhakti marga* is undoubtedly prevailing. However, the level of the devotees, if the distinction made by the *Bhagavata Purana* is taken into account, would mainly be the lowest, as most people confine themselves to the temple worship and domestic *pujas* together with the rituals required at certain occasions and festivities without making much efforts to explore their relation to the ultimate being.

## 6.2.2 The Christian View of Suffering, Death and Salvation

### 6.2.2.1 Suffering and Death

Suffering, according to the biblical texts, has been brought upon mankind by man's disobedience to the commandment of God.<sup>802</sup> Consequent to the failure of the first man, Adam, suffering and pain has become part of human existence.

Suffering has always been an unanswered problem in the Old Testament. There it is generally presumed that the wicked will be punished by God, and the righteous will be rewarded. Righteousness is always understood as the fidelity to the covenant. Especially the Psalms often talk about this concept. At the same time, it is the suffering, righteous man who is praying in these psalms to God and rejoices when he realizes that the wicked will finally be punished. This punishment is often seen as an unlimited suffering, if not in this world, then after death in the kingdom of death or in the hell.<sup>803</sup>

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800. Vivekananda has called the *bhakti marga* as "the most convenient and the most popular of all the ways" to salvation. Basant Kumar Lal, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, p. 34

801. cf. the sections 2.1.9 and 2.1.10 on Sankara and Ramanuja

802. Gen 3,16-20 contains the curse according to which man has to suffer in order to survive

803. It is important to note that the idea of a hell in which the individual has to serve his sentence for the sins he committed during his lifetime, is developed only slowly and is not present in all the parts of the Old Testament. Even the New Testament does not often use the idea of a hell in order to describe the punishment for the sins. The kingdom of death, however, is present in all parts and reminds man that after death he doesn't have a chance to repent: "In death there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol who can give thee praise?" (Ps 6,5)

There are attempts to justify the difference between the belief that God is good and does not want any harm to man, and the experience that suffering is spread among mankind indifferently. An attempt to reply to the question why a just man has to suffer is given in the book of Job in the Old Testament. Job is hit by different calamities, including the loss of all his property and all his children. He himself becomes sick and suffers tremendously. Friends visit him and discuss with him about the reason for his suffering. He insists that God is hitting him with these calamities without considering his righteousness, while his friends defend God, saying that Job must have committed some sin and is therefore punished. Finally, God reveals himself to Job and declares his sovereignty. This revelation may be the actual answer to the quest for the reason of the suffering of the righteous: In pains and distress, God reveals himself to man.<sup>804</sup>

In Isaiah 53, the element of “solidarity with all who sin and suffer”<sup>805</sup> is added. Here, the suffering is viewed as the solidarity with the suffering mankind.<sup>806</sup> The solidarity goes far beyond a small social entity. It comprises the entire humanity, as it is believed to be in need of such an act.

In the New Testament the view found in Isaiah 53 is taken up. The concept of original sin<sup>807</sup> dominates together with the vicarious self-sacrifice performed by Jesus. The humanity is sinful and full of darkness, which symbolizes the evil forces acting in man. God enters into this world as Jesus and removes the suffering from some people; even dead persons are raised to life. This is certainly only a symbolic act, revealing that suffering is not in accordance with the will of God and is to be removed entirely, once the kingdom of heaven is established. This time is yet to come, but with Jesus it is already indicated that the suffering comes to an end.

If one turns to God and has complete faith in him, he experiences the liberating power of God. Jesus, in full obedience to God, is himself made to suffer and finally put to death at the cross. His message is the liberation of man from oppression, injustice and all the evil powers. Man is to follow his example, which includes the fight for freedom and justice for all mankind, which will attract suffering and pains. Yet, this suffering is bearable, because it leads to the total redemption, even from death.

Thus, suffering is not “explained away”. It is part of the struggle for the implementation of the kingdom of heaven, which is yet to come, but which has been indicated by the action of Jesus and which can be partly anticipated by his followers.

In the Old Testament it is taught that death has an unlimited power over humanity. All are under the power of death because of their sins. Death is the power of sin, to which the entire mankind is subordinated. The death according to the Christian Scriptures is not the final end of a person’s life. Similar to Hinduism, the Christian doctrine teaches that there is a soul which is the eternal being of a person. However, a sharp contrast exists in the fact that the soul according to the Christian point of view is not united with God or a part of God, but, together with the body, a creation made by God.

Death, in Christianity, is not merely a biological act. The one who turns to Christ in faith, dies to the power of death:

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804. cf. Samuel Rayan, *That the World Might Be Saved*, p. 31-32

805. Samuel Rayan, *ibid.*, p. 32-33

806. Speculations have been made how to interpret the person whom Isaiah talks about. The Jewish tradition generally sees in him the people of Israel as a whole entity, while Christianity has adopted this chapter as a hint towards Jesus’ vicarious suffering. Another attempt holds that the person may be the prophet himself.

807. see the section on page 169

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.<sup>808</sup>

Viewed from the death of Jesus and his resurrection, biological death has been overcome by the kingdom of heaven. Those who “die in the Lord”, i.e. in faith to Jesus, experience death as the move into the kingdom of heaven, i.e. into the presence of God. Death, then, is a beatitude:

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth. Blessed indeed, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours.<sup>809</sup>

Thus, “suffering and death unto despair can be changed into suffering and dying unto hope. The cross of Jesus is the force that can bring about the transformation and guarantee the hope”.<sup>810</sup>

On the other side, those who die without this faith are believed to die totally, i.e. their life comes to an end in eternal death, and what is more, their life is no life at all, it is lived in vain.<sup>811</sup>

Beside these basic views, there are again attempts to justify the imbalance between the wicked and the righteous during lifetime. The doctrine of a final judgement holds that the soul will be judged by God according to its deeds. There is no chance for a person to do good what he has done evil during his lifetime. The final judgement represents the end of the rule of evil forces and the beginning of the rule of God over the entire world and was thus awaited eagerly by most Jewish people at the time of Jesus. Because of this expectation, Jesus’ announcement that the kingdom of God was near drew much attention on him.

The question of what happens to the dead, until this final day of judgement comes, has led to the development of the doctrine of a hell and a purgatory, which is based on some hints found in the Old and the New Testament.

According to Roman Catholic teachings, each soul has to go through the purgatory in which it will be cleansed from its sin which it had done during the lifetime of the person. After this process is completed, the soul will be admitted into heaven, which is believed to be a state of never ending joy and loving relationship with God.

The Protestant churches generally deny the existence of a purgatory, but often speak of the hell, which at times reaches a similar shape like the purgatory. The souls of all those who did not receive redemption by accepting Jesus as their Saviour are thrown into the hell after death. Those who believed in Christ and died in the faith that Jesus had redeemed them from their sins, would be in a waiting stage until the second coming of Jesus, when he would sit and judge the entire world together with them.<sup>812</sup>

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808. Rom 6,11

809. Rev 14,13

810. Samuel Rayan, *That the World Might be Saved*, p. 44

811. cf. Col 2,13

812. Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians:

Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you; are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? (1 Cor 6,2-3)

This statement is made in relation to the fact that members of the Corinthian congregation had filed a lawsuit against another member of the Christian community in the local court which is headed by non-Christians. For Paul, going to a civil court is shame for a Christian community, as they are entitled to judge the whole world and should therefore be able to

The fact that the physical body withers has also raised the question in which form the soul will be in communion with God. Paul states that there will be a new creation in which everyone receives back his or her own identity, but with a new, spiritual body, which cannot wither.<sup>813</sup>

### 6.2.2.2 Salvation

Salvation, according to the Christian teachings, cannot be obtained by ones deeds and actions. The only way to be redeemed is through God alone. God is the author of salvation. The Bible presumes that man is determined by the original sin and therefore unable to redeem himself.<sup>814</sup> Paul refers to this condition in his letter to the Romans.<sup>815</sup>

God's redeeming action is what actually man should have done, but was unable to do: he gave a pure sacrifice in order to purify the whole mankind from their sin of disobedience to the law of God. The sacrifice was performed by the crucifixion of Jesus. Because God became man in Jesus and let himself be crucified by man, the need to live in accordance with the will of God was finally fulfilled. The question why God did not redeem the mankind without such a cruel sacrifice can be answered with the fact that man had to see and to realize his proper place within the world. If Jesus had died a normal death, he would have been a prophet like many others, but his redemptive task would not have been fulfilled, because it included the defeat of death as the power of sin. Thus, Jesus had to be crucified in order to defeat death, which is the power of sin and barred man to regain a close relationship with God. According to the gospels he was indeed raised from death on the third day. Thus, Jesus was the first to restore the original status of man, as man should live and act in the face of God. With this, a new covenant has been initiated by God, which is open to the whole mankind.

Those who accept that Jesus has died on account of their sins and was raised from death, are saved. Salvation, according to the Bible, is received during the lifetime of a person. It is often emphasized that the dead persons cannot reconsider whether they shall believe in Christ or not.<sup>816</sup> It is understood that salvation means the forgiveness of sin, not only of those sins committed during the lifetime up to the date when Christ's redemptive act was accepted, but also beyond that.

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settle disputes among themselves, with the help of experienced and wise members of the community.

813. cf. also the section 6.1.3.1 on the concept of soul in the Indian Christianity on page 174

814. see also page 161

815. s. the letter of Paul to the Romans chapter 5,12 – 21, and the explanations beginning on page 170.

816. There is one passage in the first letter of Peter which suggests that even the dead have the choice to accept Jesus' redemptive action:

For Christ also died for sins once and for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through the water. (1 Peter 3, 18-20)

This portion is interpreted in various ways, and it remains unclear whether the descend of Jesus is a unique, historical act, which has no effect for those who die after his resurrection.

The acceptance of Jesus' self-sacrifice can be done only by the individual person through faith, i.e. salvation is an act which is initiated by God but requires a positive response from man.<sup>817</sup> Like *jnana* in Hinduism, faith in Christianity is not so much the remembrance of a scientific or historical fact, but an experience.

To mark the acceptance of Christ's salutary act through faith, the believer is baptized.<sup>818</sup> With the baptism, a new life<sup>819</sup> of the individual begins in the presence of God.<sup>820</sup>

Since it is hard or actually impossible to measure faith, different factions within the Christian world community emphasize either the faith of the individual person as the indispensable element which has to be testified before the baptism can take place, or the redemptive act of God testified by baptism (which is considered to be a sacrament) as the initiation of man's response. The latter view is mostly held by the established churches, while the former is supported by evangelical communities.

### 6.2.3 Suffering, Death and Salvation among the Indian Christians in Andhra Pradesh

In this section, we will present a few observations which throw a light on the understanding of suffering, death and salvation among the Indian Christians in Andhra Pradesh. These observations may form a whole together with the findings presented in chapter 5, especially in the section 5.5.2 on the rites related to the death of a person.

#### 6.2.3.1 Suffering and Death

Suffering among Indian Christians in Andhra Pradesh is generally accepted as a fate which one cannot escape. However, when a member of a Christian family becomes sick, he or she is generally prayed for.<sup>821</sup> It seems that the belief which was common in the 19th century in the European Pietism and which is the basis of most missionary societies, has been accepted by the Indian Christians in Andhra Pradesh (and elsewhere): that any kind of suffering, be it on account of sickness, of social injustice, or of lack of opportunity, is sent by god as a kind of trial. To undergo this trial without revolting is a sign of piety and fidelity to God. This is especially reflected in the attitude of many Christians who are better off, towards those who suffer under social injustice. The social injustice is interpreted by them as a trial from God and therefore to be endured. Reward can be expected in the transcendent world, the

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817. The question of an universal redemption of all mankind, irrespective of their response, is often discussed, but not clearly answered.

818. see the section beginning on page 119

819. The new life of a Christian, after he has gained faith in the redemptive act of Christ, is not only reflected spiritually. It is expected to change the entire life-style of a person, as it happened e.g. with the tax collector, who, after he had been visited by Jesus and realized the love of God for himself, exclaimed:

"Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house." (Lk 19, 8-9)

820. It is to be kept in mind here that the baptism of children became common during the first centuries A.D. This signifies a change also in the emphasis laid on salvation: Salvation is now viewed in the first instance as an act performed by God, and only in the second place as a responsive act of man. This has led to the so called "people's church" in many countries, where one becomes more or less automatically a Christian. If he does not want to be registered as a Christian, he would have to apply for it.

821. Cf. the section 5.7.2 on page 135



kingdom of God, which cannot be implemented in this world. Even the caste system was not rejected in a number of churches because of the believe that it was a pure worldly system and thus it would not be necessary to abolish it on the ground of Christian faith.<sup>822</sup>

It is only in the recent years that the so called “dalit theology” has been developed and is emphatically discussed in the Christian colleges. In this theology, the caste system is opposed because it is against the will of God. Those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are the ones loved by God. An organization called the “Christian Dalit Liberation Movement” came into existence in 1985.<sup>823</sup> This organization as well as the Dalit Theology are not yet fully recognized and supported by the various churches.<sup>824</sup>

The understanding of death is ambivalent in Indian Christianity. On the one side, the doctrine of rebirth has been successfully rejected. The soul of a person will not be reborn again.<sup>825</sup> On the other side, there is a belief that the soul of the deceased does not come to rest and has to be cared for by the successors.<sup>826</sup>

Death is not understood as the result or as the power of sin. Death is a part of man’s life, which is reflected in the fact that the soul is believed to be still in need of the successors’ help in the form of prayer and sometimes also in the form of material goods. The view that after death a better life can be expected, is often held and supports the claim that the suffering and pain endured during the worldly life will be compensated after death in the *svarga* or *paralokam*.<sup>827</sup> The wicked will come to *yamalokam*, the kingdom of death.<sup>828</sup>

### 6.2.3.2 Ways to Salvation in Andhra Christianity

It appears that the understanding of the way to reach salvation in Indian Christianity in Andhra Pradesh is close to the concept found in Hinduism.

The three major ways to obtain salvation, which are taught by the Hindu scriptures, i.e. *jnana marga*, *karma marga* and *bhakti marga* appear e.g. also in the Telugu poetry, a few examples of which are given below:

- Mangamuri Devadoss describes Jesus as the cause of the knowledge which makes him (the devotee) a justified person who is able to obtain *moksha* by his way of life.
- Jesus is also called the “model of true devotion” (*bhakti*). To follow the example of Jesus enables the devotee to realize his oneness with God.

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822. see on the other hand the section 4.1.2 beginning on page 99. Cf. also K. Wilson, *The Twice Alienated*, p. 43-46

823. This organization on the national level is a forum of numerous regional Christian Dalit associations which came into existence years ago.

824. see Ravi Tiwari, *The Role of Theological Colleges in the Emergence of Dalit Theology*, p. 141

825. This is also because among the Dravidians there was no such concept of a rebirth. For them, the existence of a soul was evident in the experience of mysterious phenomena which they believed to be caused by the souls of the deceased.

826. cf. the section 5.5.2 beginning on page 129, where certain rites are explained which substantiate this observation

827. Both terms are used for a place of peace and happiness. *Paralokam* means “the world beyond”.

828. It is usually stressed that the dying person should confess his sins, in order to be saved from being thrown into the *yamalokam*. See also P.Y. Luke/J.B. Carmen, *Village Christians and Hindu Cultures*, p. 177-178

- Pantagani Paradesi, in a similar way, expresses the *karma marga* to be a way to salvation by pointing to the example of Jesus' self-sacrifice. The poet requests Jesus "to give him strength to do good".<sup>829</sup>

It seems that, due to the fact that the concept of an original sin has not been fully accepted by the Christian community<sup>830</sup>, God's redemptive act does not have such an importance as would be appropriate. The affection and love of God towards humanity, revealed through his son Jesus Christ and enacted in his sacrificial death, is at best understood as an evidence of God's turning towards mankind and his love for man. It is, however, not understood as an act which is absolutely necessary for the redemption of mankind. The view is, in concord with the Hindu concept, that man is basically good and without any evil. The relation between God and man is primarily undisturbed, and there is therefore no need for any special sacrifice or act from the side of God in order to restore the relationship.<sup>831</sup> This leads to the conclusion that those who belong to the Christian community cannot be removed from the covenant. In other words: a person belonging to the Christian community, i.e. the church, cannot become a non-Christian except he turns away from the Christian community. God, therefore, carries characteristics of the village deity, which always was at the same time the deity of the community: his redemptive act lies in the provision of the things which are necessary to lead a more or less comfortable life, and in the protection from diseases and calamities.<sup>832</sup> "Christians share with most Hindus and Muslims in these villages the idea that divine blessing is expressed in very tangible or material ways."<sup>833</sup> This observation, made by Luke and Carmen about twenty years ago, can still be made today among the Andhra Christians in the Andhra villages as well as in the towns.

### 6.3 The Concept of Sacrifice

In many religions, the need for a sacrifice is stressed whenever the God is approached by the devotee for some help. The sacrifice consists in animistic religions mainly of natural things, like vegetables or animals. Thus, the livelihood of the priest who performs the sacrifice is also secured. Often, when a concept of sin had been developed, sacrifices were offered in order to appease the God and to beg for forgiveness of the sins by means of the sacrifice. The material used for the sacrifice is generally something of a special value.<sup>834</sup>

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829. P.S. Shalem Raju, *A Reminiscence of the Suffering and Death of Christ...*, p.33f

830. see section 6.1.3.2 on page 176

831. See also on this issue Luke/Carmen, *Village Christians...*, p. 170: "For the majority of Christians, the death of Jesus is without sacrificial significance."

832. This is reflected in the importance which is laid on the prayer; cf. the section 5.7.2 on page 135

833. P.Y. Luke/J.B. Carmen, *Village Christians...*, p. 178

834. The animal sacrifice is performed because it is believed that the blood is the most valuable element, carrying the life of the animal.

### 6.3.1 The Hindu Concept of Sacrifice

In popular Hinduism, sacrifice plays an important role as a means of communication between the devotee and God.<sup>835</sup> In this section, an attempt is made to understand the concept of sacrifice in Hinduism on the basis of the Hindu scriptures.

#### 6.3.1.1 Vedic Sacrifices

In the Vedic scriptures<sup>836</sup>, sacrifice (*yajna*) plays a most vital role. Agni, the god of fire, is the mediator who transforms the oblation into spiritual realities and takes them to heaven, the abode of the gods. Sacrifice is understood as the way for man to reach out into the heavenly spheres.

In *Rigveda* VII,99:4 we read that “Vishnu and Indra made the spacious world for the sake of sacrifice”<sup>837</sup>, and sacrifice soon becomes the means to preserve the universe.<sup>838</sup> At the same time the idea develops that the one who performs a sacrifice enters himself into the spiritual world, thus sacrificing himself (*yajamana*) symbolically. With this, other material becomes a substitute for the sacrificer, and is not the actual sacrifice.

The *soma*-sacrifice<sup>839</sup> can be interpreted as the first step towards immolation (ritual killing).<sup>840</sup> The sacrifice of the self is required in order to unite the sacrificer with the destination of the sacrifice, i.e. with the universe. To perform this self sacrifice, a substitute was used, and this attempt finally led to the spiritualization of the sacrifice.<sup>841</sup> Thus, sacrifice in the sense of the Hindu scriptures and especially of the *Upanishads*, is to offer one’s own self by means of a substitute in order “to realize the centre of his existence in Brahman – not in himself.”<sup>842</sup>

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835. On the performance of sacrifices see also the section 5.8.1

836. cf. the section on the Vedas on page 14

837. quoted from S. Amirtham, *The Value of the Category of Sacrifice in Christian Preaching in India*, p. 3

838. This idea is introduced with the *purusha sukta* and then continued in the *Brahmanas* (e.g. *Satapatha Brahmana* II:1,8,2-3), and in later scriptures

839. *Soma* is the shoot of a plant which is believed to have certain powers, which are concentrated in its juice. The juice is extracted from the plant by crushing and grinding it, and then poured into the fire

840. In the *purusha* hymn (*Rigveda* X,90) a human called *purusha* is sacrificed by the Gods, which may lead to the conclusion that even human sacrifices were known to the Vedic people. The *Brahmanas* also at several places state that a human sacrifice would gain all:

All, all is the human sacrifice, for the obtaining of all, for the gaining of all. (*Satapatha Brahmana* XII, 6:1; quoted from S. Amirtham, *The Value of the Category of Sacrifice in Christian Preaching in India*, p. 5)

There is, however, no evidence that human sacrifice was common in the Aryan tradition, and the texts referring to human sacrifice are generally interpreted symbolically. Even the interpretation given by the Vedas does not suggest any idea of a human sacrifice. Instead, the sacrifice of *purusha* is actually seen as the prototype of the *yajna*, in which “the offerer, offering and receiver” unite: “With the sacrifice the gods sacrificed to the sacrifice”. (*Rigveda* X,90,16a; quoted according to Louis Malleckal, *Yajna and Eucharist*, p. 91 and 116-118)

841. Louis Malleckal, *Sacrifice: Core of Vedic Religion and Christianity*, p. 317-318

842. Jose Thachil, *The Theology of Religions and Sacrifice*, p. 337

The idea of sin plays a minor role with relation to the sacrifice in the Vedic scriptures. Only *Varuna* is a God related to ethical issues, and he punishes the sinners as well as forgives the penitent. Thus, sacrifices to *Varuna* are related also to forgiveness of sin, but not reported as the most important.

There is, in addition, the idea of *rina* (debt) connected with the ritual sacrifice.<sup>843</sup> Behind this concept stands again the idea of self-sacrifice, which is the most valuable sacrifice.

The *Bhagavadgita* views *yajna* in a very complex way, and the quintessence of this view is the *ego*-sacrifice for the sake of the divine, i.e. to give up all egoistic desires and to direct all actions towards God.<sup>844</sup> It must, however, be distinguished between the “*ego*-sacrifice” and the “*atma-yajna*”, the latter of which would be in the line of the *Upanishadic* interpretation. *Ego*-sacrifice, according to the *Bhagavadgita*, means actually to give up all attachments and to fulfil one’s *dharma* properly. In the discussion between Krishna and Arjuna, the emphasis is clearly on the *dharma* of the *kshatriya*, and it is therefore also concluded that to conduct war is itself a proper *yajna* of the *kshatriya*. The cosmic dimension of the *yajna* has been reduced, because it is directed to the supreme Lord, who himself is the creator and preserver of the universe. But, viewing the fulfilment of *dharma* as the proper *yajna*, it is maintained in the *Bhagavadgita* that the “wheel of sacrifice” (*yajna chakra*<sup>845</sup>) must be kept moving by the fulfilment of *dharma*, else one would commit sin.<sup>846</sup>

### 6.3.2 The Christian Concept of Sacrifice

To make good the failures of man in fulfilling God’s will, and to cleanse from ritual impurity, there are ways prescribed in the Old Testament to reconcile God by means of (animal-)sacrifices, the rules for which are exactly and very detailed laid down in the biblical book of Leviticus.

Sacrifice was understood as a “gift” to God. Beside the complete form of sacrifice in the burnt offering, there were other forms of sacrifice which separated the gift from the profane and transformed it into sacred material, which was then returned to the person who had presented the gift.<sup>847</sup> Sacrifice has the character of an atonement for the sins which an individual or the community had committed. It shall repair the damage caused by this transgression, but can do so only if a sentiment of repentance is found. God can not be forced

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843. see page 159

844. “Whatever you do, eat, sacrifice, perform – do it as an offering to Me”, says Krishna to Arjuna (*Bhagavadgita* IX, 27), and: “From whom is the evolution of all beings, by whom all this is pervaded, worshipping Him with his own duty, a man attains perfection.” *Bhagavadgita* XVIII, 45, transl. Swami Chidbhananda

845. The *yajna chakra* is the cycle of creation, as the *Bhagavadgita* says:

From food creatures come into being, from rain food, from *yajna* rain, from *karman yajna*. From *brahman* comes *karman*, from the imperishable *brahman*; *brahman* is based on sacrifice. (III, 14f; transl. Swami Chidbhananda)

846. cf. S. Israel, *Post-Vedic Developments in the Understanding of Yajna (Sacrifice) and the Response of the Bhagavad Gita*, p. 256-263

847. Usually, part of the offering which was thus sacrificed was handed over to the priests as a kind of remuneration for their work done in the sacrifice. In this form of sacrifice, the union with God is sought. cf. Lev 21,6.8.17 The Passover sacrifice which is performed yearly in remembrance of the liberation from the slavery of the people of Israel in Egypt, is the best example for a sacrifice which is understood as a communal offering.

to accept the sacrifice by ritual accuracy,<sup>848</sup> because finally to accept a sacrifice depends purely on God's will.<sup>849</sup> A clear statement in this regard is made in 1 Sam 3, 14, where God says to Samuel:

I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering for ever.

Thus, God's sovereignty over man is maintained in all respects. On the other side, the knowledge about God's sovereignty leads to the conclusion that the ritualistic sacrifice in itself is not the end of the communication between man and God. The sacrifice has to be performed with the heart, i.e. with the faith that God responds to the sacrifice and forgives the sins.<sup>850</sup>

The idea of a substitute for one's own sacrifice can be found as well: In Lev 16, a scapegoat, on which the sins of the people of Israel are loaded, is chased into the desert as a symbol for the removal of the sins of the people of Israel by God.<sup>851</sup> Isaiah 53 speaks about the Servant of God who will sacrifice himself as an atonement for the sins of all the people of Israel.

Jesus' teaching is in the line of the prophets who emphasize that the ritual accuracy is not as important as a repentant heart. His own death then is predicted by himself as a "ransom"<sup>852</sup>, and he is crucified on the day of the Passover. With this and many other references to the concept of sacrifice, as it is found in the Old Testament<sup>853</sup>, the four gospels point out that Jesus' death is more than a mere killing: it is the sacrifice which establishes the new covenant, in which man is no longer required to repair his failures by means of sacrifice. With Jesus' crucifixion, the reparation has been paid once and for all.

Paul, as the most important interpreter of Christian faith, supports this view of the death of Jesus as the "once for all" sacrifice to redeem mankind from its sin.<sup>854</sup> According to him, it is only by the grace of God, which has become visible through Jesus Christ, that man is

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848. The priestly tribe among the Jews, with the passage of time, over-emphasized the ritual accuracy of these sacrifices and neglected the remaining demand for repentance set up by God. They believed that ritual accuracy would be the only important element in order to perform a sacrifice successfully.

849. God says to Moses in Ex 33,19:

I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

Remarkable in this connection is also the story of Cain and Abel (Gen 4), where, without obvious reason, God rejects the sacrifice of Cain, while he accepts the sacrifice performed by Abel.

850. The prototype of sacrifice is found in Gen 22, where Abraham is asked by God to offer his only son as a burnt offering. Abraham is prepared to do so and takes his son to the spot where the sacrifice shall take place. In the moment when he wants to kill his son, an angel stops him from doing so, because God has seen Abraham's faithfulness. Then, a ram was discovered and sacrificed instead of the son.

851. Lev 16, 21-22

852. Mk 10,45

853. see also the article about sacrifice in Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 514, for more references

854. On Paul's understanding of sin, see page 170

redeemed from his sin. There is no way for anyone to restore the relationship with God on his own, but only through faith in Jesus' self-sacrifice.

Thus, a change had taken place from the Jewish religion which intended to give means to the people to restore the relationship with God by certain rituals or certain action. That this is not a radical change, but rather in continuation of the teachings of the Old Testament prophets, has already become clear.

The New Testament further teaches that there is no sacrifice necessary by any man in order to gain blessings from God, because Jesus has been sacrificed for all the sins of the mankind and therefore God's desire for sacrifices has been satisfied.<sup>855</sup> If one wants to talk about sacrifice, then it is only possible by referring to faith as some kind of a sacrifice. This seems, however, difficult, because the meaning of faith does not at all imply anything like a sacrifice.<sup>856</sup>

This understanding is also reflected in many of the lyrics composed by Indian poets.<sup>857</sup> Only through the sacrifice which was given by Jesus Christ, the devotee is able and justified to have a close relationship with God. At the same time, it has become clear that the cause for Jesus' death is the basic sinfulness of the mankind.<sup>858</sup>

The Christian community celebrates the sacrificial death of Jesus in the Holy Communion. This sacrament<sup>859</sup> is celebrated according to the command of Jesus in remembrance of him<sup>860</sup> by using unleavened bread and wine, which were the elements used in the last supper, that Jesus had with his disciples on the eve of the Passover.<sup>861</sup> When taking and eating or drinking these elements, the Christian is believed to enter into union with Christ, like the disciples were in union with him at the evening before the crucifixion.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the Holy Communion, which is celebrated there at least once in a week, is not only a mere remembrance, but some kind of a repetition (or an actualization) of the sacrifice which was performed by the self-sacrifice of Jesus. According to this, the elements used in the Eucharist, i.e. bread and wine, are considered to be sanctified and may thus no longer be treated like ordinary bread and wine.<sup>862</sup> To ensure proper protection, each Catholic church has a small shrine called *tabernacle*, which houses the consecrated bread. If consecrated bread has been placed into the *tabernacle*, a light is lit in order to let everyone who enters the church know that Christ is present in his physical form.

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855. See also page 143

856. There may be the suggestion that one who believes in God gives up his evil desires and attitudes. However, one does not give up his evil desires and attitudes in order to achieve faith, but this is a consequence of faith. In the same way, to give away one's possession is for a Christian the consequence of faith, which makes one to realize his dependence on God and thus creates a new relation to all material values and to one's fellow-beings.

857. Purushothama Chowdhari, who lived in the 19th century, is one of the Telugu poets who emphatically stress the importance of the death of Christ for the removal of man's sin, and man's inability to do so on his own. See R. Joseph, *Purusottama Coudhari: His Special Contribution to Indian Christian Theology*, p. 49

858. P.S. Shalem Raju, *A Reminiscence of the Sufferings and Death of Christ...*, p. 25-30

859. cf. also the section on page 140

860. Lk 22,19

861. Actually, the ceremony described in the gospels is the ritual celebrated in the houses of the Jewish families on the eve of the Passover.

862. Since wine can be spoiled easily, only a little amount is consecrated and taken by the priest himself. The congregation receives only the bread, which is believed to be sufficient. On the understanding of the Holy Communion in the Roman Catholic Church, see also the article *Eucharist* in A. Darlap (ed.), *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol II, p. 264 f.

Due to this understanding of the Eucharist, the priest, who is the only one able to celebrate it, gains an important status. Besides, the repetition or actualization of Jesus' sacrifice imposes the impression that the sacrifice of Jesus was insufficient, thus opening the way for personal offerings by the people in order to ensure one's salvation.

### 6.3.3 Influences of the Hindu Concept of Sacrifice on Andhra Christianity

In spite of the changes with regard to sacrifice brought forth by Jesus, many Indian Christians especially in the Andhra villages, but also in urban areas hold the view that the performance of a sacrifice has a positive effect on one's relation to God. It is believed that sacrifices can restore the affected relationship and yield prosperity and other positive fruits.

The "once-for-all" character of Jesus' sacrificial death is not understood by most Christians in Andhra Pradesh. The elements of the Holy Communion are sometimes, and then mainly among village Christians and in the Roman Catholic congregations, understood as some kind of *prasada* from God. A salvific quality is not attributed to the Holy Communion or to its elements.

What kind of sacrifices are most common and for which purpose they are performed, is described in section 5.8.4 on page 143.

## 6.4 The Concept of Time

It strikes a westerner who visits India that time seems not to play such an important role as in Western countries. There is not such a restlessness and hectic, as he usually observes in his home country. The reason for this fact are the different *Weltanschauungen* which had been developed in the dominating religions.

It seems appropriate that at this place, the bases for the different concepts of time in Hinduism and in Christianity are explained and the differences are discussed, as the concept of time plays a vital role also in the spirituality of a person.

### 6.4.1 The Concept of Time in Hinduism

Time, in Hinduism, is "the rhythm by which things are and with which they move"<sup>863</sup>, which means that time is not linear, i.e. time does not have a beginning and an end, but repeats itself like a rhythm that beats continuously in order to provide the environment in which the tune can materialize itself.

In Hinduism, the concept of time is determined by the understanding of the ultimate being, which is infinite and therefore also timeless (in the sense of limitless). Since the *atma* is considered to be a part of the *atman*, and since the Hindu belief is that the only important thing is to realize this union, which may take innumerable generations for one *atma* to succeed, the moving part within the universe is not the time, but the individual person or better: the individual's *atma*. Unlike in Western countries, where time has gained much influence on the day-to-day life in all aspects, the day-to-day life of a Hindu is not governed by the passage of time, or, in other words, by the clock, but by the desire to fulfil the *dharma* in order to be liberated from the *karma samsara*.

In the *Bhagavadgita*, Krishna says to Arjuna:

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863. Raimundo Panikar, *The Message of Yesterday's India to Today's World*, p. 65

Of created things I am the beginning and the end and also the middle, O Arjuna. Of the sciences I am the Science of the Self; of those who debate I am the reason.<sup>864</sup>

In this verse, Krishna sets himself as the beginning and the end of all creation, which means actually that he is the time, as he points out later in chapter XI:

I am the mighty world-destroying time now engaged in wiping out the world.<sup>865</sup>

The world or universe is considered to be a temporary creation of the *brahman*, which will, after due course of time, be destroyed and then rebuilt again. The life or the time of the world as well as the life of the individual can be imagined as a life in a circle, going out from the ultimate in order to become an individual being, and then, after having failed many times, seeking to return to its source. Time can therefore be understood as the space within which the creation moves. There is no end to the time, but time is the eternal basis of the universe.<sup>866</sup>

Since *karma* is the power which brings the world into existence, time could also be said to be the result of *karma*. As long as *karma* exists, there is also time.

History is therefore not, like in Western countries, viewed as a line of various events which happen one after the other. History in Hinduism means to understand and to evaluate the individual being as depending on and in relation to *karma*. "Time past means past *karma*, and future time means *karma* to come."<sup>867</sup>

The universe as the world which can be experienced and would be called real in terms of human experience, "is nothing but a concentration of *karma*"<sup>868</sup>, which puts all and everyone into relation with each other. As such, *karma* is not the absolute, but the relative par excellence. It keeps in order and in relation to each other all that is not absolute. *Karma* is the law of the universe, it is the power according to which all elements of the universe are set up.

Since *karma* can be influenced by one's actions,<sup>869</sup> *karma* also changes, and this change is nothing else than what is experienced as time. Thus, the flow of *karma* is what is called time in Hinduism.<sup>870</sup> Because there cannot be a standstill of *karma*, unless the universe stops to exist, time exists.

When time is the flow of *karma*, then there is also no possibility to waste time, because *karma* can not be wasted. Time cannot pass unused, in the same way as action cannot be performed without an effect (and even the smallest atom is always active); every action will always have an effect on the entire universe.

But while time cannot be wasted, time has always been categorized in auspicious and inauspicious times, thus qualifying or disqualifying certain times for certain activities<sup>871</sup>. This categorization is basing on the view of the cosmic order, which is best understood by realizing the meaning and importance of *karma*. Whatever one does may not always have the same

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864. *Bhagavadgita* X, 32

865. *Bhagavadgita* XI, 32

866. cf. E. Frauwallner, *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*, Vol II, p. 109-114, 207-209

867. R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, p. 381

868. R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, p. 375

869. R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, p. 378

870. R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, p. 381

871. see page 132



effect, because the effect of his action depends on his present relation to the other elements of the cosmos.<sup>872</sup>

In present India, much attention is paid to the predictions of astrologers. That the Indian astronomy is strongly related to the doctrine of *karma* becomes obvious when in their books the astronomers point out that the stars and planets do not only indicate the present (and future) status, but also permit to know the entire existence of a person through all his incarnations.<sup>873</sup>

## 6.4.2 The Concept of Time in Christianity

Christianity sees the time as limited and actually part of the creation. The bible begins with the narration of the creation, and the first thing God made, after he had created the formless and void earth *ex nihilo*, is the time:

And God said: "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.<sup>874</sup>

By creating the light, God creates the day, which shall regularly exchange places with the night. All following creations are performed on days, thus marking already a progression of time in the creative act. Time can be measured right from the beginning of the creation, being itself a creature. God then creates all the elements which allow the measurement of time to be more accurate: the stars, the sun and the moon.<sup>875</sup>

God himself is timeless. His quality is eternity (Ps 102,12f), he lives forever, he is before and beyond the time. On the other side, he also intervenes in history in order to let man realize his original purpose and to perform redemptive acts.

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872. Thus, efforts were made very early in order to learn the constellation and movement of all elements of the cosmos, and already in the Vedic period a concept of 27 or 28 lunar mansions had been developed together with a classification of the known planets for the study of their influence on man. According to the position of the planets in relation to the lunar mansions, their power and influence is measured and auspicious or inauspicious times are laid down.

873. cf. Varahamihira's teachings in his book *Jaghu-Jataka*.

874. Gen 1, 3-5

875. Gen 1, 14-18; this story of creation is also the cause for the week of seven days, as the creation ends after 6 days with the seventh day as a day of rest. (Gen 2, 2-3) Feasts and festivals, which had been established in non-Jewish religions on the ground that certain times and seasons of the cycles of nature are the revelation of divine power, were partly taken over, but received a new meaning: no longer the revelation of divine powers (in the sense of polytheism) was seen in the cycles of nature, but the revelation of the one God's creative power. Thus, nature, with all its forces, was not viewed as divine or as the coexistence of different divine entities, but as the creation of God which followed the order set up by God.

There are times called *καιρος*.<sup>876</sup> The *καιρος* demands a decision from man who meets with it. If the person does not recognize the *καιρος*, he may miss his opportunity of reconciliation with God.<sup>877</sup> In Christianity it is believed that the coming of Jesus into this world is the *καιρος* par excellence.

The passage of time indicates also a development of the creation towards its final redemption from the evil forces. Mankind together with the whole creation is heading towards the last day, which is also often called the youngest day, thus giving the impression that one lives under the constant expectation of the end of "his" or "her" time. The coming of Jesus Christ as the saviour into this world is a historical act which cannot be repeated, because everything happens only once during the limited course of time.<sup>878</sup>

This linear concept of time<sup>879</sup> in Christianity is the basis for the concept of man as well. Man's life is not determined by the cosmic order, but by his being a creature. The centre of Christian doctrine is that the individual will keep his individuality even after death, until the end of the time. This may be the most significant distinction between Hinduism and Christianity.

Because of the resurrection of Jesus, there is also the idea that the history of this world has already come to its end.<sup>880</sup> The time after Jesus' resurrection is no longer of importance to the one who lives in the faith in Christ. He belongs already to the new creation. The past is the time of no faith in Christ, while the present time is the time of faith in Christ. This means also, that those who do not believe in Christ, live in the past, while those who believe in Christ live in the present time. Time, therefore, is related to the redemptive act of God through Jesus Christ.<sup>881</sup>

### 6.4.3 Influences of the Hindu Concept of Time on Christianity in Andhra Pradesh

In the life of Indian Christians, the Hindu concept of time has gained some momentum.<sup>882</sup> This concept is reflected for instance in the understanding of the church as an institution with its own history, or in the behaviour of the Christians in Andhra Pradesh.

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876. This Greek term denotes the time which provides a situation of advantage or opportunity as well as the "decisive point". The *καιρος* is "divinely ordained". The *καιρος* that is present with Jesus has not been recognized by the masses.

877. cf. the article by G. Delling on *καιρος* in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p. 389-390

878. There is also no distinction of different *yugas* with different qualities, as found in Hinduism, but there are only two aeons, one of which is the "aeon of God", which is to come, while the other is "this aeon", which means the world in which we live and which is in opposition to God. At this point, one may find a similarity to the concept of the *yugas*. However, the order is opposite (the "bad aeon" is now, and the "good aeon" will come, so there is a development from bad to good and not from good to bad), and Jesus' teaching indicates rather that the second aeon, i.e. the "aeon of God", is already present, which means that the "reign of God had already begun" (*Sacramenta Mundi*, vol 1, p.12 f.), consequently there is no clear distinction of two aeons possible.

879. there are exceptions in the sense that the idea of a cosmic cycle which brings back things which had already happened is taken up: "That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been." (Eccl 3,15)

880. This view is mainly shared by the gospel according to John and the letters of John.

881. cf. the article *Das christliche Geschichtsverständnis* in K. Galling (ed.), *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Vol II, col. 1476-1481

882. The following section bases on experiences made during the field work and information received during the interviews.

To begin with, there is no real sense for historicity as it is found in the Bible. Even though, for example, the foundation of the church is generally remembered and celebrated<sup>883</sup>, there is no significant interest in the history and historical development of the own church. The church as a community of Christians is understood as an existing body, the development of which is of minor concern, because the only importance is to keep this body existing.<sup>884</sup> Elements of history are incorporated into the existing body of the church as parts of it.<sup>885</sup> These historic values are turned into values of the existing body in the sense that they are internalized. The historic and past value of the missionary efforts e.g. turns into the present value of being a Christian community.<sup>886</sup> The historic acts are not the beginning or elements of a development towards a certain goal, but at best they are made parts of the existing body.<sup>887</sup>

There is not much emphasis on punctuality, and common worship begins often much later than scheduled. This is most probably due to the reason that there is no feeling that time which passes can not be brought back. It is not the time which determines the schedule of the Indian Christian, because there is no understanding that unused time is wasted time.<sup>888</sup>

There is also the view prevailing that time is not of even quality, but that there are auspicious and inauspicious times.<sup>889</sup> According to this view of time, decisions are taken and important events are celebrated also among the Indian Christians.

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883. Obviously also because the Indian Christians, like all Indians, enjoy celebrations and festivities, which give them an opportunity to break out of the monotonous day-to-day life

884. This is to be understood in the terms of the Indian social system (cf. section 4.1.1 on page 97), within which the joint family determines the individual, and the *jati* determines the joint family. Because, among the Indian Christianity, the church has more or less taken the place of the caste, which provides protection and social security to its members, the destruction of this body would mean the loss of all what means security to its members.

885. This incorporation does generally include only external values. While there is often an enthusiastic gratitude for the efforts of the missionaries who had founded the church, this gratitude does not lead to a remembrance of their teachings. The only effect the missionaries had seems to be the conversion to Christianity and with this the uplift from the state of an outcaste to a respected community. As such initiators of Christianity, rather than Christian faith, among the Indian community, the missionaries are remembered and also incorporated into the present body of the church. See in this regard also the text on denominational differences, found in section 4.1.2

886. With this, the concept of *karma* is well established as the *karma* of the Christian church:

*Karma* is the crystallization of actions past, as well as of the results of acts that are no longer in the past, but that emerge and are present in the contemporary situation of whoever bears that particular *karma*. (R. Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, p. 383)

887. This is for instance done by the installation of memorial tables and foundation stones, which name the participants in the particular event. It could be suggested that this is in concordance with the view that, with the beginning of the faith in Christ, there is no historicity, because a new life in Christ has begun. None of those interviewed expressed this view, and it seems that the Christians do not understand themselves as members of an eschatological body, except for members of some evangelical churches. The majority understands the church as the community to which they belong.

888. With regard to punctuality, normally other reasons are given for the lateness, like work at home, or the bell was not heard. In villages, the worship begins when the whole congregation has gathered, independent from a certain schedule, but in the towns, the worship often begins when there are barely a few members present, and the church slowly fills with members while the worship continues.

889. see section 5.6.2. The strong existence of the believe in auspicious and inauspicious times among the Indian Christians indicates as well that there is no idea of the present time being the eschatological time, which would be even and without different qualities, because its quality is determined by the presence of Jesus as the son of God.

Although all Christians would admit that there is a last day of judgement, the idea of this “end of time” is very vague and rarely elaborated. It is preferred just to think of a heaven as a place of eternal bliss and the hell as a place of eternal punishment.

It must be added in this connection, that the evangelical churches are more rigorously following the biblical interpretation of time. For them, time always has the same quality, and the time in which they live is “their” time, the time of action, which could be wasted by being inactive. The action required is mostly the promotion of the gospel, i.e. evangelistic work, since the expectation of the second coming of the Lord into the world as the final coming and as the beginning of his eternal kingdom depends on whether each and everyone has heard the gospel.

## 6.5 The Concept of Purity

Purity is very important in all ancient religions. It is required for approaching sacred things. Purity is generally obtained through appropriate rituals, which often have a symbolic character. One cannot approach God if he or she is not ritually clean. Most religions offer a catalogue of observances and rituals to be performed before the temple or any other sacred place is entered in order to communicate with God. In this section, the concept of purity in both, Hinduism and Christianity, is explained separately and then an evaluation of the concept of purity among the Indian Christians in Andhra Pradesh is made.

### 6.5.1 Purity in Hinduism

Rituals for the purification of material as well as of persons who are going to perform any sacred act or to approach any sacred thing are found already in the Vedic scriptures. The awareness of the danger of being polluted by coming into contact with unclean elements, was developed very early and then also strengthened with the development of the caste system, in which purity and pollution became a matter of distinction and separation.<sup>890</sup>

Thus, the concept of purity, in Hinduism, with regard to external pollution, can be divided into two different categories:

- social purity
- ritual purity

With the development of the caste system, a clear separation between the various levels of castes was required, which was best performed by the development of laws of purity. These include the prohibition of the inter-caste-marriage as well as the inter-caste-dining. The use of the well of the one caste is forbidden to the inferior castes. To touch a member of a lower caste and, even more, of an outcaste, results in social pollution.<sup>891</sup>

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890. Beside the external pollution, there is also the concept of an internal purity. The “purity of heart is the highest of all purities”, writes M. A. Buch in his book *The Principles of Hindu Ethics* on page 127. This internal purity is compared to the purity of *brahman*, the ultimate being, which is present in oneself in the form of *atman*. Since *brahman* cannot be impure, one can become pure inwards when he realizes his identity with *brahman*. Cf. also T. Pereira, *Towards an Indian Christian Funeral Rite*, p. 142-144. Regarding customs related to purity see also chapter 5

891. cf. U. Schneider, *Einführung in den Hinduismus*, p. 7. Rules to avoid the contact to lower castes can be found already in the *Brahmanas*; cf. G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India*, p. 307

Purity is quite important when it comes to the performance of any kind of religious ritual. Here, emphasis lies more on the inward than the external purity.<sup>892</sup> This is why most rites which are performed in order to clean oneself or any material used in the ritual, have a symbolic character. On the other side, the detailed prescriptions for these purification rites have given at least as much, if not more, importance to the external purity as it is given to the purification of the soul.

Numerous natural events have gained a polluting attribute, e.g. the menstruation of women<sup>893</sup> or the birth of a child results in the pollution of the woman.

### 6.5.2 Purity in Christianity

The Old Testament is full with regulations regarding purity and the avoidance of pollution. Cleanliness of the body is required more as a matter of hygiene, but gains some ritual meaning as well.<sup>894</sup> Even sickness can cause pollution (in this regard certainly a precautionary measure against infection), especially leprosy. Certain animals are unclean and thus shall not be eaten. The list could be continued. What is unique in the Jewish religion, is the Day of Expiation<sup>895</sup>, on which the entire people of Israel is cleansed from its sins and impurities through certain rituals.

All these regulations are made in order to develop an awareness of God's holiness and purity among the people, and to prepare the people of Israel for the encounter with God. Pollution and purity are terms generally used only in connection with the ritual and refer to the relation between God and man rather than the relation between man and man. A person who has come in contact with a polluting element would be unfit to participate in or to perform a religious rite, but still he could have normal contact with his fellow beings. Further, there is no such case in the bible that an entire people or community was considered to be polluting.

On the other side, the prophets in the Old Testament emphasize that the external purifying rituals have no meaning if they are not understood as a measure for interior purification.<sup>896</sup> Impurity is no longer just caused by the contact with polluted or polluting elements, but by the sin one commits in disobedience to the will of God, which is now primarily understood as the care for the oppressed and needy people.

In the New Testament, the external purification loses its significance. Jesus says:

There is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him. ...What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts,

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892. On the other side, the exclusion of *sudras* e.g. from the place where a sacrifice is to be performed, is demanded in order to avoid pollution by their presence. This demand shows already that as much attention is paid to the pollution caused by external powers as to the pollution caused by inward impurity.

893. The menstruation period has been regarded as a period of pollution in most religions

894. e.g. the excrements shall be buried outside the camp, because the camp of the Jewish people is regarded a holy place because of the presence of the Lord. (Dtn 23,12-14)

895. Also known as the Day of Atonement; see Lev 16

896. Isaiah e.g. uses the ritual terminology for a re-interpretation:

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good. (1,16-17)

see also Is 29,13; Hos 6,6; Amos 4,1-5; Jer 7,21-26

fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile man.<sup>897</sup>

Purity according to Jesus' teaching is not only moral perfection, but the presence of God in one's existence:

You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.<sup>898</sup>

Nevertheless, there are occurrences of the concept of purity as it is found in the Old Testament. E.g. Lk 2,22 talks about the time for purification according to the "law of Moses" and refers to Mary, the mother of Jesus, who had become unclean by the process of the birth.<sup>899</sup>

It appears that the early Christians from Jewish origin believed that certain things like food could cause pollution.<sup>900</sup> God, in a vision to Peter, tells him that "what God has cleansed, you must not call common." Paul says:

I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for any one who thinks it unclean. If your brother is injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died. ... Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for any one to make others fall by what he eats.<sup>901</sup>

With this, Paul makes clear that nothing can actually pollute a person. The only cause of pollution is the non-respect to others, which can also give reason to avoid the contact with certain things.<sup>902</sup>

The blood of Christ shed at the cross has the ultimate purifying effect:

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.<sup>903</sup>

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897. Mk 7, 15.20-23

898. John 15,3-4; transl. Revised Standard Version. The term "word" has a special significance in the gospel of John and stands for the son of God, Jesus. (see John 1,14)

899. cf. Lev 12,2-6

900. see Acts 10, 14; this vision of Peter is in regard to the proclamation of the gospel to the Non-Jewish people. Later, Paul accuses Peter of separating himself from the Christians of Non-Jewish origin, whenever a group of Jewish Christians is found

901. Romans 14,14-15.20; transl. Revised Standard Version

902. It is obvious that this rule of Paul can cause problems, especially with regard to social contact. One could claim to hurt his brother when he would join the Christians from a different background. This is, however, not in the mind of Paul in this context. In another letter he makes very clear that all belong to one community, and there should be no separation on any ground (1 Cor 1). Here he just talks about the eating of food which is considered unclean.

903. 1 John 1, 7-9; transl. Revised Standard Version. Cf. also Apk 7,14

The baptism is the symbolic act which actualizes the purifying act of Jesus.<sup>904</sup> The Christian is supposed to purify himself, i.e. to refrain from any act which is not in accordance with the will of God. Thus, purity gains a moral aspect which comes to the fore and finally replaces all ideas of external purity.<sup>905</sup>

### 6.5.3 Purity in Andhra Christianity

Among the Christians in Andhra Pradesh, it is believed that the contact with certain things or natural events like menstruation and child birth are polluting. The pollution results in the abstention from social events, like worship, prayer meetings and the like, until the prescribed period after the pollution is over and a bath, sometimes accompanied by various rituals, is taken. Mostly women are affected by these rules of purification and pollution.<sup>906</sup> Also the contact with members of a lower caste is, among many Christians, considered to be polluting.

When any kind of material, like candles, is going to be used during the worship, it will first be blessed, thus making it usable for the sacred purpose. Whether this blessing is believed to have a purifying effect, could not be established.<sup>907</sup>

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904. Eph 5, 26

905. cf. the article "pure" in Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 477-479

906. For further details, see the chapter 5.

907. Some answers on this question were, that the material is used at a sacred place and has therefore to be blessed in order to invoke God's protection.

## **CHAPTER 7**

## **CONCLUSION**



The present study provides insight into the life of the Christianity in Andhra Pradesh in form of a comparative study. This kind of approach helps to understand better certain elements of social and cultural behaviour prevailing among the Christian communities.

The study reveals that there are two different ways of Hinduism taking influence on the Christianity in Andhra Pradesh. While one way is the deliberate acceptance of Hindu customs and manners in order to reach as many people with the Christian message as possible, the other way is the thoughtless continuation or revival of manners and customs which had been followed before the conversion to Christianity. The study shows also that the former way of deliberate adoption of Hindu customs and manners is an attempt made by a few Christians who are well versed with the Hindu philosophical systems<sup>908</sup>, while the way of unconscious adoption or continuation of many elements of the Hindu way of life is followed by the majority of the Christians. The often made statement that the customs followed were “Indian customs” and not “Hindu customs” reveals that the the Christians are not willing, and sometimes also unable, to reflect the actual background of the various practices and their relation to the biblical doctrines.<sup>909</sup>

Christianity in Andhra Pradesh, mainly accepted by the Mala and Madiga communities, has caused those converts who had access to a proper education on account of their conversion, to think of themselves as superior to the Hindu members of the same caste background. To prove their superiority, they also adopted voluntarily some manners and customs followed by caste Hindus, including the caste segregation. This becomes obvious when considering the existence of numerous Christian denominations and the existence of different places of worship for the Christian congregations of different caste background within the same denomination.

Considering the development in other countries<sup>910</sup>, one should conclude that, with the passage of time, many of the customs and social restrictions would be re-interpreted, i.e. Christianized, or given up under the influence of the biblical doctrines. However, this is obviously not the case even in the fourth and fifth generation<sup>911</sup>, when the tendency towards acceptance or continuation of Hindu customs without Christianizing them has in fact gained normalcy.

This is an evidence for the fact that there is a stronger force which does not allow the re-interpretation or abandoning of certain manners and customs. It has become apparent during the study that this force is the concept of *dharma*, which determines the behaviour of the individual in relation to his fellow beings. The *dharma* of the Christian community in Andhra Pradesh has changed to some extent, but elements of the Hindu *dharma* are predominant. This becomes visible for instance in the demand for complete loyalty to the

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908. Attempts of deliberate adoption in Andhra Pradesh are mainly seen in the development of Ashrams and the development of Telugu poetry and theological thoughts on the line of the *bhakti marga*

909. It was impossible to establish whether the Christians in Andhra Pradesh know about the origin and purpose of these manners and customs. Especially when considering the educated Christians, who, in the same way like their uneducated counterparts, continue to practise certain customs which are in contradiction to the biblical doctrines, it seems that the existing knowledge is voluntarily suppressed, most probably in order to avoid a confrontation with and a further separation from the Hindu majority.

910. As mentioned in the introduction, in its beginning Christianity was exposed already to different cultures, the customs of which were re-interpreted and some basic concepts rejected, while others were adopted in order to use them for a more acceptable way of expressing Christian faith. In many African countries, it is observed that Christianity has remarkably transformed the various societies, which based on tribal systems.

911. The only attempts of re-interpretation are the introduction of certain customs with a prayer and with a biblical lecture, and the practice to call them “Indian customs” instead of “Hindu customs”.

members of the same *jati*, irrespective of their performance in the light of the Christian doctrines, and in the adoption of caste distinction and segregation. The concept of sin upheld by the Christians in Andhra Pradesh does not base on the biblical concept of sin, but on the concept of *dharma*. Sin is the failure to comply with one's *dharma*. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead, i.e. the Easter festival, does not have a major importance, because the power of death is not realized as an ultimate power over mankind. On the other side, Good Friday is celebrated extensively because it commemorates the event in which God reveals his love to the mankind.

Concluding, while putting aside a few attempts made by a small number of Christian scholars, it can be said that Christianity in Andhra Pradesh has in many aspects not responded creatively to the challenges to which it is exposed. The initial demand for the exclusion of all practices related to the life before the conversion to Christianity, made by the foreign missionaries, caused a dissatisfaction among the Indian Christians, which was soon responded to by re-adopting many of those practices after the departure of the missionaries. On the other side, there was no or only little encouragement to respond to the challenges of the environment creatively. The new status gained by the conversion to Christianity encouraged also to adopt manners and customs common among the caste Hindus, in order to be accepted as members of the Indian society.<sup>912</sup>

Certainly, this development has not come to an end, especially with the evangelical communities gaining power within the Christian community, and it remains to be seen how Christianity in India is going to face the numerous challenges with which it is confronted.

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912. This is a typical reaction for minority groups.

## **Appendix A**

### **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>1 Cor</b>	First letter of Paul to the Corinthians (Book of the New Testament)
<b>1 Sam</b>	First book of Samuel (Book of the Old Testament)
<b>1 Tim</b>	First letter of Paul to Timothy (Book of the New Testament)
<b>2 Sam</b>	Second book of Samuel (Book of the Old Testament)
<b>AELC</b>	Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church
<b>B.M.S.</b>	Baptist Missionary Society
<b>C.I.S.R.S.</b>	Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (Bangalore)
<b>C.L.S.</b>	Christian Literature Society
<b>C.M.S.</b>	Church Missionary Society
<b>Col</b>	Letter of Paul to the Colossians (book of the New Testament)
<b>Dtn</b>	Deuteronomy (book of the Old Testament)
<b>Ecc1</b>	Book of Ecclesiastes (book of the Old Testament)
<b>Eph</b>	Letter of Paul to the Ephesians (book of the New Testament)
<b>Gal</b>	Letter of Paul to the Galatians (book of the New Testament)
<b>Gen</b>	Genesis (first book of the Old Testament)
<b>GSELC</b>	Good Samaritan Evangelical Lutheran Church
<b>H.E.L.M.</b>	Hermannsburg Evangelical Lutheran Mission
<b>Hos</b>	Book of Hosea (book of the Old Testament)
<b>Is</b>	Book of Isaiah (book of the Old Testament)
<b>Jer</b>	Book of Jeremiah (book of the Old Testament)
<b>L.E.L.M.</b>	Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Mission
<b>Lev</b>	Leviticus (book of the Old Testament)
<b>Lk</b>	Gospel according to St. Luke (book of the New Testament)
<b>Mk</b>	Gospel according to St. Mark (book of the New Testament)
<b>mn.</b>	Million
<b>Mt</b>	Gospel according to St. Matthew (book of the New Testament)
<b>NBCLC</b>	National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (Bangalore)
<b>Num</b>	Numbers (Book of the Old Testament)
<b>Rev</b>	Book of Revelation (Book of the New Testament)
<b>S.P.C.K.</b>	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
<b>S.P.G.</b>	Society for the Propagation of the Gospel
<b>SALC</b>	South Andhra Lutheran Church
<b>TTS</b>	Tamilnadu Theological Seminary (Madurai)
<b>U.P.</b>	Uttar Pradesh
<b>UTC</b>	United Theological College (Bangalore)

## **Appendix B**

## **GLOSSARY**

In this appendix, most of the sanskrit and some other terms used in the thesis are shortly explained. In case a term is not found here, it is explained within the context where it has been used.

<b><i>advaita</i></b>	Expression used for the non-dualistic system
<b><i>Agamas</i></b>	Ritual texts produced by theistic sects which describe also practices called <i>tantra</i>
<b><i>ahankara</i></b>	Notion of 'I' contained in the soul according to Ramanuja
<b><i>Alvars</i></b>	Means "divers" (into the divine); Expression for the Vaishnava poet-saints.
<b><i>ashrama</i></b>	One stage or section of the individual's lifetime. There are 4 such <i>ashramas</i> in life: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>brahmacharya ashrama</i> – the youth and time of education until marriage</li> <li>– <i>grihasta ashrama</i> – the time of marriage and bringing up children</li> <li>– <i>vanaprastha ashrama</i> – the time of meditation and seclusion, yet not separated from worldly bounds entirely</li> <li>– <i>sannyasa ashrama</i> – the time of renouncing all pleasures of the world and of absolute inwardness and meditation</li> </ul> <p>The four <i>ashramas</i> are not to be entered directly, but a person has to complete one <i>ashrama</i> before he can enter the next.</p>
<b><i>atma</i></b>	Used for the individual's soul in <i>dvaita vedanta</i> . In <i>advaita vedanta</i> , generally the term <i>atman</i> is used, which is also sometimes used in <i>dvaita vedanta</i> , but then in contrast to <i>brahman</i> as the ultimate being. Both terms are often used in the literature interchangeably.
<b><i>atman</i></b>	The individual's self, which is actually <i>brahman</i> <sup>913</sup>
<b><i>avidya</i></b>	Ignorance of the soul about its original state
<b><i>bhajan</i></b>	Hymn, sacred song
<b><i>bhakta</i></b>	One who follows the <i>bhakti marga</i> <sup>914</sup>
<b><i>brahman</i></b>	The eternal being, the world-soul, the one of which all things are made and to which all things return (according to the advaita-philosophy)
<b><i>chuda-karma</i></b>	The ceremony of tonsuring the hair of a child for the first time (after one or three years; see page 122)
<b><i>cit</i></b>	Term used by Ramanuja for the soul
<b><i>daiva</i></b>	Fate or destiny

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913. The term *atman* is used in the *Upanishads* with the meaning of both, the absolute self and the individual self. This may be also the reason for the emergence of both, the monistic *advaita vedanta* and the qualified monism of Ramanuja, on the basis of the *Upanishads*

914. cf. page 182

<i>dalit</i>	Member of the oppressed and downtrodden class; term used for members of the social and economical inferior and backward castes
<i>dana</i>	Gifts, alms-giving
<i>dasa</i>	Non-Aryan, person belonging to the inhabitants of the southern part of India. This term is used in the <i>Rigveda</i>
<i>dasyu</i>	Same as <i>dasa</i>
<i>dharma</i>	Duty, set according to the circumstances and the caste to which one belongs. Originally, it contains the meaning “to sustain” or “to support”. This original meaning is in so far still valid, as to fulfil one’s <i>dharma</i> will protect him from accumulating <i>karma</i> and will finally lead him to <i>moksha</i> .
<i>dharmasastra</i>	A law book or code of laws. It is used for all Hindu laws
<i>dhyana</i>	Meditation; mean to get to get to know God according to <i>Svetasvatara Upanishad</i> .
<i>dvija</i>	Twice-born (the three upper <i>varnas</i> )
<i>gopuram</i>	Tower over the entrance of a temple or a town.
<i>Isvara</i>	God; term used by Ramanuja to distinguish the individual soul from the ultimate
<i>jati</i>	Birth; term used for a social entity, often also called “caste”
<i>jivatman</i>	Another expression for the individual’s soul, like <i>atma</i>
<i>jnana</i>	Knowledge in the sense of experiencing the ultimate reality in one’s life <sup>915</sup>
<i>karma</i>	The law of cause and effect. It determines the level of the rebirth and can be influenced to some extent by the present life-style
<i>kundalini</i>	Means “the coiled”; according to tantrism the limited consciousness and <i>shakti</i> of the individual, which has to be led to the union with cosmic <i>shakti</i> and unlimited consciousness
<i>mantra</i>	Verses from the Vedic scriptures which are used to perform religious rites
<i>marga</i>	“Path” or “Way”; it is used for different types of worshipping practices
<i>maya</i>	Creative power of <i>brahman</i> ; generally used to determine the illusory character of the world
<i>moksha</i>	Liberation, salvation
<i>mudra</i>	Gesture used in tantrism as means to release divine power.
<i>mukti</i>	Liberation, salvation
<i>murti</i>	The physical form of something
<i>nama-karma</i>	The ceremony of giving a name to the child
<i>Nayanmars</i>	Means “leaders”; expression for the Shaiva poet-saints
<i>nirguna brahman</i>	<i>Brahman</i> devoid of all qualities; used in Sankaras <i>advaita</i> philosophy

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915. cf. page 181

<i>nishkamakarma</i>	Unattached action, action performed without any desire. To perform <i>nishkamakarma</i> is, according to the <i>Bhagavadgita</i> , the only way not to accumulate new <i>karma</i> and thus to finally reach liberation.
<i>paramarthika</i>	Higher level of truth (according to <i>advaita vedanta</i> ); can be experienced only after severe austerity. At this level, <i>brahman</i> is the only existing reality
<i>pradakshina</i>	Clockwise circumambulation of the idol of a deity
<i>prakriti</i>	The material of which the universe is made
<i>prasada</i>	Gift of flowers or/and food which had been brought into contact with a deity during <i>puja</i> and is returned to the devotee
<i>puja</i>	Worship, which is performed by the Hindu priest <sup>916</sup>
<i>pujari</i>	Person who perform a <i>puja</i> . The term is commonly used for <i>brahmins</i> who perform the <i>puja</i> in the Hindu temples, but also for those set aside for the <i>puja</i> among the untouchable castes.
<i>punarbhru</i>	Remarried widow
<i>Puranas</i>	Texts which originated at the time of the <i>Atharva Veda</i> . Extant are only texts which had been edited and added from theistic groups, which makes the <i>Puranas</i> very important for all theistic sects <sup>917</sup> .
<i>rina</i>	Debt or obligation
<i>Rigveda</i>	The oldest Vedic scripture of Hinduism, written approximately 1200 to 1000 B.C.; since it is mainly a collection of devotional hymns, which had been handed down orally over centuries, the origin of some of its parts can be assumed to be earlier in the second or even in the third millennium B.C.
<i>sadacara</i>	Correct conduct, the correct social behaviour.
<i>samsara</i>	The cycle of rebirth
<i>shakti</i>	“Power” or “energy”; is used in various ways to denote the ultimate power or energy, or even the limited energy of the unreleased individual (see also <i>kundalini</i> )
<i>sudra</i>	The lowest of the four <i>varnas</i>
<i>suddhi</i>	Rite used by the Arya Samaj to reconvert to Hinduism people who had embraced Christianity or Islam
<i>sulka</i>	Bride price to be paid for the bride to the bride’s parents
<i>susumna</i>	As the body contains, according to tantrism, a vast number of channels which connect the senses with the mind, these are given different names. <i>Susumna</i> is the most important, which runs up the spinal column and through which the individual’s <i>kundalini</i> can reach beyond the physical body and unite with the cosmic <i>shakti</i>
<i>svadharm</i>	The duties laid down for an individual (the personal <i>dharma</i> )

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916. cf. the section on *puja* on page 19

917. cf. the section on *Puranas* beginning on page 18



<b><i>varna</i></b>	Colour; term is used in the <i>Rigveda</i> to describe the different social groups of <i>brahmins</i> , <i>kshatriyas</i> , <i>vaishyas</i> and <i>sudras</i> .
<b><i>vivaha</i></b>	Marriage
<b><i>vyavaharika</i></b>	Lower level of truth (according to <i>advaita vedanta</i> ), which can be realized under normal conditions
<b><i>yajna</i></b>	Sacrifice

## **Appendix C**

### **MAPS**







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This bibliography contains books and articles as well as unpublished sources and periodicals, to which reference is made in the text and in the footnotes of the thesis. Books and articles which have been consulted but are not referred to in the text of the thesis are also included. The original source of articles is listed with full details in the bibliography at the appropriate place in case of books. Periodicals are referenced with their full name, issue and year of publication in the article entry. Only those magazines, newspapers and periodicals which do not appear in an article entry in the bibliography are listed separately.

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