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Toward a Dialogical Hermeneutic of a Hindu-Christian: A Socio-scientific Study of Nepali Immigrants in Toronto

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Theology

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Monograph

by

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Abstract

In search of a hermeneutic that is dialogical, transcending one's own realm of understanding to give enough space to the other, the theory of dialogical self provides a framework which is not only able to engage mutually incompatible traditions but inculcates a whole new insight into considering that the other is not completely external to the self. One of the most significant features of theory of dialogical self is that it is devised in the conviction that insight into the workings of the human self requires cross-fertilization between different fields. The thesis therefore employs social-psychology, religious studies, inter-cultural studies, theology and philosophy to study the phenomenon of religious diversity. Within this theoretical framework, the thesis includes an empirical study conducted among Hindu Nepalis in Toronto, analyzing their encounter with people of other religious traditions and their attitudes towards them. Complementing the empirical analysis is Panikkar's *Cosmotheandric* vision which functions on the premise that the whole of reality is integrated – *cosmos*, *theos* and *anthropos*. This paradigm helps to explain religious diversity and combined with the insights learned from the empirical research illustrates how the other is indispensible in dialogue. This thesis concludes with an elaboration of a dialogical hermeneutic of a Hindu-Christian.

Keywords:

Cosmotheandrism, Dialogical Self, Hermeneutics, Hinduism, Hindu-Christian, Multiculturalism, Nepalis, Other, Pluralism, Religious Diversity.

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INTRODUCTION

Having recently arrived in Canada, I am particularly intrigued by the current phenomenon of religio-cultural diversity and its impact in Canadian society due to the increasing number of migrant communities in Canada. Immigration fueled by globalization has evidently had a great impact upon Canadian public life, and religion is powerfully related to many of the most complex features of contemporary migration.[1] How religion affects migrants and how migrants practice and interpret religion is accordingly one of the major issues of our time. A decade ago religion was almost absent in academic and policy debates about international migration and integration, but there is now a steadily increasing stream of symposia, workshops, papers, journals, and books devoted to this topic.[2]

"The clash of cultures, identities, and religions, along with debates over economics, resources, and rights, has polarized public discourse, making the migration debate convoluted and confused."[3] Not only does diversity confuse public discourse but it also exerts an impact on everyone personally and collectively. Charles Taylor says, "It is a pluralist world, in which many forms of belief and unbelief jostle, and hence fragilize each other."[4] Encountering the other is inevitable in this context and causes this jostling but the levels of

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[1] Paul Bramadat, "Religious Diversity and International Migration: National and Global Dimensions," in *International Migration and Governance of Religious Diversity*, edited by Paul Bramadat and Matthias Koenig, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 2.

[2] Bramadat and Koenig, "Preface," *International Migration and the Governance of Religious Diversity,* ix. See also The Religion and Diversity Project online: http://www.religionanddiversity.ca/en/opportunities/conferences/ lists over 50 conferences on the issues dealing with religion and diversity, multiculturalism and pluralism.

[3] Daniel G. Groody, "Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees," *Theological Studies*, 70 (2009): 639, accessed January 19, 2012 URL: www.nd.edu/~dgroody/.../files/TSSeptember09Groody.pdf

[4] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), 531.

that encounter may vary from person to person or perhaps from one ethnic group to another due to their own distinct religio-cultural background and upbringing.

In this broadest setting, we are aware of the fact that, "increased immigration to Canada has been accompanied not only by greater number of religious groups in the country but also by a rapid expansion in the minority religious traditions already in existence in the late 1960s."[5] In response to this phenomenon Canadian multiculturalism policy was implemented with a view to help immigrants towards integration. Most of the responses, either at the policy level or at the practical level have only emphasized the external factors at the expense of ignoring the internal aspects of the individual person. In other words, what actually happens to the dialogical self is diminished by the premise that every immigrant in the Canadian social imagination is the same. This drawback of multiculturalism attracts substantial criticism. Gilles Paquet clearly states, "Nobody denies that *laissez-faire* multiculturalism has failed to help immigrants overcome barriers to full participation in society, that it has also failed to promote creative interchanges among all groups, or that it has instead encouraged parallel lives and socially disconnected enclaves".[6] One of the obvious reasons that Paquet points out for this failure is the false assumption that all cultures are equal by quoting Irshad Manji, who says, "…just because human beings are born equal, cultures are taken to be so as well."[7] This critique unfolds the fact that human beings are different and therefore a genuine otherness has to be acknowledged. As Nandita Chaudhary writes, "Observing ourselves from another's point of view will always bring in the other

[5] Micheline Milot, "Modus Co-vivendi: Religious Diversity in Canada," in *International Migration and the Governance of Religious Diversity,* 116.

[6] Gilles Paquet, *Deep Cultural Diversity: A Governance Challenge* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2008), 47.

[7] Ibid.

person into the horizon."[8] The fundamental thing that is lacking in the social psyche of Canada is this view of an immigrant. To illustrate this, not many immigrants come here with their Judeo-Christian background influenced by enlightenment, particularly not Hindu immigrants. In this way the deep cultural diversity of Canada has generated much debate in recent decades, but it is not clear that a general agreement had been reached. Therefore, it is appropriate to suggest that incorporating dialogical-self theory in this discussion or in policymaking is useful and hopefully will reveal why a large number of immigrants have difficulty when it comes to integration.

What is obvious in this phenomenon is that virtually every immigrant, and the majority population, is impacted by the sheer encounter with the other and this opens up the horizon for a dialogue between the self and the other (society) but also within the self which Hermans and Hermans-Konopka call "a society of mind."[9] Of the many changes that are taking place in Canadian society since the arrival of immigrants one of the most notable ones is the religious landscape. This change begins within the dialogical self and it is a cognitive aspect of self. As Peter Berger puts it, "What takes places under conditions of genuine plurality can be subsumed under a category used in the sociology of knowledge – "cognitive contamination." This is based on the very basic human trait: if people converse with each other over time, they begin to influence each other's thinking." [10] When that "contamination occurs, people find it more and more difficult to characterize the beliefs and values of the others as perverse, insane, or evil. Slowly but surely, the thought obtrudes that, maybe, these

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[8] Nandita Chaudhary, "Persistent Patterns in Cultural Negotiations of the Self: Using Dialogical Self Theory to Understand Self-other Dynamics within Culture," *International Journal for Dialogical Science* 3, no. 1 (Fall, 2008): 10.

[9] Hubert J. M. Hermans and Agnieszka Hermans-Konopka, *Dialogical Self Theory: Positioning and Counter-Positioning in a Globalizing Society.* (New York: CUP, 2010), 1, 62, 105, 137.

[10] Peter Berger and Anton Zijderveld, *In praise of Doubt: How to Have Convictions Without Becoming a Fanatic* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), 10.

people have a point. With that thought, the previously taken-for-granted view of reality becomes shaky."[11] In fact, this shaky reality creates uncertainty not only among immigrants but it also creates an internal struggle in the mainstream population.

In this globalized world different cultures, including their different religious traditions, values and practices, are meeting each other in the life of one and the same individual. Hermans and Hermans Konopka say, "on the interface of different cultures, a self emerges with a complexity that reflects the contradictions, oppositions, encounters, and integrations that are part of the society at large and, at the same time, answers to these influences from its own agentic point of view."[12] Hermans' view is that immigrants "develop multiple and hybrid cultural identities rather than selves that are unified or "purely integrated" in the host societies."[13] Therefore, the byproduct of this encounter is the dialogical self which analyses and processes things in the light of the new culture it faces. For example, I myself lived as a Hindu for seventeen years and now am a Christian. However, I find that my Hindu/Past self continuously dialogues with the Christian self which is present. What I have discovered is that I cannot get rid of my past completely which implies that there is this overlapping of the past self and this has implications for the hermeneutics of the theology of religions. Because the essence of that self to some extent remains static although the exact measure of it cannot be confirmed. If the total unlearning of the past self were possible, assimilation would have taken place to its fullest form. Hence, the presupposition that William Connolly has is "that there are unchangeable standards founded in the nature of man and the nature of things."[14] It is perhaps virtually impossible to

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[11] Ibid, 10-11.
[12] Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 2.
[13] Ibid, 91.
[14] William Connolly, "Pluralism and Faith," in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-secular World,* edited by Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 280.

get rid of the past completely and with that rather ad hoc presupposition, I want to explore the idea of dialogical self, particularly focusing on religious diversity. When it comes to the religious life of a person,

> Faith is sustained by a mixture of cultural devices, including induction at a younger age, common rituals, shared stories, epiphanic experiences, scientific research, and public arguments, all mixing into each other. Occasionally, an argument, unexpected event, expression of mockery, or startling piece of evidence hits a person of this or that faith in just the right way at a susceptible moment, prompting eventual conversion from one faith to another.[15]

Religious beliefs are not timeless eternal truths. They are not static but dynamic because we are in a constant process of dialogue with the world around us and also within ourselves. There is an influence of the external for the sustenance of faith, thus the migrant's transition does affect his or her belief system, values, morals, lifestyle etc.

Moreover, studies show that immigrants retain strong allegiance to religious systems and traditional values. Peggy Levitt and Jessica Hejtmanek are right in saying, "…that for many migrants, religion and culture are inextricably linked. They found it difficult to separate their ethnicity from their religion… Even among people who said they were not religious, faith guided how they lived their everyday lives, those with whom they associated, and the kinds of communities to which they belonged."[16] In the Hindu context this category of separating religion from culture has to be viewed through a hermeneutic of suspicion due to the difficulty in making those distinctions. For a Hindu everything that they do is an integral part of the religious.

Taking diversity seriously and apprehending the value of the human self and its dialogue with the world is the main agenda of this research. Dialogical-self theory assumes that the clear demarcation of the self and the other is not possible because the self cannot

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[15] Ibid., 284.

[16] Peggy Levitt and Jessica Hejtmanek, "Constructing Religious Pluralism Transnationally: Reflections from the United States," in *International Migration and Governance of Religious Diversity,* 81.

really exist without the other. Hence, we are part of the other.[17] However, in order to limit the study, I have focused on one group in particular: Nepali immigrants in Toronto and particularly, the Hindu population because of my own background as a Hindu. Micheline Milot mentions that Hindus are one of the fastest growing religious groups in Toronto.[18] This study therefore, is valuable in terms of knowing how for Hindu Nepali immigrants, religion is a major moral and cultural anchor, reflected in all aspects of life.

Being indifferent or antagonistic to people of other religious traditions has its grounding on that inner dialogue and eventually an internal change and perspective develops. If a genuine dialogue with the self and other takes place "the new other" emerges in the process. And in fact this kind of encounter has "given birth to new traditions, cultural conventions, languages, forms of art that are no longer based on a commonly accepted, limited foundation. Instead, they arise from situations of encounter, from movement and dislocation, and from a union with the other and the subsequent transformation of this new other."[19] Moreover, an authentic, ethical encounter with the other requires the self to expose its own conceptualizations of the world to be altered and we cannot, however, predict the outcome of such a processes.[20] However, what can be assumed is the fact that both the self and other simultaneously influence each other. The human is not a free-floating intellect but rather a social being, influenced by the other.

Therefore, the main quest in this study is to examine and analyze what happens to these subjects of encounter. This actually paves a way for a deeper engagement of various religions and cultures that co-exist. The research questions I will be working with include:

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[17] Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 29, 64.

[18] Micheline Milot, 109.

[19] "Introduction," in *Seeking the Self – Encountering the Other: Diasporic Narrative and the Ethics of Representation,* edited by Tuomas Huttunen, et., al. (New Castle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), xii.

[20] Ibid., xiii.

What are the religious aspects that Nepalis in Toronto are influencing other religious people with? If the cultural values, social norms and human behaviors are the result of one's religious beliefs can we make a distinction between religion and culture? What part of the self is influenced and changed in the encounter? How much of their past self remains static which might be useful to the present self? These are some of the questions this research will try to answer. Above all, the failure to take religion seriously and to think creatively as we imagine the shape the world will take in the next several decades has serious ramifications.[21] It therefore, entails that religion is never found in its purest form but is mostly shaped by religio-cultural and socio-political milieu.

Rationale

The purpose of the research, however, extends beyond pure ethnography. Coming from a *Brahmanical* Hindu religio-cultural background, I have taken religious ideals and values seriously, as they have dictated every aspect of life and have functioned as driving forces not only for personal piety, but also for public reputation, morality and for standards of value that greatly influence political allegiance. Therefore, my interest in the religious was deeply personal. It has been inculcated and reinforced by my own search for a greater reality as I am faced with the context of religious pluralism brought about by globalization and; by my own struggles for an integrated approach to life, which were influenced by my Hindu background and now by Christianity and by my own previous academic experience doing research in Asia on Christian contextual theology during the ten year Civil War in Nepal. I have in the past found myself astounded by the reality of working among Nepali migrants in the UK. And now here in Canada as a migrant myself I sense a deep responsibility both to

[21] Bramadat, 12-13.

advance scholarship in this area, and also to be involved in working among immigrants and in seeking to understand more deeply the issues of their lives.

Significance of this Research

This research is intended to develop a dialogical hermeneutic of the theology of religions in general and a Hindu-Christian understanding in particular. I therefore hope it will be a significant resource for those who engage in working among Hindu immigrants. It will moreover shed light in the most recent discussion on Canadian multiculturalism. I hope it will provide agencies that deal with immigration and resettlement of immigrants who are from Hindu faiths with a better understanding of how to formulate their programs with a certain degree of knowledge of those who they are dealing with. Besides this, it is expected that this work will be immensely helpful for those converts from one religion to another particularly those from Hinduism to Christianity like myself. Studies thus far have shown that other religious views are usually interpreted from a perspective of one's own religion and do not usually include the other in the encounter or make sure the other understands the truth one sees from his/her own perspective.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter one develops the theory of the dialogical self as a framework to analyze the present phenomenon of religious diversity. As the self relates to the other in the context of multiculturalism, complexity arises due to the multiplicity of voices in which the traditional, modern and postmodern self, simultaneously jostle together. However, some part of the self remains stable in the process of positioning. I have identified that the dichotomy of various kinds become problematic if they are understood or treated as mutually exclusive. Having

established that premise later in the chapter I discuss how maintaining dichotomous views are problematic in developing theology in the context of interreligious encounter.

Chapter two essentially is analytical data from the ethnographic studies done among Nepalis in Toronto. The chapter has been divided into three main sections. A discussion on the religious identity of Nepalis is present with an elaborate discussion of their religious observances and awareness of the divine. Following that is the change in meaning in the multicultural context in which their dialogical self is highly capable in positioning and repositioning as they encounter people of other religions. This flexibility therefore, is accounted for in their polytheistic, multi-ethnic and multi-caste background.

The third chapter attempts to suggest a dialogical hermeneutic that can address the present religious diversity and pluralism. To that end I first of all argue that plurality is not a new phenomenon; dichotomy is problematic to the interreligious context. Followed by that I present an argument that the hermeneutic should be dialogical enough to provide a much broader framework in understanding as it is illustrated by Hindu *Vaisnava* hermeneutics. All of this is combined with an integrated worldview through the *cosmotheandric* vision of Raimon Panikkar, developing a method through dialogue, which considers the other as indispensible and thereby develops a notion of a dialogical hermeneutic of a Hindu-Christian.

CHAPTER I

THE DIALOGICAL SELF AND THE RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

The process of globalization has opened the world to an abundance of new outlooks and broadened the horizons of both the newcomer and the majority population. While this has offered increased possibilities for international contacts and fosters various forms of cooperation across the borders of countries, cultures and religions, it also restricts and closes the selves of many who perceive this as a threat.[22]

Much public policy is concentrated on integration or assimilation to the majority's viewpoint, which Catarina Kinnvall and Jitka Linden call "a former colonial policy," at least in Europe. They say, "Policies of integration or assimilation thus tend to reflect historical, cultural, and structural relationships of the receiving society, often in relation to former colonial policies."[23] The Canadian response to diversity has greatly leaned toward multiculturalism. While it has amply provided space for both the majority population and the immigrant to explore "the other" for enrichment, it also has been criticized for its top-down approach, which does not take into account the self that is constantly in dialogue with itself and its surroundings. The challenges brought about by globalization are not just external but also internal and therefore, trying to overcome those challenges based on the view of the mainstream population, does not minimize the situation. Therefore, what is required is a dialogical concept of self and identity that can account for the different and even opposing demands resulting from diversity.

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[22] Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 21.

[23] Catarina Kinnvall and Jitka Linden, "Dialogical Selves between Security and Insecurity: Migration, Multiculturalism, and the Challenge of the Global," *Theory Psychology* 20, no. 5 (2010): 610, accessed January 25, 2012 DOI: 10.1177/0959354309360077.

The point of departure I want to take in this chapter is Hubert J.M. Hermans' proposal that this world of intermingling requires a dynamic multi-voiced dialogical notion of self. The rationale for this dialogical approach is the inadequacy of the universal notions of self and the other dichotomy. The available literature on the discussion of religious diversity, although relevant and informative, does not seriously attempt to grasp the psychological effects of globalization on individual subjectivity.[24]

Hermans and Hermans-Konopka write, "it is our conviction that fundamental differences in an intensely interconnected world society not only require dialogical relationships between people to create a world that is liveable, but also a self that has developed the capacity to deal with its own differences, contrasts, tensions, and uncertainties."[25] Acknowledging the existence and the value of the other is crucial, and also relatively easy, but to interact and live with the other, embracing them with a notion that the other is part of one's self with an expectation to learn and be influenced by them, is a rather difficult path to walk.

The aim of this chapter is to establish a theoretical framework of the dialogical self, explaining the dynamics of multiplicity, simultaneity and stability in the light of the phenomenon of religious diversity and multiculturalism in Canada. This study is primarily aimed at unfolding the neglected aspect of the self and its intrinsic relation with the other in the context of religious diversity and will also look at how the self copes with the multiplicity of voices as a way for the dialogical self to function whereby suggesting a paradigm that is relevant to contemporary Christian Theology. It is my belief that the individual or collective

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[24] For Emmanuel Levinas subjectivity becomes an important factor. "You Are, Therefore I am": Emmanuel Levinas and Psychoanalysis," reviewed by Marcus, Paul. *Psychoanalytic Review* 94, no. A4 (Aug 2007): 516, accessed January 16, 2012 DOI: 10.1521/prev.2007.94.4.515. Raimon Panikkar's thesis for a mystical aspect of religion is grounded in subjectivity rather than objectivity.

[25] Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 30.

self not only interacts with itself and the society around it but also with the divine. Therefore, understanding the process of globalization and its impact on the human self and identity is a crucial task not only for social scientists and practitioners but also for theologians who desire to respond to the situation.

The Dialogical Self: Multiplicity, Simultaneity and Stability

Hermans and Hermans-Konopka write, "In a society that is increasingly interconnected and intensely involved in historical changes, dialogical relations are required not only *between* individuals, groups and cultures, but also *within* the self of one and the same individual."[26] Modernity's assumption that self-other categories are distinct and mutually exclusive has now been considered irrelevant. In this context of intermingling and boundary-crossing, the theory of dialogical self makes a daring leap to challenge the self-other dichotomy due to the realization that self is not properly understood until the other is understood and *vice versa*.

The "Jamesian self"[27] and the "Bakhtinian dialogue"[28] inspired Hermans in the theory of dialogical self. The dialogical self is described as a "dynamic multiplicity of *I*-positions in an imaginal landscape."[29] Although these positions are autonomous they make their dwelling in an individual self at the same time. In other words, the dialogical self is like a ''society of mind'' because ''there is no essential difference between the position a person takes as part of the self and the position people take as members of heterogeneous society.''[30] Therefore

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[26] Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 1.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., 2.
[29] Hermans, "The Dialogical Self: One Person, Different Stories." In *Self and identity: Personal, Social, and Symbolic,* edited by Yoshihisa Kashima et. al. (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 71.
[30] Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 62.

self, like society, is based on polyphony or multi-voicedness, that is, the expression of heterogeneous voices and this approach regards the other as constituent of the self, which is dynamic and heterogeneous.[31] The dialogical self is not only part of the broader society but also as a "society of mind" with tensions, conflicts, and contradictions as intrinsic features of a healthy functioning self, it goes beyond the self-other dichotomy by infusing the external to the internal and, in reverse, to introduce the internal into the external.[32] Functioning as a "society of mind," it has the possibility to entertain dialogical relationships with each other.[33] The self is actually developed through a person's participation in various social organizations, it is made by and through institutions that regulate these organizations.[34]

As such, the dialogical self is contrasted with the self-musing or multiple monologues as suggested by Peter Slater who rightly puts it, "Dialogism diminishes any gap between thought and reality by stressing that ordinary language is originally public. The springs of meaning arise from conscious encounters, not private musings. Communication occurs on thresholds where we meet others."[35] Even with the most isolated people or groups, an encounter of some sort is inevitable. However, a proactive engagement with the other in this case is likely invisible to those who are not consciously open to the other, and since the encounter is inevitable, it triggers the self into action for a dialogue. The encounter presumes the existence of difference or alterity, leading to the necessity of dialogue. Commenting on the Bhaktinian dialogue Slater affirms,

> For dialogue to occur conflicting views must be embodied and clash in the course of real oppositions. Dialogical negation keeps a suggestion of what is absent while

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[31] Michele Grossen and Anne Salazar Orvig, "Dialogism and dialogicality in the Study of the Self," *Culture & Psychology* 17, no. 4 (2011): 493, accessed February 12, 2012 DOI: 10.1177/1354067X11418541.

[32] Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 32.

[33] Ibid., 62.

[34] Grossen and Orvig, 494.

[35] Peter Slater, "Bhaktin on Hearing God's Voice." *Modern Theology* 23, no.1 (January 2007): 3, accessed February 5, 2012 DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2007.00350.x.

> foregrounding what is present. It affirms that "transcendence" is immanent and the immanent transcendent without collapsing the two, as in the relationships between authors and characters in their novels.[36]

This notion of "without collapsing the two" is what makes this theory valuable and relevant in the context of religious diversity. The specialty in the theory of dialogical self lies in the fact that it is not a game to be won but a game in which both players continuously compete and appreciate each other's strengths and weaknesses. This game never ends in history. However, the players are different from each other in many ways. Likewise, maintaining those differences in views, cultures and religions while being able to embrace the other is a perspective that is indispensible to have of the other in order for one's own self to be discovered more fully. In the end this can foster relationships that are based on real differences rather than something that might otherwise be created superficially.

Slater says, "Bakhtinian dialogue moves us in and out of changing situations, including theory but not just on the level of theory. It does not conflate meanings or *personae* but retains their concrete differences, allowing other voices to be heard, sometimes simultaneously, on several registers of significance at once and anticipating different responses at different times."[37] An example of this would be avoiding the concept and language of "at the expense of," which is the reflection of "either or" categories. However, acknowledging the reality of the cacophony of voices plunges the self into deeper uncertainty and disillusionment in the contact zone. To tackle this issue Hermans proposed something called the positioning of the self, which is actually the heart of the theory. In this, Hermans proposed that some voices become dominant while others become controlled and this

[36] Ibid., 4.
[37] Ibid.

positioning acts to minimize chaos in the self.[38] Indeed, it is complicated in a society where pervasive individualism prevails and people depend on instant solutions to any issue they confront. But in contrast, this suggestion requires a great deal of engagement regardless of one's culture, ethnic background, nationality and economic condition. Indeed, it is worthwhile mentioning Slater's opinion at this juncture:

> Our given whole is not the physical world plus some supernatural or "spiritual" other world or a collection of discrete things to which "values" are added. It is an evolving universe, pregnant with new possibilities, a network of interacting being-becoming-events. Bakhtin rejected both Hegelian dialectical idealism, for privileging self-experience, and Marxist dialectical materialism, for privileging the self's experience of otherness. He also rejected as abstract reifications psychoanalytic notions of "the" unconscious. Dialogical realism undercuts the hegemony of the privileged and powerful, prompting us to listen to all others and hear their interpretations of events. The result is orientational pluralism, not relativism. No one has a God's eye view above the fray.[39]

The above narrative is loaded with significant insights, which are relevant to the discussion here. The categories of dichotomy like powerful and powerless, wise and foolish, rich and poor, East and West and superior and inferior become irrelevant in one sense but at the same time they become significantly important in this context because the dialogical self does not adopt the "either or" framework and hence even the most seemingly contradictory idea or people have space in the dialogue. Does this mean the contact zone should be neutral? Neutrality is not entirely possible otherwise it would be duplication, dialogicality does not assume pretense. All these categories become meaningless provided that the idea of self-contained individualism becomes futile because, "the other is not simply outside the self but rather a constitutive part of the self, in terms of multiplicity of voices emerging from global, local dialectics."[40]

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[38] Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 7.
[39] Slater, "Bhaktin on Hearing God's Voice," 4.
[40] Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 64.

This theory claims that the "self is extended in space and time."[41] As culturally embedded, the *I* is not an isolated agent hovering above the self while determining and organizing it as from a control center and it does not have an existence on its own, separated from time and space.[42] To this point the question arises, "What does it mean to be extended in space?" Hermans and Hermans-Konopka illustrate that globalization does not flood all areas of this planet with the same water but rather "confronted with the process of globalization that transcends the borders of cities, regions, countries, and continents, people no longer experience their own culture as purely self-evident, and "natural."[43] As a result a "cognitive contamination" occurs in the language of Peter Berger. In other words, what was considered to be pure and pristine now becomes muddled: whether it is one's views on the religious or moral philosophy. So the self, extended to the space of the globalized world is multi-voiced and hence a higher level of uncertainty arises. Despite this uncertainty, people want to be more certain and affirmative about all aspects of life, which is the irony of the present world with intermingling and border crossings. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka describe five general reactions to this uncertainty but the one that they recommend is the dialogical approach, which does not avoid uncertainty altogether, but allows it to shape the self.[44] Therefore, it would be a misunderstanding to conceive the self as an essence in itself and its extension as secondary or "added" characteristics but in contrast, the dialogical self is formed and constituted by its extensions.[45] In the construction of the dialogical self what has been perceived is that self and culture provide a multiplicity of positions among which dialogical positions can be established and this becomes the place of departure from the dualistic notion

[41] Ibid., 2.
[42] Ibid., 144.
[43] Ibid., 2.
[44] Ibid., 3.
[45] Ibid., 6.

of the self and the other. Accordingly, intertwining of self and culture occur in a way that the study of self is "culture-inclusive," while the study of culture becomes truly "self-inclusive."[46] Thus avoiding the pitfalls of treating the self as individualized and self-contained, and culture as abstract and reified.[47] Eventually, the social interactions involved in relationships emerge as predominant, shaping the self through dialogue with individuals in different zones.

Secondly, self's extension to time is categorized into three phases each with its own distinct characteristics: the traditional self, the modern self and the post-modern self.[48] These are essential categories in terms of understanding the "simultaneity" and overlapping of all three at the same time and in the same individual. The traditional, modern and post-modern are not purely successive and mutually exclusive but rather the previous phase continues when the next phase starts, leading to simultaneity and hence, higher complexity.[49] However, "…a simultaneity of positions among which the *I* is capable of moving back and forth in flexible ways so that question and answer, agreement and disagreement between the several positions are in line with the demands of the situation at hand."[50] It therefore, breaks the modern assumption that self is static. In fact, the self is not a static object, but constructed as an identity in the context of difference.[51] This is crucial generally in the context of religious diversity but most importantly even in the context where much of the intermingling of the cultures is not visible. It also implies the need to understand that we are not autonomous, independent individuals, but are, rather, ontologically related to one another. This in fact has

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[46] Nandita Chaudhary and Sujata Sriram, "Dialogues of the Self," *Culture Psychology* 7, no. 3 (September 2001): 380.

[47] Jutta Koenig "Moving Experience: Dialogues between Personal Cultural Positions," *Culture & Psychology* 15, no.1 (2011): 101, accessed February 19, 2012 doi: 10.1177/1354067X08099617.

[48] Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 4.

[49] Ibid., 96.

[50] Ibid., 37.

[51] Kinnvall and Linden, 598.

consequences for how we understand relations with those who we identify as others, be they migrants, strangers, or enemies.[52]

While modernity's autonomous, independent individual can help understand the worth of an individual person, that alone would fail to incorporate the fact that we live in a society where mutuality plays an enormous role in binding us all together in family, society, nation and the world. In other words, western notions of self-contained individualism have failed to answer those questions of the other-in-the-self. This has to be especially taken seriously when we are living in a globalized world. Hermans says, "If the other would be seen as something that "influences" or "determines" an otherwise socially isolated self, such a self would be reduced to a monadic existence."[53] This notion of interdependency prompts a shift from a modern thinking which heavily depends on the notion, "I think therefore I am" to "you are, therefore I am." Once this fact is realized the expected outcome is that we can relate to each other better, which would make up a society that is truly multicultural while continuously working through its differences.

The dialogical process begins with the potential for the innovation of the self. Hermans says that "the most straightforward way in which the self can be innovated is when new positions are introduced that lead to the reorganization of the repertoire such that the self becomes more adaptive and flexible in a variety of circumstances."[54] The notion of the contained-self tries to explain every reality away using modern rationality, without being aware of the space that one cannot venture into because of its improbability and ambiguity. Therefore, it would be erroneous to conceive of the traditional and the modern as mutually

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[52] Ibid., 607.

[53] Hubert J.M. Hermans, "How to Perform Research on the Basis of Dialogical Self Theory? Introduction to the Special Issue," *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* 21, no. 3 (2008): 186, accessed January 29, 2012 DOI:10.1080/10720530802070684.

[54] Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 71.

exclusive.[55] As has been mentioned earlier, the self is "not a static concept, a reified entity, but is something that is continuously defined by one's experience in interaction with others, and it is this interactional process that contains the meaning of social experience."[56] This implies that the self changes diachronically and synchronically. It changes in the life cycle and with social change occurring external to the individual and such changes can cause new tensions in the experiential self, resulting in changing forms of behavior.[57]

Bhatia and Ram identify that some part of the self remains permanent:

> For instance, charting the ontogenetic and phenomenological conditions under which an individual's *I*-positions show both continuity and discontinuity would be important because such conditions tell us what parts of the self have remained permanent and what parts have changed after we have entered into one or many dialogical relations with the other.[58]

While elucidating the temporal level of the extension of the self, I did comment on the fact that from three phases, one of them might be dominant and hence have a control on the other two which has its own consequences in the behavior and decision making and that is a sign of self being stable. The problem is not simply to insist on the dynamic dimension of the self, but to also account for the interplay between change and stability.[59] There is a potential danger in focusing on the instability of the self in this theory.

In the process of presenting the dynamic function of the dialogical self, I have tried to highlight that the dialogical self contains polyphonic voices, which jostle with the simultaneity and stability in the self, finally positioning oneself according to the sociological need, which only helps individuals and communities for progress and development. The

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[55] Ibid., 105.

[56] George DeVos et al., "Introduction: Approaches to Culture and Self," in *Culture and Self: Asian and Western Perspectives*, edited by Anthony J. Marsella George DeVos and Francis L.K. Hsu. (New York: Tavistock Publication, 1985), 10.

[57] Ibid., 6.

[58] Sunil Bhatia and Anjali Ram, "Locating the Dialogical Self in the Age of Transnational Migrations, Border Crossings and Diasporas," *Culture Psychology* 7, no. 3 (2001): 297, accessed February 23, 2012 DOI: 10.1177/1354067X0173003.

[59] Michele Grossen & Anne Salazar Orvig, 492.

following section will lead us into the discussion of the dialogical self in the context of Canadian multiculturalism.

The Dialogical Self, Religious Diversity and Multiculturalism

One of the typical phenomena of the process of globalization is the fact of religious resurgence. Ashis Nandy has identified this resurgence as a destabilizing effect and the tendency to withdraw into local niches. He writes,

> …in recent years many expatriate South Asians in the West have become more aggressively traditional, and more culturally exclusive and chauvinistic. As their cherished world becomes more difficult to sustain, as they and their children begin to show symptoms of integration into their adopted land, they become more protective about what they think are their faiths and cultures.[60]

This leads people to something called homesteading. Although homesteading, Kinnvall writes, may be caused by several factors this is perhaps common to many immigrants: "a way to return intimacy and security to their everyday life. Homesteading can be a reaction to the continuous exposure to an increasingly commercialized society where the individual is experiencing feelings of existential isolation."[61] As far as the dialogical perspective is concerned Hermans and Hermans-Konopka say,

> …Religious orthodoxy, the rise of fundamental movements, and the phenomenon of patriotism find their expression in collective voices that encourage a hierarchical organization of the position repertoire of the self and a reduction of the heterogeneity of positions with a simultaneous avoidance of internal disagreement, conflict, and uncertainty.[62]

While a reduction of the heterogeneity of position is positive in the midst of the instability caused by the cacophony of voices, one has to be watchful of what positions or repositions

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[60] Ashis Nandy**,** *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 158.

[61] Catarina Kinnvall, *Globalization and Religious Nationalism in India: The Search for Ontological Security* (London: Routledge, 2006), 31-32.

[62] Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 40.

the self of an individual or the collective takes.

The phenomenon of religious diversity and multiculturalism is interpreted with the hermeneutic of social theory, cross-cultural studies and political science. The arguments for and against multiculturalism are equally robust. While scholars such as Paul Nesbitt-Larking, Michael Adams and Phil Ryan have been able to advocate for Canadian Multiculturalism, Paul Nesbitt Larking has proposed a deep multiculturalism in which the host society has to be critical in its core-values.[63] On the other hand Neil Bisoondath and Daniel Stoffman have been advocating against the policy. What has been suggested is that both of these views could be complemented by the theory of dialogical self as it would take seriously both of these views desire to engage in critical dialogue.

Usually responses to religious diversity are based on an absolutist premise. Therefore, the language of "to be either tolerated or be accommodated or assimilated" is implicitly prejudiced against the other. In this case the dialogical self theory helps unfold the fact of hegemony in policies and at the same time it gives voice to the self. The universal notion of self-culture dichotomy fails to explain the challenges accompanying the acculturation process within a world where cultures are mixing and moving and the local and the global are merging.

However, what is required is an understanding of how self is defined or operates in different cultures, which is the basic means of unlocking the secrets of social and cultural stability and change.[64] In general, the understanding is that the Western concept of self is characterized by *individualism* and *egocentrism*, the non-Western concept by *wholism* and

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[63] Paul Nesbitt-Larking, "Dissolving the Diaspora: Dialogical Practice in the Development of Deep Multiculturalism," *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 18, no. 4 (July/August 2008), 352, accessed March 10, 2012 DOI: 10.1002/casp.956.

[64] Francis L. K. Hsu, "The Self in Cross-cultural Perspective," In *Culture and Self,* 24-25.

the self of other cultures as *sociocentric.*[65] This can be distinguished from the point that a Western self is characterized by "independence, autonomy, and differentiation" and a non-Western self is "extended to include a wide variety of significant others."[66] These categories are based on alterity or otherness because the dialogical self allows those differences to be maintained and at the same time encourages the subjects to be aware of the other without collapsing the other because the other is not totally outside the self.

The Hindu Self Vs. Western Self

As mentioned in the introduction, the empirical study for this paper will be conducted among Nepali Immigrants in Toronto who are predominantly Hindu in their religious practices. This will require a brief explanation about the view of the Hindu self. The Hindu self is studied mostly in juxtaposition with the Western self. Agehananda Bharati writes, "…anthropologists suggest that the Indian/Hindu self is not an individual but a "dividual."[67] In line with this thought Nandita Chaudhary says, "The sense of self among Indians can be described as 'dividuals' rather than individuals, indicating the fundamental 'other-orientation' of selfhood… As mentioned earlier the single person is believed to be an incomplete entity and fundamentally interconnected with others, at least for the first three stages of personhood."[68] In both of these statements the "Indian" means the "Hindu" which is obvious at the end of Chaudhary's statement where she assumes that in three of the four

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[65] Hubert J. M. Hermans and Harry J. G. Kempen, "Moving Cultures: The Perilous Problems of Cultural Dichotomies in a Globalizing Society," *American Psychologist* 53, no. 10 (October 1998): *1111,* accessed January 30 2012 DOI: 10.1037//0003-066X.53.10.1111.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Agehananda Bharati, "The Self in Hindu Thought and Action" in *Culture and Self.* 196.

[68] Nandita Chaudhary, "Persistent Patterns in Cultural Negotiations of the Self: Using Dialogical Self Theology to Understand Self-other Dynamics within Culture." *International Journal for Dialogical Science* 3 no. 1 (Fall 2008): 17, accessed February 01, 2012 URL: http://ijds.lemoyne.edu/journal/3_1/pdf/IJDS.3.1.02.Chaudhary.pdf.

stages of human life the other consciousness is part of the self but in the last stage of life a Hindu has to renounce the world and be in the search of the spiritual.

It is fascinating to discover how the Western self, based on a monotheistic idea, developed into individualism and the implications this has had on the external and empirical. There seems to have existed polytheistic theology in the Western culture and hence pluralism was part of the philosophy of that age. In fact, David Tracy finds that the religious pluralism existed from the beginning of Christianity in the first century.[69] How then has existing pluralism in Western thought disappeared to the point that we now have a difficulty in understanding people who come from polytheistic beliefs like Hinduism? Frank Johnson, using Miller's proposition explains that Miller's lament about the loss of this pluralism has application to Western psychology and theories of self:

> In Western culture the polytheistic theology that would enable us to 'name' our plurality died with the collapse of the Greek culture. From then on our explanation systems, whether theological, sociological, political, historical, philosophical, or psychological have in the main been monotheistic. That is, they have been operating according to fixed concepts and categories which were controlled by a logic that demanded a rigorous and decisive 'either/or': either true or false, either this or that, either beautiful or ugly, either good or evil.[70]

Thus, monotheistic normative systems have a potential for being narrowly bipolar, and thus, for placing extreme judgments onto both qualities of existence (e.g. good/bad, beautiful/ugly, sacred/profane, etc.), and categories of identity or experience (e.g. God/Satan, mind/matter, love/lust, etc).[71] These categories of "either or" are not helpful in the present context and hence a critical view is required.

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[69] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 372.

[70] Frank Johnson, "The Western Concept of Self," in *Culture and Self: Asian and Western Perspective*, 116.

[71] Ibid., 117.

Additionally, in Western Christian traditions, the relation of the self to a monotheistic God has been complicated by the experience of separation as a tragic "species condition," i.e., the inherent loss of "grace" (for all mankind) through the consequences of ancestral "original sin." This sense of anxiety, separation, and longing has been suggested as a central concomitant of western alienation experience and has also emphasized the implication of the concept of "original sin" (and separation) on the western experience of alienation.[72] This is the implication of the understanding of the Western self as analytic, individualistic, and monotheistic. Therefore, the fundamental difference in the notion of the Western self from the Hindu self is that one is self-contained and the other is more other-oriented and the latter in fact is the suggestion that the theory of dialogical self makes.

The Importance of the Other in the Dialogical Self

The dialogical theory aims not only to maintain the differences but also to embrace each other as dialogue between one another takes place. However, the irony is that society functions on the basis of power structures created by the majority. The demand of the dialogical self is that socio-politically and in the policy levels both the individual self and collective selves of a particular ethnic group or a person in the encounter with the other has to be considered non-contradictory, yet different. Theology and religious studies were not free from dichotomizing the self-other as mutually exclusive and therefore, religio-culturally and theologically one has to take note of it as well. A primary concern of Hermans' position is how one should go about the business of theorizing about the dialogical self in a global, transnational culture.[73] It therefore becomes impossible to "speak of a static, core,

[72] Ibid., 118.

[73] Bhatia and Ram, "Locating the Dialogical Self in the Age of Transnational Migrations, Border Crossings and Diasporas," 298.

unchanging self when there is so much dynamic movement, shifting and mixing around its cultural boundaries."[74] Having knowledge of the other is only the first step in the process of the dialogical self and going forward towards acceptance, respect and mutual sharing with the differences takes time. Hence, the difference is not to be considered a problem to be solved but rather is a challenge to an individual or group to see how capable it is in positioning this push-pull factor. For instance, from the study of Sunil Bhatia and Anjali Ram we understand, "For many first- and second-generation South Asian women in America, the discourses about identity are often marked by a push-and-pull phenomenon where oppositional voices about America vs. India, West vs. East, Modernity vs. Tradition are an integral part of their selfhood."[75] This push-pull factor creates uncertainty in the self and hence shifting. However, the shifting is not negative it is rather an indication that the person is normal and trying to figure out what is best for herself or himself. The shifting only becomes negative if there is sedimentation of the binary opposition through self-oppression of an essential kind. Applying this notion to theology, particularly in relation to the concept of liberation, it is able to take into account that dual and contradictory positions on the premise that no one has the universal awareness of the ultimate. This gives a greater sense of freedom in doing theology.

The dialogical self therefore, is a reality to the subjects of globalized world, and a self that arises out of a dialogue between individuals in a social context is an appealing construction.[76] Nandita Chaudhary says, "Each individual exists in a plural network, with both interpersonal and intrapersonal processes impinging on the ultimate expressed voice and therefore social factors like caste, hierarchical relationships in the family and gender also

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[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid, 305.
[76] Chaudhary and SriRam, "Dialogues of the Self," 380.

come into play."[77] The encounter with the other in the religious or a cultural domain always involves some double movement: on the one hand, people get in touch with the foreign culture, but, on the other hand, there is also a movement of returning to one's own culture.[78] This can be applied to most people in the contact zone regardless of any categories mentioned earlier. Bakhtin has an interesting comment:

> …seeing the world through its eyes, is a necessary part of the process of understanding it; but if this were the only aspect of this understanding, it would merely be duplication and would not entail anything new or enriching. *Creative understanding* does not renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing. . . . In the realm of culture, outsideness is a most powerful factor in understanding . . . . We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise itself; we seek answers to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and new semantic depths.[79]

Therefore the call of the dialogical self is not of shifting gears deliberately and instantly to see from another's point of view. Bakhtin thinks this would be unnatural as it is possible to shift the gear back to the original position. Therefore what is important to the dialogical self is allowing the other to influence one's self rather gradually. It allows me to illustrate how negotiating one's migrant identity involves multiple negotiations with larger sets of religious, cultural, political, and historical practices and also encourages both the self and the other to examine the contradictions, complexities and the interminable shifts of immigrant identity construction.[80] It has facilitated contextual and interpersonal constructions of the self and a major contribution has been to incorporate relationships with others as fundamental to self-processes. Meaning is believed to be created through basic

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[77] Ibid.

[78] Joao Salgado, "Listening to India, Listening to Ourselves: The Place of Self in Culture," *Culture Psychology* 12, no.1 (March 2006): 101, accessed February 27, 2012 DOI: 10.1177/1354067X06062278.

[79] M.M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays,* translated by Vern W. McGee, edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin : University of Texas Press,1986), 6–7.

[80] Sunil Bhatia and Anjali Ram, "Culture, Hybridity, and the Dialogical Self: Cases From the South Asian Diaspora," *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 11, no. 3 (2004): 229, accessed February 26, 2012 DOI:10.1207/s15327884mca1103_4. 224-240

incongruity between at least two perspectives, the 'I' and 'Other.'[81]

The purpose of employing the dialogical self approach to the phenomenon of religious diversity in Canada is to open up instances of human interactions not customarily addressed in the policy of multiculturalism and to generate a discussion on the importance of integrating the individual human self and the society at large in order to gather a more wholesome understanding of people we live and work with.

The Dialogical Self and a Theological Dilemma

Raimon Panikkar says, "Experience is full of risk. Only what has been experienced can be interpreted; only then can one understand it. Only what has penetrated me and then springs out of me in a spontaneous fashion, has life, power and authority. One might explain this more precisely in philosophical language."[82] The experience is fundamental to the forming of one's self in this sense. It is not always rational and absolute. Regarding the self-other relationship Panikkar says, "There is no I without a Thou; there is no isolated and individually existing soul in the least respect. … We exist and live in a web of relationships. We become aware of ourselves when becoming aware of others."[83] In the process therefore, "One of the most significant features of dialogical self theory is that it is not restricted to the boundaries of traditional disciplines and sub disciplines. The theory is devised in the conviction that insight into the workings of the human self requires cross-fertilization between different scientific fields."[84] Having realized the importance of this phenomenon we now move to incorporate the religious, which has an integral role in constituting the self. This is seminal to the work of understanding religious views, practices and life style seen as

[81] Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 224.
[82] Raimon Panikkar, *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom,* (Louisville: Westminister/John Knox Press, 1993), 45.
[83] Ibid, 42.
[84] Hermans, "How to Perform Research on the Basis of Dialogical Self Theory?"185.

an integrated whole.

In most comparative religious studies the focus is on differences or commonalities and usually from one's own perspective. For example, when a Christian studies Hinduism, the study dictates that it is a Christian perspective of Hinduism. Bakhtin's proposal to see the other from its own eyes is a very difficult exercise to do because it is not simply the cognition but also the experience that comes along with it. Panikkar poses a good question however as he questions whether one can ever have a true experience of the other. For instance, can a devout Hindu-self experience the Christian life and *vice versa* at the same time? In other terms, can a Brahmin experience *dalitness*[85] even if he or she can talk about it eloquently?

Dialogical theology does not start with one static premise but rather starts inquiring from a vantage point of having a certain level of knowledge and/or experience of more than one religious faith in one's life time. However, what is important in the process is to know which one is dominant and this hence helps in determining one's identity. In this globalized world different cultures, including different religious traditions, values and practices are meeting each other in the life of one and the same individual. If this pattern is applied to every other aspect of life, the most cherished aspect of the religious in which all other aspects anchor is equally applicable to this self and identity. Therefore, it is possible to have the Hindu self (if there is one at all) in dialogue with the Christian self of a person who changed her/his religious allegiance at the same time in the same individual. This has huge implications for the understanding of the meaning of religious conversions. In fact, "Dialogism resists tying religious significance to any one mood or tone of voice. It also resists finalizing any one account of ''religious'' or ''numinous'' experience or making that a

[85] *Dalit* according to the caste system of Nepal is the lowest in the category. *Dalitness* here refers to the very being of *Dalit.*

universal reason for religion."[86] In other words, is it possible to avoid an eclectic mix of various religious thought or a doctrinal synthesis to form a new religion? The theological question is this: Do I cease to be a Hindu when I decide to be a Christian? Does being a Christian mean being a non-Hindu? The biggest question one has to confront is do I betray my tradition at all in being able to embrace both?

Christian Theology that came out of the West until recently is now facing challenges from the developing world. However, the theology that is coming out of the developing world mostly is primarily a reaction to Western theology. What is dangerous in this phenomenon is that we consider the other as an enemy to be defeated rather than understanding the histories that shaped those thoughts. With the new realization that the other is as valuable as one's own self we need to change that reaction. The other should not be seen as a threat because it is the power structure we create that gives us so much strength to talk about whether it be of the West or the East, colonial or post-colonial.

Every theologian, as David Tracy mentions, is obliged to interpret the religious dimension of the contemporary situation, whether one wants it or not.[87] However, one has to be conscious that such an interpretation alone does not fully represent the whole of reality and hence multiple interpretations are necessary. This creates a space for the other. Interestingly, theologians who respond to religious diversity differ in their opinions. Some consider it a problem but some others think it is a process whereby God's divine plan and work is manifested in the richness of diversity. Pluralism in the latter sense becomes a vehicle of God's self being manifested. For Tracy it is an important aspect of epistemology whereby the divine is being revealed in its fullest sense and the human "other" is being

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[86] Peter Slater, "Contesting Confessions: Connolly's Augustinian Imperative and Bakhtin's Dialogical Imperative," *Theology Today* 68, no. 3 (October 2011): 284, accessed March 12, 2012 DOI: 10.1177/0040573611416700.

[87] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 61.

revealed simultaneously. David Tracy says, "The pluralism of cultural worlds has enriched us all with new vision of our common lives and new possibilities for an authentic life. Yet it does so at a price we can seldom face with equanimity."[88] Culturally pluralistic worlds can still make space for something common to human lives. This indeed has implications for the inter-religious dialogues that mostly concentrate on differences by way of defending one's faith as authentic at the expense of others.

All theological claims to the formulation of universal truth must be put under a strict theological hermeneutic of suspicion of "idolatory."[89] This leaves no excuse for any religious view that is intolerant of other expressions of the religious. Hence, absolutizing some doctrinal norms have inculcated a sense of inerrancy of those claims, completely idolizing them without even being conscious of the shared space and the limitation of the human understanding of reality. Having established that, we now have to provide space for both the faith claims and religious experiences of the other and ourselves to be put under scrutiny. Tracy provides a paradigm.

> Authentic religious experience, on the testimony of those all consider clearly religious, seems to be some experience of the whole that is sensed as the self-manifestation of an undeniable power not one's own and is articulated not in the language of certainty and clarity but of scandal and mystery. The religious person does not claim a new control upon reality but speaks of losing former controls and experiencing, not merely affirmating, a liberation into a realm of ultimate incomprehensibility and real fascinating and frightening mystery.[90]

Depending only on one's own view might provide a sense of clarity and certainty but meeting the other turns that clarity and certainty into incomprehensibility and uncertainty. This usually happens because the other is different and moreover, to know that the other is constitutive of the self is a mystery to unfold for which the following chapter is designed.

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[88] Ibid., 4.
[89] Ibid., 66.
[90] Ibid., 173.

The next chapter is the analysis of the ethnographic study done among Nepali Immigrants in Toronto using the theory of dialogical self, aiming to discover what it means to be a Hindu. My objective is to find out any shifts taking place in their religious views, practices and lifestyle living in multicultural Toronto. As we shall see their way of understanding the self and its relation to religion becomes necessary because religion is seen as an anchor upon which every other aspects of life depends.

CHAPTER II

A DIALOGICAL RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY: A STUDY OF NEPALI IMMIGRANTS IN TORONTO

In the previous chapter, I expounded that the dialogical self is an important hermeneutical tool in terms of understanding the present diversity as it not only attempts to be holistic in its approach, dealing with the self and the other, but it also takes into account seriously what happens to an individual and communities. The major findings of the previous chapter can be summed up in the following: The self in the globalized context deals with cacophony of voices, and in the process some parts of the self become stable and some change due to sociological influences. At the same time, however, the simultaneity of traditional, modern and postmodern selves play a great role in positing, repositioning and counter positioning of the self in which some aspects of the self become dominant to form the identity of the individual, while other parts remain passive. One of the fascinating notions of dialogical self theory is that it works with binaries, giving a new perspective on the seemingly contradictory elements. Therefore, I believe that this theory plays an important role in the context of religious diversity and multiculturalism. Empirical research serves to explore and illuminate these elements.

Specifically, the theory of dialogical self sheds light in at least two ways: understanding the otherness in the self and how that understanding constitutes one's identity in the multicultural context. That being the backdrop, I have conducted ethnographic studies

among Nepali[91] immigrants in Toronto with a view to understanding how they have responded to religious diversity in Canada and whether or not any changes are taking place in the process, both internally and externally. This phenomenon is analyzed in light of the theory of dialogical self, because the theory takes into account the internal dynamics of an individual person.

Encountering people of different religions and cultures may have various effects in the dialogical self. While it might lead some to a vulnerable position of confusion, fear, ambivalence, uncertainty, anxiety, and stress, it leads others to a sense of joy, satisfaction, opportunity, inner-strength, celebration and growth. In fact, the theory suggests that these qualities could be found in the same individual, at the same time. It is my contention that the dialogical self holds the potential to unlock these seemingly contradictory qualities and that it functions as the best interpretative tool for providing an explanation of both the chaos and satisfaction caused by the encounter. This is called the positioning of the dialogical self and it reflects one's religious identity and the potential to relate with the other in a spontaneous fashion. Therefore, I am using this hermeneutical instrument to analyze the data collected from the research conducted among Nepali immigrants in Toronto.

This study entails a qualitative, in-depth interpretation of the experiences of the Nepalis, particularly of their religious beliefs, practices and attitudes towards people of other religions. The following reasons contribute to my interest in the religious: the resurgence of religion in the beginning of the 21st century;[92] the use of religious paradigm in the major

[91] The word 'Nepali' stands for national and ethnic identity but also denotes the lingua franca of present day Nepal. Nepalis are one of the ethnic groups of South Asia as classified in *Statistics Canada*.

[92] Sociologists and literary theorists have written in the lines that religion, although was expected generally to disappear by 21st century was rather found to be in its resurgent mode. For example, Terry Eagleton in his Gifford Lectures expresses that god and religion are back in 21st Century. See Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, & Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

fields of study and policy making;[93] religion becoming the anchor to all aspects of immigrant life, particularly those who are Nepalis. Furthermore, the immigrants' religion has also produced various debates and discussion that challenge the present multicultural discourse. This study is valuable in terms of understanding what makes up the religious identity of Nepalis, how they respond to the existing religious diversity and what changes might have occurred in the process of shaping their theological views. For Hindu Nepali immigrants, religion is a major moral and cultural anchor, reflected in all aspects of life.

Nepali Immigrants in Canada

The Nepali immigrant community in Canada is comparatively small, representing the diversity of Nepali ethnic backgrounds.[94] It is one of the ethnic groups classified as "South Asian" in Canada.[95] The history of Nepali people's migration to Canada is a recent phenomenon in comparison to other Asian and South Asian countries. Nepalis or Nepali speaking people not only migrated from Nepal but also from the neighboring countries of India, Bhutan, and others.[96] According to a Multicultural Canada report from 1991 only 125 people indicated Nepal as their country of birth.[97] The population grew steadily to just under 4,000 in 2006. One of the major push factors for Nepalis in migrating to Canada was a 10 year Maoist Insurgency in Nepal during 1996-2006 which worsened the situation and forced

[93] David Seljak writes, "Increasingly, policy makers, media analysts, and academics are realizing that religion remains an important element in the identities of many Canadians, both immigrants and those born in Canada. Religion has become a regular presence on the agenda at conferences on immigrant integration, multiculturalism, and diversity in Canada." David Seljak, "Dialogue among the Religions in Canada," *Horizons* 10 no. 2 (2005): 29 accessed May 27, 2012 www.policyresearch.gc.ca

[94] Gopal Sharma, "Nepal Government wants time to form Constitution," Originally published on Reuters taken by The London Free Press on May 23, 2012. B3.

[95] Kelly Tran, Jennifer Kaddatz and Paul Allard, "South Asians in Canada: Unity through diversity. Canadian Social Trends," *Statistics Canada* Catalogue No. 11-008 (Autumn 2005): 21.

[96] "Migration, Arrival, and Settlement," *Multicultural Canada.* n.d. http://www.multiculturalcanada.ca/Encyclopedia/A-Z/n1/2

[97] Ibid.

many educated people to leave the country for a better life, economic opportunities and professional fulfillment.[98] Some Nepalis arrived in Canada as independent professionals and members of various occupational groups, while others were able to enter through family affiliations.[99]

Although Nepalis belong to different caste, ethnic, lingual, and cultural backgrounds, Nepali is their primary language of communication. The population in Canada is comprised of professionals, students, skilled workers in Indian restaurants and the Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) of Nepali speaking Bhutanese.[100] Although Nepali speaking Bhutanese are not included in the research sampling, they are to be considered as the Nepali Diaspora based on their ethnic origin.

The religious structure of Nepali society is formally Hindu. However the interplay of Nepali peoples and their religious traditions has produced a rich fusion of Hindu and Buddhist beliefs, making it common for both Hindus and Buddhists to worship at the same shrine. This co-worshiping illustrates adequately that the dialogical self of Nepalis is active in positioning and re-positioning according to the theory of the dialogical self. Nepalis are capable of switching back and forth, being adjusted to the sociological demands. This ability is accounted for in their religio-cultural background, which will be reflected throughout this chapter.

Research Methodology

A myriad of factors contribute to the research sampling in which demographics, nature of participants, and the methodology in the data collection are the most significant.

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[98] "Migration, Arrival, and Settlement," *Multicultural Canada.* n.d.

[99] Ibid.

[100] The Nepali speaking Bhutanese refugees, who are of the Nepali ethnic origin and religio-cultural background have come to Canada under the third country resettlement program.

Firstly, In regards to demographics, Toronto is chosen with the premise that it is multicultural[101] and therefore, the encounter with the other is more likely to take place in comparison to other cities such as London.[102] Moreover, as Micheline Milot points out in her study of religious diversity in Canada, Hindus are one of the fastest growing religious groups in Toronto, making Toronto even more appropriate for this study.[103] Secondly, the corpus of data examined in this chapter covers 20 interviews from individuals considering their gender, age, profession and education. Participants consisted of 8 professionals, 4 students, 2 housewives with the rest being skilled-workers. Six among them were women and although an attempt had been made to balance gender because of the cultural factors, the women did not want to be interviewed in the presence of their husbands.[104] Five participants were under the age of 25; two were over the age of 60; and the rest ranged from 25-60 years. In terms of marital status, 13 among them were married and the rest were single. The participants' experience living in Canada ranged from 10 months to 22 years. Throughout the thesis, pseudonyms are used to identify each participant.

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[101] See "Multiculturalism," Multicultural Canada website: http://www.multiculturalcanada.ca/Encyclopedia/A-Z/m9

[102] Statistics Canada reports that in 2006 the Nepali population of Toronto was less than 2000 and the population of London was 40. These are the official statistics, however, as they are not up to date the popular estimates are dispensible. Skilled migration to Canada become popular after 2006 and Canada not only attracted the skilled manpower but also a significant number of students to pursue both undergraduate and graduate level education became famous. These factors, perhaps contributed to the growth of Nepali population in Canada. Regarding the approximate number of Nepali population the Founder of Canada Foundation for Nepal (CFFN) Pramod Dhakal said in the email conversation that Nepali population in Canada has grown to be approximately 20,000. That excludes the Nepali speaking Bhutanese refugees, who were brought to Canada under third country resettlement program. In May 2007, the Government of Canada announced that it would resettle up to 5,000 Bhutanese refugees over the next three to five years. Out of the total 4,200 are already in Canada by Feb 2012 according to Citizenship and Immigration Canada records. See for further details CIC website at http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/outside/bhutanese.asp Although, I have included them in the linguistic category, I have not included them in the ethnographic research.

[103] Micheline Milot, "Modus Co-vivendi: Religious Diversity in Canada," in *International Migration and the Governance of Religious Diversity,*109. In "Toronto more than one-third of South Asians reported being Hindu." For further details see Kelly Tran, Jennifer Kaddatz and Paul Allard, "South Asians in Canada: Unity through diversity," 23.

[104] I could have found other 4 women to be participants but it is important to reflect in this research to present the best cultural scenario and the understanding of the role of women in Nepali Society.

The participants were interviewed with a semi-structured schedule to gain deep insights into the participants' experiences of their own religious identities, their encounter with the people of other religions and future trajectories. Most interviews were conducted in the Nepali language, as many people in the community could not articulate their experiences in English. However, some of them felt comfortable using English rather than Nepali and occasionally answered in English. Transcribing and translating the recordings was a part of the project and interviews were translated with an attempt to be as literal as possible.

The methodology of data collection had three different phases: namely, pre-interview sessions, interviews with a semi-scheduled questionnaire and participant observations. All of these stages became complementary for verifying and analyzing the data with meaningful and consistent findings. I knew earlier that Nepalis in general are not used to questions, particularly of the religious nature. This was evident in the fact that most participants hesitated to respond not because they did not want to do the interviews but because they were not familiar with being asked of their experiences, particularly in regard to their religion.[105] This necessitated pre-interview sessions, which were designed to help the participants understand the rationale of the project, make them familiar with the whole questionnaire and ultimately help participants respond meaningfully to the questions. This means that some of the data that I included in the research are not from the formal interview sessions but from the pre-interviews. This informal rapport building session eventually revealed things that would not otherwise have appeared in the interview sessions.

Pre-interview sessions were followed by interviews with a semi-structured schedule. The questionnaire functioned as a guide and a way to maintain contextual focus as much as

[105] For instance, it may be the first time for some of them for being asked of their religious experiences. Most of them never critically thought why they were doing those religious practices. I presume that it is an irrelevant question when everybody in the village does the same practices without question.

possible on acquiring information related to their religious experiences. A fine line had to be drawn between being too formal and losing touch with the participant and from becoming too informal to the point where the questions wandered out of context.[106] Balancing this was a difficult task. In fact, the original questionnaire had to be reformulated based on how people understood the questions. In the process, I found that some of the questions were irrelevant to them. An example of this was my first two questions:

1. Please try to recall what was going on in your mind when you started preparing yourself to come to Canada. How did you expect Canada to be?

2. Thinking back to Nepal, What did you hear from other people about Canada and how did you come to view religious and other values in Canada?

I asked these questions with the expectation that at least some of them would consider the religious factor while making a decision to come to Canada as general knowledge in Nepal is that Canada is a Christian country. To my utter surprise none of them thought of the religious at all. From the responses to these two questions, it had a heuristic effect on me with regards to my strong proclivity to modernity's conceptual clarity in all matters. This finding suggests that Nepalis have little to no expectations as they encounter the other, or rather their dialogical self is familiar with encountering the unexpected that the "Christian other" or any other does not make them anxious. I always had to give examples to illustrate the questions, as many times they did not understand the meaning, not of words but of concepts. For example, when I asked them, if their religious beliefs influenced their lifestyle, since they have been in Canada, they were wondering about the meaning of it. Obviously, the separation I made in my question between the belief and the lifestyle is quite a strange concept for them because their way of thinking is hardly dichotomous. Another point here is

[106] I felt that two of the first interviews were too informal and therefore took about 2 hours, however that was the most interesting conversation, I had in which the participant without hesitation opened up themselves in answering questions.

the consistency factor. The lifestyle may not be the result of one's belief in the divine or a religious text but based on the rituals that they perform. Hence, some of their responses: "What you do you mean by belief influencing lifestyle?", "What are you saying?", "Could you please explain", "I don't understand."

The final phase in this methodology was participant observation. I considered it important to stay with some of the participants over three weekends for participant observation of their daily religious practices and their lifestyle. I believed this would aid in my understanding of the previous interviews as well as reveal any disparity between what they had said and how they actually live. Therefore, over the period of three weekends, I stayed with and observed six families. In general, the data orally provided in the interviews was confirmed by their practices. For example, their daily ritual of doing *Puja*. It was easy for me to put what they said in the interview into perspective, otherwise it would have been much more difficult in the analysis. It is important to acknowledge that my co-presence with the research participants as a house guest could have had an impact on both their conduct and their responses. Therefore, this has been taken into account in interpreting the research data for proper analysis.

Regarding the data analysis, it is important to mention here that I have used their first-hand responses to establish the argument that I am making. However, often times with careful analysis I had to make valid inferences. Any inference that is made passes through the above-mentioned three-phase methodology of participant observation reinforced by pre-interviews and the interviews. I also relied on my own immigration experience of researching and working among the Nepali speaking Bhutanese immigrants in London, which affords me a unique and special position of experience in this field. This made it plausible for me to draw sensible inferences.

Chapter Overview

The overarching theme in this chapter is the religious transformation of Nepalis in Toronto with a view to study their religious identity inculcated by the dialogical self and its entailments. To comprehensively address this theme of religious transformation, I begin in section one with the making of religious identity of Nepalis, which I found is dialogical even before they arrived in Canada. Indeed, this implies that they are not from a mono-cultural background and are hence familiar in relating with differences. In this context of diversity, it is essential to my discussion to present a major section on how they consider their present religious identity. In other words, one must have some level of knowledge of one's identity and here particularly of the religious, to even relate with the other in the encounter.[107] That identity could be made up of various factors including people's background, cultural environment, upbringing and one's religious beliefs. Therefore, I will be presenting the dynamics of their identity and how the meaning of various religious symbols changes in the course of living in a contact zone.

This is followed in section two by a look into their multicultural encounter here in Canada and how that encounter changed their religious views and practices. The major finding of my research is that Nepalis are dialogical in absorbing otherness and therefore, according to the theory presented in the previous chapter, the contact zone further strengthens their self in the process of positioning, counter-positioning and repositioning. Finally, section three will analyze their theological stand at present with a view to know how exactly their dialogical self is coping with the binaries. Particular focus will be given to, "the one or the other" which will bring implications to the factor of ambiguity as an important factor in the

[107] Panikkar is of the opinion that one has to have knowledge of one's identity to be able to understand the other in the light of that knowledge and *visa versa*.

meaning making in multicultural Canada and the indispensability of the other in the dialogical self while discussing religious phenomenon.

The Religious Identity: Observances and God-consciousness

Identity has been an important factor in the discussion of the theory of the dialogical self. For some Nepalis the multicultural experience has been a source of enrichment and confirmation of their religious identity but for others it has been a source of confusion and uncertainty. However, in both of these responses the knowledge of one's religious identity is preconditioned with some level of the knowledge of the other and *vice versa*.

From the empirical research I have identified that religious observances and god-consciousness are two of the main factors that make up Nepalis religious identity. These two factors alone do not make up the whole of their identity however they were the dominant factors that arose during my research. Religious observances and practices are identified as they precede the god-consciousness, which is the belief system. This itself is a fascinating idea in terms of why belief system is the not in the first place.[108] In this section, I am going to present how their religious observances and practices are not based on scriptural texts but rather based on their belief related to ancestral practices. Following that I will discuss the notion of god-consciousness, which again is not based on a creed or a denominational category but rather is generic. Part of the theme has also been multiculturalism; how the meaning of certain religious symbols and practices changes in a multicultural society. In fact, separating these two factors, as mutually exclusive or completely distinct categories would be a violation of the very religiosity of Nepalis.

[108] Asking a question of identity, first of all most of them did not talk about belief system in the first place rather started with practices. I presume if this were the question asked to people from Western traditions, the majority of them would have answered in terms of belief system, which would be followed by practices.

Religious Observances

Religious observances for Nepalis in Canada consists of various practices however, daily *Puja,*[109] and *Tika* (applying a red dot on the forehead) are two of the main ones that were identified in the conversation and therefore it is plausible to assume that they, over the course of time, have become essential factors of identity formation for Nepalis.

Nepalis' religious observance is evident by the fact that every Nepali apartment or house has a shrine or a separate room in which they have set up images of gods and goddesses and regularly have morning *Puja* offered. One of the participants said, "We have a *Puja* room where I do the morning rituals and do *puja*. I never, even a single day, have forgotten to do morning prayers and *Aarati*."[110] A daily prayer at a home shrine in their apartment or house is integral to Hindus. One of the women participants said,

> When I pray in the morning, I have a peace of mind the whole day and never have a feeling that I missed something and have experienced that my day goes according to what was expected, although not without problems but have strength and enthusiasm to face whatever comes along. However, during menstruation I do not do *puja* and therefore, I always have a feeling that there is something wrong/bad going to happen and nobody can help me in that situation.[111]

When asked what it is that they feel objectively happens when they do *Puja* she replied saying, "I don't exactly know what happens when I do *Puja*, but our ancestors did that and I do it as my '*Dharma Karma.'* There is some satisfaction in my heart when I do *puja* and I believe the day is going to be good one."[112] Again looking for some objectivity is rather an unknown factor among Nepalis. In other words, subjectivity supersedes because the doer is

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[109] The word *Puja* means an "offering" given to deities either at home or in temples. However, it is sometimes translated as "Worship," which many Indologists do not agree with. Only one, among 20 said that he did not have a shrine in his apartment. I have observed while staying with 6 families that every morning both husband and wife did morning rituals after taking shower. In 2 houses I saw only the wife doing *Puja.*

[110] Gyani Siwakoti. Interview by author, recorded, 6 April 2012.

[111] Saraswaoti Acharya. Interview by author, recorded, 14 April 2012.

[112] Saraswoti Acharya, Interview by author, recorded, 14 April 2012. *Dharma Karma*, she meant by religious duty. This is the participant who told me that she does not like Christianity for the patronizing behavior of some Christian missionary teachers while she was training herself as a Nurse in Kathmandu. However, she mentioned that she did not find that sort of attitude with Christians here in Canada.

not objectively aware of the rationale and the obvious outcome of his or her action.[113] However, what does make sense is that they feel and experience inner peace and serenity as some of them mention. This peace and satisfaction is highly subjective and different from one person to the other.

Another interesting characteristic of this observance is its communal nature – not everyone in the family practices daily *Puja*. While asking this question, the majority indicated that individual practice is not necessary. One of them said, "In my family, only my mother does it and we feel that we all are included in what she does."[114] Another responded that she is the main person in the family doing *Puja.* She said, "I believe if I do *Puja* it will bless the whole family. In fact, others do not have time as some have to rush to school and others for work."[115] Another lady whose husband is very busy at work says, "Since my husband does not have time I pray for him and so far we have experienced peace at home."[116] This reflects that the religiosity for most of them is a collective act and not an individualistic one, which I think holds great significance in a society where the rampant effects of a pervasive individualism exist.[117]

However, it was surprising for me to discover that some of them were rather skeptical about this practice of daily *Puja* and yet continued the practice as a symbol. One of the participants replied, "I don't become a Hindu by praying everyday and doing *Puja* in front of

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[113] Obviously looking for objectivity is the modernity search for truth. If something does not make sense, it is jettisoned as contradictory. However, now that notion of truth has been challenged, as the universality of truth is difficult to establish.

[114] Kumari Lamsal. Interview by author, recorded, 14 April 2012.

[115] Gyani Siwakoti. Interview by author, recorded, 6 April 2012.

[116] Laxmi Niure. Interview by author, recorded, 6 April 2012.

[117] The Judeo-Christian understanding in the West at present tends to be more individualistic. For example, if somebody wants to follow a religion, one has to personally commit to that, whereas Nepalis had unison voice that if one member of the family does religious practices that blesses and keeps the whole family from the bad fate. But interestingly, some others on the other hand said they were hesitant in answering peoples' questions of those religious symbols and avoided wearing them.

god's image. But I do that in my heart and remember god in every activity."[118] What can be deduced is that some Nepalis' tradition of following the ancestral practices uncritically have now begun to develop a sense of critical thinking in terms of those practices.

In all these practices there was not only a commitment to their ancestral practices but there was also a determination to follow those practices, even without knowing their meaning. Those who continuously practice feel at peace not only individually but also collectively. This points to the Hindu tradition's proclivity to struggle to pin point absolute truth as Hindus are able to maintain ambiguity as an integral part in their process of knowing truth. This stance regarding the ambiguous nature of absolute truth could be jettisoned by the Western tradition but at the same time not pose any problem to those of the Hindu tradition. Hence, subjectivity prevails.

Regarding the foundation of these practices, it is surprising to note that this strong religiosity is not an outcome of a belief in Hindu scriptures or a creed. For most Hindus, reading religious scriptures is not normal practice, moreover, the tradition does not impose the daily reading of scripture. This however, does not mean they do not believe their religious texts, but because none of them made a reference to their scriptural text, it can be inferred that the text is not consciously made the basis of their practices. Even if they subscribe to any scriptural texts, they will find reference to the generous nature of Hindu scriptures towards other views. However, when asked why they observe certain rituals and daily religious activities, most of them mentioned that their parents have taught them and it is their ancestral practice. On the contrary, the Judeo-Christian tradition has taken a lead to base one's religious identity on the text, creed – set of beliefs and practices. What has been generally observed among these Nepali immigrants is that they do not base their identity on

[118] Upendra, Gaurav, Chet, and Sanjog responded it that way although their families had a home shrine.

their religious text per se. In fact, none of them made any scriptural reference when talking about the religious. It is interesting to note that the frame of reference for them was the ancestral practices, which they inherited.[119] Most Nepalis base their religious identity on their family origin, rather than the text, creeds or regular attendance to the temple. Their identity is made up of a view of the family unit not based on individual choice. It is sensible to infer that text or creed for them is ancestral practices inherited from generation to generation and hence they feel strongly that they should not abandon the religion of their ancestors.[120] The majority of the participants expressed the same notion and therefore it is plausible to infer that Nepalis consider abandoning the tradition of their ancestors intolerable.[121] Consider this story from a Hindu mother of three sons in Mississauga who said, "We are trying our best to inculcate a sense in them [sons] of our ancestral identity so that they will continue the Hindu tradition. All of my sons have memorized the epics of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*."[122]

Another practice of their religious identity which is not only telling of their distinct identity but of how they changed their customs after coming to Canada is in their observance of dietary laws. Many *Brahmins* who happened to have strict dietary rules of not having meat in Nepal have now become non-vegetarians in Canada.[123] Asking about the changes,

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[119] As Tracy points out that as much as literate cultures use the written text as the frame of reference the cultures where oral tradition is popular don't ever make allusion to the written scriptural text. David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*: *Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 11.

[120] The majority of the primary participants have confessed that that they would not change their ancestral religion as if they are eternally destined with that religion. Although one of them had a very interesting comment saying, "god does not send us with religion but we were born in a Hindu family so we are Hindus."

[121] I can say from my own experience that my family was not happy when I made a choice to become a Christian. I had to abandon my home for the choice I made. Many have to take up that risk if converted to Christianity. After my family came to know about me having become a Christian, everybody in the family and in the society blamed me for all the bad incidents taking place at home. And usually the basis was that I left the religion of my ancestors and the gods were angry because of me. However, I don't claim that the people's mindset is the same as of 1990s.

[122] Devi Biunkote. Interview by author, recorded, 7 April 2012. *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are popular epics of the Hindu tradition.

[123] Although some sub-castes in this category allow goat meat but chicken, beef and pork are strictly prohibited. Interestingly, chicken has become a popular dish among Nepalis here in Canada. In fact, I was

some of them express that it has become acceptable in the community. Some of the participants themselves are surprised by this change. One of the participants who works as a social worker said, "I was surprised to see 80 year old *Brahmin* lady eating chicken along with other caste people."[124] This implies that what is considered religious in Nepal has now become merely cultural and demonstrates how changes are apparently taking place among them.

With my participant observation and my own visits to their homes in the past one and a half years, it is conceivable to say that for some Nepalis, practices such as these do not become essential in the making of one's religious identity. At the same time most of my participants mentioned that not consuming beef and pork is part of their religious identity.[125] This might sound strange for most Canadians in general because for them meat is meat. However, for Hindus and particularly Nepalis it has two implications. The first is that cow is a sacred animal and vehicle of the god Shiva. The second is that cow is the national animal of Nepal and law prohibits the killing of a cow and therefore it is not tolerable for a Hindu to consume beef. Regarding pork, it is considered a religiously unclean animal.

Furthermore, that which is the essence of one's religious obligation, *Dharma,* is reduced to a symbol of one's own cultural identity and hence changes from its original meaning. For example, some *Nepalis* bragged of wearing *Janai* – holy thread and *Tika*. However, these are not just symbols in Nepal but are integral parts of the religion. For instance having a holy thread entails that one does *'Gayatri Mantra'* every morning after the

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surprised to see most of Brahmins' main non-vegetarian dish is chicken, which is considered religiously unclean in Nepal.

[124] Karuna Sharma. Interview by author, recorded, 7 April 2012.

[125] Gaurav Pudasaini, Sanjog Pyakurel, Kumari Lamsal. These were young people saying it. But most of the people who worked in the Indian Restaurant did prepare beef and pork dishes in which they had to taste the sauce as well. But they excused themselves saying, "it's a work and it is must. I don't care about that, although I would not eat beef and pork."

purification ritual of taking a bath and yet one of the Nepalis stated a complete ignorance of this saying, "I wear *Janai*, just because I want others to know that I am a Hindu, I don't even know how to do *Gayatri Mantra*."[126] It is also interesting to note that those who had gone through this ceremony back in Nepal did not care about wearing *Janai* whereas those who either had their ceremony here in Canada or who grew up in Canada are found to be protective of their tradition of wearing *Janai.* It can imply that the second-generation migrants for various reasons become very conscious of their distinct identity because of the experiences they have had.

However, there were some who did wear *Janai* and also did *Gayatri Mantra.*[127] When asked, one of them said "Our parents told us that we would go insane if we remove it [*Janai*] because our deities would get angry with us."[128] And again some of the Brahmins did not have holy thread and also did not practice *Gayatri Mantra.* The latter was known while staying with them as part of the participant observation.

What can be said is that in the encounter with the other in the contact zone, the meaning of those religious symbols changes and hence their interpretation as well. It could happen to any religious symbol in a border crossing. The shift in meaning depends on the context, for that matter religion in its entirety cannot be static, it is rather dynamic and ever changing. [129] Wesley Ariarajah in this context writes "Religions and cultures as well as their

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[126] Sanjog Pyakurel. Interview by author, recorded, 15 April 2012.

[127] About those who were doing the both were known from my observation staying with them. As noted above, this will only apply to those who are from *Brahmin* and *Chhettri* background and women do not wear *Janai* but say *Gayatri Mantra.*

[128] Sanjog Pyakurel. Interview by author, recorded, 15 April 2012.

[129] Religion for James Beckford is dynamic. This dynamic understanding has to go beyond religious use, rather as a way to categorize what is secular and religious in social setting. Therefore, religion is not inherently extrinsic and organized. See James A. Beckford, *Social Theory and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 25.

relationships are not static but in a dynamic of change and development."[130] Therefore, it is rather obsolete to talk about religious tradition as pure and pristine but rather the borrowing, being influenced by other traditions happened through out the history. Christopher Duraisingh rightly says, "No tradition is monolithic. It is a myth to talk about a pure and homogenous tradition. Euro-American Christian tradition is certainly a long process of complex sociocultural synthesis, drawing together several indigenous elements as the "handing-over" process of the Christian story was told and retold in the West."[131] Therefore changes in the meaning of some religious views, practices, symbols are inevitable while meeting other religious traditions and cultures.

God-consciousness

God-consciousness is another important factor that constitutes the Hindu religious identity. It is the awareness of divine guidance in whatever situations they come across after coming to Canada be it good or bad. In fact, they did not even distinguish in terms of good and bad. For most of them the reality is what they go through in life because the divine has predetermined it. This consciousness of the awareness of the divine was a point of surprise for me as I thought they had all succumbed to the materialistic world, jettisoning any sense of the divine. On the contrary, one of them, describing the struggles he went through while establishing his business in Toronto, said:

> In all that I went through here, which involved the loss of thousands of Canadian dollars, I do have a sense that god is with me and he is guiding me. Many times it did not make sense what was happening but again whether it is bad or good in

[130] S. Wesley Ariarajah, "Intercultural Hermeneutics – A Promise for the Future?," *Exchange* 34, no. 2 (2005): 101, accessed June 24, 2012 DOI: 10.1163/1572543054068523101.

[131] Christopher Duraisingh, "Contextual and Catholic: Conditions for Cross-cultural Hermeneutics," *Anglican Theological Review* 82, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 689, accessed June 13, 2012 URL: https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi/docview/215273162?accountid=15115. 679-701.

> all of this he is the one who sustained me. All these 22 years I never forgot to pray to that which sustains me.[132]

Clearly a deep sense of the divine is reckoned. The majority has this sense of the divine, which can easily be deduced from the experiences they shared. As I have mentioned earlier their ancestral practices are underlined with a belief that there is a divine power that guides the course of their lives. While asking to describe more about this sense of the divine, one of them said, "I do believe that there is power which is much more higher than the human capacity, therefore, I should acknowledge that power."[133] Interestingly many of them did not know what and how to describe their beliefs or any details of the object of their belief. Some of them said that they do not care about the details. One replied saying, "I don't know what happens when I pray whether god hears or not but I do have a sense of peace at the end of the day."[134] What is remarkable is the fact that the sheer belief in something like this gives direction to their lives and they are able to maintain that consciousness even here in Canada. The implication of subjectivity and experience of the divine becomes much more sensible than having concerns about whether what they believed is logically right or wrong. In other words, the concern is not in the absoluteness of their faith. For those who are accustomed to the "unknown" are able to accept the unprecedented more easily, in fact they rarely have unexpected situations. It is normal for them to look forward to something that is unknown. This indeed is contrast to the influence of enlightenment rationalism that is ingrained in the Western mindset. In the same way, one of my participants said, "I consider myself religious because I deeply have a sense of belief in god, I am not really bothered about the details

[132] Toyanath Jogi. Interview by author, recorded, 7 April 2012. He and his family have lived in Canada for the past 22 years and he is the restaurant owner who struggled to establish his business. He experienced failure after failure and problems and even in the midst of that he was able to see that god was sustaining him.

[133] Narayan Sapkota. Interview by author, recorded, 7 April 2012.

[134] Karuna Sharma. Interview by author, recorded, 7 April 2012.

about god, it is rather just a belief which helps me sustain my life and helps me to be disciplined."[135]

It is this kind of ambiguity regarding the divine that becomes instrumental in fostering diversity more efficiently than trying to subscribe to an absolute truth. The search for god and the divine work in the world is subjective for no one can claim to have universal awareness.[136] Putting emphasis on the absolutes about god or the divine ends up in having ethnic and religious violence as some of my participants indicated and therefore they are more lenient towards ambiguity. One of the great religions that cherishes ambiguity is Hinduism. It is surprising to note that their view of the divine could be called ambiguous or subjective in a sense that they do not demand from gods to make their plans or ambitions come through but they believe that whatever the divine has predetermined has to happen and they accept it.

I have put forward the argument that Nepalis' religious identity is based on their observances and belief in the divine, which I called god-consciousness, where subjectivity plays an important role in their religiosity. The ambiguous nature of their religiosity combined with a collective in the application of their observances and subjective experience as against objective nature of divine are some notable markers identified in making their religious identity both individual and collective. It has been made clear that the self of the Nepalis is already dialogical even before coming to Canada and that has its own reasons, which I will discuss in detail in the next section.

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[135] Kumari Lamsal. Interview by author, recorded, 14 April 2012.

[136] Raimon Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, New York: Paulist Press, 1999, 86. Hereafter the book will be referred as *TID* in the footnote.

Multiculturalism and the Changes in the Religious

Multiculturalism assumes that people retain their religious identity while encountering religio-cultural diversity. However, this idea breaches the social norm that humans influence each other as they begin to interact over a period of time. It is also contradictory to the theory of dialogical self because it assumes that the other is constitutive of the self, making the other inevitable in the process of interaction. The changes are rather gradual in both the immigrants and the majority population whether one realizes it or not. These changes might not be obvious to the person but to an outside observer the changes are clearly evident.

While it is understandable that the majority do not reckon a change consciously, it is obvious for me as I talked to them that there have been a lot of changes since they arrived in Canada. When asked about whether they have changed their religious beliefs and/or practices since coming to Canada one of the participants said,

> No way, I have not changed my religious view. I was born in a Hindu family and the belief I have in Hinduism will never change. God is God and he is invisible power. When it comes to the talk of that invisible power, God is the same so why should I change my beliefs anyway? I cannot be other than a Hindu. I don't think anyone will change religion that easily.[137]

Answers like this demonstrate an automatic resistance to any kind of change in their religion and even my question was taken with such an adamant response it was as though they thought I was there to convert them to Christianity.[138] After sensing their resentment towards this, rephrasing the question for clarification became indispensible. Most of them understood that the word "change" meant changing from Hinduism to Christianity. The majority of them had known about Christianity in Nepal before coming to Canada. From my own experience,

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[137] Laxman Dhungel. Interview by author, recorded, 31 Mar 2012

[138] Usually Nepalis have a suspicious attitude towards those who come to their home for evangelization. Most of the people have told me that some Christian groups have visited their home, telling them about Christianity. At least 3 of them showed me some tracts and pamphlets saying that those people came to convert them. Since, most of them knew that I was converted to Christianity, I could sense the feeling that I was one of them in the proselytization mission.

the kind of Christianity they are acquainted with is radical in its form and aggressive in proselytizing. At least three of my participants expressed concerns with a Christian proselytizing agenda and these concerns help to explain their reaction to my question.

When asked what exactly happens in their mind when they encounter other religious people, one of them said, "If I know about my position why should I be confused, if I had doubts about my own religious beliefs when encountering other religious people, I will be shaky."[139] Surprisingly, responses like these were heard from young people who were definite about what their religious identity and position at present was. A different response was identified among those who had children; they were not that sure about their religious beliefs because they were experiencing confusion as their children were constantly asking questions and were holding to different views than theirs.

Their claim of 'no change' in belief and attitude contravenes the theory of dialogical self, which assumes most of them in the encounters are open to each other and actually can influence one another. However, the reason for this stability in the dialogical self could be attributed to the fact that the majority of the participants have experienced diversity before coming to Canada and therefore, Canadian diversity is not a matter of surprise for them.[140] It is appropriate to assume that the self of Nepalis is dialogic even before coming to Canada.[141] I can illustrate this from what one of the participants said, "I was not surprised to see Muslims or even talk to them because I knew several Muslims in Nepal where we lived. They used to sell bangles and cosmetic items and told us that they were from Pakistan."[142] Another responded saying, "I studied in a Christian Nursing College. I knew all about Christians

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[139] Kumari Lamsal. Interview by author, recorded, 14 April 2012.

[140] At least 16 of them said that they have not perceived any change in them and nobody else has pointed that out to them thus far.

[141] This also illustrates why two of my questions did not make sense to them and hence, irrelevant to their concept. Refer to page # 38.

[142] Gyani Siwakoti. Interview by author, recorded, 6 April 2012.

while I was in the college. They never liked it when we did *Puja* and chanted hymns."[143] However, the same participant also said, "I did not find that sort of aggressiveness in Christians here. My boss is a Christian and there is a mutual participation in the functions. He also came to my daughter's marriage." Some indicate that the view of other religious people also changes in the contact-zone. Although they do not confess that their view of the religious changed but the attitudes towards the other changed rather unconsciously.

As per the theory of the dialogical self, the Nepalis I interviewed are found to be more pliable to handle multiple voices and in turn easily position and counter-position their dialogical selves. Surprisingly none of them expressed any level of uncertainty in taking things at their face value, except those whose children often times confronted with some Christian examples from school teachers or during the public holidays like Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Christmas in which they expected their parents to explain to them the significance of these festivals.[144] But in general, the Nepalis I interviewed are found to be relatively stable in their dialogical self.

As I mentioned earlier there is an impulse in Nepalis to maintain their Hindu identity and heritage by persisting on ancestral practices. Also explicit in them is the phenomenon of change. While it is necessary to maintain the distinct identity the tendency to be too obsessive about it leads to religious violence because it somehow undermines that the extended space that we live in is common to everyone. And in fact, forgetting about the sociological aspect is rather too judgmental and self-aggrandizing.

Coming from a multi-ethnic and multi-caste background with differences in worldview, lifestyle and economic background they have developed a dialogical self that is

[143] Saraswoti Acharya. Interview by author, recorded, 14 April 2012.

[144] Devi Biunkote, Keshav Rajbhandari and Shankar Biswa especially mentioned some of their stories from school that their children told.

able to comfortably deal with the differences. Nepalis who have been already accustomed to dealing with pluralities are quite confident in coping with the multiple voices. While this confidence leads a person to stability in the dialogical self, it also has negative effects in inculcating a sense of indifference towards the other.

The majority of the participants talked about respect for the other but their comments usually had undertones of indifferent attitudes such as "I have nothing do to with the other." The "other" here means other than Hindu. In this sense the depth of respect is in question. Respect involves willingness to open oneself and listen to what the other has to say. The process of being open to the other requires "letting go" of the things that have been cherished as the most essential. It implies that one begins to see those essentials with a view of the other. It requires a great deal of love or it is not possible. Respect might mean tolerance, but it has its own limits. One can only tolerate to a certain extent; crossing the boundary of limitation, anything becomes intolerable and unacceptable.[145] We engage consciously with the other not only to find out the common but most keenly the differences and to dialogue about them openly "without expecting the other to come to my terms" to a particular conclusion of whether one is right and the other is wrong. Dialogue in fact is "unending" as learning is also an unending process. Although being indifferent sounds more acceptable than being antagonistic, it is important that a meticulous analysis of the interplay between the two ought to be carried out. However, Nepalis sound more indifferent than antagonistic here in

[145] William E. Connolly, "Pluralism and Faith," in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World, eds.,* Vries, Hent de and Lawrence E. Sullivan, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006, 285. "The most urgent need today is to mix presumptively generous sensibilities into a variety of theistic and nontheistic creeds, sensibilities attuned to the contemporary need to transfigure relations of antagonism between faiths into relations of agonistic respect. The idea is not to rise either to one ecumenical faith or to a practice of reason located entirely above faith, but to forge a positive ethos of engagement between alternative faiths/philosophies." Charles Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Also the discussion on "Charitable Citizenship" by Charles Mathewes is a fascinating account on agonism. Although, agonism is proposed to be an appropriate response to the conflicts among the different worldviews and religious traditions for that matter, it justifies the fact that there is ontological conflict among humans.

the contact zone. The causal factor in this kind of attitude towards the other is that one does not want to confront the other for a religious reason. The general finding is that the dialogical self of Nepalis in Toronto sounds capable of dealing with diversity as they come from multi-ethnic and polytheistic background.

The assumption that people encounter the other or experience diversity only after coming to Canada is rather irrelevant to the Nepalis I interviewed. Nepalis are one of many ethnic groups or nationalities that come from a context where diversity exists. People who come from such a background have an easier time adjusting and in fact my conversation with Nepalis suggests that they have hardly anything of the religious that they need to adjust to.

There are at least two factors undergirding the stability of the dialogical self of the Nepalis in multicultural Toronto. First is the multicultural context in their country of origin. Due to the caste system within Hinduism and the existence of over 100 ethnic groups in Nepal with their own ethnic languages and distinct cultures and traditions within the broad spectrum of Hindu religion, they are not homogeneous. This is in contrast to commonly held beliefs in the West of a common language or ethnicity. Because they speak the same language does not imply there is uniformity in tradition and cultural values. Pluralism and the experience of living and dealing with the other is a day-to-day activity in Nepal. This could be considered an asset in the context of multicultural Canada. This openness can be said to have theological moorings that they ascribe to, which is the polytheistic belief that makes up the second factor for the stability in their dialogical self. Secondly, Hinduism is known as a polytheistic religion.[146] Hinduism has this unique openness to accommodate any deity into their pantheon. About this one of my participants commented, “Hinduism is great in a sense

[146] From the interview I have a sense that the understanding of polytheism is the openness to accommodate any deity into their pantheon, they believe the polytheistic notion is a manifestation of Brahma. Since, Brahma is without attributes, indescribable and transcendent, their main focus is on the manifestations. As such not many Nepali Hindus are philosophical for that matter.

that it is open to accept any belief or a deity which has no absolutist views. My parents never forced me to follow Hindu religion and I cannot force my children as well."[147] This is in contrast to monotheistic religions such as in the Abrahamic tradition where truth and reality are considered to be objectifiable and most aspects of life are judged from the viewpoint of one absolute truth.[148] Nepalis, due to a pluralistic understanding of reality, are somewhat ambiguous about things that they face on a daily basis and therefore it has implications for the way they respond to alterity. Hence, there are no surprises in the contact zone, which is positive for those that need adjustment of various kinds when encountering the other.

More than One

The self is caught up in a cacophony of voices in the contact-zone and as I explained earlier. Since Nepalis are already accustomed to diversity to some extent before coming to Canada the level of uncertainty is much less. However, the people that they confront in Canada are different than they are used to and so they can still be caught in a bit of a push and pull situation. Perhaps, people might not have many choices in their country of origin, not just in terms of the religion but also in several aspects of life. Although the Nepalis I interviewed are generally found to be stable, a struggle in the dialogical self still exists. Most of the young people I talked to said that they obeyed the expectations of their parents in following Hinduism but are still inclined to be influenced by other beliefs and ideas. The level of religiousness that is seen or given heed to at present depends mostly on the sort of religious discipline they were given when they were brought up. One mother of three children talked about her sons' eagerness to learn and practice Hinduism at home. When

[147] Jalraj Sharma. Interview by author, recorded, 30 March 2012.

[148] Christopher Denny, "Interreligious Reading and Self-definition for Raimon Panikkar and Francis Clooney," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 44, no.3 (Summer 2009): 415.

going out, those same sons were afraid of being looked at differently by their friends and therefore, wiped off their *Tika* before leaving the house.[149] Only one participant indicated that he was not asked by his parents to follow a particular religion.[150]

Most of them appreciated the value of multiculturalism in Canada, particularly of the existing space they find to express their own religion. Moreover, one of them pointed out how illustrations given by teachers are mostly Christian in their perspective and therefore illustrates how immigrants are exposed to the Christian principles through illustrations and somehow if they want to get educated they have to learn values that are Christian. A participant says,

> One of the things I have identified here is that people who go for education, teachers give examples or illustrations that are not heard by those immigrants who come from Hindu background. Not just the teachers but anywhere you go and have a conversation with Canadians who are from Christian background they take examples from Christian philosophical viewpoint and therefore, it compels us [immigrants] to think or ask about Christianity.[151]

On the one hand they realize that it is rather essential for them to learn from others but on the other hand, they also think that changing religions would cause disintegration of community and family values and the tradition they desire to keep alive. So most of them cannot think of converting to any other religion. One respondent had a fascinating thought and said:

> I would have thought of changing religion but because it will also affect my family my parents and others' view about me. And as people of religion, we should not hurt other's feelings hence by converting to another religion, I felt I was hurting my family. I had been to the Church for three years while in Nepal but never decided to convert. Religion teaches not to hurt others and speak truth and I liked those things but while following those fundamentals of religion I cannot convert to Christianity by hurting everyone around me, which I feel is the

[149] Devi Biunkote. Interview by author, recorded, 7 April 2012.

[150] Jalraj Sharma. Interview by author, recorded, 30 Mar 2012. He is the only one participant who said that he was never told by his parents to follow Hinduism and he is also not imposing the Hinduism on his children.

[151] Shankar Biswa. Interview by author, recorded, 31 Mar 2012.

> violation of the very religious principle. Conversion does not make sense to my mind.[152]

Here we see an important consideration of the Hindu mind when it comes to conversion. It compels one into making a decision of whether or not to violate the community principle, simply because one is able believe in one absolute truth at the expense of the rest of the belief systems and understanding of truths available. Moreover, the community consciousness is intrinsic to most Nepalis and in fact the identity is not only based on what one thinks about him or her but also what community designates to the person.

Thus far I have explained the participants' expression of "no change" in the religious views although some practices did have some changes. However, one third of the participants did have a realization of some changes in their thinking after having encountered the other here in Canada. A young woman said, "I have become broadminded after meeting and working with Christians and Muslims alike."[153] Another participant said, "My view about Christians changed after coming to Canada."[154] This is a participant who did not like Christians at all while she was studying in a Nursing College.

Changes appear to be gradual but bypass the consciousness of an individual, however easily beheld by someone other than the individual himself or herself. I have nonetheless identified some popular tendencies from some participants. Several reflected that after coming to Canada and confronting the other that it paved a way for them to understand their own tradition much better in the light of the other.[155] At least four of the informants agreed to the above and one of them said, "I think I have broadened my mind in terms of the religious

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[152] Keshav Rajbhandari. Interview by author, recorded, 14 April 2012.
[153] Kumari Lamsal. Interview by author, recorded, 14 April 2012.
[154] Saraswoti Acharya. Interview by author, recorded, 14 April 2012.
[155] Upendra Devkota, Surendra Dhungana, Narayan Sapkota and Chet Prasad Adhikari.

because while I was in Nepal I was not constantly in touch with people of other religions as much as I am now. However, even while I was in Nepal I was holistic."[156]

This multicultural experience wrought a self-reflective consciousness of a much bigger reality than people had experienced earlier. This is also indicative that the reality based on the self and in the absence of the other, which perhaps is totally or somewhat different, can only be partial. However, one religious tradition does not exhaust the whole reality that might be available. Especially in the multicultural context this is important and one cannot be continuously self-contained. However, all religious traditions put together would also not exhaust the reality that is available. What suffices for human living with great satisfaction to both self and the other is a posture of adequacy and openness.

From the interactions with Nepalis, it is plausible to infer that the Nepalis' encounter with religious diversity has revealed those parts of the self that were rather passive and which have now become active and important. In fact, encountering people of other religions not only made them knowledgeable about other views but also helped them reflect on their own beliefs. According to the theory of dialogical self the other is a necessary part of the self and here in particular the religious other becomes essential in meaning making. The implications are that one's religious views are complemented by other religious views. At times they might seem contradictory at their face value but entering deep into the essence of things they are rather complementary in light of a bigger reality. Some of them said there are certain things that we need to reconsider. One young man who changed his beliefs to Baha'i faith and actively works as a volunteer to guide other young people in spiritual exercises every week said, "there are lots of things of Hindu system that do not make sense to me. I feel that

[156] Upendra Devkota. Interview by author, recorded, 7 April 2012.

Hinduism has become outdated."[157] He further indicated that he needs to seriously consider other faiths that make more sense in the context that he is now living.

Most participants identified the dominant religion in Canada as Christianity. One of them said, "Tomorrow I will become a citizen and all my generations will remain here so I cannot talk about preserving the Hindu culture because I know my children will learn about Christianity in the school or at least be exposed to Christians."[158] Another participant said,

> They behave positively. We often times hear that Christian's preach and proselytize others to increase their numbers. To comment on that I can say that due to the way they behave with new people they influence others. I feel people who meet Christians are obviously influenced by their behavior and change their religion I guess. The way they behaved with me when I went to the Church for the first time I had this impression that they are skilled in influencing other people to somehow attract them to their religion.[159]

Both of the above mentioned informants had rather negative experiences with Christians in Nepal. After coming to Canada they have changed their perspective because the encounter not only reveals more of other religions but equally opens up a new horizon of one's own religion, eventually leading in the change in attitude towards others. In other words, their dialogical self is able to re-position accordingly because of the counter-position they have rather explicitly experienced here in Canada.

A Sense of Belonging

Integral to the talk of multiculturalism is a sense of belonging. People find a strong sense of belonging in the religious practice of going to a temple. Perhaps the homesteading that Hermans and Hermans-Konopka and Kinnvall refers to have its implication for Nepalis in the place of religious gathering. Whether people really feel that they belong to the place of

[157] Gaurav Pudasaini. Interview by author, recorded, 8 April 2012.
[158] Subodh Shrestha. Interview by author, recorded, 30 March, 2012.
[159] Laxman Dhungel. Interview by author, recorded, 31 Mar 2012.

migration and the other people they come across is fundamental to the integration dynamic. Language alone does not determine a sense of belonging; culture and tradition also play a pivotal role in giving a sense that a person belongs to a group or a place and provides a sense of home feeling. People might speak the same language but their culture and traditions in general may be different. One of the things that felt foreign to me was the voices who were arguing in favor of a Nepali Temple in Toronto. I immediately wondered why just going to the temple did not satisfy their spiritual quest and they needed a Nepali Temple in particular? Later I came to understand from a participant's opinion that it is a matter of a sense of belonging. Toronto has a big number of Hindus from India but some of the observances, the style of keeping the images of gods and goddesses and the language play a role in whether people feel a sense of belonging. One of the participants said, "I went as far as Oakville for '*Shivaratri'* celebration this year but I felt that I did not belong there. Although it was a Hindu temple the hymns were sung in Punjabi and the way the ceremony was done was totally different than the way we Nepalis would conduct it. I felt that I did not belong to." [160]

With all these shifts in practices and meanings of religious symbols, and opinions some of them surprised me further. Eleven of my participants said that they go to Church once in a while and at least 2 said they attend every month. If going to Church makes an individual a follower of that religion some of these people could be identified as Christians. On the contrary, these individuals have no intention to leave their ancestral religion. When asked why as a Hindu they would like to attend a Church, one of them said, "I like the way they sing and the different way they express their belief in their god. I want to learn more."[161] This is the irony in terms of the religious, trying to perceive it from the "either or" notion –

[160] Laxman Dhungel. Interview by author, recorded, 31 Mar 2012
[161] Upendra Devkota. Interview by author, recorded, 7 April 2012.

either one belong to Hinduism or to Christianity. Does this in any way reflect their multi-religious belonging or just being open to the other out of curiosity? We will explore this more, later in the chapter and also in the next chapter on theological reflection.

There is another change I observed in people. The mindset of those Nepalis I interviewed is comparatively integrated and holistic in nature, which flies in the face of Canadian culture where life is more compartmentalized and therefore, most people do not talk about religion while at work.[162] Nepalis after coming to Canada have been influenced by compartmentalizing life into various categories and this might be accounted to the so-called secularity in the society.[163] For example, I would imagine that these people while working in Nepal had stories to talk about religious matters but here the majority said that they do not talk about it at their work place.

What can be summarized from the knowledge gained from the participants is that the struggle within self is much higher in those who migrate from mono-cultural societies than those who migrate from a multicultural social unit where the experience of diversity and its entailments have already been experienced. People living in a mono-cultural society do not face questions of identity, because it is taken for granted that all people in that society belong to a particular religion. However, experiencing multiculturalism on a daily basis leads some to be critical of one's own religion and their identity whereby they become broadminded, as some have experienced. For a few others it becomes confirming that their own religion is more satisfying and meaningful than others' and their dialogical self becomes a closed mechanism whereby the attitude of indifference to the other is identified.

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[162] Keshav Rajbhandari, Saraswoti Acharya, Karuna Sharma.
[163] Hindu worldview is integrated, encompassing all aspects of life under the religious whole.

One and the Many: Theological Implication

"Ekam Sat Vipraha Bahuda Vadanti."[164] The Truth is one but the paths are many." Various paths to the same reality are assumed in Hinduism. Those paths could be within Hinduism or different religious paths. I assume that the majority of Hindus will not have a problem embracing Christianity or Islam as alternative paths to the same truth.[165] This is not some sort of universalism or relativism as they are proud of their own tradition, wish to preserve it and are committed to it. In this context the following account from one of the participants is rather profound:

> I am working with Christians who make up the majority. I am the only Hindu person at work. They asked me about my religion and I respond that I was by birth a Hindu. They try to learn from me about Hinduism and also they try to influence me with Christianity and tried their best to make me believe in Christianity. My response was positive in a sense, 'I believe in almighty God and if you say I have to believe in Christianity I definitely will say yes but if you say I have to believe only in Christianity then I will definitely say no.' They tried to influence me but not to convert me. My response is "that's okay" Even if Hinduism imposes on the only path as Hindu path I would not want to follow that because it is not complete in itself, unless it incorporates other views and beliefs.[166]

This is a fascinating response, which reflects the person's view of the religious. The person retains his identity as Hindu because he was born a Hindu and is also able to incorporate other views without having inner struggles.[167] This might not be applicable to most of the Hindus however, in general majority will agree with maintaining pluralism without claiming exclusivity for one particular religious tradition. This of course raises a question of double religious belonging, which we will implicate, although my participants did not have that

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[164] Rig Veda 1.164.46.

[165] However that might be called relativism in the language of Western modernity.

[166] Upendra Devkota. Interview by author, recorded, 7 April 2012.

[167] It is as much easier for a Hindu to accept a pluralistic idea but for a Christian it is almost impossible because of the attitude "the truth is at my disposal." However, we only belong to the truth and truth does not belong to us and hence it is not possible to have universal awareness.

notion. As I would think even the double religious belonging in one sense is again a Western dualistic category premised on dualism, however we will have a section in the next chapter.

What has been discussed thus far has theological implications. For example, when talking about common core-values, one of the first and foremost things participants said was that they held a belief in "the same god," even though the majority had expressed that prayer and service to humanity were common core-values to world religions. Very significantly, most of them believe that all religions aim for the same reality of experiencing god who is one and the differences are only superficial labels in terms of adhering to different religions. This in a sense does eliminate the idea of proselytization.[168] While it is logical to maintain any belief system one likes which is purely based on subjectivity, any search for total objectivity and absoluteness is in question. Considering genuine difference between religious traditions and people's understanding of reality, it is very difficult to make everything relative. If this can be maintained in balance, religious conversions become obsolete. One of the participants had this interesting comment:

> If I don't maintain the difference I will have an identity crisis. If I do one thing of the Muslim because I like it, than I do another thing of Christian because I also like it. I don't belong anywhere so in that case I need to maintain my identity, whatever that is. Therefore, we need to maintain the difference for sure and we need to belong to some group although we believe in one God."[169]

The need to belong to one particular group is considered important because the sense of belonging is in relation to that particular group. Both approaches: philosophical and the practical are seen in this discussion because one can have beliefs in whatsoever but the practical aspect of belonging to some group or a sect with a particular label is indispensible.

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[168] Proselytization is not only the agenda of some Christians; other religions including Hinduism and its various sects are involved in it.

[169] Laxman Dhungel. Interview by author, recorded, 31 Mar 2012

Most of the participants that I interviewed had a feeling that I was approaching them for this research with an ulterior motive of a conversion agenda. This I infer from the kind of reaction they had from one of the questions regarding the change of religious view. Originally, I did not have a question on religious conversion in my semi-structured schedule but one of my participants talked about why many conversions to Christianity are taking place, particularly people from *Sudra* caste, "Because they are not allowed inside Hindu temples, they prefer being Christian for access to a church."[170] Some others want to change their religion because they need social support in a new country. The implication is that not many people change religion because of intellectual satisfaction. However, it is interesting to know that many do not consider the doctrinal when it comes to changing one's religion. The conversion process somehow entails the idea of renouncing the previously held religious belief and identity to become a member of the newly found religion, which for a period of time fascinates them. The testimonies of people who changed their religious allegiance suggest that others force them or there is a certain urge in them to completely get rid of their old world. This implies that one does not see anything good in the previously held belief system and they begin to see the new faith as the best option for making sense of what one sees. If someone was looking for an answer pertaining to a particular vantage point, they failed to find genuine answers and hence, the new faith's doctrine or practices gives some intellectual and emotional satisfaction, leading to conversion. From these stories and connecting to my own conversion experience I still think that there is a slippery slope for those who feel that they did not get answers in their own religion, because it raises the question of whether or not the person looked at the whole of reality in that particular religion.

[170] Laxman Dhungel. Interview by author, recorded, 31 Mar 2012

The overarching issue with all these conversions is the identity in light of the theory of the dialogical self. Having a particular religious identity does give a sense of belonging. One of the participants said, "God does not predetermine some to be Christians some Hindus some Muslims and some Christians. It's people who are born in a family that followed a particular religion and they are labeled accordingly. God just makes humans not religious humans."[171] One has to have some kind of label, which basically pertains to their identity to which he or she can belong to. But from a purely philosophical viewpoint do we need to choose from either Hindu or Muslim, either Christian or Buddhist? We are products of our culture and tradition and our mind is limited and hence nobody can claim to have universal awareness. Therefore, that which is beyond one's comprehension remains ambiguous. Taking the aspect of the ambiguous in every religion, creating a space for the other is essential in this multicultural context. Most people I interviewed had a beautiful sense of ambiguity in what they were saying rather than sounding like what they said was totally true.

On the one hand the participants said they want to defend their belief but on the other the same person confessed that they do not know much about their own religion. So there was a multiplicity of voices apparent in what they were saying and hence the ambiguity was apparent. Most respondents did not feel obligated to change their religion although they were ignorant about their own beliefs. People are not bothered about whether or not their faith made sense. Or in other words, whether something they believed was logical or not. They are comfortable with their ignorance and with ambiguity. People do not always act based on the objective or the absolute truth (it is hard to know), rather they act based on the understanding they have which is mostly subjective. The world is progressive and dynamic, implying that what happens in the world is not fully understood by humans in one time and

[171] Toyanath Jogi. Interview by author, recorded, 7 April 2012.

space. It is eventually revealed to our mind and is based on that one act or response to a situation. This is not to suggest in any way that objectivity is not important but what I am suggesting is that people often times base their conclusions on their own subjective understanding, action, reaction or response to various situations. This very fact makes subjectivity indispensible while talking about the religious.

I have said earlier that the stability of the self in the Nepalis I interviewed is apparent and it is not without reason. Some reasons are obvious from the participants' experiences but some other reasons have to be inferred. Some of them expressed that they are sure of their religious identity and hence do not shift. While the stability of the self could be considered positive in the contact-zone, it is also indicative of the fact that the Nepalis I interviewed have not been able to open up to people of other religions; they presuppose that all Nepalis ought to be Hindus.[172] One cannot have a proper relationship with the other when he or she does not understand one's own identity. One has to start from something for a relationship; it does not happen in a vacuum.

As I have pointed out earlier, the discussion on being influenced by other religious views creates a sense of curiosity if the person's identity is more than one. However, the studies have shown that people struggling to deal with the differences also maintain double identity or multiple religious belonging.[173] The following discussion will address that phenomenon what is real to multicultural context.

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[172] It is automatically inferred that the national identity has to follow religious identity. That is why talking to most Nepalis they would either assume one, a Hindu or a Buddhist.

[173] See Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue.* Orbis Books: Maryknoll, 2004, 6-81.

What Then Shall We Say?

The analysis from the empirical study explored religious views, practices and attitudes of the Nepalis in Toronto. The major finding of the study pertains to the change in the religious in the light of the theory of dialogical self reflects a high level of dialogism already present among most of the Nepalis I interviewed before they come to Canada and hence it is much easier for them to relate to the other. As has been analyzed in the chapter most participants, opine that there are no changes in their belief system even after encounters with the other. What can be deduced from their stories of religious practices and beliefs in the process of adjusting in the new place is that they are changing, remodeling, or altering some of their practices. This is happening not consciously but gradually and it is rather unintentional to them. Some people just make a choice and it is not until later that they find it is actually edifying. When people talk about not changing views or practices of a particular religion it can be very misleading. Owing to the fact, it denies the social constructionist point of view of the religious because different religious views were influenced by other opposing views and the exchange happens most of the time.

We have seen in the previous chapter how the encounter with the other has rather mixed effects on the dialogical self. Nepalis, coming from a polytheistic, multiethnic and multi-caste background are considerably capable in dealing with the differences as their dialogical self is already acquainted with the diversity. However, that does not mean they are static, because we also have identified that there are considerable changes in their religious views and practices. Applying the theory of dialogical self in the analysis the study also shows that they are open to learn and be willing for cross-fertilization and mutual fecundation however, at the same time want to maintain their identity as Hindus.

One of the fascinating ideas of the dialogical self is making use of binaries, which is also reflected in some areas of Nepalis' experience of the religious diversity in Toronto. While being different is important, one could also fall into religious fundamentalism, universalizing the notion of difference without seriously taking into the account of the common values. Since, the other is constitutive of the self, so also in theology we need to be aware that the other views are constitutive of our view. So differences are not always contradictory but also complementary, although they might seem contradictory at their face value. This knowledge should lead us to religious transformation where we are open to each other more by trusting each other as subjects rather than treating each other as objects of study. It requires going an extra mile for cross-fertilization and mutual fecundation in which convergence is not assumed but remaining different yet having an attitude of love, respect and mutual sharing because of the intrinsic relationality on which Raimon Panikkar's Theology rests. This will be explored in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

TOWARD A DIALOGICAL HERMENEUTIC OF A HINDU-CHRISTIAN: THE INDISPENSIBILITY OF THE OTHER

In this chapter, I attempt to present a reflective discussion on the dialogical hermeneutic, which considers that the other is indispensible in meaning making, especially in a multicultural context. The empirical study and its analytical findings in the previous chapter elucidates that Nepalis' encounter with the other suggests to have a considerable level of dialogism already at work in them, which is accounted for by their religiously polytheistic, socially multi-ethnic and multi-caste background. In the process of adaptation, we have learned that Hindu tradition plays a significant role in Nepalis' beliefs, practices, lifestyle, and attitudes. While these Nepalis' observances and beliefs indicate their identity consciousness, their attitude in relating with other religious people seems highly dialogical.

First of all, it is important to highlight again the distinct features of Hindu religious tradition practiced by the Nepalis I interviewed in Toronto in a multicultural context. The identity consciousness of Nepalis based on observances and the view of the divine remains stable and perhaps stronger than in Nepal; their eagerness to be rooted in their own tradition seems to be evident because of the inner urge to maintain their distinct religious identity. From their experience of the divine, or god-consciousness, what is evident is their integrated worldview, which is reflected by the way they handle struggles, confusion and adverse situations in life. At the same time, the Nepalis I interviewed, their attitude toward the other and their celebration of multiculturalism all come out of the same integrated worldview. Moreover, their honest confession of their ignorance regarding the divine and their ability to

accept and absorb the ambiguity is rather remarkable. Additionally, the findings suggest that in the encounter with the other, there is a certain level of desire to know their own religious text as they encounter people whose religious views and practices are based on the claims that their religious text is noteworthy.

One of the important observations is that their theology is primarily ritual-based, rather than based on belief in a creed or a scriptural text. Nonetheless, the major theological view is that god or the divine being is ultimately the same, regardless of differences among various religious traditions that exist. Hence, the 'difference' is the reality at present and following that different path does not deprive one from the whole of reality because there is an intrinsic relation between humans.[174]

Secondly, the Nepalis I interviewed, their already active dialogism helps them in encountering and relating with people of other religions, especially in encounters where the exchange of ideas, participation in each other's religious festivals and ceremonies, and broadening of their thinking are typical outcomes. Religious gatherings take the form of social events as they deal with a sense of belonging, and therefore, the Nepalis I interviewed in Toronto have developed a practice of going to the temple more often than when in Nepal.

Another important finding is the change in the encounter. Interestingly, most participants denied the change, but their narratives began to show that change occurred. This change in particular calls for a discussion on the indispensability of the other in meaning making because dialogical self requires the other to help understand the self better. In other words, the other is self-inclusive, and this notion is much more applicable across religious traditions. The sharpening of one's own tradition [Hindu] and a realization that other

[174] See footnote # 137, 169. Laxman expressed in terms of god/divine being the same and only the manifestations seemed different. However he was strict about maintaining the difference, as he does not want to change his Hindu identity.

religious traditions are revelatory to their tradition is also evident in the process of adaptation. Therefore, genuine eagerness to know other traditions more closely is apparent, and interestingly, most often it is not similarities they observe that make them curious but obvious differences.[175] Therefore, the findings of the ethnographic research elicit active engagement across various traditions.

Multiculturalism as a platform for genuine religious encounter requires more than a mere coexistence of multiple religious traditions. In reality, it anticipates a proactive engagement across traditions for meaning making. Such an engagement necessarily challenges preconceived ideas about beliefs and values.[176] This might lead some to a sense of multiple religious belonging. Peter C. Phan makes clear that for many globalized people multiple religious belonging today is a reality.[177] The dialogical analysis of the ethnographic research has suggested that the other is indispensible in the meaning making of the religious. Accordingly, the multiculturalism of Canada is not a threat or an obstacle towards Nepalis' integration, but rather is an opportunity for them to learn and grow.

The findings from the empirical studies in chapter two and my study of the theology of Raimon Panikkar provokes a great deal of interaction leading to a method which opens a new horizon of understanding. It has been found that to know one's own traditions better requires a constant nudge from other traditions. With that I envisage to carry forward an interaction on the dialogical hermeneutic of the theology of religion in general and Hindu-Christian understanding in particular. Accordingly, I am not proposing a full-fledged theology of religions, but rather a reflection that enables individuals and communities in the encounter to be aware of the other. The other may be totally different, but is still part of

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[175] Kumari Lamsal and Gaurav Pudasaini have expressed this view explicitly in the interviews.

[176] Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 104-105.

[177] See Peter C. Phan, 60-81.

one's self, making the other indispensible to understanding and living within the present religious diversity. In other words, it is the dialogical process that is desired to take place in the contact-zone for a better understanding of the post-modern human and its relation to the divine. It aims at interpreting the experiential dynamics: personal change or transformation and reflection on the interreligious phenomenon.

My hope is that this method will bring transformation among all the participants in the dialogue involved in this unique engagement. I am not arguing for an eclectic mix of various religions or a doctrinal synthesis of a new religion as a superstructure. Instead, I propose to address the struggle one has between maintaining the difference, and at the same time being able to carry on the human gift of relating to the so-called other with a realization that the other is not completely external to the self.

In attempting to establish my argument properly, I will begin with a thesis that religious pluralism is not a problem to be solved but a process in which the divine is revealed much more clearly, for which the discussion on the theology of religion is inevitable. The hermeneutical component is the notion of the indispensability of the other, which is the undergirding factor in all of this discussion because it involves an understanding of the experiences of those who encounter the other, whether they are Christians, Hindus, immigrants, or members of the majority population. How we understand and interpret this religious phenomenon today plays an important role in our own beliefs about god or the divine being, lifestyle, moral values, attitudes, and relationships, particularly living in a multi-religious context.

I am using the hermeneutics of the theology of religion primarily based on Raimon Panikkar's theology. However I occasionally refer to other authors when appropriate, and I will engage in the current discussion on religious pluralism and its theological responses to

highlight that the dualisms underlying those assumptions are inadequate to address the present phenomenon. The thesis of this chapter rests on the assumption that the relationship with the other is not external but internal as it is confirmed by the theory of dialogical self and Panikkar's notion of *cosmotheandric* vision of reality, of which there is a detailed discussion later in the paper.[178]

Raimon Panikkar: Double Identity, Multiple Belonging

Raimon Panikkar is one of the pioneers of comparative theology, whose influence in interreligious dialogue spans over five decades. Jyri Komulainen, whose doctoral dissertation was on Panikkar, says,

> Due to the idiosyncratic nature of his thinking, Panikkar could not be categorized in a straightforward way. He has been described as such a 'mutational man,' one in whom the global mutation has already occurred and in whom the new forms of consciousness have been concretized. This is obvious, if one pays attention to his extraordinary life and its background.[179]

Panikkar himself says that a major turning point in his life was becoming acquainted with India, his father's homeland in the 1950s and 1960s. In this process, according to his own understanding, he found his Hindu and Buddhist identities without losing his Christian identity.[180] He says, "I left [Europe] as a Christian; found myself a Hindu; and I return as a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian."[181] This is the core of his theology and experience and his multiple and distinct identities are not mutually exclusive because he could have said it otherwise: "I left [Europe] as a Christian; found [*I became*] myself a

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[178] See Page # 94.

[179] Jyri Komulainen, "Raimon Panikkar's Cosmotheandrism: Theologizing at the Meeting Point of Hinduism and Christianity," *Exchange* 35, no.3 (2006): 279, accessed June 03, 2012 Online article available from www.brill.nl.

[180] 'I "left" as a Christian, I "found" myself a Hindu and I "return" a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian.' Panikkar, *TID,* 2. See also Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, completely revised and enlarged edition, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1981), x. He says'. . . I am at the confluence (*sangam*) of the four rivers: the Hindu, Christian, Buddhist and Secular traditions.'

[181] Panikkar, *TID*, 2.

Hindu; and I return as [*shifted to being*] a Buddhist, without having ceased [*finally*] to be a Christian." I want to highlight and reflect on the meaning of the word 'found' which means 'he discovered' – that which was existing in his subconscious level. He did not deliberately change or shift from one religion to another.

Secondly, Panikkar's statement is a reflection that change is inevitable while encountering the other. However, Panikkar goes beyond 'mere change' due to an encounter and into deep experience of both Hindu and Christian traditions, which is evident in the following. In his own words he states,

> I have gone in pilgrimage to distant places in the north and south of India; I have been lost among the crowds and in danger often in my life. I have lived the simple life of the masses and have also been an academic, taking part in the more intellectual aspects of dialogue. I have found myself sincerely carrying on the dialogue from both ends of the spectrum. . . . I have been shunning labels all my life. . . . I have spontaneously identified myself with both sides – Hindu and Christian – without preconceived strategies.[182]

Moreover, what has become apparent to him as he became submerged in Hindu tradition was his position as an inclusivist. This is apparent from his doctoral dissertation published in 1964 as *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* where he became a radical pluralist.[183] Komulainen writes,

> In his famous book, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism,* the approach of the study was inclusivist as Panikkar attempted to read in the Hindu text in the light of Christology, and in doing so to prove that the Hindu concept '*Ishvara*' refers ultimately to Christ, the ontological link between God and the world. Christ is thus present already in Hinduism although Hinduism has not yet become aware of this presence. Hinduism is a potential Christianity aspiring towards fulfillment, which is in Christ. For this reason, Christ has to be crucified and die with Hinduism as he has already done with Judaism and Hellenism. Only this process can produce a resurrected and transformed version of Hinduism that is Christianity. This kind of inequality giving preference to Christianity is absent in the later pluralistic works of

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[182] Panikkar, "Foreword: The Ongoing Dialogue," in *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters,* edited by Harold Coward (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books 1989), x.

[183] See Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1964), 17, 59-61, 126-131.

Panikkar.[184]

A radical change or a 'mutation' had happened and yet his profound realization that it had occurred is remarkable. It is remarkable because of my own experience with the religious journey as I have observed people closely. Additionally, the ethnographic studies suggests that many people do not have a conscious realization that change has taken place over a period of time. For some, they realize that mutation has occurred, are conscious of it, and are honest to openly share and justify the change. However, many others struggle with that mutation and it takes them time to come to the realization that it has occurred. Therefore, they find themselves defending the belief that their views are unchanging.[185] Having become conversant with Christianity and Hinduism, Panikkar sees his own life as an intercultural-interreligious pilgrimage. As a result, he refuses to reject either of his Christian or Hindu identities, and instead, sees himself as a person with 'double identity' and 'double or multiple belonging.' It is clear that he has been able to maintain that level of dialogism in the following statement. He says,

> . . . I have duly performed Hindu ceremonies . . . and celebrated the Christian mysteries . . . I have been dialoguing in Europe, America, and India; sitting in ashrams, gurukuls, universities, and bishops' houses; living in presbyteries and temples. Karma-*bhakti* and *jnana-yoga* are not unknown to me or foreign to me; the Vedas and the Bible are holy books for me and I have spent years in practice, study, and meditation of both . . .[186]

What seems inconceivable is the level of comfort Panikkar had in being able to live with both cultures and religions at the same time without the fear of sociological factors of

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[184] Ibid.

[185] Refer to footnote #157. Gaurav Pudasini, as I mentioned in the previous chapter has been influenced by Baha'i faith. Refer to footnote #133 Narayan Sapkota, who studies engineering at the University of Toronto expressed that he has found himself having influenced by agnosticism. Refer to footnote #155. Although he says there that knowing and experiencing other religious traditions have become revelatory to his own which is Hindu tradition. He at the same time holds agnostic tendencies. Both of these participants struggle with their double movements.

[186] Panikkar, "Foreword: The Ongoing Dialogue," xi.

identity.[187]

Double or multiple religious belonging usually emerges as a theological problem in religions that demand an absolute and exclusive commitment on the part of their adherents to the foundations of their faith. This used to be the case and still is in some cases with the religions of the Book - the Abrahamic religions. In the past, these religions considered themselves not only mutually incompatible but also irreconcilable with any other religion whatsoever, so that "conversion" to any one of them was often celebrated with an external ritual signaling the total denial of all previous religious alliances.[188] The basis on which this sort of wholehearted commitment was required is built upon belief in the absolute truth claims and religious texts of these religions, which they assume are both objectifiable.

On the contrary, Panikkar argues, "To know what a religion says, we must understand what it says, but for this we must somehow believe in what it says. Religions are not purely objectifiable data; they are also and essentially personal, subjective. As we have said, the particular belief of the believer belongs essentially to religion."[189] Panikkar's notion of giving importance to subjectivity obviously restricts the study of other religious traditions, as it involves more than just analyzing the texts, but also having an experience that would parallel those who follow these traditions. This consideration is generally lacking in most religious or comparative studies at the moment. In this regard, Panikkar writes, "This seems to be a major challenge in our times; lacking an authentic philosophy of religion we shall be able to understand neither the different world religion nor the people and cultures of this earth, for religion is the soul of a culture and one of the most important factors in shaping the human

[187] This concern that I am raising, I presume is an obvious irreconcilable struggle for those who strongly hold the dichotomy of the 'either or'.

[188] Phan, 62.

[189] *TID,* 96.

character individually and collectively."[190] If importance is given to the experiential part of any religion, the possibility of having double identities or belonging to multiple religions becomes inevitable.

With the present method of determining religious affiliation, one person can only specify one religion. This view, however, reflects a western concept of religion, according to which one can only adhere to one religion at a time. Conventional understanding of Christian theology is also centered around this notion. The professor of comparative religions at McGill, Arvind Sharma says, "The Hindu tradition, by contrast, permits multiple religious participation as well as multiple religious affiliations."[191] This is true from the experiences for some of the Nepalis I interviewed whose religious identity is Hindu but still go to church and are able to pray to the divine (maybe to their god). Although they are able to make sense of it, it is rather confusing to the Christian population.

My own religious journey is a mixed one, sometimes confusing to me, yet other times inspiring. I had been going through the experience of multiple religious belongings. I was born in a Hindu *Brahmin* family and converted to Christianity at the age of 17, completely abandoning the Hindu way of life and thought. I even considered my own family members as outcasts, and they viewed me in the same way. During the first nine years after I became a Christian, I was associated with the Pentecostal type of Christianity because it was the only denomination I was exposed to. It left an impression on me about the very thinking of the divine and the commitment I should have about my beliefs. Later, I was influenced by Episcopalians and Liberation theologians, who inculcated in me a sense of responsibility to the world and exposed me to socio-political

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[190] *TID,* 96.

[191] Arvind Sharma, "The Hermeneutics of the Word "Religion" and Its Implications for the World of Indian Religions," in *Hermeneutics and Hindu Thought: Toward a Fusion of Horizons* (The Netherlands: Springer Books, 2008), 29, accessed May 23, 2012 [Book Online] DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4020-8192-7.

issues as a way of doing theology. These experiences and worldviews became equally important to me, alongside personal devotion. This left an impression on me, which included another horizon. Later, when I had been more exposed to the philosophy of religions, I realized that my thinking began to take a radical shift, almost like a 'mutation'. Currently, on the one hand I am excited to know what is ahead of me and how enriched I am to have experienced the Hindu, Christian, North, and South worlds. I want to avoid these categories but have found this is not possible thus far. On the other hand, there is an ineffable dilemma of being caught between the Christian tradition, which gave a new experience of the divine, and the very thinking pattern that I feel is from my Hindu background. I am at a crossroads between being a Hindu-Christian or a Christian-Hindu. Although Panikkar's background and mine are rather different I see a common ground. I feel that all the factors that influenced me play a role in the way I am looking at the world, the divine and the human. This is not just because of my Christian self but because I discovered my Hindu self in the process of living a Christian life. The more I try to shun it the more it has become obvious.

What lies ahead of me is rather strange. I can see that I might be welcomed in Canada but the struggle became more real when I got back to Nepal. The following questions arise because for a Nepali, one's identity is not just individual but is also based on what the community determines. So, I wonder what makes up my religious identity? Do I need to have one or two? Does one need to be primary over the other – Hindu-Christian or a Christian-Hindu? How would I react to the criticisms from my evangelical friends and my Hindu family and relatives? Will Christian friends and collogues have more difficulty accepting my identity than my Hindu family and relatives? Will I be able to go to the temple and observe Hindu festivals and celebrate with my Hindu parents and

sibling? I know this all entails rejection – rejection possibly from my dear friends who claim that what they know is the absolute. Ever since I have been arguing from these lines I have been attacked both directly and indirectly. As I mentioned, often times for a Hindu it is not an individual decision that determines one's identity but the collective. I also wonder if this line of thought might lead to an absolutizing of my beliefs. I have my own critical doubts but at the moment I feel it is necessary to take this adventure. Behind these questions there is fear and insecurity regarding acceptance because of the part of me that is trying to engage in dialogue with the other. It raises questions in not only those of the Western Christian tradition but also those who belong to a tradition that accepts multi-religious belonging. With these rhetorical questions in mind, along with the responses I got from the participants of the ethnographic research, I will try to use the theology of Panikkar to help interpret this situation, which will answer some of the questions posed above. I cannot promise a clear conclusion or solution, but will definitely generate a meaningful discussion. This will hopefully take us to a method or a hermeneutic that will allow us to interpret present religious phenomenon dialogically.

I identified from my research participants that they are also caught in between these two worlds, but only a few testified to this push and pull factor. I had two participants in particular who found they were caught between the Baha'i faith and Hinduism, and another who mentioned about his proclivity towards agnosticism and yet he also expressed that he cannot totally abandon Hindu beliefs because of the family pressure. When they like a particular religious tradition or a philosophy they do not fully embrace it and make an individual decision, as they need to convince other people in the family and community. I presume that it was possible for Raimon Panikkar to hold dual identities and belonging, but if I say it is also possible for all others then I am guilty of

promoting bland universalism. Usually the claim that has been made for Panikkar is genealogical – by birth he had two identities. However, that may not be the case with all those who are in the interreligious encounter situation. What needs to be deliberated in detail is the question of which one of his/her self was dominating over the other using the theory of dialogical self. I believe the Christian self is the dominating self in Panikkar, depending on various factors. Likewise, I consciously spent more than half of my life practicing and thinking in Christian terms and it is more dominating than my Hindu self, according to the positioning aspect of the dialogical self.

Religious Plurality: A Theological Critique

Religious plurality is not a new phenomenon, in the sense that most religious traditions began in a context where other possibly contradictory traditions existed and interacted. David Tracy finds that the plurality of religions existed from the beginning of Christianity. He writes, "As everyone knows, the later Christian tradition from the post-New Testament period to the present is yet more radically pluralistic in its interpretation of Christianity and often mutually contradictory…. Pluralism is not an invention of our present age. Pluralism is a reality in all traditions."[192] Particularly, Christianity has constantly interacted with other religious traditions from the time it began in the first century. However, the difference today with Christianity in the West is that it is losing its ground and therefore the presence of other traditions and their phenomenal growth is considered, a challenge or a threat.[193] In the words of Christopher Duraisingh, "Yet it is the stark and painful reality of our times that both in the Church and in the world at large, diversity itself has become a central

[192] Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 372.
[193] See for details Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (Oxford: OUP, 2002).

problem threatening the very life and unity of the Church and the very fabric of human community."[194] Primarily, the Christian tradition seems to be more threatened by the diversity. This is perhaps normal, as it has had a monopoly over the knowledge of the divine and universalizing tendency until recently. On the one hand, the dwindling of the church and the growth of other religious traditions are challenging but on the other, the growth of ethnic churches in the West is an interesting phenomenon.[195]

Despite all these recent developments, can we still speak of the Christian tradition as homogenous and one that values expressions of unity over diversity? Duraisingh considers this to be an essentializing tendency of the Christian West. He writes, "Essentialist description of reality and valorizing the homogenous over the diverse seem to be significant features of much of Western thought and culture."[196] This tendency to privilege and valorize unity, harmony, and totality and thereby to degrade, suppress and marginalize multiplicity, contingency, and particularity is being challenged by other religious views and practices which are more supportive of the latter characteristics.[197] In fact, the colonial and Euro-centric definitions of other cultures and traditions that arose out of the same philosophical mind-set where "the other," that which is "strange" is to be conquered, or suppressed, converted and civilized, are becoming irrelevant in the context of radical plurality.[198] This implies that establishing a monolithic tradition is rather difficult to achieve, hence understanding and accepting differences and actively seeking meaningful and mutual

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[194] Duraisingh, 680.

[195] I have observed that most Evangelical Churches have ministries among immigrants. The ethnic churches are sprouting up like mushrooms in North America. As the first generation Christians who continue to speak their own language this becomes essential to them as they deal with a sense of belonging but however, it is unpredictable and I am rather skeptical to comment if or not this phenomenon will remain the same in the next generation. There is a possibility that this might continue because my ethnographic studies suggest that the second generation immigration are more serious about maintaining the distinct identity.

[196] Duraisingh, 680.

[197] Ibid, 681.

[198] Ibid.

engagement seems to be the way forward for both the Christian Church and other religious traditions alike.

Therefore, Western theology can no longer ignore the rapid growth in the Latin American, African, and Asian theological scenes. It requires taking on the role of a recipient in its relationships with them more than ever before. The emergence of contextual theologies has meant, principally, that theology in general has become more polyphonic, and that different local versions of theological thinking are in the process of interaction. This context of religious plurality has raised questions concerning the theology of religions especially in Asia, but also increasingly in other areas. Consequently, interreligious dialogue has emerged as a new theological method. This means that the theology of religions should be formulated not merely on the basis of some theological *a priori*, but also in concrete dialogue with other religions.

Interestingly, what has been rather distinct to Christian tradition is the fact that the gospel imperative is always an imperative for a permanent openness to the other, the stranger. Hence, hospitality to strangers and mutuality of recognition of "the other" is intrinsic to the Christian story of God's love in Christ.[199] Japanese born theologian Kosuke Koyama argues convincingly that the gospel is essentially stranger-centered. An inclusive love for the "other" is at the heart of the biblical faith and is the defining characteristic of the early Church's understanding of the person and work of Christ.[200] In fact, for any theology to be authentic, it must be constantly challenged, disturbed and stirred up by the presence of strangers. Hence, the stranger, in this sense, is indispensible.

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[199] Ibid.

[200] Kosuke Koyama, "Extend Hospitality to Strangers: A Missiology of Theologia Crucis," *International Review of Mission* 82, no. 327 (July/October 1993), 283-295. Accessed June 03, 2012 DOI: 10.1111/j.1758-6631.1993.tb02670.x.

In responding, other religious traditions and culture's various political, public and contextual theologies have emerged in recent decades, ranging from open embrace of other cultures and efforts to identify a common human morality and language, to withdrawal from the world to preserve the gospel values against cultural forces that may be hostile to them. In order to preserve the gospel values, most of the current theological responses to religious pluralism are centered on two different factors: one leading towards convergence of different traditions, proposing an eclectic mix of views and traditions, and the other leading towards radical diversity and emphasis on differences by completely ignoring the notion of the common ground of humanity. The first response, falling on the category of inclusivism, exposes tendencies where the other in the process is completely merged to be the same. The latter response shows that there is a tendency for complete separation to occur on the premise that the other is absolutely other. Both of these extreme attitudes give importance to the self at the expense of the other and are inadequate to address diversity in the present. Therefore, looking for a paradigm to maintain the differences across traditions and yet finding ways to relate to each other for a better and just society is the present hermeneutical search. It implies that theology in the context of intermingling and border crossing has to take a leap to move beyond previous synthesizing tendencies in the theology of religions. As postmodernism continues to gather steam in an era suspicious of ontological claims about the divine, religious synthesis becomes irrelevant to the present context. Raimon Panikkar's contention against inclusivism is,

> It…presents the danger of hybris [hubris] because it is only you who have the privilege of an all-embracing vision and tolerant attitude, you who allot to the others the place they must take in the universe. You are tolerant in your own eyes but not in the eyes of those who challenge your right to be on the top. Furthermore, it has the intrinsic difficulties of an almost alogical conception of truth and a built-in inner contradiction when the attitude is spelled out in theory

and praxis.[201]

The self is autonomous and has no place for the so-called other in this attitude or a world of thinking. The other either has to come into terms with the self or remain separate and mutually exclusive. On the other hand, the attitude of exclusivism is equally problematic as it is reflected in what Panikkar describes,

> It carries with it the obvious danger of intolerance, hybris [hubris], and contempt for others. "We belong to the club of truth." It further bears the intrinsic weakness of assuming an almost purely logical conception of truth and the uncritical attitude of an epistemological naivete. Truth is many-faceted, and even if you assume that God speaks an exclusive language, everything depends on your understanding of it so that you may never really know whether your interpretation is the only right one. To recur to a superhuman instance in the discussion between two religious beliefs does not solve any question, for it is often the case that God 'speaks' also to others, and both partners relying on God's authority will always need the human mediation so that ultimately God's authority depends on Man's interpretation (of the divine revelation).[202]

The downside to inclusivism and exclusivism respectively is the tendency to digest the other into self and treat the other as mutually exclusive. This does not reflect dialogism. Even in Chapter two we have seen that Nepalis do not have wishful thinking that they will be able to fuse two different traditions to create a synthesis of a new religion. Additionally, they are not seen to be reserved to their own tradition or antagonistic towards the other under the pretext that Hinduism is a *Sanatana Dharma,*[203] that is superior to religious traditions that came later. That said, tendencies such as these are present in some Hindus. What has been discovered is that the Nepalis' willingness to associate and explore the other inspires a hermeneutic that can produce a method of being engaged across traditions. Duraisingh rightly says, "This shift toward a comparative theological enterprise raises questions about interreligious

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[201] *TID,* 7.

[202] *TID,* 6-7.

[203] *Sanatana Dharma* refers to "the eternal law." Most of the Hindus hold this view that Hindu tradition is the oldest of all religious traditions.

hermeneutics."[204] What follows is the discussion on the dialogical hermeneutics, based on the theology of Panikkar and also the notion of the dialogical self, which regards the other to be self-inclusive.

The Dialogical Hermeneutics

To appropriately respond to the present encounter of various religions the tendencies towards either synthesis/convergence or complete difference are not adequate because the radical pluralism of Panikkar assumes that the differences are maintained even when a genuine relationship is established among the different people who belong to different traditions. To illustrate this, we can go back to the empirical data that showed clearly that the Nepalis I interviewed on the one hand were strict about the difference. Many of them indicating a strong identity consciousness particularly in those who are second generation when it comes to their visible religious symbols like *Janai* and how some others were in particular about their wearing *Tika*. However, the same participants were also flexible to allow their children to go to Sunday Class taught by Christian teachers.[205] Not able to control my curiosity, I asked what they are learning in their Sunday class to one of students' brothers and he replied saying, "god and spirituality." There are a couple of other examples I can reiterate but suffice it to say that the push and pull factor of keeping the difference and wanting to be related with the other is a clear picture of a hermeneutic that is dialogical in the context of interreligious encounters. In fact, a dialogical hermeneutic is already taking place among Nepalis but in its incipient form.

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[204] Denny, 409-410.
[205] This is one of the observations I made while staying with families for participant observation.

Therefore, I am proposing a hermeneutics that is dialogical, which attempts to move towards developing a method that is faithful to both differences and similarities. This dialogical hermeneutic has its roots in dialogical self theory, which assumes that the other is self-inclusive and at the same time, it is analogous to Panikkar's theology of pluralism. This term "dialogical hermeneutics" (I began using dialogical self as a framework) can also be termed as "hermeneutics of difference" or "interreligious hermeneutics" or "intercultural hermeneutics" as scholars dealing with inter-cultural, inter-religious or comparative religion make use of it.[206] For the sake of uniformity I prefer the former. The premise of this method rests on what Panikkar says, "We must learn from 'others' without ceasing to be 'ourselves'."[207]

Again referring back to the ethnographic study, the discussion on Nepalis' religious identity is reckoned to remain stable or without ceasing to be a Hindu but willing to learn from others was present in Nepalis. They deliberately did not want to liquidate their identity, because the identity they got from their birth is important as Panikkar's own double religious belonging has its roots in his Catholic mother and Hindu father.

Thus far the hermeneutics of Western tradition has struggled to maintain objectivity in its approach to understanding, but as the subjectivity is making its ground in hermeneutic, pure objectivity is under question. In fact, Panikkar is raising the subjective, personal, religious experience to a new level of methodological importance for religious understanding that fosters dialogue across traditions. The rationale behind the proposal of such an inter-religious hermeneutic is to make use of the differences as in the dialogical self theory and to keep the experience of the other pivotal to the religious interaction and sharing. In fact an

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[206] S. Wesley Ariarajah uses the term, "Intercultural Hermeneutics," Gerrard Hall uses "Intercultural and Interreligious Hermeneutics."

[207] Raimon Panikkar, "Rising Sun and Setting Sun," *Diogenes* 50, no.4 (November 2003): 6, accessed May 29, 2012 DOI: 10.1177/03921921030504002.

attitude of "I don't understand but I will have to let them be who they are, however, I am willing to go as far as I can, to support them by being aware of my own boundaries" is what it requires from those who are willing to engage in this rich encounter.

The dialogical hermeneutic privileges dialogue over dialectics because its goal in the religious context is divine truth, but its method focuses on existential encounter rather than argumentative discourse. In this regard Panikkar says, "Dialogue seeks truth by trusting the other [subject], just as dialectics pursues truth by trusting the order of things, the value of reason and weighty arguments. Dialectics is the optimism of reason; dialogue is the optimism of the heart."[208] This is in fact a critique against dependence on pure rationality but not against dialectics itself. Panikkar admits that, "Dialectics have an irreplaceable mediating function at the human level."[209] Therefore, completely denying the use of dialectics he says, "It would amount to falling into sheer irrationalism to ignore this essential role of dialectics."[210] Therefore, his main concern is that there should be a space for something that is above the rational because the human being is "certainly a rational animal and rationality may be its most precious gift, but the realm of reason does not exhaust the human field."[211] However, particularly in the cross-cultural or inter-religious encounter dialectics are not enough because we cannot expect the other to be as rational or irrational as ourselves.[212] Therefore, allowing the other to be themselves is part of the dialogical process and hence the inadequacy of dialectics according to Panikkar. He is not promoting a mindless, irrational human by elevating subjectivity at the expense of objectivity. In fact, valorizing only subjectivity betrays the very being as human.

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[208] Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 243. Hereafter it will be referred as *MFH.*

[209] *TID*, 29.

[210] Ibid.

[211] Ibid., 28.

[212] Ibid., 29.

The empirical findings are clear that the relationship of Hindus with people of other religious traditions is not based on a discussion about objective truth or pure rationality but is one that allows the person to be who they are with all of their experiences and feelings combined with reason. In this what primarily matters is the subject in the dialogue. It requires admitting that the first task is to seek genuinely to understand the religious other as far as possible as the other understands him/herself. My own experience in getting to know Muslims personally and interacting with some of them has opened up a new horizon for me and eventually I found that I came out of Islamophobia. Indeed, I had to transcend the rationality of the universalizing tendency to put "all Muslims" into one box. After my acquaintance with Muslims, I also learnt some of their religious expressions. Making use of those expressions invites positive attitudes from them and, in the process, it changed my attitude toward them while at the same time opening me up to a new horizon, a horizon where I could look at the whole Muslim world differently. I found that I had begun to view the world through a dialogical lens. Indeed, this requires a certain level of being self-critical which is an essential characteristic in relating to the other. Now to be self-critical one has to give space to the ambiguous nature of self, other, divine and all that we see.

Therefore, Panikkar's *Myth*[213] is an important element of the hermeneutic because the struggle of existence is a cosmic, divine, and human conflict that involves all three worlds. We tend to have a distaste for the word 'myth' on the pretext that it is irrational and therefore, sometimes used improperly connoting to only gods and their play. But Panikkar clarifies saying, "…myths are stories about reality, and because the mythos of modern scholarship had forgotten the Gods in its overall picture of the universe, what most strikes

[213] Panikkar refers to 'myth' as the horizon of intelligibility that helps to see the world, and it refers to the convictions that underlie one's explicit beliefs and are always unclear to oneself. One believes so deeply in one's own myth that one cannot even observe that one believes in it.

modern scholars about ancient myths is the presence of the Gods. So these scholars suppose that myths deal only or mainly with the Gods, whereas such stories also deal with us and world."[214] Any single element cannot have its own existence or they make no sense, as they do not have a platform in which they can perform their functions. The myth can assist in paving a way for dialogue. Panikkar in fact makes distinction between the logos and myth. "Panikkar maintains that dialogue is possible on the basis of myth, whereas the logos only leads to dialectics. This has to do with the question of pluralism and tolerance. It is the dimension of myth which makes pluralism possible – and tolerable."[215] The modern Western obsession with certainty is being challenged by this notion of myth. Therefore, dialogical dialogue is a process in which participants make each other realize their limits and mutually expose the myths they have that one cannot see oneself as the foundation of one's own 'logos', i.e. thoughts that could be expressed rationally.[216] Although people might think their belief is objective it could still be based on what Panikkar calls myth. This implies that the myth is inevitable whether one likes it or not. Although the dialogue might start with a simple conversation with the other, as we have identified, in some cases people confessed that their mind became broader and open after the encounter. This has a profound implication that it might develop into not just enriching each other tradition's but opens up a space to the possibility of conversion and therefore, the dialogical dialogue bears this beautiful potential.

Wesley Ariarjah says, "From the experiences of Panikkar…. it would appear that a genuine intercultural hermeneutic tradition would emerge only in the context of genuine interaction between peoples of religions and cultures, as they struggle to discover purpose

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[214] Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford* Lectures (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010), 376. Hereafter this book will be referred as *TRB*.

[215] Bettina Baumer, "Panikkar's Hermeneutic of Myth" in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*, edited by Joseph Prabhu. (Maryknoll: Orbis books, 1996), 173.

[216] Komulainen, "Raimon Panikkar's Cosmotheandrism: Theologizing at the Meeting Point of Hinduism and Christianity," 292.

and meaning of their life together in a fractured world. Such a hermeneutic does not produce but arises out of life in community."[217] In fact, a dialogical hermeneutic seems to be already taking place among Nepalis whose active participation across other traditions and religious people is obvious. It is in fact taking place in the universities and across academia that are equally looking for enrichment from each other's traditions. One of the characteristics of this type is evident in Nepalis attending the festivals and ceremonies of Christians while being able to talk about the differences openly and Christians coming to attend Hindu marriages which are mainly ritualistic. My own meeting with a couple of Hindu priests and also a Buddhist priest in the city of Toronto tells me that Hinduism is being revived among Nepalis in Canada. Moreover, some of my research participants indicated that they like the Christian practice of being thankful to God and to others and some others indicated that Muslims know about their own religion better than they did and in particular their knowledge of the Koran impressed upon these Hindus a sense that they should know their scriptures better. This is indeed a dialogical process and this is the outcome of many elements as I indicated above.

Komuleinen says that Panikkar's theologizing is hermeneutical in approach, and attaches crucial importance to experience.[218] Experience is central to dialogical self in coming to know one's own response in the encounter. Some of my participants' broader thinking, in being able to be open to the other and the change of attitude towards the other did not happen by somebody's heart touching lecture or a sermon but rather it was based on experience as they faced differences that inculcated a sense of curiosity. From the study of the dialogical self and from the ethnographic study, I have highlighted the indispensability of the other in the encounter to show one's own weaknesses. Moreover, this hermeneutic gives an

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[217] Ariarajah, 101.

[218] Jyri Komulainen, *An Emerging Cosmotheandric Religion?: Raimon Panikkar's Pluralistic Theology* (The Netherlands: Springer Books, 2005), 36. See also Komulainen, "Raimon Panikkar's Cosmotheandrism," 287.

opportunity to be self-critical and have a sense of contingency, which greatly helps in the dialogical process to be open to the other, who might be entirely different. A precondition that needed to be dealt with for a dialogical hermeneutic is: the dichotomy. If we maintain mutually exclusive dichotomies they become barriers to the hermeneutic I am proposing.

Throughout this thesis, I have made references to binaries that are at work as underlying premises to theological and multicultural thinking. However, these binaries are too often used for criticism without giving much thought to them. There is always a danger of course in over-simplifying this binary between East and West; between insiders and outsiders; between self and other; between them and us. However, it is assumed that a genuine dialogue transcends these polarizations, as I try to bring forth how the dialogical self-theory plays a role in inviting honest critique and understanding. In fact, transcending these binaries is the aim of dialogical hermeneutics. How the conversation can and should take place may vary, but the goal is the same and worthy of pursuit. The aim of dialogue is to know each other better in the light of the belief one holds on the divine that is ambiguous. Panikkar seeks a new, contemporary interpretation of traditions in dialogue in which others enrich one's own tradition.[219] The best way to let that dialogue take place until its won is through persistent, relentless practice, without which, we may lose the chance to change each other and ourselves for the better.[220] However, to be the other, is to be temporally and spatially distant or different from the subject, without which the other would cease to be other, but would become self.[221] In fact, the denial of otherness is the reversal of the dialogical process and the extinguishing of self as I have already made a reference. The full

[219] Panikkar, *Blessed Simplicity,* 22-23.

[220] Leena Taneja, "The Other of Oneself: A Gadamerian Conversation with Gaudıya Vaisnavism," in *Hermeneutics and Hindu Thought: Toward a Fusion of Horizons* (The Netherlands: Springer Books, 2008), 212, accessed May 23, 2012 [Book Online] DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4020-8192-7.

[221] Ibid., 213.

acknowledgment of the other and the co-relationality of both self/other stand at the heart of the dialogical encounter.[222] Therefore, the following discussion on the *Vaisnava* hermeneutic is an illustration of how Hindu hermeneutics is useful in unfolding the present need for an authentic dialogical hermeneutics of a Hindu-Christian.

Differentiation and Nondifferentiation: A *Vaisnava* Hermeneutic

Diversity of hermeneutic methods is available in Hindu traditions but they have not been used much in interpreting religious diversity. RD Sherma writes,

> While Western hermeneutics have been employed in the study of Hinduism for over a century, Hindu hermeneutics have rarely – if ever – been employed in the service of examining elements of Western history, religion, and culture. Nevertheless, thousands of years of exegesis, interpretation and reinterpretation, of adaptation and reconstitution of ancient norms, concepts, and practices have endowed the Hindu tradition with a wealth of hermeneutical systems and strategies, many of which may have the potential for cross cultural application.[223]

To illustrate this point, I will use the research done by Leena Taneja, who conducts a comparative study of Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics and the *Vaisnava* school of *bhakti*[224] that holds the differentiation and nondifferentiation in tension. The *Vaisnava* tradition maintains that the relationship between the individual and *Krishna Bhagavan,*[225] whom the *Visanava* devotees worship is both of differentiation and non-differentiation.[226] The relationship with Lord *Krishna*, Leena says,

> …is essentially one of differentiation within non-differentiation in which the individual is seen as real and separate from the Absolute, while still maintaining sameness with it. The individual is thus both identical with, yet simultaneously different from or distant from the transcendent. What this amounts to

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[222] Ibid.

[223] RD Sherma, "Introduction" in *Hermeneutics and Hindu Thought: Toward a Fusion of Horizons*, edited by RD Sherma and A. Sharma (The Netherlands: Springer Books, 2008), 2, accessed May 23, 2012 [Book Online] DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4020-8192-7.

[224] A major Hindu sect that gives emphasis to devotion (*Bhakti*)

[225] One of the Hindu deities.

[226] Leena Taneja, 215.

> hermeneutically speaking is a constant awareness and consciousness of the individual condition as something wholly individual and human.[227]

This in fact opens up a new horizon of discussion on the importance of keeping the transcendent and the immanent in tension as in the theory of the dialogical self. Taneja continues, "If individuality were given up through a communion with the divine, the specific type of pleasure that comes only from a relational experience of differentiation is lost. There is joy in union, but for *Vaisnavas,* the pleasure of separation is higher and more gratifying." [228] This is rather strange since the Christian tradition reifies the separation with the divine to be in a sinful condition while for *Vaisnavas* it is the pleasure of separation which is gratifying. This could imply that the separation is the precondition to the union because only through the experience of separation can one know the importance of union. Sameness is the precondition to maintaining the difference and one has to apply love (*bhakti*), which leads both the parties to spiritual transformation. Consequently, writes Taneja,

> …spiritual transformation, as it is described here, is a recovery of individuality and difference through a relation of love with God and the abandonment of an identity of sameness. Transformation locates itself in that imprecise space between identity and difference in which the *Jivatman* [self] stands continually between the threshold of union with and separation from the divine. Bhakti or pure love locates itself in the liminal space in between the individual and the divine relation wherein the subject/object polarities are perennial renegotiated in the unmediated ways of love.[229]

In this type of dialogical participatory relation the parties involved "belong together" and are open to listening to and understanding each other in ways that inculcate all to voluntarily set aside their own prejudices and forethoughts. Gadamer calls this openness. For him "Openness to the Other involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that

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[227] Ibid.
[228] Ibid.
[229] Ibid.

are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so."[230] However, even for a person to come to recognize that, there are certain things against him/her, one needs the other to point that out and therefore, again, the other becomes part of the self and hence indispensible.

To this end, each person in a conversation is "forced" to recognize their limitations – their finitude – and in doing so, moves towards a genuine dialogue and real understanding. As Gadamer writes, "experience is experience of human finitude. The experienced man knows that all foresight is limited and all plans uncertain. In him is realized the truth value of experience."[231] To interpret and dialogue with the other involves being aware of the limitations of one's own viewpoint and being willing to question one's viewpoints by opening them up to the other's point of view. From a religious perspective, the *bhakti* school offers a unique example of how important it is to be willing to submit to another's point of view for a genuine communication to occur.[232] Submitting to the other needs lots of stripping away of the matters that are considered essential to the self.

The sense of superiority that has been deeply ingrained into Christian consciousness has now been challenged by globalization, paving new ways of interreligious hermeneutics. A point to be noted is that the effects of globalization, especially in terms of movements of peoples, ideas, and transplantation of religious traditions across the globe, has left postmodern human with a new inter-religious and intercultural reality. Wesley Ariarjah writes, "Happily the movement and revolutions of history come to our aid."[233]

Indeed, what is required is transcending the self and other dichotomy. Dialogical hermeneutics looks at the other without unduly favoring the self and also without unduly

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[230] Ibid., 216. Quoted from Hans-Georg. Gadamer, *Truth and Method.* Second Revised Ed. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (Trans.). New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1999, 361.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Ibid., 223.
[233] Ariarajah, 92.

valorizing the other – while every other is truly other, no other is wholly and absolutely other. For example, two of my participants are in between caught up in a push and pull factor of the double identity or multiple belonging I mentioned above.[234]

Cosmotheandric Vision: Panikkar's Hermeneutic of the Theology of Religions

The underlying notion of Panikkar's theological vision in general is a Trinitarian understanding, which is presented in his famous word, "*cosmotheandrism."* The concept *cosmotheandrism* implies three dimensions of reality, in terms of 'God' (*Theos*), 'Man' (*Anthropos,*), and 'Cosmos' (*Kosmos*).[235] The relationship of these three poles is described in the following way, "The three poles of reality are in the same way definitive; they permeate each other. . . every one of the three poles is definitive, and they cannot be reduced to each other or to the assumed center. And still, every one of these poles, so to say, presupposes the others and includes them. The reciprocal resonance is perfect."[236] In other words, Panikkar's vision of the *cosmotheandric* principle expresses the fundamental structure of reality in terms of the intimate interaction of God, humankind, and the world or cosmos. There is no hierarchy, no dualism; one of the three does not dominate or take precedence.[237] It implies that the dimensions are not reduced to each other, or to any concept outside them. Nevertheless, they are inseparable and essentially belong together.

Therefore, *cosmotheandrism* has reference to the coming together of God, humanity, and the world in simple terms. In Panikkar's own words, "The cosmotheandric principal

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[234] Refer to the footnote # 157 in the previous chapter.

[235] See for details, Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 19930, 72-75. Hereafter it will be referred as *TCE.* Panikkar sometimes uses the word 'theanthropocosmic,' e.g. in Panikkar, T*CE,* 4 & 54. He is aware of the fact that his vocabulary is only one among many and in this case Hellenistic.

[236] Quoted in Jyri Komulainen, "Raimon Panikkar's Cosmotheandrism: Theologizing at the Meeting Point of Hinduism and Christianity," 294.

[237] Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007) 337.

could be stated by saying that the divine, the human and the earthly – however we may prefer to call them – are the three irreducible dimensions which constitute the real, i.e., any reality in as much as it is real."[238] Panikkar actually employs the classic theological conceptions such as '*perikhoresis*' in Greek and '*circumincessio'* in Latin when illustrating the relationship of the three dimensions of the *cosmotheandric* reality.[239] Moreover, the relationship is explained in terms of the interpenetration of the three. Therefore, he very confidently says, 'There is no God without Man and World. There is no Man without God and World. There is no World without God and Man.'[240] He seems to understand the words 'God', 'Man', and 'Cosmos' as symbols through which he can describe the central beliefs of his intuitive vision of metaphysics.[241] With the concept of the divine, Panikkar wishes to refer to the 'abyssal dimension' and the 'infinite inexhaustibility' of everything, to the way that every being transcends both everything and itself.[242] The cosmic dimension means that every being not only 'stands in the World' but also 'shares its secularity'. In fact, being in the world means that all that exists has a constitutive relation with matter and energy as well as with space and time.[243] The adjoining of the cosmic dimension with the divine and anthropological dimensions is unique to Panikkar, in the light of a certain tendency among religions to renounce the world, or at least to subordinate immanence to transcendence.

Panikkar understands the Trinitarian character of his metaphysics to be a legitimate expansion of classical Trinitarian theology. Moreover, he also thinks that the Trinity is neither a monopoly of Christianity nor of Divinity, for reality as such is Trinitarian.

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[238] *TCE*, ix. See also, Panikkar, "The Myth of Pluralism: The Tower of Babel – A Mediation on Non-violence," 74.
[239] Ibid., 76. See also Panikkar, *The Intercultural Challenge*, 275-276.
[240] Quoted in Veli-Matti Karkkainen, 337.
[241] *TCE*, 61.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Ibid., 64.

Therefore, Panikkar emphatically says, "every bit of reality has this Trinitarian imprint. This means that all existing entities present the 'triune constitution expressed in three dimensions."[244] In fact, Ewert H. Cousins calls Panikkar's Trinitarian view "*advaitic Trinitarianism."* He says, "I call this aspect Panikkar's *advaitic Trinitarianism*, for it developed out of his own inner dialogue with the advaitic tradition of Hinduism and yet remains, I believe, authentically Trinitarian in the full orthodox Christian sense of the term."[245] *Cosmotheandrism* functions as a metaphysical model that enables Panikkar to attain the holistic vision of reality and relational ontology that gives room for both unity in reality and differentiation.[246] Hence it provides him with philosophical foundations that render a radically pluralistic theology of religions plausible without challenging the fundamental unity of humanity.[247]

For Panikkar, reality is neither one nor many, but rather non-dual, *advaita*. He contends, "…the *advaitic* order of intelligibility is intrinsically pluralistic."[248] This plurality however, seems to be integrated. He writes, "I am not only saying that everything is directly or indirectly related to everything else: the radical relativity… I am also stressing that this relationship is not only constitutive of the whole, but that it flashes forth ever new and vital in every spark of the real."[249] The integrated whole is his famous notion of *cosmotheandric* reality which is based on *advaitic* (non-dualistic) theology. Panikkar says, "our relationship with the other is not an external link but belongs to our innermost constitution, be it with the earth, living beings – especially the humans – or the divine. The entire reality presents a

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[244] Ibid., 128; *TCE,* 60-61.
[245] Ewert H. Cousins, "Panikkar's Advaitic Trinitarianism," in *Intercultural Challenge,* 120.
[246] Panikkar, *The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha*, translated by Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989), 140; See for details *TCE* 58-59.
[247] Panikkar, *Invisible Harmony*, 54-55,
[248] *TRB,* 24.
[249] *TCE,* 60.

'theoanthrocosmic' or, better sounding, a *'cosmotheandric'* nature."[250] Accordingly, Panikkar's radical pluralism is "neither an unrelated plurality nor a new ideological superstructure designed to keep everybody in their assigned cultural slots."[251] Although this notion of Panikkar's integrated whole does not give value to dichotomy, in the process of realization dichotomy becomes a precondition even to make sense of that very concept of the integrated whole.

Western modernity's attempt to dissect the whole of reality into categories does have its own significance but in terms of applying these catagories to the whole of reality it is more difficult. Hence, what has come into view in developing a theology is the nature of ambiguity in one's own tradition. Tracy writes it this way, "all of us know we have been formed by traditions whose power impinges upon us both consciously and preconsciously. We now begin to glimpse the profound plurality and ambiguity of our traditions."[252] This is further more reflected in the God and world relation. "God has cosmological dimension, just as the cosmos has a divine aspect. In short, a theology without cosmology is a mere abstraction of a non-existing God; and cosmology without theology is just a mirage. Cosmology and theology are intrinsically knit together."[253] As in the dialogical self these dichotomies only disappear if the nature of reality is *cosmotheandric.*

The above discussion on *cosmotheandrism* makes it clear that it is essentially a dialogical concept. Dialogical within the Christian tradition based on classical Trinitarianism, at the same time it is deeply rooted in the *advaitic* philosophy because it would not be wrong

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[250] *TID,* xvi.
[251] *TCE,* vi.
[252] Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 8.
[253] *TRB,* 187-188.

to say that Panikkar's very thinking is *advaitic*.[254] Although, the *cosmotheandrism* is a comprehensive subject, which has doctrinal aspects to it, it is not possible to go into those in detail here for the sake of the length of the work I am engaged in. However, suffice it to say that Panikkar considers Christ as a symbol of the *cosmotheandric* reality. "Christ is still a living symbol for the totality of reality; human, divine and cosmic. Most of the apparently more neutral symbols such as God, Spirit, Truth and the like truncate reality and limit the center of life to a disincarnate principle, a non-historical epiphany, and often an abstraction."[255] Therefore, Christ, as the symbol of the *cosmotheandric* reality, contains the two poles where the distinction is made: the divine on the one hand and the cosmic on the other. This reality is inherently dialogical and keeping the binaries of the human divine divided in tension is reflected in the symbol of Christ.

This *cosmotheandric* vision is reflected in most of Panikkar's thought. Therefore theology for Panikkar cannot be separated from philosophy because it has implications for understanding reality as a whole and hence implications for anthropology. He writes "Western civilization has introduced fundamental distinctions that have ended in a lethal separation between philosophy and theology, leading to the fragmentation both of knowledge and subsequently of the knower."[256] In fact, this dichotomy, he says,

> …is not the original Christian insight, nor does it exist in most traditional cultures. Once the epistemic dualism is accepted, it becomes an anthropological split and in the cosmological arena leads to an ontological two-story building. The holistic approach of the whole Man to the entire reality then loses all meaning. "Theology" without "philosophy" cannot rely on reason and becomes a special field for those who claim to have another source of knowledge. Theology is then often reduced to mere exegesis of alleged "Sacred texts" or degenerates into superstition.

[254] See Francis X. D'Sa, "The Notion of God" in *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar* edited by. Joseph Prabhu (Orbis Books, 1996), 25-45.

[255] Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism,* 27.

[256] *TRB,* 181.

> Philosophy without theology is reduced to mental analyses with practically no relation to real life.[257]

The dialectic split between philosophy and theology is done to understand the things of the universe better but the divine is not given a place in such a discussion. Panikkar, therefore, transcends the arena of dialectics to dialogue. His basic premise in the discussion of reality is dialogical rather than dialectical because the dialectical treats the dichotomies as separate and therefore ends up with an 'either or' category. And this modern Western apartheid between philosophy and theology he says "emasculates the former and destroys the latter. We lose critical touch with the whole."[258] In that sense, theology has to be philosophical with an all-encompassing reality, which might have equal share of the views of all religions. This is unique to Panikkar, which is the reason why he does not use the word "God" but 'divine' as a generic term. For him inter-religiosity is an academic pursuit primarily but experiencing and living it through is what makes up the whole of reality. In this regard, Fred Dallmayr writes about Panikkar saying, "Perhaps his most notable intellectual contributions have been in the field of inter-religious and cross-cultural studies where he has persistently criticized both a bland universalism neglectful of differences and a narrow (ethnic or religious) particularism hostile to reciprocal learning"[259] The tension between universalism and particularism did arise in the previous chapter as the participants were saying with their own experience of Christians in Nepal and here. An illustration of this would be the case of one woman who was studying in the Christian Nursing college and had this idea that all Christians are bad. Now, after coming to Canada she happens to work in a place where the boss is a Christian. She continuously thought that Christians in Canada would be like those she knew in Nepal.

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[257] Ibid., 182.
[258] Ibid., 20.
[259] Fred Dallmayr, "Rethinking Secularism (With Raimon Panikkar)," *The Review of Politics,* Vol. 61, no. 4 (Autumn, 1999): 715-735 accessed May 13, 2012 URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1408405.

This, in fact refers to bland universalism but her encounter with other Christians here in Canada changed that thinking and a reciprocal learning has taken place.

Self-critique of one's own tradition is the prerequisite to even starting a dialogue with the other. The proper self-critique can happen primarily in the encounter with the other. But being totally uncertain about one's beliefs and tradition might not help to proactively engage with the other. Self-critiquing requires the self to be able to transcend. In this regard Leong Yew says, "To be 'The Other' is to feel that one is always in a shaky position, to be always on guard, ready to be rejected and … unconsciously doing everything needed to bring out exactly this catastrophe."[260] To be rejected by the other is not an easy experience and this again needs a lot of stripping away of the self.

I indicated in the previous chapter that some of my participants felt that they need to know more of their own religion better and this realization comes after their own radical encounter. So the other becomes indispensible for a better understanding of one's own traditions. The premise upon which Panikkar's radical pluralism works is primarily this notion that "Religions are ununderstandable without a certain background of "religion." Religions do not exist in isolation but over against each other. There would be no hindu [sic] consciousness were it not for the fact of having to distinguish it from muslim [sic] and christian [sic] consciousness."[261] The cosmic dimension means that every being that exists in the universe has a constitutive relation with matter and energy as well as with space and time.[262] I have highlighted a thesis based on the dialogical self that the other is not totally separate from the self, and hence self-inclusive.

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[260] Leong Yew, "The Asian Other," in *Alterities in Asia: Reflections on Identity and Regionalism,* edited by Leong Yew (New York : Routledge, 2011), 18.

[261] *TID,* 9.

[262] *TCE*, 64.

The Indispensability of the Other

What defines commitment to dialogue for Panikkar is growth, and the growth can happen in dialogue with the other. If the self has not been transcended in this engagement, the dialogue has failed. Panikkar's dialogue is properly called "dialogical dialogue,"[263] In this model the other is not a problem to be solved nor is the other a minefield who has to be cautiously stepped through with the use of interreligious conversations dispensed only to maintain an uneasy peace. In Panikkar's idea of dialogue, the so-called other is absolutely necessary for the transcendence of the so-called self. Moreover, the alleged other is necessary because of its very otherness, not because of some propositional truth or phenomenon it can yield up. On this last point Panikkar contrasts dialogue with dialectics: "Dialogue seeks truth by trusting the other, just as dialectics pursues truth by trusting the order of things, the value of reason and weighty arguments. . . . Dialectics believes it can approach truth by the objective consistency of ideas. Dialogue believes it can advance along the way to truth by relying on the subjective consistency of the dialogical partners."[264] People and their relationships are considered important in dialogue rather than the theory on which one wants to aim.

Panikkar writes about those traditions that privilege on the basis of "chosen people" of God, which is a rather demeaning to oneself because the underlying pretext is that we have the responsibility to save the world. In his words, "…the whole idea of belonging to a chosen people, of practicing the true religion, of being a privileged creature, struck me not as a grace but a disgrace... I thought it would ill become me to discriminate in such a fashion and I thought it would ill become God to do so. ... I contend only that this idea contravenes the

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[263] See *TID,* 23-40.
[264] Denny, 414. See also *TID,* 65-69.

freedom and joy I would look for in a belief that enables the human being to grow to full stature."[265] This might be Panikkar's strongest criticism against tendencies that give privilege to the chosen status and consider all others as objects to be converted.

The notion of the indispensability of the other invokes the practice of tolerance. By tolerance Panikkar is not referring to political, theological, philosophical, or pragmatic tolerance but, rather, a mystical tolerance constituted by an experience that transcends theory. Panikkar writes:

> You redeem, you raise up what you tolerate; you transform it, and this transformation purifies the active agent as well as the passive agent of the tolerance. Tolerance here is experienced as the sublimation of a state of affairs by the power of tolerance itself…. This notion of tolerance implies that all reality is redeemable because it is never immutable. . . . Tolerance, then, is the way one being exists in another and expresses the radical interdependence of all that exists.[266]

Tolerance is about knowing and accepting the fact that the other is in one's self and this is terrifying and implies interdependence. Interestingly, Panikkar writes, "Man should tolerate not only the tares but also the wheat. I would say quite simply: Man has to tolerate the world. Beginning with himself, the Christian must tolerate the world."[267] The inclusive attitude one could have in this matter of tolerance might be summed up in saying, "I know the truth and the others do not, but I will still tolerate them anyway." This attitude is not what Panikkar is proposing here. The practice of tolerance begins with oneself. The self is not separate as in the inclusive attitude. If the aim was the identity of sameness in the process of the encounter tolerance would not have emerged but while attempting to maintain a difference the practice of tolerance becomes integral to the dialogical dialogue.

This hermeneutic supersedes all ideological belonging to the order of *logos.* If an ideology perfects itself, it must become intolerant as a matter of principle. Panikkar notes:

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[265] *TID,* 45.
[266] *MFH,* 23.
[267] Ibid., 24.

"You can tolerate only what you believe you can tolerate, but outside or beyond these limits, no tolerance is possible."[268] In order to remedy this situation *praxis* must take precedence over theory, a reversal of the priorities of an ideology. What is distinct to the dialogical dialogue of Panikkar is the recognition of interdependence. He says, "No religion, system, or tradition is totally self-sufficient. We need each other and yet find our ideas and attitudes mutually incompatible and ourselves often incapable of bridging the gulf between different worldviews and different basic human attitudes to reality."[269]

What Then Shall We Say?

In order to defend one's own religious identity of sameness and difference one has to know better one's own tradition. This is also one of the findings from the ethnographic study. That in the encounter with the other people are rather obliged to know one's own tradition, even if they have ignored or taken it for granted. Scott Eastham in the preface for the book *The Cosmotheandric Experience* writes,

> There can be no branching out unless the roots grip down ever more deeply. The case of Raimon Panikkar illustrates that genuine multicultural, multireligious experience is only possible if you are capable of deepening your understanding of your own "stand" or tradition, while at the same time reaching out to "stand under" another horizon, another tradition of understanding. Indeed, the two movements are complementary. Only "other" can show you what you take for granted about your "own" culture, and only by getting to the roots – that is, the religious core, the very soul – of your tradition will you ever be able to meet and embrace the others on their own grounds and for themselves.[270]

Although Nepalis were not able to explain all the religious practices from the viewpoint of the western rational mind, they do show whole-hearted commitment to the divine by observing rituals and religious practices. In all of this subjective experiences play

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[268] Ibid., 27.
[269] *TID*, 29
[270] *TCE*, vi-vii.

an important role. One of the interesting things discovered from the interviews is that some of them had this realization that their minds were broadened while encountering the other, which is due to the openness one has to learn from the other. A complete closed system would not have even dared to venture into the strange other.

Analogous to the theory of dialogical self, Panikkar says while talking about the religious of the present day, "The more we come to know the religions of the world, the more we are sensitive to the religiousness of our neighbor, all the more do we begin to surmise that in every one of us the other is somehow implied, and vice versa, that the other is not so independent from us and is somehow touched by our own beliefs."[271] Sometimes this could be taken to partially apply to Christians, but for Panikkar it could be anybody belonging to any religious tradition and that neighbor could be of any other tradition even though a lot of blame for western modernity is placed on the Christian West.

Therefore, it is possible to accept the notion that religion is not a static entity, but that it changes in response to its encounter with other religions in ways that cannot be predicted in advance.[272] In fact, there is no reified concept of religion that serves as a central point upon which to balance the religiously pluralist world because one's own religion changes in response to others' religions.[273] This is one of the questions that should be asked to inclusivists and exclusivists alike, or to those who hold views that advocate the non-changing character of religion. This entirely obliterates the idea of one religion being better than another if the other religion continually impinges upon one's own religion and changes it.[274]

Being certain about one's own views and clear all the time is not a universal desire. In this regard, Panikkar says,

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[271] *TID,* 9.
[272] Denny, 414.
[273] Ibid.
[274] Ibid.

> The fact that we cannot state with apodictic certainty what is eastern and what western in a text of wisdom helps us to overcome the near-pathological obsession with certainty (inherited from Descartes) that modern humans are subject to. Is it not true that a large part of present-day society's anxiety and stress has its roots in the desperate search for certainty? And what is this based on? Thus the dialectical dilemma reappears: either certainty (rationality) or uncertainty (irrationality) – whereas it is precisely wisdom that invites us to experience contingency and overcome the dilemma through the *advaita* intuition of the Trinity.[275]

While the obsession for certainty leaves many people with anxiety, stress depression and many other psychological problems, but for those who have developed a dialogical self give enough space for ambiguity that gives joy and satisfaction.

There are obvious differences but the reality is that we can bridge the gap by finding some of the essential bridges within. Those bridges might not lie on the practices of respective religions but the underlying rationale or an expected outcome of those practices. One might do one thing and another that is seemingly the opposite and yet both practices are being done for the same reason. For example, most of the Nepali people do not have a habit of saying "thanks" verbally for the service rendered to them because for them words alone do not matter and they usually repay back with whatever service they can provide. Finally, verbally saying, "thanks" or repaying back has effect on the dialogical self which is self-satisfaction.

The analytical account presented above regarding the dialogical hermeneutic has its roots both in the dialogical self theory and in the 'dialogical dialogue' based primarily on the *cosmotheandric* vision of Raimon Panikkar. The distinct feature of this method is maintaining differences while in proactive engagement though dialogue with the other but without collapsing the other. It has been one of the findings from the ethnographic study among Nepalis in Toronto rather than an armchair theologian's observation or of wishful

[275] Panikkar, "Rising Sun and Setting Sun," 10.

thinking. Therefore, this becomes a serious matter related to the intercultural hermeneutics in which the following has to occur: The dichotomy of the East/West, Them/Us, North/South categories are put in tension. It is important to maintain these differences because we are the part of the historical development. However, due to religious diversity we need to transcend these while not seeking a synthesis as in the dialectics. While we are captivated and obsessed by the theory of objectivity, Panikkar in fact was raising the subjective, personal, religious experience to a new level of methodological importance for religious understanding. The real dilemmas of religious pluralism arise when we can no longer keep the compartments watertight.[276] It is no longer possible for people to live within mutually exclusive belief systems. Panikkar says the dialogue is not a symposium or a conference with somebody's agenda but is instead rather gradual. "The interreligious encounter does not occur in the abstract... It occurs in the day-to-day encounters each of us has with competing or conflicting worldviews. The human person is the nexus, the arena, the living crucible of the encounter between cultures, religious, and often painfully non-negotiable values."[277]

I am not propagating a multiculturalism, which assumes only differences. If it is about the difference at all, it has to be further taken to mean that those differences could be combined with commonalities through a dialogue not aiming to establish an objective truth not in terms of whose opinion was right and the other, wrong but for mutual learning and growing. To make this viable, it requires a dialogical self that is flexible enough to shift positions accordingly. The theory of dialogical self elucidates that the self alone cannot exist without recognizing the existence of the other.

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[276] *TCE,* vii.
[277] Ibid.

To know that we are different is redemptive in itself and it is a process of growth, which brings into being a radically new world of meaning. Panikkar says, "Such a growth means continuity and development, but also means transformation and revolution. Growth does not exclude mutation; on the contrary, there are moments even in the biological realm when only a real mutation can account for further life."[278] If the aspiration to grow together takes place then the mutation is inevitable and will take place within all religious traditions that encounter one another. In the end this will lead to cross-fertilization and mutual fecundation.

[278] *TID,* 100.

CONCLUSION

Having studied and employed the theory of dialogical self, and in light of my own religious journey combined with Panikkar's concept of *cosmotheandrism,* I have come to understand that a theological mindset can evolve. Theology is about human understanding of the divine, its relation to the world and human beings, so it is experiential and subjective. The fascinating aspect of *cosmotheandrism* is its flexibility and evolving nature. Therefore, theology for me is a process not a finished product. This evolving nature of theology however does not mean that we cannot have a particular viewpoint as theologians but it means that our stance could be changing. Therefore, I am still in search of a theology that can help me understand reality comprehensively. In the process of doing theology, I consider that a dialogical attitude is essential. My own theological orientation has taken various shifts, heavily depending on my own encounters with the "other." As I describe my own experience of having been a staunch Hindu, then an evangelical Christian, and now an Episcopalian, I do not imply that I have completely left any of these identities behind. All of these elements are present in my way of thinking and practice and I do not neatly fit into present denominational categories within Christianity.

The journey began from my own personal interest, and indeed struggle, caused by the "religious other" not primarily outside myself but within. It further took an accelerating pace after having acknowledged that religion has become important in the 21st century in all fields of knowledge and research, even in policy making. All of this is credited to globalization that added fuel to diversity and its entailments. Upon discovering that the neglected aspect in all of the discussion is what happens to the individual person and communities in the encounter

in a multicultural context, I wanted to explore further this new phenomenon by way of adequately addressing the experiential and subjective elements of religious diversity. In the process of doing this, I found it appropriate to employ the theory of dialogical self as a framework to study the experiences of 20 Nepali Immigrants in Toronto and combined with the theology of Raimon Panikkar resulted in a dialogical hermeneutic which takes into account the other as indispensible in meaning making. I will not do justice to the theory of the dialogical self or Panikkar's notion of dialogical dialogue, if I attempt to conclude this with a particular imperative. However, there are some implications for understanding myself as a religious person.

One of the struggles for religious converts like me and also for those who struggle in the encounter with the 'religious other' is about deciding the boundaries. Interestingly, these boundaries as we have discovered are fluid and therefore, undefinable because they do not remain static as we wish them to be. In other words, they change constantly and hence, it is difficult to set the boundaries according to the demands of a society that functions by the myth of dichotomy. Moreover, it is a petrifying experience for those converts to realize that their later religious faith is not better than the previously held religious tradition. Hence, it would be meaningless to linger on the discussion that focuses on which religious tradition is better. Usually this is based on some overarching superstructure, which leads to convergence that I have argued against through out the thesis. Relationship matters the most, hence the subject of the dialogue is given preference over the objective argumentation. As I have pointed out, my own experience with relating to Muslims has changed my perspective. As in the distinction made by Panikkar between dialogue and dialectic, we have noted that the dialogue gives priority to the person in the dialogue.

My attempt though was not focused on objective truth claims of Christianity or Hindu tradition but I gave preference to the hermeneutical element because I believe that before we are rooted in our own tradition, be it Christian or a Hindu, we cannot even engage in a dialogue that will lead to interacting with the doctrines. In the process of dialogue with other religious traditions, we might realize that the other tradition can be revelatory to one's own religious views or theology. This thought leads to the possibility that one's own tradition may be strengthened or illuminated through this encounter. Therefore, the implication is that if any religious tradition wants to maintain the difference and have a distinct religious identity, it still needs the other.

For example, throughout chapter two I observed that for the Nepalis I interviewed the scriptural text is secondary to observances and rituals or a neglected aspect of the religious. However, some of them realized that after meeting with people of traditions that give importance to text they are now inspired to learn about their own text and the richness within that practice. Likewise, Hindu neighbors and their traditions could be instruments of revelatory experience to rest of the traditions. For example, we have seen that Hindus are much more dialogical; open to the other, committed to the divine, their integrated understanding of the reality could be revelatory for other traditions. Finding joy in engaging in the dialogue will not only benefit each other's tradition but also God's fullest manifestation could be sensed across traditions. It does not in anyway lead to the eclectic mix of various religions. It is the complementarity of the various traditions that makes up the whole of reality. Therefore, double identity and multiple religious belonging could be possible even while one of the traditions might have dominance over the other based on the fact that certain aspects of self remain static.

Now applying all of this to my own personal life, does this mean I now abandon Christianity and go back to Hinduism as a solution, because I did not find anything better in the later faith than my previous one? Not at all. This would contradict dialogicality because it is again falling into the temptation to embrace the dichotomy of 'either or'. The best suggestion would be to hold the two in tension. Both of these traditions have equally influenced me and I find both are complementary despite the differences.

The *cosmotheandric* vision of Panikkar is the glue that brings into relation different aspects of reality leading to healthy relations across religious traditions. It not only sees that these dimension are intrinsically related but also distinct and separate. This is integral to understanding the interreligious encounter. Leaving space for subjectivity and experience in life is seminal to Nepalis' experience. The data presented also reveals that a change is inevitable whether or not people realize it and that change could be credited to the encounter in which one's own tradition is unfolded and deepened by the revelatory presence of the other.

As I have stated numerous times my attempt is not to establish or produce a new theory or theology but to put fuel to existing discussions on religious pluralism and the theology of religions, especially Hindu-Christian relations. However, the method derived could be made applicable to other religious traditions. Therefore, what I finally suggest is that Panikkar's way of theologizing, which is basically philosophical, complimented by his own life experiences, does adequately address the present situation of diversity and provides a method that is equally faithful to the self and to the other. However, this cannot be a normative theological principle or a law that could be universally applicable but rather a method in which the window that Panikkar uses is just one among many and hence equally vulnerable to criticism. I believe however, this model is the best of all in dealing with

interreligious situations, particularly of the Hindu-Christian relations. Moreover, it is helpful in the discussion of multiculturalism because it attempts to take seriously the experience of individuals and communities whether they are immigrants or the majority population.

Dialogue becomes necessary and inevitable among people in the encounter but when we consider that acknowledging a 'myth' is the precondition to dialogue, the myths that we hold become much more clear in the process of dialogue. The subject in the dialogue becomes the central point and the dialogue is not aimed at establishing whose worldview is right or wrong but is aimed toward creating a relationship that is mutually enriching.

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The Religion and Diversity Project website http://www.religionanddiversity.ca/en/opportunities/conferences/ lists

Appendix 1
Interview Questionnaire in English

1. Please try to recall what was going on in your mind when you started preparing yourself to come to Canada. How did you expect Canada to be?

2. Thinking back to Nepal, What did you hear from other people about Canada and how did you come to view religious and other values in Canada?

3. Thinking back to your expectations regarding religious and other values in Canada, what turned out to be accurate and what did not?

4. Have any of your friends or colleagues seen any changes in your views or life style since you came to Canada?

5. Since coming to Canada, have you changed as a religious person? I am thinking both about your religious beliefs and your religious practices.

6. When you meet people of other religions in Canada how do you respond to them and how to they react to you?

7. Do you detect any dominant religion in Canada?

8. Are there any core-values common to all world religions?

9. Has meeting other Canadians changed your perspective on your beliefs/religiosity?

10. Have your religious beliefs influenced your lifestyle, since you have been in Canada?

11. Do you ever find yourself to be pulled in more than one direction when it comes to the observance of religious beliefs and practices?

12. Are there any challenges in terms of practicing Hinduism in Toronto?

Appendix 2
Interview Questionnaire in Nepali

अन्तरवार्ताका प्रश्नहरू

१. क्यानाडा आउने तयारीमा तपाईंको मनमा के सोचिरहनु भएको थियो सम्झन सक्नुहुन्छ। क्यानाडा कास्तो हुन्छ होला जस्तो लागेको थियो ?

२. त्यति बेला, तपाईंले क्यानाडाको बारेमा अरूबाट के सुन्नुभएको थियो र क्यानाडामा क्स्तो धार्मिक मुल्य र अन्य मान्यताको बारेमा तपाईंले के सोच्नुभएको थियो ?

३. पछि फर्केर हेर्दा तपाईंले अपेक्षा गरेका के के कुराहरू मिल्दा जुल्दा भए भने केके कुरा मिलेनन।

४. तपाईंका साथिहरू वा आफन्त अथवा तपाईंका सहकर्मिहरूले तपाईंका विचरमा र जीवन शैली मा नेपालमा रहँदा को भन्दा फरक भेट्टाएकाछन् ?

५. क्यानाडा आइसकेपछि धार्मिम व्यक्तिको रूपमा के कस्ता परिवर्तहरूको महसूस गर्नुभएको छ ? तपाईंका धार्मिक विचारहरू र तपाईंका धार्मिक अव्यासहरू।

६. जब तपाईंले तपाईंले मानि आएका धर्मका भन्दा अन्य धर्म मान्ने मान्छेहरूलाई भेट्दा तिनीहरूले कस्तो प्रतिकृया जनाए अनि तपाईं प्रतिक्रया कस्तो रह्यो।

७. के तपाईंले क्यानाडामा कुन धर्म बढी देख्नुहुन्छ ?

८. तपाईंको विचारमा विश्वका सबै धर्ममा पाइने साझा मुख्य–आदर्श अथवा मुल्य के के होलान ?

९. तपाईंले अरू क्यानेडियनलाई भेटेपछि के तपाईंको धार्मिक आस्तामा परिवर्तन आएको छ ?

१०. तपाईं क्यानाडा आएपछि तपाईको धार्मिक आस्ताको कारण के तपाईंको जीवनशैलिमा परिवर्त आएको छ ?

११. धार्मिक कार्यहरू गर्दा के तपाईंको आत्मा आफुमा द्वन्द भएर दुइ तिर खिचिएको अनुभव गर्नुहुन्छ ?

१२. टोरोन्टोमा हिन्दु धर्म मान्दा केहि चुनौति सामना गर्नु परेको छ ?

Appendix 3
A Letter of Information in English

Project on Religious Attitudes

LETTER OF INFORMATION

I am interested in your views on how people who migrate from Nepal to Canada experience religious diversity. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in the interview in person. The interviews will be done in Nepali.

The interview will take between one to two hours. Participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any question, or withdraw from the study at any time. All information provided by you will remain confidential. You will not be identified by name in any reports of this study. Your interview data will be stored in a locked cabinet to ensure safety and it will remain for a maximum period of 5 years from the time the study is completed and after which it will be destroyed as per the regulations of the University.

There are no risks involved in participating in this study and I also want to ensure that it does not cost you anything. Likewise, you will not get any monetary compensation for the time spent in participation but I assure you that your participation and performance is indispensible to the research.

Your participation in this study does not require you in any way to participate in any future research at Huron University College or at The University of Western Ontario.

Appendix 4
A Letter of Information in Nepali

धार्मिक मनोवृत्तिहरू

जानकारी पत्र

नेपालबाट क्यानाडा बसाइसरेका मानिसहरूले धार्मिक बिविधताको आनुभव कसरि गर्छन् भन्ने बिषयको यो अध्ययनमा तपाईको सहभागिताको अनुरोध म गर्दछु। यदि तपाईं सहभागि हुने निर्णय गर्नुहुन्छ भने, तपाईंलाई व्यक्तिगतरूपमा अन्तरवार्ता गरिनेछ। अन्तरवार्ता नेपाली भाषामा गरिनेछ र बीचबीचमा स्पष्टिकरणका लागि थप प्रश्नहरू सोध्न सकिने कुरा पनि जानकारी गराईन्छ।

यो अन्तरवार्तको समय एक देखि दुइ घन्टा लाग्न सक्छ। तपाईंको सहभागिता स्वैच्छिक हुन्छ र तपाईंले सहभागिता नहुने निर्णय गर्न सक्नुहुन्छ अथवा तपाईंले चाहेको कुनै पनि बेला यो अन्तरवार्ताबाट पछि हट्न पनि सक्नुहुन्छ। तपाईंले दिनुभएको सबै जानकारी र तथ्याङ्कलाई गोप्य राखिनेछ। यस अनुसन्धानमा तपाईंको परिचय खुलाइनेछैन। सहभागिले उपलब्द गराउनुभएको तथ्याङ्कलाई ताला चाबीकासाथ सुरक्षित राखिनेछ र अनुसन्धनकर्ताले पाँच वर्षसम्म अफ्नो हिफाजतमा राख्नेछु र त्यस पश्चात वेस्टर्न यूनिभरसिटीको नियमानुसार नष्ट गर्नेछ।

यो अध्ययनमा सहभागि हुँदा तपाईंले कुनै जोखिम उठाउनुपर्ने छैन र म यो पनि प्रतिवद्दता जाहेर गर्न चाहान्छु कि सहभागिले कुनै किसमको आर्थिक खर्च ब्यहोर्नु पर्ने छैन। त्यसैगरि, यो पनि जानकारि गराउन चाहन्छु कि सहभागिताका लागि खर्च भएको समय र त्यसबाट उपलब्द गराइएको ज्ञान बापत केही आर्थिक तपाईंलाई मिल्ने छैन। यद्यपि तपाईंको सहभागिताका लागि अनुसन्धानकर्ता सदैव आभारि रहनेछ।

तपाईंले यस अध्ययनमा सहभागि हुनु भएको कारण, ह्यूरोन यूनिभर्सिटी कलेज अथवा वेष्टर्न यूनिभर्सिटीले तपाईंलाई भविष्यमा सहभागिताको माग गर्नेछैन। यदि तपाईं हामीले गर्ने अनुसन्धानमा भाग लिन इच्छुक हुनुहुन्छ भने अथवा यसै अध्ययनको बारे थप जानकारी लिन चाहानुहुन्छ भने कृपया सूर्य आचार्यलाई तलको ठेगानामा सम्पर्क गर्नुहोला। हाम्रो अनुसन्धनमा तपाईंले दिनुभएको बहुमुल्य समय र चासोको लागि धन्यवाद व्यक्त गर्नु चाहन्छु। यो पत्र तपाईंको लागि हो।

Appendix 5
Participant Consent Form in English

Project on Religious Attitudes

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read the letter of information, have had the nature of the study explained to me, and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

_____
Name of Participant (please print)

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

_____
Name of the Researcher Obtaining Consent (please print)

_____ _____
Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent Date

Appendix 6
Participant Consent Form in Nepali

धार्मिक मनोवृत्तिहरू

सहभागि सहमति फारम

मैले जानकारी पत्र पढेको छु र मलाई यो अध्ययनको बारेमा स्पष्टरूपमा व्याख्य गरिएको थियो र त्यसैले म अध्ययनमा सहभागि हुन मञ्जूर छु। सन्तुष्ट हुने गरि सबै प्रश्नहरूको जवाफ मलाई दिइएको छ।

_____
सहभागिको नाम

_____ _____
सहभागिको सहि मिति

_____
अनुसन्धानकर्ताको नाम

_____ _____
अनुसन्धानकर्ताको सहि मिति

Appendix 7
A Debriefing Letter in English

Project on Religious Attitudes

Thank you for participating in this study. Your time and effort are much appreciated. This study investigated the phenomenon of the self and its relation with the culture that is religiously diverse. Had you not agreed to participate in the study, this project would have been impossible to accomplish.

As has been assured in the letter of information that the data provided by you will be secured, to ensure the safety and the information or data will remain with me for a maximum period of 5 years after the study is completed. It will then be destroyed as per the regulations of Huron University College and Western University.

Sincerely,

Surya Prasad Acharya

Appendix 8
A Debriefing Letter in Nepali

धार्मिक मनोवृत्तिहरू

धन्यवाद–ज्ञापन पत्र

यस अध्ययनमा तपाईंको सहभगिताका लागि धन्यवाद। तपाईंले दिनुभएको समय र प्रयासका लागि म आभारि छु। मानिसको मनभित्रको अन्तरकृयाले वर्तमान धार्मिक विविधताका माहोलमा टोरोन्टोमा बसाईसरेका नेपालीहरूको धार्मिक विचारधारा र त्यसमा पर्ने मनेवैज्ञानिक अवधारणको मुल्याङ्कन गर्नु यो अध्ययनको मुख्य उद्धस्य थियो। अध्ययनको क्रममा अन्तरवार्तामा सहभागि हुनुभएर तपाईंले ठूलो भूमिका खेलिदिनु भयो। यदि तपाईं सहभागि हुन नमानिदिनुभएको भए, यो अध्ययनको कुनै महत्त्वनै रहने थिएन।

यो अध्ययनका लागि ह्यूरोन युनिभर्सिटी कलेज को मनोवैज्ञानिक अनुसन्धान साखाको नैतिक कमिटीद्वारा अन्तर्वाताकालागि चाहिने नैतिक जाँच पास गरे पश्चात गरिएको अन्तरवार्त हो भनि यहाँलाई पुन जनाउन चाहन्छु। यूनिभर्सिटीको नियमानुसार, तपाईंले उपलब्द गराउनुभएको जानकारी वा तथ्याङ्कलाई ताला चाबीकासाथ सुरक्षित राखिएको कुरा यहाँलाई विश्वास दिलाउन चाहन्छु।

तपाईंको सेवामा,

सूर्य आचार्य

Appendix 9
Ethics Approval

HURON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE at WESTERN
1349 Western Rd. • London, Ontario Canada N6G 1H3
Tel.: 519.438.7224 • Fax: 519.438.3938 • www.huronuc.ca

March 22, 2012

Surya Acharya
Faculty of Theology
Huron University College

Dear Mr. Acharya:

The Research Ethics Committee is pleased to give you ethical approval for your project entitled:

Towards a Theology of Religious Transformation: A socio-scientific Study of the Nepali Immigrants in Toronto.

We wish you all the best with this research

Mark R. Cole, PhD
Chair
The Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 10
A List of Research Participants

As per the consent, the identity of the participants has been kept confidential
The names listed below are pseudonyms

No	Name	Gender	Occupation	Interview date
1	Jalraj Sharma	M	Civil Engineer	30 Mar 2012
2	Subod Shrestha	M	Chef	30 Mar 2012
3	Laxman Dhungel	M	Office work	31 Mar 2012
4	Shankar Biswa	M	Lawyer	31 Mar 2012
5	Gyani Siwakoti	F	Housewife	6 April 2012
6	Laxmi Niure	F	Nurse	6 April 2012
7	Devi Biunkote	F	Housewife	7 April 2012
8	Toyanath Jogi	M	Businessman	7 April 2012
9	Narayan Sapkota	M	Student	7 April 2012
10	Karuna Sharma	F	Social Worker	7 April 2012
11	Upendra Devkota	M	Skilled Worker	7 April 2012
12	Gopal Joshi	M	Lab Technician	8 April 2012
13	Bhumi Raj Kandel	M	Chef	8 April 2012
14	Gaurav Pudasaini	M	Student	8 April 2012
15	Saraswoti Acharya	F	Matron/works with the mentally challenged	14 April 2012
16	Keshav Raj Bhandari	M	Accountant in a Bank	14 April2012
17	Kumari Lamsal	M	Student	14 April2012
18	Chet Prasad Adhikari	M	Works at McDonald	15 April2012
19	Surendra Dhungana	F	Study/Work	15 April2012
20	Sanjog Pyakurel	M	Co-op Student works for Chrysler	15 April2012

Curriculum Vitae

Name:	Surya Prasad Acharya
Post-secondary Education and Degrees:	Gospel For Asia Biblical Seminary Thiruvalla, Kerala, India 1995-1998 B.Th. South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies Bangalore, India. 2004-2006 M. Th.
Related Work Experience	Principal, Believers Church Bible College 2001-2004 Lecturer, Nepal Theological Seminary Kathmandu Institute of Theology 2006-2010 Translation Consultant, GFA Publications 2001-2011 Research Assistant, Huron University College 2010-2012

Publications:

Toward a Contextual Theology for Nepal: A Christian Response to Current Socio-political Issues (Thesis, M.Th.)