

Grip of The Dysfunctional Narrative as Seen in
South Indian Pentecostalism

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Preface

The thesis you're about to read is based on a story. A personal story that communicates the lived experiences of what South Indian Pentecostalism entails in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries set in Karnataka, South India. In this Preface, I explain why I have chosen, against convention, to adopt story-telling and the literary as touch-stone and framework for an MA thesis on religious, philosophical and sociological dimensions of religious and political conflict.

The thesis is divided into two parts. Part one consists of the story and part two is a section dedicated to commentaries on the story. This section is further divided into three chapters or three different lenses from which the story is analyzed. Here I briefly mention the methodology in approaching each one these parts in its particularities.

Part one: **The Story** entitled *Nudge...Snap* is a personal piece of fiction loosely based on my experiences of South Indian Pentecostalism. In drawing inspiration from real-life scenarios, I use the story to lay the foundation to the thesis to show first-hand the devastating psycho-religious effects of fundamental religion.

Part two: **Chapter one** deals with the Partition of India and the bitter Hindu-Islam relationship in India to situate religious trauma within its context. Here I try to identify the politics of the Partition as problems of self-revelation and redemption as playing out in fundamental religion. In doing so, I identify my story along with stories/narrations set in Post-Partition India, of other authors like Urvashi Butalia, Sadat Hasan Manto and Shashi Tharoor, to present my story in an incommensurate relationship with the religious trauma ensued. In this transnational context, I seek to uncover or produce alternative modernities, narratives and ways

of articulating cultural and religious claims that fall outside the national spheres of institutionalized political and religious discourses of solely Hindu and/or Islamic narratives.

Chapter two deals with the lived experience of a staunch Pentecostal in Southern India. Taking the shape of a religious and philosophical discourse, I delve into the mind and life of the character as she grapples with questions of what it means to be biblically holy while dealing with internal (personal) and external (societal) conflicts thwarting the character from the “narrow path to heaven.” Here I bring in the interpretative methodologies used by William James, Rudolph Otto and Evelyn Underhill and apply it as literary criticism to uncover the mystic and the psycho-religious within my story. This I do in order to unravel what the normative political and religious discourses implicitly include and exclude.

I culminate in **chapter three**, with the mutually interactive relationship between theology and the literary form. In using the literary form to envision and inscribe complex identity formations of the main character of the story in light of the events marked by suffering, pain and the maximalist nature of the religious, I deal with the specific subjectivities of theology and literary form to render them as contingent and fluid, rather than static. I use Stanley Hauerwas and his conception of Narrative Theology to dig deep into the particularities of what makes Pentecostal religion fundamental of moral development, imitation, conversion, intentions and perfection that thereby go on to have a deep influencing on the identity of the character in question. This thereby allows the possibility of making intelligible the ineffable narrative of theology and encourages us towards a deeper understanding of the interconnectivity of these two forms.

In this interdisciplinarity of religion, literature and politics, I aim to undertake two mutually invested projects. One is of reading the story for the way in which it represents and renders intelligible the philosophies, politics and practices of religion and its ensuing conflicts from shifting cultural perspectives. Two is of considering how stories, testimonies and literary theories contribute to such philosophies, politics and practices.

Significantly, I believe that this thesis has profound implications for the realm of the political as is located within the flows and jumps of religion.

Introduction

Growing up, I have come to witness and experience religion as a narrative. A narrative in which many people scramble to one name, one power and one embodiment above themselves relinquishing their will, their freedom and their lives unto this greater force. I have also come to see that the lesser they are able to comprehend this force, the more they are willing to surrender themselves to this power to the point that they as themselves vanish while making room for a new identity carved out of this narrative. To call this power/force as God, religion or man (pastor) is up to the reader; but for me, here, this divergent, multi-voiced and fragmented force forms the basis of the South Indian Pentecostal institution, set in the state of Karnataka, that I intend on exploring in this thesis.

In this thesis, I also seek to show the necessity of a narrative for constructing the self. The narrative form chosen here is a story of a woman enamored by religion (South Indian Pentecostalism) and her journey of pleasing God and ensuring her place in heaven. The narrative becomes one of showing the power of religion in one's life — how one story has the power to change, re-write and determine another story [of man himself]. If we look at her story from the point of view of the Kantian ethic of implying that man's story is that she has no story, we can understand the easy absorption of her life into the bigger moral narrative of South Indian Pentecostalism. This moral narrative involves the task of describing the world not merely as it is but also how it ought to be seen and intended.

Hence the kind of character that is described and analyzed here is one that is constantly transforming the self to conform to God's way, enabling a means that allows for a constant conversation with God in a truthful manner. By truthful, here, I mean lacking self-deception.

The narrative of the Christian gospel chosen here is one that trains her to accept the limits of her own abilities to be truthful, to combat the tendency of self-deception that marks her life, thereby making this Christian narrative a story that is continually discomforting. In constituting herself by the practices of the risen Lord, we are introduced to a reasoning that lies behind the character's choices and actions in narrative terms of: faith, sanctification and justification. These terms in turn become descriptions of her journey by which she makes the story of Christ her own. It is hard and painful, and it is this struggle of herself with the over-arching, over-bearing narrative — that she has given reins to control her life — that is explicated here.

For the purposes of this thesis, what I mean by South Indian Pentecostalism is the Pentecostal institution specific to the Pentecostal Movement in Karnataka as of the twentieth century. I use Michael Bergunder's definition of the same: "a vast and vague international network consisting of historical connections going back in time to the beginning of Pentecostalism, and on-going communicative links [among] different churches, organizations and individuals who share theological styles and oral traditions and thus maintain some sort of common Pentecostal identity." South Indian Pentecostalism is thus a constructed category that refers both to a diachronous and a synchronous network that have to be applied within a global context as Pentecostalism is a global movement. What is also to be considered is that within these historical connections, there has been social, cultural and regional splits that identifies itself within the broad category of "Pentecostal" while being particularly customized under Godly direction and providence. Thus, this network of South Indian Pentecostalism is very fluid and is in no way a closed structure.

Drawing on the works of Urvashi Butalia, Evelyn Underhill, Stanley Hauerwas and Rudolph Otto (to name a few), this thesis seeks to show the necessity of narrative for understanding the constitution of the religious self, approaching the dysfunctionality of religion and delving into the process of development of the righteous self, according to the Pentecostal Gospel.

Part One: Story

Nudge...Snap!

Mother

(Yearly Excerpt of Diary Entries)

1983: I am married. I'm married to a man of another religion. I am married. I'm...I'm... Why is religion the first thought on my mind? I knew this about him. This wasn't an arranged marriage, this was a marriage made out of choice, my choice. This was a marriage of love. I mean *is* a marriage of love. I knew this going along. Is this what second thoughts look like? I can't divorce him, I won't divorce him. It's against my religion. No! No more such thoughts. He's a good man. He makes me happy. Yes, he gets angry at times and yells, but who doesn't. He loves me and I am happy. He and I may not celebrate the same festivals, but that doesn't matter. We can be a neutral family. Save that money for our children and their education.

Oh no! Children! Which religion would they follow? What if they choose my husband's religion over mine? Jesus Christ died to save me and my family. What have his "Gods" done? Nothing of this importance, that's for sure. That is why his family scrambles to many names not knowing which "God" can help them, oh the stupid, blind souls!

Anyway, that can be decided once we do have children (Start praying that my future ~~child~~ children accept Christ as their personal savior).

Husband...Husband...feels weird to think of him as *my* husband. He'll be a good husband. He wouldn't force his religion on me or on our future children, I can take solace in that.

Father. He'll one day be a father. What if he loves them more than me? What if he forgets me after I bear his children? Will I hate him and my children then? Is his love the tarp over the religious aspect of our marriage that is bothering me? Why is it bothering me today of all the days? Is it because I got married according to his religious custom and the realization then hitting me on what it actually entails? I remember feeling nauseated throughout the whole ceremony. Maybe I was nervous. No, no, I have always known that I wanted to marry him. I have been ready ever since he proposed two years ago. Maybe it was the abundance of his family and the lack of mine that made me feel sick. Just seeing all of them there together, judging me for being different, for looking nothing like them, their eyes piercing my soul....

Shhh...Shhh...quiet down. Here he comes. He's smiling. Ah! Everything is going to be fine.

1984: Today is my daughter's first birthday. She is my life. I can't believe that only a year ago I was skeptical about having children, of having her. I love her so much. The way she looks at me, I just want to dissolve into those baby-blue-green eyes of hers. I would give my life for her. I look at her and wonder what kind of person she would be next year and the year after that and the year after that. I want her all to myself. Her tiny fingers and toes. Her tiny nose. Her tiny ears. I just want her to stay this precious and small forever. Here comes her father. He loves her so much. That smile of his is unlike anything I have ever seen. He's so calm around her. I love the effect she has on him. He's always in a better mood with her around. I sometimes hear him talk about his day to her like she's his best friend and can understand. She's smart, she always coos, gurgles and laughs at him during these conversations. She's going to be the hit of her party.

1990: She refuses to go to school if her father doesn't drop her off. He has to hug her, kiss her goodbye and only then she goes to school. She doesn't care if I drop her off or hug her, she wants her daddy. His travel schedule now revolves around the schedule of her school. We don't go out anymore, just the two of us, she wants to be around him from the minute he gets back from work to the time she sleeps. And he indulges her. He lets her have her way. *She's five, come on, she's my baby, our baby, lighten up*, he drones whenever I talk about disciplining her. I can't remember the last time that "our daughter" was not mentioned in every conversation we've had. I feel sidelined. I feel like a terrible mother for having these thoughts. Maybe if she let me be her mother I wouldn't have these thoughts. But she outgrew me the minute she came out of me. All she wants is her father. All she wants is to be like him. Her mannerisms resemble his over mine, I feel outnumbered. Her face lights up when he comes home, she smiles at me, a charitable smile.

She's beginning to look more like him, his family, his devil family, over me. We share a skin tone and nothing else. She likes to read over going shopping with me. Likes to discuss school and geography with her father over baking with me. She appreciates me but she indulges him. I feel lonely. I don't know what I did to deserve a daughter like this. She doesn't get me and I, her. I feel like I have failed as a mother and now as a wife. My husband and I are no longer best friends. He has found a new best friend, a better suited friend — his daughter. They share the same tastes and views and their arguments never turn into fights. My arguments with him always blows up in my face leaving me dazed and lost. I never understood the difference between our relationship and the relationship he shares with her. Maybe it's because she is genetically 50 percent him. At this point, more like 85 percent him.

I feel distant. Distant from him, distant from her. Am I distancing myself from her? Her presence overwhelms me, she is always on another tangent and mental framework from mine. Keeping my distance is safe. We argue, we fight, she never seems to understand my point and what is worse, she gets him on her side. I feel lonely. Loneliness comes over me as a very palpable force and wraps me in her arms tight, drawing me away from my world. I try my best to avoid that. I need to find something/someone that wraps me and understands me for who I am. I need a new family. I need a greater purpose than just being an ignored mother.

1994: She agreed to come to church with me. For a ten-year old she is quite intrigued about the place and said she would like to experience it first-hand. I'm taking this as a ray of hope, as something we can do once a week, maybe this can pave the way for the start of a relationship.

She said she enjoyed the music thoroughly. She called it...*edgy* and *contemporary*, I think. She did always like to sing and play the piano, I guess this isn't surprising then. She said she didn't mind going back solely for the music. I am ecstatic. Finally, something that is exclusively ours. We can have something to discuss about besides dinner options. And so, week after week we went. She focused on the tone, tune and harmony while I focused on the words, verses and application. We went to the same event but came out with different perspectives and feelings. I was just happy that this space was ours. I didn't find it in shopping, I found it here, it was more befitting. I feared she would get tired of it, she didn't, I did. Got tired that all she did was focus on the music. She wasn't seeing the bigger picture of the greater, better after life, of becoming closer to God, of ensuring a divine dimension in her life. She was being immature about this. How could she not see that life is more than some songs and books, she needed to learn the importance of the beyond and above before experience taught her that. She wasn't listening to me, instead she went and discussed this with her father, together they joked that I was hung up on the "unknown" and how I should instead learn to love this life. How could I, when nobody got me here.

1999: I'm not around her these days. I find peace and purpose in Christ. As the pastor of my own church I am helping many like me by my prayers and His life that flows through me to heal and deliver my people. The Bible and His words give me the strength and hope I need to endure and remain strong in my personal life. I have left my three-year old son to be looked after by his sister. Even though the age difference between them is substantial, they seem to get along well. She takes such good care of him, it's astounding. As much as I hate to admit it, she seems to have a better hold on being a mother than I have to either of my children. She seems to understand and anticipate his needs and wants and is always overlooking him. I should be proud. Atleast that is what my new friend, from our Sunday service, tells me. Yet, I don't feel proud. She's a sister, not a mother, why is she trying to

take my position. Does she know that I put my dreams of being Dean of a University on hold when I decided to have her?

As the youngest of my family of seven, I have never known what it feels like to be an older sibling, but I was at the receiving end of my all five older siblings' care and none of them loved me the way she overwhelmingly loves her brother. I am the mother here. A son I fought and suffered for so that that void would be finally filled. My daughter would have her father and I, my son. But no! My son prefers my daughter to me too. When he's around me he cries. His baby blue eyes always looks at me questioningly. But when he's around her, he jumps with joy and laughs. He's attached to her more than he is to either me or my husband. It worries me that she will have too much of an influence over him and soon I will be displaced, all over again.

Thank Jesus He's in my life. I have Him in my life, a purpose greater than my own! Compared to His great burden, my problems seem small and petty. Thank heavens for this new lease on my life.

2001: I am jealous of her! There, I said it! Christianity teaches me to be upfront with my feelings and emotions so that I can deal with them in the right manner. So here I am, confessing to God as I write this that I am jealous of her. Yes, I know she is my daughter, but my position as a mother does not help relieve this feeling. Maybe because she has never let me feel like her mother. *We have nothing in common*, she asserted once, *you haven't made an attempt to find an interest in things I like, you always expect me to do things you like. And God knows I've tried. I even came to your Church services, but that wasn't enough, was it?*

Strong, gnawing jealousy to the point that it makes me sick. Sick, not because I'm jealous of my own daughter, but sick that she makes me feel this way. If it wasn't for her being so...so...her, I wouldn't be in this position today. Everybody automatically just loves her, they are drawn to her presence, I mean what is that?! From my own husband to my son to even my Church friends, they all acclaim as to what a "great daughter" I have. She has so many friends. Friends who would do anything for her and who consider her to be their confidant. I don't understand why. I am definitely prettier than her, she looks nothing like me. I'm taller, better dressed, with better hair, yet, I'm the one who's left on the sideline. I know the real her. All this is a gimmick that no one else but me can see through clearly. If she was so great, she would have loved to do things I love and understood how I feel. Instead *don't force it, it only makes us miserable*, she says. Ppft! Just thinking about it angers me so so much. Give me strength dear Jesus to overcome this! You're all I have. Let your grace rest upon me so that I don't lose my temper and shower me with your infinite strength that I may feel jealous of her no more. Wipe it all away! Jesus, Jesus, change her so that this hate in me goes away.

2004: I didn't find peace in my family. I didn't find peace in my past of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, nor in his of Shiva, Ganesh and Vishnu, nor did I find happiness and contentment in my job, my friends or even my family. But now, because of my closer relationship with Christ, I have a better understanding of what can be changed, of what exactly I must do. I need to follow His commands fervently. It might not make sense to my family and the sinful society they're a part of, but I choose to change that, to be happy and I choose to do so by following His commands. I have heard people say that if you don't chase after money, money chases after you. I thought by that same logic I would have my family and happiness chase after me by now. It sickens me to see that they are happy. They don't work as hard as I do and yet they are happy. Maybe they are reaping the fruits of my labor. I don't know how I feel about that! Unfair? Hurt? Envy? I would like for things to change. I am focusing on myself according to the principles of the Bible, so I don't know what more I should be doing. My pastor says that for me to be completely happy, I need to pray for my family to be a part of this divine journey as well. Now I know that would make me blissful and calm. I want all of us to be together, to journey together to eternal peace and joy.

2005: My son and his sister went on trip today, together. Just the two of them. With her being eleven years older than him, she has the resources, the means and the ability to go on a trip leaving her parents behind. I always see them laughing and discussing "stuff", joking about what they watch on television and even pass judgments on "my ways". He looks like me but behaves like her. She has made sure that he likes and does things she likes and does. He reads a lot as well. It's good, I agree, but I fear that these books are corrupting his brain, soiling his soul just as they did her's. Besides, he's a boy, he will do something with all that reading/studying. She doesn't have to read as much. It will be very difficult for her to be a wife. How will she be a good wife if all those books teach her to be independent and un-submissive. She will be a terrible wife, that's for sure. My children don't read the Bible, instead they go around filling their heads with this unnecessary... outside stuff. It's ruining them, making them behave in ways I don't approve of.

He works out though, much like me, thank God for that. He likes to shop and dress up too, but I can see this side of him disappearing as well just like his sister. He gave up meat, like she did years ago, he's beginning to be more like her. I worry that on this trip of theirs she's going to pollute his head even more with her new ideologies and theories. I never did understand her points of view and so I think of her as a master brainwasher, master manipulator, turning my son away from me. Before you know it, he will think that the intellect trumps the body as well. Gah! Her presence is overwhelming. I don't see a way out of this.

Jesus, Jesus, come take me away from this. I want to be with you! Away from her, away from this nasty life.

2008: In three days she leaves. Leaves to do her Ph.D. in Philosophy. Philosophy at Harvard. I don't understand her obsession with gaining more knowledge. I am the pastor of my own church without going to Divinity School. God taught me and continues to teach me His word every week and I in turn go and lead his children thus. No professor can teach me what He teaches me. Jesus is the ultimate teacher and professor for all forms of knowledge. She needs Him in her life, not more education. How can she not see that? She doesn't pay heed to my advice. Does she not realize who I am?! I am the daughter of Christ. The Devil bows to His name through me, souls that belonged to Satan once now belong to Christ because of me, the lame walk and His people become wealthy, all through His power and obedience to His words preached through me. I am His vessel and in disrespecting me, she is disrespecting Him. I have told her this over and over again so that she doesn't end up in hell one day. But does she listen to me?! Of course not! She doesn't care.

And when does she tell me she's leaving to another country? Today. She blurts it out on her way out to meet her friends for one last time. My husband and my son kept it a secret from me. They took her side and decided to keep me in the dark about this. If she hadn't told me, would I have realized that she was gone for good? I highly doubt it. At times she goes for days-on-end visiting, meeting her many many friends. Anyways, a Ph.D., a freaking Ph.D.! Almost all her friends are married and yet at her age she decides to study some more? When will she get married? When will she be a wife? When will she start experiencing what I have as a mother? *Children only ruin your life*, she laughs it off whenever I say that to her. She needs to experience it to know what I have gone through, maybe then she will be apologetic and finally be my daughter. I want her to suffer at the hands of her future husband, kids and in-laws so that she knows what it feels like to be sidelined, to be ignored, just as my mother-in-law did until her death. *You don't have the pure Hindu blood* she would say. I shudder every time I remember those lines.

My daughter walks around like she owns the world, like she is David, her ego needs to be tamed. I would have to wait longer now for this karmic balance. Why is God so cruel? Couldn't He have just made sure that she doesn't get an opportunity to do her Ph.D. and made sure marriage was around the corner? She's ugly, who would marry her? Men look for beauty not smarts, stupid daughter of mine doesn't realize that. What is all this education going to do for her? *So that I don't be like you, mother*. Humph! If only she knew of my hardships and difficulties in being me. It's not easy being me. I struggle, work hard and toil to make sure I am perfect in His eyes. Yes, I have flaws, but at least I am aware of them and not lost in the world of books like my fiendish daughter. And Philosophy? This is her father's doing. Encouraged to read philosophers' works from a young age, what else was going to happen?! It's closing her eyes to the reality around her, crumbling her in the world of dead words and theories. If only she had read the Bible, she would have realized that what is here today will not be there tomorrow. She cannot have it this easy, she cannot have it this happy.

I have cried and cried in my room, in the sanctuary of my Church, in the privacy of my diary. I did not cry when she left, I did not cry after. I expected a feeling...some feeling...anything to wash me, to overwhelm me. Happiness, sadness, relief, joy, anything. But nothing! I felt nothing. I feel nothing. Life continues on its monotonous path. Both of them cried though - the man I had married, whom I haven't seen cry in 23 years, wept for his daughter; and my son, cried for days. She is coming back. They know that right, maybe not. I know she will come back. Neither her Ph.D. nor her university is going to make her happy. She will come back, searching, looking, yearning for something bigger and better; and I, her mother, will have the answer. But right now, she is the devil.

Postscript

2018

Cummings Psychiatric Research Centre

Dr. Cummings (M.D. Psychiatry)

(Names have purposely been omitted to retain the privacy of the patient, her family and friends)

I met her through her husband. He came to me a few weeks ago and I have been intrigued ever since. What I have presented above is an excerpt from her diary, entries dating back ten years that stopped corresponding to the year her daughter left to pursue higher studies. With the lack of a continuous contact with her daughter, the mother/wife in question, no longer seems to understand and recognize her likes, choices and priorities over the last 35 years of her life, namely that of the religious. While she still recognizes the role of the Church in her life, its vehemence in her life is no longer justified to her.

This is a case of dissociative disorder deeply entrenched in the religious. Brought on by the lack of control in her life, she tried giving this dissociative state a syntax, a coherence and a social function in the community, the aura and workings of the religious. This space allowed for her the capacity to withdraw from the everyday and become entirely absorbed by this interior experience.

A follow-up study on the patient has shown that she has had no contact with the daughter for the last ten years. This is not just in terms of the physical. Her husband and son have actively avoided talking about her around the patient.

When the husband was contacted, he revealed that not once has she asked about her daughter's well-being or anything about her. *At this point I doubt she even knows that she has a daughter*, he says.

Having divorced her five years ago, the husband and wife still keep in touch. He also noticed that with the departure of his daughter combined with the divorce, it has brought the old, pre-marriage personality of the patient back. *She reminds me of how she was when she was 20, when we were dating, she reminds me of my daughter. Now it seems like she's in a trance, not knowing why she's doing what she's doing, i.e., the Church work, and why she volunteers at the local Montessori twice a week. She's happy that she does it but she is not able to see that these are spaces for her to connect with herself and her children without actually doing so,* says the now ex-husband. It's like her head is dislodged from her body, both operating at different spaces and times, almost parallel to each other, they can never coincide.

Although the patient is in a state of complete absence of identity, a kind of dangerous nothingness, nothing we know indicates that she built a new identity. Instead, the lack of the pressures brought on by her competition [her daughter] and the social pressures of being in an inter-racial, culturally mixed, religiously diverse marriage, has made her regurgitate back to her old self.

She no longer identifies herself with the friends and the family she had built for herself via the Church. It would then follow that her impending divorce should have been a shocker and further disgruntled her. *I remember she smiled. When I told her that we should get divorced and I would claim full custody over our kids, she smiled. She seemed peaceful, like what I was saying was the antidote to her condition,* said her ex-husband.

The human mind has the ability to completely repress the memory of events which are deeply distressing even if they were frequently repeated, routine, and familiar. In creating a wall within awareness, the integrated sense of the mind, body and self is somehow split as to create a trance-like state, a state of the protective absorbed during the time of the “trauma.” When the agent of the trauma is removed, she returns to her normal state. She can no longer remember the experience (or here, the identity) brought on by the state of the protective absorbed.

The patient's source of trauma was two-pronged: her daughter and her marriage. The relationship, socio-cultural and religious differences brought on by her stations in life as a mother and as a wife being too hard for her to handle caused the elastic band of her cognitive mind to snap. When each of these factors were taken away, part-by-part — first her daughter, then her marriage — she found her way back to herself in stages. First it began with her individuality — her personality, her likes, dislikes, choices, perceptions which was later followed by her social self, i.e., how she identified herself with the world in terms of job, clothes, food and friends.

The patient has even gone back to her old job as an accountant at a small accounting firm. Relying before heavily on “divine abundance,” the concept of toiling and working hard to make one's own bread does not seem alien to her anymore. The manager at her firm calls her diligent, hard-working and responsible. *She's one of my few employees I absolutely trust and see her going a long way, having the capability to even take over, after me, someday.*

Looking at her now, I wonder if I had made a mistake, divorcing her. Then I remember that her normalcy is brought on by us being un-married. The patient is aware that she was married and that it did not work out. But not once has she asked if she had children. She sees her ex-husband now and no children around and assumes that maybe they didn't have kids. But she never confirms this. Her mind is too fragile to handle the reality of this. *Between the two of us, it was she who wanted to have children — a boy and a girl. I find it weird then that she has not mentioned them even once over the last five years after our divorce. Is this her mind creating the wall or the protective shell she's retrieved into that you've talked about earlier?* He asks with anxiety and worry all over his face.

What should be remembered, in this case, is that the patient's disassociation is deeply entrenched in religiosity. This form encourages people to attend to the stream of their own consciousness. It encourages them to identify moments of discontinuity that are natural to the flow of our everyday awareness, and to interpret them as discontinuous. It encourages them to seek for evidence that they might be hearing a voice spoken by another awareness — the divine or the leader. Under the influence of this cultural encouragement i.e., the Church and the Sunday services that create a conducive atmosphere, they shift their attention from reality to the supernatural. They attend to their thoughts, and they learn to pay attention to thoughts they think are "different" and may come from some other being, leading them to be absorbed in their own thoughts. This behavior is called a "trance," I prefer to use the technical psychological word "absorption," and by that word I refer to the capacity to become absorbed in inner sensory stimuli and to lose some awareness of external sensory stimuli.

The patient was so absorbed in the "different" as a means to avoid the discontinuity in her life that there is a de-personalization involved, a process that has dissociated her from her old self that was rooted in her past roles in life of wife, mother and devoted disciple.

A couple of months ago, she was sent to Manila, Philippines by her company for an on-site job of overseeing the Accounts department in their Manila branch. The project commanding more time than was expected resulted in her staying for a total of eleven months. Missing her volunteer work with the Church and her work with the children back home, she decided to do the same at Manila. Having found a place, life went back to its routine of work weekdays and volunteering weekends. She was happy. She even encouraged her new colleagues to help the school and the local Church she was attending and working with.

Towards the close of the eleven months, she started volunteering on Friday evenings as well. *She couldn't get enough of the children, she used to tell me,* narrates one of her colleagues who accompanied her to Manila.

It was then, on the last Friday of her week there, that it finally happened. A new team had arrived at the orphanage. A bigger team from the one she was used to seeing volunteer there regularly. A girl in her early thirties, tall, hair in a loose bun with a red floral dress that came just

above her knee stood out of the group for a reason not apparent to her then. She glances at her but doesn't see her. She was doing the round of goodbyes, when she bumps into the girl. The blue-eyed girl says hi.

Snap!

— *Dr. Cummings*
2018

Part Two: Commentaries

1.

Partition of India

In this chapter, I aim to understand the psycho-religious experience of my protagonist from the lens of the Partition of India. In using the lived-experiences perspective and not the historical perspective of Post-Partition India, I juxtapose the effects and results of religious confusion and its role in religious chaos and trauma both big and small.

In the grand narrative of the Partition of India into India and Pakistan, what has been the focus are the two nations thus created and its dividing factor — religion. But what was forgotten in this chaos was the people. Their lives not just in terms of this physical division but also in terms of the religious fraction that affected them and continues to be the dominant factor affecting their lives in everything they have done ever since. Urvashi Butalia in her book goes on a quest to collect these stories¹. The stories of men, women and children whose lives have revolved around religion (of either Hinduism or Islam) and of those who have actively suppressed this destroying force. The result is both horrifying and daunting as it paints a parallel picture of sadness and remorse to the one that history has painted and politics continues to modify today, redrawing and filling those faded lines with a fresh coat of hate, bitterness and blame².

History establishes Partition as a one-sided argument on either section of the divided country of: evil Muslims warring with good Hindus or evil Hindus warring with good Muslims in the name of justice, peace and retribution. But what Butalia and Manto focus on through their

stories is the escapism that is involved, a sense of home that is found in the opposing side, a new peace found in the *other* that continues to baffle the warring sides³. History commands that a Hindu be a Hindu and fight for his motherland India and a Muslim do the same for his Pakistan. Inter-mingling of faiths, beliefs and homes shakes the established equilibrium and brings along with it the tremors of an earthquake that threatens to destroy peace and the established order.

Although the character of my story does not fit into the obvious post-Partition narrative of abandoning Hinduism for Islam or vice versa, we see her abandoning Christianity for Hinduism and when that does not pan out i.e., when she does not find her peace and home in it, she turns to a fanatical version of Christianity (South Indian Pentecostalism). In the hope that a vehement version of the old will overwhelm her, engulf her in its embrace so tight that all she sees around her are tropes and manifestations of her God and His Kingdom in her life.

Manto and Butalia talk about escapism. A sense of the new as a hope for a different. A hope that things will never go back to the past of turmoil and difficulty. The dust from the chaos that ensued the Partition had not settled for years after the event, leaving people confused and scared. Their world was no longer recognizable to them. What was once considered their safe haven was shaken, they could no longer trust their land and their people. This home became their enemy. The only solution that presented itself before them was that of escape. Escape into the hands of the *other*. They did not recognize this new land, this *other*, but at least she was not tainted by hurt, betrayal and abuse. A tiny glimmer of hope opened up before them, more hope than they could perceive in their land, a hope based on which they were willing to reorganize their entire lives and begin afresh⁴.

The character in my story is also hoping for the same. What sent her running away from her Christian household into the arms of a Hindu man was not love but a desperate need for change, a permanent difference she sought for that when it did not fulfill its purpose she went back to the old order of the familiar of Christianity. But this was spun into a new form that catered to her growing anxieties of pain and loss, disembodiment and lack of identity, a new home that she created within the familiar to finally call her own.

Butalia raises the question of whether the sole basis for the creation of these two countries was religion. Was the pull of religion so strong that men and women were willing to be “martyred?” using it as a vehicle to pull them away from all sorrow and grief both physical and mental⁵. Did the changing of one’s religion equal changing of one’s situation over which one had no control? These questions arise in the explication of the character in focus as well.

While the character in my story did not physically move from one country to another on the basis of religion, her mental state made the journey to the *other* side. She was willing to be a refugee in the *other*, the land of the unknown where she could be rescued and cared for. The *other* here being Hinduism. In Hinduism there was a freedom, freedom in terms of the many Gods and the many lessons and messages it imbibes unlike in Christianity where its whole premise is based on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The pressure and burden of immolation of Christ’s perfection was off. She was open to accepting the new and strange Hindu Gods to find her peace and satisfaction. But instead she was lost in the myriad of Gods and rituals presented before her. She found it to be too chaotic and un-relieving. She went in confused, she came out even more confused and now is scared that she has no home. So, she turns back to the known, to the familiar with a renewed energy. Having already experienced life outside its

comforting shelter, she vows to never turn back. Hence, she now adopts Christianity as her own, to translate its principles based on her own interpretation, with a devoutness and rigidity that is unshakable from here on now. For her, changing her religion equals change in her situation and mental space.

Butalia in her book writes about women she encountered who were happy to be new-Muslims over being original-Hindus i.e., the religion they were born into. In Islam, in Pakistan, they were happy. While history dictates that this is nothing but a consequence of naïve women being brainwashed by the ruffian Muslims or of Stockholm Syndrome, Butalia's encounters with them weaves a very different story. Hindu women for the first time felt like they belonged. While the Partition tore them away from their family, their new family was where they felt like themselves. This could have been a consequence of the new surroundings, environment or just a nice Muslim man, but since the Partition was based on religion, religion came to the forefront as the game changer.

The new change that this Pentecostal Christian⁶ character expected out of the Hindu life did not fulfill her need and thirst for the difference she sought nor was it strong enough to quench her thirst for a new life. Hinduism and Catholicism were weak in front of rigid Pentecostal Christianity⁷. Hinduism failed to capture her soul. It failed to seize her in its commands and directions. In its liberalism, she felt uncared for. She did not get the attention and focus she yearned for which Pentecostalism was able to deliver by focusing on her soul, her-relationship with God and her after-life. In this dynamism with God, she was the central focus.

Pentecostalism, here, reveals a complex level of attraction that its richly embodied, imaginative and even transgressive force had for those (like the character of my story) aspiring to thrive in modernizing societies transformed by globalization⁸. This strain of Christianity is devoid of

hierarchies, structures and denominationalism considered to inhibit the freedom of the Holy Spirit's activity which is rife in Hinduism.

Hence, Pentecostalism allowed for the change she yearned for. In its rigidity of commands and rules she found the purpose and meaning of life so much so that she dedicates the rest of her life propagating its decrees over what society or even common-sense dictates. As after all, "separation is the external sign of the internal change."⁹ She lets herself be dissolved in this strong portion of Pentecostal Christianity such that all traces of her past existence are now erased, calling it the transformation of the Holy Spirit, setting her free and sustaining her. To be seen as either a Hindu (her once adopted religion) or a Catholic now amounted to sin. A sin so grave that she could not live with herself unless she completely transformed and transforms those around her to make her life and environment conducive to this new life thus established.

Religion was considered to be the entire rationale for the division of India into India and Pakistan¹⁰. Butalia, Manto and Tharoor talk about how religion commanded the Partition and continues to shape the life of not only her players then but of her descendants now as well¹¹. Religion shaped India and Pakistan in 1947 that even in 2018, Indians and Pakistanis are not able to see beyond the motifs of Hinduism and Islam to see each other as equals as was witnessed in 2019 Pulwama attacks and the national-religious tensions that followed. Religion has ensured that animosity.

Such is the power of religion in my character's life as well, such that, anybody who subscribes to a life outside the Pentecostal order is automatically labelled as "Satan" — the enemy that houses the power to destroy the holy with the weapon of its existence of wickedness (secularity)¹². By merely existing, this enemy of the other religion threatens to destroy what the

holy of Pentecostalism has struggled and worked hard to establish — the essence of the cross of a new order.

Religion then becomes the method of survival. In Hinduism and Catholicism she was forgotten, but in Pentecostalism she is seen. Her actions and inactions affect not only her life but the lives of the members of the body of Christ i.e., people around her. Jesus Christ then goes from exalted status of God to close best friend whose presence in her life is determined by her actions. She is not just seen and heard, but here she is valued¹³. She as a person matters. She is no longer lost in the confusion wrought in her head and in her surroundings of a Hindu/Catholic environment, instead she is now chosen. Chosen to be His vessel, chosen to do His work, chosen to reflect Him in everything she does and she takes this responsibility very seriously. By being its most prominent player, she now moves into the public sphere of being seen, heard and followed (this is expressed in the transition of the character from a demure housewife to the pastor of her own Pentecostal church). In this division all other identities of herself cease to exist. In creating new rules and orders within the ambits of the Bible, she is now not just an ardent follower but also a dynamic leader that is assured a greater place and closer spot to God in heaven.

In Pentecostal Christianity, the character in focus found her rescue, her angel of mercy, a grace that covered her naked identity-less body with the overwhelming grasp of His commands. Her poverty and hunger were filled by the richness of the holy “manna.” In Him, she found care and concern as her sins were punished and her good acts were rewarded with His grace and blessings. To allow for anything else amounted to a violation of her essence. Hinduism here, in

all its secular glory, is then seen as weak, inadequate and not bold enough to demand justice, hence the strong rejection of Hinduism for Pentecostalism.

Her heart is now directed towards the day of the Lord where she yearns for the Spirit to establish peace, justice and righteousness, breaking down the barriers of different religions to establish one Christian nation. This is done in anticipation and fulfilment of her life's work of preparing for the coming of the Kingdom of God wherein all the people of the world will, "bring into it the glory and honor of the nations" (Revelation 21:26, NIV).

The Partition of India made people taste religion for the first time in their lives. In separation, in escapism and in confusion they understood what it meant to be either Hindu or Muslim. The realization that religion was something more than some rituals, prayers and chants was experienced by their displacement. My character also goes through her version of mental displacement. A similar realization of religion being a tangible entity takes on a whole new meaning of becoming an instrument through which change can be enforced for her personally. Since religion thereby becomes the stepping stone towards this change, the grip on it becomes stronger and tighter trying to squeeze any and all remnants of change, enforcement and purpose as is witnessed not only in the narrative of the protagonist of my story but also within the larger discourse of Post-Partition India. This was witnessed yet again in the 2019 Pulwama Attacks.

Therefore, from this chapter we can infer that the tangible framework of religion can be used to instigate a large or small change/conflict — on societal and/or personal levels. In drawing on the essence of the biggest religious conflict of the Partition of India I deduce that all religions follow the same path and structure of pushing and pulling people within its variegated iterations and movements, directed in turn by the people's choices and their submissive willingness.

Notes:

1. Bhutalia, Urvashi. *The Other Side of Silence*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000, 8-9.
2. Bhutalia, Urvashi. *The Other Side of Silence*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000, 10.
3. Bhutalia, Urvashi. *The Other Side of Silence*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000, 117-119.
4. Bhutalia, Urvashi. *The Other Side of Silence*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000, 118.
5. Bhutalia, Urvashi. *The Other Side of Silence*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000, 35.
6. Here I define Pentecostal specific to the Pentecostal Movement in Karnataka as of the 20th century and use Michael Bergunder's definition of the same: "*a vast and vague international network consisting of historical connections going back in time to the beginning of Pentecostalism, and on-going communicative links between different churches, organizations and individuals who share theological styles and oral tradition and thus maintain some sort of common Pentecostal identity*" (see Bergunder, Michael. *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century (Studies in the History of Christian Missions)*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008, 11-13).
7. Bergunder, Michael. *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century (Studies in the History of Christian Missions)*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008, 216-217.
8. Bergunder, Michael. *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century (Studies in the History of Christian Missions)*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008, 129.

9. Bergunder, Michael. *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century* (*Studies in the History of Christian Missions*). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008, 183.
10. Bhutalia, Urvashi. *The Other Side of Silence*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000, 29.
11. Bhutalia, Urvashi. *The Other Side of Silence*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000, 111.
12. Bergunder, Michael. *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century* (*Studies in the History of Christian Missions*). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008, 181-182.
13. Bergunder, Michael. *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century* (*Studies in the History of Christian Missions*). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008, 133.

2.

Religious Conflict, Religious Experience and Holiness

This chapter shows how the Passion of Christ becomes the protagonist's constant obsession such that it takes over her perceptions, her choices and her whole life. In her change thus, she discovers and finds confidence, love and contentment that only fits together when it translates into a meaningful life within the idea of the Holy.

With a failed marriage, foiled dreams and an overall confused existence, the protagonist of my story continues to constantly be on the look-out for change, for something new, for something different. At this point, the only person she trusts is herself. Her thoughts and ideas form concepts with visions of her way forward. But there is only so much that she can generate and hence her mind is constantly wandering, looking for more. She has experienced religion, she knows what it entails, but she has not experienced God. A God that opens up a world of possibilities, opportunities and emotions that she wants to feel and experience. In the intensity of a religious existence as that entailed in Pentecostal Christianity she has found not only Jesus and heaven but herself in relation to this. This leaves her believing in the translation of her ideas and interpretations as the voice of God, communicating personally with her through the Word and visions to make her see her world in an all new light of the divine and blessed.

With the possibility of new revelations bringing her closer to God and the unknown, she is satisfied in Him and has found her rest in Him. She no longer sees meaning in her earthly existence outside of herself that constitutes her children, job and society at large.

Human thought begins at the I, the Ego, the self-conscious. As Evelyn Underhill points out, the uncertainties begin only when we ask what else is¹. This leads to the "evidence of her senses" which comes as a constant stream of messages and experiences attributed to a higher

power which in the case of mystics is God (A mystic, according to Underhill, is a person who has attained that union with Reality in greater or lesser degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment). God here sits in the unknown, in the what-else-is, in the external world (the world we mortals do not occupy). Hence, when these messages come in, she pounces on them — sorting, accepting, rejecting and combining them — to form a concept which she now believes is cognizant of the unknown universe². For her, as Hume says, “reality consists in impressions and ideas.” This concept of the unknown world she has created is thus nothing but Self projection³. A picture painted of her own sense perception, understanding and channels of communication which would have no meaning for people outside her bubble of dissimilar cognitive functions. It comes back to the I and the Ego creating these impressions which are at best symbolic, acting as dangerous guides to lead her close to the unknown. This gives her the overwhelming feeling of getting closer and closer to the realm of the “what-else.”

Evelyn Underhill and William James mention that religion is a strictly personal affair, of vision rather than argument⁴. Nevertheless, such a living metaphysic outwardly attaches itself to a traditional subjectivism i.e., the Church⁵. By church, here, I mean a community of people who subscribe and live according to the Pentecostal tradition particular to South India (Karnataka) in the twentieth and [twenty-first] centuries⁶. The church plays an important role in the protagonist’s life. From congregation-member to pastor of her own church, her artistic journey leads her to create her own art gallery of sorts to hang the pictures of her visions and personal communications she has had with God, filling it with an audience of a certain aesthetic who hold an appreciation for her interpretations in all its framed glory: binding and ultimate. Just as art

emulates the transcendental world, so does religion as it belongs to this world, partaking more of the nature of reality than any other expression such as love, patriotism or fame (to name a few)⁷.

Pentecostal Christianity steeped in its idealism condemns the materialists, the worldly people⁸, those who fail to appreciate the pictures hanging on these walls with reverential humility and submissiveness. They are then condemned not only in the after-life to the flaming pits of hell but are guaranteed a life of tests, temptations and trials designed to make their life on earth a preview of what is to come after. It is from this idealism, from this guarantee that the protagonist's confidence of mystical experience of direct communication with God through her ideas and visions arise. This confidence enables her to shed the societal mundane roles donned on her of a mother, wife and a working woman in society. She leaves all these roles behind to take-up the only one role which is of the utmost importance to her — being the daughter of God.

Here we see the disturbance of the equilibrium of the self which results in the shifting of the field of consciousness from lower to higher levels, with a consequent removal of the center of interest from the subject to an object now brought into view: the awakening of the transcendental consciousness⁹. This is what “sanctification” entails according to Underhill. What this sanctification also holds within itself is Conversion. A larger world consciousness now pressing in on the individual consciousness breaking in as a sudden great and new revelation, swallowing up the life of the person into a larger whole¹⁰. This experience is one that is sharply marked off from the long, dim struggles of the preceding experiences in her life, opening up her world to a sudden and acute realization of splendor or reality in the world or a never-before perceived divine sorrow and struggle that appeals to the obscure — taking upon herself the “wound of the Divine Love.” What continues to accompany this new light as a constant is the

forgetting of the past life. In this abrupt recognition of reality, “all things are made new,” wherein there is a sense of liberation and victory, a conviction of the nearness of God and a sentiment of love towards God¹¹. At the intersection of these characteristics is where the protagonist’s new life begins. Her center of interest is now shifted and the field of consciousness remade, re-cemented due to a period of mental distress she had suffered as a result of her failed marriage and general unfulfillment in life.

Emotions gets involved, emotions get messy and entangled in the web of finding an outlet as well as a revitalization in the new life which is sustained by the sharp stimulation of the self. This is an act of the will, an act so intense that drawn into the depths of the Divine Love she no longer belongs to herself but to the Object loved i.e., God¹².

The character in my story experiences this surge of emotions and feelings of being obscured while finding herself in the unknown of the Divine and the external. She loves the rush and at the same time she is terrified of the waves that crash and destroy the old making room for the new to come and fulfill her, construct her — begin a life process of intense conversion that renders her inseparable from God. The awakening of the self is to a new and more active planning of being, new and more personal relations with Reality, to a more real work which she must do. In the case of my protagonist, this translates into working for God, spreading His message and being a vessel of His manifestations that take the form of miracles, exorcisms and healings [all of which follows from her being the pastor of her church]¹³.

Whatever form then the mystical adventure may take, it must begin with a change in the attitude of the subject. A change which will set it into the order of Reality and enable it to set up

permanent relations with the Object¹⁴. Underhill calls this relation a spiritual marriage which entails goodness as this marriage is with the Good, the Beautiful and the True. One of the ornaments of this spiritual marriage then becomes repentance, a passionate longing to escape from the suddenly perceived hatefulness of selfhood and to conform to Reality, the perfect which has aspects of Goodness, of Beauty and of Love¹⁵. “This showing,” says Gerlac Petersen of that experience, “is so vehement and so strong that the whole of the interior man, not only of his heart but of his body, is marvelously moved and shaken, and faints within itself, unable to endure it. And by this means, his interior aspect is made clear without any cloud, and conformable to its own measure to Him whom he seeks.¹⁶” This vehemence is so strong that there arises a deep-seated sense of the necessity of a life of discomfort and conflict, going against every known experience of hers that is now seen as false thereby making room for the true. Here on now then, the transcendental consciousness takes the reins. It forces on the unwilling mind a sharp vision of its own ugliness and imperfect life, and the thirst for the Perfect which is closely bound up with the mystic temperament of “No more sin!”

In this sense then, purification is a perpetual process. It is the drastic turning of the self from the unreal to real, an orientation of the mind to the Truth. Its business is the getting-rid of self-love and all those foolish interests in which the surface-consciousness is steeped. According to Meister Eckhart, there are, “four ascending degrees of such spiritual poverty. One, the soul’s contempt for all things that are not God. Two, contempt of herself and her own works. Three, utter self-abandonment and four, self-loss in the incomprehensible Being of God.¹⁷”

We see the protagonist of my story going through each of these four stages. In finding God and her new identity in Him, there is contempt, abandonment and a loss wherein *she* is

erased. As her transcendental consciousness grows stronger, the distracting influence of the outer world is felt more and more. They are perceived as a drain upon her energy which ought to be directed instead to that new, deep and more real life she feels stirring within her, commanding a complete concentration on the business in hand in order to achieve its mighty destiny. Her life therefore is not in a position to have more than one focus and as long as she retains these personal satisfactions, she is not whole-hearted in her surrender to the Absolute.

This sacrifice is not easy. For years she struggled as her deepest instincts warred between the distracting influences and the necessary sacrifice. The focus then becomes the self, there is a remaking of the self in relation to the permanent elements of this new character. As Underhill says, "These elements so far have sub-served the interests of the old self, worked for it in the world of sense. Now they must be adjusted to the needs of the new self and to the transcendent world in which it moves."¹⁸ Here there is a killing of the old self, breaking up of her egotistical attachments and cravings, in order that the higher center, the new woman, may live and breathe. In such a killing lies the secret of a holy life says William James.

That "in order to approach the Absolute, mystics withdraw from everything, even from themselves."¹⁹ This then is undertaken as the rule of her life, pushed by her vivid consciousness of imperfection, her intuition of a more perfect state becomes necessary to her fulfilment of her love for Christ. In this strain of Pentecostal Christianity²⁰, the Passion of Christ becomes proof that the cosmic journey to perfection follows the necessity of the way of the Cross. There is no progress without pain, hence her quest of the Absolute drives her to an eager union with the reality of suffering out of which is produced true joy, as the path of suffering is the imitation of Christ. In conversion, sin engrosses the attention wherein conversion becomes a "process of

struggling away from sin rather than of striving towards righteousness.²¹ “Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity,” is the theological way of putting this act of self-surrender²².

The protagonist of my story becomes a Pentecostal Christian minister with no book-learning save her Bible, she let experience and Jesus Himself be her teacher²³ and thenceforward her life becomes one of excruciating austerity and singlemindedness. Without having any knowledge of the letter of religious doctrine, she now intuitively perceives its sense and spirit, she feels “those hidden things”, she feels them by the inexplicable effects they produce in her. It all happens in her interior mind, more rapid than any thought can produce or perceive them, shaking her soul, revolving and turning it in another direction, towards aims and paths that bring her closer to the Lord.

Happy as she was in this strenuous way, her soul had the permanent imprint left by the iron of melancholy. Her redemption was into another universe than this mere natural world such that life remains, for her, a sad and impatient trial²⁴. According to William James, here there is an earnestness, an earnestness which brings with it the willingness to live with the energy that brings pain. The pain maybe pain to other people or pain to one’s self — it makes little difference. “When this strenuous mood is on, the sweetest delights are trampled upon with a ferocious pleasure the moment they offer themselves as checks wherein higher indignations are elicited.²⁵” At this stage, it costs nothing to drop friendships, renounce privileges and break social ties. Rather, the joy comes from this astringency and desolation. Weakness of character, here, consists in the inaptitude for these sacrificial acts.

In Pentecostalism, in the extreme of melancholy, the self that consciously is can do absolutely nothing, “It is completely bankrupt and without any resource” says William James. Redemption from such subjective conditions is through the grace of Christ such that, “the more literally lost you are, the more literally you are the very being whom Christ’s sacrifice has already saved.²⁶” These gracious and supernatural experiences and influences, considered to be the effects of the Spirit of God creates a new woman, a new creature. And the ultimate test of these religious values is nothing definable in terms of *how it happens*, but something ethical, definable only in terms of *what is attained*²⁷.

As we proceed further into the story, we shall see the protagonist attaining an altogether new level of spiritual vitality of a relatively heroic level in which impossible things have become possible²⁸. New energies and endurances are shown in terms of exorcisms and personal miracles that take the form of healings or fortuitous chance activities that are coincidental but chalked as miracles. She now lives in this religious center of energy actuated by spiritual enthusiasm. This new ardor that burns inside of her consumes her, makes her feel different from her previous carnal self in definite ways. Magnanimities once impossible are now easy, paltry conventionalities and mean incentives once tyrannical hold no sway (like her belief that only fellow-Pentecostals deserve to be helped — monetarily, emotionally, etc., — as they are the children of God as opposed to a homeless man, say, who is not saved and hence does not deserve her help as he is doomed to hell anyway)²⁹. There is a confidence, an indescribable feeling of inner security of God’s presence with her all the time which forms her source of absolute repose and confident calmness in the face of societal wrath when she goes against its conventions.

The nearness of God is a constant reinforcement of His will being done through her and her acts hence being justified, more afraid to offend God than man. “Religious emotion makes us feel that other kingdom to be close at hand, within our reach³⁰.” In order to capture this overwhelming, all-encompassing emotion, Rudolph Otto created a befitting expression of *mysterium tremendum*. According to him, religious emotion is a series of surging and falling emotions that create a powerful reassurance and breaking of self-doubt. A deep pervading tide of the deepest worship that dwindles into the non-religious mood of everyday experience. It oscillates between grisly horror and shuddering of demonic forms (of doubt in God and His ways) and hushed, trembling, speechless humility in the presence of the divine — a *mysterium inexpressible* and above all creatures³¹. This *mysterium tremendum* is seen in the nature of the character in focus. Her Pentecostal noumena attributes it to her human nature, her physical weakness such that only allows for God to prove His strength and resilience through her.

William James says that the transition from self-responsibility and worry to equanimity, receptivity and peace comes from throwing down the burden and abandoning self-responsibility, an act that is specifically religious (reinforced by the Bible: Psalm 55:2) as distinguished from conventional moral practice³². When the craving for moral consistency and purity is developed to this degree, she may well find the outer world too full of shocks to dwell in and can unify her life and keep her soul unspotted only by withdrawing from it. Secular existence then becomes torture, a feeling of violation and discordancy spreading through her as she finds that inner smoothness and cleanliness that comes of a holy mind to be violated. An obsession develops to keep the inner consciousness feeling right again, an assurance that in obeying [His commands] she can commit no fault and a confidence that it is God who is holding her intellect and her

will³³. Here she is certain of following the will of God in whatever she may do out of obedience, but never certain in the same degree of anything which she may do out of her own proper movement³⁴.

This revelation, this truth, that overwhelms people like the character of my story exists only for the individual who is enmeshed in it. Its incommunicableness hides behind its deeply personal sentiment. In this it resembles knowledge brought out of sensations more than conceptual thoughts. This is the peculiarity of divine language. The more infused, intimate, spiritual and supersensible it is, the more personal it is thought to be³⁵. The soul then feels as if it is placed in profound solitude to which no other person has access. In this solitude, in this personal space she has overcome the barrier between individual and the Absolute, she has become one with the Absolute and her strength, her authority, attributed to as spiritual strength, comes from the awareness of this oneness.

According to William James, this “mystical state” that the character experiences, “merely adds a super-sensuous meaning to the ordinary outward data of consciousness.” They are excitements, like love or ambitions, by means of which facts which are already objectively before one, falls into a new expressiveness and makes a new connection with one’s life³⁶. They neither contradict nor deny any of the facts that the senses seem to have seized.

While religion is deeply private and individualistic, going beyond our powers of formulation and understanding at times, I do believe that feeling is the deeper source of religion. Feeling is private and incomprehensible, unable to give an account of itself, giving rise to mysteries and enigmas that shrouds itself in the supernatural and the Absolute. The character of

my story has given full reins to this waywardness, there is no objective standard that can be applied to her religion. She has let her religion manifest itself in emotions and feelings enthusiastically. She hasn't stopped to step back and think *what* these conceptions of God and the divine are by which these emotions are called forth. In this state of her perception it is the Bible verse of John 11:26 "and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (NIV), that speaks to her, appealing to her thereby allowing her feelings and sense perceptions to thrive uninhibited. It amplifies and defines her faith and dignifies it and lends its words plausibility.

In Pentecostalism there is a Manichean struggle of the Sons of Light vs the Sons of Darkness where all must enlist on one side or the other without possibility of neutrality. This is backed by the verse, "Whoever believes in him [Jesus Christ] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18; NIV), giving it an extreme nature. In not accepting Jesus Christ as God and following His ways in every aspect of one's life, man is eternally condemned to the position of enemy of God. A principle strongly followed by the protagonist of the story in her approach to her daughter, family and society. In expressing her hatred and wrath against them, she positions herself to be the vessel of God through whom divine anger flows, an anger that is premised in the Bible, denouncing them as adversaries, outliers and sinners. God is good. God is holy and just. He is the embodiment of the Perfect. He has intelligence and will and every other creature-perfection for we have them. In Him, all things are absolute. The forms which he imprints on us have their prototypes in His ideas. To distinguish the ideas as they are in God and

the way in which our minds externally imitates them, is the objective standard that is needed to see these differing aspects³⁷.

Principal John Caird in his *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* writes thus:

“Feeling is necessary in religion but it is by the content or intelligent basis of a religion, and not by feeling, that its character and worth are to be determined.”

This chapter can be captured by the ethos of William James’ words, “the more literally lost you are, the more literally you are the very being whom Christ’s sacrifice has already saved.” This chapter was to show the process by which the character has landed at that step of loss and saving, revelation and contentment. This through contempt, self-loss and self-abandonment has allowed for the conversion of the soul to God and His Reality.

Notes:

1. Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. United Kingdom: Pantianos Classics, 2001, 9.
2. Bergunder, Michael. *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century (Studies in the History of Christian Missions)*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008, 130.
3. Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. United Kingdom: Pantianos Classics, 2001, 9.
4. Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. United Kingdom: Pantianos Classics, 2001, 10.
5. Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. United Kingdom: Pantianos Classics, 2001, 10.
6. In this paper, South Indian Pentecostalism is a constructed category that is established as both a diachronous and a synchronous network. But these two criteria are not clean-cut

ideas with historical connections and synchronous interrelations. While both these ideas have to be applied within a global context as Pentecostalism is a global movement, what is also to be considered is that within these historical connections, there has been social, cultural and regional splits that identifies itself with the broad category of “Pentecostal” while being particularly customized under Godly direction and providence. Through this synchronous network, theological styles and oral traditions are made or kept compatible with each other. Thus, this synchronous network of South Indian Pentecostalism is very fluid and is in no way a closed structure (see Bergunder, Michael. *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century (Studies in the History of Christian Missions)*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008, 12-13).

7. Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. United Kingdom: Pantianos Classics, 2001, 11-12.
8. “Worldly people” is a term used in South Indian Pentecostalism to denote the non-Pentecostals. This includes not only Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, but also Catholics, Lutherans, Episcopalians, followers of the denomination called Church of South India (CSI) and other Christian denominations. This is a version of such terms used in the Bible of *unbelievers* and *adulterous people* (see James 4:4 and II Corinthians 6:14) and are also referred to as Satan’s children (see Bergunder, Michael. *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century (Studies in the History of Christian Missions)*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008, 182).
9. Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. United Kingdom: Pantianos Classics, 2001, 82.
10. Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. United Kingdom: Pantianos Classics, 2001, 83.
11. Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. United Kingdom: Pantianos Classics, 2001, 83-84.
12. Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. United Kingdom: Pantianos Classics, 2001, 91.

13. Bergunder, Michael. *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century* (*Studies in the History of Christian Missions*). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008, 155-172.
14. Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. United Kingdom: Pantianos Classics, 2001, 93.
15. Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. United Kingdom: Pantianos Classics, 2001, 93.
16. Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. United Kingdom: Pantianos Classics, 2001, 93.
17. Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. United Kingdom: Pantianos Classics, 2001, 97.
18. Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. United Kingdom: Pantianos Classics, 2001, 99-100.
19. Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. United Kingdom: Pantianos Classics, 2001, 102.
20. See Note 6.
21. Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism*. United Kingdom: Pantianos Classics, 2001, 103.
22. James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1961, 175.
23. Bergunder, Michael. *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century* (*Studies in the History of Christian Missions*). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008, 191-202.
24. James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1961, 182.
25. James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1961, 214.
26. James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1961, 200-201.

27. James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1961, 197.
28. James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1961, 198.
29. Bergunder, Michael. *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century (Studies in the History of Christian Missions)*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008, 212-213.
30. James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1961, 229.
31. Otto, Rudolph. *The Idea of the Holy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1950, 12-13.
32. James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1961, 233.
33. James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1961, 238-239.
34. James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1961, 251.
35. James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1961, 320.
36. James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1961, 335.
37. James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1961, 340-345.

3.

Narrative Theology

In this chapter I focus on how my character's story fits into the overarching story of South Indian Pentecostal Christianity of conversion, moral development, intentions and perfection.

Protestant Christianity emphasizes the need for moral development. What is “moral” is not the univocal concept attributed to by philosophers but instead, here, it takes the shape of spiritual growth, growth in holiness, sacrifice of the self for God and the notion of perfection. This formation of the “moral” self is quite different from the contemporary concern for moral development.

Hauerwas gives us three ways by which such a contention can be stated: “(1) The Christian thinks it important to live in recognition that life is a gift rather than live autonomously; (2) Christian ethics involves learning to imitate another before it involves acting on principles; and (3) the Christian moral life is not one of ‘development’ but of conversion¹.”

All these three ways stand true of my protagonist. Life everyday is reminded to be a gift, over taking it for granted, in prayers and meetings. She conducts her life by putting a personal pressure on herself to be the best version as she is now a reflection and vessel of God, which also entails spreading the Word of God and conversion of people. The notion of the best version of herself has been developed in the following manner. In the initial days of her Pentecostal Christian life, the pastor of her church was worthy of imitation as his position was that of God's liaison making him worthy of emulation. Further immersion into her Christendom and the Bible rendered apostle Paul (from the Bible) worthy of emulation. This was further solidified by its very mention in the book of I Corinthians: “And you should imitate me just as I imitate Christ” (I

Corinthians 11:1, NLV). As she delved more deeply into her spiritual life and kept her relationship with Christ active on a daily basis, she transformed herself, steadily but surely, to be the one worthy of imitation as she boldly preaches thus from the pulpit of her church. And how does one transform themselves into this perfect image of Christ? Not through development, but through conversion — conversion here means to become a completely different person².

South Indian Pentecostalism³ does not care for development, it does not want you to start from the foundation of yourself, instead it requires you to destroy that foundation and start afresh⁴. They hold, in general, to a two-stage *ordo salutis* which comprises of adult baptism and conversion, wherein by being immersed in water the old self is obliterated, coming out as a new person with the rock-solid foundation of Christ, ready for the blocks of Biblical principles to start building a new you. The awareness of a sinful life before conversion is at the heart of the individual experience of rebirth (Matthew 9:14-17; Mark 2:18-22; Luke 5: 33-39).

Conversion brings us to holiness and sin. In South Indian Pentecostalism, to be holy is to be separated from the world with a strong undertone of a more radical transformation and continued growth in the Christian life than can be captured by the idea of “development.” The separation from the world that is propagated here includes rejection of every kind of leisure, enjoyment and sensual pleasure. This separation is to ensure that believers⁵ will always be in the lair of the Kingdom of God, never diverted or prevented from serving Him⁶. In conversion, the formation of the self is never complete. Thus, the narrative of the character, within this Pentecostal Christian framework, becomes one of training. Training to regard herself under the category of sin which means she must do more than just change her character, nature and attitude in facing the world. A new reality to which she has been converted is thus established. Hence

here, “conversion is something never merely accomplished but remains also always in front [of her]. Thus, growth in the Christian life is not required only because we are morally deficient, but also because the God who has called us is infinitely rich.”⁷ So, conversion becomes this training wheel wherein the self has to necessarily keep changing, moving closer inch-by-inch to the perfect image of God placing her on a path of growth for which there is no end.

We see this in the protagonists’ life — not just in her personal life but also while dealing with her church, members of society and even her family. By constantly having change, perfection and sin on her mind, her every interaction is heavily underlined by these ideas. She starts seeing them as solutions to problems, as a way to receive favor and grace from God and as the only means of survival. By offering up the alternative to change as hell, eternal condemnation and a life of misery, change and perfection becomes imperative to survive in this world. By neglecting herself and focusing only on Christ and His commands, she has set herself up as the prime candidate for heaven, as life on earth becomes a preparation for the eternal destiny of Heaven. The Protestant condemnation of moral theology does not help. Concern for moral development from the Protestant perspective is seen as a form of works righteousness and in the absence of any way to talk about this, Protestants are left vulnerable to whatever moralities happened to pertain in their immediate environment which entails emulation⁸.

As Hauerwas suggests, “the language of gift encourages dependence.”⁹ In South Indian Pentecostal Christianity, to be a slave means to be a slave to the self and the self’s desires. In contrast, it is the firm Pentecostal Christian belief that to be truly free is to be accepted as disciples, living by imitating the Master. To be perfectly free means to be perfectly obedient. “True freedom is perfect service¹⁰.” Obedience to the extent that you ignore yourself, your needs,

your intuitions and your thoughts to follow God blindly in His commands, be it through the Bible or through the one that is being imitated. What is also interesting to note here in this discipleship is that the principles meant to be followed are not known prior to this emulation. For the Pentecostal Christian, morality is not chosen and then confirmed by the example of others; instead she learns what the moral life entails by imitation. This is intrinsic to her nature as a Christian, for the Pentecostal Christian life entails a transformation of the self that can be accomplished only through directions from a master — be it God Himself or a human liaison of God, like a pastor. What lies at the heart of this contention is that what becomes important here is not the *what* she must do, but *how* she is to do it. And the *how* is learned only by observing and following *en suite*¹¹.

What is also interesting to note here is that the character in focus is the result of a combination of many narratives, she is constituted by many different stories. She is the result of the development of a correlation of narratives that trains the self to be sufficient to negotiate her existence — fighting the deceptions and illusions of herself — while learning to be receptive to the omnipresent voice and direction of God. She is thus now in constant conversation with her God and herself, commanding her to be quiet, while making a way for her to live in appropriation of the character of a Godly existence. By learning to make her life conform to God's way, she is “provided with a self that is a story that enables the conversation to continue in a truthful manner¹².”

The protagonist of my story seeks to imitate the character of Paul (from the Bible). A life of living as a testimony to Christ overwhelms Paul's entire being. His actions, his personality, his work of preaching God's message constitutes him. He now has the authority, the power and the

voice of Heaven in him. To do what he does is nothing short of what God Himself would do. This story captures the character of my story. She sees herself in Paul. She wants his story to be her's: advocating, voicing and commanding the people around her with the "authority" of God. She firmly believes that to live like Paul is her purpose in life and shapes the narrative of her life thus. A large part of this also comes from being one's own moral judge of one's own actions. What we see here is the firm belief that integrity or moral identity is dependent on a single moral principle sufficient to determine every moral situation. The moral self that results here is the product of discrete decisions that have been justified from this moral point of view¹³. So, we see an aura of constant vigilance being built around the character. She therefore not only becomes her own biggest and ruthless critic but she also becomes a critic of the world around her. This gives her the burden to go around correcting the world's wrongs through the authority of the Biblical principles which is perceived to be her divine burden. Hauerwas points out that here ironically, the demand for moral growth requires an account of morality that helps understand that with every new advance comes a new possibility of a higher level of degeneracy. The greater the level of integrity, the more susceptible to self-deception and fault she becomes¹⁴. A fact that is failed to be recognized by the character in my story. This ignorance gives her the perception that she is perfect compared to others around her, not better, perfect. She calls herself perfect in the "eyes of the Lord" as she is constantly on this training wheel of transformation that allows her actions of change to be an act of sacrifice for the Lord, making her worthy of His unconditional sacrifice. Every time she is "perfecting" herself, she is undoing the nails from His cross, she is reciprocating that great love and sacrifice of Christ that He had made just for her.

This now brings us to the morally central issue: intentions, namely that actions not only constitute the right thing but should be done for the right reasons as well¹⁵. Aristotle notes that man is capable of performing just actions without becoming just, “it is possible for a man to be of such a character that he performs each particular act in such a way as to make him a good man—I mean that his acts are due to personal choice and are performed for the sake of acts themselves¹⁶.” This is very evident in my protagonist as her acts of good and perfection are done not because she wants to be a good human being to those around her, transforming herself from selfish to generous, liar to an honest person, stubborn to understanding. Instead, the only reason she is in the process of transforming herself and converting those around her is because she wants to reach Heaven. The miseries and tribulations she faces as a part of her life need to be justified in the form of an end of a better: Heaven. Life as coming to an end after an earthly existence of sorrows and tribulations, interspersed with happiness is something she cannot fathom and comprehend. Her interpretation of the Bible and how she should live give her that security and guarantee that she is on the “right” track. Hence, what matters are not human beings or how she behaves to/with them, but how she is perceived in the eyes of God through the lens of the Bible. She draws her strength from Jesus Himself who was ostracized by society as He was the epitome of perfection. This gives her the courage to go against the social imperative of the moral and design a morality that meets her needs and standards of the excellent and the flawless to make her the ideal candidate for Heaven. By fitting her story within the story of the Scripture i.e., the many accounts of the struggle of God with His creation, she is essentially claiming to create a narrative that can provide the basis for a self, appropriate to the unresolved, that often involves tragic conflicts to this worldly existence. As after all, “What we crave is not dignity as an end in itself, but the participation in a struggle that is dignifying¹⁷.”

In the narrative of the protagonist, there is a conflict between the self and her immediate world. Pentecostal Christian life allows for this as what becomes functional here is man's justice versus God's justice. Man's justice, that is the justice approved by society, provides a support necessary for the formation of man to become 'a self.' Uprooting one from this support system to stand against it and conform to God's justice commands an alternative story and society in which this new 'self' can find a home¹⁸. This home then constitutes the church, prayer groups and communal meetings of like-minded people supporting, encouraging and building their selves together. For such a society to sustain, it becomes the brunt of Christian spirituality to provide exercises and examples through which Christians might better what they already are. To then be a Christian is not that she knows the truth but becomes the truth. This entails being different from other people in regard to worldly tempers, sensual pleasures and the pride of life¹⁹. Different here automatically does not mean good and moral. These are terms but construed by society, making man a slave to these worldly definitions which is a sin in itself. Hence to live in opposition to this story, requires nothing less than an alternative story and society. Here the self can find a home in complete obedience to the One who commands emulation constituting the different of "God's justice ²⁰."

The protagonist of the story now having reached the stage of one who is to be imitated is easily angered and irritated by disobedience. Her hard work of carving the perfect version of herself from the flawed block of stubborn sin then goes unrecognized, this version of herself is hereby not given her due. The constant ratification she gets through this obedience is a vital supplement that keeps her nature alive and well. This claim becomes central to her survival as it corresponds to the truth of her existence. Here, the moral language does not just describe what is, but describes how one ought to see and intend the world. "The truth that is at least partly

captured in the naturalistic fallacy is that moral language must necessarily presuppose a world that is not but should be ²¹.”

My character is thus the result of stories that has allowed manifold activities of both the world and God, constructing a coherence that she has claimed as her own. A coherence between sustained attention to the world and her personal divine intentionality.

Adopting the framework of Narrative Theology, I show how the character is a combination of many narratives. She is constituted by many different stories (of Christ and of Paul) that cements the building blocks of conversion, emulation and role-model to fit one on top of the other. This also thereby puts her on a path of growth to the perfect image of God for which there is no end.

Notes:

1. Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Hauerwas Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 223.
2. Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Hauerwas Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 225-226.
3. See Note 6 of Chapter 2.
4. Bergunder, Michael. *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century (Studies in the History of Christian Missions)*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008, 138-145, 223.
5. Here I use the term ‘believers’ to denote those Pentecostal Christians who hold up to the two-stage *ordo salutis* of conversion and adult baptism along with living a life distinct and in opposition to the world in terms of lifestyle, choices and beliefs.

6. Bergunder, Michael. *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century (Studies in the History of Christian Missions)*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008, 182-183.
7. Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Hauerwas Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 226.
8. Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Hauerwas Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 227.
9. Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Hauerwas Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 224.
10. Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Hauerwas Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 224.
11. Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Hauerwas Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 225-226.
12. Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Hauerwas Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 228.
13. Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Hauerwas Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 231.
14. Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Hauerwas Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 233.
15. Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Hauerwas Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 235.
16. Aristotle. *Ethics*. 1144a17-20.
17. Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Hauerwas Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 249.
18. Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Hauerwas Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 252.
19. Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Hauerwas Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 252.
20. Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Hauerwas Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 252.
21. Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Hauerwas Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001, 168-169.

Conclusion

The affects and impacts of South Indian Pentecostalism is deep-rooted in my life. In drawing from my personal lived experiences of Pentecostal Christianity, I have communicated the subtle and sensitive treatment of this narrative and the experiences it holds from closer drawings of the trauma it perpetuates. I have done this from the standpoints of the confusion and escape within the discourse of the Partition of India, the meaning of moral development and perfection as seen within the religious experience of South Indian Pentecostalism and the imbrication of the many narratives to form a distinctive personal identity.

I have to admit that, in writing this thesis, I struggled with the overlap between the personal and the academic. As this project is deeply personal to me, there were times when I found it hard to drop my biases, my anger and pre-conceived notions outside the doors of each of the commentaries used. But I persevered and through my readings I was able to step back and understand the convictions and the constitution of South Indian Pentecostalism with help from the academics whose works I reference. I am not claiming to have become a renewed person who has a new-found respect for Pentecostalism and all the practices it entails, that I can't wait to go to an All-Gospel Sunday Service and be born again. Definitely not! But I do possess a new recognition and a comprehension that allows me to approach them objectively, to not see them anymore as persons bereft of reason, human decency and compassion. Instead in approaching their beliefs and practices outside of the emotional and spiritual dimensions, I understand them as just that — profoundly religious. I now see them as people of unshakable faith, overwhelmed by the word of God, presented as people who draw their strength from their religious disposition to which all other concerns — that constitutes this worldly life — are distinctly subordinate.

While I cannot, for the purposes of this thesis, write about the thousands of people who have been negatively impacted by Pentecostalism from a distant objective perspective, I use the microscopic method of drawing in on my own personal experiences to dig deep into its nuances and convictions. By focusing in on one such case, I draw out the essence and ethos of what it means to be Pentecostal in twenty-first century India.

I would like to conclude by saying that I hereby also infer that people are attracted to the dysfunctional subconsciously and that religion is essentially a dysfunctional narrative. In luring people to discover and use its deep hidden “secrets” and “truths” with the freedom of personal choices, interpretations and communal balances, people have used Religion as and how they deem fit. This in turn has helped birthed “maximalist religion” (using Bruce Lincoln’s terminology) be it within the Christian, Islam or even Buddhist discourses of religious beliefs as we see across the world.