RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY AMONG SADHUS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF UDASEEN AND NAGA SECTS THROUGH THEIR PRACTICES

Thesis Submitted for the Award of the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Sociology

By

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2022

DECLARATION

I, hereby declared that the presented work in the thesis entitled **"Religion and Spirituality among Sadhus: A Comparative Study of Udaseen and Naga Sects Through Their Practices"** in fulfilment of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D)** is outcome of research work carried out by me under the supervision of **Dr. Sukanya Das**, working as Assistant **Professor, in the Department of Sociology, School of Social Sciences and Humanities** of Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India. In keeping with general practice of reporting scientific observations, due acknowledgements have been made whenever work described here has been based on findings of another investigator. This work has not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work reported in the Ph. D. thesis entitled **"Religion and Spirituality Among Sadhus: A Comparative Study of Udaseen and Naga Sects"** submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the reward of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)** in the Department of Sociology , is a research work carried out by **Rohini Dabgotra, 11720077**, is bonafide record of his/her original work carried out under my supervision and that no part of thesis has been submitted for any other degree, diploma or equivalent course.

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Abstract

As a nation-state, India practices a variety of religions, which further branch out into numerous belief systems that either directly or indirectly supplement the larger religion. These counterparts take the form of cults, sects, and, at some point, denominations. Out of these major sects, this study explores the Udaseen Sect and the Naga Sect, which are two orthodox sects that belong to Vaishnavism and Shaivism. They happen to believe in and practice deviant religious rituals. Sadhus and their spirituality are very influential among the Hindu community. Sadhus are thought to be the highest form of religious regulation for remaining alive on chastity. They are expected to break all ties with family or home and wear clothes and jewellery associated with the sect they belong to. This study also analyses the place of women among these sects of sadhus and identifies the ways in which caste structure influences their religious life.

Religion does not only help us understand social experiences and institutional practices; it also serves as a powerful source for explaining a wide range of social attitudes and behaviours. Religion is a cultural element and, as found in all societies, is powerful and pervasive. Religion is found to be at the centre of the political, economic, social, educational, technological, and scientific lives of a people. Inbuilt in religion are theological and doctrinal teachings as well as values, laws, ethics, creeds, and beliefs that shape the lives of adherents in a society.

The sociology of religion is the study of society from a religious perspective. It is the systematic study of societal variables from a religious perspective. The sociology of religion therefore constitutes an integral part of a more general study of culture and knowledge. Religion is a key construct for understanding social life in all parts of the world. Religion should be of interest to sociologists for two reasons: first, it sheds light on the understanding of various rituals performed by the majority of people, and second, it has the potential to play an important emancipatory role in the process of social change.

In general, sociology of religion seeks to comprehend the extent to which religion has structured and directed society through involvement, participation, and contribution. It

is interested in studying the extent to which religion has brought about change and cohesion in society. Also, it seeks to understand the impact of religion on the individual as well as the institutions of society. Indeed, this subject particularly studies the belief systems of individuals among the various religious groups in society. It studies changes that have taken place among the various religious denominations found today and seeks to understand the dynamics and dialectics of such changes, including the direction such changes take. Sociologists of religion study social aggregates, groups, and organisations as well as institutions, law, and crime as they relate to religion. The discipline studies conflict and deviance and tries to undertake research that will enhance peace, order, and stability in society.

Any religion we find in this society is divided into various sects and subsects that deviate from the main religion in their practices. These sects and subsects are followed by various people, sometimes taking the form of denominations. In India, the majority of people have their roots in *Sanatan Dharma,* which comprises three major sects: Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and Shaktism. The present work tends to understand the subsects of Vaishnavism and Shaivism, namely Udaseen and Naga, respectively.

Baba Shri Chand Ji, Guru Nanak Dev Ji's eldest son, founded the Udaseen Sect. His reign witnessed deterioration in religion, morality, and politics. His sociocultural milieu shaped Baba Shri Chand's ideas and behaviours. Udaseen order of Sadhus (the renunciants) Outwardly, they are known for their yellow clothes, lack of interest in materialism, and avoidance of wealth and women. They practice their faith by joining a network of organised groups. 'Udaseen' is a combination of the Sanskrit terms 'ut' (Brahman) and 'asina' (a seated person), denoting a mendicant. It is a state beyond names and forms. Lord Narayana, in the shape of a heavenly ascetic, founded the Udaseen sect of Sanatana Dharma. This sect has been through numerous sages. He is the 165th *Acharaya*. This lineage has many ascetics, evolved monks, and spiritual luminaries. Udaseen sadhus were created when people made a new dhuni at their seats. Four dhunis became Udasi's preaching centres. Each dhuni had its own preacher. Besides the four dhunis, bakhshish seats emerged.

Another sect that is studied in this work is from Shaivism, namely Naga Sect. In the 8th century A.D., Adi Shankaracharya Ji established the Naga Sect among *Dashnam Sannyasa*. Naga Sadhus are heavily armed and considered military ascetics or guardians of Sanatan Dharma. Dashnami, as the name implies, is given a name that combines one of the ten words: Giri, Puri, or Bharti. *Van, Aranaya, Parvat, Sagar, Tirth, Ashram, and Saraswati*. The Dashnami Sampradaya is perhaps the most powerful monastic order, and it played a great part in the history of India. The initiation has to make strict vows not to indulge in more than one meal in a day, not to beg for food from more than seven houses, not to sleep anywhere but on the ground, not to speak ill, not to salute, not to praise, and not to cover himself with cloth unless it was a *bhagwa* brownish red color. They are the devotees of Lord Shiva. Previously, their primary mission was to protect Hinduism or Santana Dharma; they mostly lived in Himalayan caves and appeared during the Kumbh Mela. They are always lashed with the *trishul* of Lord Shiva, a sword, and other deadly weapons in their hands for *Dharma*. Naga sadhus are mostly half-clothed saints with *jatas* on their heads. The Naga sadhus do *tapsya* to escape the cycle of rebirth.

Both Udaseen and Naga sects are ascetic orders comprised of sadhus who practice diverse religious practices *(sadhana)* in order to achieve *moksha* (liberation) or to maintain the state of bhakti.

India has a beautiful and sparkling Spiritual Aura. These practices and customs are mainly ignored by the West. Even more important is that, despite declines, old spiritual practices are still common throughout India. India is the birthplace of spiritualism, with Vedanta, Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, and Vaisheshika. Today, Spirituality and Religion are often mixed. Religion gives a path to attain spirituality to people. Spirituality's abstractness spawned religions. Spirituality is one end of the spectrum, religion is the other, and philosophy connects them. Spirituality is a way of thinking about the truth or heavenly force, whereas religion is a way of life; both share a similar philosophy. Spirituality, religion, and philosophy have merged in Indian thought. First, the definition of spirituality according to ancient Indian scriptures is explored, and then modern practices are analysed.

Pthyogorus originally used the word 'philosophy.' 'Philo' denotes love, while 'Sophia' means knowledge. In India, *'Darsana'* see or experience. This seeing or feeling, however, has a deeper meaning. Does that imply absorbing everything at once? No *Darsana* refers to super-sensual transcendental experiences of Brahman that transcend time, space, and cause. Spirituality is the experience of a spirit (the Atman) permeating the universe and all human endeavours.

Religion and Spirituality are inherently distinct. For instance, he separates spirituality from religion, which entails dedication to specific rituals and ideas, even though he acknowledges that the two are typically difficult to differentiate and are seldom defined in theory and study. The benefit of differentiating the two is the knowledge that a sort of spirituality properly described is highly relevant to individuals outside of strict norms and organisations. Spirituality works particularly effectively within a Western worldview that places a premium on the person and his or her experiences over social demands and relationships. Academics from world-wide find the difference especially interesting because they think that the loss of traditional traits and religion is linked to a move toward otherworldliness and a focus on deeper parts of the self.

There is a wealth of evidence in the experimental literature suggests that concepts and measuring instruments can be developed to autonomously assess religion and spirituality in Western descriptions continuously, recognising their distinctive features or consequences and identifying those who are either profound or strict but not both. Even though sharing genetic material and appearing related to many. Despite spirituality influence on legalism, studies show religion and spirituality coexist. Spirituality included instructions to help others do exceptional work and participate in personal activities. This differs from rigidity, which involves beliefs and practices. Several studies indicate how religion and spirituality may be separated and how they evolve over time, with rigidity being predictable across a person's life and otherworldliness increasing with age. People who are less dogmatic about otherworldliness may also believe in rationality.

Caste is India's defining social institution. Caste is a community that maintains its unique identity through endogamy and hypergamy and a required employment or

function. All castes are hierarchical, regardless of duty status. Further, it is assumed that all castes exist in a hierarchical order, although the exact location of a single caste in this order may be contested, and that such an order is based on the varied degrees of purity possessed by each caste. The caste system did not arise from an overpowering priestly concept of purity but from internal societal dynamics involving economic and political developments. The spread of iron, the rise of towns and strong states based on rising monetary resources, and the trend to protect one's occupation from outsiders by claiming hereditary monopoly for one's caste (jati) created space for a more specialised division of labour and the imposition of a hierarchical order by use of caste. It is possible that occupational fixity, endogamy, and the repression of huge groups as low jatis evolved in society first and entered Brahmanical rules afterwards. Sudras where 'jati' appears, though less often than 'varna,' were all compiled after the Buddha's time. The caste system gained much of its classic structure and universality in India during the period when Buddhism expanded and Prakrit, not Sanskrit, was the dominant language of inscriptions (third century BC to third century AD). Buddhism alone did not cause caste transformation in India's regional communities. We may not be able to discern complex political, economic, and cultural forces. Buddhism and Jainism have ideological theories that helped to justify the caste system.

Gender Identity is generally consistent from early childhood through adulthood. Although gender identity as a man or woman is stable, some of the content of an individual's gender role may change over a lifetime because of changing social norms or a move to another society. According to social role theory, behavioural sex differences spring from the differential social roles inhabited by women and men, especially those concerning the division of labour. The study of women and religion examines the context of different religious faiths. This includes considering female gender roles in religious history as well as women's participation in religion. Particular consideration is given to how religion has been used as a patriarchal tool to elevate the status and power of men over women, as well as how religion portrays gender within religious doctrines.

Throughout history, Hindu women have held public religious positions as practitioners and performers of Vedic rituals. Hinduism portrays women as figure who play an important role in understanding how the world works, women in Hindu society have often been marginalised and their importance has diminished as a result of females being made to feel lesser and not as important as males.

This research incorporates descriptions that serve to understand reflexivity and positionality. By using both direct and indirect observation methods in this research, the later chapters attempt to articulate the sociological knowledge on the construction of culture, beliefs, values, and experiences of the community, all are based on the narratives of the respondents. Thus, narrative analysis is appropriate for this current research initiative.

Ethnography is a qualitative approach that emerged from anthropology and was adapted by sociologists. It is perhaps well suited for the study of beliefs, social interactions, and behaviours, as well as for micro community research. The main goal of this study is to learn everything there is to know about Sadhus in a certain social context. This involves an in-depth analysis of their cultural practices, rituals, lifestyles, and habits. It also looks deeply into the how's and why's of their initiation into the sect and mainly focuses on their interest in the sect. A cultural interpretation relies on a foundation of carefully collected ethnographic data. Together with ethnographic methods and techniques, cultural interpretation and a variety of other fundamental concepts shape what ethnography is—notably, a holistic perspective, contextualization, and non-judgmental views of reality. This research presented a detailed description of the traditional practices of Sadhus.

The present research work is undertaken to study the community of Sadhus in Uttarakhand and Punjab. In order to collect first-hand knowledge of the community, it has been decided to resort to the technique of participant observation. During participant observation, the researcher kept a detailed record of Sadhus and their daily lives. Furthermore, the analysis after the collection is investigated and comprises both primary and secondary data.

Snowball sampling and Purposive sampling were used to conduct research where the respondents were assuredly adjoined and fulfilled the purpose of the research, and participant observation was used to collect primary data. The interview schedule is prepared under the objectives.

After the interview schedule was finished, it was talked over with experts in the field, such as academicians and some Sadhus, to make sure it was correct both in terms of content and appearance.

Secondary data was collected from the following sources: For data collection, the researcher visited different libraries as well as various ashrams.

The interest in Sadhus came from the visit to the Kumbh Mela. The pilot study was conducted in Allahabad at the Kumbh Mela. The mass exodus of the Sadhu population from all over India occurred, but most of the respondents who took part in the pilot survey were from Punjab and Uttarakhand. Hence, the study is geographically confined to these two states.

The data obtained from the field and secondary sources collected from journals, books, research articles, and so on are thoroughly reviewed and analysed in order to produce concrete conclusions regarding the findings. A method that focuses on qualitative narrative analysis was used to look at the survey results and secondary data from other research projects, journals, academic papers, and published records. As per the methodological lens to be used, an in-depth analysis of the selected narrations was conducted to formulate the findings that dealt with conclusions like: Sadhus do have a caste that is termed "Vihangam," but their approach towards the caste system that is prevalent in the social scenario of India is also a part of their identity, and it still manages to hold a place in their social life, especially in context to their hierarchical positions allotted by their religious heads like the supreme *Acharaya* for the Naga sect and four main Mahants for the Udaseen sect.

Sadhus are religious ascetics who stay alive through renunciating material world, according to Indian religious and philosophical tradition. They live a life of detachment

from the mundane world, for which they break all ties with their families and social life. In Sanatan religious tradition, there are different sects, and each of the sects has its own norms, values, rituals, dress code, and religious markings.

A Sadhu or hermit is the one who practices sadhana and penance *(tapsya)* for the attainment of higher consciousness and moksha *(liberation).* As a result of their critical contribution to streamlining the socio-cultural and religious ethos, Sadhus are elevated in social standing. They act like a guiding principle for the common people to obtain spiritual values and a disciplined life. However, the perceptions of the Sadhus have stated that the universal religion has its fundamental materialisation in the form of *Santana Dharma*, where the provisions of an egalitarian society exist. With regard to spirituality, the perception of sadhus has an idealistic view that connotes self-realisation and the realisation of the soul, or inner peace.

As caste is a dominant social structure in Indian society, Sadhus have denied this worldly view and referred to the division of society as a pure demonstration of the varna system. However, it was observed and discovered in the field that the prevalent caste system has significantly impacted the institution of sadhus in a downward trend. Though the Dumontian concept of caste places hierarchy at the centre and assumes that this (coiled in the notions of purity and pollution) prevails in the Sadh institution. To this, Sadhu added that they also experienced the influence of caste while attributing administrative roles in the upper rung of the hierarchy.

Gender discrimination is one of the most widespread forms of social inequality, and it has a wide range of harmful repercussions. The position of women determines the position of society and how far it has progressed. Denton describes how women are considered polluted because of the menstrual cycle. However, the discrimination among sadhus is further amplified by gender identity. In certain cases, gender plays a key role in nominating a particular member to the upper stratum of the institution. The male identity among sadhus paves the way for their higher roles as compared to their counterparts.

Another significant finding concerning the gender aspect that was examined in the research concludes that in the Udaseen sect, male sadhus respect the female figure, but in its maternal form, but their literature prohibits the initiation of women into the life of a sadhu, whereas in the Naga sect, women were not allowed to become sadhus, but a cultural renaissance that has occurred recently in this sect now allows the women to become sadhus and serve their sect.

The present study has explored the asceticism and spirituality among the Naga and Udaseen sadhus. Above all, the study tries to understand the interaction and interconnectedness between gender and caste within the context of asceticism and spirituality among these two sects.

Further, the study provides a platform for exploring the interconnection between spirituality, asceticism, caste, and gender in a conceptual and theoretical framework. For further study, examine the intersection between religion and caste, religion and gender, religion and spirituality, gender, spirituality, and religion, caste, and spirituality. The Naga and Udaseen Sects have received the barest minimum of research attention until recent years. It was proposed that additional research on the Naga sect and the Udaseen sect be carried out with the purpose of determining their societal importance. This study did not go into great depth on the socio-political or socio-economic aspects of the topic. In the current study, there was a smaller proportion of female sadhus represented in the data set compared to male sadhus; hence, this research can work as an initiating point for future scholars who aim to engage in research with female sadhus and can have an understanding of their behaviours. There is a very limited amount of published literature on female sadhus and the religious practises they engage in. According to the findings of the study, additional research ought to be carried out in order to strengthen the existing body of knowledge regarding sadhus.

Acknowledgement

When you start your journey with firm foot to stop at a peak, when it seems that peak, you realise that had it not been the firm support and friendly push of people across the journey, the journey would have been a day dream without any saga of peak in it. It is not possible without the support and faith of the people around me, still God has given me the opportunity to express my string of harmony overloaded with feeling of gratitude to all who guided me and uplifted me this peak. It is only a small opportunity in comparison to the good will show by people to me. Several people have been instrumental in the making this thesis possible and I grab this to thank them all for their valuable contributions.

I would give my immense thanks to my supervisor **Dr. Sukanya Das,** who not only guided me with patience and diligence but also bestowed her faith and trust over me. She imparted her wisdom along my unknown path of this research.

I cannot miss this opportunity of acknowledging the fact that I am blessed by **Baba Shri Chand Ji and Tapaswi Baba Puran Dass Ji** to whom I owe each day of this journey. Another prominent person is **Dr. Swami Nirmal Dass** who simplified my task with his experience and skills. His support enabled me to carry out my field work by tracing the accurate respondents for my work.

My life journey would not have been possible without my **parents** because of whom I am enabled to pursue my education. I would also like to mention thanks to my **brother** who have always stood by me and embraced my journey of Ph.D.

My fieldwork of almost two years was only possible because of all the sadhus who participated equally with me and helped me gathering the prescribed knowledge about their living experiences.

Lastly, how can I not remember the insane period of tolerance that was overtaken by my friends, who transformed made my low times into fun and motivation. Also, I would like to thanks my co scholars whom I met in my institution and conferences that I attended.

"To Maa and Papa, who always picked me up on time and encouraged me to go every adventure, specially this one"

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CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

1.1 SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

Sociology of Religion examines the societies from religious perspective. The methodical exploration of socioeconomic variables from a theological perspective. Therefore, sociology of religion is an intrinsic aspect of the broader study of knowledge and culture. Religion is a critical element for comprehending social relationships throughout each part of the world. Religion should be of concern to sociologist because (a) it gives insight on the everyday rituals and practices of the majority of individuals, (b) it is a significant indicator of a wide range of social processes, from political action to healthcare outcomes, and (c) it has the ability to play a crucial emancipatory contribution to the process of social change. (Michele, 2003).

Religion not only helps us to comprehend social interaction and institutionalized norms, but it also acts as a positive impact of understanding for a vast variety of societal behaviours and attitudes. Religion is a cultural factor that is prevalent and potent in all communities. Religion is fundamental to the political, economic, social, educational, technological, and scientific existence of a nation. Religion entails theological and doctrinal teachings, as well as the values, laws, ethics, creeds, and beliefs that determine the lives of society's members.

Sociology of Religion is indeed concerned with comprehending the extent of religion's involvement, participation, and contribution to shaping and guiding society. It is concerned in examining the extent to which religion has contributed to social transformation and progress. Sociology of Religion primarily examines the historical evolution of religion, its beginnings, and the numerous shapes that religious beliefs have evolved over time. In addition, sociology of religion attempts to understand how religion influences both individuals and societal structure. In fact, sociology of religion investigates the entirety of society, focusing on human interactions, associations, beliefs, customs, and values among the various religious groups. It seeks to comprehend the mechanics and dialectics of such changes, as well as their direction, through an examination of the variations that have occurred among the numerous 'religious

denominations' existent nowadays. Sociologists of religion investigate social aggregates, groups, and organisations, in addition to institutions, law, and crime in relation to religion. Conflict and deviance are studied, and research is conducted in an effort to promote peace, order, and stability in society.

1.2   BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

India as a nation state follows various religions that further transcends into numerous belief systems which directly or indirectly counterpart the large religion. These counterparts grow out in the form of cult, sect and may at some time branch out as a denomination. Out of these major sects formed this study explores the Udaseen Sect and Naga Sect which are two orthodox sects (Tripathi, 2007) that belong to Vaishnavism and Shaivism. They happen to believe and practice deviant religious rituals. Sadhus and their spirituality are very much influential among Hindu community. It is assumed that Sadhus are regarded as the highest forms of religious regulation to stay alive in chastity. They are expected to break all ties with family and wear markings and clothes associated with the sect they belong to (Tripathi, 2007). This study also analyses the place of women among these sects of sadhus and identifies the ways in which caste structure influences their religious life.

The Udaseen Sect was established by Baba Shri Chand Ji the eldest son of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Significant decreases in religious practice and moral beliefs, as well as numerous political turmoils, marked his period. Baba Shri Chand's perspectives and behaviours were profoundly influenced by his sociocultural context.   The Udaseen sect is also recognized as the Udaseen order of the Sadhus, (the renunciants). Outwardly, they are recognized by their yellow attire and their total lack of interest in the materialistic aspects of the world, as well as their strict avoidance of wealth and women. They put their religion into action by belonging to an organised and disciplined network of groups (Nigham,1994). The word Udaseen is the conjunction of two Sanskrit words that is *ut* (Brahman) and *asina* (a person in a sitting posture) the one who is indifferent to or disregardful of worldly attachment or is a mendicant. It means a state of attainment which is beyond manifested names and forms. The Udaseen sect of the *Sanatana Vaidik Dharma* owes its origin to lord *Narayana* who had taken the form of a divine ascetic in order to impart knowledge to the four *Kumaras,* passing

through many sages this sect stands before us in a grand form. Jagat Guru Sri Chandra Ji is the 165 Acharya. One can find many ascetics, highly evolved monks and spiritual luminaries of high attainment in this tradition. Udaseen sadhus set up from those embers a new *dhuni*[1] each at his seat and thus came into existence the four *dhunis* or hearths which became the active centres of Udasi preaching. Each *dhuni* came to be known after the name of its principal preacher. Besides the four *dhunis,* there emerged another set of Udasi seats called *bakhshish.*

Establishment or centre in Udaseen sect was known by various names such as Akharas, deras, temples etc. These centres were the important organizations of Udaseen known as baksheesh. The Akharas were the largest organization of the Udaseen sect. These Udaseen centres functioned independently in its administration, financial matters and other religious affairs.

In the 8th century A.D Adi Shankaracharya Ji established the Naga Sect among *Dashnam Sannyasa.* Naga Sadhus are heavily armed and considered as military ascetics for safeguarding Sanatan Dharma. On the initiation, as the name suggests, each Dashnami is given a name made up of two of the ten words. *Giri, Puri, Bharti. Van, Aranaya, Parvat, Sagar, Tirth, Ashram, and Saraswati.* (Sarkar,2017). The Dashnami Sampradaya is arguably the most powerful monastic organisation to have played a significant role in Indian history. The initiate must take rigorous vows not to eat more than one meal a day, not to beg for food from more than seven houses, not to sleep anywhere other than on the ground, not to speak ill, not to bow, not to praise, and not to cover himself with anything other than a *bhagwa* brownish-red cloth. They are the devotees of lord Shiva. They are both Shavities and millitary for defending Sanatan Dharma which is the base and entity of India. Earlier their main aim was to protect Hinduism, they mostly live in Himalayan caves and they appear during the time of Kumbh Mela. They are always lashed with *trishul*[2] of lord Shiva, sword and other deadly weapons in their hands for *Dharma.* Naga sadhus are mostly half cloth saints

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[1] Dhuni, the fire lit by Hindu mendicants or sadhus to inhale smoke for penance or for keeping warm.
[2] Trishul is a trident, a divine symbol, commonly used as one of the principle symbols or totem in Sanatan Dharma (Hindu religion).

and jatas[3] on their heads. The Naga sadhus do Tapasya (austerities) for escaping out from the cycle of rebirth. The history of the Nagas is very ancient, as evidenced by coins and pictures from Mohenjo-Daro depicting Naga sadhus worshipping Shiva in the form of *Pashupatinath*. Dashnami Naga sect is divided into two parts that is *Astradhari* (specialized in Arms) and *Shastradhari* (specialized in divine traditional knowledge). The sanyasi is ranged in four ranks: *Kutichak, Bahudak, Hansa*, and *Parmahansa.* Infact they or some of them at least might have been naked in former times since the names of the oldest and most important regiment is Digambar, usually translated as sky clad, thus naked (Sarkar,2017).

The present study focused on the Sadhus of Udaseen and Naga sect, who have played a primary role in preaching religious teachings for centuries. The purpose here is to understand how the representation of these organisations evolved over the centuries. It interprets if any change materialised the practices they followed.

In the ordering of both Udaseen and Naga Sects two prominent personalities viz., Baba Shri Chand Ji and Adi Shankaracharya Ji respectively have an essential position in leading the progression of these religious disciplines (Nigham,1994 and Sarkar,2017). This study is an attempt to explain the intersection between religion, spirituality, caste, and gender. Based on aforementioned underpinnings following are the research questions of the study.

1. What is the nature of asceticism and spirituality among Sadhus?
2. How caste is influencing Udaseen and Naga Sects?
3. Why is there gender discrimination among Sadhus?
4. What are the functional aspects of the female Sadhus?

1.3   ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

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[3] Jata refers to a cluster of matted hair according to the sivapurana 2.2.32. Accordingly, as brahma narrated to Narada,' o sage, on hearing the words spoken by you, siva became furious in a trice, Śiva of great fury and valour. Then Rudra, the destroyer of the world, plucked out a cluster of his matted hair (*jaṭa*) and struck the top of the mountain with it. O sage, the cluster of the matted hair (*jaṭa*) of the lord split into two, on being struck on the mountain.

The introduction of the study deals with subject matter, resources, background of the study, research problems, research gaps, research questions, and research objectives, along with an operational definition of the major central concepts.

The second chapter of the study is fragmented into two parts. The first half of this chapter deals with the literature regarding understanding of spirituality and asceticism. In Hindu religion, the Vedas and the Upanishads are considered to be the most fundamental works of religious studies. The second segment examines the ways in which there is an interconnection between religion, sects, sadhus, caste and gender.

The third chapter of the study focuses on the methodology, which is combined with ethnographic research, research methods, interview schedule has been employed for collection of data, focus group discussion including participant observation method is described in this chapter. Narrative analysis has the potential to be an effective research tool.

The fourth chapter deals with the analysis of the data of the major themes of the study that is religion, spirituality, asceticism, caste and gender is evaluated through the narrative analysis, and the findings of the study are analyzed and discussed.

The final chapter is concluding the aspects of aforementioned chapters of the thesis, and briefly notes down the major underpinnings of all the chapters.

1.4   HINDU AS RELIGION/ SANATAN DHARMA

Belief in reincarnation and a supreme being with multiple forms and natures, the concept that competing theories are merely different perspectives on the same ultimate truth, and a rigid caste system are all characteristics of Indian religion, philosophy, and culture. The Vedas, the Puranas, the Upanishads, and the Bhagwad-Gita are just a few examples of the ancient writings that contain the ideology of the Hindu faith, which has no established curriculum of scriptures.

The word 'Hindu' comes from the Persian language 'hind' or 'al-hind', which refer to the Indus region. This word comes on or after the Indo-Aryan word for 'ocean' or 'river', which is spelt differently but means the same thing 'sindhu'. Although non-Muslims may not have ever used the name 'Hindu' prior to the ninth century, when

Muslims landed in the Indus valley, it is true that Persian authors made a distinction between Muslims and non-Muslim Hindus. A later period of Sanskrit writing, the Saiva historian Srivara of 15th-century Kashmir used the term 'Hindu' to differentiate between Muslims and non-Muslims (Sanderson forthcoming). This phrase was first used to describe people who were not Muslims in the works of Sanskrit and Bengali Vaishnava authors in the 16th century (O'Connell 1973:34-4). There is a suggestion of cultural bonds across tribes in these texts, particularly around rituals like cremation and cow worship (Sanderson:1). The British coined the term 'Hindu' or 'Hindoo' to describe those residents of 'Hindustan' (northwest South Asia) who did not practise Islam, Sikhism, Christianity, or Jainism. For the purposes of establishing a national identity in opposition to colonialism and developing a religion on par with Christianity, in early nineteenth century, "ism" was added to "Hindu." (Kellingley 2003: 509). It comprises a vast variety of ideas, ranging from pluralistic theism to absolute monotheism, and constitutes India's religious and cultural framework. There is no explicit mention of Hindus or Hinduism in any ancient scriptures or by any religious or political authorities. In the ancient and classical period, there were *Vedic, Shaiva, Vaishnva, Shakt*a, and numerous religious traditions, although there was no religion identified as Hinduism. Adi Shankaracharya himself recognised six religious traditions as *"Shanmata"* during his lifetime. Even though Vedic tradition is assumed to represent Hinduism today, it would be scholarly to refer to Hinduism as a "plural religion of diverse traditions", *"ekam sat viprah bahuda vadanti"*- "the truth is one, but people call it by many names." (Rig Veda I, 164.46).

Hinduism comprises multiple religious systems, including polytheism (believing in multiple gods), pantheism (God in everything), theism (a specific God), and monotheism (believe in a single God) (everything is one). Absolute Monotheism (Brahman is the only source of truth) is the highest of all beliefs, according to Vedantic tradition. Vedic Hindus refer to their tradition as Sanatan Dharma, which is a timeless tradition without a specific creator or scripture. It is a universal and eternal law that graciously provides the truth to the sacred texts. It is known as aparuseya and has no human origin. Hinduism is a blend of philosophy and theology; it is not merely a series of religious rites and ethical precepts, but a way of life.

Traditionally, ascetics have abandoned worldly interests and adopted a life of simplicity, purity, and celibacy. Asceticism (Sanskrit: Tapasya) is defined as "a voluntary, prolonged, and at least somewhat structured programme of self-discipline and self-denial in which immediate, sensuous state" (Kaelber,1986: 441). Ascetics have a position within the Hindu socio-cultural-religious structure known as the varnaashrama dharma system, as defined in the dharmasastras, the religious law document composed between 200 BCE and 300 CE. The dharmashatras specify four stages of life (Brahmacharyaashrama[4], Grihasthashrama[5], Vanaprasthaashrama[6], and Sanayasaashram[7] which means live the life of a renunciant) that male members of the upper three levels of society follow, according to this idea. This social religious concept becomes the essential of a larger patriarchal social system called as Brahminical orthodox tradition. At the fourth step, sanayas, the renunciate formally abandons society and conducts his own funeral rites. Literally, the Sanskrit root word sanayas means "placing or throwing down, laying aside, resignation, abandonment, and renunciation of the world." With the completion of these rites, he severs all ties to his former personality and is deemed socially deceased. After this, in his new duty as a renunciant, he was to live alone; he only visited a village to obtain food. He had nothing but a begging bowl and worn clothing, but his demeanour was characterised by calmness and equanimity (Manusmriti, 6:42-44).

Women do not typically experience these stages of life. According to Hindu culture, a woman's religion is her family. Despite the absence of a structured place for female religious experience beyond marriage and motherhood, women continue to engage in the activities and lifestyle associated with the sannyasa/ascetic lifestyle. There is evidence of female poets/saints and female renunciants who did not appear to adhere to

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[4] Brahmacharya means celibacy. This is the student phase of life, in this asrama, one is supposed to acquire knowledge from his teacher and to remain celibate. This stage starts from 8 years of age. The student is introduced to his guru through a ceremony called 'upanayana'.

[5] Grahasthashram means the stage of life when the person is married and has to fulfil all his duties towards his wife, children, father and mother. This stage starts when brahmacharya asrama ends. During this stage, he is authorized to enjoy 'kama' as well as he has to work hard to secure 'artha'.

[6] Vanaprastha means going to the forest. This is the third stage of life. This is the stage when the person is to retire, give up sexual life, give up all the possessions to children and enter the forest. He will live as a hermit, surviving on alms.

[7] Sanayasa means complete renunciation. This is the last and may start at 75 years of age but there is no such restriction of age. He is to dedicate himself entirely to spirituality. He is to practice austerities and thus be released from the cycle of birth and rebirth and would attain Moksha (Salvation).

the Hindu dharma and obligation laws. Women and shudras (servants) are prohibited from becoming renunciants according to Hindu tradition, although this does not mean that they truly adhere to the regulations. According to Vasudha, 'there is a sense of conflict between text and practice in several areas of dharma, including the role of women and shudras' (Narayanan, 1995:446). Narayanan believes that one approach to explain this paradox is to distinguish between the terms 'ascetic' and 'renunciation.' While these terms are frequently used interchangeably, there is a significant difference between them. The term "renunciant" is derived from the Sanskrit word 'sanayasin' (male) (female: sanayasini), which refers to those who have forsaken the world formally and who have executed their own 'funeral ceremonies,' resulting in the social and legal death of their previous identities. As they approach the final phase of life, this ceremony relieves them from the obligations and commitments of their previous selves. On the other hand, the term ascetic refers to a broader range of disciplinary practices that are not confined to renunciants.

1.5   ASCETICISM AND DEVOTION

The Udaseen and Naga sects are ascetic orders comprised of sadhus who practice diverse religious practices *(sadhana)*[8] to achieve *moksha*[9] (liberation) or to maintain the state of bhakti.

Despite the fact that renunciation increased over the ages alongside the development of metaphysical concepts and reflected itself in a number of different orientations, this development took place simultaneously (Olivelle,2008:12). The majority of what we know about renunciation comes from Brahamanic literature, which Patrick Olivelle refers to as the Brahmanical theology of renunciation *(Sannayas)* (2008:166). Brahamanic literature, including some *Dhramshastra*, advocate abstention exclusively for Brahman. According to the *Manavdharmsastra,* the renunciation must be a Brahman who renounces everyone and wanders alone through the wilderness in quest

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[8] Sadhana, refers to a method or practice adopted to accomplish a specific goal. Without sadhana one cannot obtain the goal. Sadhana corresponds to various goals, those who desire material enjoyment adopt the path of karma as their sadhana, and those who desire liberation adopt the path of Bhakti, which involves the spiritual practices.
[9] Moksha, also spelled as moksa, in Indian philosophy, is a liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth. In its epistemological and psychological senses, moksha is freedom from ignorance, self-realization. In Hindu traditions, moksha is a central concept, and the utmost aim of human life.

of the nondual existence of Brahma (Burghart 1978:525). Other scriptures, as well as the *Chandhogya Upanishad*, the *Jabala Upanishad,* and the *Sannyasa Upanishad,* imply that *sannyasa* is acceptable for all those who are twice born (also known as dwija) (Kane,194:930)

1.6   RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality is informal, contemporary, and individual, in contrast to the organised, communal, and traditional nature of religion (Ammerman 2013). The common understanding did not do justice to either of these two ideas (Ammerman 2013). Due to this individualised perspective of spirituality, sociologists have historically focused on religion. Since the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, there has been an increased interest in spirituality and sociology (Wuthnow cited in Ammerman 2013). According to the metanarrative, more and more individuals are opting for individual spirituality over institutionalised religion (Ammerman 2013). It is possible that globalisation is to blame for the growing consciousness of a spiritual marketplace (Roof 1999 cited in Ammerman 2013). It is impossible to arrive at a definition that satisfies everyone's needs, despite the fact that numerous attempts and approaches have been made. Each viewpoint contributes something new to our overall comprehension of these two seemingly unrelated phenomena.

Spirituality is often used as a substitute for religion in the modern Western world, however it is both intrinsic to and transcendent of all religions (Singleton 2014). One way that religious people might experience transcendence is through communion, whereas spiritual but not religious people can do so through meditation. A moral ideal, a belief in a supernatural force (such as karma or reincarnation), a supernatural being (the souls of the deceased), or a sense of oneness with all living things are all possibilities, as proposed by Singleton (2014). According to Ammerman (2013), the best way to learn about spirituality is to observe how it is portrayed in everyday narratives. The process by which each person arrives at their own definition of the term, as well as what spirituality is as a cultural phenomenon, are both explored (Ammerman 2013). Using discourse analysis, Ammerman (2013) developed a classification of spirituality. Religion, Ethics, and God were three of the eleven themes that emerged (Ammerman 2013). From these eleven ideas, four distinct packages developed:

According to the theorists of Theistic Spirituality, spirituality is all about welcoming the unknown. Deity is the essence of spirituality (Ammerman 2013). Extra-Theistic the focus of spirituality is on one's own existence, the meaning of life, and the appreciation of aesthetics (Ammerman 2013). People of both the Theistic and Extra-Theistic traditions held that spirituality is connected to being good and moral (Ammerman 2013). For some, the two concepts of belief and belonging having a spirituality where you 'tick all the boxes' is admirable. Religious power was permeated with spirituality. Atheists and agnostics often dismiss the spirituality they assume believers possess (Ammerman 2013). The diversity of spirituality is illustrated by these four 'packages,' and the centrality of religion to the top three themes—religious tradition, ethical behaviour, and God—illustrates the intimate relationship between the four. According to Ammerman's (2013) research, a sizable percentage of people practise some form of organised religion or spirituality. One can be spiritual even if they do not follow any particular religion.

Defining religion is difficult. According to academicians, definitions are unnecessarily extensive, limited, and Western. According to Bouma (as cited in Singleton 2014), Religion is a 'shared meaning system' that derives its responses to questions of meaning on the presumption of the existence of a transcendent reality. Smart (quoted in Singleton, 2014) says that a religion is made up of seven parts: ritual practices (which are purposeful and classical patterns of behaviour that build a connection between an individual or community and the transcendent), myths (which are doctrines and narratives about the origin and nature of the universe, rules for lifestyle, and the history of the religion), doctrinal (which are recognised teachings that instruct a religious person), experiential (which must be experienced through ways), and eschatological (Singleton, 2014).

Religion and Spirituality have transformed during the past century, although not as anticipated by researchers (Woodhead, 2011). Religion has generally opposed modernization and globalisation. Secularization was expected to be a certain consequence of modernity, yet religion refuses to give way to its supposed replacement by dispersed personal spiritualities (Ammerman, 2013). As a result of globalisation, religious opposition to contemporary culture grows stronger (Berger, 2002). In an ever-

changing and expanding contemporary world, identity and belonging are essential. Stibli (2010) argues that extremism, which may be disguised by religion, philosophy, or politics, may be a consequence of globalisation. Christianity's tremendous influence and expansion have produced a worldwide network of devotees (Berger, 2002). This is evident among Islam, Buddhism, Scientology, and Neopaganism (Berger, 2002).

Religion and Spirituality are as intricate as their various meanings and situations. Both cannot be categorised as historical, contemporary, structured, spontaneous, theistic, or monotheistic (Woodhead, 2011). These elements exist both within and without religious organisations. Both can be institutionally generated and experienced simultaneously (Ammerman, 2013). Religion should not be measured as classical belief and structured belonging, and spirituality as non-traditional and individual. In reality, the two concepts are not mutually exclusive but overlap substantially (Ammerman, 2013). This overlap must be taken into account, and sociological study boundaries and frameworks must be adapted to a world in flux (Woodhead, 2011).

1.7   RELIGION AND CASTE

Caste is the most distinctive social institution in India. Caste is most obviously a community that maintains its separate identity through rigorous endogamy and (hypergamy) as well as a reported, confessed, or actual requirement to engage in a particular occupation or execute a specific function. In addition, it is considered that all castes exist in a hierarchical sequence, whatever the precise position of a given duty. Further, it is assumed that all castes exist in a hierarchical order, although the exact place of a specific caste in this order may be challenged, and that such an order attaches a relative degree of purity or is based on the varying degrees of purity possessed by each caste (Hutton, 1969).

The Brahmana's position as the purest members of society inevitably brought a religious dimension into the caste system, and Louis Dumont has argued convincingly in Homo Hierarchicus that the 'Hindu' philosophy of purity and pollution is the actual controlling and organising principle behind caste (Dumont, 1998). Thereby, it contributed to the development of caste society.

While much of what Dumont says has been widely disputed (Jaiswal, 1991), his ascription of a causative role to the 'ideology' of Hinduism (or rather Brahmanism) in the genesis, evolution, expansion and configuration of caste system is often explicitly or implicitly taken for granted (Jaiswal, 1998). It would certainly be foolish to deny the connection and interaction between the two. The question is whether the evolution of the caste system could not have been a largely autonomous or separate process, which began to germinate appropriate justifications and theoretical rules within Brahmanical codes only ex post facto.

The argument here advanced is that the alternative hypothesis deserves to be given a hearing. While it would be wrong to disregard the varna order or underplay its importance (Dumont,1998), the fact is that the varna order as it is described in the main Vedic corpus lacks the two essential fundamentals of the caste system, namely, occupational fixity and endogamy, which have belonged mainly to the realm of *jati*[10], the actual element of the caste system. The term *jati* itself has not been mentioned in the Vedic corpus (Macdonell and Keith, 1965). In its early occurrence it still seems to be the synonym of varna (Nirukta, XII), (Jaiswal,1998).

As has been often remarked, Rigveda, IX.112, describes diverse occupations for livelihood with no suggestion of hereditary constraint. Rather 'striving for wealth with varied plans, we follow our desires like cattle'. (Shastri,1973).

The *Vajasaneyi-samhita,* XXX, provides a detailed list of occupation of men and women, and yet without any suggestion of hereditary fixity (Griffith, 1957). How far the spirit was from endogamy is revealed by the assertion in the *Atharvaveda*, V, 17.8-9, that if a women had ten former husbands, and yet a Brahmana now claimed her for a wife she would be his, not of a *Vaishya* or a *Rajanya (Kshatriyas),* (Griffith,1962). This would be consonant, in a far-fetched interpretation, a dogma of hypergamy; but, then, we have the rather causal way in which the *Vajasaneyi Samhita*, XXIII.30-31, looks at the seduction of an Arya's wife by shudras, put at par with that of a shudra's wife by

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[10] Jati**,** also spelled jat , caste, in Hindu society. The term is derived from the Sanskrit *jata*, "born" or "brought into existence," and indicates a form of existence determined by birth. In Indian philosophy, *jati* (genus) describes any group of things that have generic characteristics in common. Sociologically, *jati* has come to be used universally to indicate a caste group among Hindus.

an Arya. On the question of purity and pollution, something at least can be extracted from Vedic corpus. The *Shatapatha Brahman*[11] bars a consecrated person at a sacrifice from directly speaking to a Shudra (III,1.19.10) and enjoins a holy teacher to avoid contact with shudras and leavings of food, or even look at shudras and a woman (XIV.1.13), (Eggerton's,1963). Overall, however, the amount of evidence about needs or maintaining such an extreme distance from the underprivileged is extremely limited.

In the Purusha-sukta, where the Brahamana, Rajanya, Vaishya, and Shudras are pictured as originating from the various parts of the sacrifices of purusha's body, it is evident that this is merely a declaration of social hierarchy, with the classes of priests, warriors, masses, and the lowly arranged in descending order. (Atharvaveda, XIX.6 and Vajasaney, XXXI.11). Such a description could have been given of any ancient or medieval culture and barely implies the existence of the caste system. However, once the caste system was included into the Brahmanical canon, this description began to be quoted as an account of its genesis. (Buhler,1886).

Such silence about castes and their endogamous customs and fixed occupations in the Vedic corpus needs to be explained, since we have ample evidence from Buddhist literature going back to the fifth century BC, some of it possibly preceding in time most of the Upanishads, that the caste system, in the form we know it, had by then been well established in society at large, at least in Eastern India. It was essentially based on the *jatis* a unit, and the status of a low or high jati was fixed by occupations - the *jatis* of the *Chandalas,* basket-makers, hunters, charioteers and sweepers were held to be 'low' *jatis,* the Khattiya (Kshatriya) and Brahmana were the high ones. Endogamy prevailed; the Buddha is quoted as saying that the concept of *jati* (jativada) was of no importance in matters of salvation; it was only of importance for marriage (Wagle,1966). The Buddha's own Sakya family was so concerned with maintaining their pure lineage that their descendants married within the family. The Buddha, after telling this story, emphasized that the Khattiyas were so firm in their belief in endogamy that while the Brahmanas would recognize as a Brahmana the offspring of the union of a Khattiya

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[11] Shatapatha Brahman is a Hindu sacred text which describes details of the vedic rituals, including philosophical and mythological background.

youth and a Brahmana maiden, the Khattiyas would reject the offspring as absolutely illegitimate (Wagle,1966). The last statement is interesting as suggesting a greater espousal of endogamy on the part of the Kshatriyas rather than the Brahmanas.

One can fairly conclude from this evidence that the caste system arose not out of an overbearing and hugely infecting priestly ideology of purity, but out of internal social processes in which economic and political changes played a major role. From at least c. 700 BC the diffusion of iron, the increase in commerce (so well reflected in the importance assigned to merchants in early Buddhist lore), the rise of towns and strong states based on rising monetary resources, (Shrimali,2007) created space for a more and more specialized division of labour, the trend to protect one's occupation from outsiders by claiming hereditary monopoly for one's caste (jati) and for the imposition of a hierarchical order by use of the power of the state. It is surely quite plausible that customs of occupational fixity, endogamy and the persecution of larger groups as lower jatis emerged first in society and entered Brahmanical rules., the Dharmasutras and smritis, only later. The sutras where the term jati begins to occur, though much less frequently than the term varna, are all generally believed to have been compiled after the Buddha's time (Shrimali,2007) and the Manusmriti is generally assigned to the first century BC. Much of this literature is, then, subsequent to the important account of the Indian caste system, left by Megasthenes, the Macedonian envoy to the Mauryan court (c. 300 BC), surviving in the works of Diodorus (II, 40-41), Strabo (XV.1.39-41, 46-49) and Arrian (Indica, XI-XIII) (Majumdar,1960). The influence of the varna order is present here but essentially the description suits the jati organization, with occupational fixity and endogamy being emphasized. The *Arthashastra* has also much interesting material on the caste system, with its intermediate and menial castes, and its varied use of the term jati, but the times to which the text's various parts can be assigned is uncertain, and much of the work may contain material long posterior to Mauryan times (Trautman,1971; Mishra,1997).

In view of the above, it seems quite unlikely that the origin and expansion of the caste system can be substantially traced to Brahmanical influence. Since the Buddha lived and preached in Eastern India (Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar), the caste system that

is described in early Buddhist literature must have been prevalent in that region. It is not certain that it had then also taken root in other parts of India. It is singular that classical accounts based on Greek narratives of Alexander's campaign in the Indus basin (327-325 BC) are absolutely silent about the castes, at best mentioning the Brahmanas only as philosophers and conspiratorial advisors of local kings (Habib and Jha, 2004). It was Megasthenes who travelled up to Pataliputra and provided us with the first Greek account of a recognizable caste society. An inference can, then, fairly be drawn that caste institutions took time to spread, radiating from Eastern India. If so, the kingdom of Magadha and, then, the Mauryan Empire may have played as important a part in its spread as any priesthood or monastic order.

Here we must consider the role of Buddhism (and Jainism). We have seen that the early Buddhist literature has much information to give about caste. The Buddha's sermons about morality in worldly life adopt a curiously neutral attitude towards caste- neither endorsement nor rejection. Ashoka (reigned c. 270-234 BC), who drew on this legacy for his dhamma formularies, inscribed on rock and pillar, not once mentions either varna or *jati,* and, except for his references to Brahmanas, mostly paired with Buddhist, Jaina and Ajivika monks, bypasses the issue of caste altogether. And yet both Buddhism and Jainism, by their theories of life-cycles based on karma, and the doctrine of ahimsa (non-killing), provided an ideological underpinning for the caste system that was, perhaps, far more potent than the mythical Purusha sacrifice of Vedic tradition.

It is possible that the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (VI, 2.13 15) and the *Chandogya Upanishad* (V,3-10), the earliest texts of their genre to contain the doctrine of transmigration of souls, were composed during or after the times of Mahavira and the Buddha. But even if they were not, and are earlier in time, it is curious how the doctrine is said to have been discovered. A Rajanya (Kshatriya) asked Shvetaketu Aruneya some questions which he could not answer. His father Gautama then went to the King, who, after showing some perplexity, told him of secrets known till then to the Kshatriya class alone; and the centrepiece of this teaching was the description of the transmigration of souls. At the end of it all came the following:

Those whose actions in earlier incarnations have been commendable will acquire a Brahmana, Kshatriya, or Vaishya birth swiftly. Those whose actions have been reprehensible, on the other hand, will promptly be born as a dog, pig, or Chandala. (Muller,1990).

One is, then, responsible for one's own low birth in the caste order, owing to one's deeds (karma) in the past life. The fact that this doctrine had not come out of the Vedic lore was itself so well known that the doctrine had to be acknowledged as an import into Brahmanical thought from the lore of the Kshatriyas. It will not escape notice that both Mahavira and the Buddha were Kshatriyas, and so probably drew directly on beliefs already in circulation among non-Brahmanical thinkers, and so not at second-hand, from what the Upanishads contained in respect of the theory of life-cycles. Moreover, whereas the theory remained only a peripheral element in Upanishadic thought, it occupied a central part in the teachings of Jainism and Buddhism. The spread of these religions naturally greatly contributed to a strengthening of the popular belief in the legitimacy of the caste order as a product of past karma. This justification for the varna system duly appears, but still weak, in the Manusmriti (e.g., XI. 24-26) (Bhuler,1886).

The other element, that of ahimsa, arising out of the protest against Vedic animal-sacrifices and extending to avoidance of killing of living beings, was shared in different degrees by both Buddhism and Jainism. Implicit in this position was the disapproval of the occupations of hunting-and-gathering communities. Not only is non-killing of living beings given the pride of place in Ashoka's dhamma formularies, but it is claimed in his Aramaic inscriptions of Lamghan that he threw out of the prosperous populace those who lived by hunting and fishing (Mukherjee,1984). Their occupations could thus be used as a reason for treating the forest folk and other gathering communities as outcastes. Once the ahimsa doctrine was accepted by Brahmanism as well, this attitude could easily find its reflection in Manusmriti, not only in its listing of the outcaste Jatis as those engaged in hunting and gathering (X.32, 34, 36-37, 48-49), but also in its condemnation of peasants who use ploughs that kill earthly creatures (X, 84). This last sentiment is echoed in late Buddhist tradition - the scholarly pilgrim Yi-Jing (I-tsing)

(d.713) reported that monks were forbidden by the Buddha from ploughing and watering fields, since this destroyed 'lives' (Takakusu,1896) In time this could become one further argument for treating all peasants as Shudras (Sharma, 1958).

The fact that the caste system obtained much of its classic shape and universality in India during the time that Buddhism spread over the country, and Prakrit, not Sanskrit, was the major language of inscriptions (third century BC to third century AD) represents a synchronism which might not be entirely accidental. It is not the intention here to assert that Buddhism alone generated the entire process of caste-transformation of the various regional societies within India. Complex political, economic and cultural forces were probably at play, which we cannot perhaps as distinctly identify as we would like to. But the point made here is that it was no simple process of Brahmanisation. Buddhism and Jainism also contained ideological baggage with which the caste system could be explained, justified and lived with.

1.7.1 SOCIOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON CASTE

Indologists cite the *Vedas, Upanishads*, *Manudharma Sastra,* and the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* as sociological texts. Hindu sacred writings celebrate the caste structure and demonise shudra and anti-shudra classes. The theory promotes Brahmanism and marginalises lesser castes. The structural-functionalist explains caste based on occupational division of labour and the European guild system. Louis Dumont (1998) argues that India's caste system is a religious rationalisation of social inequality. Scholars are silent on caste mobility.

M.N Srinivas (1995) introduced conceptual languages to understand the caste system's organisation. During British administration, the caste structure changed. Pax Britannica led to the growth of caste solidarity across horizontal lines among Indian states, unlike pre-British India where territorial boundaries were limited to particular areas. India partially industrialised, urbanised, and modernised during British control. Srinivas says 150 years of colonial rule changed modern India and modernised Indian traditions (Yogendra Singh,1986). Functionalist researchers believe social mobility has always been part of the Indian caste structure. Srinivas called this phenomenon

"Sanskritization", in which lower caste groups emulate upper caste cultural traditions. The caste system is not a rigorous social system.

Marxist, anti-caste, and feminist thinkers criticised this method. A R Desai (2011) and Joan P. Mencher (1974) claimed that caste is a system of economic exploitation and resource deprivation. Caste undermines class unity and solidarity, says Mencher. Institutionalizing chained or linked labour, they say, legitimises slavery. Mencher contends that untouchables in pre-modern northern and southern India were like slaves. Kalpana Kannabiran (2014), Sharmila Rege (1995), and Padma Velaskar (2012) highlight women in caste and Dalit women in the Hindu caste system. These studies show the importance of caste in 21st-century India. Caste determines access to socio-cultural capital, economic capital, political power, and bureaucratic power, according to Jodhka (2012). Caste affects many Indian organisations and institutions.

1.8 RELIGION AND GENDER

A person's gender identification is constant from childhood to adulthood. Even though gender identification as man or woman is stable, some aspects of a person's gender role may change over the course of a lifetime due to shifting social conventions or migration to another culture. According to social role theory, behavioural sex differences arise from the distinct societal positions that women and men occupy, particularly in terms to the division of labour. (Eagly, Wood, and Diekman, 2000).

Gender roles are culturally and socially established behavioural and emotional expectations for men and women (Anselmi and Law 1998). A person's social networks and cultural history have a substantial influence on the development of their gender identity. Numerous theories contend that perceived gender roles serve as the foundation for the formation of gender identity. Evolutionary Theory (Buss 1995; Shields 1975), Object-Relations Theory (Chodorow 1989), Gender Schema Theory (Bem 1981), and Social Role Theory are among the significant psychological theories of gender role and gender identity formation.

The genetic distinctions that exist between men and women provide the theoretical foundation for evolutionary theories of the emergence of gender. Functionalists (e.g., Shields 1975) argue that men and women have developed in a different way in order

to fulfil their distinct and harmonizing survival-related purposes. Similarly, sociobiologists (e.g., Buss, 1995) argue that the behavioural differences between men and women are the result of various reproductive and biological tactics that have progressed so that men and women can reproduce and pass around their genes efficiently.

Women and Religion are studied within the framework of many religious traditions. This encompasses exploring female gender roles in religious history and women's religious participation. Particularly attention is paid to how religion has been utilised as a patriarchal instrument to promote the position and authority of males over women (Linda, 2002), as well as how religion depicts gender within religious beliefs. (Arora, Veenat et.al, 2016).

From ancient times to the present, Hinduism has the largest presence of divine feminism among the major world religion. According to the Shakti and Shaiva Hindu traditions (David, 1988), the goddess is a prominent figure. In Hinduism, women are viewed as equivalent to or even superior to males. *Kali Ma*, for example, is the Hindu goddess of creation, preservation, and destruction. As a result of her power over life and death, *Kali* was regarded as a goddess who should be both revered and feared. This results in a higher prestige for women compared to men, as everyone must respect her. Shakti, Adishakti, or Adiparashkti, the divine feminine, is a goddess who embodies the energy of the universe and frequently appears to remove demonic energies and restore equilibrium.

Over history, Hindu women have had prominent religious positions as Vedic ritual practitioners and leaders. There have been numerous female rulers in Hindu history, including Rudramadevi, Rani Ahilyabhai, women saints such as Andal, philosophers like Maitreyi, and religious reformers (lilejestrom et.al,2010). Despite the fact that Hinduism represents women figures who play a significant role in comprehending how the world functions, women in Hindu society have frequently been marginalised and their significance has been decreased as a result of girls being made to feel inferior and less significant than boys.

Hindu mythology suggests that patriarchy, the belief that men are superior to women, was created. A power shift occurred in society between males and women, sometimes to the extent that a woman was subject to a man (Tahira Bashrat, 2020). In contrast, matriarchal theology is widespread in Sanskritic traditions and villages. Hinduism about the worship of Shakti, and there are various matriarchal Hindu communities (Karmarae, 2004). Where there has been societal inequity, reformers and feminists have utilised Hindu text to realign the social position of women to empower them with equal possibilities, and modern Hindu society has observed a rise in the number of women assuming leadership positions in numerous contemporary institutions.

Historically, religion has been an oppressive institution for women worldwide. Various attempts have been made by feminist studies of religion and gender to identify the influence of religion on women's conceptualizations. Some theologians think that religion was left off of the list of things that make women unique, which includes race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and culture. (Castelli Elizabeth,2001:4-5). But Malory Nye also considers the study of religion to be the study of culture (Nye,2008:2-3). Religion, according to her, is "cross-cultural" and is somewhat that individuals do and experience in their social lives. And she has enthusiastically commented on the androcentrism of faiths all over the world, whether Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or others, highlighting the extent to which religion generates and operates gender disparities in society (Nye,2008). She cites Mary Daly (1973:28-33) to discuss the male-centeredness of religion, even when glorifying gods, and provides a de-masculinized god who understands to presume differently using the concept of a verb instead of a noun, as a "Being" process.

The French philosopher Luce Irigaray has the similar view of de-masculinizing God, especially in her concept of "divine becoming" (Irigaray1985a [1974], 1985b [1977], 1987; Jantzen 1998; Magee 1995; 102-4) Nye,2008. Her critique of Christian patriarchy was grounded in Freud and Lacan's psychoanalytic concepts, notwithstanding their notable gender insensitivity.

Psychoanalytic theory implies that God does not put prepared souls into bodies. Instead, human personhood is attained at great expense (Jantzen,1998:8). Religion has historically been the basis of the most effective control strategies. This happens mostly

through the suppression of an individual's numerous conflicting desires (1998:8). Lacan, on the other hand, says that a boy's desire is repressed when he enters into "the symbolic," a term he uses to refer to "the broad conceptual patterns of civilization" (Jantzen,1998:10). Only by joining this symbolism — through the development of language and total cultural competency — can a person become a united self with their own subjectivity. Women are so far removed from the symbolic that they are 'the Other,' the object through which the masculine subject defines itself.

Feminist critique questioned the religious belief, which favoured certain groups based on their gender, class, and even skin colour. Some of them aimed for the reformation of religion, with an emphasis on metaphysical and moral issues. Moreover, it cannot be disputed that religion is utilised in the never-ending gender stereotyping process in society and vice versa. The religious discourses and practises account for gender as both are poised to make a distinction and hold power (Castelli, Elizabeth,2001:4). Gender is the defining feature of social connections constructed on observed inequalities between the sexes and the means of sustaining power relationships. People may accept religion by promoting favourable qualities that appear to appreciate women and demonstrate gender sensitivity by disseminating the concept of women's protection. However, the false awareness provided by organised religion cannot be accepted as a mere abstraction. Elizabeth A. Castelli asserts that while it would be irrational to view religion as merely supplying false perception, the negative portrayal of religion is in many ways an ironic holdover from feminism's own Enlightenment inheritance.

By dichotomizing religious/secular conceptions and related experiences, disciplinary territory has become a tool for the development of a gendered society. In India, where secularism is asserted alongside many religious notions centred on spirituality, binary antagonism has played a role. In reality, any of the opposites that arose as organisations or philosophies fared improved contrary to the social gendering of individuals into stereotypical male and female individuals. Secular ideology seemed to be doing nothing more than subjugating women with the same conceptions of gender, such as the idea that men and women have the same fundamental features that made them feminine and masculine. This was in contrast to the religious metaphysical assumptions, which

constrained women in a different way. According to the religion, the female body was inherently evil and inferior to the male body. In accordance with their souls, men are positioned as the norm in God's eyes.

Several religions have also constructed holy books that encourage women's subjugation on the basis that they are sinful beings. In India, for instance, the Upanishads, Smritis, and Buddhist writings declare the innate nature of women to be abnormal. According to the *Brhadaranyaka* Upanishad, man created women for pleasure *(Brhadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4. 1-3).* This indicates that the concept originated around 600 B.C., at the same time as Buddhism. The struggle of Buddhist nuns Soma and *Sumangalamatha* against religious prejudice against women demonstrates Buddhism's gender bias (De LaMotte, et.al, 1997). Ancient Greek religion, which also provided the foundation for great ideas, viewed women as impure and males as pure, whereas Christianity asserted that God created man first and woman from his rib (V. Geetha, 2002:12-13) Alison Jasper believes that there is only ever one transcendent male divine being that exists beyond the realm of terrestrial reality. (Gamble, Sarah,1998:158-167). Therefore, she challenges the process of feminising by religious phenomenology, beginning with God itself.

1.9   RESEARCH PROBLEM

Sadhus are persons who are considered to be holy or ascetic and become part of any religious order. These holy people are referred to by other names as well like *sanyasi, vairagyi, yogi* who perform sadhana to attain moksha. Sadhus are being affected by the societal transformation that has been taking place in recent times. It has been discovered that there are distinct understandings of asceticism and spirituality, and the primary reason for this is the impact of western culture. The categorization of sadhus on the grounds of caste, and gender need to be investigated in the present study. There appears to be a recent contradiction in the textual interpretation of Sadhus, which states that they live apart from the materialistic world; however, in practice, their spiritual orientation is questioned itself, as it is seen in the form of rising engagement of Sadhus in other elements. Some kind of shift seems to take place with regard to one's spirituality and asceticism. As a result, it is essential to understand the extent to which these changes are influencing one another. The present study focuses on how or where

one might identify sect, caste, and gender distinctions among sadhus. Moreover, these new trends on spirituality and asceticism are the primary inspiration for this research.

1.10 RESEARCH GAP

There have been a lot of studies done on Sadhus, particularly that focuses on spirituality and other aspects associated with them. Majority of previously done work highlighted the importance of caste differentiation in religion. Quite a few Indian scholars have studied Indian Sadhus which call for utmost need to study sadhus and their practices of asceticism performed by them. Asceticism being prominent to Hindu religion, a religion which is practiced by the majority of India is the key aspect of Indian Sadhus which has not been broadly covered by majority of previously done work. Spirituality depends on one's understanding and differs from person to person. Very few studies have distinguished the understanding of spirituality by different sects of Sadhus. Since a lesser number of studies have been done on the representation of women as sadhus in these sects therefore, this study emphasises the significance of gender in religion by tracing their practices and focuses on the functional aspect of female as a sadhu in Udaseen and Naga sects. Additionally, how the nature of spirituality and asceticism influence society is not explored by the majority of these studies. Hence, on the basis of the present gap, the objectives of the study are mentioned below.

1.11 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To explore the nature of asceticism and spirituality among Sadhus.
- To analyse the caste influence on Udaseen and Naga Sect.
- To analyse the gender differences among Sadhus.
- To identify the functional aspect of female Sadhus.

1.12 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research proposes a theoretical framework that can be used as a platform for discussions regarding the interconnection between spirituality, asceticism, caste, and gender. Prior to recent years, the Naga and Udaseen Sects received bare minimum attention from researchers in this field of study. It was suggested that additional

research on the Naga sect and the Udaseen sect should be carried out with a goal of tracing the significance that each of these groups holds in the society. This study did not delve explicitly into the sociopolitical or socioeconomic aspects of the sadhus. There is less amount of published research available on female sadhus and the religious rites that they perform. However, it implicitly analyses the influence of caste on the functioning and performance of both Udaseen and Naga sects. Therefore, the addition of gender and the variation of understanding about spirituality that each sadhu holds are vividly covered by this study.

CHAPTER 2 : REVIEW OF LITERATURE
SECTION-I: UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUALITY AND ASCETICISM

2.1   INTRODUCTION

The literature review was linked with past research conducted in my study area and kept under a methodical investigation. This current literature review section focuses on the structural analysis of the topic of religion and the spiritual beliefs practiced within it. A formal section is added. Section one of the chapter discusses understanding spirituality and asceticism from Indian and Western perspectives. The second section, which comprises the intersection between religion, sect, caste, and gender in the Indian context, is the main goal line of this chapter. Religion can be viewed as a social structure characterised by shared rituals, beliefs, and practices. The institution of religion affects society in and of itself. People who identify as members of a certain religion are very attached to their religion. Over time, religious conventions and traditions become enforceable laws.

2.2   SPIRITUALITY

The enchanting land of India (Bharat) has held an aura of allure and spirituality that is sparkling. While largely ignored by their Western counterparts, the practices and traditions that originated here are thorough. Even more crucial is the fact that, though reduced, the ancient practices of spirituality are still widespread in the lives of Indian people. India is the foundation of spiritualism, where several schools of thought emerged, such as Vedanta*, Yoga, Nyaya, and Vaisheshika[12]* (Goswami, 2017). Over several thousand years, an overarching metatheoretical framework developed, which made no distinction between philosophy, religion, and spirituality, binding them together in a mosaic representing the Indian ethos. The consequence is that, today, it is common for a person to intermingle spirituality with religion. In a way, it is true; religion allows people to gain spirituality. Spirituality's abstractness paved the way for

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[12] Hindu philosophy encompasses the philosophies that emerged in Ancient India which includes six Darsana- Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Mimamsa and Vedanta. See more, Goswami, A. (2017). Spiritualism in India. The Pioneer. Retrieved from https://www.dailypioneer.com/2017/sunday-edition/spiritualism-in-india.html

the birth of religions (Aayush, 2015). To understand it better, consider spirituality at one end of the spectrum, religion at the other, and philosophy as the thread that binds them together. So, Spirituality is a way of thinking about the truth or divine power, while religion is a way of living it (Goswami, 2017), and both are based on a similar philosophy.

In Indian thought, the three concepts of spirituality, religion, and philosophy have blurred their distinctions in between over the years. Therefore, the attempt is to explore the meaning of spirituality according to ancient Indian texts in the first phase and then take this account in the further analysis of contemporary practice as a reference.

2.2.1. SPIRITUALITY IN WESTERN CONCEPT

Spirituality begins with the Judeo-Christian tradition, with little distinction between it and religion (Jacobs, 2013). In 1989, Schneider's reached the word "Pneumatikos," meaning a person under the influence of the "Spirit of God" (Oman, 2013), as the root of the word "spirituality." Another understanding comes from the Hebrew word "Ruach," which means "Spirit."

Spirituality is "something that broke free from the restricting confines of association with formal religion." This separation in the West between religion and spirituality, especially concerning the religion of Christianity, is traced back to the work of psychologist Carl Jung (Benner, 1988 as cited in Jacobs, 2013). For example, Love (n.d.) provides a specific context, explanation, and comprehension of the two ideas and how they differ in his article, 'Difference Spirituality from Religion.' Further, he explains religion as an external phenomenon while spirituality is internal. Several other scholars have also given the distinction (Woods & Ironson, 1999; Koenig et al., 2001, as cited in Rao, 2011). Religion is attributed to rules, conducts, traditions, and beliefs developed by humans, whereas spirituality moves away from these, with the quest being to achieve higher being and fulfilment (Jacobs, 2013; Love, n.d.) through connectedness, which occurs intra, inter, and trans personally (Meezenbroek, Garssen, Berg, Dierendonck, Visser, & Schaufeli,2010)

However, it is also expressed that the two constructs have similarities. One view is that spirituality forms an outer circle that encircles several religion's smaller circles (Koenig et al., 2001, as cited in Rao, 2011). The other view holds religion as the outer circle which encircles spirituality (Miller & Thoreson, 1999, as cited in Rao, 2011). Thus, what is observed is a conflicting view of the relationship between spirituality and religion. Furthermore, a minor distinction, 2010) is seen between the two. In empirical studies (Rao, 2011), often cited as religion and spirituality, therefore, a clear disagreement exists on whether the two are the same or different. Since the early 2000s, efforts to understand spirituality in Western studies have increased roughly forty-fold (Oman, 2013). It indicates the revived interest in a once-forgotten, unscientific and supernatural concept. However, many view it from the confines of a scientific view and have detached several spiritual practices from their roots while adopting eastern practices. Moreover, in qualitative research on ten spiritual questionnaires, it was found that they could not capture the essence of spirituality, failed to discriminate spiritual facets from those psychological facets such as personality or well-being, and the items often had inconsistencies (Meezenbroek, Garssen, Berg, Dierendonck, Visser & Schaufeli, 2010).

2.2.2. SPIRITUALITY: A CONCEPT FROM INDIA

The philosophy that emerged in the land of India is believed to be much older than that which emerged in ancient Greece. Moreover, the difference between the two is that Indian philosophy was an amalgamation of scientific reasoning, spirituality, and religion to some extent. Western philosophy is solely based on objectivity and scientific pursuit. Consequently, the slow acceptance of spirituality in the West can be attributed to the complex systems of philosophies in the subcontinent. India has eight distinct systems, each with its own interpretations and teachings on spirituality. Furthermore, it is comprehensive, holistic, and cyclic.

The word "philosophy" is known to have been first used by the Greek philosopher, Pthyogorus. The two words, 'Philo,' which means love, and 'Sophia,' which means wisdom, combine to make the word 'philosophy.' From an Indian perspective, the

Sanskrit word '*Darsana*'[13] It translates into seeing or experiencing (Prabhavananda, 2019). However, this seeing or experiencing has a deeper meaning than the immediate perception. Does that mean absorbing everything through our senses at a given time? No *Darsana*, according to Indian epistemology, refers to super-sensuous transcendental (Prabhavananda, 2019), that is, witnessing the Absolute truth—the experience of Brahman transcending time, space, and causation (Yvas, 1982 as cited in Gill, 2006). Therefore, experiencing spirituality means the experience of spirit *(Atman),* or spiritual consciousness permeating the universe and encompassing all human endeavours (Rao, 2011).

a) Vedas

Indian spirituality derives from the *Vedas*, the *Brahmanas,* the *Aranyakas*, the *Upanishads*, and the two great Indian epics, *Ramayana and Mahabharata*.' The *Vedas* are believed to date back to at least 2000 B.C. and are passed down through oral tradition. It is when you do not find the followers of '*Sanatan Dharma,*'[14] Today, they are known as followers of Hinduism, worshipping idols *(Murtis).* However, the *Vedas* reveal the eternal order (formless) itself.

The Vedas come from the Sanskrit root word, *'Ved,'* meaning 'knowledge,' and is believed to be a non-human (*Aparuseya*) creation revealed to the *Risis,*[15] the seers of truth (Kumar & Choudhary, 2021). It is held in the highest regard as the source of sublime and scientific knowledge.

The four-great works of Vedic literature are: the *Rig Veda* (written in honour of deities, concepts around death, life*, Atma, and Paramatma),* the *Yajur Veda* (hymns to perform *Vedic Yajnas*); the *Sama Veda* (ceremonial texts, melodies, and chants), and the *Atharva*

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[13] Darsanas are schools of philosophy based on Vedas, in Indian tradition the word used for philosophy is Darsana. see Prabhavananda, S. (2019). Spiritual Heritage of India, NY, New York: Taylor & Francis. Retrieved   from https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/_/hu4xvgEACAAJ?hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKE%20wj52ILkj rXwAhXNzjgGHcTAA_0Q8fIDMBV6BAgGEA0

[14] Sanatan Dharma is an endonym used by Hindus to refer to Hinduism, it refers to eternal truth and teachings of Hinduism. See more Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Sanatan dharma." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 18 Jun. 2009,   https://www.britannica.com/topic/sanatana-dharma.

[15] Kumar, S., & Choudhary, S. (2021). Ancient Vedic Literature and Human Rights: Resonances and Dissonances. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2020.1858562

Veda (deals with magic, *tantra-mantra,* spirits, and medicinal resources of plants, etc.) (Roy, 2016; Vyas, 2016; Kumar & Choudhary, 2021).

b) Upanishads

In the Hindu religion, apart from the Vedas, the *Upanishads* are also considered a spiritual philosophy.

"To know Brahman is to be Brahman."[16]

For example, in Upanishads, scholars like Radhakrishnan (as cited in Jacob, 1975) are known for their utmost clarity and work on them.

"Though in some sense the Upanishads are the continuation of the Vedic religion, they are in another sense a strong philosophical protest against the religion of the Brahmanas. It is in the Upanishads that the tendency to spiritual monism, which, in one form or another, characterizes much of Indian philosophy, was first established whose intuition rather than reason was first recognized as the true guide of ultimate truth."[17]

The statement makes a few things clear:

1. The Upanishads present the ancient Indian understanding of spiritualism, which is profound and enlightening.
2. They are philosophical interpretations of the Vedas, but they are also a revolt against the Brahmanas born of the Vedas.
3. It talks about the ultimate truth, considered the end goal of Indian thought.
4. The ultimate truth lies within us.

The texts of the *Upanishads* are believed to bring closure to the Vedas and, therefore, are also called *Vedanta* (end of the *Vedas*). Prabhavananda (2019) states another interesting interpretation of 'anta', which means the final goal-the highest wisdom (transcendence). Today, a total of 108 Upanishads is extant. Curiously, an undertone of mystery revolves around these ancient sacred texts. Nobody knows when they first

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[16]Jacob, T. R. (1975). Concept of Self in Indian Thought. Retrieved from https://epublications.marquette.edu/theses/1075

[17] Ibid

appeared, who wrote them, or how many there were in total. (Prabhavananda, 2019) The *Upanishads* are held in high regard among the followers of *Sanatan Dharma* as they allow an average person to connect more with their philosophy and religion and with the formless. (Roy, 2016; Prabhavananda, 2019) The word "Upanishad" comes from Sanskrit words that mean "sitting next to the spiritual guru to learn secret spiritual knowledge."

It is imperative to realise that the *Upanishads*, a driving force behind Indian thought, are far from belief. They move away from the ritualistic and sacrificial traditions of the Vedas yet retain the scientific basis. The sacred texts deal with the metaphysical and spiritual aspects, which are abstract at their core (posing a challenge to appreciate them from an objective lens). However, the *Upanishads* were just as scientific as their source texts—the Vedas. In the scientific archive, the *Upanishads* took an unparalleled turn toward the medium of knowing-the mind (Easwaran, 2007). The Upanishads comprise the basis of the Upanishads. When philosophy was rising in the West, the sages in India dealt with a complex understanding of dreams, wakeful states, and self- 'I' and found their answer in consciousness (*Brahmavidya*)[18] the Supreme Science (Easwaran, 2007). Ancient people were interested in understanding these complex ideas that scientists still do not fully understand. This shows that these texts are just as important today as they were back then.

2.2.3. CONNECTION BETWEEN RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Religion and Spirituality are inherently distinct. Sinnott (2001), for instance, separates spirituality from religion, which entails dedication to specific rituals and ideas, even though he acknowledges that the two are typically difficult to differentiate and are seldom defined in theory and study (Sinnott, 2002a, b). The benefit of differentiating the two is the knowledge that a sort of spirituality properly described is highly relevant to individuals outside of strict norms and organisations (Rayburn, 2004). Spirituality

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[18] Brahmavidya is that branch of scriptural knowledge derived primarily through a study of the Upanishads, Brahmasutra and Bhagvad Gita. See more
 The Upanishads (E. Easwaran, Trans.; 2nd ed.). (2007). Retrieved from https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/The_Upanishads/CcnJAAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv%20=1

works particularly effectively within a Western worldview that places a premium on the person and his or her experiences over social demands and relationships (Mattis, Ahluwalia, Cowie, and Kirkland-Harris, 2006; Bonny Castle, 2004). Academics from Europe find the difference especially interesting because they think that the loss of traditional traits and religion is linked to a move toward otherworldliness and emphasis on deeper parts of the self (Houtman & Aupers, 2007).

There is a wealth of evidence in the experimental literature suggesting that concepts and measuring instruments can be developed to assess religion and otherworldliness autonomously in Western descriptions continuously, thereby recognising their distinctive features or consequences and recognising those who are either profound or strict but not both even though they share much genetic material and appear to be related to many people (Halman & Riis, 2003; Shahabi et al., 2002). For example, (Dowling et al.,2004) revealed that religion and otherworldliness flourish independently, notwithstanding the influence of otherworldliness on legalism.

They found that otherworldliness included direction to help others accomplish great work and partake in exercises of personal circumstance. This was found to diverge from legalism, which included things connected with convictions and institutional impacts. A few investigations with grown-ups also demonstrate how religion and otherworldliness can be distinguished and how they transformed distinctively throughout the maturing procedure, with bunch midpoints on legalism remaining genuinely predictable across the life expectancy, while otherworldliness increases, particularly around the age of 60 (e.g., Dillon and Wink, 2003). (Shahabi et al., 2002) People who are less dogmatic about their otherworldliness may also have other beliefs, like a more logical outlook or the certainty that life has no purpose.

Others are opposed to the practice of clearly separating religion from spirituality. Those who adhere to strong customs tend to be generally peculiar (Merton, 2005). According to research conducted by psychologist Brian Zinnbauer and his colleagues, experts who distinguish between religion and otherworldliness frequently conflate the two ideas in a value-laden manner, with organised common religion characterised negatively and personal otherworldliness positively. According to them, these definitions may reveal more about the abilities and preconceptions of the agents than the distinctions they are

attempting to capture (Zinnbauer et al., 1999). They also illustrate the fact that the majority of our targets do not differentiate between them. In their studies of US Midwestern adults, only 6.7% of the sample perceived the two as totally separate, whereas the majority viewed the two as intertwined in certain manner (Zinnbauer et al., 1997; cf. Musick, Traphagan, Koenig, and Larson, 2000). Japan also discovered comparable findings (Takahashi & Ide, 2003). A personality study indicates that those high in otherworldliness and legalism share several traits, including a loving disposition toward others (Piedmont, 2005). In some social situations, the difference between religion and otherworldliness may not matter, and when both are accepted, they may, in some ways, complement each other (Verma & Maria, 2006).

Is it possible to be otherworldly and not rigid? The answer to whether it is feasible to engage in extra-terrestrial travel without official enrolment in a structured group is yes. However, separating otherworldliness from religion is problematic. David Elkins, a therapist, believes it is possible and outlines a path for a deep life beyond religion in his book, Beyond Religion (1998). Nonetheless, his programme employs habits and beliefs derived from substantial and rigorous conventions, and he frequently cites strict statistics to support his arguments. This demonstrates that it is often difficult to distinguish between otherworldliness and religion (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Eliassen et al., 2005) and that practising otherworldliness without stringent guidelines is problematic in several ways. In Christianity, specialists and intellectuals have long opposed the separation of religion and philosophy from otherworldliness because it is unsuitable and hazardous, even though this separation has happened throughout history. These academics would argue that Christianity and otherworldliness are inextricably intertwined and that the same is likely true of other stringent traditions (Tillich, 1963; Pannenberg, 1983; Rahner, 1975; Sheldrake, 1995). The investigation of spirituality in people beyond strict gatherings is especially troublesome. Most considerations of spirituality to date include the people who belong to temples or other strict gatherings (Emmons, 1999:98). There are two distinct techniques to determine the relationship between religion and otherworldliness, assuming they are unmistakably connected. It is plausible to think that religion is either an 'add-on' or reaction to otherworldliness or that otherworldliness is merely a subset of religion. For example, Kenneth Pargament (1999:32) describes religion as a craving for meaning in sacred-related ways and argues

that religion is a more inclusive notion than otherworldliness (Zinnbauer et al., 1999; Pargament, 1999). Stifoss-Hanssen, a European scientist, asserted that spirituality is a more general concept in 1999, claiming that atheists and sceptics cannot understand the specifics of holiness as they are stressed in religion. According to a third viewpoint, while holiness is linked to religion and the consecrated, it can also be attained in other ways (Demerath, 2000). (Hill et al., 2000; Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2019) It would be smart to think of religion and otherworldliness as both obvious and inclusive.

According to Roof (1999:35), there are four main aspects of spirituality: (1) an external source of values and ultimate meaning or purpose; (2) a way of perceiving; (3) an internal state of awareness; and (4) a connection with one's fellow human beings (cf. Tillich, 1957; Becker, 2001; MacInnes, 2003:51; Ingersoll, 1994). The significance of the end product's quality cannot be overstated. Spirituality unites and harmonises who we are on the inside, our relationships with others and the universe as a whole, and our resilience to transcendence (Schneiders, 1998; cf. McGrath, 2006; Kosek, 1996; Theophan, 1995:95–99). Humans are spiritual beings, and spirituality is not anything separate from who we are or what we do (Wagener & Malony, 2006; Wuthnow, 1998; Shafranske & Gorsuch, 1984:231); May 2004, p. 42; Most views of spirituality include interaction with the divine or forces whose influence over man grows or appears to grow in proportion to man's efforts to subjugate them (Girard, 1977:31; cf. Roehlkepartain, 2004). Spirituality is a vast, incomprehensible characteristic that cannot be reduced to a particular field of study (May 2004:183). Spirituality transforms our lives and relationships beyond ordinary, everyday experiences. It is about being and doing, too. It entails searching for greater ideals, personal freedom, and significance in life (Shannon, 2000:47; Vergote, 2003). In Western countries, this question is usually about God, but a nontheist could also be involved (Mansager et al., 2002).

2.3 UNDERSTANDING ASCETICISM

Asceticism is a practice marked by the renunciation of sensuous gratification, often for the purpose of pursuing spiritual aims. Ascetics may abandon the world for their practices or remain a part of the community. However, they typically adopt a modest life, marked by the renunciation of worldly things and sensual pleasures, and spend more time fasting while focusing on their religious practice or ability to reflect on

spiritual matters (Richard Finn, 2009:94-97). Different individuals have also sought asceticism to relieve themselves of attachments, some of which are materialist world specific (Deezia, 2017).

2.3.1. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION ON ASCETICISM

The word asceticism originates from the Greek word askesis, which means 'to train' or 'to exercise' in terms of the physical ability and physiological control of an individual (Smith, 2005:153). However, 'asceticism' may be described as self-denial, abnegation, self-inflicting suffering, and renunciation to attain some higher purpose. It involves improving one's physical state to make one's spiritual state more perceptible.

It is the structure of one's life around religious texts and interpretations. Asceticism comes in two varieties. Natural asceticism is a way of life in which material things are minimised without mutilation or severe monastic vows that hurt the body. Unnatural asceticism, on the other hand, involves physical mortification and self-inflicted pain, like sleeping on a bed of nails.

Asceticism is a collection of rituals, beliefs, and motivations developed in several historical and cultural settings. It is widely acknowledged as the highest spiritual state attainable in this life (Nabofa, 1997:55). It is site-specific in the terminology of art criticism. Suppose the historical and phenomenological integrity of asceticism's multiple forms is to be preserved. In that case, it is without a doubt necessary to let ascetic events happen in different ways that have different material and psychosocial meanings.

Every religion has a method of disseminating its concepts and doctrines. As a result, the term asceticism has come to apply to a wide range of practices in diverse religious traditions worldwide. Ascetic practises are used to achieve a range of goals. Many religious traditions urge or demand austerity at specific seasons in the religious calendar, typically for purification for a major ritual event (Smith, 2005). Ascetic practices include "fasting, chastity, seclusion, full avoidance of intoxicants, and abandonment of material possessions."

Scholars have been baffled by the origins of Indian asceticism. The rationale is oblivious. Classical Hinduism, as well as other faiths that emerged on Indian territory, emphasises asceticism. However, the Vedas, India's oldest surviving writings, exude a distinct understanding. There is no desire for emancipation from this and the next life, no yearning to withdraw from the world, but rather to achieve all the benefits this life has to offer: a long life, a son, cows, money.

2.3.2. ASCETICISM AND ITS ORIGIN

Asceticism is a collection of features characterised by bodily mortification and spiritual and bodily isolation. Its core is inactiveness vs. commotion, in denial of materialistic life versus immersion in it. This concept of asceticism as an individual practice must be modified when referring to asceticism as a communal behaviour. When more than two people get together, rules and restrictions are practically unavoidable. Some form of shelter becomes necessary. The guiding principle of the universe in ancient India was known as *"rta* (literally, "the flow of things")[19]*."* According to Vedic religion, *"rta"* is the primary order that controls and directs the universe's operations. *"Ma'at"*[20] and dike were instances of cosmic regulations in ancient Iran. *"rta"* signifies the law, unity, or righteousness that defines the social order of the cosmos. On a societal level, instability and disorder would prevail without *"rta."* Additionally, this cosmic energy makes the sacrifice successful (Mahony, 1998).

As a result, *"rta"* is the foundation of truth and reality, allowing cosmic harmony and dynamic order between objects and events to exist. It is a creative force that runs through the whole universe and is neither a thing nor a place (Mahony, 1998). In addition to *"rta,"* *"tapas"*[21] (literally, heat) is an essential element of the classical

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[19] In the vedic religion, rta is the principle of natural order which regulates and coordinates the operation of the universe and everything within it. rta is described as that which is ultimately responsible for functioning of moral and sacrificial orders. See more from William K. Mahony, 1998, The Artful Universe: An Introduction to the Vedic Religious Imagination. Retrieved from https://books.google.co.in/books?id=B1KR_kE5ZYoC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false

[20] Ma'at refers to the ancient concept of truth, balance, order, harmony, law, morality and justice. Ibid

[21] Tapas is a variety of austere spiritual practices, it often involves solitude and is a part monastic practices that are believed to be a means to moksha (liberation, salvation). see more
Walter O. Kaelber, (1989) Tapta Marga: Asceticism and Initiation

Indian reality paradigm. Tapas is an inherent component of reality. According to an ancient Indian hymn of creation, there was once a period when (*Rig Veda 10.190.1). "Tapas"* (heat), a naturally occurring heat connected with the sun or fire, gave birth to *"rta"* (cosmic order) and "*Satya"* (truth). By using the innate heat involved in biological conception, embryonic development, and birth, one can achieve invulnerability, the ability to ascend to the highest point in the cosmos, poetic inspiration, greater strength, and the capacity to battle death *(Rig Veda 10.154.2; 8.59.6; 19.183.1). Tapas* is a creative, dynamic, and transformational force that can influence the cosmos. Furthermore, while *tapas* predate Vedic deities in origin, the deities employ them to carry out their creative endeavours, even though they are the source of their existence. A human can obtain poetical inspiration *(RigVeda 8.59.6)*, become invincible, and reach the greatest point of the universe in Vedic literature (*RigVeda 10.154.2). Tapas* can also defeat death and avert reincarnation (*RigVeda 10.183.1*; *Atharvaveda Samhita 11.5.19).* Tapas practice helps you find your true self, or atman, and prepares you for higher states of awareness, knowledge, or meditation *(Mundaka Upanisad 3.1, 4.4).* In short, "tapas" is a spiritually powerful material that can be earned or lost. This means that people who have it must be careful to keep it from breaking down or getting lost.

Asceticism is well established by the time of the epic literature (roughly 200 BCE–200 CE), as evidenced by its appearance in the Mahabharata's *Moksha dharma* (teachings of liberation), which includes a discussion of *Samkhya* philosophy and the practise of yogic techniques, though neither is developed systematically. Ascetics are described as travelling ascetics wearing kusa grass (considered sacred within the Vedic sacrificial cult), animal skins, or tree bark. Hair, beards, nails, and body hair are not cut by ascetics (12.192.2). Leaving behind fire, wealth, and wives; being detached; treating all objects equally; having detached thoughts; viewing all people as equals; practising nonviolence in thought, word, and deed; begging from pure householders; dwelling in a village for a single night or five nights in a town; desisting from sensual pleasure; and not sinning are all examples of ascetic practices. (12.192.3–5).

"The Brahmacarin: Homology and Continuity in Brahmanic Religion," History of Religions 21/1 (1981) and "Tapas, Birth, and Spiritual Rebirth in the Veda," History of Religions 15/4 (1976).

The epic's *Moksha dharma* portion refers to universal sorrow regardless of social or economic background (12.174.13). Moreover, happiness is not permanent and is followed by sadness. To emphasise their transient nature, happiness and suffering are compared to a revolving wheel (12.174.19). The human body is the seat of happiness and misery, influenced by past karma (12.174.21). Suffering is linked to numerous forms of social connection. By severing all links with society, the ascetic wanders without possessions, a state associated with happiness *(Sukham).* Curbing desire is like a tortoise withdrawing its limbs (12.174.51). A person experiences suffering within a body and the flux of time that is conceived as a wheel with no beginning or finish (12.210.13). Time is depicted as forceful, destructive, and capable of cooking beings (12.227.15, 73, 84). *Tapas* (asceticism) is a power that permeates the three worlds and allows the moon and sun to shine (12.217.15). From another angle, *tapas*, which includes celibacy, nonviolence, and mental restraint, develops knowledge (12.217.16). Lastly, not only does meditation have the most power, but so does asceticism (12.294.7; 215.14).

In India, acquiring power, attempting to eliminate the effects of transgressions and ritual failures, and securing a place in the afterlife serve as the driving elements for someone choosing an asceticism-based existence. Later, the Upanishads advocated a quest for an absolute being as a reason because it was believed important to go beyond the practise of *tapas,* which had limitations in accomplishing the higher aim embodied in obtaining control over and maintaining the universe.

2.3.3.   ASCETICISM IN HINDU TRADITION

The term 'Hinduism' originates from the word 'Hindu,' which means India (William, 2003). It is one of the most prevalent faiths in Asia and is considered the oldest religion in the world. On this premise, it may be regarded as the Indian people's religion, way of life, and philosophy. The Vedas, which include the *Rig-Veda, Sama-Veda, Yajur-Veda, and Atharva-Veda[22],* are among their oldest manuscripts (Omeregbe, 2002).

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[22] The Vedas are a large body of religious text originating in ancient India, there are four Vedas: the Rigveda, the Yajurveda, the Samaveda and the Atharvaveda. The Rigveda contains hymns about their mythology, the Samaveda consists mainly of hymns about religious rituals, the Yajurveda contains

Hindus refer to Brahman as the absolute truth or a superior human being. Seals portraying a man sitting in 'what appears to be a yogic stance' have been discovered at the Hindu Valley site, suggesting that yoga and meditation, two forms of asceticism, have been practised in India since ancient times. Long-haired quiet sages *(Munis)* Clarol are shown, as a result of their austere habits, dressed in filthy yellow robes or naked. (Smith, 2005).

In specific places, the Vedas guarantee that the gods achieved their position or even made the universe through the strength of their internal, austere intensity *(Tapas),* which they accomplished through thorough physical and otherworldly self-control and body change (Bhagat, 1976). It is critical to take note that one can achieve this plain intensity of becoming joined with, or burdened with, the *Brahman* (general soul) through an assortment of parsimonious methods, like fasting, virtue, and different yogic strategies. For instance, breath control *(Pranayama)* is a means through which adepts might acquire extraordinary supernatural abilities and, surprise, celestial position (Eliade, 1969). For example, some ascetics may go for years without moving, while others can stand or swim for many weeks. Ascetics entirely 'eat fruits or discarded grain.' Ascetics who practise the five fire rituals and spike-lying ascetics who sleep on beds of nails are among the most famous (Haripuda, 1973). In a nutshell, Hindus exercise asceticism for their *atman".*[23] (Single Soul) to come to be linked to the Brahman (Universal Soul), and then they become *Brahmatman.*

It is worth noting that austerity was an important aspect of the ritual process in the early Hindu or 'Vedic period,' notably among the Brahmans. The *Diksha*[24] ceremony acts as a rite of passage into the sacrificial situation, that is when ascetic behaviour is most visible. During the three days of consecration and purification, people 'fast, stay in a

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instructions for religious rituals, and the Atharvaveda consist of spells against enemies, sorcerers and diseases.

[23] Atman is one of the basic concepts in Hindu philosophy, the universal self, identical with the eternal core of the personality that after death either transmigrates to a new life or attains moksha from the bonds of existence. See more
Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "atman". *Encyclopaedia Britannica.* https://www.britannica.com/topic/atman

[24] Diksha in ancient India, the rite performed prior to the vedic sacrifice in order to consecrate its patron, or sacrifice; the initiation of a person by the guru (spiritual guide) of a religious group. See more
Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "diksha". *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/topic/diksha

hut, limit their breathing, abstain from sex, and do other ascetic things.' A magical heat accumulates within the sacrifice throughout this period of austerity, or *tapas*. '*Tapas*' also refers to the heat itself in Sanskrit, implying that austerity is both a practice and a product. Tapas pervades the ascetic, endowing him with incredible strength.

Patrick Olivelle's research on Hindu hermits and Sanyasis is intriguing. Olivelle remarks that sanyasis travel freely, challenging stability. Hindu renouncers can portray themselves as children, fools, maniacs, or drunkards, demonstrating the renouncer's rejection of logic, morality, and purity. Olivelle considers early Hindu renunciation anticultural. Asceticism is only intelligible in terms of the culture it resists. Asceticism is sometimes seen as purposeful disagreement. According to Professor Olivelle's work, shaving one's head, as Buddhist monks do, and not shaving one's hair both reject traditional cultural norms and values.

2.3.4. FORMS OF RELIGIOUS ASCETICISM

Asceticism is viewed as a fundamental part of spiritual development as it contains many activities that focus on enlightening indecencies and imparting uprightness. Throughout the existence of religions, there has been a wide range of parsimony. Renunciation or restrictions of survival (fasting), sexual forbearance (abstinence), social withdrawal, renunciation of resources (or, failing that, limitation to the basic basics), renunciation of all that may be helpful for happiness, and in extreme cases, self-inflicted agony (like whipping and self-mutilation) are the most widely recognised forms of asceticism (Fuchs, 2006).

In contemporary usage, the phrase refers to the daily practice of renunciation and the subjection of one's entire daily lifestyle to the rules of that renunciation. Ascetic's approaches, on the other hand, are founded on the demands of daily living, driven by instincts. "Air, food, water, sleep, sex, clothing and shelter, friendship and status, communication, sense-pleasure, and a feeling of identity" are things humans require or desire. Asceticism includes breath control, fasting, vigilance, moderation, poverty,

bareness and begging, isolation, calm, pain tolerance, and self-inspiring character to meet these prerequisites (Thurman, 2016).

a) Fasting

Fasting is not eating or drinking for some time. It is abstaining from food and restricting its intake. The intensity, time, and intention of a fast vary; a full fast is one in which all food and drinks are avoided. The practice is frequently combined with other secretive or explicit religious rituals. Christians, for instance, fast during Easter (40 days). Muslims fast throughout the lunar month of Ramadan. As a means of purification, African traditional religious priests undergo fasting.

b) Celibacy

Celibacy is sexual abstention for spiritual or religious reasons; asceticism, and monasticism. It includes worldly renunciation and chastity vows (Hemthep, 2014). Sannyasa is the fourth and final stage of Hinduism and includes celibacy for the Vedic path (Brown, 1988). Even though chastity is encouraged in Islam, Jesus called those who stay celibate to get to heaven "Eunuchs" (Matthew 9:12), and Paul said that staying celibate was the best way to live.

c) Asceticism in Community/Solitude

Solitude/Isolation refers to a complete disengagement from or renunciation of the local community for religious purposes. For example, the desert, forests, waterfront, and mountains could also provide such a distance. In other words, full separation from society on both a physical and mental level showed that the likelihood of sinning was much reduced since the desire to sin was gone. For example, in African Traditional Religion, most shrines are near rivers or in the woods, where the priest is supposed to live.

d) Asceticism in Yogic Culture

It is a meditation and self-discipline technique that allows practitioners to engage with the ultimate truth. It incorporates restrictions, observations, positions, deep breathing,

sensual detachment, meditation, and reflection. This kind of austerity is common in Hinduism.

e) Nocturnal Vigils

It is self-inflicted sleep deprivation that occurs overnight or at a set time. To achieve a spiritual goal, the practitioner remains up, particularly at night, to indulge in meditation, prayer, and penance. This kind of asceticism is not exclusive to Christianity; some ceremonies and rituals in African traditional religion are carried out at night.

f) Asceticism Causes Pain

Asceticism that produces pain includes tiresome or painful tasks, consciousness, and mortification. They allow the individual to intentionally become bodiless and feel ecstasy, self-greatness, and other states. The majority of Christian monks self-tortured, for example, priests self-flogging to practice, the Ogoni Amanikpo Secret Society, and its solemn induction rites in African traditional religion.

Asceticism in India has several connotations and is not necessarily synonymous with renunciation (sannyasa) since it may also be achieved in the home sphere. According to Burghart (1983: 643), asceticism can take different forms, such as staying in a normal social environment, refusing societal roles, or moving outside of the societal structures (in which circumstances overlap with abandonment).

As Emile Durkheim stated in "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life," 'we cannot detach ourselves from (the profane) without doing violence to our nature and without painfully wounding our instincts. In other words, the negative cult cannot develop without causing suffering. Pain is one of its necessary conditions' (Durkheim, 1961:351). Asceticism is the criterion for development, yet asceticism causes more harm than good. As long as humans have stigmatised desire, they have caused unnecessary pain (Wise Sloth, 2013:44).

SECTION – II: THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN RELIGION, SECT, SADHUS, CASTE, GENDER IN INDIAN CONTEXT

2.4 RELIGION

Religion is an attitude towards superhuman powers. Superhuman power, in effect, is related to spirituality. Humans are said to be endowed with a natural capacity for spirituality. Their mission is to find that indomitable energy that permeates the cosmos and directly impacts everything. Religion may be seen as a tool for revealing and realising human spirituality. The Oxford English Dictionary describes religion as "human recognition of superhuman controlling power and especially of a personal God entitled to obedience, the effect of such recognition on conduct and mental attitude" (Oxford, 1963:1048).

Religion is predicated on man's intellectual need for completion; human have a hunger for God, albeit his understanding of what that end is has diverse tremendously through time, (Spinks, 1963:50). Considering this fact, C. G. Jung (1958:42) says that religion is the result and culmination of a whole life.

The relationship between individuals and the supernatural, all-pervading force is also upheld by philosophy. In the views of Radhakrishnan, everything that exists strives for its own perfection, and man is acutely conscious of his own imperfection. Religion is the one and only human activity that enables man to pursue a life of greatness and self-determination, as it provides man with purpose and the will to live.' (Radhakrishnan, 1969:443).

Roland Robertson explains that, 'Religion is the belief in the existence of a supernatural being that regulates life.' (Robertson, 1969:170). Similarly, Melford E. Spiro believes that religion is founded on a foundation of faith. 'Beliefs in superhuman beings and their power to assist or harm man,' (Spiro, 1983:196). Geertz examines religion from a different viewpoint. Geertz (1947: 92) explains that religion, 'system of symbols functions to produce these feelings and impulses by creating conceptions of a general order of reality and clothing these ideas with such an aura of factual accuracy that they seem particularly substantial.'

2.4.1. ORIGIN OF RELIGION

Many philosophers and intellectuals have quite different perspectives on the question of when religion first emerged. The development of faith is something that philosophers may see from a variety of perspectives. Charles de Brosses, in the 18th century, claimed that the initial form of religion was fetishism— The worshiping of inorganic items such as rocks and living things such as trees, animals, etc., Brosses, (1972:8). It refers to the admiration of material objects because of their mystical power. The Portuguese explorers were the first to introduce the term fetishes to West African Negroes' wooden sculptures. The core of a fetish is that an object possesses a hidden power for good or evil, which some primitive society individuals term 'mana'. If the fetish fulfils the desires of its possessors, it is revered; if it does not, it is degraded.

The philosopher Herbert Spencer proposed a similar but modified idea. Spencer asserted that human beings converted their ancestor's spirits that were transformed into gods. Ancestral reverence is the basis of all religions. The ancients thought that the soul continued to live in some manner after death. The idea manifests in appeasing the deceased soul or spirit at the funeral and for a time afterwards. This persistent ancestor worship evolved from this ghostly idea. The formation of religion appears to have been significantly influenced by ghost belief. This view is frequently called euhemerism after Euhemerus, a philosopher from the fourth century B.C. They maintained that the gods of religion were initially strong and authoritative mortals elevated to divine status (Spencer, 1972:6).

James Frazer, a proponent of "magical theory", was a classical academic who gathered a large amount of content on religion and published The Golden Bough, a very important multi-volume study (1972:6). According to him, magic is the progenitor of religion. The theory assumes that man's initial effort to influence nature relied on magic. When he recognised it was difficult to dominate the forces of nature with magic, he decided to revere and worship them. Frazer infers the emergence of religion from this transformation of magical to supernatural belief. Frazer felt that the magical period came before the animistic stage. M. F. Keesing defines magic as a word that

encompasses many techniques by which man pretends to repeatedly alter the sequence of events with a touch of the supernatural.

Edward Tylor, one of the most influential pioneers in anthropology, stated that religion originated from the belief in immaterial souls that might occupy objects such as rocks, trees, mountains, animals, and human bodies but could also exist independently of them. A significant kind of animism seen among the Santhals and Oraons is ancestral worship. Tylor believed that the preliminary form of religion was animism, or the certainty in the soul. He coined the word animism (after the Greek word anima, meaning soul) to refer to the belief in the survival of such trans-empirical souls or spirits. A man may dream of a friend who has recently died. In the dream, the man seems to continue to exist as a soul, independent of his physical body. Through dream experiences, man thus became convinced of the existence of a realm of spirit entities, which is the basis of religious beliefs, Tylor (1972:5). Tylor says that religion evolved in the form of animism to fulfil man's cognitive ability and his need to make meaning of death, dreams, and visions. (Tylor,1970:142). According to Tylor, animism, polytheism, and monotheism are the historical progression of religion. Risby also contends that the primary tribal religion is animism.

According to prominent British anthropologist Robert Ranulph Marett, animatism, believing in the impersonal force behind every material item, should be considered the basis of all religions. This impersonal force maintains collective harmony and prosperity, Marett's animatistic approach (1990:502). R.H. Codrington defines Mana as a force different from physical strength that operates for good and evil and is advantageous to possess or control. Chota Nagpur, Ho and Munda tribes name it Bonga (Bongaism), Madan (1990:166).

Totemism is the concept that a tribe is connected to a thing, generally a plant or an animal, to which they pay honour by taking its name, sacrificing, or worshipping it. The totem is regarded as the tribe's progenitor. The main exponents of the importance of totemism for the origin of religion were W. Robertson Smith, S. Freud, E. Durkheim, and J.G. Frazer.

W. Robertson Smith, who had made a special study of sacrifice among the Semites, assumed totemism as the basis of all religion. He maintained that on a certain festival,

the totem animal, identified with the God and the members of the tribe, was sacrificed and a communal meal made of its flesh and blood; thus, the intimate connection with the totemic God was renewed and his vital powers newly absorbed by this common feast or communion. He claimed that all sacrifices were derived from this totemic communion sacrifice. He argued that the most fundamental aspects of religion might be reduced to rituals and ceremonies, which is what ancient religions were based upon. That was also the opinion of Durkheim. According to him, Totemism is the bedrock from which all other religions spring. He arrived at the sociological description of religion after concluding in his essay "the elementary forms of religious life" that society is the eventual basis of religion. The formal name is sociological theory.

Sigmund Freud explained the origin of religion by totemism differently. According to him, men lived in the past in hordes, consisting of one adult male, some females, and immature individuals. The sons of the primal horde were driven off by their father when they grew up. They later banded together, slew their father, ate him, and appropriated the females. In the survival of those primordial times, the psychoanalysts discovered a subconscious sexual love between the son for his mother and the daughter for her father. The totem, now, is a father-substitute. The primordial hatred of the son for the father is transferred to some beast to which the child feels himself related.

Durkheim was concerned with totemism, the transformation of certain natural objects or animals into a clan-based social organization's symbolic (or totem). Durkheim argued that totemism proved the social structure of religion and its social foundation. Durkheim (1972:9) J.G. Frazer's great work on totemism tries to explain the relationship between totemism and the origin of religion. However, later, he rejected the theory.

David Hume, Giddings, and other German scholars have also endorsed F. Max Muller's naturalistic thesis. The nativist worldview holds that natural phenomena are imbued with a supernatural quality. According to Max Muller, this is the first form of organised religion. Volcanoes, thunder, and lightning are examples of the awe, fear, marvels, and miracles found in nature. Early man personified, deified, and revered these items due to being overwhelmed by the might and wonder of nature. Naturism looks to man's

emotional needs for the genesis of religion, as opposed to animism, which looks to the academic requirements of man. The result of man's emotional reaction to the beauty and majesty of nature is naturism. The Assamese Garo tribe worship the sun, moon, rivers, mountains, stars, trees, and other elements of nature, (Max, 1967:22).

According to C E M Joad, the early religious ideas could be understood as a mixture of "fear and cupboard love." (– (Joad, 1975:24). According to Plekhanov, religion begins when a tribe begins to believe in the existence of a relationship between itself and a supernatural being (Plekhanov, 1965:95). According to him, the belief in a God or Gods sets religions apart.

The English Deists of the 18th century sought to provide a rational account of religion's beginnings. They believed that religion's basics, such as God's existence, soul immortality, and moral law, resulted from logical thought. Consequently, in their view, the religion of reason is something inherent to and always familiar to man. The priests used the anxieties and naivety of the masses to gain control over them for their benefit. They progressively supplanted the straightforward religion of reason with superstitious and complex ceremonies. Therefore, according to Deists, there are two roots of religion: human reason and dishonest priestcraft. Despite this, the unadulterated form of religion evolved from the extraordinary intelligence of early man.

According to Sumner and Keller, religion emerged in response to a specific need, namely the urge to adapt to a supernatural or imaginary environment that mimics the real world and is compelling in its adaptation. They contend that religion may not have developed without the influence of chance. The Aleatory theory is the name given to this concept (Sumner, 1990:502).

2.5   SADHUS

Sadhu[25]*, and *Sadhvi*[26]*, According to Klostermaier (2007:299), religious ascetics, mendicants, or holy people in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism who have abandoned worldly life, According to Monnier William, the term "sadhu" exists in the Rigveda and Atharvaveda, where it denotes "straight, correct, going to goal." The Sanskrit terms Sadhu and Sadhvi allude to renunciates who have decided to live away from or on the fringes of society to concentrate on their spiritual activities (Gavin Flood, 1996:92). In Hindu religious terminology, Sadhu describes a man endowed with high spiritual wealth and religious values.

'Mahatma, Santa, Paramhamsa, Avadhuta, Guru, Baba, and Acharya' these are just a few other names for Sadhus. A *"Mahatma"* is a person with a great soul, a *"Sant"* is a religious leader, and a *'Paramhamsa'* is a divine being of the highest order who has the ability to know the truth from the untruth. A Sadhu's discovery of the truth is compared to a swan's ability to separate milk from water, thus the name *'Paramhamsa.'* Since the words *Guru, Baba*, and *Acharya* allude to instructors, it is safe to assert that *'Avadhuta'* does not mean a violent conflict. Ashrams are places where religious teachers (sadhus) live and disseminate knowledge to their disciples. As a result, they are also referred to as teachers.

Similarly, sadhus use the mantra as a teaching tool to entice non-members of their sects. They are given names like that. In other sources, they also go by the names 'Bratya and Saanichamedra' (Ghurye, 1953:13).

There are several types of Sadhus on the Indian subcontinent. Some are observed travelling without clothing, while others are dressed in tattered and worn-out garments. Many Shaiva Sadhus also wear garlands composed of human skeletons and skulls, a horrifying sight. In this position garb, *"Kalamukha, Kapalika*, and *Keshin Sadhus"* are seen in particular some Naga Jogis have been witnessed without any clothing on their bodies (Gross, 2001).

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[25] Sadhu is a wandering ascetic or a holy person, the one who practices sadhana and keenly follows the path of spiritual practices.
[26] Sadhvi means a virtuous woman and refers to women who have renounced their possessions and chosen to live apart from society to focus on spiritual life.

According to some sacred Hindu literature, only Brahmins were allowed to finish all four ashrams and become Sadhus. Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra are required by religion to live their whole lives in three, two, and one ashram. Therefore, they are not permitted to join a Sannyasa Ashram or become a Sadhu. Furthermore, the practice of being a Sadhu by groups other than Brahmins has existed in India from its inception. In this region, there are also instances of female Sadhus. According to a story unearthed in the Mithila area, Sulava, a Kshatriya woman, became a Sadhu and adhered to the Sannyasin principles. Initially, she could not marry a suitable man, eventually becoming a Sadhu. This episode demonstrates that women and Kshatriya Sadhus had a custom during the Upanishadic period (Gross, 2001:33).

2.6 SECT OR SAMPRADAYA

The term sect derives from either of the three Sanskrit words *marga*[27] (path), *panth*[28] (path), or sampradaya. These three terms are frequently used as synonyms in literature and popular languages. In a terminological essay, McLeod (1978:293) asserted that this word is too thoroughly tinged with western connotations for us to be able to translate it into an Indian context. As a result, he is opposed to its use. He disregards Marg and rejects sampradaya for two reasons: first, he believes that non-Indians would be incapable of pronouncing it; and second, he believes that its meaning is too ambiguous. The first argument is unconvincing, and in the second, McLeod ignores the fact that the word 'secular' has been used to indicate a sect for decades. He prefers to use only the Panth. According to traditional historical sources, the ritualism of Vedic or Brahmanic Hinduism has prompted the emergence of new sects in India. At the doctrine level, this could be accurate. However, lay followers of all religions lead very ceremonial lives nowadays. Although they may be different, these rituals are nevertheless rites.

Regarding their own sect's rituals, the members of the group have differing perspectives. The variety of lay members within each sect is wide. At one end are the most conservative members, who observe all sectarian ceremonies with the utmost

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[27] Marga refer to the path to spiritual realization, salvation or enlightenment. The literal meaning is path and can also come to mean a way of achieving something, but this usually refers to a spiritual goal.
[28] Panth also means path, is the term used for several religious traditions in India. A panth is founded by a guru or an Acharya, and is often led by scholars or senior practitioners of the tradition.

precision. There are controversies within every sect over the observance of its regulations by its members.

Dvaita (dualism), *Advaita* (non-dualism, monism), *Vishishtadvaaita* (qualified monism), and *Suddhadvaita* (qualified monism) are distinct sects based on their philosophical and theological perspectives regarding the nature of brahman (the universal soul) and its relationship to atman (the individual soul) (pure monism). It does not imply that these concepts are irrelevant, even though most ordinary members are not specially engaged in philosophical problems, Usually, philosophical concepts are used to explain the meaning of rituals.

Sinha and Saraswati (1978:36) describe 'Sampradaya is a doctrine inherited from one guru to the next. Moreover, it relates to traditional customs and beliefs. any unusual or sectarian system of religious doctrine or practices, etc. It implies a religious doctrine that includes the worship of a certain deity.'

The Vaishnavas (followers of Lord Vishnu), Shaivism (followers of Lord Shiva), and Shaktism are the three primary groups in Hindu philosophy (followers of Devi Shakti) (Tripathi, 2007). Later, these sects or denominations were divided into two subsects: orthodox and reformist. The Orthodox sub-sect is somehow rigid with many diversifications, like there are different ways of worshipping; no doubt they belong to the same sect, but their ways of initiation differ. Similarly, there is diversity within the Reformist sect; the main point of distinction in this sub-sect is their ideology; some reformists believe in idol worship, while others do not. Different sectarian markings can be seen throughout these groups. Most Shaiva sects promote yogic techniques, mystic knowledge gained via meditation, and *Vedantic Samkhya* (Tripathi, 2007).

2.7 CASTE

The word 'caste' means that which is of Spanish and Portuguese origin. In this context, caste refers to one's lineage or race. This name comes from the Latin word 'Castus', which means "clean" in English. The Spanish word casta, which means 'lineage', 'race', or a group bearing hereditary character, is the source of the English word caste. The Portuguese introduced it to India in the fourteenth century, and the Spaniards

quickly followed suit. The French term 'caste,' from which the current spelling derives, first appeared in the early 1740's, though it was not widely recognised until the early 1800's. Before that time, the spelling was projected. As early as 1555 A.D., it was used to refer to a certain human race or subrace. The Spanish term 'casta' was used to describe a mixture of Europeans, American Indians, and Africans. However, the word 'station' in its Indian context was not employed until the early 1700's. Indian usage is currently the most common, influencing all other applications. Because the Indian idea of caste was misunderstood, the term was loosely applied to hereditary classes in Europe that preserve social divisions comparable to the castes of India. Darwin has used this term to describe several types of social insects. The Portuguese adopted this term to describe the Indian institution because they believed it was designed to preserve the purity of the blood. Thus, we can see that the origin of the term does not assist us in comprehending what caste is.

2.7.1. VARNA AND JATI SYSTEM

Although it is hard to piece together a history of the caste system, it is still worthwhile to get a sense of its past before we submerge ourselves in the present. The earliest mention of Varna in the Rig Veda was produced in the area between Kabul and the Ganges between 1500 and 1400 B.C. Historians have used this and the other three Vedas to recreate the socioeconomic conditions of that civilization up to roughly 500 B.C., when the Vedic period is considered to have ended. After the Aryans colonised the immense Indo-Gangetic plains, the Varna System was developed. It is unclear if the Vedic people were of a different racial stock, but they certainly belonged to a distinct linguistic family.

According to Kosambi, although there is no evidence of specific skull morphology, certain Indo-European tribes were aware of their ethnic identity as Aryans. For instance, Darius of Persia said on his tombstone (486 BC) that he was *Parsu, Parachaya Putra, Arya Cithre*, or a Persian son of a Persian, an Aryan of Aryan ancestry (Kosambi, 1996:173).

During the early Vedic period and the growth of the Aryans, expansion was not only accomplished by invasion. The woods were cleared, and the land was made arable with the assistance of certain daring Brahmans and Kshatriyas from various Aryan kingdoms (Chanana, 1960:24; Kosambi, 1996:123). They also established new monasteries. It was made possible by the mutual understanding and collaboration of the Brahman (priests) and the Kshatriya (warriors), who reinforced their position as the higher caste. The Aryan culture and tradition were spread to the masses by Brahman missionaries who accompanied Kshatriyas. Also, they converted the main characters to the Vedic religion and made it legal for high-born Aryans to marry people from other cultures, which made it easier for people from different backgrounds to get to know each other (Pusalker, 1951:314).

At the outset of Aryan colonisation in India, the four Varna strata were not fully formed. The Rig Veda distinguishes between the Arya and Dasa Varnas, but this is not the primary one. On the other hand, the Aryans did not exist as a homogeneous group. They had the upper and lower classes separated. The Rig Veda referred to the latter as a vis. The Vaishyas, the third caste in the mature varna system, are predominantly descended from members of this category. The Vaishyas were regular peasants who worked mostly in agriculture. The Aryans attempted integration and cooperation with native tribes and groups, but did it from a position of power. Some friendly tribes, such as the Sutas, were considered respectable (Jha, 1975:15). Shamanistic rituals were successfully employed to win over non-Vedic people to the side of the Vedic Aryans (Sharma,1975:11).

Members of weak or hostile tribes unable to fight the Aryan invasion were enslaved or constituted subservient classes inside the Vedic economic framework. *Dasas* was their given name. As per Kosambi, the *Dasa* subsequently came to mean a form of helot. He had no right to initiate or use weapons because he was the property of the entire Aryan tribe. Similarly, to livestock, both male and female data were objects of contribution to the superior group (Chanana, 1960:21). Kosambi and other historians have found evidence that the Dasas became part of the Aryan culture. This suggests that the slave class known as the Shudras grew out of this group, and that it was also made up of

Aryans who were "conquered and enslaved in fighting among themselves" (Habib, 1965:23).

In the *Rig Veda*, there is no clear difference between the four varnas; nevertheless, this differentiation becomes apparent in the *Purusasukta*[29], is a later addition. Furthermore, the Brahmans, or priestly caste, were not a closed group. During the whole Vedic period, members of priestly families were not necessarily responsible for performing priestly duties (Apte, 1951a, p. 388). Even in the later Vedic era of the *Yajur Veda*, when the Vedic Aryans lived in a stable society and the four orders of the varna system were fully developed, there was a fight for dominance between the Brahmans and the Kshatriyas, as well as a large degree of overlap in their roles (Sharma, 1975, p. 10). Throughout the later Vedic Age and the Upanishad period, we find several examples of Kshatriya's growing interest in learning and their desire to understand the fundamental nature of the cosmos and its natural world. So, even though both the priest-king and the warrior groups were part of the ruling elite, it was hard to tell them apart.

It would appear that the four-part Varna model had little to do with widespread exploitation and was instead the result of a lack of growth in productive forces (and, by extension, a limited division of labour). The Varna system's fourfold categories were adequate for managing social interaction and social standing even throughout the later post-Vedic Mauryan period, which was characterised by a large division of labour, as a result, the Varna system was established on a more fundamental truth: that the link between production and the character of exploitation remained substantially intact during the later Vedic and Mauryan periods. The Varna system is an example of a basic four-tiered stratification structure that can exist alongside significant differentiation and division of labour.

It is often assumed that these associations eventually become *Jatis* (Ghurye, 1969:114). It is clear that the concept of vocational specialisation first took root. However, it may not be entirely accurate to assume that the guilds were destined to evolve into inflexible caste systems. Further progress in the socioeconomic structure was required before the

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[29] Purusasukta is the hymn 10.90 of the Rigveda dedicated to the purusha, the cosmic being. Also found in Yajurveda 30.1-16 and in Atharvaveda 19.6

numerous orders designating the laws of intercourse and trade could be fully elaborated and strictly separated from one another. The ancient Vaishya and Shudra populations had not yet developed attitudes of superiority or inferiority bordering on hostility among artisans, peasants, and merchants, nor had they developed feelings of superiority or inferiority bordering on hostility. It was because they were all exploited by the government and had few, if any, rights and duties towards one another.

The rise of a unified, centralised government may be traced back to the Vedic Age and continued through the Mauryan era. State control and ownership persisted and expanded with the rise of expansive empires. Even throughout this time, the Vedic justification of superiority based on ascription criteria was widely used. One could hardly overstate the importance of this factor in the organisational framework of authority. Its pre-eminence resulted from the pre-iron Vedic Age's sluggish economy and poor output rates. To understand how different the evolving caste system is, it's important to focus on this part of the varna classification.

After the Mauryan Period, several political and administrative tendencies tended to feudalize the government system. The practise of land donation provided to Brahman (Brahamadaya), sanctified by the instructions in the Dharmasastras,[30], was the most notable development (Sharma, 1965:1-2). According to the Arthashastra, officials received cash salaries during the Mauryan era. However, during Manu's reign (around 200 AD), they received payment in the form of land grants, and during Harsha's reign, they received payment as a proportion of revenues (Sharma,1965:11).

The word Varna refers to many hues. The name *Asat Shudra* has been linked to the later Vedic period (untouchable community). Diversified vocations led to the emergence of many occupational groupings, which eventually gained their Jatis somewhere between the second century B.C. and the first century A.D. So, the only place you can find the Varna Vyavastha[31] the paradigm of the Indian social order today is in ancient literature. In contrast, *Jati* is the contextual or field perspective of the Indian social

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[30] Dharmasastras is a genre of Sanskrit texts on law and conduct and refers to the treaties on dharma. Unlike Dharmasutras which are based upon Vedas, these texts are mainly based on puranas.
[31] The varna Vyavastha was the functional pre-requisite for the Hindu social system because of the decentralisation of power. The power of knowledge, power of arms, power of wealth and the power of labour were distributed among the four varna's in accordance with their position in the hierarchy respectively Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras.

order, meaning that Jatis are what we see in the world today rather than Varnas. There are around 4000 Jatis but only four Varnas. There are roughly 200 *Jatis* in each area. According to the Panini hierarchy of the Varna, Brahmins are at the top, followed by Kshatriyas in second place, Vaishyas in third place, and Shudras at the bottom. In India, the hierarchy was uniform, but in the Jati language, the hierarchy was not uniform. In the shifting scenario, Brahmins dominate certain regions, while Thakurs (Rajput) dominate others. Today, even Dalits may be found on top in certain regions. Thus, the Jati system has (economic and political) secular requirements.

On the other hand, religious ritual conditions are present in *Varna Vyavastha. In Varna Vyavastha,* there is nothing immediately inviolable. In the *Jati Vyavastha[32],* untouchables are an intrinsic component of the system, but in the *Varna Vyavastha,* they are placed outside the system. One's standing can be altered in *Varna Vyavastha* due to the better socioeconomic conditions. Therefore, one should not equate Varna and Jati.

2.7.2. CASTE IN INDIA

To comprehend the Indian caste system, it is necessary to examine three wider viewpoints by G.S. Ghurye, M.N. Srinivas, and Louis Dumont.

The Indological viewpoint, which Ghurye has highlighted, is the first method used to analyse India's social and cultural history. This technique facilitates the comprehension of society through Sanskrit literature, which he extensively cited from the Vedas, Shastras, epics, and poetry of Kalidas or Bhavabhuti to throw light on social and cultural aspects of Indian civilization (Nagla,2008:98). He has considered castes as well-established social groupings whose membership is decided not by selection but by birth. If a community's moral standards apply to everyone equally, then individuals of a certain caste are no longer considered part of that group. Furthermore, castes and subcastes incorporated people into an ordered order based on the criteria of cleanliness and defilement. He established a connection between caste and blood relations by

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[32] Jati Vyavastha, jati, also spelled jat , caste, in Hindu society. The term is derived from the Sanskrit *jata*, "born" or "brought into existence," and indicates a form of existence determined by birth. In Indian philosophy, *jati* (genus) describes any group of things that have generic characteristics in common. Sociologically, *jati* has come to be used universally to indicate a caste group among Hindus.

permitting caste endogamy and forbidding clan (gotra) exogamy. Overall, he focused on six structural aspects of the caste system that were prevalent in India, including segmental division of society, hierarchy, the idea of purity and pollution, marriage restrictions, differences in civil and religious rights and privileges, and limited occupational opportunities. As practised in Indian civilization, each was demonstrated by innumerable examples from a wide range of geographic regions. While the first, fifth, and sixth represent components of material community life, the remaining three refer to caste as a whole (Ghurye, 1932).

M.N. Srinivas offered the second viewpoint, viewing caste as a segmented system of hierarchy, occupational distinction, caste panchayat and assembly, dietary limitations, and pollution. He created the idea of the dominant caste when he relocated to India to begin studying Rampur, a hamlet near Mysore. In defining his idea of the dominant caste, he identified the factors responsible for making a particular caste dominant.

1. Numerical strength: This is one of the crucial factors contributing to the dominance of a particular caste the larger the number, the greater the power. In many areas, the Kshatriyas were able to exercise control and power over the few rich Brahmins of a locality due to their large population dominating the socio-political situation of those areas.

2. Economic power through land ownership: In rural areas, the land is considered a highly valuable asset as it is the prime income source for the rural population. A vast area of land is concentrated in the hands of the rich minority, mainly big landowners from higher castes. These landowners exploit the people of other castes by employing them as labourers in their fields and paying them very less wages. Thus, these few landlords exercise considerable power over all the other castes and turn dominant.

3. Political power: The caste being more involved in political affairs of the locality, automatically raises its position and exercises control over all the other castes. They execute their dominance in all matters connected with the people's social life. (Nagla, 2008).

Dumont offers the third viewpoint, describing caste as a structure of economic, political, and family relations maintained by particular ideals, most of which are

religious in origin. He provided a prototypical illustration of the cultural perspective that caste is ranked solely based on ceremonial conceptions and values. According to him, caste is the fundamental aspect of Indian society. He compares the western class structure, which he sees as expressing an equitable perspective of man, to India's hierarchical caste system. In Homo Hierarchicus, the author contrasts the ideology of Hinduism with that of the west. In Hinduism, hierarchy is built on ceremonial concepts of purity and impurity, fundamentally distinct from western ideology, in which disparities are based on power, wealth, and opportunity equality. The first three varnas in the hierarchy are more virtuous than the fourth varna, the Shudras or untouchables. Dwija, meaning twice-born, refers to the first three varnas, thought to be more morally upright than the lowest caste, the Shudras. It indicates that the rank of a person's caste is always decided by ceremonial concepts rather than by their actual power or money. To provide just two examples, the social standing of a poor Brahmin will always be greater than that of a strong Kshatriya, and the social position of a poor Kshatriya will always be higher than that of a wealthy Vaishya (Dumont, 1980).

Bougle (1972) outlines three characteristics for identifying the Indian caste system: hereditary speciality, hierarchy, and mutual repulsion. Per him, the spirit of caste connects these three characteristics that must be considered to comprehend the notion of the Indian caste system.

Annihilation of Caste is B.R. Ambedkar's most extreme work. He challenged the caste structure and law books of Hinduism. He maintained that inter-caste dining and marriage are insufficient to abolish the caste system. Caste is based on religious beliefs, which must be eradicated immediately. He believed that the only way to undermine the sanctity of caste and varna was to reject the divine authority of the Shastras. The Hindu society should be reformed on a religious foundation by adhering to the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity rather than based on Chaturvarna, which is destructive since it degrades the masses by denying them the chance to acquire knowledge. Annihilation of Caste captures the thoughts of a rebel on the social, moral, and economic oppression of individuals by caste and religion. Ambedkar's most innovative concept was questioning the basic authority of the Vedas, Upanishads, and Manu smritis (Anand,1990:114).

On the whole, one thing common among all the above-discussed sociologists is that based on their fieldwork, they traced caste as a community based on kinship and primitive affinity and viewed it as an inseparable part of Indian society. In addition, the concept of caste conjures up images of set positions, vocations, and social immobility enforced by endogamy restrictions.

2.7.3. HINDU RELIGION AND CASTE

The Hindu faith is among the world's oldest religions. It has established a pluralistic framework incorporating within it a set of norms and institutions based on the cardinal principles of *Karma, Samsara, Dharma, and Moksha*. As stated by Jones, Hinduism is an amorphous thing. It has been compared to many coloured and many fibered cloths in which Brahmanism, Buddhism, Christianity mixed (Jones,1908:27).

As described earlier, caste is a major social institution in India associated with the Hindu religion. A caste is a religious group at its core. There are certain rituals that members have to do. The rules of behaviour in a caste are religious rules. (Srinivas,1952:43).

Rituals and behaviour in a number of areas, such as eating certain foods, tapping specific objects, and adhering to the rules for marriage and remarriage, are placed or classified on a scale of pure and impure. This scale shows a stepped series of more and less clean and dirty situations. The religious and ritualistic rules of conduct imposed by a person's caste are a significant factor in determining his behaviour. Every Hindu is born into the caste of his parents, and he is bound to remain in that caste. No amount of money or talent can change his caste, and marriage outside of his caste is either inappropriate or strongly prohibited. (Report of the Indian Statutory Commission,1930).

An individual may embrace Hinduist beliefs, but according to a prior report, he cannot be a Hindu society member unless he belongs to a caste. Caste is the clear emblem of Hinduism, as per Barth, the individual who is a member of a caste is a Hindu, he who is not, is not a Hindu (Barth cited in leach,1971:113-146)

Barth claimed that even if Hinduism were to be evaluated merely as a religion, caste would still be the most significant aspect of it; in the Indian community, the adherence to caste norms and rules and religious rites are the dominating aspects that regulate traditional society. Bougle says that caste is the core of the Hindu religion that governs the traditional society. While discussing the relationship between Caste and Hinduism, one can discuss two approaches to analysing such a relationship: the Mythical approach and the Metaphysical approach.

The mythical approach emphasizes the origin of different caste groups in the Hindu religion. It is thought that Brahma's mouth gave birth to the Brahmins, from arms Kshatriyas were born, from his thighs Vaishyas were born, and his feet gave birth to Shudras.

As per Vishnu Purana, Brahma devised this four-fold framework for the execution of sacrifice (Hocart,1950:18), and by his plan, Brahma wished to establish a world constituted of Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. They emerged from his mouth, breast, thighs, and feet. Bhagwat Gita makes a similar statement, the four-fold system (Chaturvarna) was created by me according to the division of qualities (*gunas*) and functions (*karmas*), (Gita chapter IV,13).

As per *Purusasukta* of the Rigveda, his mouth became a priest (Brahman), his arm was turned into a noble man (Rajanya), his thigh was transformed into a farmer (Vaishya), and from his feet, the servant man (Sannyasi) was born (Shudra). These are similar to other Hindu myths regarding the origin of caste, which suggest that a superhuman agency had created the caste system to perform certain preordained functions. In this version, we get information on the origin of the four Varnas and their functional differentiation. Caste hierarchy is justified in terms of the occupational hierarchy, and caste-based distinctions are portrayed as natural.

On the other hand, the metaphysical account is based on different emphases. The caste system is believed to be based on certain metaphysical principles such as *Samsara, Dharma, Karma, and Moksha.*

Nagendra (1965:262-273) refers to reincarnation or rebirth, implying that this life alone would have no meaning except as a link in a cycle of rebirth. (Nagendra,1965:262-273).

Liberation is obtained within this span of life. Essentially, the birth of a human being is but an opportunity for him or her to free himself or herself from this chain of birth by living a life of *Dharma* (Lewis,1958:83). Regarding the principle of *Dharma,* Louis Dumont says that it is a principle relating to the natural law or law of cosmic beings. He has made this observation from a microcosmic standpoint. *Moksha*[33] "Liberation" means liberating life from the chain of actions.

Karma refers to an action. "The doctrine of karma" maintains that every action of an individual has a moral significance (Farquhar, 1920:33). This account indicates that an individual's karma forces people into different strata. Srinivas also makes the following statement: When a person stands according to the dharma, he accepts the caste system and the rules of his sub-caste. A violation of the dharma is punished both here and in the next life. (Srinivas, 1952:76).

Let us now examine how these metaphysical principles of *"Samsara", "Dharma", "Karma"*, and *"Moksha"* were used to support the observance of caste practice. As explained earlier, the caste system was considered to be a Dharmic system. The older formulation of the Dharmic System was predicated on the tenets of natural law or the law of cosmic existence, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the circumstances. So, the roles that each of the four castes played would also be set by the natural laws.

The concept that caste, which the Hindus characterise indifferently by one or both of the two labels, Jati and Varna, is a social role, determined by the distinctive nature of each human being, was also highlighted by Samin Amin in his book (Amin, 1976:87). Let us compare how these actions (works) are related to the major caste groups in a brief manner. Cultural-religious actions are agent-oriented, superior to most other actions, and occupy the topmost position in the hierarchy. It is understood that cultural-religious functions are assigned to the Brahmins, who constitute the spiritual and intellectual authority, the political and legal positions are assigned to the Kshatriyas, who perform the royal administrative and military functions, and the techno-economic

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[33] Moksha, also spelled moksha, also mukti, in Indian philosophy and religion, liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth, emancipation. In Hindu traditions, moksha is a central concept and the utmost aim of human life. See more https://www.britannica.com/topic/moksha-Indian-religion

functions are assigned to the Vaishyas. The other ordinary functions are assigned to the Shudras.

To understand how caste works, we must look at another essential aspect: the concept of Jatis, a tiny endogamous community that practises a traditional vocation and has certain cultural, ceremonial, and judicial autonomy. There are numerous *Jatis*. According to Ghurye's estimation, there are around 2000 Jatis in each linguistic region (Ghurye, 1932:27). This will give us an idea of the total number of endogamous Jatis in India.

As Srinivas says, "The significance of the varna system lies in the fact that it provides a pan-Indian framework into which the many *Jatis* of each given linguistic region can be inserted. It systematised the disorder of *Jatis* and enables the subcastes in one region to be understood by people in another location by referencing a common scale." (Srinivas, 1969, 265).

In brief, the Varna system reflects a spectrum of values and certain standardisation measures. Jatis inhabiting the lower levels have always sought to improve their position by adopting the habits and rites of the highest Jatis. It has helped Hindu society as a whole spread a single cultural identity.

Srinivas claims that categorising the Jatis of any given area into a convenient five-tiered structure is an arduous task. It is clear who the Brahmins and the untouchables are everywhere, but the grey areas are far more difficult to navigate. He observes that the Jatis of South India are often ridiculed for arguing to be Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. So, disagreements about the caste system are based on social status, particularly among the many Jatis in the fourth varna of the Shudra caste.

T.N. Madan employs descriptive and Indological methodologies to elucidate the religious landscape, pluralism, diversity, and secularism of India, employing the framework of equality-hierarchy binaries. Madan provides a critique of modernity as a dynamic phenomenon while also providing a framework to differentiate between its distinct manifestations, including modernity within the context of colonialism and

modernity beyond Western societies. Madan's approach involves a non-critical amalgamation of the dichotomies between materialism and religion, as well as those between the West and the East. This perspective lacks the ability to discern the cultural customs of Jatis and ethnic communities, and it fails to acknowledge the manner in which these diversities are assimilated into an upper caste understanding of Hinduism.

Regions and castes exhibit distinct cultural practices and customs. The tradition that an individual derives from is indeed the tradition associated with their particular caste. Although the notion may appear demeaning at first glance, the stories derived from the epics and puranas uphold an individual's prerogative to adhere to their caste traditions.

According to Madan (1991), an individual's caste placement in the social system is determined by their karma from a past life, thereby shaping their fate. One recurring theme in Dumont's essay is the critique of Western scholars' definition of caste as a form of social stratification, which is argued to be socio-centric. Dumont suggests that these scholars need to free themselves from their preconceived notions, such as egalitarianism, individualism, and the primacy of politics and economics in society, which constrain their understanding of caste (Madan, 1971).

The concept of caste, which is undeniably associated with inequality in both theory and practice, should not be understood as the antithesis of equality or as a mere variation or distortion. The inequality inherent in the caste system is a distinct form of inequality. Dumont's focus in his current work is on the "traditional social organization of India" from a theoretical comparative perspective. He aims to construct an idealized model of the traditional caste system, rather than investigate its current existence. His approach to constructing this model does not follow the chronological orientation of a historian. In fact, Dumont explicitly states that his intention is not to provide a historical account of the caste system, although he does incorporate historical data in his analysis.

According to Madan (1971), Dumont develops a theoretical framework to analyze the structure of traditional Hindu society. It can be postulated that this phenomenon underwent gradual evolution over a period of time. The specific temporal framework within which Dumont perceives the crystallization of the caste system, as expounded by him, remains ambiguous. According to Madan, Dumont posits that a form of

organization does not undergo change, but rather it is substituted by another form. Similarly, Dumont argues that a structure can either be present or missing, but it does not undergo alteration.

The concept of dharma, as perceived by Hindus, encompasses numerous connotations and incorporates cosmological, ethical, social, and legal principles that serve as the foundation for the belief in a structured and harmonious cosmos. Within the social framework, the concept of dharma pertains to the regulations governing social interactions that are established for individuals based on their social standing (varna), stage of life (ashrama), and inherent attributes (guna). In essence, each individual is expected to adhere to a suitable code of behavior, which is determined by their caste, gender, age, and temperament. However, the prescription of context-sensitive measures is subject to the principles of universal morality, which impose obligations on all individuals. According to the religious tradition in India, human activities are believed to carry inevitable consequences. The sociological work pertaining to the concepts of purity and impurity is extensive and intricate.

Throughout the years, Indian culture has effectively embraced plurality by primarily emphasizing interdependent group identities, with caste being the fundamental unit of such identities. The caste system, as per the prevailing perspective, is structured on the principle of purity, with each caste occupying a position on a hierarchical continuum of purity. According to Madan (1989:365), there exists an upward relationship between one's caste and the level of purity they hold. According to Madan (1989: 365), he asserts that the concept of rank order in traditional caste ideology is particularly attributed to the Brahmins.

As a result, caste can be viewed as both a social institution and a component of Hinduism. In actuality, caste is the steel framework that holds Hinduism's numerous ideas together.

2.8 GENDER

Gender discrimination is the furthermost widespread types of social inequality, and it happens everywhere in the globe with diverse detrimental impacts. Primarily, these

distinctions are the product of cultural legacies, ancient past, geographical setting, and, lastly the predominantly religious societal norms (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Religion is fundamental to the cultural existence of a number of regions. It shapes the economic and political development of nations and is embedded in the lives of individuals (Stump, 2008). Similarly, according to Peach (2006), religion may now be a more significant factor in society and geography than race or ethnicity.

The social position of women is defined by the understanding of religious manuscripts and the cultural and institutional makeup of religious groups (Klingrova, 2015). Recognizing the complexity and diversity of religion's function across history and cultures is a tall order. We agree that gender parity is good for society (Verveer, 2011). We believe that the economic, social, and democratic development of the world's regions may benefit greatly from the independence of women and the promotion of gender equality. Norms, culture, and tradition in institutions all have a hand in shaping this procedure, and religion has a significant role in shaping all three. Because of the two-way street that is the connection between ethos and religion, religious systems remain entangled in a web of common impact with societal mores and organisational structures (Sinclair, 1986). The position of women in religious studies mirrors that of women in the society. (King, 1995). Nevertheless, when cultural, political, and geographical contexts are considered, each religion upholds slightly diverse values, establishes unique organizations, and distinct cultural and historical foundations are established. The different religions around the world have very different effects on how women are treated (Klingorova, 2013, 2015).

2.8.1. WORLD RELIGION: WOMEN AND SOCIAL STATUS

It demonstrates the increasing intensity of discussions over the connection among religion and gender (Hopkins, 2009; Seguino, 2011; Moghadam, 1991; Chaudhari, 2013). It draws specifically on the theoretical frameworks of feminist geography and the geography of religion, two fields that have lately gained popularity in the intellectual world (Massey, 1994; Rose, 1993; Havlicek and Hupkova, 2008, 2013; Kong, 2001, 2010; Sharp, 2009; DelCasino, 2009). Moreover, gender-related issues keep appearing in the field of religious studies. This research assumes that religion,

culture, lifestyle, and upbringing are the primary factors in constructing gender roles (King, 1995). Several geographers have turned their attention to the role of women within various religions, particularly in Islam (Hopkins, 2009; Falah & Nagel, 2005; Moghadam, 1991; Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Aitchison, 2007). Gender identities and gender interactions within the context of religion are central to feminist geographies of religion (Hopkins, 2009). It is also feasible to discuss a new pattern in religious studies related to the study of religions by female scholars (Kong, 2010).

Presently, all faiths promote male social dominance inside societal structures (Young, 1987). Women are more likely than males to contribute in religious life (Hamplova, 2013, 2011; Renzetti & Curran, 1999). Research on the expansion of so-called sophisticated faiths, notably Islam, reveals a negative societal trend toward devaluing women (Holm, 1994; Krejci, 2009). In addition, religious customs and prejudgments may represent male-controlled ideals (Nespor, 2008), which are innate to the cultures of all global religions (Seguino, 2011). God, or the creator of religion, is generally male, and a woman's primary function is to bear sons. She belongs at home, not at religious meetings or in communal office. Furthermore, the actual position of a woman in religion is more problematic, as women have risen to positions of prominence in various religions (Holm, 1994).

The patriarchal inclinations of the civilizations from which these faiths sprang muted some of the changes in women's positions brought about by these new religions; as a result, women's voices are rarely mentioned in the history of faiths. Women are highly esteemed across the religious spectrum, and their roles as mothers and wives are emphasized. Therefore, they do not support complete equality with males in the sense of emancipation. Holm (1994) says that the strictest rules are for women when they are menstruating or pregnant, when they are not allowed to touch the Quran or go into the temple.

In the world's religions, male and female roles are highly diverse and uneven. Even though several ideologies involve women whose normative ideas were accepted and men who pushed for equal participation of women in religious rituals, the effect of women on establishing religious norms and traditions is limited. Prescriptive

conditionality, referring to what a particular religion teaches (male and female equality before God), and practical conditionality, referring to the status of women in religious groups and state society in relations of everyday living, are at odds with one another (Holm, 1994). Additionally, it is important to highlight the diversity of the international groups (Islam, Hindu, etc.) so that generalisations must be tempered by considering such differences in religious affiliation. If not, we risk falling into the trap of generalising about religion, which is not what we want to do.

2.8.2. RENUNCIATION AND GENDER ISSUES

Even though women's fertility is often celebrated in Hinduism (Bumiller, 1990), ascetic practises and piety have been largely ignored by the many normative Sanskrit codes of law (Dharma shastra), as well as by the two centuries of western scholarship that has depended on these codes.

Renunciant is the English translation of the Sanskrit term sannyasi (female: Sannyasini) and refers to people who have forsaken the world publicly and executed their burial ceremonies to symbolise the social and legal death of their former selves. The Sanskrit term Sannyasa means placing or throwing down, setting aside, surrender, abandonment, renunciation of the world, the practise of asceticism, food abstention' (Monier,1974). They begin a new (and last) stage of life as outlined in Hindu legal books after undergoing this rite, free from the bonds that bound their former selves to their former identities. When used here, the term ascetic has a broader meaning, encompassing renunciants but not limiting them to that category. To bring more joy into the home, many women, especially widows and abandoned spouses, and sometimes even married women, embrace austere practices for specific weeks or months. Therefore, they have not entered into a different phase of life than that of a sanyasi renunciant who has renounced the dharma (obligations) incumbent upon a person in worldly life; rather, the austere wife or widow may be just fulfilling the obligations imposed upon her by society. The widow's renunciant lifestyle is her female responsibility; official renunciation signifies a rejection of this dharma. It is so because most legal rules specifically prohibit renunciants from entering the last stage of life, including women and the lowest social class, Shudras. Although the practises of the widow and the female

ascetic may be similar, the intent behind them places them in very different categories in Hinduism. The ascetic life of a widow indicates that she is accepting the role of a woman/wife by the dharmasastra, whereas becoming a renunciation shows her rejection of that role and all that is associated with life. This discussion has shown that not all ascetics are renunciants. However, it is important to emphasise that not all renunciants live ascetically. Some abbots of monasteries are renunciants (sanyasis), yet because of their status, they receive benefits that are appropriate for royalty. So, an abbot who has renounced may be celibate and even wear ochre like other sannyasis, but his robes may be made of the finest silk, and on special occasions, he may dress in full regalia and wear a gold crown, jewels, or ornaments that have been given to the monastery by devout followers (Chambersburgs, 1992).

2.8.3. WOMEN'S ILLUSTRATIONS IN BRAHMANICAL SOURCES

The earliest Upanishads, which belong to the first half of the first millennium BCE, portray women engaged in spiritual pursuits; despite their marginalization, they are occasionally allowed to speak. When she questions the sage *Yajnavalkya*, Gargi, an often-cited female character from the *Brhadaranyaka* Upanishad, exhibits her better understanding of the teachings on spiritual freedom (Olivelle, 1998:89-93). However, she remains mute at the end of the discussion, even if her loss may be challenged. Aside from these examples, women's voices are rarely heard in Brahmanical literature, and when they are, they are always limited and quieted (Black, 2007, p. 135).

Women are given just one position in the Dharmasastra, a key collection of ancient Brahmanical texts. This role is that of a wife whose *Stridharma*[34] (religious obligations) centre on supporting and appeasing her husband and giving him male progeny. As a result, women are consistently portrayed as being inferior to men on all fronts (physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually) in the Law Code of Manu (Manu Smriti), one of the most famous authorized transcripts of ancient India, which was most likely written in amongst the second century BCE and the second century C.E. It also

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[34] Stridharma (the dharma of women) is articulated in the Dharmasastras, of which the best known is the Manvadharmashastra (the Laws of Manu). The Laws of Manu both praise women as essential in the household and denigrate them as fickle, unreliable, corrupt, and licentious; they cannot be granted independence from men.

suggests that women should always, in all circumstances, be under the control and subservience of men (Manu Smriti 5:147–148; Ditrich, 2010:145). This literature primarily discusses women about males and emphasises their subservience as spouses to the point that a very clear subtext arises, displaying a profound dread of female power embodied by sexuality and motherliness (Ditrich, 2010:156–157). While the Brahmanical tradition acknowledges abandonment (sannyasa) as a viable path of life, it was exclusively open toward males; the only model for women offered in the scriptures was to be a perfect wife. This obligation was conceived as a form of domestic asceticism involving virginity, self-sacrifice, absolute subordination to and admiration of her husband, regular abstinence, and other restraints and vows (vrata) in order to win virtue for her family and husband (Clementin Ojha,2012). In addition, bereaved women were mandated to lead a life of seclusion and austerity because it was believed that this was the only method to communicate with their deceased spouse.

The Brahmanical perspective of women's duties in society, which deprives them almost entirely of agency, should be questioned regarding their application, if any, to women's lives. A careful investigation of the legal texts demonstrates that women had some financial power and independence during the period (Olivelle, 2004); also, ancient Indian literature has several examples of female ascetics or renouncers, spanning from the great epics to Kalidasa's tragedies (Kausiki in Shakuntala). Numerous women in India opted to live as ascetics, such as Buddhist and Jain nuns, throughout the compilation of legal books. However, these women are rarely addressed in Brahmanical literature. So, it seems like the Brahmanical orthodoxy saw the growth of female renouncer groups, which gave women more choices, as a threat to their ideas of what it means to be a woman (Ditrich, 2010, p. 154).

2.8.4.   FEMALE ASCETICS

Although both sexes were allowed to pursue a life of renunciation, female ascetics were consistently marginalised and given less attention than their male counterparts in ancient records. Several scholars have argued (Gross, 1993:20; Black, 2007:133) that the widespread omission of women from India's textual traditions is attributable to the fact that all historical records on Indian religions were constituted, transmitted, and

documented by men, written primarily for male audiences, and focused on men. Therefore, great care must be taken while analysing textual resources on female renouncers since they tend to construct an ideal of femininity that is tied to the real social events and gender relations of the period but does not represent them. As a result of the prevailing androcentric and patriarchal beliefs of the period, the academic records of ancient India are not straightforward historical descriptions but rather complex transmissions of (male) societal desires, utopias, anxieties, and projections. Therefore, they may not be useful to female renunciants in their day-to-day activities. (Black, 2007:158).

Renunciation by women is a topic that has been largely ignored in both ancient Indian texts and contemporary academic studies. Numerous modern textbooks on Indic religions and many older works, notably from the first half of the twentieth century or earlier, give women (and female renouncers) relatively little consideration, often describing them in a few phrases or paragraphs as a single standardized group. The study of ancient literature, often via a feminist perspective (Gross,1993) or more commonly, drawing upon research on modern female renouncers (Denton,2012; Salgado,2013; Sethi,2020), has only lately emerged as a basis for research on female ascetics and monastics. These investigations show a major gap between historical texts and recent ethnographic research. Even though there are fewer resources and studies on female renouncers than on male ones, there is enough evidence to show that the traditions of female renouncers on the Indian subcontinent have stayed the same from antiquity to the present.

Several communities of Indian women who have chosen to forgo conventional gender roles and instead identify as Hindu ascetics have emerged (Denton, 2012; Clementin, Ojha, 2012). Extremely little has been written or researched about Hindu female ascetics in the past or today, and this topic has only recently gained scholarly attention (Denton, 2012; Khandelwal, 2009; Bevilacqua, 2017). Their societies are fragmented across religious and social lines, and before the twentieth century, there was no record of a specifically female Hindu renouncer tradition. Traditionally, only men were allowed to follow the Brahmanical path of abandonment. However, this paradigm has

been continually challenged, especially with the rise and spread of theistic and Tantric movements in India, which welcomed people of all backgrounds and genders. Several literary works, ranging from the Middle Ages to the modern age, detail the lives of female ascetics, mystics, and saints. By describing their spiritual journeys, ecstasies, and the joy of liberation, Hawley, Juergensmeyer, and Lal Ded, a yogini from Kashmir in the fourteenth century (Hoskote,2013), are just two of the well-known female renunciates who contributed their perspectives to the huge form of Indian devotional and mystical literature by describing their spiritual journeys, ecstasies, and joy of liberation. They showed women that they might be free on a spiritual level, but because of their celestial status, they were one-of-a-kind figures rather than universal role models (Clementin Ojha, 2012).

Hindu female renouncers have always been on the periphery of India's rich and lengthy renunciant history, joining monastic communities (sampradaya) led by men if they accepted female members. The many Sakta and Tantric ascetic communities that have welcomed me have shared a belief that the female body is sacrosanct and that all women are essentially manifestations of the Goddess. As a result, they elevate women to positions of respect and power; they often oppose and even invert Brahmanical ideals of purity and asceticism; and they encourage women to pursue careers outside the home (Khanna,2000). Tantrism has been a safe place for women to be treated with respect for hundreds of years, even though it is not widely practiced.

Women in Hinduism who choose to abandon their lives share many of the same beliefs, practices, and institutions as their male counterparts. A renouncer's identity, loyalty, and related spiritual activities are signalled by their outward appearance, which may include a type of initiation and the exhibition of certain physical markers such as shaved, or tangled hair and white, red, or saffron clothes. In their search for enlightenment, many ascetics choose austere lifestyles, including celibacy, food restrictions, and a wide variety of rituals, prayers, and meditations. It is more significant for initiated female renouncers than for their male counterparts to make the transition from the sacred practices probable of laity, which are just about completely centred on the wellbeing of others (primarily the husband and sons), to the lifetime of a renouncer,

whose primary religious focus is on themselves in the pursuit of self-liberation (Denton, 2012:34). Women have more options than men when it comes to the worldly/non-worldly dichotomy; they can take celibacy vows and practise asceticism without leaving home, join a renouncer assembly and live moderately settled life, or become wandering ascetics without maintaining any family ties.

Significant twentieth-century events, similarly colonial control, interactions with Christianity, and the Hindu reform movement, affected the formation of a mostly or completely feminine monastic establishment within Hinduism in India (Sinclair Brull, 1997:7-22; Bachetta, 2007:157-176; Singh, 2013:171-201). Due to its extensive network of institutions, the 1937-founded Brahma kumaris is arguably the most well-known modern monastic institution. Despite being created by a man, most of its members and leaders are women who have opted to abandon their sexuality. This trend might be interpreted either as a feminist movement couched in a particularly Hindu vernacular (Babb, 1991:107) or as a patriarchal attempt to regulate female sexuality (Chowdhary, 1996:2312). Celibacy is heavily emphasised in Hindu spiritual practise since it is believed that sexuality is the root cause of women's inferiority in Hindu society. Celibacy is viewed as a means to female divine supremacy, autonomy, and emancipation, and the movement is a critique of existing cultural systems that imprison women in marriage by promoting the idea that husbands are not deserving of love (Babb, 1991:141).

The line between widows and female renouncers is often blurred in contemporary India. Some female renouncers, such as widows, live a very austere lifestyle, including wearing only white and going without hair care products (Denton 2012:19–21). Interestingly, this assumption does not just apply to modern Hindu female renouncers and ancient Buddhist and Jain nuns. Recent studies (Denton, 2012:41-55; Sethi, 2012:221-225) demonstrate that the majority of Indian female renouncers are not victims of society's marginalisation; rather, they choose to devote their lives to asceticism and spiritual pursuits.

2.8.5.   FEMALE ASCETICISM

According to Bronkhorst (1993), the term asceticism has many different connotations in India and is not always associated with renunciation (sannyasa). Indian asceticism may refer to one of two separate religious traditions: the non-Vedic tradition uses meditation and restraint from action to achieve liberation from rebirth (samsara), which is also possible in the domestic sphere. The Vedic tradition emphasises achieving superhuman strength through self-inflicted suffering. Asceticism can thus manifest in several settings, including adhering to established social norms, disliking societal roles, and going beyond established social institutions (in this particular instance, asceticism and renunciation coincide) (Burghart affirms, 1983:643). The adaptability of the notion of asceticism highlights the barriers women have faced and continue to face since they are often prevented from engaging in either a nomadic ascetic lifestyle or an ascetic route inside the domestic sphere.

Several anthropological studies have examined and characterised female asceticism in recent decades, highlighting women's inclusion in established religious organisations and the emergence of new communities. It is hard to get reliable data on the austere population as a whole and assess the percentage of females. Khandelwal uses the research of authors like Denton (1991), Gross (1992), Narayan (1989), and Ojha (1981) to come to the conclusion that only 10–15% of all ascetics may be women (1997:80).

This research (Clementin-Ojha, Denton, and others) has demonstrated that a woman's decision to become an ascetic is not necessarily motivated by a religious calling (although, according to the studies above, it remains the primary factor), but rather by dire social or financial circumstances. As a result, widows and other women without male protection may find themselves in financially precarious situations and choose a spartan lifestyle as the more suitable and acceptable alternative. According to Clementin-Ojha (1995:5), a woman who leaves society is inclined to be considered as the one who can misuse her independence.

Consequently, women's asceticism was and still is far harder to attain than men's, and the decision by women to follow the austere path is frequently met with harsh societal criticism. Most people see the decision to become an ascetic as an act of self-determination that breaks, at least in part, the Brahminic paradigm of female gender

and sexuality, which is characterised by total dependence and obedience to the male-dominated system.

Widows and women unable to marry and thus not under the control of a spouse are rare. The austere route for women is often advocated to eradicate their harmful, unregulated, unchecked libido. Instead of being seen as sexual or even dangerous, the female ascetic is now seen as a caring mother figure.

2.8.5.1   WOMEN IN BRAHMANICAL TEXT

It is important to explain the concept of women and the function that is ascribed to them by Brahminical texts to comprehend the opposition that organisation and male ascetics provide to females who choose to become ascetics or renouncers. When normative Brahmanical sources are considered, they seem internally consistent when it comes to the topic of female asceticism. Despite being explicitly forbidden in only a small number of texts (the *Smriticandrika*, the *Arthashastra*, and the *Stridhramapaddhati*) (Denton, 2004:23), it is always discouraged and seen as improper for women. According to the *Manusmriti* and the *Stridhramapaddhati*, written centuries later (Leslie, 1993:108), women must pursue a path of dharma *(stridharma)* that is unique to them, determined by their nature *(strisvabhava),* and realised through marriage, domesticity, and the raising of children.

According to Denton, the processes of menstruation (Olivelle, 2008:115) and delivery (Leela Mulatti, 1989:10) are responsible for the notion that women are inherently dirty and wicked and hence lack a natural propensity towards dharma. Due to her impurity, a woman must perform various ritual activities to achieve a state of purity, a condition she shares with Shudras. Due to her alleged immoral nature, she must be governed and safeguarded by paternal authority (2004:25-26).

The Manusmriti asserts that a woman, regardless of her age or whether she is a kid, a young woman, or an older woman, should never accomplish anything independently, not even within her own household. As a child, she must submit to the authority of her father; after she is a kid, a young woman, or an older woman, should never accomplish anything independently, not even within her own household. As a child, she must

submit to the authority of her father; after marriage, she must be subordinate to her husband; and after the death of her husband, her son holds authority over her. She should never strive to live alone. (Olivelle, 2008: 55).

In addition, because women are judged unfit for Vedic knowledge and conventional religious practice (Altekar, 1956:16), they are inducted into their society through marriage. According to the *Manusmriti,* marriage is the Vedic rite for women; hence, it should be required of them (Altekar, 1956:32-35). It demonstrates that a woman's success is limited to marriage and family (Altekar, 1956:33).

According to theory, women are not permitted in Brahminic asceticism: According to Dharmasastra, only men of the three upper varnas— the so-called twice-born (dwija)— have access to the Vedas, are capable of making offerings, and are suitable for sannyasa (renunciation).

 A woman may only exercise asceticism in the framework of her marriage. According to Clementin-Ojha, the Smriti literature offers women a code of self-renunciation and serenity. Ideal Hindu wives, totally devoted to their husband (pativrata) and indifferent to their wants, choose a life of austerity defined by deprivations (such as food restrictions) and regular fasts. By giving in to her husband's demands and giving up her desire to serve him, she stops being herself (Ojha, 2011, p. 62).

As a result, the wife is sometimes referred to as a Sadhvi, the female version of Sadhu, which generally alludes to the ideal wife rather than female ascetics.

Indian literary evidence reveals that women were free to follow austere ways in various religious currents, including those based on the feminine principles of *Shakti* (divine feminine) and *bhakti* (devotion), as well as in conventional orders, despite these normative expectations. Charpentier contends that representations of women and female behaviour in dharmic and gastric texts are more likely to be symbolic idealizations than to reflect the actual realities of real women (2010:32).

Women played prominent roles as academic and religious leaders in the Upanishads. In the *Brihadaranyakaupanishad*, which *Pechilis* uses as an example, three distinct

categories of women engage in discourse with the sage *Yajnavalkya* (2004:12-13). The philosopher Gargi, who is well-versed in religious studies, is shown interrogating *Yajnavalkya* on the nature of Brahman (Altekar, 1956:12).

Yajnavalkya's first wife, Maitreyi, is said to have taken part in religious debates, indicating that she was educated in religious issues; *Yajnavalkya's* second wife, *Katyayani*, is believed to have been preoccupied mostly with womanly concerns. Altekar (1956:12) uses many examples to show that these women philosophers never got married so they could focus on their spiritual research without interruption.

The *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, the *kathasartisgara*, and Sanskrit dramas and songs all feature female philosophers, hermits, and renunciates. In *Shakuntala,* for instance, *Kalidasa* introduces the reader to Pandita Kaiseki, a wandering ascetic woman with Vedic wisdom. Dandin mentions female ascetics experiencing tough penance sacrifices in the *Dasakumaracarita* (7th-8th century BCE). *Maikramavarma's (seventh century) and Bhavabhuti's (eighth century) pictures of women who followed extreme ascetic sects, the Mattavilasa and the Malatimadhava,* respectively (Clementin-Ojha, 2011:63).

There have been bhakti currents in India since the seventh century C.E., which laid stress on adoration and respect for God either through a journey full of love as opposed to Brahminic or Sanskrit literature, because of its widespread dissemination, the term bhakti has come to include various conservative and progressive ideologies (Tripathi, 2007). Since Moksha (liberation) was based on God and all people were seen to be equal in front of God, gender and status were not seen as barriers to entry into the stream of bhakti. So, when devotionalism became a key part of women's religious practice, women won the right to be involved in religious life (Denton 1992:213).

Sakta organisations developed an additional policy that accepted women. Tantrism is the veneration of the feminine through ritualised sexual satisfaction and the pursuit of occult powers. whereas Shaktism is the worship of the Goddess (2004:118). For these traditions, Sakti is the embodiment of the divine. As per Gupta (1992:205). Sakti, represented as a goddess, is represented as having been created by God's fire

consciousness; this is the way God creates the universe. As the world is both produced and held inside her, she is considered as the divine mother who both produced and sustained the world. (1992:207). Many Sakta religious writings give a reverential approach to women because of their potential to be mothers, and being a woman is seen as a blessing in and of itself. As a result, tantric schools have always given preference to female gurus. Denton describes two basic tenets of tantric practice: the inversion of traditional societal standards and the focus on the body as a means to redemption. If they met these requirements, women were allowed to have sexual partners, drink alcoholic beverages, and involve in all manner of acts that no conventional or traditional lady would ever dream of doing (Denton, 1994:229). In addition, by celebrating single and married women as goddesses, tantric groups instill a feeling of self-respect and self-confidence in them and other women of the community, as well as educate males on new ways to look at their women (Gupta,1992:207).

Those traditionalist groups who allowed Sudras to enter sannyasa also allowed women to do so because they were on par with Sudras regarding religious status. According to Clementin Ojha (2011), women were allowed to join a small group of orders that had not authorised their recruitment before the emergence of several sub-sectarian groups and the independence of gurus in selecting and recruiting followers. For instance, the Dashnami sampradaya, which can trace its ancestry back to the orthodox Brahman Shankaracharya, apparently forbids women from entering sannyasa since he disapproved of women being ascetics. But it seems likely that women were allowed to join Sudra subgroups when certain sadhus (called nagas) gave their permission.

As was previously indicated, the *Ramanandi* sampradaya, a Vaishnava order thought to have been founded by *Ramananda* in the 15th century, is a sectarian tradition that recognises women's entitlement to sannyasa. It is stated that *Ramananda* initiated *(diksha)* people of any caste, religion, or gender. Two women, *Padmavati* and *Susri*, were among his twelve pupils, proving that he also granted diksha to women. He emphasised that spiritual development is available for everyone since the bhakti path consists of love, devotion, and total surrender to God (Clementin-Ojha, 2011:64). A

successful woman who leads an austere lifestyle might choose a route based on her religious background and beliefs.

The Saiva faith allows women to become *sannyasinis* (introduced into one lineage of the Dashanami sampradaya). On the other hand, the sakta and tantric currents often lead women to become yoginis, which is also how the Nath panth refers to female ascetics.

Followers of Vishnu or avatars of Vishnu can choose to live as *brahmacharis* (maidens) in female institutions or throughout married life, or pursue the righteous path defined in the various Vaishnava sampradayas and become *"vairaginis"* (isolated from the world) or *"yoginis"*.

Female Baul renouncers of West Bengal and Bangladesh have a distinct position, identified as sannyasinis, *yoginis*, and *vairaginis*[35], But their ascetic existence revolves around ceremonial sexual actions, as Baul renouncers are likely to be in a partnership (Knight, 2006, p. 191).

There are instances of austere lives conducted while married, as indicated by Frank Ernest Keay's (1995) research on the *Kabir Panth*. He states that there are *vairaginis* in some parts of the *country*, often the spouses of vairagya men. Similar to the *gharbhars* of the *Ramavat panth* mentioned by Horstmann (2003:107), we might assume that the spouses of householder sadhus also live like ascetics. It is extremely rare for the wife of a householder ascetic to follow in her husband's footsteps. Sarada Devi, Ramakrishna's wife, became his student's teacher after he died. She became well-known and accepted on the path to salvation.

The *Swaminarayan* sampradaya is yet another (beginning of the 19th century). According to what Raymond William has written, yoginis, or female ascetics, are initiated into the sampradaya by the wife of the acharya. They keep the grounds and only communicate with other women while living in women-only temples and practising extreme asceticism. Both *brahmacharis* and *sannyasins*, members of new

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[35] Sannyasinis, yogins, vairaginis is a female master practitioner of yog and tantra as well as a formal term of respect for female Hindu and Buddhist spiritual teachers. The term is the feminine Sanskrit word of the masculine yogi, while the term yogini is masculine and feminine sense.

groups led by women and male gurus, have the same modern Hindu ancestry (Tripathi, 2007:244).

The external appearance of female ascetics is strictly regulated by sect. Therefore, *vairaginis* and *brahmacharinis* will wear 'white, yellow, or a pale orange'; sannyasins will wear saffron; and yoginis will wear saffron or red, like the *bhairavis*; *yoginis* of the *Samkhya* tradition will instead don dark crimson garments. The *tilak* (vermillion) they place on their foreheads and the *mala* (necklace) they wear (*rudraksha* for *saiva* groups, *tulsi* for *Vaishnava*) also reveal their allegiance. *Saiva* or *Sakta* affiliation is denoted by a *tilak* with horizontal lines, whereas two or three vertical lines denote *Vaishnava* affiliation. However, there are many sub-differences (Entisle, 2003).

Ascetics can shave their heads, leave their hair short or loose, or wear *jata*[36], a haircut that is different from the traditional way a Hindu housewife's hair is tied (Clementin-ojha 2011:64). A female ascetic's lifestyle is defined by the sadhana she chooses to perform. As Clementin-Ojha sees it (2011:64). Furthermore, their ascetic practises vary based on whether the body is seen as a tool for spiritual emancipation, devotional actions, or ecstatic attitudes. While some individuals lack knowledge of the outside world, others rigidly adhere to socially accepted standards of conduct. Despite this, they are not much different from male ascetics. Similar to the male celibates, they depend on the kindness of believers for their food and help with other parts of their lives.

Renunciants of the female gender must choose between living a nomadic existence, going from pilgrimage site to pilgrimage site, or residing in ashrams or other religious institutions. Those who continue to travel typically seek security in groups. Even though Hausner and Khandelwal claim that a group of women is guarded against men, sceptical, and disgruntled householder members of the community who may use the argument that a woman refuses her position in the world, a woman can be dishonoured and face aggression, and she is no longer a respectable part of society (2006:8). As per

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[36] Jata refers to a cluster of matted hair according to the sivapurana 2.2.32. Accordingly, as Brahma narrated to Narad,' o sage, on hearing the words spoken by you, Siva became furious in a trice, Śiva of great fury and valour. Then Rudra, the destroyer of the world, plucked out a cluster of his matted hair (*jaṭa*) and struck the top of the mountain with it. O sage, the cluster of the matted hair (*jaṭa*) of the lord split into two, on being struck on the mountain.

Hausner and Khandelwal (2006:9), a woman's interest in religion may be influenced by the freedom an ascetic has. Because most Indian women are hesitant to travel by their own and, in some instances, they are not even permitted to, move freely tour the globe is regarded as a symbol of strength among those who choose a nomadic existence. Nevertheless, as Khandelwal points out, ochre attires do not themselves afford an escape from the day-to-day realities of being a woman in north India. (1997:91).

2.8.5.2. WOMEN AND DIFFICULT ASCETIC PATH

Asceticism is viewed as a discipline and a path for males, with celibacy being one of the essential disciplines to adhere to. The significance of celibacy culminates in a negative perspective on women: their existence is detrimental due to the sexual threat they pose. According to Olivelle, ascetic literature frequently references the description of a woman's body and the inherent risks of women as objects of desire (2008:111). As per ascetic literature, the sight of a young woman is as intoxicating as the use of alcohol. Therefore, males should avoid women whose mere presence is poisonous (2008:112).

Over the history, typical representations of female ascetics have presented them as "untamed, destructive, demonic, occult-powered women who attack male renunciants, enchant, imprison, and physically abuse them" (Gold, 2006:256).

Even though he was part of a sampradaya that was meant to include everyone, one of the most influential sadhus of the 17th century had a Brahminic view of women. He would only let them join asceticism if they were willing to walk the hard path of renouncers and defend the idea of pativrata.

2.9   SUMMARY

Indian Philosophy (Bharatiya Darsana) is a blend of logic and religion to some extent, while western philosophy is influenced primarily by objectivity and science. The slower adoption of spirituality in the west might be attributed to the subcontinent's complex system of philosophies. First, the meaning of spirituality according to ancient Indian texts is explored, and then this is used to analyse contemporary practise. The review of previous studies has stated that religion and spirituality grow irrespective of other

worldliness. A few studies have found that religion and spirituality can be segregated and evolve independently, contrary to common practise. Nevertheless, the difference between religion and spirituality may be insignificant, and when both are acknowledged, they may complement one another. Thus, it is demonstrated that spirituality depends on one's understanding and varies from individual to individual.

The origin of Indian asceticism has left scholars perplexed. The reasoning behind it is completely incomprehensible. Hinduism and other religions that evolved on the Indian subcontinent place emphasis on asceticism. However, India's ancient text, the Vedas, reflects a unique perspective. There is no aspiration for emancipation from this life and the next. Later, the Upanishads encouraged people to look for an absolute being because it was thought to be important to go beyond the practises of tapas, which could not help people to reach a higher goal, such as controlling and maintaining the universe in the right direction. Asceticism has multiple connotations in India and is not always synonymous with renunciation; thus, staying within the regular social sphere, rejecting social roles, and transcending the social structure may appear to overlap with renunciation.

Caste, the concept of jati, a small endogamous society that practises a traditional occupation and has cultural, ceremonial, and judicial autonomy, is also fundamental to comprehending how caste functions. The varna system is important because it gives a framework to many Jatis from each linguistic region. In short, the Varna system shows a range of values and some ways to organise things. So, it is considered a socio-religious system because it integrates religion or a set of beliefs with a social structure that sets the rules for how a person interacts. Thus, caste can be perceived as both a social institution and an element of the Hindu way of life.

Gender discrimination is most prevalent type of social disparity. It occurs all over the world and has many negative effects. Several studies have found how religious texts are interpreted and how the culture and institutions of religious groups shape the social position of women. The standing of women in the study of religion is reflective of their position in society as a whole. Even though there are multiple perspectives that include women whose normative ideas were adopted and men who pushed for equal

participation of women in religious ceremonies. In this milieu, women still have a limited impact on setting norms and traditions. In addition, although Hinduism frequently celebrates women's fertility, conventional Sanskrit legal rules have largely neglected ascetic practises. While many Indian women have chosen the austere lifestyle, few Brahmanical texts rarely discuss the experiences of these women. So, it seems that Brahmanical orthodoxy thought that the rise of female orthodoxy, which gave women more choices, was a threat to their ideas of what it meant to be a woman.

CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   INTRODUCTION

Analytical research as the central methodological orientation of the study, along with supportive tools, was used in gathering data, processing, reporting. The methods comprise the research design, sampling type and the sample size, as well as the tools and techniques used to gather the data. This research examines the numerous facets of Sadhus of the Naga Sect and Udaseen Sect. The study aimed to understand asceticism, spirituality, the influence of caste on sadhus, and gender discrimination among sadhus.

3.1.1.   ORIENTATION OF STUDY

Analytical research is being followed by micro ethnography, which intervenes through 'why' questions by negating the theory and understanding and interpreting the data, with narrative analysis for human participation in reporting and analysing experience (Cortazzi, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993; Toolan, 1988). Narrative analysis is used for systematic interpretation of others and interpretation of events. Therefore, narrative analysis is a useful research tool to complement the use of ethnographic research here. A goal of qualitative research across disciplines is to gather, evaluate, analyse, and understand research participant's experiences and theories.

Positionality is a term for the culturally assigned characteristics of a researcher, such as race, caste, gender, and nationality. Positionality is also shaped by a person's personal history and experiences, which can have different effects on data collection. Chiseri-straters (1996:115). (1996:115). So, when doing qualitative research, it is important to talk about positionality so that the analytic process can be accurately captured. She also says that the location of the ethnographer's point of view affects every step of the ethnographic process, from gathering data to building theories and understanding methods, to creating a narrative voice and writing the ethnography as a whole. So, the positionality in this research is to explore the aspects of caste, gender, spirituality and asceticism.

In this research is where the caste and identity of the researcher hardly play any role. These descriptions serve in comprehension of reflexivity as well. In fact, as Maya

Nazruk explains, the method in which fieldwork is experienced, as well as the construction of the ethnographic narrative, is influenced by the social interaction between the ethnographer and his or her interpreters. (2011:78).

Using both direct and indirect observations method in this research, the later chapters attempt to articulate the sociological knowledge on the construction of culture, beliefs, values, and experiences of the community and are all based on the narratives of the respondents. Thus, narrative analysis is best suited for this current research initiative.

3.1.2.   QUALITATIVE METHOD

The choice of methodology in research is dictated by the epitome rather than the question to be addressed in the research. When the research involves subjectivity, attempts to understand reality from the subject's perspective, is process-oriented, and focuses on specificity rather than generalization, then the research falls under qualitative paradigm attributes (Okley, 1999:156).

The qualitative research methodology was the approach used for this research since it happened at the micro-level, explored why and how of the processes happening at the individual level, tried to understand the processes in the particular context that the participants lived in and through the meanings that they made of their lived experiences, and attempted to unpack empowering enablers for co-researchers.

On methods of data gathering in qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2011:3) suggest that despite the intrinsic diversity of qualitative research, it can be characterised as a collection of interpretive and material practises that make the world visible. These practises altered the course of history. They represent the world through fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, images, recordings, and internal communication. Attempting to make sense of or understand occurrences based on the meanings individuals assign to them, qualitative researchers examine things in their natural environments.

Qualitative research, therefore, is the suitable methodology for research where the subjective understanding of individuals and phenomena is explored and valued, where

the researcher's subjectivity is valued and respected, and where research is not aimed at constructing or testing any objective reality.

3.2   RESEARCH DESIGN

The qualitative approach of ethnography, which emerged from anthropology and was adapted by sociologists, is well suited for the study of beliefs, social interactions, and behaviours as well as for small community research. Reeves, Kuper, and Hodges (2008) as well as Denzin and Lincoln (2011) have given interpretations of the gathered data (Berry, 1991; Berry, 2008). Ethnography began as a tool for social science. It involves the observer, the people being studied, the study report as text, and the people who read the delivered text (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Therefore, the researcher's goal in applying the framework was to thoroughly define specific Sadhu communities. The main goal of this study is to learn everything there is to know about Sadhus in a certain social context. This involves an in-depth analysis of their cultural practices, rituals, lifestyle and habits. It also looks deep into How's and Why's of their initiation into the sect and mainly focuses on their interest into the sect.

The Interview Schedule is composed of open-ended questions that try to find in-depth descriptions of traditions, practices, and perceptions using snowball sampling and purposive sampling. Griffiths (2017) and Blackstone (2012) Qualitative interviews seek narratives, not numbers; not merely how many or how frequently, but also "How did that make you feel?" or "What happened next?" By asking open-ended questions, qualitative interviews are able to elicit the interviewee's most significant story.

3.2.1. ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLANATION

A cultural interpretation is based on ethnographic data that has been methodically collected. Along with ethnographic methods and techniques, cultural interpretation and a number of other essential principles define ethnography, including a holistic viewpoint, contextualization, and emic, etic, and non-judgmental perspectives on reality.

The rich detail of data that is acquired through ethnographic research and engagement in fieldwork is the major advantage of both (Denzin 1997, Holt and Sparkes 2001, Wolcott 1999). This research presented a detailed description of the traditional practices of Sadhus.

Ethnography (Frosh et al. 2003, Griffin 2000, Holt and Sparks 2001, Huberman and Miles 2002, lofland 2002, Park 2005, Willing 2003a, Wolcott 1999) describes the activities, interests, rules, and ways that people in small groups interacted with each other.

The theoretical orientation and problem selection of an ethnographer will determine whether a micro- or macro-level investigation is carried out. A microstudy is a close-up examination, as if via a microscope, of a small social unit or a distinguishable activity inside that unit. Microanalyses are ordinarily conducted by an ethnomethodologist or symbolic interactionist (see Denzin, 2001; Hinkel, 2005). For instance, Erickson's (1976) study of gatekeepers entailed evaluating filmed recordings of interviews in order to examine the subtle signals given by counsellors to clients.

3.3   METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The present research work is undertaken to study the community of Sadhus in Uttarakhand and Punjab. In order to collect first-hand knowledge of the community, it has been decided to resort to the technique of participant observation. During the course of participant observation, the researcher maintained a complete account of the observation of the normal life of Sadhus. Furthermore, the analysis after the collection is investigated and comprises both primary and secondary data.

3.3.1. PRIMARY DATA

Participant observation was employed for the collection of primary data, in which snowball sampling and purposive sampling, helped to conduct research where the respondents were assuredly adjoined and fulfil the purpose of the research The interview schedule is prepared under the objectives, and it comprises of two sections:

- The first section of the schedule, primarily concerned with gathering personal information from Sadhus, such as a general profile of the respondents, including local area, name, gender, age, marital status, and educational qualification.
- The second section of the schedule seeks to gather information on the Sadhus. All the aspects of the study were taken into detail, and questions were framed in the proper sequence. From questions 1 to 8, based on spirituality, sect, and the post-initiation life of sadhus, were discussed with respondents. Questions 9 to 11 were based on the caste system and whether it is prevalent among Sadhus or not. Questions 12 to 17 were based on gender discrimination and Kumbh mela.

After the interview schedule was finished, it was talked over with experts in the field, such as academicians and some Sadhus, to make sure it was correct both in terms of content and appearance.

3.3.2. SECONDARY DATA

Secondary data was gathered from the books and articles. For Secondary data collection, researcher visited different libraries as well as various ashramas.

3.4 TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES OF DATA COLLECTION

To collect authentic information, it is important to maintain the use of proper tools. These tools helped in collecting a descriptive repertoire for this study. Open-ended questions allow respondents to interpret it. In informal or conversational interviews, which allow for a more lifelike discussion and questioning of events, researchers frequently inquire about incidents they have observed. In-depth interviews as well as documentary evidence such as minutes of the meeting, diaries, and photographs were collected and further analysed for the purpose of an intensive study.

3.5 SAMPLING DESIGN

Numerous methods of sampling are feasible while conducting research, however qualitative researchers tend to focus on relatively small samples. (Lyell, 1998). This study was done with non-probability sampling, which included the use of both purposive sampling and snowball sampling.

3.5.1. INCLUSION CRITERIA OF INFORMANTS

Snowball sampling inclusion criteria was blurred. Most of the time researcher tried to attempt to get information from experienced sadhus of Udaseen and Naga Sect for authentic information. Some of them are academically experienced. Hence the inclusion criteria are educated and experienced respondents

3.5.2. INCLUSION CRITERIA FOR LOCALE SELECTION

The interest in Sadhus came from the visit to the Kumbh Mela. The pilot study was conducted in Allahabad at the Kumbh Mela. The mass exodus of the Sadhus population from all over India, although most of the respondents who took part in the pilot survey were from Punjab and Uttarakhand. Hence, the study is geographically confined to these two states.

3.6   DESCRIPTION OF FIELD WORK

From the two selected states, four regions were selected and a sample size of 50 to 100 respondents was selected under the parameters of an ethnographic study, which is an average sample size enabling the proper estimation of results with a much-varied scope of viewpoints on the research theme (Kennedy 2017). The number of interviews per participant required to achieve data saturation, as studied by Janice M. Morse (2004), has been taken into consideration when determining the sample size. Other factors taken into consideration including the scope of study; the quality of data, the nature of the subject matter, and the proportion of relevant information gained from each participant, Warren (2002), Gerson (2002), and Horowitz (2002) all say that a sample size of 50 to 100 can produce strong results and give enough data for a quick and accurate analysis.

PUNJAB

Figure 3.1 Map of Punjab
Source: www.mapsofindia.com

Punjab is a state in northern India known as the 'land of five rivers.' It is the 20th largest state in India by area, covering an area of 50,362 km with 27 million inhabitants, and the 16th largest state by population, comprising 23 districts. Majha, Malwa, and Doaba are the three major divisions that make up the state.

Malwa region of Punjab: Malwa refers to the area of Punjab that is located toward the Satluj River's left bank. Malwa covers around 60–70% of the land of Punjab state and reaches as far as the Haryana district of Ambala. The term 'Malwai' is used to describe the locals. The Malwai language of Punjabi is spoken as the major language in this area. The written form of Punjabi is thought to be extremely similar to Malwai Punjabi. This region of Punjab is divided in 15 districts that are Barnala, Bathinda, Fatehgarh Sahib,

Fazilka, Ferozpur, Ludhiana, Mansa, Moga, Mohali, Muktsar, Patiala, Ropar, and Sangrur are the districts of the Malwa area.

Doaba, region of Punjab: Doaba refers to the region that is between the Satluj and Beas rivers. Jalandhar Doab (also spelled Jullundhar Doab) is another name for Bist Doab. The term Doaba literally means 'region of two rivers' since it is made up of the letters 'Do,' which stands for 'two,' and *'Aab,'* which stands for 'water or river.' The dominant language in this region of Punjab is the Doabi dialect of the Punjabi language. The inhabitants of this region go by the nickname 'Doabia.' The Doaba area is made up of the Punjabi districts of Jalandhar, Kapurthala, Hoshiarpur, and Nawanshahr.

These two Punjab regions were chosen based on the availability of respondents from Udaseen and Naga Sect.

UTTARAKHAND

Figure 3.2 Map of Uttarakhand
Source: www.mapsofindia.com

A state in northern India, Uttarakhand was formerly known as Uttaranchal. Due to the large number of Hindu temples and pilgrimage sites spread out over the state, it is sometimes denoted as the 'Dev Bhoomi' (land of the Gods). The Himalayas, the Bhabar, and the Terai areas are famous for natural settings. Total area of Uttarakhand is 53,483 kms, of which 86 percent is covered with mountains and 65 percent area is shielded with forest. Depending on where in the Garhwal or Kumaon area they are from, the natives of Uttarakhand are sometimes referred to as *Uttarakhandis* and other times as Garhwalis or Kumaunis. In 2011, 10,086,292 people were counted in India's population. Almora, Bageshwar, Chamoli, Champawat, Dehradun, Haridwar, Nainital, Pauri Garhwal, Pithoragarh, Rudraprayag, Tehri Garhwal, Udham Singh Nagar, and Uttarkashi are the 13 districts that make up the state of Uttarakhand.

HARIDWAR

Haridwar, is known as the "Gate Way of Gods". It is a district in the Indian state of Uttarakhand. Haridwar is one of the four places; where Kumbh Mela is held every twelve years and Ardh Kumbh subsequently every six years. Haridwar, serves as its administrative centre. Due to its profound religious significance, Haridwar also organises a number of religious celebrations throughout the year. Three of the most well-known are: *Kavad Mela, Somavati Amavasya Mela,* and *Ganga Dashara*. Also, the huge Kumbh Mela happens every 12 years when Jupiter (Brihaspati) moves into the sign of Aquarius (Kumbh).

RISHIKESH

Rishikesh, which is also known by the spelling Hrishikesh, is a city in the Indian state of Uttarakhand's Dehradun district and is run by the Rishikesh Municipal Corporation. It is referred to as the pilgrimage town and is one of the most sacred locations for Hindus. Since ancient times, Hindu saints and sages have travelled to Rishikesh to meditate in quest of greater knowledge as argued by Ranjeni, A (2014).

3.7   DATA PROCESSING

The data obtained from the field and secondary sources collected from journals, books, research articles, and so on are thoroughly reviewed and analysed in order to produce concrete conclusions regarding the findings. A method that focuses on qualitative narrative analysis was used to look at the survey results and secondary data from other research projects, journals, academic papers, and published records. Per the methodological lens to be used, an in-depth analysis of the selected narrations was conducted to formulate the findings that dealt with conclusions.

3.8   INITIAL LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The community of Sadhus in these states is very vast and even if some rough sample is drawn, it is almost impossible to pinpoint individual cases from the sample. To carve out a representative sample from this vast, nebulous, and ever moving group is an uphill task because of the following difficulties:

Most monasteries that try to get people to become disciples do not keep a list of disciples; the monastic authorities do not disclose the number of disciples recruited in their respective centres.

Another difficulty is that of locating the selected cases because of the itinerant character of the members of this community, a quasi-compulsory code of conduct except during Chaumasa (the four months of the rainy season).

3.9   THEORETICAL VIEWPOINTS

3.9.1.   THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT ON CASTE SYSTEM

Caste as a Hindu Social Construct

Caste a Hindu social construct, a self-contained figurative universe. Most agree with Bougle's standard formulation that caste combines aversion, hierarchy, and inherited subjects. Those who consider that caste is a distinct phenomenon classify it as Pre-Dumontian, Dumontian, and Post-Dumontian.

PRE-DUMONTIAN CONCEPTIONS OF THE HINDU CASTE

Max Weber undertook his classic study of religion and society in India, all of the Hindu main Sanskrit scriptures had been translated by orientalists. Weber was familiar with these census reports, which he assessed as "scientifically outstanding" (Weber cited in Lunheim 1993:64). Weber saw Indian society as a 'ideal type' of his concept that belief systems shape social and economic structure (in contrast to the Marxist view). Religious beliefs and social distinction were direct and explicit in India; in the West, they are indirect and ambiguous. Weber recognised caste as an essential component of Hinduism, asserting self-evidently that "there is no Hindu without caste" (Weber cited in Lunheim, 1993:64). Weber made a comparison among caste and guild. He concluded that caste is more than just occupational specialisation. Guilds, for example, were not endogamous like castes in the Middle Ages. A comprehensive parallel between caste and guild overlooked important differences. This demonstrated Weber's point. Hinduism, not economic or material circumstances, determines caste.

Weber considered caste an extreme status group. A class is made up of people in similar economic situations, while a status group is bound by honour and prestige. Limiting social interactions and marriage with people who 'did not belong' helped maintain identity, especially those lower on the honour and prestige scale. With rigid caste endogamy and the religious idea of impurity, the Indian caste system became intense. Class had a more restricted structure than caste.

Weber's look at the effects of industrialization is based on class and the Protestant Ethic. He used John Calvin's belief that hard-work, self-control, and frugality could guarantee a place in heaven to explain industrialization. A similar idea of rebirth in Hindus, calls for severe duties based on your caste and rewards that go beyond this life. The combination of caste and Hinduism by Weber was based on the notion of karma. How did the idea of karma, which is part of other religions besides Hinduism, mix with the idea of caste in India? Weber was not sure, but he said that the main cause of caste in ancient India was differences in race. Weber did not say exactly what the comparative

perspective was, but the way he put them together showed how understanding the caste system changed the way sociologists thought about western civilization.

Celestine Bougle's essay is a turning point in the history of caste. Bougle identifies three defining characteristics of 'caste' (Lunheim 1993:66) The relationship between caste and a trade or profession due to inheritance. Personal status, privileges, and responsibilities are unequally distributed by group level in a hierarchy. Repulsion: reciprocal repulsion between social groupings, separation into opposite pieces, group isolation, and measures to prohibit alliances and relationships over group boundaries, such as endogamy, pollution ideas, and dietary restrictions. These three criteria define caste. Bougle examined whether caste is entirely Indian based on this notion (Hindu). Similar to Weber, he concluded that many social structures, such as those found in the West, exhibit caste-like traits, but that "the spirit of caste" exists only in India in its fully established form. (Lunheim 1993: 67). Ultimately, Bougle attributed the caste system to the Brahman's ritual and religious domination. In addition, he is one of the scientists who acknowledged, or at least highlighted, the difference among socio-religious positions and secular authority in Indian society, triggering an intense dispute in the caste anthropology. The first person affected by Bougle's articles on caste was Louis Dumont. (Dumont 1980:30).

PERSPECTIVE OF DUMONT ON CASTE

The French researcher Louis Dumont wrote Homo Hierarchicus, which was published in 1966 and translated into English in 1970. Purity and Pollution were portrayed as the structuring principle of caste system and hierarchy (Dumont, 1980) Dumont felt that the Hindu caste system was founded on a religious hierarchy rather than a political one. Purity and Impurity were also religious tenets, as was interdependence, the concept that all parts are interconnected. According to Dumont, the caste system in India is not individualised; rather, it emphasises its entirety. These essential elements of caste hierarchy, according to Dumont, are observed in Hindu literature and daily life (understandably in India). Caste, according to Dumont, places hierarchy at the centre and accepts it (intertwined with purity and pollution) is prevalent among Hindu populations. From a theoretical point of view, Dumont compared how traditional societies were organised.

Dumont states structural analysis focuses on interconnections, not substance-relationship components and totality. According to Dumont, the caste system should only encompass relationships between castes and not inside castes.

Gerald Berreman (1991) suggested that Dumont spent too much time listening to Brahmans and their religious literature, which present an idealised perspective of caste. Gerald Berreman observed that not every Hindu adheres to Dumont's Brahmanical hierarchy. In addition, he criticised Dumont's idea that power and economic forces are different from and experiential to caste, stating that the two are inextricably linked.

Dumont focused upon value structure, not interest structure (Beteille 1991:132). Dumont supported the caste system and its associated sanctions, whatever he said about using caste to study Indian society. For him, caste was 'social,' as Radcliffe-Brown and Durkheim define religion. Dumont defended the caste system by highlighting its benefits for individuals, groups, and the Indian state.

POST DUMONT VIEWS OF HINDU CASTE

To analyse the Hindu caste system, McKim Marriott (1976) offered a paradigm based on "coded bodily substance" principles. Marriott offered a functionalist, interactional, monotheistic, substance-codes-based strategy. He felt that caste was determined by biological substances and social interactions.

The Brahman caste does not accept payment for services, women from inferior castes, or commonly prepared food. Brahmans exchange substance-code for land, money, or grain. Brahmans hold the highest rank due to their religious studies, exclusive transactions with higher, more substantial items, and assistance to extra-terrestrial men—universal knowledge in the form of substance-transforming rituals, instruction, and counsel (Marriott 1976).

Based on research conducted in India, Gloria Godwin Raheja (1990) challenged Dumont's dualism, hierarchy, and purity of caste as religious phenomena. 98% of Pahansu's agricultural land is owned by the Gujar caste, making them the dominant caste. Raheja claimed that castes are associated in three distinct hierarchies, which were confirmed and emphasised in different contexts. Brahman and Bhangi (sweeper) are at

the top and bottom of the ritual purity hierarchy (Raheja 1990:3). This order reflects caste rank. Raheja (1990) positioned the dominant land-owning caste in the core of Jajmani. The system is driven by ritualistic significance, not the purity of Brahmans. Raheja's study showed the complexity of Hindu caste.

Despite the fact that inter-caste connections are hierarchical, Raheja disputes Dumont's assertion that there is only one conceptual premise and one type of relationship. She says context determines how relationships are valued. An example is the 'centrality' of the Gujar in the trading structure when they disperse bad luck. Caste interactions are viewed as sharing and reciprocity in local contexts defined as transactions amongst one's own people. Brahmans lack rank and purity, so they are considered polluted and dependent. Dumont said Brahmans are pure and high-ranking. These two conceptions of Hindu caste contradict one another, demonstrating that there is no unified understanding of caste in Hinduism. Unlike the Hindu concept of purity and pollution, the perspective of centrality supported by Raheja more closely resembles the Marxist conception of social class, according to which those who control the means of production are superior.

3.9.2. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION ON GENDER DISCRIMINATION

In the present thesis, a comparative method will be utilised to examine the phenomenon of female asceticism, including what it appears like, how it is perceived, and what it means to those involved, such as practitioners, followers, and hagiographers. the modern Hindu phenomenon in light of distinct indigenous or socioreligious perspectives, beliefs, and ideals, which collectively reflect the ideology of the relevant socio religious and sociocultural context.

DEPRIVATION THEORY

When examining participation of women in religious activities, the deprivation theory has occasionally been used as a lens. According to the deprivation theory, when individuals experience acute subordination, whether it be political, economic, intellectual, or social, they may turn to religion as a safety valve. In his influential book Ecstatic Religion, I. M. Lewis argues that in communities where women are subservient, religion provides a mechanism for them to gain pecuniary, emotional, and

social benefits that would otherwise be unavailable to them in their lowly position (Lewis 1989: 26–28). Melford Spiro, focused on the sexual side of female religious attraction. In cultures where women's sexuality is enclosed by prohibitions, he suggests that spirit possession may be a means of finding sexual fulfilment (Spiro, 1984: 47–48).

In analysing female initiation rites, Bruce Lincoln shares the same viewpoint. In contrast to male initiation ceremonies, he asserts that female initiation does not elevate their status since it stays tied to their responsibilities as mothers and wives. He asserts that women have no standing. The man is preoccupied with status, whereas women are prohibited from participating directly in the social order (Lincoln 1981: 102). Female initiation, according to him, "elevates life above monotony, mindlessness, and misery" and works as an opiate, a reassuring and seductive illusion for people who will never be awarded power or status (Lincoln 1981: 108). This remark is made despite Lincoln's belief that female initiation practises are widespread. Susan Starr Sered, among others, has criticised the deprivation theory, arguing that female participation in religious life should not be explained in terms of social or psychological deprivation (Sered 1996: 62-66). In this study, deprivation theory will be utilised to examine the status and challenges of power and subordination.

CHAPTER 4 : ASCETICISM AND SPIRITUALITY AMONG SADHUS: RELIGION, CASTE AND GENDER

4.1 RELIGION

Religion is based on a belief system, which is structuring an individual mind. A social cultural system of prescribed values, beliefs, and texts that generally tie mankind to supernatural and spiritual components is what is typically understood by the term "religion". Different religions may or may not have different components, such as divine sacred objects, faith, or a type of ultimacy that will offer rules and authority for the remainder of one's life (James et al., 2010).

4.1.1. PHILOSOPHIES OF RELIGION

A Philosophy of Religion is not a religious course. Atheists, agnostics, and theists may philosophise about religion. The philosophy of religion is a discipline of philosophy, not theology, which analyses religious beliefs. It explores theology's principles, propositions, religious experience, and worship (John Hick, 1963).

Indian philosophy discusses diverse philosophical traditions of the Indian subcontinent from around B.C.1500 to the 20th century by Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda Sri Aurobindo, J. Krishnamurti Mahatma Gandhi, and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism are examples. It encompasses Bhakti, Sikhism, Sufism, and responses to Islam, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. The philosophy of religion is primarily concerned with clarity of statements, consistency of claims, adequacy of evidence, validity of argument, and comprehensiveness of generalisation (George L. Abernethy,1965).

According to Radhakrishnan, he believes that religious philosophy cannot exist without religious experience. It is an effort to compile and harmonise religious experience data. The distinction between speculative and dogmatic theology must be made with great care. In contrast, speculative theology uses dialectic to move from basic principles to the conclusion that God is a possibility. From religious experience and tradition, the philosophy of religion logically concludes that God is real. Dogmatic theology limits itself to the presentation of a single set of experiences recorded at a specific time and

place, however, the philosophy of religion takes into account the diversity of religious experience over all time and space. Radhakrishnan states, "Philosophy of religion refuses to accept the priori of theoretical religious doctrine and the apologetic method of dogmatic theology and accepts a scientific view of religious experience and examines with objectivity and detachment the spiritual inheritance of men of all creeds and even of those with no creed." Such a study of the ideals and elements of religious cognition, which has as its framework the entire religious idealism in opposition to the disintegrating principles of scientific realism on the one side and religious dogma on the other, is deemed essential. (Dr. Radha Krishnan, 1940).

4.1.2. MAJOR CONCEPTS FROM DARSHAN SHASTRA (INDIA)

In Indian philosophy (Darshan Shastra), *Dharma, Moksha, Karma*, and *Atman* are significant. *Dharma* is the cosmic order, for which people must execute their Karma properly. Otherwise, dharma or adharma collapses. *Atman* means soul/self, while *Karma* means action/duty. Salvation is *Moksha*. These principles should be analysed scientifically, not blindly. All these principles are connected. For example, man's undiscriminating demolition of nature has led to an imbalance in nature, resulting in global warming and natural disasters. The cosmic order gets affected when a human being does not fulfil his karma or obligatory duties and as a consequence of that an individual is reborn again and again to reconcile his past transgression. This leads us to the concept of sustainable development, which has a spiritual component.

4.1.3. THE AIM OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY IN CONTEXT OF UDASEEN AND NAGA SECTS

The word *"darshana"* originates from the Sanskrit origin *"drish,"* which indicates "to see" (Radhakrishnan, cited by J.N Mohanty, 2009). It is thought that those who adhere to it will "see" the truth. (Hamilton, 2001) and live according to the apparent truth. The Astik schools of Indian philosophy believe in God, but the Nastik schools do not. Some Indian schools of thought, such as *Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya,* and *Vaisesika*, etc., are pro-Vedic. Therefore, Indian philosophy has particular features. For example, its pursuit of spiritual advancement is a defining trait. Consequently, several Indian philosophical traditions believe in the soul and its need for illumination. It surpasses religious and

ethically-motivated cognition. In addition to pursuing "Moksha," or spiritual advancement, in addition to seeking truth and knowledge, Indian philosophy explains and encourages principles. Consequently, it provides a basis of values and morals to govern human existence. Indian philosophy offers methods for obtaining the ideal of happiness, which is central to Indian thought. The majority of Indian ideologies adhere to the karma idea. According to this view, our lives are determined by the acts (*karmic*) of our current and previous lives. To be liberated is to be released from the constraints of Karma. However, there are a few notable outliers: the teachings of Charvaka reject karma and reincarnation. Therefore, the term *"dharma"* has a broad meaning in India. *Darshan* and *Dharma* have the same goal of liberation from suffering and ignorance. The relationship between philosophy and religion is harmonious.

4.1.4. NARATIVES FROM UDASEEN SECT

An informant from the Udaseen sect has the view that these philosophies such as *Yoga, Nyaya, Mimansa, Samkhya, Vedanta, and Vaisesika* are based on different views given by different philosophers and these too will lead us towards the path of God. They are of the view that ideology might be different but the principles of these philosophies are the same. The main aim is to attain the ultimate god. They believed that the *Nyaya* school of logic presented a technique based on scientific standards of deductive reasoning by which definite knowledge of the subject of inquiry could be attained. Therefore, the talent for logic and reasoning is honed and the values of verification, fairness, and prudence are emphasised, while the *Vaisesika* School of individual traits focuses on physics and the fundamental concept that nature is asynchronous. Nature is made up of atoms which are separate from the soul. Therefore, there is 'dualism,' or the existence of two separate parts—matter and soul.

In the case of Samkhya and Yoga philosophy, they claimed that the Samkhya school of enumeration of Kapila is one of the six Darshana's and one of the world's first rational systems. The *Samkhya Karika* begins by stating, 'It is because of the anguish of suffering that the desire arises to know how to overcome it.' According to *Samkhya* philosophy, our perception is limited to our five senses, and learning has to take place experientially using these five senses. Learning should be open-ended, experiential, and

based on reason. Accordingly, teachers should incorporate hands-on learning, projects, debates, discussion, drama, and exhibitions as much as possible. In a world of change, happiness is the result of a temporary relationship with certain things that produce a favourable condition in our minds at that point of time. Once we accept that absolute happiness is not possible, we can discipline ourselves to have fewer expectations and consequently be less disappointed. According to *Samkhya* philosophy, only a healthy and focused individual can attain salvation. Therefore, science, arts, and yoga are integral to the curriculum and to the yoga philosophy. According to them, the word 'yoga' comes from the Sanskrit term *'yuj,'* which means 'to attach oneself to a job with great discipline, mind and body, and the person with God'. The school of Yoga lays more stress on spiritual discipline or application. We are led astray by our senses; yoga helps us to attain control, calm and gain inner perception. The aim of yoga is to control the activities of the mind *'citta-vritti-nirodha'* (giving reference to the yoga sutra) as for the *Mimamsa* and *Vedanta* philosophy; the *Mimamsa* School has merged with *Vedanta*. *Mimamsa* philosophy *(darshana)* was different from all the other schools in that it was a school of inquiry and not a school of salvation. Its original purpose was to explain the Vedas. The *Vedantas,* which conclude the Vedas, are the most significant of the six *darshanas.* Many features of modem Hinduism and philosophy are taken from the *Vedantas* and their sub-schools, and while giving reference to Adi Shankaracharya, they argued that the *Brahma Sutras* presented the doctrine of *Advaita* or monotheism, non-duality (allowing no second). Brahman, who is the entire core of the One Universe, is the only entity. Everything is Brahman, so the self, or atman, is also Brahman. This means that "atman is brahman," which means "the self is Brahman."

4.1.5.   NARATIVES FROM NAGA SECT

An informant from the Naga sect has stated that all these philosophies differ according to the different observations of the individual saint. All the philosophies help an individual to attain *Moksha* and to get free from the cycle of rebirth. They share same perception as of Udaseen Sadhus that the basic ethics remains the same, but the ideology may differ, but the end goal is to attain the ultimate god. As for the *Nyaya*

ideology, they claimed that *Nyaya* schools emphasise the development of logic and reasoning abilities and the reinforcement of the ideals of verification and fairness. The *Vaisheshika* school of thought is concerned with nature and the soul, whereby nature is composed of atoms but is distinct from the soul. It gives the idea of dualism, or the existence of two separate parts, matter and soul. For *Samkhya* and *Yoga,* they stated that this is one of the oldest among all the six darshans and the first rational system above all. *Samkhya* philosophy states that our perception is limited to our five senses. According to *Samkhya* philosophy, only a healthy and focused individual can attain salvation (*moksha*) and for yoga philosophy, they stated that the word yoga comes from the Sanskrit term *'yuj*,' meaning to attach yourself to the task at hand with great discipline, which unites the mind and body, individual and God. The School of Yoga laid more stress on spiritual applications. As for *Mimansa* and *Vedanta* philosophy, the *Mimansa* school has merged with *Vedanta*. The philosophy of *Mimansa* school is different from all other schools. It was a school of inquiry and not of salvation. Its original purpose was to explain the Vedas. Additionally, they assert that Adi Shankaracharya identifies the *Brahma Sutra* as having established the philosophy of *Advaita* non-duality or Monotheism. They also stated that the Brahaman is the only essence of one universe.

Sadhus from both sects have the same ideology regarding the philosophy of Hindu religion. Therefore, most of the informants gave us the same responses and relatable points. To support the above-mentioned content from primary sources (Keith E. Yandell, 1999), in Hinduism there are two assumptions: reincarnation (cycle of rebirth) and *Karma* (what you sow, so shall you reap). Consequently, each of these viewpoints needs a religion that explains how to "escape the wheel" or break the never-ending cycle of birth and death.

According to the concept of rebirth and *Karma*, we are promised to be reincarnated in favourable circumstances, and this process may continue indefinitely. This is what a Hindu text says:

"In this ill-smelling body, which is a conglomerate of bone, skin, muscle, marrow, flesh, semen, blood, mucus, tears, rheum, faeces, urine, wind, bile, and phlegm, what is the

good of enjoyment of desires? ... In this body, which is afflicted with desire, anger, covetousness, delusion, fear, despondency, envy, separation from the desirable, union with the undesirable, hunger, thirst, senility, disease, sorrow, and the like, what is the good of the enjoyment of desires? We see that this whole world is decaying... In this sort of cycle of existence, what is the good of the enjoyment of desires when, after a man has fed on them, they are repeatedly seen to return to earth? ... in this cycle of existence, I am a frog in a waterless well''.

According to Yandell, Advaita Vedanta is one of the three primary Vedantic Hindu schools. It emphasises both polytheistic and monotheistic practices, that is, the worship of one or several deities. According to *Advaita Vedanta, monotheism* belongs to the domain of appearance rather than the sphere of truth. (Keith Yandell, 1999).

As observed by the researcher, the majority of Sadhus adhere to the doctrines of Samsara (the perpetual sequence of life, death, and rebirth) and *Karma* (the cosmic law of cause and consequence). The belief in the soul, or *'atman,'* is one of the central concepts. According to this philosophy, every living thing has a soul and is a part of the ultimate soul.

4.2   SECT

A sect is a group of individuals who share a set of religious or political convictions. (Cambridge Learner's Dictionary, 2013:643). Regarding a religious sect, it is an offshoot of an existing religion, sharing certain doctrines with the mother religion but also including some innovative notions. The sects rely on their religious and historical pasts for self-assurance and spiritual and intellectual nourishment (Karunakaran, 1965:72). It employs some innovative and novel concepts.

4.2.1.   UDASEEN SECT

In Sikh history, the name '*Udasi'* relates to Guru Nanak's (1469–1539) missionary journeys and an order of ascetics formed by Baba Sri Chand in 1494, Guru Nanak's son, Sandhu (2011). It comes from the Sanskrit term *'Udas or Udaseen,'* which means ascetic or celibate priest. Udasi denotes grief, sadness, disappointment, and distance from worldly concerns (Sandhu 2011:1).

Figure 4.1 Interaction with Respondent
Photo Courtesy: Jagdish Dabgotra, 15-04-2021, Kumbh Mela, Haridwar

The ascetic orders of Udaseens commemorate their spiritual ancestry of Baba Sri Chand. Guru Nanak's eldest son. They adopted the term Udasi because they all followed renunciation (Udaseen) and celibacy in pre-colonial Punjab. Singh (2000:3)

One of my informants from the Udaseen Sect stated that Udaseen means an individual who attains control over his mind and body completely. He also stated that the Udaseen sect is the sect that teaches us how to be self-controlled. The ocean is limitless, but it remains within its own boundaries. That is the real meaning of being an Udaseen ascetic and those who follow this Parampara have true allegiance unless and until they are faced with adverse or challenging circumstance. A spiritual person is one who has an ocean of knowledge and from this reservoir of esoteric wealth of Atma Vidya nothing can be added to or subtracted. An Udaseen remain stable and unperturbed just like an ocean.

Figure 4.2 Interaction with Respondent
Photo Courtesy: Jagdish Dabgotra, 30-09-2019, (Bhupatwala), Haridwar

Some of the informants also stated that Udaseen means *ut + aseen,* which depicts stability in Brahma. It is one of the oldest sampradayas that are prevalent in Bharat. Udaseen also means a way to find the right path in life and getting completely immersed with God himself.

4.2.2. NAGA SECT

To belong to the Naga Sect an ascetic or a seeker of God realisation has to first follow any of the sampradayas that are part of *Sanatan Dharma*. This chosen path actually depends on one's own choice and inclination. If an individual wants to choose the path of spirituality, as per the most ancient religion of '*Sanatan Dharma',* then the seeker has to choose one of the prevalent sects of *Sanatan Dharma* namely: Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Shaktism. The principles of these sects are the same, but they differ in their methods or practices of worship.

One of the respondents stated that he finds that the path of Dashnami sannyasa is more ancient as compared to other sects and therefore the aspirant has to be   initiated by the Dashnami Juna Akhara and spend most of his life according to its norms. The aspirant further shared his views that not everyone renounces to join the Naga sect.

The main reason for him to be initiated as a Naga Sadhu was to completely mould himself so that he can learn and adapt self-control because will power plays a vital role in the life of a Sadhu. So, the easiest way for a seeker to attain spirituality is to choose the Naga Sect.

Respondent also claims that the main reason behind adopting the Naga sect particularly is that in ancient times during invasion, when people of India got exploited by the foreign invaders, Shankaracharya established this sect and provided them a particular way to protect them and the common masses so that their lives would not be destroyed. Shankaracharya also tried to get them on the right path of spirituality where they can channel their rage in the right direction and thereby form the military ascetics to protect Sanatan Dharma called 'Naga Sadhus'.

One of the informants stated that there are ten different orders in Dashnami Naga sanyasis, that is *Giri, Puri, Bharti, Saraswati, Aranya, Ashrama, Parvata, Sagara, Tirtha, and Vana*. The Naga Sadhus are famous for their war skills. They have no particular place to stay and just keep roaming from one place to another.

4.3   CASTE SYSTEM

Hindu theology and religion, rituals and traditions, family, and marriage are closely intertwined with caste. It is sustained eternally by rituals and ceremonies. The system of "Chaturvarna" is the genesis of caste division in Indian society. According to the Chaturvarna concept, Hindu society was split into four varnas, namely Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. The varna system was primarily centred on the division of labour and occupation during the Vedic period. The varna system gave rise to the caste system. The contemporary caste system is a distorted form of the old varna system.

4.3.1. NARRATIVES ON CASTE SYSTEM FROM UDASEEN SECT

Caste is an extension of the varna system. Sociologically exploring, it is an endogamous group. It maintains and nourishes the innumerable strands of the Hindu social order with a view to controlling and regulating the same. Sadhus are expected to strengthen the hold and comprehensiveness of this situation. Does it mean, then, that all Sadhus favour the caste system?

Figure 4.3 Interaction with Respondent
Photo Courtesy: Jagdish Dabgotra, 28-09-2019, (Sadhusuda Ashram, Kharkhari,) Haridwar

According to one of the informants, Lord Krishna stated in the Bhagavad Gita that the kind of deeds an individual does throughout their life only represents one's caste. The caste system is directly related to an individual's occupation or ability and interests. He was giving reference to the verse of *Matravani* of the Udaseen sect *"Syah Safed Jarad Surkhai, jo le Paherai so Guru Bhai",* which means these are the basic colours and the one who wears one of the colours gets treated equally as brother. However, according to him, he personally considers this verse with the varna system in which *Syah* is

Shudras, *Safed* is Brahman*, Jarad* is Vaishya, and *Surkhai* means Kshatriyas. They all get treated as brothers. He also stated that all these four classifications of the Varna system are interrelated to each other, and if there were no Shudras, then there would be no need for the Vaishyas, and therefore Kshatriyas would have no one to protect, and thus there would be no one to teach or guide (brahmans). Brahman's duty is to provide knowledge or to teach each of the varnas/classes.

Some of the informants are of the view that when an individual digs deep into the depths of the divinity of God and thereby gets involved with God, then caste does not count. What counts is an individual's thoughts and moral values. They also stated that if God does not discriminate against any individual, then how can humans make the difference on their own? We are all the same but, in our Vedas and Shastras, it is mentioned clearly that there is a varna system based on an individual's interests and ability instead of the caste system.
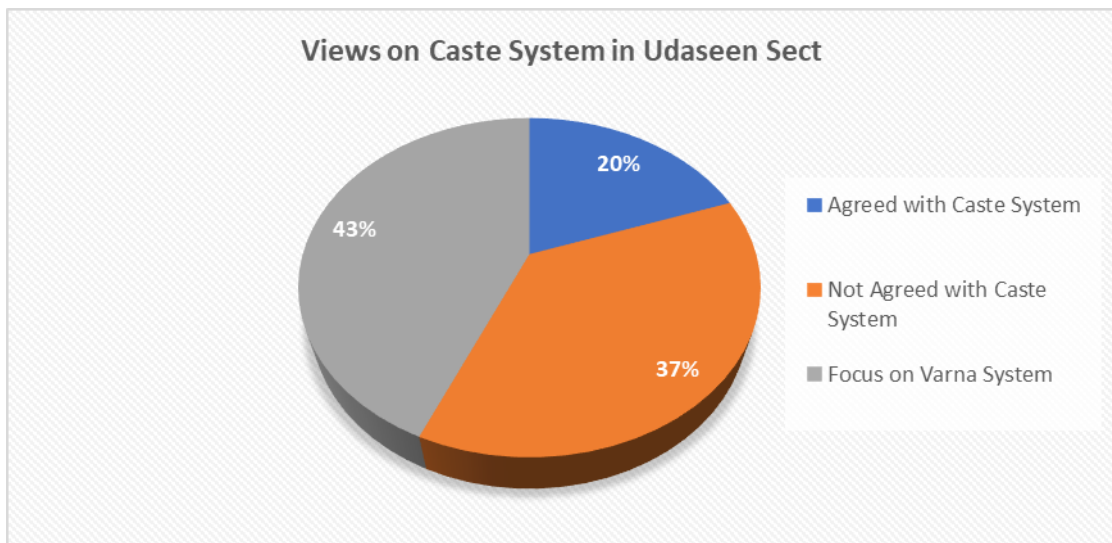

Figure 4.4 Views on Caste System in Udaseen sect
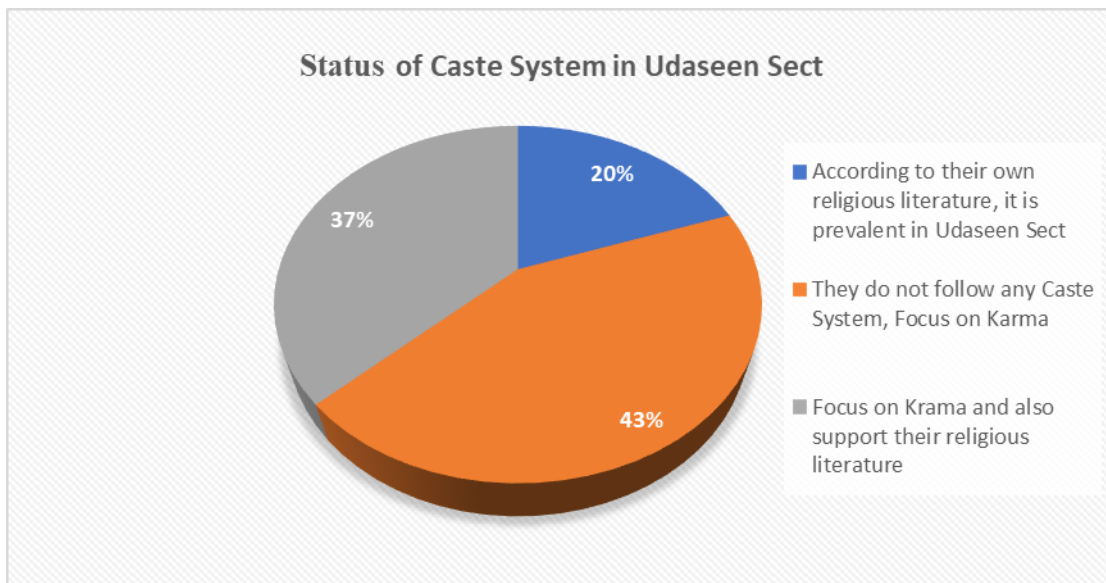Source: Information collected from fieldwork

Figure 4.5 Status of Caste System in Udaseen Sect
Source: Information collected from fieldwork

Figure 4.6 Participation in Kumbh Mela
Photo Courtesy: Jagdish Dabgotra, 04-04-2021, Kumbh Mela, Haridwar

4.3.2.   NARATIVES ON CASTE SYSTEM FROM NAGA SECT

In sannyasa, there are no barriers to caste. One of the informants believes that human blood is the same and caste does not differentiate any human. She also has the view that there are only four varnas in Sanatan Dharma.

One of the informants does not personally believe in the caste system because every person is God's own creation. Everyone is made up of the same flesh and blood. The almighty God has not differentiated between each one of us.

Another informant is of the view that there is no such thing as a caste system. The almighty God made four varnas. By giving the example of the human body, he stated that just like the body consists of different parts, for which different roles and functions are allotted by God, so goes with the varna system. That is, each varna is given different roles and occupations according to their abilities and interests, but they all are under the umbrella of Sanatan Dharma. Along with that, he also stated that Britishers divided these four varnas into a caste system for their own benefit which is unfortunately still being followed by the people.

One of the informants spoke easily of his own kshatriya caste background. At the Kumbh Mela, I was told that the difference in the nature of distinct Sadhus orders could be attributed to the fact that some sects, like the large and unruly Juna Akhara, initiate members of all castes, while others, like the wealthy and subdued Niranjani Akhara, for example, only initiate the members of 'twice born' or upper castes. I was also told that sadhus orders are mapped on too many aspects of the divine body of Shiva (a clear parallel to the popular narrative that correlates the four varnas or castes with the primordial body of *Purusa*), and thus represent a clear social hierarchy, with those orders closest to the head ranking highest and being considered purest.

Narayan (1989) emphasises the danger of accepting the distinction between caste householder and renouncer as too stark for the same reason: caste does not entirely disappear from the world of the renouncer, and too much attention to caste obscures the multiple other social divisions that many renouncers aim to transcend. My own

informants tended to adhere stringently to some habits that looked to be associated with their own natal caste origins. For example, bathing was essential for renouncers born into upper caste households. Those who did not adhere to this, might have said that preening the body too much was a sign of vanity.
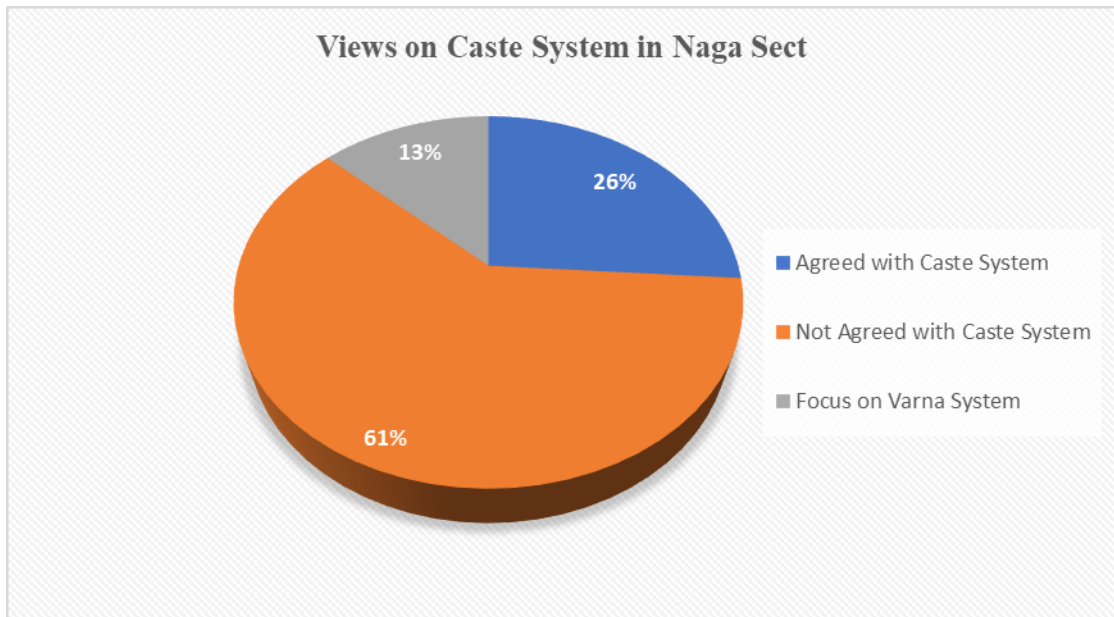

Figure 4.7 Views on Caste System in Naga Sect
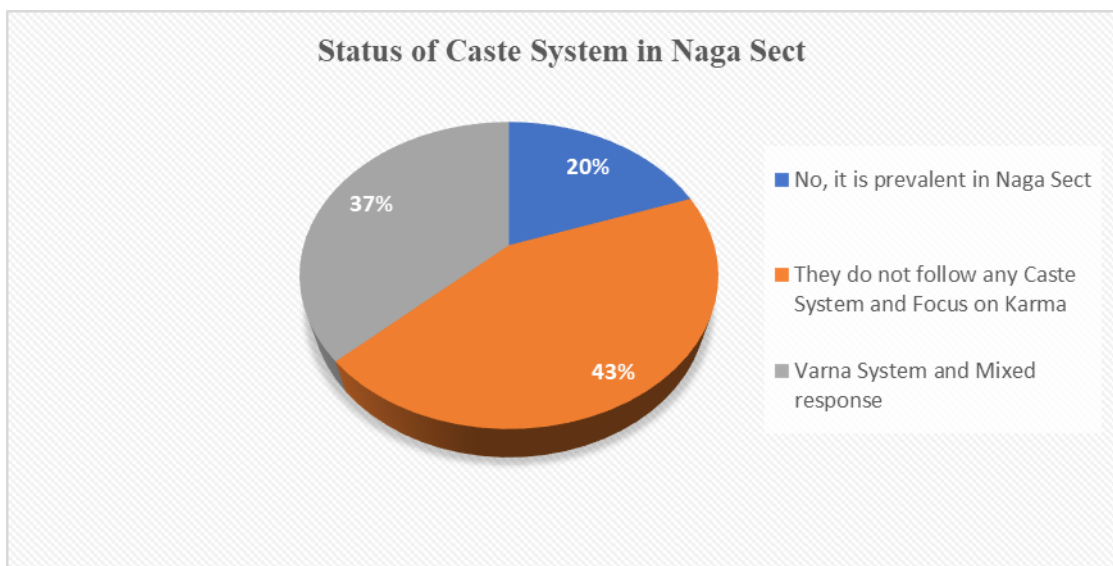Source: Information collected from fieldwork

Figure 4.8 Status of Caste System in Naga Sect
Source: Information collected from field work

Some of the informants pleading for the caste system could not properly differentiate between caste and varna. They used these words as synonyms. Sadhus falling in the category of strong support mostly belong to upper Varna. The chief motive behind their arguments (though they are not aware of it) is to maintain the superior status of their Varnas in Hindu society. Sadhus back the caste system because many of them have not been able to think for themselves because of the pressure their institutions put on them.

Some low-caste ascetics support the caste system partly due to their social and financial background and partly due to the superior status which they gain by virtue of being Sadhus, which could not have been achieved by them had they been a non-ascetic member of Hindu society.

Some informants are of the view that it is the Varna system that is divine in origin and not the caste. The Varna system, originally function-oriented, was gradually transformed into a rigid caste system, which causes hatred and introduces separatism in Hindu society.

Figure 4.9 Interaction with respondent
Photo Courtesy: Jagdish Dabgotra, 10-10-2019, Bathinda, Punjab

Sadhus do not attach importance to this question and show their indifference to it. Some of them could not precisely clarify their stand on this issue. They show their mild

opposition to the prevailing caste system. Strangely enough, some ascetics prefer to condemn caste against their institutional ideologies, though in a mild tone.

Ideologically, this class does not have any faith in the traditional theory of the caste system. They are of the view that the caste system is a social arrangement and if society can create caste to fulfil its needs, it can also abolish it if social conditions do not require it any more.

To justify their stand, they quote historical evidence. In Buddhist India, the caste system was almost uprooted from Indian society. It was again revived by Shankaracharya. Ascetics believe the caste system to be a kind of division of labour with a religious content to support it. They oppose the caste system because of the innumerable ills that have crept into it. Those who oppose the system mildly believe that mass opinion should be mobilised against it through education and religious teaching.

There is no doubt that the renouncer's society largely opposed caste society, and the symbol of the sanyasis has been held as a radical critique of caste in the Indian political movement. But the community in its place is not entirely without caste consciousness.

4.3.3. PERCEPTIONS ON CASTE

Caste is a sociologically distinct form of social stratification characterised by the separation of ceremonial rank and secular (political and economic) authority within the same social structure. In terms of the concept of pure and impure, brahmins, were assigned for religious practices, occupied the highest position in the social hierarchy and were regarded as pure, whilst the lower castes were regarded as impure. The same socially patterned practices based on purity and impurity are observable in the rituals of both the sects in the field. Consequently, hierarchy and segregation are two fundamental principles of the antagonism between purity and impurity and, by implication, the caste system. Thus, caste is a pervasive aspect observed in the ritualistic practices in structure of the sects as well. The traditional sociological approach illustrates on origin and development of caste system from the point of occupation generation and work distribution. The replicated pattern is visible through the practice of sects in Udaseen and Naga but in disguise.

4.4   GENDER DIFFERENCES

Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men, such as their customs, responsibilities, and relationships within the two different groups. It differs among cultures and is adaptable. Some societies enforce gender roles more strictly than others. However, this is not always the case because duties and assumptions can alter over time. Gender differences between males and females are founded on the same common biological capabilities. The culturally unique differences between men and women that have been influenced by a culture's beliefs and practises

4.4.1.   NARATIVES ON GENDER DIFFERENCES IN UDASEEN SECT

One of the informants from the Udaseen Sect stated that there are no gender differences in the Udaseen sect. He stated that both are of different dimensions. He also stated that, according to the historical relevance, in the medieval period women were exploited a lot, but in the early Vedic era women were treated not just equally but above all others. In Sanatan Dharma, they worshipped women and still believe in worshipping women as they believe women reflect the goddess Durga's image. In the end, he also gave reference to the Sanskrit verse "*yatr nariasto pujiyante, ramante tattr devta"*, which describes that "where women are worshipped and honoured, there divinity blossoms" (Manu Smriti). By considering me as an example, he said that every sadhu of the akhara is sitting in front of you, answering your questions, which reflect that we do not believe in gender discrimination at all.

Figure 4.10 Interaction with respondent
Photo Courtesy: Jagdish Dabgotra, 04-10-2019, (Kankhal) Haridwar

Another informant stated that they believe in equality totally. They also referred to women as goddesses. They believe that women deserve more empowerment. So, they did not support discrimination between gender. They stated that God can be depicted and found in any form or face as in Sanatan Dharma where women hold such an important place.

One of the informants is of the view that they considered women as a 'Devi Shakti'. They discussed the mother who shaped the universe and concerns for it herself. Women are closer to Shakti than males because of their motherhood potential.

One more informant is of the view that they honoured women but in the Udaseen sect they did not initiate women as sadhus because they personally believe that in Buddhism when female monks renunciated the declination of Buddhism started due to several reasons. Yet another reason to not initiate women is because of their menstrual cycle.

Figure 4.11 Interaction with respondent
Photo Courtesy: Jagdish Dabgotra, 11-04-2021, Kumbh Mela, Haridwar

When we talked about the spiritual role of female sadhus some informants are of the view that practices are almost same as male sadhus but there is a slight difference because of their biological system. Female sadhus cannot remain brahmachari for 40 days due to the menstruation days. So, their technique of meditation is a little different but it does not mean that she cannot get into the meditation practice. By giving examples of *Gargi, Maithli, Anusuya* they explained that there are many women saints in the field of spirituality who achieved those heights.

They said that they initiate very few females as a Sadhu and by not giving any high position, she does not hold the place of four main Mahants or Maha Mandaleshwars as it is the rule of the sect. In the religious literature of this sect, women are not allowed to hold any position. Even today very few or no females are initiated as sadhu in this sect.

Views on Gender Discrimination in Udaseen Sect

- 15% — Yes, they agreed with gender discrimination
- 44% — Not agreed with gender discrimination
- 41% — Lack of awareness
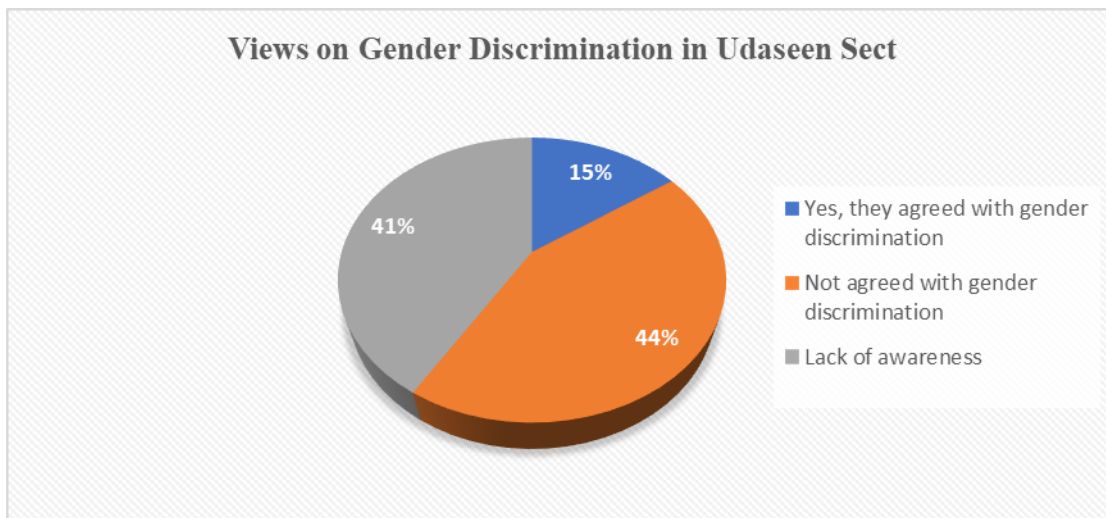
Figure 4.12 Views on Gender Discrimination in Udaseen Sect
Source: Information collected from field work

Reasons of Gender Discrimination in Udaseen Sect

- 48% — Women is not allowed to get initiated as sadhu in Udaseen sect
- 35% — Not able to follow practices and rituals of sect because of mensuration cycle.
- 17% — Women are deemed not appropriate for Vedic knowledge and orthodox practices
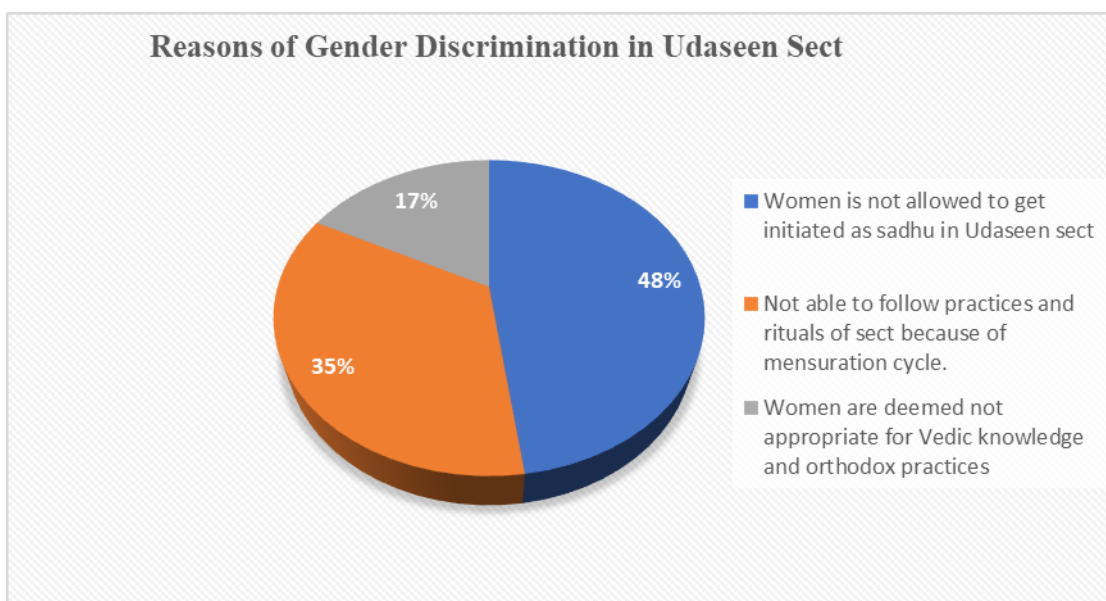
Figure 4.13 Reason of Gender Discrimination in Udaseen Sect
Source: Information collected from field work

4.4.2. NARATIVES ON GENDER DIFFERENCES IN NAGA SECT:

Human body is the form of reflection in which one cannot differentiate between male and female but we are all souls for which there is no difference, and that is why the Naga Sect do not consider any gender discrimination.

One of the informants stated that the practices or rituals remain common to both male and female sadhus but the female sadhus do not visit different places. But the male

Naga sadhus who reside in forest to practice their rituals remain smeared with ash of dhooni, (the ritual fire) and do not wear any clothes but when they are confronted with general population, they do wear clothes because the common people do not have ability to understand the divine knowledge as practice by the Naga Sadhus.

Contrary to the views of the above respondents another respondent was of the view, that since women are not considered suitable for Vedic knowledge and traditional form of religious activities, they are inducted into their society via the marriage ritual. Giving reference to Manu Smriti, they stated that the Vedic rite for women is marraige; thus, it should be mandatory for women. This confirms that a woman may only achieve success in marriage and family and her success is equivalent to achieving liberation.

Another female informant said that she believes that both are equally capable because females are no less than men thus there is no discrimination in Sannyasa Parampara but when we talk about the ranking of *Acharya,* women are not allowed to participate and the reason behind is that the male sadhus considered women as impure because of the menstrual cycle. When the *Acharya* rank is appointed, which is the highest and most honourable position, the women sadhus are not considered even though they follow the same rituals as male sadhus.

Figure 4.14 Views on Gender Discrimination in Naga Sect
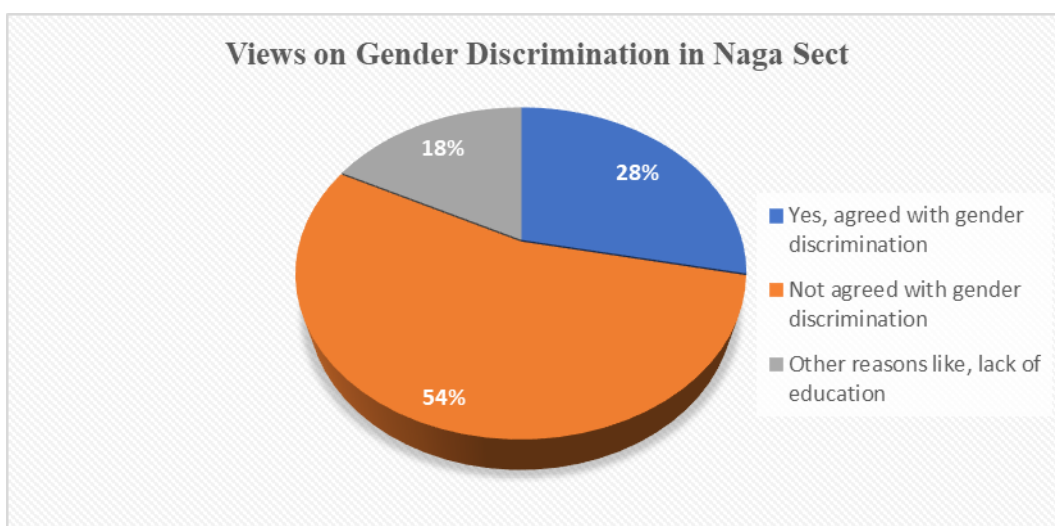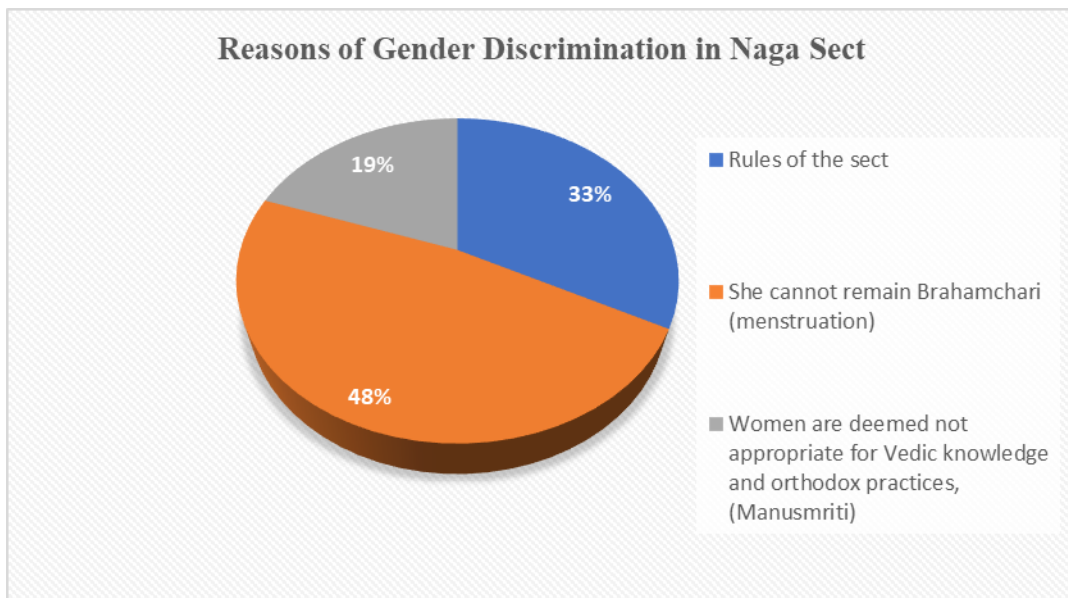Source: Information collected from fieldwork

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To support these arguments, Clementin-Ojha (1998:5) argues that a woman who quits society "tends to be accused of intending to exploit her liberation" and might be confronted with sexual harassment.

The path to asceticism was and remains more difficult for women than for men, in addition to the fact that a woman who chooses the monastic lifestyle is frequently cruelly mocked by society. Largely, asceticism is considered to be a form of consciousness that, at least to some extent, dismantles the description of female gender and sexuality according to Brahamanic tradition as being entirely reliant on and submissive to the male ruling order.

To comprehend why women who desire to be sadhus or renouncers encounter hostility from the general population and male sadhus, it is important to describe the concept of female and the functions that Brahmanical sources ascribe to women.

Dhramshastra says that sannyasa (renunciation) has mostly been granted to the male population of the three upper varnas of the hierarchical system, who are declared as "twice-born" (Dwija) because they can read the Vedas and are allowed to perform ceremonies. The only time a woman can practise asceticism is when she is married. According to Clementin Ojha, the smriti literature teaches women to surrender and remain calm. Women, completely committed to their spouse (pativrata) and ignorant to

self, commit to the marital life pattern of an austere lifestyle characterised by hardships (such as dietary limitations) and frequent abstinence. By completely submitting to and sacrificing her inner desire to serve her spouse, she stops to be her own self (2011: 62).

Thus, married life has become a sadhana (religious discipline), and the female becomes a Sadhvi, the female version of a sadhu that typically refers to the ideal wife rather than female ascetics.

In addition, as noted by Clementine Ojha (2011), because of the existence of numerous sub-sectarian organisations and the authority of the gurus in choosing and initiating followers, women were also accepted into a subset of orders that had not traditionally permitted their involvement. This was the case despite the fact that women were not traditionally allowed to be involved. For instance, there is the traditional Dashnami Sampradaya, which traces its organisational roots all the way back to Shankaracharya.

Theoretically, females are not allowed to initiate because Shankaracharya, an orthodox Brahman, did not allow women to enter Sannyasa. In spite of this, it is very probable that women were permitted to undergo initiation within some subgroups of sadhus that were known as Nagas. This is due to the fact that certain groups of sadhus permitted initiation for shudras.

A woman who has been successful in leading an austere life is entitled to choose the path she wants to take in accordance with her religious beliefs.

Women engaged with the Shaiva sect have the choice of getting the sannyasin vow (initiated into one lineage of the Dashnami Sampradaya).

4.4.3. PERCEPTION ON GENDER STRATIFICATION

The central articulation from the field studies is to be presented in the form of sociological perception hereafter. Gender practices are thus indicating further mentioned religious controls in the life of individuals through its practices, restrictions and allowance. Hinduism is a lifestyle centred on patriarchy and male dominance, resulting in the subordination of women. These are retained by religious ethics and codes of conduct that restricted women and obligated them to accept subordinate positions. Women are effective practitioners, but they have less textually recognised

religious authority, which is restricted to a small group of men. paradoxically, women are prominent religious participants at the collective level. Religious activity in both the sects is not based solely on vedic rituals. The sexual discrimination also articulates with the role that religion plays in illustration of women together. Purity and pollution are central to Hindu thought of life. It has been analysed that purity and pollution characterises bodily emission like, menstrual blood, rites and rituals (vedic, puranic) recognised to be polluted. This idea of purity and impurity often leads to the perception of women as unclean, and impure. Women have been awarded the status of being unable to study scripture and undergo upanayana. There is clear discrimination against women in life cycle rituals. The organisations have been headed by Sannayas, not without upanayana and the study of scripture, and Sannayas women could not become heads of the math or ashramas. Women could not become Sadhus or ascetics, and the role of women was often restricted to cleaning, preparing components for worship, etc. the higher Hindu organisation have been patriarchal, even ritualistic worship of goddesses was done by a male Sadhus and priests.

4.5. SPIRITUALITY AND ASCETICISM

Spirituality is the wide concept of a transcendental perspective. It seeks answers to questions concerning the purpose of life, the relationships between individuals, the truths of the universe, and other secrets of humankind. Spirituality refers to something transcendent that unifies all individuals and the universe beyond. It may include religious practices revolving around a belief in a superior being. Asceticism is the belief that an individual can achieve a high spiritual and ethical state through self-denial and self-mortification. It defines a life marked by renunciation of material pleasures. Those who live an austere lifestyle frequently view their rituals as noble and practice them in order to attain a higher spiritual level.

4.5.1. SPIRITUALITY AND ASCETICISM ACCORDING TO UDASEEN SECT

One of the informants said that spirituality can exist without religion but religion cannot exist without spirituality. Religion is just a *Parampara* that is followed by the Guru Shishya tradition and the aspirant need not make an attempt to raise his awareness and

search for the highest truth or have *Brahm Jigyasa*. You may or may not be aware of anything, or any practices but if you live in discipline wearing the same costumes, living in the same Parampara you can follow a religion but you cannot be living a life of spirituality like that until and unless your conscious level is raised. You will remain as an ignorant individual just as you were at the time of joining the Sampradaya.

The requirement is to be spiritual first, and for that religion is not the only thing. By giving reference to historical events, he stated that there are various religions in the entire world with different interpretations but the basic concept of spirituality remains the same. By giving the example, he elaborates his views that if today's individual flies in a modern aircraft while their ancestors flew in the aircraft of that period the theory remains same. Here the analogy is that the aircraft is considered as religion which can be changed but the theory of flying remains the same which depicts spirituality. With the advancement of modernity, technology improves but the principle still remains the same. So, the spirituality is considered as a principle. According to him an individual should be spiritual because spirituality is boundaryless, limitless like water. A spiritual person is like water, and just as water takes the shape of the things or the situation it is in, so does a spiritual person. On the other hand, religion it is like ice cubes which can break down and lose its true form, and same is the case with a religious person.

Figure 4.16 Interaction with Respondent
Photo Courtesy: Jagdish Dabgotra, 15 -04-2021, Kumbh Mela, Haridwar

According to the respondent asceticism does not help the individual to attain spirituality. On the other hand, spirituality helps an individual to attain asceticism because until the level of consciousness does not upsurge from inside the aspirant cannot detach himself from worldly pleasures or push himself towards asceticism. By giving the example of Mahatma Buddha, he stated that during his time monks (bhikshu) were not initiated directly for they had been taught about regression which meant that an individual was required to focus on achieving a particular target without thinking or getting distracted about anything else. That is what can be defined as regression.

According to him, asceticism does not help individuals attain spirituality. Instead, of this spirituality helps individuals in attaining asceticism because until the level of consciousness does not rise an individual cannot push oneself towards asceticism.

Figure 4.17 Interaction with Respondent
Photo Courtesy: Jagdish Dabgotra, 20-04-2021, Kumbh Mela, Haridwar

Another informant said that spirituality is not a subject or discipline but it is a state of mind that a seeker is in search of which gives him everlasting peace and happiness. Spirituality is to know that the world *(Jagat)* is not permanent. It is ever changing and transient whereas Brahman or God is the only truth that remains the same always. The world is a transactional reality just as the dream state. When I get up from the dream it is no more. The joys and sorrows all disappear. When the Guru imparts knowledge to

the seeker the true self is known and the *Mahavakya* statement "Aham Brahmasmi" is an experiential reality.

Another informant stated that Spirituality according to him is self-realisation or the realisation of the soul. He also stated that asceticism works in the direction of attaining spirituality with the help of *"hatha yog"* and the karmas an individual has done in their earlier life is also responsible in attaining asceticism. There are no conditions applied in attaining asceticism, even highly educated or highly classed individual can also attain asceticism. When they are familiar about asceticism, they inevitably understand the need for knowing the self. Spirituality gives a burning desire to know the purpose of life and remove the incompleteness that is intrinsically experienced. With the knowledge received from a Guru who has a legacy of realised Masters the true nature of the Self becomes evident. The effulgence within does not need any other source of life. The truth that is beyond time and space can be known when the seeker listens to the knowledge imparted by the Guru with complete surrender and with an attitude of devotion.

When a desire to know the Satchitanand Swaroop of Brahman is felt by an ascetic or any seeker the universe provides opportunities and means to receive this higher knowledge of self-enquiry known as *Adhyatama Vidya*. Like-minded people flock together and the seekers of the ultimate truth will generally look for the company of holy people who will help them on the path of self-realisation just as a smoker would be happy to find the company of another smoker.
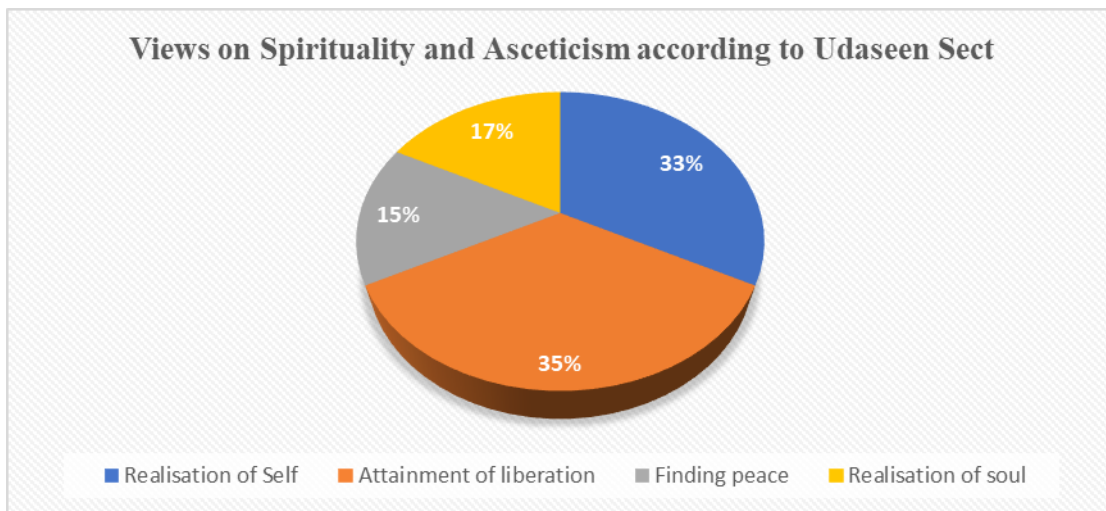
Figure 4.18 Views on Spirituality and Asceticism according to Udaseen Sect
Source: Information collected from field work

4.5.2. SPIRITUALITY AND ASCETICISM ACCORDING TO NAGA SECT

One of the informants stated that there comes a sudden dawn in one's life when the individual has to make a firm decision to either opt for worldly life or to pursue the path of self-realisation and seek liberation from ignorance or Avidya. Spirituality is to know that the pot is nothing but clay and the ornaments are nothing but gold. The names and forms that we give delude us and joy and sorrow is felt as a consequence of this superimposition on reality. When Asceticism practiced under the guidance of a Guru by an individual, renunciation becomes his true nature. The material happiness ceases to attract or sway a true ascetic.

Another informant expressed the view that it is not just the ascetic who desires to know God. Any common person who is put of this *jagat* sooner or later realises the ephemeral nature of the life that he is leading and desires permanent happiness and is automatically attracted towards spirituality.

Spirituality teaches us about the principle of living and suffering of life. Materialistic happiness comes and goes but spirituality provides peace of mind and soul.

Asceticism is a feeling, in which oneself is in the search of the absolute truth and That truth attracts an individual towards inner peace and therefore originates the feel of asceticism. From there, an individual start realising that the supreme goal of the life is to find and achieve Absolute God and hence they gravitate towards spiritual living.

Spirituality influences common people in a way where questions arise in an individual mind about self-realisation and about attaining God. The path of spirituality is not about greediness or lust. It is all about sacrifice, that is why it influences common people. Indicating 'me' as an example, the Sadhus I was interviewing pointed out that there was no desire on his part to answer my questions regarding their ascetic life even though my need to get answers stemmed from greed to help me in my study of ascetics. The Sadhu said that he gave his precious time and imparted knowledge just to help me to know the significance of spirituality and to highlight its importance in the life of an individual.

In order to provide evidence for these claims, the term "spirituality" is used to refer to the universal characteristic that exists inside every individual about the consciousness of the one that exists beyond the self, as well as the awareness that there is Creator that exists beyond this creation (Balswick, King, & Reimer, 2005). Furthermore, another definition of spirituality describes it as the experienced and subjective dimension of a human's interaction with something transcendent or divine (Nelson, 2009).
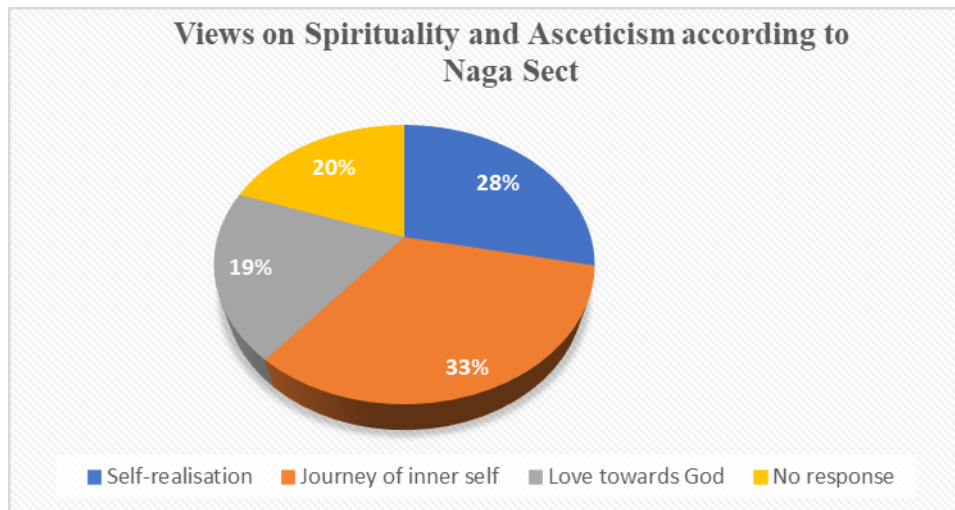
Figure 4.19 Views on Spirituality and Asceticism according to Naga Sect
Source: Information collected from field work

Asceticism has a tendency to put up a theological explanation as to why they adopted this path through life of materialistic abstinence to achieve their salvation, as Clementin Ojha mentioned in her research (1988).

Max Weber developed the church-sect concept to explain how religious groups are established. Prior to Weber's analysis of their interrelationship in the church-sect

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theory, the term sect and church existed. According to the church-sect concept, categorising religions extends from protest-like sects to the unity that maintain religion. However, the theory argues that sects are often separatist organisations that seem to be at odds with society (Weber,2002).

4.6   SADHUS AND KUMBH MELA

Figure 4.20 During Peshwai (Kumbh Mela)
Photo Courtesy: Jagdish Dabgotra, 08-03-2021, Kumbh Mela, Haridwar

Sadhu and Sadhvi:

Sadhu (feminine, Sadhvi) comes from the Sanskrit root 'sdh' (meaning 'achieve') and therefore Sadhu means a 'good or virtuous person.' In Hinduism, a Sadhu or Sadhvi is someone who, under a guru, has performed a ceremony of renunciation called as Sanayasa and has abandoned family life and traditional ways of obtaining a living.

Sanayasa, followed by an initiation process, is commonly conducted during Kumbha Mela, the sadhu's premier celebration. A guru and numerous Brahmin pandits participate in the process, relieving the initiate's family of obligation

Figure 4.21 During Peshwai (Kumbh Mela)
Photo Courtesy: Jagdish Dabgotra, 0-03-2021, Kumbh Mela, Haridwar

The Hindu religious rationale for accepting Sanayasa and becoming a sadhu is to 'realise God' or achieve liberation (moksha), a challenging goal in the world. Some sadhus claim a direct religious impulse to renounce, often in later stages in life. Others become sadhus to avoid legal, financial, personal, or familial troubles. Sadhvis may adopt and raise orphans, and they are often widowed. Renunciate practises vary from devotional ways to liberation (reciting mantras for chanting a deity's name) to austerities and asceticism (tapas, meaning 'heat') that may incorporate meditation and yoga. Asceticism, from food restrictions to severe mortification, is thought to develop supernatural abilities (siddhis) in Hindu mythology, which are feared and believed as reality.

4.6.1.   VIEWS ON KUMBH MELA ACCORDING TO UDASEEN SECT

One of the informants from the Udaseen sect has the view that Kumbh Mela is a religious gathering, where sadhus from different sects as well as the general population participate. It is India's largest religious bathing festival and pilgrimage. For one month every twelve years, this sacred tradition brings millions of people to Allahabad, Haridwar, Ujjain, Nashik. Descriptions of the enormous tent city constructed on the banks of the Ganges by the Royal Procession (Shahi Yatra), as well as by religious men and ascetics, are the primary source of this reverence.

Figure 4.22 During Peshwai (Kumbh Mela)
Photo Courtesy: Jagdish Dabgotra, 04-04-2021, Kumbh Mela, Haridwar

Another informant stated that it is a pilgrimage that believers conduct in the aspirations of making amends for past misdeeds, and it is the greatest assembly of believers, with lakhs engaging. He asserts that Kumbh is a 'jar with nectar.' With the help of a historical myth, he claims that the curse of the sage *Durvasa* had debilitated the gods and demons who created chaos on the earth. Then, Lord Brahama urged the gods to produce the nectar by churning the ocean of eternity with the assistance of the Asuras.

Figure 4.23 Interaction with Respondent
Photo Courtesy: Jagdish Dabgotra, 22-04-2021, Kumbh Mela, Haridwar

One of the informants stated that Kumbh is the "pitcher" or "kalasha". He stated that Kumbh is also likened to the human body; the sun, the earth, the ocean, and the Hindu god Vishnu are all synonyms for it. The Kumbh Mela is a gathering place for people of all cultures and a symbol of acquiring enlightenment, which are both fundamental aspects of the meaning of the word "Kumbh." While mela refers to a conference, or even a fair in its simplest terms.

This argument, the very core of The Elementary Forms, was also intrinsically linked with Durkheim's significant understanding of the use of symbols in society. In addition to their utilitarian significance as representations of societal values, Durkheim asserted that such symbols assist to promote the sentiments themselves. As we have seen, collective representations simply assume the collaborative interaction of consciousnesses to one another, interactions inexplicable in the absence of collective symbols; and, at first when developed, such representations would rapidly dissipate without symbols which serve to maintain them in the individual consciousness. Thus, society 'in all its features and in all of its historical periods' is only made feasible by a huge symbolism. (Extracted from Robert Alun Jones. Emile Durkheim: An Introduction to Four Major Works., 1986: 115-155.)

4.6.1.1. PRACTICES PERFORMED IN KUMBH MELA BY UDASEEN SECT (DERIVED FROM OBSERVATION)

Shahi Snan: It is also known as the royal bath, and many people believe that it is the most prosperous and significant bath of Kumbh Mela.

Initiation Rituals: The novice was to drink water in which five Udasi Mahant's toes were bathed, fulfil Baba Sri Chand's teachings, and wear salmon-coloured attire or *Bhagwa.*

Figure 4.24 Interaction with Respondent
Photo Courtesy: Jagdish Dabgotra, 20-04-2021, Kumbh Mela, Haridwar

Hair was not specifically restricted. Some wore it matted long, some short. The matted hair signified their worldly renunciation. They may remain naked and adorn their body with ash, representing their mortality to the world of familial ties, caste and other materialistic things.

Worshipping Rituals: The religious observance known as 'worshipping the ball of ash' (Gole di Puja) was widely practised by adherents of the Udasi sect of Sangat Sahib as well as those of Pritam Das.

Figure 4.25 Interaction with Respondent
Photo Courtesy: Jagdish Dabgotra, 16-04-2021, Kumbh Mela, Haridwar

4.6.2. VIEWS ON KUMBH MELA ACCORDING TO NAGA SECT

According to an informant from the Naga sect, the Kumbh Mela is a massive gathering of pilgrims who come together to wash or immerse themselves in a holy river. A significant event of the festival is called the Shahi Snan, and it consists of a ceremonial bath that takes place at a certain time and location. The devotees have faith that merely taking a dip in the Ganga may cleanse one of their previous sins, also known as karma, and make them eligible for salvation from the endless cycle of rebirth

Another informant from the Naga sect stated that according to Hindu Mythology, Haridwar is one of the four places where the elixir fell during the war between gods and demons and this is why the land is considered blessed.

Another informant stated that bathing in the water of River Ganga is symbolic to gaining immortality during the Kumbh mela, and thus, a large number of believers indulge in this act of taking a dip in the river. He also stated that all the akharas participate in the Kumbh mela amongst which Nagas are the one who get the

opportunity to take the first bath. Apart from it they also stated that their main goal is to protect Sanatan Dharma.

4.6.2.1. PRACTICES PERFORMED IN KUMBH MELA BY THE NAGA SECT (DERIVED FROM OBSERVATION)

Strong Celibacy and Penance: An individual who desires to lead a life as a Naga Sadhu must have absolute control over his body. *Brahmacharya* encompasses not just the physical body, but also spiritual ideals. A person should mentally abandon materialistic things and worldly desires.

First, the individual is thoroughly evaluated on *Brahamcharya* principles, and only when it is determined that he has achieved self-control is then accepted to the group for training to become a Naga.

Figure 4.26 Interaction with Respondent
Photo Courtesy: Jagdish Dabgotra, 16-04-2021, Kumbh Mela, Haridwar

Initiation of New Sadhus: Thousands of men and women, both young and elderly, are given rites of passage into the Hindu monastic tradition of sanayas at the initiation of new sadhus. Initiation is given irrespective of members' previous social background and thus creates a gateway for the inclusive formation of restricting social community.

Last Rites: Considering oneself to be deceased and performing funeral rites is crucial for the family and community. It is similar to a human being reborn into a new universe

of Nagas. The person is responsible for performing the final rituals, *Pind Daan* and *Shraadh*, after severing ties with his family and friends. Guru then grants him a new identity and name.

Renouncing Clothes: Naga Sadhus are not permitted to wear clothes. They may wear a single saffron garment that may not cover the complete body. A Naga sadhu cannot utilise material objects to adorn his body; as his own adornment / Shringaar consists of smearing his body with ashes.

Once a day meal: A Naga Sadhus may only consume food once every day, regardless of the day/night cycle. Naga Sadhus may beg (bhiksha) at a maximum of seven homes for sattvik food.

4.7   SUMMARY

This chapter is broadly discussing Asceticism, Spirituality, among sadhus in India with special reference to religious philosophy, religious practices and on caste and gender.

In Indian religious as well as philosophical literature, Sadhus are considered as religious ascetics who stay alive in chastity. They live a life with detachment from the mundane world for that they break all the ties with their families and social life. In Sanatan religious tradition there are different sects and each of the sect has its own norms, values, rituals, dress code and religious markings.

A sadhu or hermit is the one who practises sadhana and penance *(tapasya)* for the attainment of higher consciousness and *(moksha)* liberation.

Sadhus are placed in higher order of society for their crucial contribution in streamlining socio-cultural and religious ethos. They act like a guiding principle for the common people to obtain spiritual values and disciplined life. However, the perceptions of the Sadhus have stated that the universal religion has its fundamental materialisation in the form of Sanatana Dharma, where the provisions of an egalitarian society exist. With regard to spirituality, the perception of sadhus has an idealistic view that connotes self-realisation and the realisation of soul, inner peace.

As caste is a dominant social structure in Indian society, Sadhus have denied this worldly view and referred to the division of society as a pure demonstration of the varna

system. However, from the field it was observed and found that the prevalent caste system has significantly affected the institution of Sadhus in a downward trend.

However, the Dumontian idea of caste priorities hierarchy at its core and implies that this (entwined with conceptions purity and pollution) predominates in the institution of Sadhus.

With this in the community of sadhus, they also experienced the influence of caste while accrediting the administrative roles in the upper rung of the hierarchy.

Gender discrimination is one of the most widespread forms of social inequality, and it has a wide range of harmful repercussions. The position of women determines the position of society of how far it progressed. Denton describes, due to the process of menstruation women are considered as polluted. However, the discrimination among sadhus is further amplified by gender identity. In certain cases, gender plays a key role in nominating a particular member to the upper stratum of the institution. The male identity among sadhus paves the way for their higher roles as compared to their counterparts.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

5.1 SUMMARY

The present study is an attempt to explain the interaction and interrelationships between religion, caste and gender. Though various scholars have worked on the area of religion, caste and gender, they are largely missing to explain in the context of Naga sadhus and Udaseen sects. Which is why the present study largely explores the context of their philosophy, beliefs and practices. The study was carried out with the following objectives: to explore the nature of asceticism and spirituality among Sadhus, to analyse the caste influence on Udaseen and Naga Sect, to analyse the gender differences among Sadhus, to identify the functional aspect of female Sadhus**.**

To attain the following objectives the study was employed and integrated analytical research with micro ethnography, which answers why questions by refuting the theory and analyzing and interpreting the findings. Since narrative analysis is employed for the purpose of both the systematic interpretation of others and the interpretation of events, it is clear that narrative analysis is an effective research method that can be used in combination with ethnographic research.

The present study was divided into five chapters including introduction and conclusion. The introductory chapter introduced the research problems, research gaps, research questions, research objectives with operational description of major concepts. The second chapter of the study is broadly divided into two sections. The first segment consists of understanding spirituality and asceticism in the context of India, particularly with respect to the Vedas and the Upanishads which are regarded as the most important works of spiritual philosophy in the Hindu religion. The second section deals with intersection between religion, sects, sadhus, caste and gender.

The third chapter of the study deals with methodology of thesis which is integrated with ethnographic research, narrative analysis which has the potential to be an efficient research instrument. This section explains the methodology that was utilized to accomplish the objectives. Interview schedule was employed for the content collection from the informants.

The fourth chapter of the study deals with analysis of the data gathered during fieldwork, collected data was analyzed by using narrative analysis and the findings of the study were discussed. The chapter also highlights major findings which have been determined that Sadhus from both sects share the same ideology with regard to the philosophical underpinnings of the Hindu system of religion. As a result, the majority of the informants have provided us with the same responses.

During field work and interactions with both male and female sadhus as well as devotees it was discussed and observed that understanding of asceticism and spirituality can vary from person to person. It was observed that with regards to asceticism they do follow some rituals like penance (*tapsaya*), fasting and worshiping their deities and self-control. Moreover, spirituality also has different understanding and it was observed that self-realisation, focussing on preaching and serving poor people provides them inner peace.

Similarly, Weber's concept of asceticism unites few aspects under the route of salvation: human behaviour and training the mind in conduct. Weber claims contrasts like asceticism and mysticism and inner worldly and world rejection. Asceticism has larger economic and political ramifications; ascetic behaviour is carefully regulated and oriented toward particular goals; and ascetic behaviour defines methods of interacting with others. Harpham thinks that the core operational underpinning is what the specific culture is built upon. He defines asceticism in two ways: in a strict sense, he characterises it as the asceticism of early Christianity; and in a broad sense, he defines it as any act of self-denial committed as a technique of empowerment and fulfilment.

In a similar vein, Roof asserts that there are four components that make up spirituality. These components are an external entity of values and an eternal meaning or purpose, a sense of mystery and consciousness, a method of understanding, spiritual consciousness, and inner unification. Similarly, Zinnbauer and Pragament, articulate spirituality is a person's endeavours to achieve holy or existential goals, such as inner potential, completeness, and connection with others. East has limited spirituality definitions, unlike west spirituality is ingrained in Indian culture and cannot be defined precisely. Mahatma Gandhi, Tulsidas, Kabir, and Swami Vivekananda and various others taught about self-realization, acknowledging the purpose of one's life, exploring

the absolute truth, various ways leading to higher states of consciousness, rising above ignorance, the value of meditation, and self-realization. Vedas and Upanishads are used to illustrate spiritual ideas.

Following that, it was also discussed and observed that they do not agree with caste discrimination; however, on the basis of the observation, they do follow as well as practise the caste system; however, they do not openly discriminate against sadhus who belong to the Shudra varna. In addition, they do not initiate sadhus who are from lower castes. Sadhus who belong to lower varnas are ineligible for the ranks of Mandleshwar and Maha Mandaleshwar. In his essay Homo Hierarchicus, Louis Dumont introduced the idea of purity and pollution, which is central to the ideology of Hinduism. Both the caste system and the hierarchy are structured around the concepts of purity and pollution. Other major themes include religious purity and impurity, as well as interdependence, which describes a relationship in which the whole and its elements are interconnected and interrelated. According to Dumont, "the Indian caste system does not emphasise individualism; rather, it emphasises the society's totality." According to Dumont, these specific qualities that lie behind the surface of caste hierarchy can be seen in the composition of Hindu holy texts as well as in everyday life. According to the Dumontian notion of caste, hierarchy is the most fundamental aspect of caste, and it is believed that this (in combination with the ideas of purity and pollution) universally exists among Hindu people.

Following that it was also discussed and observed that Gender discrimination also plays a significant role in the context of sadhus of Udaseen and Naga Sect. They view women as the embodiment of Shakti. However, being a sadhu as a woman required following an entirely different set of laws than did becoming a sadhu as a man. Even in the Udaseen Sect, it was found that not a single woman was becoming a sadhu through the initiation process. While Naga ascetics are allowed to roam around naked and participate in religious gatherings without clothing, Naga Sadhvis are expected to wear garments at all times. In addition, although certain male ascetics are well-known for engaging in behaviours that are predicated on demonstrating sexual control, there are no female analogues to these types of behaviours. This may be because feminine sexual control and repression are assumed to be natural or because they are not something that

should be displayed. Therefore, for women who opt the monastic path for reasons of own conviction and religious and spiritual exploration, asceticism was and continues to be a means to individual empowerment that can be utilised. Due to the fact that female ascetics are aware of the gender-based limits they face, this does not necessarily result in equality with male ascetics. Asceticism is a term of protection for women who choose to become ascetics for reasons that are not related to religion. Clementin Ojha' s female ascetics are marginalised in society largely because they are kept on the periphery of the ascetic movement as a whole. The perspective of Hindu ascetics with regard to female members, which has followed the orthodox viewpoint as presented in *Dharam Shastra,* is strongly against the concept of women renunciating the world. The Smriti literature preaches women an ideology of self-sacrifice in which, by entirely submitting to her partner's needs and abandoning her innate desire to assist him, she forfeits her individuality.

5.2   MAJOR FINDINGS

Sadhus do have a caste which is termed as 'Vihangam' but their approach towards the caste system that is prevalent in the social scenario of India is also a part of their identity, and it still manages to hold a place in their social life, especially in context to their hierarchical positions allotted by their religious heads like the supreme Acharya for the Naga sect and four main Mahants for the Udaseen sect.

Another pertinent finding regarding the gender aspect that was analysed in the research concludes that in the Udaseen sect, the male sadhus do respect the female figure but in its maternal form, but their literature bars the initiation of women into the life of a sadhu, whereas, in the Naga sect, women were not allowed to become sadhus however, a cultural renaissance that has happened lately in this sect, now allows their women to get initiated as sadhus and serve their community's purpose.

In context of the aforementioned, a general consensus that was drawn from interacting with the female sadhus was that despite the changes that have happened over the years, women sadhus are still treated as inferior to their male counterparts based upon their biological factors such as menstruation, which is implied to make her impure and acts as a barrier in their religious practices and rituals.

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5.3   FURTHER SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study has explored asceticism and spirituality among the Naga and Udaseen sadhus. Above all, the study tries to understand the interaction and interconnectedness between gender and caste within the context of asceticism and spirituality among these two sects.

FURTHER SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Further the study provides a platform for interconnection between spirituality, asceticism, caste and gender in the form of conceptual and theoretical framework. For the further study of intersection between religion and caste, religion and gender, religion and spirituality, gender and spirituality, religion, caste and spirituality.

The Naga and Udaseen Sects have received the barest minimum of research attention, until recent years. It was proposed that additional research on the Naga sect and the Udaseen sect should be carried out with the purpose of determining their societal importance. This study did not go into great depth into the sociopolitical or socioeconomic aspects of the topic. In the current study, there was a smaller proportion of female sadhus represented in the data set compared to male sadhus; hence, this research can be carried out with regard to sadhus and an understanding of the behaviors they engage in. There is a very limited amount of published literature on female sadhus and the religious practices they engage in. According to the findings of the study, additional research ought to be carried out in order to strengthen the existing body of knowledge.

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APPENDICES:

<p align="center">**Annexure-I: Interview Schedule**</p>

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

I, Rohini, am working on my Ph.D. program titled **"Religion and Spirituality among Sadhus: A Comparative Study of Udaseen and Naga Sects through their Practices"** under the guidance of Dr. Sukanya Das (Assistant Professor) Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab. I want to collect some important and relevant data from you for my doctoral thesis. All the responses will be kept confidential.

This research work is based on the nature of Spirituality, Caste and Sectarian influence, and gender-based discrimination among Sadhus.

Local Area ………………………

Village/ District: ………………………

Name of the respondent: …………………….

Gender: ………………………

Age: ………………………….

Marital status: ………………

Educational Qualification: ………………….

1. What is your opinion about spirituality?

   …………………………………………………………………………………………

2. From which sect do you belong to and how?

   …………………………………………………………………………………………

3. Why do you adopt Sadhuism?

   …………………………………………………………………………………………..

4. How does asceticism work in the direction of attaining spirituality?

   …………………………………………………………………………………………

5. Do you think spirituality is influencing individuals in their everyday life?

   …………………………………………………………………………………………

6. What is Udaseen/ Naga Sect?

   ………………………………………………………………………………………….

7. What are the different philosophies found in Hindu religion?

   …………………………………………………………………………………………

8. What is your opinion regarding caste system?

   …………………………………………………………………………………………

9.   What is the status of caste system in Udaseen / Naga sect if it prevalent at all?

…………………………………………………………………………………………

10.   What is your perspective on Sanskritization?

…………………………………………………………………………………………

11.   What do you think about Gender discrimination?

…………………………………………………………………………………………

12.   What are the reasons for gender discrimination among Sadhus?

…………………………………………………………………………………………

13.   What is the spiritual role of female Sadhus?

…………………………………………………………………………………………

14.   What is the importance of your sect in Kumbha Mela?

…………………………………………………………………………………………

15. What are the practices you followed in Kumbha Mela?

…………………………………………………………………………………………

16. Do you observe any kind of change in these practices?

…………………………………………………………………………………

Closing:

- Is there any other important thing that I forget to ask you about the subject matter?

- Do you have anything to suggest that will help me to carry out a successful matter?

- Please accept my thanks and appreciation for giving your time?

I do hereby declare that the information given above is best of my knowledge and is true.

Date: Signature of the Respondent

Place: