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Lived Pentecostalism in India

Middle Class Women and Their Everyday Religion



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Abstract

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In recent decades, the Pentecostal movement in India has not only grown significantly, it has also become increasingly diverse. While the majority of the movement's adherents still belong to marginalized groups in Indian society, middle-class Pentecostals are growing in number and changing the dynamics and identity of the movement.

This dissertation explores middle-class Pentecostal Christianity as a lived religion in India. More precisely, the aim is to better understand how female members of middle-class Pentecostal churches express and experience their religion in the context of their everyday lives. In addition, it examines what it might mean to be a Pentecostal and middle class in contemporary India.

The analysis suggests that, for the participants, it was a relational project to live as a Pentecostal. The women were engaged in a common effort together with God to realize shared goals connected to their religious lives, such as, working on the self and living according to God's plan. While largely dismissing rigid and ritualistic religious behavior codes, the women were nonetheless in agreement on the importance of living a Christ-like life. However, in contrast to many other Indian Pentecostal contexts, this moral imperative did not involve withdrawal from "the world". Rather, it was closely related to their emotional lives in that they strived to resemble Christ by being loving, humble, and grateful. The study also draws attention to how the women's religion, to a significant extent, revolved around handling worries and concerns. Despite being in a privileged economic position that provided the women with a relatively comfortable standard of living, they experienced their everyday lives as unstable and insecure. The analysis shows how their religion was a resource that empowered and aided them in tackling these uncertainties while at the same time brought on a sense of vulnerability.

The study is based on six months of fieldwork in the North Indian city of Gurugram. The participants were members of the two middle-class churches, Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations. During the fieldwork, a combination of methods was used, namely, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and diaries.

Keywords: Christianity in India, Pentecostalism in India, middle class Pentecostalism, religion and gender, lived religion, everyday religion, agency, emotion, intersectionality, Gurugram

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To my mother

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Acknowledgments

It has been almost two years since the outbreak of COVID-19. At the time of writing, over five million people have died in the pandemic and day-to-day lives are still being overturned all over the world. I believe that for all of us there is a before and after COVID-19. For this study of Pentecostal Christianity in India, I did the fieldwork between October 2016 and March 2017, that is, before the pandemic. That period now feels very distant. In a way, to read this dissertation is to go back in time to when people could travel, study and work outside their homes as well as freely socialize and live without fear of this terrible disease infecting them or those close to them. While things are slowly improving, even in India where the pandemic hit especially hard, we have all been through experiences that are likely to change fundamentally how we live. Time will tell if this will also change people's faith and ways of doing religion.

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Julia Kuhlin

Malmö, December 2021

Map



Figure 1 Map of India

PART I. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1. Introduction

Gurugram, 5 February 2017, Wednesday

It is 5.30 p.m. and my husband and I are on our way to a Couples Meeting in Church of All Nations in Gurugram, a city located 30 kilometers south of New Delhi. The meeting is to be held in the home of Rachel and Aron, a former New Delhi-based couple with three kids. An Uber taxi has just picked us up and is trying to make its way out of our block on a bumpy road. As we reach the heavily trafficked MG Road, famous for its many malls, I ask the driver to close the windows to keep out the noise and polluted air.

When we arrive at the gate of the compound, the guard asks me whom we are planning to visit. When I give the name of Aron, he nods and says that there seems to be a gathering there tonight. The Uber driver drops us off at the door of the 25-storey residential building. We enter the marble covered hallway and take the elevator to floor 23. Rachel meets us at the door with a big smile and shows us into their apartment. On the walls, modern art is hanging next to pictures with quotations from the Bible. A few couples have already arrived. I take a glass of sparkling water and mingle with the other guests. I talk to Mira about the recent developments in the North Eastern state Nagaland and discuss the issue of female pastors with Patrick. As we stand on the balcony, we have a good view over the gated community's park and pool area. There is also a gym and I can see people there lifting weights.

Aron and Rachel ask us to take a seat in the living room as the meeting will soon begin. Ten couples are present. They come from various religious, geographical and cultural backgrounds, but they have been drawn together by a desire to live as followers of Christ. They tend to describe their church as a family. Many work within the IT industry, finance sector or at one of the reputable hospitals in Gurugram. However, some of the women have put aside their careers and taken up less time-consuming work or become homemakers.

Aron opens the meeting with a prayer and then points out that divorce rates are rising in India among non-Christians as well as Christians. He maintains

that in order to have a well-functioning and happy marriage it is vital for couples to work continually on their marriages. Today's topic is communication. Rachel and Aron use material from the Alpha Marriage Course as they lead the discussion. We talk about personal, gender, and cultural differences in communication and each couple shares experiences from their marriage. The discussion is brought to a close with prayers. Afterwards, we are served a dinner that has been prepared by Aron and Rachel's chef. The atmosphere is relaxed and cheerful.

In recent decades, Pentecostal Christianity in India,¹ as a religious movement, has not only grown rapidly but also become increasingly diverse. The rising presence of middle-class churches is changing the Pentecostal landscape in India (Abraham, 2017; Shah & Shah, 2013; Abreu, 2020; Thomas, 2008). While the majority of the movement's adherents still belong to the social and economic lower strata of Indian society, middle-class Pentecostals are increasing in numbers and becoming ever more visible on the Indian religious scene.

The churchgoers in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations², which are the two churches where I did my fieldwork, largely belonged to the so-called middle-middle class and upper-middle class.³ Although not all members were as wealthy as Rachel and Aron, they did have middle-class incomes and shared middle-class markers such as having university degrees, being fluent in English, employing part-time domestic help, and using middle-class commodities (Bellappa, 2013; Fernandes, 2006; Wilson, 2019).⁴ In contrast to the majority of India's Pentecostals whose religion is closely linked to their marginalized position (Abraham, 2011; Bauman, 2015; Roberts, 2016), the members of Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations did not have to worry about how to afford such things as health care or education for

¹ Throughout the dissertation, I use Pentecostal Christianity as an overarching term to refer to explicitly Pentecostal denominations and churches, as well as non-denominational Charismatic denominations and churches (that is, those that are Pentecostal in their orientation and do not explicitly regard themselves as being Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant or Pentecostal). My usage of the term does not include Charismatics within the Catholic, Orthodox and mainline Protestant churches.

² In order to provide anonymity, the names of the churches, the pastors, and all churchgoers (including the research participants) are pseudonyms.

³ The middle class in India is often sub-classified into the lower-middle class, middle-middle class and upper-middle class depending upon income, education, occupation, and so on.

⁴ For further discussion, see Chapter 3.

their children. In this study, I focus on the female adherents in these two middle-class churches. Proceeding from a lived religion approach, I will explore how these women express and experience their religion in day-to-day life.

Aim of Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this dissertation is to study Pentecostal Christianity as a lived religion in India. More precisely, the aim is to better understand how female members in middle-class Pentecostal churches express and experience their religion in the context of their everyday lives. Accordingly, this is a study of religion in practice rather than of middle-class Pentecostal churches per se. It draws attention to the religious lives of ordinary members more than the perspectives of religious pastors and leaders. In addition, I have tried to understand what it might mean to be Pentecostal *and* middle class in contemporary India.

The main research question that guides the study is:

- How do women in middle-class Pentecostal churches express and experience their religion in their everyday lives?

To this overarching question can be added further questions. What are the main features of the women's lived religion? How do they navigate as Pentecostals in their day-to-day lives? How is the women's class position reflected in their lived religion? Does their way of being religious diverge from how Pentecostal Christianity is expressed by Pentecostals in more marginalized economic positions?

In conducting this research, I draw attention to two aspects of Indian Pentecostal Christianity largely overlooked by scholars, namely, the manner in which women practice religion, and what Pentecostal Christianity can look like among the Indian middle class.

Pentecostal Christianity in India

While the history of the Indian Pentecostal movement dates back to the early 20th century, it began to take its current form in the 1960s and 1970s (Bergunder, 2019). Before these dates, Pentecostal Christianity in India was

mainly a minor movement in South India consisting of four major Pentecostal denominations⁵ and a substantial number of independent Pentecostal churches (Bergunder, 2008). Rapid growth took place when a spirituality inspired by Pentecostalism started to make inroads in the Catholic Church and mainline Protestant churches during a time when non-denominational Charismatic churches emerged in increasing numbers. Also in the 1960s and 1970s the established Pentecostal denominations in South India started to send missionaries to North and Northeast India, thus reviving the movement in these regions (Abraham, 2017). It was during this time that the Pentecostal movement in India began to take its current fragmented and multifaceted form. Accordingly, rather than being a coherent religious force, the Pentecostal movement in India is more of a loose network of denominations and churches. Some of these are part of transnational movements and others have a more national and indigenous identity. Some have a nationwide following although those with a regional and local influence are more common (Satyavrata, 2011).

It is notoriously difficult to find accurate statistics for Christianity in India and the Pentecostal movement in particular. Reasons for this include the lack of a consensus on who can be counted as Christians, some Christians being reluctant to publicly announce their allegiance due to fear of persecution,⁶ and many Christians in marginal positions do not officially declare themselves as Christians in order to preserve their access to lower caste reservations⁷ (Daugherty & Athyal, 2016). According to the 2011 official census, Christians constitute 2.3% of the total population in India, which at the time of the census

⁵ These are: Indian Assemblies of God (founded 1918), The Pentecostal Mission (founded 1923), The Indian Pentecostal Church (founded 1933) and Church of God, Full Gospel (founded 1936).

⁶ With the increasing influence of the Hindu nationalistic movement in India, anti-Christian attitudes have become gradually more common. Historically, Hindu-Christian tension has manifested itself primarily in non-violent forms, however, since the late 1990s, anti-Christian harassment and violence has been on the rise in India. Hundreds of attacks take place every year including the destruction of churches, beatings of pastors and lay Christians, and illegal detention of church workers (Bauman, 2020).

⁷ Reservations refers to India's system of affirmative action based on reserving seats in educational institutions, government jobs, and political representations for historically disadvantaged castes and groups. The three main groups that receive reserved quotas or seats are Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). ST are largely but not exclusively ex-"untouchables", nowadays known as Dalits. ST are the tribal groups that have received reservation due to their historical geographical and cultural exclusion. OBC is a heterogeneous group marginally higher up in the "traditional" hierarchy than ST but that contains socially, educationally, and economically deprived communities. Reservations are only available for Dalit Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs and, if a person changes their official religious status to Christian (or Muslim), they lose their right to reservations.

was around 27 million Christians. However, scholars of Indian Christianity commonly estimate the numbers to be considerably higher for the reasons just mentioned. According to the *World Christian Encyclopedia Online* (2020), a more probable number is round 67 million (4.9% of the total population). How many of these can count as Pentecostals or Charismatics is uncertain. According to the same source, around 21 million of these are Pentecostals or Charismatics,⁸ while *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements* (2002) estimate there are around 33 million Christian “Renewalists”⁹ in India. The difference between these two calculations clearly shows that there is no straightforward answer to how many Pentecostals and Charismatics there are in India. What we can say is that even if the former number is only approximately correct it would mean that India has one of the largest populations of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians in the world.

In terms of geographic spread, there is a certain concentration of Pentecostal churches in South India, which is also where we find the largest Christian population (Bergunder, 2008). In Northeast India, where Christians in some states are the majority, there is a growing presence of Pentecostal churches. Apart from this, the major trend has been that mainline Protestant churches, through reoccurring revivals, pick up elements of Pentecostal spirituality (Snaitang, 2002; Zeliang, 2014). In North India, Pentecostal Christianity is the form of Christianity that is growing fastest. Even so, it is a region with relatively few Christians and a place where the Pentecostal movement has never thrived as such (Abraham, 2017). While these are major trends, there is a need to look separately at each state, and sometimes even location, in order to understand the spread and dynamics of the Pentecostal movement in India.

As a religious movement, the Indian Pentecostal movement has been most successful among the poor, especially among people with low-caste or Adivasi (tribal) background. Among possible explanations for this we can note that Pentecostal pastors historically have limited or no formal theological training, that there has been an emphasis on reaching the unreached in rural

⁸ In this encyclopedia, this term refers to “denominational Pentecostals”, “Charismatics within mainline denominations” (Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant), and “independent Charismatics”.

⁹ A term that includes “classical Pentecostals” (4%), “neo-Charismatics” (81%), and “Charismatics within the mainline denominations” (Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant) (15%)

areas, and that Pentecostal Christianity in India has taken the form of a “healing movement” which has attracted people with little or no access to health care (Abraham, 2011; Bauman, 2015; Bergunder, 2008; Lukose, 2013).

As a significant departure from the above trend, the relatively recent rise of middle-class Pentecostal churches has not only expanded the movement but also diversified it. Middle-class churches tend to differ in form, style, and theology from churches among the poor and working class. This is due to the fact that middle-class churches have different resources (in the form of, for example, sound systems, big screens, premises, and professional musicians), tend to have pastors with higher level of theological education, and are generally more influenced by a global Pentecostal culture (in terms of worship style, for instance, and the use of media including social media). Middle-class Pentecostal churches are mainly found in urban areas and vary in size from house churches to mega churches.¹⁰ An important explanation for the upsurge of middle-class Pentecostal churches is that the Indian middle class itself has grown significantly since the beginning of the 1990s (something I will come back to in Chapter 3). In other words, the recruiting pool has increased dramatically. Another reason behind this development is, as pointed out by Wessly Lukose (2013), that due to religious persecution and the accusation that Pentecostals unethically target vulnerable people, there has been a shift in mission practice to focus more on the urban middle class.

Another feature of the social composition of the Indian Pentecostal movement is the high participation of women. In most churches, women comprise a clear majority of the churchgoers and exercise strong influence in shaping congregational life (Abreu, 2020; Bergunder, 2002; Lukose, 2013; Roberts, 2016). Women can participate in the life of the church in various ways, for example, as Sunday school teachers, worship leaders, by giving testimony, making intercessions, leading prayer circles or cell groups, praying for the sick, doing charity work, and working as evangelists. Compared to other religious contexts in India, Pentecostal churches offer more opportunities for women to participate (Abreu, 2020; Bauman, 2015). However, while women are quite visible in Pentecostal churches, they seldom occupy positions of formal authority. Official leaders and pastors are mostly men, and women are

¹⁰ Pentecostal mega churches are almost exclusively found in South India. In North India, middle-class churches tend to be relatively small, ranging in size from house churches to a couple of hundred members.

seldom part of the church administration, which is structurally male dominated.

Until recently, the Pentecostal movement was largely ignored by mainstream society in India. The historically established churches regarded the Pentecostal movement as a peripheral Christian movement and, for the Hindu majority, Pentecostal churches represented yet another form of Christianity (Abreu, 2020; Thomas, 2008). With the growth of the Pentecostal movement together with the revival of Hindu nationalism, this situation has changed radically. The Hindu nationalistic movement perceives Christianity as a foreign and denationalizing cultural element that needs to be held in check. Conversion to Christianity is often portrayed as a political and cultural threat to the country with Christians being accused of using their access to Western money, power, and technology to allure Indians to the fold.¹¹ In response to conversions, Hindu nationalistic groups are involved in anti-conversion campaigns and stand behind many of the increasingly violent attacks on Christians (Bauman, 2015; Menon, 2010).

Pentecostal Christianity has drawn attention to itself as the fastest growing form of Christianity in many Indian states. In fact, according to statistics, Pentecostals are disproportionately targeted in attacks. With their emphasis on evangelism and more or less explicit critical stand against Hindu customs and practices, Pentecostals to some extent embody the concerns of Hindu nationalism. At the same time, the Pentecostal movement's success in India has had much to do with its ability to incorporate traditional Hindu elements into its spiritual universe and the fact that it has become one of the main players in India's spiritual healing market (Bauman, 2015; Bergunder, 2008; Sahoo, 2018). Clearly, Pentecostal Christianity is a form of religion that is growing and becoming increasingly influential in India although it also faces severe challenges.

The Problem of Definition

A disputed question and unsolved problem within research on Pentecostal Christianity in India, as well as globally, is how to determine who the Pente-

¹¹ The reader should note that these are not new accusations but rather ideas that have been present in Hindu nationalistic circles since the late 19th century.

costals are, and further, how to delineate this field of study. The diverse character and differing forms of churches and the lack of theological commonalities, shared institutions, or a mutual set of practices all contribute to this problem of finding a satisfying definition. There are, of course, many denominations and countless of churches that explicitly define themselves as Pentecostal in India. However, most churches that are Pentecostal in orientation tend to be critical of traditional denominational labels and prefer to call themselves “independent” or “non-denominational”. Overall, there is a strong congregational emphasis within the Indian Pentecostal movement.

Allan Anderson (2010) has argued that, considering the variety and diversity of churches within the Pentecostal movement, the best we can do as scholars is to apply a definition of *family resemblance* (using Wittgenstein’s term). This means looking at churches for certain similarities and relations to each other rather than trying to determine something all churches have in common. At the same time, Anderson maintains that a key feature of Pentecostal Christianity is the emphasis on the working of the Holy Spirit (p. 15). Other features that scholars have claimed characterize Pentecostal Christianity as a religious movement are the born-again conversion experience, a dualistic worldview, practices of spiritual warfare, a global orientation, the use of mass media, expressive worship, belief in the intervention of the supernatural in daily life, a countercultural religious identity, an eschatological orientation, glossolalia, the involvement of the body, emphasis on evangelization, a literal understanding of the Bible, a personal relationship with God, and strict morality (Coleman, 2000; Droogers, 2001; Koehrsen, 2016; Lindhardt, 2011; Meyer, 2010).

In recent years, scholars have raised critical voices against the family resemblance definition of Pentecostal Christianity (Bergunder, 2019; Kaunda & John, 2020; Maltese et al., 2019; Prosén, 2018; Vondey, 2020). It has been argued that such a broad definition tells us almost nothing about the type of churches being studied and does not agree with more specific definitions that simultaneously are proposed (see for example Anderson above).

Michael Bergunder (2019), one of the most prominent scholars of the Indian Pentecostal movement, has suggested that the identity of Pentecostal Christianity as a global movement is foremost a product of academic discourse rather than reflecting an entity behind these articulations. For this reason, re-

searchers need to consider conflicting claims of identity and practices of inclusion and exclusion.¹² This is especially relevant given that the Pentecostal movement as a phenomenon is constantly changing in character and scope. Bergunder is also critical of the use of typological approaches at go back to the “three waves of Pentecostalism”.¹³ For Bergunder, a main problem with this threefold division is that it privileges American classical Pentecostal churches as a prior prototype for the global Pentecostal movement. As a result, other forms of expressions of Pentecostal Christianity, which are now in overwhelming majority, appear deficient as they fail to correspond to the American “classical” model.

In his study of Pentecostal Christianity in South India, Bergunder (2008) makes use of a non-essentialist way of mapping the movement by looking for “historical connections and synchronous interrelations” (p. 12). While the first of these criteria focuses on establishing a diachronic network, the second tries to outline a communicative network between churches, organizations and individuals. Instead of defining Pentecostal Christianity through a specific type of theology or set of practices, Bergunder applies these two criteria to trace the history of the movement in South India.

An advantage with this diachronic/synchronic approach is that it allows for the inclusion of groups and churches on the fringe of the Pentecostal movement that sometimes test the boundaries of a Pentecostal identity.¹⁴ Shaibu Abraham (2017) has objected that it might be difficult to apply this approach in contexts such as rural India where the presence and growth of Pentecostal Christianity is fractional with few easily detectable relations. Nevertheless, in urban Indian settings this approach works rather well.

This is a lived religion study that aims accordingly to reach beyond traditional definitions of religion and so I have no intention of proposing a fixed, clear-cut and universal definition of what Pentecostal Christianity “is”. However, in determining if the churches I did my fieldwork in can be categorized

¹² For example in regards to Oneness Pentecostalism, African Independent Churches, and the Catholic charismatic movement.

¹³ Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Maas (2002) have argued that Pentecostalism as a movement has grown through three waves. The first wave, which was directly linked to the early twentieth-century revival and missionary movements, gave rise to so-called “classical Pentecostal churches”. The second wave started the renewal movement in established Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Churches. Lastly, the third wave gave rise to numerous independent churches (sometimes called Neopentecostal or Neocharismatic) that emerged from the 1960s.

¹⁴ In an Indian context some examples would be Oneness Pentecostals and denomination The Pentecostal Mission

as belonging to the Pentecostal movement, I have made use of a combination of the family resemblance approach and synchronic/diachronic approach. A similar tactic is employed by Sebastian Kim and Kerstin Kim (2016) in their book *Christianity as a World Religion* where they distinguish “the five main streams of Christianity” (among which “Pentecostal-charismatic-type Christianity” is one) by looking at historical origins *and* contemporary worship practices (p. 16). As mentioned above, a problem with the family resemblance approach is that it produces a definition so wide and inclusive that almost any type of movement or church could count as being part of the Pentecostal movement. For this reason, I think it is appropriate to combine this definition with the synchronic/diachronic approach in order to narrow down possible contenders.

Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations as churches displayed a clear family resemblance to the wider Pentecostal movement in terms of theology and practice. This resemblance was shown most clearly in a belief in the intervention of the supernatural in daily life, a global orientation, expressive worship, a dualistic worldview, the involvement of the body, and the emphasis on having a personal relationship with God. Other features were less prominent such as stressing the born-again experience, an eschatological orientation, strict morality, and emphasis on speaking in tongues. Both churches also had clear diachronic and synchronic connections to the wider Pentecostal movement. Loving Assemblies of God was, as its name suggests, part of the worldview Pentecostal denomination Assemblies of God. The pastor of the church, Pastor John, had been part of the Assemblies of God since childhood and had received his theological education at their seminar in New Delhi. He was involved in several Indian Assemblies of God networks and had international contacts through their organization.

Church of All Nations can best be described as an independent Pentecostal church. The pastor, Pastor Sunil, had previously been an assistant pastor in an established large Pentecostal church in New Delhi. Quite unusually, “the break” with the former church had been done with approval from the main pastor who was still a good friend of Sunil. While Pastor Sunil hesitated to refer to Church of All Nations as Pentecostal, he considered it a sister church to his previous church in New Delhi. Pastor Sunil had received his theological training mainly by taking distance courses through the Fuller Theological

Seminar in the United States¹⁵ through which he had established connections with Evangelical pastors. As such, his pastoral network included both Pentecostal and Evangelical contacts.

Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations as religious institutions might be understood as belonging to the Pentecostal movement in India, but even if this is the case, this does not mean that the common members of the churches identified themselves explicitly as Pentecostals. In fact, many of them only had a vague understanding of what might characterize or distinguish Pentecostal Christianity as a Christian tradition. Rather than describing themselves as Pentecostals, they would call themselves “Believers”, “followers of Christ”, or simply “Christians”. In order to remain true to their self-understanding, I will refer to the members of the churches (including the women that this study is about) as Believers throughout this study.

The Churches

Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations were both centrally located churches that almost exclusively attracted members of the middle class. Most congregants were professional internal migrants who had moved to Gurugram for its job opportunities. Hence, they were tied together through their class affiliation rather than ethnicity, caste, language, or religious background. The churches were multilingual and multiethnic in composition. The lingua franca in both Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations was English.

Despite the obvious lack of a distinct Haryanvi identity, both Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations were locally committed churches. During church gatherings, Pastor John and Pastor Sunil frequently stated that Gurugram was a city in need of transformation and that God invited every Believer to be part of this process. Members were encouraged to spread God’s love and show his power in their day-to-day lives. However, the pastors, as well as most members, were dedicated primarily to Gurugram as a city of professional migrants rather than to the local Haryani population. Pastor John and Pastor Sunil stressed the strategic aspect of reaching out to other migrants who, if they were touched by the gospel, could bring it back to whatever part

¹⁵ This is one of the leading evangelical educational institutions in the United States.

of the country or the world they originally came from. As such, the churches understood themselves as operating on local and global levels simultaneously.

There was a strong sense of fellowship in both Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations. Most churchgoers lived far from their native homes and for many the church functioned as a stand-in family. Apart from meeting regularly, the members were in daily contact through various church-initiated WhatsApp groups. Church-related information was shared in these groups which were also a space where members bonded and showed cared for each other.¹⁶ Through the WhatsApp groups, the church, in a very concrete way, become an embedded and everyday part of members' lives.

While Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations had much in common, they also differed in various ways. I will now present them separately in order to give an idea of what distinguished them.

Loving Assemblies of God

Loving Assemblies of God was led by John and Dharmila, a young Tamil couple with two children. John had felt a calling to start a church in Gurugram after he finished his theological training in New Delhi in 2006. At the time, there was no existing Assemblies of God church in Gurugram. Assemblies of God of North India (AGNI)¹⁷ decided to support the couple financially in planting a church in the city. In 2007, Loving Assemblies of God had its first Sunday service in a living room on the outskirts of Gurugram with one family attending. Since then, the church has experienced slow but steady growth. During the time of my fieldwork, an assistant pastor worked alongside Pastor John and the church had approximately 130 more or less regular churchgoers. When I asked the participants why they had continued to attend Loving Assemblies of God after their first visit, many mentioned the love and support they had received from John and Dharmila whom they described as an unusually caring pastor couple.

¹⁶ For example, in these groups members would share problems and prayer requests, songs that they found inspiring, funny memes, as well as congratulate each other on birthdays and anniversaries.

¹⁷ The Assemblies of God in India is organized geographically: South Indian Assemblies of God, Assemblies of God of North India, and Assemblies of God of East India. The three regional bodies govern their own internal affairs, which includes administration and the election of church officials.

John and Dharmila's Tamil background had drawn many South Indians to Loving Assemblies of God; they made up around two thirds of the congregation. The remaining third of the congregation came from various states in North and Northeast India. Loving Assemblies of God also had a notable presence of churchgoers from various African countries who had come to Gurugram for temporary work or as medical tourists.¹⁸ Now and then, people from European and other Asian countries would visit as well.

Most of the congregants were aged between 25 and 40, were married, and attended church with their spouse and children. Most of the married women had a university degree though few pursued a career. Instead, they were homemakers or had taken up less time-consuming jobs usually as teachers. Nevertheless, a few women were working as doctors, lawyers, or with NGOs. The majority of the male congregants worked within the IT or finance sector. While formal church leadership was in the hands of men in Loving Assemblies of God, female participation was encouraged, and several women had unofficial leading roles. Dharmila, the pastor's wife, was a key figure in the church and she organized events, the children's ministry, and meetings for women. During church services, women would occasionally lead the worship, sing a "special song",¹⁹ give testimony, or pray from podium. In his teaching, Pastor John was careful to include women's experience and address their problems, and he highlighted female figures in the Bible as role models. He encouraged women to "get out of their comfortzone" and "not to get stuck in the kitchen". Nevertheless, he did not share his leadership authority with women.

Loving Assemblies of God's main Sunday service was in English. During meetings, women and men sat together while children were running between the rows of chairs. On Sundays, most women would dress in a sari or salwar-kameez²⁰ though a few wore jeans and a blouse. Men would usually wear jeans and a shirt. The service always started with a long session of worship that was loud, energetic and emotionally expressive. People commonly lifted their hands or clapped, rocked from side to side, danced, cried or in other ways involved their body in worship. Following this, Pastor John gave his sermon, which lasted about 45 minutes. In his preaching, Pastor John made the most

¹⁸ Gurugram has established itself as a medical center and attracts medical tourists (who travel abroad to obtain medical treatment) from all over the world.

¹⁹ Every Sunday service, somebody or a group of people from the congregation would sing a song of their choice before the congregation – that is, a "special song".

²⁰ A traditional combination dress worn by women. The outfit comprises a pair of trousers (salwar) and a tunic (kameez) which is usually paired with a scarf (dupatta).

of the stories from Bible and taught his congregation how to live as Believers through exploring these narratives. Accordingly, rather than explicitly pointing out to churchgoers what was right and wrong in the eyes of God or teaching them about particular doctrines, he invited them to learn from and walk in the footsteps of characters in the Bible. The service ended with a few songs and prayers. After the service, people would stay and mingle for some time.

In addition to the main Sunday service, two early morning services were held in Tamil and Hindi.²¹ Loving Assemblies of God had a further weekly Friday worship meeting, a Kids club, a Youth fellowship, Men/Women's fellowship, and the church organized weekly prayer chains. Pastor John had a vision that every member should be part of and engage in a cell group although, at the time of my fieldwork, only three groups were meeting on a regular basis. Loving Assemblies of God also had an online presence through a webpage, a Facebook page, and several WhatsApp groups. Many congregants were very active in the church's main WhatsApp group; normally 30 to 40 messages were posted every day.

Church of All Nations

Church of All Nations was led by a North Indian couple, Sunil and Aditi. They both came from Hindu backgrounds and had become Believers in their early twenties. When the couple married, Sunil was working in business but had revealed to his soon-to-be wife that he wished to be a pastor. Pastor Sunil worked as an assistant pastor for two years in an established Pentecostal church in New Delhi before the couple started Church of All Nations. The first meeting was held in 2009 in their living room in Gurugram. Aditi was a dentist and was, at the time of my fieldwork, working part time to support the family. The couple had three kids.

The church rented a hall in the basement of a hotel for their Sunday service. Due to the high fees in this part of the city, the church could only afford to rent the hall on Sunday mornings. During the rest of the week, church activities took place in the pastor couple's apartment or in the homes of church leaders. The church had around 65 regular churchgoers, the majority being from North Indian states. Around a third of the members came from South or

²¹ The Hindi service was organized by the assistant pastor at another location.

Northeast India. Besides the more regular churchgoers, the Sunday service was attended by 10 to 15 medical tourists from various African countries.

As with Loving Assemblies of God, members of Church of All Nations were usually 25 to 40 years of age, married, and attended church with their spouse. Though the majority of congregants were married, there was a notable presence of “youths” in the church, that is, unmarried women and men below the age of about 35. The married couples usually had one or two kids. In contrast to Loving Assemblies of God, the majority of the women in Church of All Nations worked and several of them had careers. The men usually worked within the IT or finance sector.

While women were not formally acknowledged as leaders in Church of All Nations, they played leading roles during services and activities. For example, women served as members of worship teams, as intercessor leaders, as Sunday school teachers, and WhatsApp moderators. In addition, Church of All Nations had an unspoken rule that everybody who attended cell groups, Bible studies, and prayer meetings (regardless of their age, gender, marital status, or how long they have been a Believer) should participate by praying for others and actively taking part in discussions. This practice meant that men, whether they liked it or not, had to listen to women’s (theological) reflections and let women lead them in prayers. While this practice created a sense of equality, many women initially found it uncomfortable since they were not used to sharing their thoughts on religious matters in mixed gender settings.

The Sunday service in Church of All Nations was very well organized. Visitors were greeted on arrival and shown where to sit. Couples without kids and non-married men and women sat together in the front while families with small children usually sat in the back. Most women were dressed in jeans and a blouse, but a few would wear a salwar-kameez or occasionally a sari. Men wore jeans and a shirt. The service started with an opening prayer and welcome greetings which were followed by a worship session. Although the worship session had Pentecostal characteristics, it was not as loud as in Loving Assemblies of God and bodily expression tended to be limited to lifting or clapping hands. After the worship session, somebody would welcome newcomers, another person would lead the offerings, and a third person would lead the intercession. Thereafter, Pastor Sunil or an elder in the church would give a sermon. Pastor Sunil’s sermons tended to be topic-based and academic in style, focusing on specific theological matters. Prayers and a song followed the sermon. The service normally ended with announcements of upcoming events.

Apart from Sunday service, Church of all Nations organized a variety of activities: a Sunday school, fasting and prayer meetings, cell group meetings, Bible studies, Women's fellowship, Youth Fellowship, and Couples' meetings, social outreach activities, movie nights, and picnics. They also had their own website (including a blog), Facebook page, WhatsApp groups, and Twitter account. There was so much going on in Church of All Nations that it was often difficult to keep up with all the activities. Several of the participants told me that they had very little free time as they spend all their spare time on church related activities. Church of All Nations made an effort to come across as a modern and global church for the middle class. Their website was a good example of this where the sermons were released as podcasts and one could find an updated blog and links to the church's Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts.

Previous Research

In the following section, I will present some of the major studies on Pentecostal Christianity in India. In addition to providing an overview of research on the Indian Pentecostal movement, the purpose is to position this study alongside previous work and argue for its specific relevance. I have chosen to omit studies dealing with the impact of the charismatic movement on the Catholic, Orthodox, and mainline Protestant churches in India, as well as theologically oriented studies. There are a substantial number of the latter which tend to be written from an (Indian Pentecostal) insider perspective with the aim of making a theological rather than empirical contribution. As such, their relevance for this study is limited. Regarding the impact of the charismatic movement on the historical churches in India, it is a complex and multifaceted topic. These churches' deep historical and denominational roots make them markedly different from Pentecostal churches in India. As such, I considered the influence of the charismatic movement on them beyond the scope of this study.

Indian Pentecostal studies is a young research field. Relatively few empirical studies have been published and hardly any date back more than fifteen years. We have much to learn about the Indian Pentecostal movement, especially considering the size, diversity, and many local expressions of the movement. The reader should remember that India has a population almost twice

the size as Europe and consists of 28 states and 8 union territories, each with its unique characteristics.

As will be shown in this research overview, most published studies are historical in character and focus on particular denominations or on the issue of conversion and persecution in contexts of marginalization. Few studies bring attention to how the laity practice their religion and only a couple focus on the perspectives of women. What is more, at the time of writing there is no major study on middle-class Indian Pentecostal Christianity.

The first large systematic work on the Pentecostal movement in India was Michael Bergunder's (2008) *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century*. Building on an extensive empirical data set, the book maps out both the history of the South Indian Pentecostal movement and explains common beliefs and practices. The book also contains appendices with biographies of South Indian Pentecostal leaders, church statistics, and other informative material. At the time of its publication, the book was groundbreaking in providing a base for further exploration and research. Up to this day, it is an important work for anyone who wishes to learn about the Pentecostal movement in India. Regarding the second part of the book, it provides a helpful reference point for the current study even though the book itself focuses on South India and mainly on the perspectives of pastors and evangelists. Missing from Bergunder's study are the perspectives of the laity, especially the female laity.

Shaibu Abraham (2017) has made a brief outline of the history of the Pentecostal movement in North India in his *The History of the Pentecostal movement in North India*. The book does not measure up to Bergunder's rigorous mapping of the South Indian Pentecostal movement but is nonetheless important in being the first attempt to sketch how the movement established itself in the region. Abraham himself argues that it is not possible to write a meta-history of the Pentecostal movements' history in North India since there are significant differences in how the movement has spread and developed in various states. He encourages other scholars to look into local and regional histories, to study each state separately. While many states are covered in the book, Haryana (that is, the state where Gurugram is located) is unfortunately not one of them.²²

²² In fact, I have not been able to find a single publication that deals with how the Pentecostal movement came to Haryana and established itself there.

A very good regional study of the Pentecostal movement in North India is Wessly Lukose's (2013) book *Contextual Missiology of the Spirit*. Lukose explores the origin and identity of the movement in Rajasthan and offers a discussion of internal and external issues facing Pentecostal churches in the state. Lukose draws attention to a range of issues affecting Pentecostals including the minority situation, religious intolerance, denominationalism, and socio-economic status. Altogether, Lukose provides a rich description of the contextual challenges and possibilities facing the Pentecostal movement in Rajasthan. However, since the Pentecostal movement in Rajasthan has been almost exclusively a rural phenomenon and a tribal movement, it is mostly relevant for this study as a point of comparison.

There are two additional historically oriented works on Pentecostal Christianity in India: V. V. Thomas' (2008) *Dalit Pentecostalism* and Yabbeju Rapaka's (2013) *Dalit Pentecostalism*. Both books, which focus on the South Indian states Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, aim to highlight the contribution of Dalits while addressing the often overlooked role that caste plays in the history of Indian Pentecostal Christianity. The authors argue that historical accounts of the Indian Pentecostal movement often pay no attention to the work of Dalits. In these books, Thomas and Rapaka show how Dalits have struggled to be given equal representation in church leadership and how their fight for equality and justice has often resulted in schisms. In the early stages of the Pentecostal movement's history in India, there were hopes among Dalits that the movement would wash away caste differences as well as provide a source of economic uplift. However, even though many have experienced economic improvement, the majority of Pentecostal Dalits still live in poverty. While caste hierarchies influence the Indian Pentecostal movement in many ways, especially in the South, it did not emerge as an overarching theme in my material (which focuses on the everyday religious lives of middle-class women) and will not be a main concern in the dissertation. I will explicitly discuss this in Chapter 3. Nevertheless, I would like to underline that Thomas and Rapaka's work is important in providing both a critical perspective on the history of Pentecostal Christianity in India as well as insights into how caste affects leadership struggles.

The experiences and perspectives of Pentecostals with Dalit and Adivasi background has also engaged ethnographers and three major studies have been

published. Sarbeswar Sahoo's (2018) *Pentecostalism and Politics of Conversion in India* focuses on the Bhils²³ of southern Rajasthan, Nathaniel Roberts' (2016) *To Be Cared For* engages with slum-bound Dalits in the South Indian city of Chennai, and Shaibu Abraham's (2011) *Ordinary Indian Pentecostal Christology* explores how lay men and women understand Christ.

Sahoo's (2018) study centers on the topic of conversion. He explores questions such as why increasing numbers of Adivasis convert to Pentecostal Christianity and what are implications of such conversions. The book contains a chapter that explicitly focuses on understanding why women in high numbers join Pentecostal churches, which is relevant for this study. Sahoo concludes that most women came to the church in search of healing. Compared to modern systems of medicine and Indian *bhopas* (traditional village healers), the women experienced Pentecostal churches to be more accessible and additionally healing services were free. The female converts also appreciated how the churches welcomed them and cared for them with love and compassion. For most women, seeking help from a church was a last resort since associating with Christians and/or living as a convert in this context carried a social stigma that often resulted in social exclusion (such as from the village). With this finding, Sahoo challenges the popular and wide spread Indian perception that marginalized and poor people are allured or forced to join Pentecostal churches in rural areas.

Roberts' (2016) *To Be Cared For* is probably the work that is most germane to the present study. The world of the slum-bound Dalits which is the focus of Roberts' study is, of course, very different from that of the middle class in Gurugram. Nevertheless, women and their religious lives are at the center of this anthropological study. In the book, Roberts shows how conversion has little to do with change in social identity, culture, morality and values. Rather what was important was the power-laden relationship between humans and gods in which the latter were perceived to have an ability to intervene and deal with problems related everyday life in the slum. As will come be seen, this approach to religion in many ways resembles how the women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations related to their religion. Roberts also challenges the idea that Pentecostal Christianity is relationally corrosive. The women he studied did not break with their families or social setting which

²³ Bhils are an indigenous group found in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan. They constitute 39 of the population of Rajasthan.

would not even have been possible in the slum. Rather they identified individually as followers of a religion or specific god.

Shaibu Abraham's (2011) dissertation *Ordinary Indian Pentecostal Christology* is a study of ordinary Pentecostals' understanding of Christ. The study is based on fieldwork in three churches with mainly Adivasi and Dalit members in the North Indian states of Rajasthan and Gujarat. Abraham argues that his informants' understandings of Christ have been shaped by the challenging circumstances they live under, such as poverty, caste oppression, and religious persecution. Most commonly, they would describe Christ as a healer, exorcist, provider, and protector. The study is a good example of how context-specific circumstances shape religion and reminds us that much of our understanding of Pentecostal Christianity in India is shaped by studies that focus on the poor.

The most recent larger work on Pentecostal Christianity in India is Savio Abreu's (2020) *Heaven's Gates and Hell's Flames*. It is a sociological study of "new religious movements" in Goa, to which he includes neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic Catholic groups. The book is helpful in providing a careful description of the composition and character of the churches that are studied. However, the new-religious-movement-framework that Abreu applies, means that he is much concerned with showing how neo-Pentecostal groups are religious sects that stand in tension with society. He describes the churches as organizations that make "clear-cut boundaries" that distance them from other religious groups and that they "downgrade" other forms of religion. While there are certainly Pentecostal pastors in India who emphasize difference and make use of a rhetoric of rupture, Abreu's very one-sided portrayal of the churches gives the impression that he wishes more to prove a point rather than give a nuanced description of these groups.

The last two works that I would like to bring attention to are Chad Bauman's (2015) *Pentecostals, Proselytization, and Anti-Christian Violence in Contemporary India* and Anita Yadala Suneson's (2019) dissertation *Indian Protestants and their Religious Others*. These studies, in different ways, address a central question for Pentecostals in India today, namely, that of Hindu-Christian relations.

Bauman's book is an attempt to explain why Pentecostals have been disproportionately targeted in the rising occurrence of anti-Christian violent attacks in the last two decades. Bauman argues that even though a strong focus on evangelization and internal Indian politics are important factors, there is more to the situation. Among other things, he highlights the vulnerable socio-

economic situation of Pentecostals, the rural location of churches, and marginalization by “mainstream” Christians. Bauman also maintains that Indian Pentecostals to a certain extent make use of the rhetoric and practice of rupture which agitate and put tension on relations with their Hindu relatives and neighbors. Bauman contends that the most common reason for conversion is faith healing and exorcism, and that Pentecostals have become leading providers in the “healing market”. Bauman’s work is important since it provides context and understanding for the difficult situation facing Pentecostals in India today. Even though middle-class churches are seldom targeted in attacks, all Pentecostals in India have to find a way to live with widespread anti-Christian attitudes and threats from Hindu nationalists.

Yadala Suneson’s dissertation focuses not only on Pentecostals but also includes interviews with Protestant members of Church of South India (CSI). Distinctive in her study is its attention to the ways ordinary Christians think of religious plurality as well as its focus on middle class Protestants and Pentecostals. For Yadala Suneson’s interviewees, the most important difference between themselves and their religious others relates to salvation and religious efficacy rather than matters of everyday life. At that level, both Muslims and Hindus were portrayed by her interviewees in a rather positive light revealing that everyday interactions as well as interreligious friendship mostly took place without tension.

Yadala Suneson shows that the line between the religious self and other can also be drawn between different forms of Christianities, in this case, as when Protestants construct Catholics as religious others by highlighting “Catholic hybridity” (for example, through their use of religious images, wearing of jewelry²⁴ and *bindi*²⁵). Yadala Suneson also has a chapter exploring views on mission and evangelism where she discusses how her interviewees related to their churches’ evangelistic imperative in a context where there is widespread aversion to Christian evangelism. Her work is important for my study as it provides perspectives from middle-class Pentecostals.

²⁴ Whether or not it is allowed to use jewelry is a disputed topic among Pentecostals/Charismatics in India. To take off jewelry has been a gesture signaling world-renouncing holiness in many Pentecostal churches in South India, something that sets (female) Pentecostals apart from the wider society. While there is, in general, a strong reservation within the South Indian Pentecostal movement about wearing jewelry, attitudes vary between churches as well as between individuals (Yadala Suneson, 2021)

²⁵ A dot worn on the center of the forehead, a bindi can be worn for decoration or as a symbol of being married (red dot). For most people in India, it is a religious symbol associated with Hindu traditions. It is uncommon for Pentecostals to wear a bindi.

Together with the above major studies, a number of articles and book chapters have been published on Pentecostal Christianity in India. Among the topics addressed in these studies are: the pioneering work of women's rights activist Pandita Ramabai in the early days of Pentecostalism in India (Suarsana, 2014); early Pentecostal revivals in India (McGee, 1999); conversion among poor Dalit women in Bangalore (Shah & Shah, 2013); the role of jewelry in South Indian Pentecostalism (Jørgensen, 2012); Hindu-Christian relations in ordinary Pentecostals' everyday lives (Kuhlin, 2015); women and leadership (Bergunder, 2002); and indigenous Pentecostal movements in the Northeast (Snaitang, 2002).

In summary, previous research on Indian Pentecostal Christianity has mainly divided its attention between reconstructing the history of the movement, Pentecostal Christianity as an institutional form of religion, and the issue of conversion and persecution in contexts of marginalization. Given that this field of research is relatively young, this focus does not come as a surprise. Nevertheless, there is an urgent need to broaden research on Pentecostal Christianity in India so as not to omit the perspective of the middle class and of women. Moreover, more research is required on Pentecostal Christianity as a religion-in-practice by ordinary Pentecostals. Much research has prioritized the perspectives of pastors and leaders and, since there is often a difference between religion portrayed by the religious elite and how ordinary people actually practice their religion, this focus has created a gap in our knowledge of Indian Pentecostal Christianity. With this study, which brings attention to how women in middle-class Pentecostal churches express and experience their religion, I hope to both to broaden and deepen our understanding of Indian Pentecostal Christianity.

Delimitations of Study

Before moving on to the next chapter, I want to reiterate that this is not a study of the congregational life of middle-class churches or about middle-class churches per se. Rather, the purpose of the study is to understand how women, who are part of middle-class Pentecostal churches, express and experience their religion in their everyday life. It is a study of religion in the lives of individuals.

What is more, I have chosen to focus first and foremost on what takes place in non-formal religious contexts rather than on how the women practice their

religion in the churches. In fact, the participants spent relatively few hours in church per week. Not unlike comfortable or middle-class people in other parts of the world, the main part of their time was spent at home, college or work, also in their neighborhood or at the homes of friends and family. My focus has been to understand how they experience and express their religion in these contexts. I do not mean to say that church activities were not part of their lived religion or were not important. However, the main focus of the study is religion as it is practiced in non-formal religious settings.

Lastly, I would like to make clear that a main concern has not been to understand how the women's lived religion is informed by the churches. It is not a study of resistance or compliance. It is a study of the concrete practices that make up the women's lived religion, of how ordinary female adherents live as Believers in their day-to-day life. In other words, I have been interested in exploring what type of religion Pentecostal Christianity is if our starting point is how ordinary practitioners, on an individual level, express and experience their religion.

Outline of Dissertation

The dissertation consists of three parts: an introductory section (Chapters 1–3), an empirical section (Chapters 4–7), and a concluding section (Chapters 8–9). The following is a brief outline of the content in each chapter.

In Chapter 1, the present chapter, I have introduced the aim of the study, the research questions, the churches where I did my fieldwork, and I have also presented an overview of previous research on Indian Pentecostal Christianity. In relation to the latter, I have argued for the relevance of the study. The chapter also includes a brief introduction to the Pentecostal movement in India and a discussion about the difficulty and complexity in defining Pentecostal Christianity as a religious form.

Chapter 2 focuses on theory and method. I describe the lived religion approach that has shaped the study to a high degree. I also discuss the limitations of this perspective and how I have dealt with them. The method part of the chapter includes an introduction to the field and an outline of the methods used during the fieldwork. The chapter ends with a reflection on some ethical considerations in relation to the study.

The purpose of Chapter 3 is to provide context for understanding what it might mean to be middle class in India today. I highlight the relationship between caste and class, and what distinguishes “the new middle class” from “the old middle class”. I argue that the participants’ class status is crucial for understanding their lived religion. The chapter also includes a description of the city Gurugram.

The aim of Chapter 4, “Followers of Christ”, is to link together the introductory and empirical sections of the thesis. In order to create a deeper understanding of the women whose stories contribute to this study, I introduce four of them through individual portrayals. A main conclusion of the chapter is that, for these women, the most important aspects of becoming a Believer were to establish a personal relationship with God, learn to trust in him, and follow the example of Christ. The women did not equate becoming a Believer with becoming a Pentecostal in the sense that they started to identify themselves with Pentecostal Christianity as a movement or tradition. This is an approach to religion that leaves plenty of room for individual interpretations and adaptations. The women’s various ways of expressing their religion suggest that we cannot talk about a standard form of lived Pentecostal Christianity in the two churches that were my focus.

In Chapter 5, “Together with God”, I focus on four features of the women’s religion that were salient to many participants’ everyday religion: (1) a desire to follow God’s plan; (2) A recognition that the relationship with God needed to be tended; (3) a belief that everyday challenges and problems could be overcome with the help of God; and (4) the understanding that being a Believer was an ongoing transformational project. I pay particular attention to the active role the women play in shaping and fashioning their religious lives by employing the concept of agency. I argue that, in order to grasp the rationale behind the women’s way of doing religion and being in the world, we need to understand that their actions are intertwined with what they experience as the actions of God. The women experienced God as an active agent who guided them, strengthened them, and intervened in their daily lives. Hence, their way of acting as religious subjects was contingent upon the actions of God, a phenomenon that I conceptualize as *collaborative agency*.

In Chapter 6, “Pious Emotions”, I look at the connection between the participants’ lived religion and their emotional lives. While the women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations dismissed rigid and ritualistic religious behavior codes and welcomed the possibility of making up their own

minds about how to conduct themselves, they were in agreement on the importance of being and acting “like Christ”. Essentially, to live a Christ-like life, a holy life, was not about avoiding or rejecting things of the “world”, rather it meant adopting an emotional posture that resembles that of Christ. It was about being loving, humble and grateful. In other words, the participants molded themselves into pious Believers by remodeling their emotional lives.

Chapter 7, “Everyday Insecurities”, is the last empirical chapter and focuses on trying to understand why the participants’ everyday religion, to such a high degree, revolved around worries and concerns. Despite being in an economic position that enabled them to afford a relatively comfortable lifestyle, the women seemed to be haunted by a feeling that the world was full of dangers. By considering experiences from multiple social positions and taking into account how various social categories intersect, I bring attention to how their lives were, in fact, rather unstable and unpredictable. The analysis also suggests that the women’s religion was like a doubled-edged sword that made their everyday lives more difficult while at the same time helped them to deal with worries and dangers.

The last and third section of the dissertation consists of two chapters. The purpose of Chapter 8, “Ordinary Days”, is to bring the empirical chapters together; it is a reflective chapter rather than an analytic one. The dissertation ends with a short concluding chapter where I return to the research questions introduced in this chapter. I summarize the main findings of the dissertation and give some suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2. Theory and Method

In this chapter, I introduce the lived religion approach that has, in various ways, influenced and formed this dissertation, and I describe and reflect on the ethnographic fieldwork on which the study is based. Lived religion as an approach has been developed for the purpose of understanding religion derived from how ordinary people practice their religion in their day-to-day lives. However, as a theoretical framework it has many limitations, a matter that brought challenges to the analysis process and which I will discuss. The chapter also includes reflections on some ethical quandaries that I have encountered during the project.

Lived Religion

Lived religion is a framework for studying religion that has attracted much attention in recent decades. The primary focus of this from the ground up approach is on religion as expressed and experienced by ordinary people in their everyday lives. Hence, a lived religion approach aims to reach beyond institutional, elite, and textual definitions and understandings on what religion is and instead draws attention to phenomena, people, and locations marginalized by conventional perspectives. It stresses the active role of individuals in shaping and negotiating their religious lives while emphasizing the social and contextual dimensions of individual religion.

Lived religion emerged as a field in the United States during the late 20th century as a critique of the discipline of religious studies. A growing number of scholars considered that the strong focus on religious institutions, religious texts, and the religious elite in research on religion had given rise to a problematically one-sided understanding of what religion is and how we should understand it as a phenomenon. The tendency to view religion as a “system of beliefs and practices, anchored in sacred texts, maintained by trained elites, and conducted in official houses of structured worship” (Larrimore, 2015, p. 6) did not fit well with findings of how ordinary practitioners lived out their

religion. There was a call for working out a new understanding of religion by putting ordinary people's religious expressions and experiences at the center. In this framework for studying religion, religious institutions, texts and the religious elite were secondary, only relevant in terms of how ordinary people engaged with them and not the other way around (Hall, 1997, pp. vii–xii)

“Lived religion”, as a name for this new approach to the study of religion, originated with a conference hosted at Harvard University by the historian David Hall in 1994. A group of religious scholars, mostly historians and sociologists, gathered to try to find a way to reorient religious studies towards what ordinary religious people were actually doing. The conference papers, published in 1997 in the volume *Lived Religion in America*, became a hallmark for the emergence of the field of lived religion. The term lived religion became established as a category for a way of understanding and studying religion a decade later with the publication of Nancy Ammerman's (2007) *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives* and Meredith McGuire's (2008) *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*.

As it currently stands, the field of lived religion is not a fully developed theoretical framework (Kupari & Knibbe, 2020). Rather, it is more of what Imre Lakatos (1970) has described as a “research programme”, that is, a shared set of problems, assumptions, focus areas, methods and terminology that provide a productive field of research. Hence, theoretically, lived religion is not a unified field of research; there is a lack of a core set of analytic concepts. As a result, lived religion scholars tend to borrow concepts and analytical tools from other theoretical fields in order to bring focus and depth to their studies. For example, Elin Ekström et al. (2019) integrate the Foucauldian concept of the *gaze* in their study of unaccompanied female minors, Wim Peumans (2014) introduces the concept of *moral selves* in his study of queer Muslim migrants, and Helena Kupari (2016) uses Bourdieu's *habitus* in her study of Karelian Orthodox women in Finland. Before discussing how I have tackled the theoretical limitations of the lived religion framework, I will outline some of its core premises.

To look for religion in ordinary people's everyday lives entails having an open approach to *where* and *when* religion might appear. As Ammerman has argued (2014a), everyday religion can happen and take place anywhere and at any time; rigid and stable distinctions between sacred and secular spaces and times tend to be dissolved when we study religion in people's day-to-day lives. This also means that religion as it is lived cannot be fully demarcated from other domains (such as politics, family life or leisure pursuits) but is entangled

in the web of everyday life. In sum, lived religion is an approach that views religious life as inseparable from life in general (Schielke & Debevev, 2012).

A common strategy for locating ordinary people's everyday religion is to follow their lead; as an approach, lived religion favors what practices and beliefs individuals themselves consider to be religious (see for example Aune, 2014; Klingorova & Gökariksel, 2017; Sobczyk & Soriano, 2015). How a person uses social media, what she eats and drinks, how she tends her garden, or interacts with her neighbors can accordingly be considered religious practices. Nevertheless, a lived religion approach is not only about studying religion as conscious activity but also paying attention to embodied practices, habits, and materiality (Kupari, 2016; McGuire, 2008). Included in this are how people use their body when engaged in religious practices, express emotions, decorate their homes, or dress when going to church, and so forth.

There is a strong tradition within the field of lived religion of focusing on religious practice, how people do religion (Neitz, 2011). Lived religion is sometimes even referred to as religion in action (Kupari, 2016; Orsi, 2003; Sremac & Ganzevoort, 2019). This focus is a reaction to the previous bias within religious studies to understand religion from the starting point of religious texts, religious beliefs or as presented by the religious elite. To approach religion as practiced makes room for a very different view of it since it is no longer a stable entity existing objectively but something that is continuously being made and remade by individuals. Hence, a lived religion approach acknowledges ordinary religious practitioners as religious agents, as people who are creatively forming their religious worlds. Apart from practice, common themes of study are materiality, embodiment, emotions, spirituality, health, narrative, and experience (Ammerman, 2016; Neitz, 2011)

Lived religion as an approach proceeds from an understanding that ordinary peoples' everyday religion is not necessarily (if ever) a logical and coherent set of beliefs and practices. In contrast to how religion tends to be presented by religious organizations and the religious elite, that is as a coherent and consistent scheme, religion found among ordinary practitioners tend to be multifaceted, flexible and at times contradictory (McGuire, 2008). People do not commit to a religious package or a theological system when they join a religious community or identify with a certain faith. Accordingly, religion-as-prescribed by institutions tends to be different from religion-as-practices by individuals, even if there, of course, are overlaps. Hence, as I have proceeded from a lived religion approach, I have tried to bracket my own understanding

of what it might mean to be a Pentecostal and favor what the women themselves consider being at the heart of their religion. As such, there are certain typical elements of Pentecostal spirituality that are not given much attention for the reason that the participants did not give much importance to them (such as speaking in tongues).

Importantly, individual religion should not be confused with a socially isolated form of religious engagement. An individual's lived religion is always linked to the context in which that person lives and acts (Ammerman, 2014b). Hence, even though the main departure point for the analysis is how religion is experienced and expressed among the women that the study focuses on, the churches are important parts of the analysis. Moreover, in terms of context, India as a location, and Gurugram in particular, are essential for understanding the everyday religion of the women.

When I state that this study is about how "ordinary people" express and experience their religion, I refer to the laity, individuals who are not part of the formal religious elite, rather than average religious practitioners. As pointed out by Samuli Schielke (2010), ethnographic accounts of religious lives tend to privilege committed and pious individuals who participate in the activities of religious communities or organizations, as well as focusing on pious moments (such as prayer group meetings). Discussing the anthropology of Islam, Schielke claims "there is too much Islam in the anthropology of Islam" (p. 2). In this study, I have tried to include churchgoers with various sorts of commitment to the churches, and I have broadened the focus beyond pious moments. Nonetheless, as it is a study of religion with an emphasis on religious practices, the women will probably appear somewhat more religious than would be the case if the study was a general anthropological account of women in Pentecostal churches. Moreover, since it was easier to build rapport with women who routinely visited the churches, the majority of the participants are, using Schielke's terminology, "committed individuals". Hence, the participants are ordinary in the sense that they do not have any formal theological training and do not belong to the formal religious leadership of the churches.

Lived religion premises have shaped the design and execution of the study in various ways. For example, the call to draw attention to people whose religious lives can be sidelined when studying official forms of religion has motivated me to focus on the female laity in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations. I have tried to have an open approach to what Pentecostal Christianity might be for these women by putting traditional definitions

aside and allowing for the women's viewpoints and ways of doing religion to inform my understanding. In this, I have also tried to be open as to where I might find religion being practiced by attending to seemingly mundane subject matters, such as how the women dressed, used social media, or spent their money. A lived religion approach has influenced the interview guide in that there was emphasis on contexts outside formal religious settings and on how the women practiced their religion rather than what they believed. In order to learn more about their everyday lives, I chose to work with diaries in addition to the use of interviews and participate observation. Moreover, in the analyses there is an emphasis on the active role of individuals in shaping and negotiating their religious lives, rather than on how institutions influence their religion. Also, the empirical chapters focus on themes we commonly find within lived religion studies, that is, agency, emotions, and experiences.

Studying Women

As describe above, a lived religion approach has shaped the design of the study, the premises, the fieldwork, and the themes explored. Nevertheless, this study has also been inspired by feminist thought, both in its topic of investigation and in its analysis.

An aim with the study is to draw attention to the perspectives and experiences of women. As early feminist scholars noted, much research has an androcentric bias, privileging the perspectives and experiences of men (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). This bias has also influenced research on the Pentecostal movement in India. Our understanding of Pentecostal Christianity as a religious form in India is based predominantly on male standpoints. Because the Indian Pentecostal movement is patriarchal in its formal structure, when we study the movement in its institutional form, interview pastors and leaders or by consulting written material produced by Indian Pentecostals, we are in fact almost exclusively paying attention to the perspectives and experiences of men. Now, considering that women are in a clear majority in most Indian Pentecostal churches, it is problematic that their views and lives are overlooked. With this study, I aim to contribute empirically to more a nuanced account of the Indian Pentecostal movement by exploring the ways women express and experience their religion. However, I also considered it important that our understanding of Indian Pentecostal Christianity should be largely informed by

how ordinary people in general, and women in particular, actually practice their religion.

Feminist thought has also inspired the study's analyses. As mentioned, lived religion as an approach is not a fully developed theoretical framework. There is no established definition of what lived religion is or any consensus on its core concepts, and there are few analytic tools available. That lived religion is about studying the role of religion in ordinary people's everyday lives does not give much theoretical direction on how to process a material (or write a dissertation). Thematically, there are considerable overlaps between lived religion research and feminist studies (Kupari & Knibbe, 2020). In both these fields, there is plenty of research on embodiment, experience, difference, health, emotions, narrative, agency, etc. Indeed, the three analysis chapters in this dissertation center on themes which are common topics in both lived religion and feminist studies: agency, emotions, and experience. Moreover, in both disciplines, there is an ambition to give a voice to those who have been overlooked in research and to take lived experiences seriously.

With that being said, this study is not a typical feminist study of the kind that focuses on gender in its relation to power or the nature of gender inequality. I will not investigate how women's involvement in religion oppresses or empowers them as women or how their religion works to maintain or challenge unequal gender relations. Rather, I have been inspired by postcolonial feminist scholars, such as Chandra Mohanty and Gayatri Spivak, who have criticized "Western feminist" scholarship for analyzing the lives of women in the Global South primarily through the lens of victimhood and oppression. In this, Western scholars not only fail to address the differences among women in these contexts, but they also produce a discourse in which women in the Global South are constructed primarily as objects in being victims of various oppressive regimes and structures.

In her famous article *Under Western Eyes*, Chandra Mohanty (1988) describes this as a discursive colonization of "Third World" women's lives. While acknowledging that the participants lived their lives in a male dominated society and that the churches were not gender equal settings, I wish to allow for a different analytic focus, namely, the construction of religion through engagement in religious practices. This is an approach in which we may allow these women, as religious practitioners, to help us learn more about Indian Pentecostal Christianity. Hence, what will follow is an in-depth analysis of religious practices rather than a critical study of underlying unequal power structures and norms that affected women's religious lives.

An Abductive Approach

The fieldwork was planned in accordance with the general principles of a lived religion approach. However, as lived religion is not a fully developed theoretical framework, the theoretical and analytic focus of the study had not yet been decided when I set out to do the fieldwork; I only knew that I wanted to address practice in some sense. In the field, I started to identify certain patterns and tendencies related to the participants' lived religion. In the encounter between empirical observations and my pre-existing theoretical knowledge, I started to distinguish possible theoretical focuses for the study. Whenever I felt that my current theoretical understanding was not enough, I read up on particular matters. This process continued during the transcribing and coding process. At this point, the dissertation could have developed in various ways since the organization of the material and theoretical focus had not yet been finalized.

After taking into account several factors (such as preliminary findings, previous research, and theoretical aptness), I decided to organize the material by addressing three aspects that to a high degree structured and organized the everyday religious lives of the participants. These were the regulation of emotions, the understanding of agency, and the experience of insecurity. I considered other ways of theorizing the material as well,²⁶ but I came to the conclusion that focusing on aspects that organized the participants' religious lives as a whole would allow me more easily to move between various areas in the participants' lives and thus I could reflect on the boundlessness that characterizes their everyday religion. The choice of particular concepts and their use was decided in the process of working with each chapter.

The process described above, where I as a researcher move back and forth between empirical findings and possible ways of theorizing the material, reflects an abductive approach to research. An abductive approach differs from an inductive approach in that it does not deny the influence of pre-existing theories during the research process and consciously views the data through different theoretical vantage points in order to find better or new ways of understanding a phenomenon. However, in contrast to a deductive approach in which the researcher works from a hypothesis or a single theory, an abductive approach allows for theoretical flexibility and lets empirical observations play a greater role. When using an abductive approach, empirical observations and

²⁶ For example through the lens of space and place.

theoretical analysis is not only intertwined, they reinforce each other. It is an intellectual dance where “the theoretical account allows us to see things in the empirical that we would gloss over. The empirical description, in turn, pushes the theorization in unexpected directions” (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014: 6).

Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018) point out that in practice abduction is probably the most common methodological approach in empirical research as taking a strict inductive and or deductive approach risks putting severe constraints on a research process. When the researcher repeatedly shifts between theory and empirical observation, she is part of a hermeneutic procedure that allows for creativity, is empirically grounded, and theoretically conscious.

An Ethnographic Study

The present study is ethnographic being based on six months fieldwork conducted during the period October 2016 to March 2017. During this time, I stayed with my husband in an apartment in central Gurugram. The time I spent in the field was equally divided between the two churches: I spent three months with each church participating in whatever goings-on took place and spending time with the members. The fieldwork also included taking part in the churches’ Facebook and WhatsApp groups. I also spent a considerable amount of time trying to understand the life of Gurugram’s middle class. During the fieldwork, I conducted 35 semi-structured interviews (including five with churchgoers from Nigeria and Kenya).²⁷ Eleven of the women I interviewed wrote weeklong diaries.

The study focuses on the 30 Indian women that I interviewed. These women have all given me their individual consent to be part of the study. Even though the field notes cover all sorts of situations, the aim of the field study has been to better understand the lived religion of these 30 women. Throughout the thesis, I refer to these women as “participants”. All participants, as well as the other members of the churches, have been given pseudonyms.

²⁷ The reason why I also did interviews with some of the African churchgoers was that I thought that the phenomenon of Indian middle-class churches as “international churches” was something too interesting to ignore and something I have not come across previously in research on Indian Pentecostal Christianity. However, for the sake of focus, I will not analyze or discuss this phenomenon in this dissertation.

There are several reasons why I choose to do an ethnographic study. As there tends to be a difference between self-reported behavior and actual behavior (Aspers, 2007), I wanted to avoid drawing exclusively on interview material in the analysis. Moreover, trust is essential in interviews covering sensitive topics such as religion. Through the fieldwork, I had the opportunity to build a good rapport with most women prior to the interviews. Since I had never been to Gurugram before, I felt that I needed at least six months to understand specific contextual features of the city.²⁸

Prior to starting my fieldwork, I did an interview-based pilot study among female adherents in a middle-class Pentecostal church in Sweden. The main intentions were to gain some insight and experience about what might be involved in studying religion as lived. The findings of the pilot study have been published in a separate article (Kuhlin, 2017).

Ethnography as a research tradition originates from the discipline of anthropology and social sciences though it has gained in popularity in recent decades and is now used within various research fields. Depending on the field of research and object of study, ethnographic studies differ in design. Apart from being fieldwork based, that is, conducted in the settings where participants live rather than in laboratories, an ethnographic study is generally distinguished by the following features: (1) a considerable amount of time is spent in the field in order to build a good rapport with participants and become familiar with the setting; (2) participant observation is a key data collection method, including the taking of field notes; (3) a combination of data collection methods is used (Harrison, 2018). These core practices have all informed the present study.

As an ethnographer, I consider the findings of this study to have emerged in the interaction between the participants and me as a researcher, rather than something I have “uncovered” or “detected” (Aspers, 2007). For this reason, I have chosen to refer to the women that the study focuses on as “participants” rather than “informants” or “respondents”. By using the term participants, I acknowledge the active role of the women in shaping the study. For example, as a researcher I was dependent on the women’s consent and their readiness to spend time with me sharing their experiences, as well as their willingness

²⁸ Previous to conducting the fieldwork, I have lived and worked for 6 months in the India, studied Hindi for one month, and made a couple of vacation trips.

to explain phenomena and events that I observed in the churches and in Gurugram.

With that said, I am not proposing that it was an equal balance of power. As a researcher, I had greater control over the research process and had a much broader understanding of the study which influenced the power dynamics in the relationship.

Before giving a more detailed account of the data collecting methods used during the fieldwork, I will describe the first encounters with the churches and some reflections over my role as a researcher in these contexts.

Entering the Field

In order to be able to start the fieldwork upon arrival I contacted the pastor of Loving Assemblies of God before travelling to India. I wanted to include one church belonging to an Pentecostal denomination and, from the look of their website, Loving Assemblies of God appeared to be the perfect match. The church had a clear middle-class profile and various ongoing activities that I could take part in, including Women's Fellowship. In an email to the pastor, I introduced myself, described my project, and asked if he would approve of my being part of the church for a period and doing interviews with female adherents. Pastor John wrote a warm welcoming reply and told me that his wife would help me to make contact with the church's female members and that he was happy to inform me that "the church's women are very prayerful and dynamic".

After my first visit to Loving Assemblies of God, a meeting was arranged with the pastor couple. Over a cup of tea, I was asked to share my "testimony"²⁹ which I did and the pastor couple shared theirs. I further introduced the project and Pastor John and his wife, Dharmila, told me about the church and described the situation for Christians in Gurugram. Dharmila promised to introduce me to the congregation at the coming Sunday service as well as put me in touch with some women that I could interview.

As promised, my husband and I were formally welcomed and introduced the following Sunday. The congregation was told that we were "not visitors,

²⁹ To share one's "testimony" in this context is to share one's life story, to tell "the extraordinary story" of how one ended up in this particular place. It is an informal ritual that is common among Indian Pentecostals when getting to know a new sister or brother. As I have previously worked at a theological college with a Pentecostal profile in India, I was familiar with this practice.

but family” and they were encouraged to facilitate my work as a researcher. I also had a chance to briefly describe the project. After the service, several women approached me and told me that they were willing to be interviewed. While I knew that I had Dharmila to thank for this smooth and heartfelt start to the fieldwork, I was also a bit concerned that the women in the church would feel pressured to participate when the pastor’s wife had encouraged them to do so. However, when Dharmila noted that I started to establish relationships on my own, she took a step back and did not interfere in the recruitment of participants.

During my second month of fieldwork, I began to search for an additional church to include in the study. As will be further described in the next chapter, there are a number of middle-class Pentecostal churches in Gurugram. Among these churches, there was no obvious choice of which one to include. I wanted the second church to have a different profile than Loving Assemblies of God, either belonging to an Indian Pentecostal denomination (compared to Assemblies of God, which is a Pentecostal transnational denomination), being an independent Pentecostal church or a non-denominational Charismatic church. For practical reasons, I aimed for a church that was centrally located and not too far from our apartment as the traffic in Gurugram is heavy. I first visited New Life Church, associated with the megachurch New Life Fellowship in Mumbai. New Life Church was very “Western” in style and was markedly influenced by prosperity teachings. After the service, I had a conversation with the church’s female senior pastor who asked me to put down my number and purpose of visit on a “new member card”.

While waiting for the New Life Church to contact me I emailed the pastor of Church of All Nations, a small independent Pentecostal church in the city center. When I did not get a response, I decided to attend Sunday service and talk to the pastor in person. While talking to the pastor after the service, he admitted that he had received my email but was unsure of my sincerity and of how he should respond. The pastor, whose name was Sunil, stressed that even though he thought it was correct of me to contact him first, he could not force anybody to participate. I explained that participation was, of course, voluntary and that I did not expect him to in any way try to persuade anybody to partake

in the study. Pastor Sunil accepted this response and told me to begin by speaking to “the leaders’ wives”³⁰ so they could make a judgment about what kinds of questions I would be asking.³¹ He also encouraged me not behave as “a Sunday visitor” but take part in the work of the church. I assured him that this was my intention. Before we left, Pastor Sunil gave my husband a warm hug and said we were welcome to come back. Since I had not heard anything from the New Life Church, I decided after meeting Pastor Sunil to include Church of All Nations as the second church in my study.

As can be understood from the stories above, the pastors’ approval and support was crucial for being able to conduct the fieldwork. Even though the study did not focus on the churches as such and I did not formally interview either Pastor John or Pastor Sunil, they were *gatekeepers* (Aspers, 2007) to the churches. However, after they had accepted my presence, it was their wives, Dharmila and Aditi, who became key facilitators for the fieldwork. Dharmila and Aditi were much appreciated, as well as looked up to, among the female churchgoers. When they expressed their trust in me as a researcher, it enabled me to build relationships with the women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations that were necessary for my fieldwork.

During my fieldwork, I was in various ways an insider and outsider simultaneously. As I had been part of a Pentecostal church during my childhood, and had taught at a theological college with a Pentecostal profile in India, I was familiar with the way of speaking and behaving in Pentecostal contexts. I also knew my Bible and most songs that were sung. This background smoothed my integration in both Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nation as I was immediately taken to be “a sister”.³² I never called myself a “Pentecostal” though, but rather stated that I considered myself a Christian and that I usually visit Church of Sweden, a Lutheran church, for Sunday service.

³⁰ Pastor Sunil had appointed certain members who he trusted as “leaders” in the church. They were all men and had been given specific tasks such as leading the meeting, Bible studies, and worship. There were women who performed the same or similar tasks, but they were not officially appointed as “leaders”.

³¹ In order to not misuse the pastor’s trust I first interviewed some of “the leaders’ wives”, but none of them made any comments or advised me in anyway about what questions to ask.

³² “Sister” and “brother” are common terms used in Pentecostal circles to address somebody who belongs to the group. In India, one can also address a stranger as “brother” or “sister”, but then it is more common to use the Hindi more respectful terms “bhaiya” (elder brother), “didi” (elder sister). In Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations, many women used “didi” to refer to the pastors’ wives.

Apart from my religious identity, my gender played a critical role in the fieldwork. It would have been impossible for a man to conduct the interviews in the way I was able to do. To sit alone for hours and talk about one's personal life is something most Indian women would only do with another woman. Moreover, as a married woman, I was also given a certain amount of respect³³ since it was assumed I was aware of the difficulties that come with marriage which enabled the women to trust me with their experiences. To have the status "married woman" also eased my interaction with male members of the churches since my social position was unambiguous. Even with friendly relations, my rapport with most men in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations were not nearly as close as with the women, but with the focus of my study on the everyday lives of the female adherents, this did not have any major impact on my fieldwork.

Both congregations strived to have an international profile and so they did not consider that my European background made me an outsider. The churches were used to having visitors from other countries and many members interacted with people from abroad on a daily basis at work. Moreover, it was common to have family members, relatives or at least friends living outside India (most commonly in the Gulf countries, the United Kingdom, or the United States). Hence, I was not an unusual feature in their everyday lives and most churchgoers were familiar with European and American culture. Nonetheless, my being Swedish did make a difference since I did not understand all the references in conversations, could not speak the participants' native languages, and I handled social situations somewhat differently, and so on.

The most significant distance between the participants and myself was that I belonged to the churches primarily as a researcher and this I informed people openly about. I also encouraged churchgoers to tell me if they wanted me to exclude them from the study (when taking pictures, for example, or when describing a situation).³⁴ I was treated more as a friend and so I often felt that people forgot my reason for being there was to gather material for my study even though they were all aware that I would be gone within a few months and that I would write a dissertation about what I had learned and experienced.

³³ In Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations, unmarried women and men was referred to as "youths". To be married was to become an adult, which brought with it respect and a new social position.

³⁴ Nobody told me to do this. However, two women declined to be interviewed for personal reasons.

I could at times feel that some churchgoers struggled with how to relate to me, that it was not clear to them what it meant to be a “researcher” or an “ethnographer”. Could I be trusted? Did I ask questions because I was genuinely interested and cared or because I was a researcher? Had I been part of the churches for longer periods it is likely that I would have become less identified with the role of researcher and more likely to go unnoticed as such in the churches. In short-term fieldwork, it is difficult to reach this level of integration (Aspers, 2007).

Participant Observation

To be a participant observer was an essential part of the fieldwork. To take part in the activities in the churches and spend time with the participants served several vital functions. It was a way for me to learn more about the everyday religious lives of the women and to build a good rapport with them. As a participant, I was also better placed to understand the cultures and organization of the churches, learn emic terms and expressions, and this helped me to formulate relevant questions for the interviews. In short, what I learnt and experienced through participant observation has played a major role in my study.

As a participant observer, I did not only observe what was happening but participated to various degrees in whatever was going on. During Sunday service, I would sing along with the worship songs, receive communion, and join the congregation for coffee after service. When I took part in Women’s fellowship, Couple meetings, Bible studies, or Cell groups, I would be more withdrawn and simply say a prayer or “share” (offer a short reflection on the sermon, for instance, or relate a personal experience) if I was asked to do so.

It would most likely not have been possible for me to have access to these often intimate conversations if I had refrained from direct participation; not least, to be distant in that way would have been perceived as atypical and regarded with suspicion. In Church of All Nations, there was even an informal rule during these types of meetings that everybody should contribute by sharing, no matter their gender, age, status, or how long the person had been a Christian. At times, I did feel uncomfortable participating, especially while praying out loud, as I knew that my way of praying did not match the passionate and powerful prayers of most adherents. This was an experience that helped me to understand how members who had recently become Believers might feel as they struggled to learn and fit in with the life of the churches.

Nevertheless, I declined to teach or lead devotions³⁵ wishing to refrain from elaborating my own theological positions and opinions and thereby avoid openly challenging the understandings of the pastors or participants.

As part of being a participant observer, I followed the standards for doing ethnographic work by writing field notes and keeping a field diary (Aspers, 2007). The field notes consist of detailed written description based on observation as well as my own reflections from having taken part in church activities or spent time with participants. How I practically went about writing my field notes varied. For example, it was common among churchgoers to take notes of the sermon during Sunday service. I used this opportunity to put down all sorts of observations in a notebook which I would later write out and elaborate in NVivo, a software program used for qualitative research. When I attended smaller meetings or spent time with participants, it was not possible to take notes while these were going on. However, if something happened that I wanted to note down immediately, I would excuse myself to go to the bathroom and take notes on my phone. But usually I would start taking notes in the taxi on my way home after these meetings and then transcribe them in NVivo.

Apart from writing field notes, I also kept a daily field diary where I wrote all kinds of observations and reflections relating to middle-class life and my stay in Gurugram. These covered worries over the fieldwork, how people were dressed at the malls, notes of things I read in the newspaper, theoretical reflections, and things I remembered but had forgotten to put down in my field notes.

Each month, I summarized my observations in monthly reports that I sent to my supervisors. This made it possible for them to follow me in the field and act as ongoing discussion partners.

Online Participant Observation

As an extension of being a participant observer “in real life”, I took part in each church’s Facebook and WhatsApp groups. I also became friends with some members of the churches on Facebook and had individual conversations with several participants on WhatsApp.

³⁵ Lay participation is a common characteristic for Pentecostal churches. As a PhD student in Missions Studies, I was regarded as theologian and accordingly a person whom might be expected to contribute by leading Bible studies and devotions. I was asked on several occasions to do this, but always declined.

During the pilot study, I realized that online activities might be important in the participants' everyday religious lives. For the purpose of engaging with participants in this way, before travelling to India I prepared myself by setting up a Facebook account for this specific purpose. Moreover, since I had several friends in India prior to the fieldwork, I knew that WhatsApp is widely used even without knowing then how it might be part of the participants' lived religion.

The initial plan was to include questions regarding the use of social media in the interviews. With consent, I would then join each church's Facebook group as well as become friends with and follow participants on Facebook. Once my fieldwork was under way, I followed this plan. I first became part of Loving Assemblies of God's Facebook group and, as I got to know members of the church, I became friends with those on Facebook. In this way, I gradually had a sense of some of the things that were taking place on Facebook. The procedure was similar for Church of All Nations.

On Facebook, I acted as a non-participant observer rather than a participant observer as it is a public social network and I did not know what consequences any comments or posts of mine would have on the participants and churches. I did not gather material directly, but I took notes about what was going on and used these as a backdrop for asking questions during the interviews. In the thesis, I refer to general tendencies on Facebook, but I have avoided pointing out what particular participants did or did not do online.

Early on in the fieldwork, I realized that WhatsApp generally played a more important role in the participants' everyday religion than Facebook. The participants preferred communicating on WhatsApp for many reasons. For example, nearly everybody had an account, it was more private, and it was easy to keep track of different groups and conversations. Further, one was not distracted by many other things as on Facebook, one could communicate directly but also had the possibility to wait, and it was free to make calls through the app. All participants communicated with their close family and friends through WhatsApp, and the majority were part of various Christian groups and networks.

Of course, I could not be part of the participants' private WhatsApp groups and conversations with friends and family, but the churches had several semi-official WhatsApp groups that I was welcome to join. In Loving Assemblies of God, I was part of the main WhatsApp group as well as the women's group. In Church of All Nations, I was part of the church's main group. These groups were very active. In Loving Assemblies of God, around 30 to 40 messages

were posted every day, and in Church of All Nations this varied from five to 20 messages a day. Indeed, through these groups churchgoers were in daily contact with each other.

As with Facebook, I have not followed the participants individually in the churches' WhatsApp groups. I have looked for general trends (such as difference in participation between men and women, the kinds of content that was posted, and so on) as well as used it as a context for the interviews. Observations and reflections were written down in the field diary.

Semi-structured Interviews

An important way I gathered data about the participants' everyday religion was through semi-structured interviews. An advantage with interviews compared to doing participant observations is the chance to "travel in time" with the participants, allowing me to ask questions about everyday activities that I could not take part in (Aspers, 2007).

In total, I conducted 30 interviews with Indian churchgoers and five with churchgoers from Nigeria and Kenya. The distribution between the churches was 17 in Loving Assemblies of God (as well as three with women from Nigeria) and 13 in Church of All Nations (and two with women from Nigeria and Kenya).

Because I started my fieldwork in Loving Assemblies of God, the plan was to do around 15 interviews or as many as it took to reach "saturation", which can be understood as a point when adding interviews does not provide any new data (Aspers, 2007, p. 202). However, after conducting 15 interviews in Loving Assemblies of God, I still felt that I learnt something new and interesting with every interview. Moreover, the women's background, life stories, and ways of doing religion differed to such a high degree that I could not see a clear common pattern in how they expressed and experienced their religion. This finding puzzled me. Pentecostals are often said to be rigorous in their way of doing religion and in my pilot study in Sweden a pattern had started to appear early on. As the time approached for me to move on to my fieldwork in Church of All Nations, I concluded that the pattern of difference I saw in Loving Assemblies of God was a finding as good as any other. When the same tendency became discernible in Church of All Nations, I decided that 30 interviews in total were enough to support this finding.

The participants varied in age from 18 to 65, but the majority were between 25 to 45 years old. Around two thirds were married, usually having one or two

children. Around half of the women were involved in paid labor and the other half were homemakers or students, with one woman who was an elderly widow living with her son. The majority of the women, irrespective of their main occupation, had a master's degree. The participants represent 11 different states and nine linguistic groups. The majority did not have a Pentecostal background, but they had in one sense or another changed religious affiliation.³⁶ In the sampling of the participants, I made an effort to capture the diversity of the congregation, especially with regarding age, geographical background, and religious background.

The majority of the interviews took place in the homes of the participants, but I also made two interviews in Loving Assemblies of God's church building, four in various cafés, and one in my apartment.³⁷ All interviews were conducted in English. Even though English was seldom the native language of the participants, the majority were fluent. Only one participant notably struggled to express herself in English.³⁸ The length of the interviews was usually around two hours but varied in length from 1 hr 45 min to 3 hr. In many cases, I was offered lunch or dinner after the interviews during which my conversation with the participants continued in a less formal manner.

Before the interviews started, I gave the participants an information sheet about the study, explained to them that I would give them pseudonyms, and told them about their rights (for example, that they were free to withdraw from participation). I explained why I recorded the interviews and offered to send them transcripts afterwards. Two interviewees wished to see transcripts but they did not send me any comments or changes. I recorded all participants' oral consent.

³⁶ The participants with Orthodox and Catholic background usually spoke of their change in religious belonging as a conversion in the same way as the participants from Hindu backgrounds. In contrast, the women who had grown up in mainline Protestant churches tended to refer to the change in religious affiliation as a "transformation".

³⁷ This interview was with a participant who was living in a dorm and who asked me if we could do the interview in a more private location. I suggested a café but she said she would prefer doing the interview in my apartment if possible, to which I agreed.

³⁸ This woman was the oldest of the participants. After the death of her husband, she had moved from South India to stay with her son in Gurugram. Before arriving in the city, she knew almost no English but she had taught herself sufficient English to engage in conversation. Because of the language limitations, I hesitated to include her in the study, but as she was eager to participate and was also interesting (being the only widow in the congregation) I decided to interview her. Compared to the other interviews, this interview has many limitations but does provide an interesting case in the study.

Several of the participants explained to me why they had chosen to be part of the study. The most common reason was that they thought my focus on women and women's way of doing religion was important since too much attention was given to men in general and pastors in particular. Several women stated that they in various ways felt personally encouraged and empowered by being asked to be part of a PhD study. As Anusha put it:

When we are reading books, we only see the experience of pastors. They are many people who are doing surveys, but the women are always in the back. So you are doing a great work. You felt that we also have some feelings and doing something. Because women like me, if there is no encouragement like this, I think that I am not doing anything. If people like you say, you are, then I can do something more. (Anusha, 2016)

Another common reason for participation given was hope that the dissertation would be of spiritual encouragement for those who read it, that by sharing their stories they could contribute spiritual support or new perspectives to somebody else. The women's life stories (including conversion/transformation stories) that I asked them to share at the beginning of the interviews were often typical of the genre of encouraging testimony and should be understood as such, which is common in Pentecostal contexts (Gooren, 2010).

The interviews were semi-structured in character. I chose this type of interview style as it offers flexibility and structure at the same time (Aspers, 2007). I always started by asking the participants to tell me about their background and to mention some major incidents in their lives (such as conversion, marriage, moving abroad, having children). This helped me get to know the participants and provided me useful information during the interview. The interviews were then structured around themes: everyday life, living in Gurugram, faith and religious practice, the church, and relationships. Under each theme, I had some open-ended questions and key words to guide me, but the exact formulation or follow up questions differed between the interviews.

A lived religion approach informed the interview guide. This meant that I tried to be open-minded as to where in the participants' responses I might find experiences and expressions of religion or what it might look like.³⁹ Even though I covered certain areas in the interviews with all participants, I tried to

³⁹ For example, under the theme "Everyday Life" I covered a range of areas including social media use, drink and food habits, raising children, main occupation, and how one spent one's money.

be attentive to and flexible about what the participants themselves considered everyday religious practices and experiences. This was because of the variety of routines and practices the women associated with their religious lives.

For example, in relation to eating meat, some women maintained that Christians were free to eat any kind of meat, including beef⁴⁰ and pork. However, most of the participants with this view were vegetarians or only ate fish and chicken, either because of cultural sensitivity or because they were not comfortable with eating beef and pork. Hence, in practice they would not comply with this conviction. Others claimed that what we eat is not a religious matter but a cultural issue, and they drew attention to the variation between the Indian states. The participants from Northeast India tended to reason that it was Hindus, not Christians, for whom the eating of meat was a religious matter. From this, we can see that the direction of the interviews would take different turns depending on the positions of the participants.

Diaries

The use of diaries is a rather common method in lived religion studies as it is a way for the researcher to make closer contact with events in the participants' lives and often see a less filtered version of everyday life than can be attained in the more formal interview situation (Smith-Sullivan, 2008).

After each interview, I asked the participants if they would mind keeping a diary for a week. I emphasized that it was voluntary and not something they had signed up to by agreeing to be interviewed. Eleven out of the 30 participants were willing to take on the task. The most common reason why the women did not want to carry out the task was that they said it felt unnatural, that they "were not a person who kept a diary".

The women who did participate were given a notebook and an instruction sheet. Each day they were asked to tell me about their day (for instance, what they had done, who they had met, how they were feeling) and then pick one question from a list and briefly answer it. The list contained all sorts of questions such as "Tell me about something you miss from your hometown", "Tell me about a favorite verse/passage in the Bible", "Have you talked about politics with somebody this week, tell me about it", "Tell me about something you

⁴⁰ The issue of cow slaughter and eating beef is very sensitive in India. In Haryana, it was illegal to sell beef and difficult to find pork. Hence, those participants who really wanted to eat beef and pork (mainly participants from Northeast India) went to Delhi to shop.

have prayed for today”. The reason for including these questions was to facilitate the task of writing a diary; in my experience of working with diaries, some people tend to find it difficult to know what to write. By adding questions, the participants were reminded of things that had just happened to them.

Some of the women wrote the diary for seven days in a row, others had a minor gap between their entries. But all of the 11 women who set out to do the task completed it. The diaries provided fascinating and very concrete information about the daily lives of the women. Moreover, in diaries they were much more open with their struggles as well as joys in their life. Many diaries were very personal which obliged me to be cautious when quoting them in the dissertation since I did not want to disclose matters and feelings that I felt were private.

Transcribing and Coding

I started to transcribe the interviews and the diaries during my fieldwork. Moreover, I continually transcribed the field notes in NVivo, and wrote the field diary directly in the program. As the diaries were already in writing, the transcribing process was rather straightforward; apart from correcting spelling and minor grammatical mistakes (such as the misuse of tense), I did not alter the texts in any way.

To transcribe the interviews was a time-consuming process that lasted well into the coding stage. The majority of the 30 interviews were over two hours long and the transcript would normally be around 20 pages. Hence, after fully transcribing 22 interviews I decided to listen, take notes, and only transcribe parts of the remaining eight interviews.

I transcribed those first 22 interviews almost verbatim keeping the text close to spoken language and noting down sounds like laughter and sighing as well as pauses and longer periods of silence. However, all quotations found in the dissertation have gone through a light editing; I have to a certain extent adjusted the spoken language, with its sets of rules, to written language. This is mostly a matter of correcting minor grammatical mistakes, erasing unnecessary repetitions, omitting non-lexical words and sounds (such as “eh” or “mm”), and working with punctuation to clarify the meaning of what is being said.

The reader should be aware that the participants spoke in Indian English, a form of English that has its own rhythm, syntax, usages, and to some extent

vocabulary. Indian English has established itself an independent language tradition and should not be mistaken for an impoverished version of British English. I have tried to avoid white-washing the quotations (Oliver et al., 2005), but on a few occasions I have adjusted the language so that the meaning might not be lost for readers not familiar with Indian English.

The coding procedure was not a linear process but a recursive and reiterative one. As the research questions were rather open in character and I had a large and varied set of data, I started out doing a *descriptive coding*⁴¹ (Saldaña, 2009, p. 70) suitable for this type of material, but I combined this approach with *process coding*⁴² (p.77) to capture more complex phenomena. To find an appropriate sets of codes was challenging, particularly the process of categorizing the codes. I tried out several versions on a limited part of the material until I found a workable way of coding the entire set of data.

At this stage of the project (after completing the fieldwork and doing most of the transcription), I had already started to identify themes and tentative findings (such as insecurity in everyday life, the importance of the relationship with God, personal transformation as a religious practice, and emotions as a structuring dimension of the participants' religious lives). However, the coding was not limited to these themes and tentative findings and I took a broad approach in building the codes and categories, allowing for the development of unexpected themes.

The next step in the research process was to organize and connect the various themes and findings that had emerged during the coding process in text. As described previously in this chapter, the major themes and subthemes of the analytic chapters were not chosen in advance. Apart from the research questions and theoretical framework, a number of factors influenced these choices such as what had been omitted in previous research, unexpected findings, and the need for contextualization. This was a process of both inclusion and exclusion; if other choices had been made, this dissertation would have looked different. Consequently, the content of this dissertation is not something that I went to the field and found. It is a result of a complex process of

⁴¹ Descriptive coding is sometimes referred to as “topic coding” and summarizes the topic of a passage (rather than content or meaning) in a word or simple phrase. For example, under the category “Media and Social Media” one will find codes such as “Facebook”, “WhatsApp”, “Instagram”, “TV”, and “Newspaper”.

⁴² Process coding uses gerunds (“-ing” words) to mark out action in the data. Examples of this in my code are “identifying with Biblical categories”, “serving God by helping others”, and “moving around in the city”.

theoretical and methodological decision-making over an extended period of time also depending on factors that I have not always been able to control.

A Note on Language

Compared to many other types of academic writing, ethnographic writing tends to be relatively informal. The use of an “objective” and neutral tone is rare, ethnographers ways of writing rather tend to reflect that they have used themselves as research instruments by being in the field seeking to understand the world and practices of whomever they are studying through experimental and empathetic engagement. Ethnographic writing commonly includes first-person accounts, a combination of emic and etic language, and is self-reflexive (Murchison, 2010). The present study follows such a tradition. To a certain degree, I have made use of different ethnographic writing techniques and made myself, as a researcher, visible in the text. I do not normally mark out when I am switching from an etic to an emic language or point out that an experience belongs to a participant. For example, rather than writing “according to person x, God confirmed the experience in a dream”, I state “God confirmed person x’s experience through a dream”. Hence, in the text, God routinely takes the form of an actor in his own right, a role that he was experienced to have in the women’s everyday lives.

Moreover, I have chosen to write about my ethnographic work in past tense. There are two main reasons for this: (1) by using past tense, I wish to mark that the text belongs to a certain time and period. The ways the participants expressed their religion at the time of the fieldwork have, most likely, changed by now. Using present tense risks giving the impression that their lived religion is unchanging and fixed which is certainly not the case. (2) The other main reason for using past tense is that I conducted my fieldwork before the outbreak of COVID-19. Sadly, the pandemic hit India very hard and, as I am writing, it is estimated that world-wide close to half a million people have died from coronavirus. People have lost loved ones, jobs, and have needed to rearrange their lives. Much has also changed in the way churches arrange their work, and I suspect how people do religion. There is a before and after COVID-19. This dissertation belongs to the time before the pandemic.

Ethical Considerations

The study has been reviewed and approved by the ethical review board in Uppsala (Sweden). It fulfills the formal ethical requirements for studies involving the collecting of personal data regarding religious beliefs and practices (for example, in terms of data collection, informed consent, storage of data and the code key for identification, and the rights of the participants). In this section, I would like to move beyond these formal ethical requirements and reflect on three ethical quandaries that came up during the research process: the question of informed consent, the anonymization of participants, and the political situation for Christians in India.

According to the Swedish Research Council, a main requirement for ethical research is informed consent, meaning that all participants should be amply informed about the study and voluntarily agree to participate, preferably giving their written consent. In ethnographic studies, where participant observation is a main method, such consent can be both complicated and difficult to achieve. As described above, I publicly announced and informed members of both congregations about the project and my role as a researcher. I also stated that if in any way someone did not want to appear in the study (for instance, in a description of a situation) it was not a problem and they could just notify me. However, I obtained individual consent only from the women who I interviewed. In order to provide some type of anonymization for the general churchgoer, the churches as well as all churchgoers have been given pseudonyms.

The procedure was different for the 30 Indian women on whom this study focuses. Prior to making an appointment for an interview, I tried to make sure that they had understood what the project was about, what participation involved, and what rights they had as participants. At the time of the interview, I gave the women a paper with written information about the study, and I explained the content. I did not ask for written consent, but instead I recorded their oral consent at the start of the interview.

Despite my efforts to provide information about the study, I sometimes doubted that I had made myself clear. The major problem was that to be a PhD student in Mission Studies (as my discipline at the time was called) means something very different in Sweden compare to India. Even though I explained that I had no theological intentions with the dissertation, that it was non-confessional in nature and a study of humans and their practice of religion, I tended to be perceived as a theologian aiming to contribute to the

church. As mentioned, many participants told me that they hoped that their participation and the dissertation would be of spiritual encouragement for others. In the study, I have tried to do justice to the experience of the women and to take care not to reduce or explain away what they have shared with me. I sincerely hope that they do not feel misrepresented even though the study might not be what they thought it would be.

For the purpose of anonymization, the participants have not just been given pseudonyms, I have also left out and altered some of the information that would make them easy to identify (such as the names of the organizations and companies they work for or the gender of their children). I also took the decision not to present a full list of the participants in which I link their pseudonyms to, for example, their geographical background, religious background, main occupation, and civil status. It would have been informative to present such a list in order to show the great diversity among members of the congregations. However, such a list would have made it fairly easy for the participants to identify one another. Parts of this information are found throughout the dissertation but by not providing a full list identification has been made more difficult.

A third ethical matter that I would like to bring attention to is the political situation in India regarding the Christian minority. As has been mentioned in Chapter 1, violence and persecution against Christians has been on the rise during the last two decades and anti-Christian attitudes are spreading. Nowadays, not only conversion is a sensitive question but also the work and influence of churches and Christian NGOs are being questioned. The situation has deteriorated with the present government which was reelected in 2019. This dissertation does not have a direct focus on any of these more sensitive topics, but it does include, in Chapter 7, a section on the minority situation as experienced by the participants. I have done my best to write that section with care since to document the situation for Christians in India seems especially important under the present circumstances.

The experiences of the women in the study, being middle class and living in a metropole, cannot be generalized to all Christians as the majority live in rural areas and are poor. Nonetheless, it is one part of the story. To continually document and bring attention to the situation of India's religious minorities is important.

Chapter 3. The Indian Middle Class

What it means to be middle class in India today is a debated issue (Belliappa, 2013; Bhatt et al., 2010; Dickey, 2012; Fadaee, 2014; Fernandes, 2006; Jodhka & Prakash, 2016; Prabhu, 2015; Säävälä, 2001). Scholars argue over whether the Indian middle class is to be defined as an income-based group, an aspirational-cultural class, or a product of discourse and social imagination. Nevertheless, most scholars would agree that being middle class in India is not just about a person's financial status, it is also a lifestyle project and to some degree a performative identity. There is a common understanding that the Indian middle class is a fragmented, divided, and heterogeneous group not only in terms of income but also regarding ethnicity, religion, gender, and language. Therefore, it is common to refer to the middle class in plural, that is, to speak about the middle classes.

To be middle class in India today is desirable position. There is a popular association between being middle class and being part of the emerging modern India. It also means belonging to a segment of society that through education and hard work is moving upwards and is contributing to the transformation of the nation (Fernandes, 2006; Jodhka & Prakash, 2016; Prabhu, 2015). With the growing popularity of the term, more and more people have come to identify themselves as middle class and class identity now challenges other identity markers such as a caste (Belliappa, 2013; Dickey, 2012; Jodhka & Prakash, 2016b; Ortegren, 2019; Säävälä, 2001; Wilson, 2019). Generally, a person's class position has become an increasingly important social marker for her or his place in the Indian society.

Members of the Indian middle classes tend to understand themselves as a class "in between", flanked on one side by the overwhelming "poor" and on the other by the rich, a small elite group (Dickey, 2012; Gilbertson, 2014; van Wessel, 2004). In contrast to the poor, members of the middle classes have sufficient income to live beyond survival level, but contrary to the rich, they live under an excessive pressure to work and earn in order to avoid downward mobility.

In this chapter, I will discuss what it means to belong to the middle class in India, with a particular focus on the so-called “new Indian middle class”. As will be shown throughout this dissertation, the participants’ class position markedly influenced their daily lives and consequently also their lived religion. The chapter also contains an introduction to Gurugram, the city where Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations were located and where the participants lived when I was doing the fieldwork. I will start the chapter with a short discussion on the relationship between caste and class.

Caste and Class

The relationship between caste and class in India is multifaceted since they are two separate but interconnected systems of social stratification (Sheth, 1999; Srinivas, 2003; Vaid, 2012). While these two social schemes partly overlap, they should not be confused with one another. One should be careful not to draw a direct line between, for example, being low caste and being poor, or being upper caste and being rich.⁴³

In the popular “textbook” version, caste is an ancient Hindu hierarchical structure based around ideas of purity and pollution. Four *varnas* make up the caste system that divides Hindus into Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (businesspersons and moneylenders), and Shudras (manual laborers). Dalits (formerly called “untouchables”) operate outside the scheme because they are considered “impure”. According to this textbook version, the caste system is a closed and rigid stratification system (Jodhka, 2012).

This oversimplified understanding of caste cannot convey the full complexity of caste in contemporary India (see e.g. Jodhka, 2012; Maiorano et al., 2021; Naudet, 2008; Sheth, 1999; Vaid, 2018). The caste system is a contested hierarchical system that has changed over time. It varies across regions and between urban and rural settings. Moreover, each *varna* is divided into thousands of *jatis* that are not ordered in a rigid way.⁴⁴

⁴³ A recent report from PEW research institute (2021:98) on religion in India did not find a strong correlation between recent financial hardship and caste identification. Respondents who said that they were unable to afford food, housing or medical care at some point in the last year were only slightly more likely than others to say that they were Scheduled Castes (SC) or Scheduled Tribes (ST). SC or ST groups constituted 37% of those surveyed in comparison to 31% non-SC or –ST.

⁴⁴ While the caste system tends to be a rather closed stratification system at the bottom and the top, most scholars agree that there is a “certain amount of fluidity” in the middle (see Vaid,

The hierarchical aspect of the caste system extends beyond the Hindu population since most Indians, regardless of religion, identify with a caste. It is also much more than a religious “ideology” since caste is reflected in social arrangements such as marriage, occupation inheritance, and power regimes (Jodhka, 2012; Vaid, 2012).

In the post-independence period, the Indian state took several initiatives in trying to reduce the influence of caste. Included in these were legal sanctions against practices of “untouchability”⁴⁵ as well as quotas for people from historically disadvantaged castes and tribes⁴⁶ in state-run educational institutions, public sector jobs, government positions, and in legislative bodies. Dalit movements have also played a role in bringing about change by carrying forward the agenda of Dalit rights and forming Dalit unions and political groups (Jodhka, 2012). Yet, it is still common for Dalits, Adivasi, and members of lower caste groups to experience discrimination and unequal economic opportunities.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, due to these and other initiatives, many members of these groups have experienced social and economic improvement.

What is more, with increasing urbanization, internal migration, economic enhancement, and the emergence of new jobs, class identity has come to challenge caste identity (Belliappa, 2013; Dickey, 2012; Jodhka & Prakash, 2016b; Ortengren, 2019; Säävälä, 2001; Wilson, 2019). Large Indian cities are like melting pots of people from different regions, castes, ethnicities, and religions. Since determining somebody’s caste in day-to-day interactions in urban centers can be difficult, class often plays a more decisive role in the creation of a personal space for action and social standing.⁴⁸ A person who is educated, has a well-paid job, speaks English, and behaves in a “respectable” way will, normally, be treated with respect in an urban setting.

2014 for further discussion). At a group level, caste mobility might occur through ritual and lifestyle imitation, that is, what M. N. Srinivas (1956) referred to as “Sanskritization”. However, mere imitation of a higher *jati* group without change in economic position will unlikely lead to upward caste mobility (Jodhka, 2012; Karanth, 1996). Those who wish to enhance their caste status need to negotiate their position within the local power structure. Such negotiation is done most effectively through a combination of change in ritual and economic status.

⁴⁵ The practice of treating anyone as “untouchable” has been constitutionally illegal since 1950.

⁴⁶ See note 7.

⁴⁷ It is worth noting, however, the above-mentioned PEW report (2021, p. 100) found that overall less than a quarter of Indian adults say they see evidence of widespread discrimination against the low caste groups SC/ST/OBC. For members of SC and ST the numbers are 26% for SC, 23% for ST, and 17% for OBC (p. 100).

⁴⁸ Indian surnames tend to indicate their *jati*. However, in large urban centers where people come from different regions of the country it can be difficult to place them in some sort of caste hierarchy by just hearing their name. Also, non-Hindus tend to have surnames not associated

Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations were, as religious communities, united by class rather than caste. With a few exceptions, the churchgoers in the two churches were middle-class professional internal migrants. While they tended to emphasize their different regional identities (for example, being from South India or Tamil Nadu), it was very rare for them to mention their caste and I never heard anyone else speak of somebody else's caste. In a way, this behavior is typical for the middle class among whom it is common to see caste as a parochial marker of identity (Belliappa, 2013). In the interviews, the participants claimed that there was no caste discrimination in Loving Assemblies of God or Church of All Nations⁴⁹ and several women pointed out that they did not know the castes of other churchgoers.

Overall, in the interviews with the participants, caste surfaced surprisingly little with most of the women maintaining that caste hierarchies did not have a major influence on their day-to-day lives in Gurugram.⁵⁰ As internal migrants, what made their lives complicated were such things as not being able to speak Hindi fluently, being from another part of the country, and being Christian. The women who had careers reported that their gender, rather than their caste, was a cause of discrimination.

As a theme, caste came up primarily in the interviews and in conversations that dealt with change in religious affiliation and marriage. Importantly, these two topics have to do with change in social status. Many women described how their change in religious affiliation (whether it concerned changing religion or moving from one Christian denomination to another) had given rise to strong reactions within their families. A major reason for this, according to the women, was that their families regarded Christianity in general, or Pentecostal Christianity in particular, as a low-caste religion. Concerning marriage, many of the participants privileged love or religion over caste in marriage. For some women, this choice had given rise to conflicts and tensions with their families because their parents wished that they would marry within their caste. However, there were also cases of arranged inter-caste marriages where the parents themselves had privileged religion over caste.

with their caste. There is also the possibility of hiding your caste identity by changing your name, not giving your surname or introducing yourself by another name.

⁴⁹ Notwithstanding the absence of caste discrimination in the churches, several participants from South India mentioned that they felt caste hierarchies impacted the life of congregations in the south.

⁵⁰ This is not to say that for the participants the caste system has no influence on everyday life in India in general.

While I discussed the impact of caste with the participants in the interviews, I did not ask which caste they themselves belonged to.⁵¹ It could be the case that none of the women belonged to any of the lowest castes and as a result did not face any severe discrimination. As mentioned above, the participants felt that caste hierarchies did not play a major role in their day-to-day lives in Gurugram, and in contrast, their class position was clearly reflected in much of their doing. As this is a study of everyday religion, I have chosen to focus on class rather than caste. If this had been a study on conversion or changing marriage arrangements among Pentecostals, I would, of course, have given caste a more prominent place.

The Indian Middle Class

The Indian middle class started taking shape during the colonial period. The British rulers could not govern the colony on their own and trained a large number of Indians to take care of the day-to-day running of the country (Jodhka & Prakash, 2016). These civil servants were educated and given employment within the colonial organization. It was during this period that English was introduced as the language of the middle class. The institutionalization of English education began to consolidate the colonial middle class who distinguished themselves from the traditional elite through their education and knowledge of English (Fernandes, 2006). Most of those belonging to this new societal group came from relatively higher levels of the caste system.

The second phase in the formation of the Indian middle class took place after independence, that is, after 1947. Once again, the state played an important and active role in promoting the expansion of the middle class. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had a vision for a modern India that required a large number of trained and skilled personnel in various fields from technology and medicine to administration and education (Prabhu, 2015). These public and state employees came from different backgrounds and produced a more

⁵¹ There were several reasons why I did not ask the participants about their caste. As caste was a topic that was seldom raised in the churches, I hesitated to be the Westerner who stressed the importance of caste and grouped people by their caste. In the context of the churches, I felt that caste was a private matter and that an effort was being made to downplay differences in caste.

heterogeneous middle class than under the colonial period. This was accomplished through the initiation of reservations⁵² for people from marginalized and disadvantaged castes and tribes (Jodhka & Prakash, 2016).

As large segments of the post-independence middle class relied on the state for employment, they tended to direct their political activity by making economic claims on the state (for example, by demanding higher wages and benefits). However, the state struggled to manage the competing interests of the now more heterogeneous middle class (Fernandes, 2006). Over time, the middle class became increasingly dissatisfied and a feeling grew that the state had failed to deliver the promised benefits of modernity.

The third phase of the formation the Indian middle class began with the adoption of new economic policies during the 1980s and 1990s. A number of factors influenced the implementation of these economic reforms including a relatively slow growth rate, recurring economic crises, frustration among the middle class, pressures from the private capital within the country, and a rapidly changing global economic environment (Jodhka & Prakash, 2016). Minor reforms were made during the 1980s but it was in 1990s that crucial steps were taken (Joshi & Little, 1996). By the end of the 1990s, India was in a major economic crisis and turned to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank for a bailout. A condition for the loan given by the IMF and World Bank was that India would make major economic liberalization reforms, including a deregulation of markets, reduction of taxes, and allowance for greater foreign investment.

The economic liberalization opened up the country for the global economy and caused the private sector to boom. Among those who enthusiastically welcomed the new economic reforms were large sections of the middle class (Jodhka & Prakash, 2016). Their already relatively strong position in Indian society meant that they could more easily benefit economically from these reforms. However, what was perhaps more significant was that the growth of the private sector opened up job opportunities for a large number of aspiring Indians thus causing the middle class to expand extensively. The middle class of the post-liberalization period is widely known as “the new middle class”. The participants in this study almost exclusively belonged to this segment of the middle class.

⁵² See note 7.

There is no consensus among scholars about what is “new” about the new Indian middle class. Nevertheless, the new middle class tends to be distinguished by participation in the global economy and culture and, to some extent, by relatively new wealth and limited cultural capital (Belliappa, 2013; Fernandes, 2006; Prabhu, 2015). The new middle class has come to embody the emergence of India as an international economic player, the new standard for an Indian nation that is competing in the global economy and market. Hence, the rise of the new middle class has become a cultural national project. This group plays an important role in forming and shaping the identity of India as a modern nation.

The economic situation for the new middle class tends to be less stable than it was/is for the “old”, government-employed middle class. The private labor market is characterized by increasing job competition and insecurity as well as a trend toward the employment of contract workers (Fernandes, 2006). Moreover, the location of the new middle class within the global labor market makes them vulnerable to economic shifts and changes (Belliappa, 2013). Hence, the new middle class needs to deal with and adjust to a more insecure economic situation. There is a high pressure to earn and work in order to avoid downward mobility.

While the labor market in the private economy is to a higher degree merit driven, the cultural and social capital that often comes with belonging to the upper castes, as with having a middle- or upper-class family background, still counts (Fernandes, 2006). For example, upper caste individuals entering the middle class have at their disposal the resources that were attached to the status of their caste in the traditional hierarchy (Sheth, 1999). Similarly, individuals with a background in middle- or upper-class families tend to benefit in the private economy through their fluency in English, access to reputable colleges, social networks, exposure to a metropolitan lifestyle, and familiarity with other cultures (Belliappa, 2013).

Nevertheless, the markers and symbols for a new middle-class identity are overall less related to traditional symbols and boundaries than they were for the middle class during the colonial period and post-independence period (Belliappa, 2013; Dickey, 2012; Jodhka & Prakash, 2016). The new middle class, to a higher degree, establish their class identity through their lifestyle which includes consumer goods such as expensive smartphones, laptops, motor vehicles, modern kitchen appliances, and branded clothes.

While there is a consensus among scholars that the middle class has expanded both horizontally (in numbers) and vertically (in economic diversity),

there is no agreement on the total size of the middle class. Various definitions and methods of identifying middle-class individuals or households provide divergent results for the size of the middle class resulting in estimates from 5% to 25% of India's total population (Jodhka & Prakash, 2016). In this dissertation, I have followed the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) definition of a middle-class household which is a household with an annual income between Rs. 250,000 and Rs. 1,250,000.

The majority of the research participants lived in a household with a monthly income above Rs. 50,000. Hence, most of the women belonged to a middle- or upper-middle-class household. In terms of background, the majority came from a lower-middle-class background, but there were also a sizable minority who had been raised in either working-class or middle-middle-class families.

To live in a middle- or upper-middle-class household – as the participants did – implies that you are in a privileged economic position. It means that you can afford a lifestyle that the majority of the Indian population can only imagine. The participants' economic standing had a great impact on their everyday lives. Among aspects affected were the area they resided in, the physical comfort of their homes, where they shopped, which school they enrolled their children, what they ate, how they moved around in the city, how they dressed, what they did on their vacation, and what health services were available to them.

However, as will be further discussed in Chapter 7, despite their privileged economic situation, the participants' lives were marked by economic insecurity and fear of downward mobility. The combination of living in a city where the cost of living was high and the competition for jobs was intense gave rise to many worries among the women.

A Gendered Experience

In the post-liberalization period, structural and cultural shifts brought about significant changes for women in India. Women now have more opportunities to pursue higher education as well as greater support from their families if they wish to be involved in paid labor. As a sizable number of middle-class women have entered the workforce (mainly due to the expansion of the private sector), they have achieved benefits such as having their own income and

greater freedom of mobility. Equipped with capital resources and a new confidence, Indian middle-class women have strengthened their position in their families and increased their decision-making power (Belliappa, 2013; Derné et al., 2013; Rangwala et al., 2020). However, as will be discussed, to be a wife and a mother are still the primary roles for women of all classes (Gilbertson, 2014; Puri, 1999; Radhakrishnan, 2009).

The number of women pursuing higher education has not only increased but attitudes around education have also changed.⁵³ While education has long been important for the middle class in India, the idea that it would lead to women's active involvement in paid labor is rather new. During the post-independence period, women's education was, among the middle class, promoted primarily as something that would make women into intelligent companions to their husbands and responsible mothers to their children (Chatterjee, 1989; Chaudhuri, 2012; Donner, 2006). In contemporary India, higher education for women is increasingly considered a means to a well-paid job rather than a stop-gap arrangement before marriage (Belliappa, 2013; Rangwala et al., 2020).

That middle-class women in growing numbers are seeking higher education and are involved in paid labor means that their public presence has increased. A middle-class woman who regularly moved around without company and interacted with male strangers would, only 20 years ago, have been regarded with much suspicion (Derné et al., 2013). While men, by all accounts, still outnumber women in public spaces, women have gained acceptance in the public realm in urban areas (Nair, 2020). Women's security, nevertheless, continues to be a concern. For this reason, shopping malls and other middle-class "fortresses" have become popular places for middle- and upper-class women to spend time (Voyce, 2007).⁵⁴ Indeed, research suggests that for reasons of security women commonly restrict their movements to certain times, places, and areas (Gilbertson, 2014; Nair, 2020; Twamley & Sridharth, 2019).

Women's participation in paid employment has also started to change their position within the family which enables them, to some degree, to redefine

⁵³ The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for women in higher education 2019–2020 was 26.4% (total 27.1%) in the 18–23 age group. Women constitute 49% of the total enrollment (*Higher Education Report*, 2020)

⁵⁴ People who do not look "proper" are literally excluded from shopping malls and other middle class places of entertainment by guards.

gender identities (Belliappa, 2013; Rangwala et al., 2020). In many middle-class households, the extra income that women provide is essential for the family's economic stability and comfort, and it enables many couples to secure their middle-class status (Belliappa, 2013; Lahiri-Dutt & Sil, 2014; Radhakrishnan, 2009). This, of course, brings importance and prestige to women's work. Moreover, increased access to money enables women to reinforce their status by performing male-coded functions (Lahiri-Dutt & Sil, 2014; Rangwala et al., 2020), such as bearing the educational expenses of children, paying for the renovation of their parents' house, buying expensive gifts for their husbands, or starting their own business.

Nevertheless, marriage and motherhood are still considered to be the primary gender roles for women of all classes in India (Belliappa, 2013; Gilbertson, 2014; Radhakrishnan, 2009). A respectable femininity includes prioritizing family before one's career and working for the family rather than for money. Women are also expected to accept a greater share of responsibility for the home and the running of the household (Lahiri-Dutt & Sil, 2014). Due to these expectations, it is common that women settle for less time-consuming jobs or positions rather than having a career of their own. Moreover, even though professional employment is associated with being a modern Indian woman, to be a homemaker is considered the decent middle-class option for women (Donner, 2008).

As is often emphasized in research, women in India have come to symbolize the duality of an Indian modernity that embraces tradition (Belliappa, 2013; Chaudhuri, 2012; Radhakrishnan, 2009). The ideal women would be a perfect blend of the traditional qualities of domestic and caring skills, knowledge of religious rituals and practices, together with modern abilities acquired through education and employment opportunities. Importantly, to hold on to traditional values in India is, first and foremost, associated with maintaining "Indian" or "our" values (as opposed to "Western" values) rather than "old" or "conservative" values. There is a widespread positive association with being traditional.

To become a mother is widely regarded as a women's highest achievement in India (Belliappa, 2013; Bhambhani & Inbanaathan, 2018; Puri, 1999).⁵⁵ Motherhood gives women respectability and authority. It is a role that

⁵⁵ Given the respect accorded motherhood, there is a corresponding social stigma to being childless whether involuntarily or by choice.

strengthens a woman's status in the conjugal home and secures her position as wife and daughter-in-law. At the same time, becoming a mother adds to the duties of women who have the primary responsibility for caring and raising the children as well as making sure that they do well in school (Belliappa, 2013; Donner, 2006). Due to the expenses that come with raising and educating children in contemporary India, it is rare that middle-class families have more than two children (Robinson, 2007).

However, while there is still a strong norm among the middle class in India that women should be family oriented, the understanding of what it means to be a wife, mother, and daughter-in-law has changed (Belliappa, 2013; Donner, 2016; Puri, 1999). For most middle-class women, marriage is not something that just happens to them, it is a choice they actively make together with their parents. Moreover, the norm of the subordinated wife has weakened and women (and men) now expect their marriage to contain a certain degree of companionship, equality, and intimacy.⁵⁶ Many structural and cultural inequalities continue to affect women though, such as differences in income, the continuation of the (male)breadwinner-(female)caregiver family model, and inequalities in decision-making power (Lahiri-Dutt & Sil, 2014; Puri, 1999; Radhakrishnan, 2009).

The Middle Class and Religion

A noticeable feature of Indian middle class religion is that the economic development of the last decades has not led to a decline in religiosity. Rather, the country has experienced a rising tide for popular Hindu practices and public display of religion (Nanda, 2009). The Indian state has played an important part in facilitating this trend by fusing Hindu religiosity with national identity and pride. A recent report from PEW Research Center (2021:130) showed that 57% of Indian adults say it is "very important" to be Hindu as a way of being "truly Indian" (among Hindus the number was 64%). Moreover, the same report stated that 97% of Indian adults believe in God, 84% consider religion to be "very important" in their lives, and 60% pray daily. As mentioned above, the Indian model of modernity differs from a Western model insofar as there is no contradiction in India between being religious and being modern (Belliappa, 2013; Choukroune & Bhandari, 2018).

⁵⁶ A so-called "companionate marriage" (Puri, 1999, p. 136).

In fact, religion seems to play a critical role in formulating an upwardly middle-class identity and consolidating middle-class status.⁵⁷ Research suggests that individuals and families that have experienced upward mobility often perform this new identity by taking up and engaging in new religious practices traditionally associated with castes above themselves (Ortegren, 2019; Säävälä, 2001; Waghorne, 2001; Wilson, 2019). By doing this, they increase their cultural capital and gain status in their community and neighborhood.

An example of this has been documented in an ethnographic study of an urban neighborhood in Udaipur (Rajasthan) by Jennifer D. Ortegren (2019) who shows that by expanding their ritual repertoire families establish their new (lower) middle-class status. Ortegren focuses specifically on the adoption of ritual practices surrounding the *Ganesh Chaturthi* festival.⁵⁸ By purchasing a Ganesha *mūrti*,⁵⁹ installing it in their home, and inviting neighbors to join in worship, middle-class families not only display their new wealth, but they also contribute to marking the neighborhood as middle class. Likewise, Nicole A. Wilson (2019) shows how women's participation in *satsang* groups⁶⁰ informs their middle-class identity. By engaging in what are viewed as high-caste Hindu performances of piety, these women renew and recreate themselves religiously as middle class.

In this context, the participants' decision to become Believers appears incongruous. Not only is there a widespread understanding that Christianity is a lower caste religion, there is also a perception among Indian Christians that Pentecostal Christianity is a form of Christianity that attracts the poor and marginalized. Why would a person with a relatively unstable middle-class status choose to join a movement when this clearly risks undermining her/his social status? By becoming Believers, the participants not only set themselves in opposition to their families, they also lost status within their communities and complicated the process of finding a future spouse. I will come back to this question later in the dissertation.

⁵⁷ Unlike Sanskritization (see footnote 50) where groups in a sense imitated the ritual life of higher *jatis* to gain a higher caste status, research seems to suggest that middle-class individuals and families that engage in new (high-caste) religious practices do this primarily to show their acquired cultural competence and to display their new wealth.

⁵⁸ A ten-day festival honoring the elephant-headed god Ganesh.

⁵⁹ A papier-mâché image of the deity.

⁶⁰ Singing groups of devotional songs.

Gurugram

Gurugram, or Gurgaon as it was called until 2017, is one of India's major international business hubs and is located just 30 kilometers south of New Delhi. The city is part of the National Capital Region (NCR) but belongs to the state Haryana. Gurugram is a distinctive example of a post-liberalization Indian urban center. During the last three decades, the city has experienced an enormous transformation from being a small suburb consisting mostly of agricultural land to a national financial center famous for its many skyscrapers. The city is crammed with companies such as Coca-Cola, BMW, Hyundai, American Express, Google, General Electric, Microsoft, Dell, Pepsi and IBM, and it draws professionals from all over India and abroad. Due to migration, the middle-class population is growing rapidly in Gurugram. This has led to a building boom of modern residential apartment buildings as well as the emergence of shopping malls, schools, golf courses, entertainment areas, hospitals, and parks. Gurugram has the third highest per capita income in India.

Before the 1991 economic reforms, the only major company present in Gurugram was Maruti, an Indian automobile manufacturer. However, after General Electric established their headquarters in the city in 1997, the rush to build and invest in Gurugram was massive despite the initial lack of basic infrastructure or public services (Goldstein, 2016). Rather than waiting for the Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) to catch up with the pace of development, private companies took matters into their own hands and built roads, drilled bore wells, installed huge diesel generators, set up their own fire service, waste disposal system, and so on (Doshi, 2016). Accordingly, Gurugram has become a city built and primarily run by the private sector. Gurugram has also managed to establish itself as a medical center and attracts medical tourists from all over India and abroad (Sharma, 2016). In both Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations, medical tourists from various African countries regularly visited the Sunday services.

Today, Gurugram hosts a population of over one million people consisting largely of three distinct groups: professional internal migrants, migrant labors, and native Haryanis. Professionals from all over India have moved to Gurugram in search of career opportunities and well-paid jobs. They generally belong to the middle and upper class of Indian society and live within gated communities or in rented apartments in well-off neighborhoods (Chatterji, 2013). The majority of the members of the two churches belonged to this category of Gurugram's population.

Migrant laborers work mainly within the domestic service sector (as drivers, chefs, housekeepers, security personnel, *dhobis* (washerwomen or men) and so on), in the construction and manufacturing industry, or as service personal or caretakers at Gurugram's many malls, office parks and gated communities. These migrant laborers belong to the lower middle class, working class, or poorer strata of society and often live in informal settlements. The professional migrants and laborers live vastly different lives in Gurugram, but they depend on each other for service and work (Srivastava, 2014). The native Haryanis constitute a diverse group including former farmers (whose pigs still roam around in the city in great numbers), small shopkeepers, and the newly wealthy who sold their farmland to private developers (Goldstein, 2016).

This economic segregation has given rise to a spatial segregation in the city. Those who can afford it tend to live in gated residential complexes which often provide facilities such as gyms, parks, full power back-up systems, and private water supply. These gated communities, together with office buildings, shopping malls, golf courses, and entertainment areas, stand out like islands of wealth that the middle class move between. In so doing, they avoid encountering many social problems facing Gurugram such as poverty, overcrowding, crime, inefficient waste management, and free-roaming animals. However, as much as the middle class wants to avoid the most unpleasant parts of the city, there are problems that affect members of all classes such as the nightmarish traffic, dangerous levels of pollution, and seasonal flooding.

Spatially, Gurugram is divided into sectors that in turn are divided into blocks each of which falls under the governance of one of the many planning agencies and builders. For example, in sector 28 (one of the most central) one will find the very affluent Sushant Lok 1 Block A with its large villas, populous Chakkarpur urban village, and large gated complex of tall and modern apartment buildings. Commercial corridors, roadways and several major highways border these sectors that, from the air, look like an uneven grid. The urban landscapes of the west and east parts of the city differ markedly. The building boom and modernization of the city have mainly taken place in the east where one will find most of the international companies, skyscrapers and the largest malls. When migrant professionals refer to Gurugram, they tend to mean the east side of the city whereas the west is often spoken of as an under-developed remnant from the 1990s. I spent most of my time in the east part of Gurugram since the two churches, as well as most of the participants' homes, were located there.

The Christian Population in Gurugram

According to the 2011 census of India, 0.2% of the population in Haryana is Christian; only Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have smaller percentages of Christians. While the number is slightly higher for the district of Gurugram (0.67%) and it is likely that the actual numbers are somewhat higher,⁶¹ Christians constituted a tiny minority in Gurugram.⁶²

In an online search,⁶³ 39 active churches were found in Gurugram. They were distributed among different denominations as follows: Catholic (8),⁶⁴ Orthodox (2), Mar Thoma Syrian Church (1),⁶⁵ Mainline Protestant (9), Evangelical Protestant (4), and Pentecostal (19).⁶⁶ Most of these churches were established in the last two decades which indicates that they have been set up to cater for the professional migrants who have moved to Gurugram from various parts of India. Some of the churches target specific linguistic groups although more commonly English is used as the common language.

While there have been no riots or large outbreaks of violence against Christians in Gurugram, the minority situation made the pastors and members of Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations feel vulnerable and behave accordingly. Both pastors told me that they had struggled to find a property owner who would lease a space for a church. The participants experienced Hindus, in general, as respectful or at least tolerant of them as Christians. At the same time, in the interviews they remarked on certain areas of tension that they had to navigate in their daily interactions with Hindu neighbors, friends, colleagues, relatives, and so on. Most participants would adjust certain of their behaviors so as not to cause any offense, for example, by ensuring they brought vegetarian food to work and accepting, but not eating, *prasād* (consecrated food) if it was offered. I will discuss this further in Chapter 7.

⁶¹ See discussion in Chapter 1.

⁶² I have not been able to find a single study of any of the different Christian communities in Gurugram and thus it is very difficult to say something general about the life of the Christian population in the city.

⁶³ The search was done on February 6, 2020. It is to be expected that the number of churches is higher than what can be found on the internet.

⁶⁴ Of the eight Catholic churches, three were Syro-Malabar Churches.

⁶⁵ Mar Thoma Syrian Church is a Reformed Oriental church that was established in 1876. It follows the (West) Syrian liturgy but is in fellowship with the Anglican Communion.

⁶⁶ This group is diverse and, going by the information on the websites, appears to consist of six churches belonging to established Pentecostal denominations, eight churches that are part of non-denominational Charismatic denominations, and five non-denominational Charismatic churches.

As I now move to the empirical section of the dissertation, I hope that the reader will have gained an understanding of what it might mean to be middle class in contemporary India together with a sense of the kind of city the participants lived in. What now follows is a bridging chapter between the introductory part and the more analytic chapters. In this chapter, we will meet four of the women who are part of this study and learn about their religious trajectories in this first glimpse of what lived Pentecostal Christianity can look like among Indian middle-class women.

PART II. EMPIRICAL SECTION

Chapter 4. Followers of Christ

To become a Christian is not about conversion and it is not about faith, it is about [a] relationship. You know, when you talk about Christianity it is mere relationship with Jesus Christ. It is not a caste, it is not a community, and it is not (..) a kind of (..) what do you say, it is not a culture. It is just a relationship. (Elina, 2016)

According to the women in the two churches Loving Assemblies of God and Church of all Nations, to be a Believer was, first and foremost, about living in a relationship with God. It was about being a person who trusted and depended on Jesus, rather than about correct practice and faith or about identifying with a particular denomination or church. Several women also pointed out that being a Believer was different from being “religious”. The latter was associated with performing rituals, visiting temples and holy places, abiding by a set of rules, and living according to caste communities’ traditions. In contrast, to be a Believer was about committing to Christ and following him as his disciple.

This relational approach to religion left plenty of room for individual interpretations and adaptations. Love and loyalty, rather than rigor and conformity, were bywords that guided the women’s way of doing religion. In fact, among the women in the two congregations, there was no standardized way to live as a Believer. Depending on, among other things, day-to-day circumstances, personal preferences, convictions, weaknesses and strengths, the women laid emphasis on different aspects of their religious lives and involved themselves in these practices to various degrees.

In order for the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the diverse ways that the participants lived out their religion, I begin this chapter by introducing individual portrayals of four of the women who are part of this study. I will briefly describe how they became Believers and ended up in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations.

The women are Rachel, a wealthy woman with a strong passion for serving God; Parvati, a medical doctor who struggles to combine work and family life; Joy, who comes from a Mar Thoma background; and Nisha, an unmarried woman who tries to keep up with the fast pace in Gurugram. The reader should

note that these four women are examples of what it might mean to be a Believer though it would be impossible to give a full picture of the women in the two churches or cover all the ways in which they expressed their religion. The portrayals are followed by a discussion of what these women's stories might tell us about their middle-class Pentecostal religious trajectories, as well as their lived religion.

Rachel

I clearly remember the first time I met Rachel. It was a Sunday morning in December and I had not yet introduced myself to the congregation of Church of All Nations. Even so, Rachel warmly greeted my husband and me and said that we must be missing home now that Christmas was approaching, whereupon she gave us a Christmas cake. I soon came to realize that Rachel was regarded as an out-of-the-ordinary person in Church of All Nations. Despite being a woman, she was given opportunities to teach, to be a worship leader, and to prophesize. When Rachel raised her voice, both men and women listened.

I knew that Rachel's husband, Aron, who was similarly regarded with high esteem in the church, had his own company. However, it was not until I first visited their apartment that I understood how wealthy they were. The apartment was huge with all floors of marble and with modern art hanging on the walls. They had a full time chef, a driver, and two summer residences.

Rachel had been born and brought up in a Pentecostal lower-middle-class family in New Delhi. Since both her parents came from Kerala, the family had attended a Malayalam-speaking church. Rachel, who was not fluent in the language, had struggled to follow the pastor and found church uninteresting. She therefore became, as she called it, "an uninvolved churchgoer". In her early twenties, Rachel fell in love with Aron who was at that time part of a mainline Protestant church. Against their parents' will, they married. As Rachel had always dreamt of getting married adorned with jewelry, something that is unthinkable in many South Indian Pentecostal circles,⁶⁷ the wedding took place in a mainline Protestant church. After their wedding, the couple continued as members of Aron's church.

⁶⁷ See note 24.

Rachel finished her master's degree in social science at a reputed college in New Delhi but stopped working and became a homemaker after the birth of her first son, Reuben. In the next few years, a daughter and another son were born. While the children were still small, the family became caught up in a personal financial crisis. The situation was so bad that the couple struggled to provide enough food for their children by the end of each month. In the middle of their trials, God gave the couple a Bible verse that would change their religious lives henceforth, namely, Matt 4:4, "man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God". Rachel and Aron decided to join an English-speaking Pentecostal church and give God higher priority in their daily lives. A few months later, their financial status started to change and their journey towards their now wealthy state began.

When I asked Rachel about her everyday life, she told me that even though she was not involved in paid labor she was a worker, "a kingdom worker". Despite having chosen the more traditional homemaker-path, she was definitely a modern woman in the sense that she was outgoing, urbane, and independent. Apart from her engagement with meetings and events in Church of All Nations, Rachel was very active in the church's WhatsApp group and used the platform to encourage friends and church members in their walk with Christ. She also ran an ecumenical women's group and looked after a charity program for poor farmers. On top of that, she was devoted to her intercessory prayer call which meant that she spent much time in prayer. She would even go abroad to pray for a particular countries. In 2014, she received a call from God to go to Scandinavia for prayer:

God has shown me places and I have been there. I have even come to your country, to Sweden. Once as I was praying in my private time and the Lord put in my heart "I will take you into the remote frontiers". So suddenly it came, because I usually pray with a world map, suddenly it came to me, these remote frontiers, Norway, Sweden, Finland. I was like doubting because going from India to these countries is big money. And (..) usually many people don't understand intercessory call. Not everybody can afford that also . . . So, I was thinking, did I hear right or not? So I just told the Lord that, "Okay Lord, if it is from you, you have to put that in my husband's heart." Within two weeks, my husband came home and said, "Sushil from Sweden called me and he was saying: why don't you make a trip with your family to Sweden and Norway. These are very beautiful countries". As he said that, I said, "Go for it, because God already put in my heart." So then, by 2014, by God's grace, we went there. (Rachel, 2017)

Overall, Rachel was not the typical kind of woman found in Church of All Nations or Loving Assemblies of God. The family's wealth gave her a unique

opportunity to spend a great deal of her time engaged with the kingdom of God. Overall, within Church of All Nations Rachel and Aron materialized the idea of the prosperous family. Their life was living proof that God would bless the faithful and that upward mobility could be achieved through loyalty to God. The fact that Rachel made such good use of her family's wealth and engaged herself in ministry made other women in the church admire her.

Parvati

As with middle-class women in general in India, many of the participants in this study struggled to combine work and family life. Becoming a wife and mother meant the participants faced intricate questions concerning their professional lives. Almost all participants had a master's degree and they held or had held well-paid positions within their professions, and many enjoyed working. Consequently, whether to become a homemaker, have a career, or look for a less time consuming job was not a self-evident choice. For Parvati, the issue of work-family balance had been particularly pressing in recent years.

In conversation with Parvati, she spoke about how the last two years had played out as an "Abraham-and-Isaac story" for her beginning with the birth of her daughter. After a short maternal leave, she was supposed to go back to her job as a surgeon at one of the leading hospitals in Gurugram. She asked the management to adjust her schedule to make it easier to combine work with family life but her request was denied. In her heart, Parvati felt that it was not right to spend so much time working now that she was a mother. Then again, she was convinced that God had called her to become a doctor and had promised her that she would be successful.

At that time, her husband lost his job and Parvati became even more confused about what to do. In a leap of faith and an act of obedience to God, she resigned from her position, potentially sacrificing her future career in medicine, and she started working part time as a doctor on call. Living in Gurugram is expensive and, with only one part-time salary, the family struggled. Parvati spent a lot of time in prayer and reading the Bible. She realized that God, above all, called her to be wife and mother and that he was trying to instill in her faith in the fact that he would bring her success but this would not be at the her family's expense. Parvati made a promise that she would always put her family first and then her heart was at peace. It so happened, as a miracle, that her previous position became vacant and this time Parvati was able to

negotiate her working hours. God gave back “Isaac”, that is, her career, to her. She had passed the test.

Parvati came from Tamil Nadu and had been brought up in a Hindu family. However, since her parents had sent her to a Catholic school, she was exposed to Christianity early in life. Parvati never considered becoming a Christian during her childhood years, but she learnt about Jesus and came to know him as a god (among others) who answers prayers.

When time for college approached, she started to pray consistently to Jesus to help her with her studies. Her parents wanted her to become an engineer but Parvati desired to become a doctor. It turned out that she was accepted into one of the most esteemed medical programs in India. She attributed this achievement to her prayers to Jesus and decided to continue to pray to him. After completing her graduate studies with top grades and moving to New Delhi for further studies, she started to attend a church. After a while, she felt that the way she was living was not quite right. Her student life in New Delhi was full of temptations that were hard to resist. Parvati was ashamed that she could not control her desires and she increasingly felt the need for Jesus to deliver her. Leaving her former gods behind and accepting Jesus as her only savior was an emotionally difficult decision and a slow process. During this time, she never told her parents about the changes that took place in her. However, when the elders in the church brought her a proposal for marriage, she knew that the time had come to reveal her secret to her parents.

And when they [elders in the church] shared the proposal, you know, initially I was afraid because (..) all along I was looking for a Believer-partner, but the moment they brought this partner I was like “How will I go and tell my parents? How will they accept? How will things proceed?” Because after I came to Delhi and I became part of the church, everything was hidden. They [my parents] were not aware of it, not a single bit. Because I knew that the moment, anything is laid open in front of them, they would try to stop it. I didn’t want to, you know, the growth in the Lord to get affected. So (..) I would, my going to the church, being part of the foundation courses, everything was hidden from my parents. So for me to tell to them, that first I have become a Christian or having received Jesus as my Lord. And then marry a Christian boy (..) Something like throwing the big stone over them. I did not want to hurt my parents, you can understand for them it is a big shock. (Parvati, 2017)

As expected, Parvati’s parents became very upset when she finally told them that she had become a Believer and was planning to marry a boy from the church she attended. Her father even wanted her to leave the house and threatened her that she would be blacklisted from the family. The elders in the

church advised her to show patience, respond with love, and pray for her parents. After declaring herself a Believer, Parvati's relationship with her parents was very tense for almost a year though eventually they accepted the situation. While her parents still did not approve of her decisions, Parvati now had a well-functioning relationship with them and met regularly.

Parvati was a woman with a strong commitment to her church. She and her family would try to attend all meetings that took place in Church of All Nations including cell groups, prayer drives, picnics, movie nights, and testimony services. However, when it came to her personal prayer life and Bible reading, Parvati struggled. She told me that it was difficult to find time to sit down and spend time with God and when she did she was easily distracted. Parvati also described herself as an introvert who often felt uncomfortable to sharing her struggles with other church members and her testimony with non-Christians. Her efforts to reach out with the gospel were therefore limited to those she cared most for, her family and a few close friends.

Joy

It was easy to connect with Joy. She was open, entertaining, and charming. However, Joy also had a serious side and was deeply committed to following Jesus, guided by the Bible. Her commitment to the Word led her to question not only her parents, relatives, and husband, but also pastors of the churches she had attended. She was a person who did not easily accept the word of authorities.

Joy had been born and brought up in New Delhi in a family that belonged to the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. Even though her parents raised her as a Christian and took her to Sunday school, she described her turn to Pentecostal Christianity as a radical transformation. This transformation was a slow process and started when her parents sent her to Mount Carmel, a Protestant school in New Delhi. Slowly she realized that Jesus was not only a god but also her personal savior. Joy described how there are tensions between Mar Thoma Christians and Pentecostals (especially in Kerala, where Joy's parents originally came from) so the news that she wanted to attend a Pentecostal church was not received well at home. In her family and among her relatives, Pentecostal Christianity was associated with people of poor and low caste background. Her parents became especially concerned about how this change in religious allegiance would affect her marriage prospects.

Indeed, Joy had refused to marry any of the boys with a Mar Thoma background that her parents suggested. As the years passed, she finished her Master's in Chinese Language and Literature and started working at American Express. Now her parents started to worry that she might never marry. During this time, she discovered Rajkumar Ramachandran, a famous Bible teacher and revival preacher. Ramachandran emphasized obedience to God and Joy became even more convinced that the only right thing was to marry a Believer. From Ramachandran, she learnt how to read the Bible and she realized how important it was to seek and dwell in God's presence and that if one chooses to be an obedient follower of Christ one is eventually rewarded.

Through a friend's mother she heard about a Believer named Ajay who was looking for a wife. They met, felt an instant rapport, and the marriage was arranged. Even though her relatives were against it, her parents were relieved that she had finally settled as she had already turned 28.⁶⁸ Soon after their wedding, Joy and Ajay bought an apartment in Gurugram and she became pregnant. They looked for a Pentecostal or Evangelical church nearby and that is how they ended up in Loving Assemblies of God.

At the time that I met Joy, she had quit her job to take care of her daughter and the household. She told me that from time to time she felt a bit isolated and bored, but that overall she enjoyed being with her daughter as well as the possibility it gave her to spend more time with God. She was planning to start working again when her daughter was old enough for school.

In her everyday life, Joy tried to be obedient to the Bible, whether it concerned what she ate and drank, her interaction with her Hindu neighbors, her attitude, how she spent her money, or treated her helper. However, her interpretation allows some flexibility. For example, when we talked about the Bible saying that the man is "the head of the household", she made the following comment:

I think (...) in decisions, he [my husband] takes the lead. But (...) he is not head in an absolute sense. He should listen to his wife, see if she makes sense, if they agree or not. Also, he is a head only if he is doing something (...) biblically right. For example, like I told you about giving a bribe. Saying, "I am the head I will do that". I don't think he will be the head there. So I would not let him do that, I fought, made a scene there. So (...) that way he is not the head. But the Bible says that man is head of the woman and Christ is the head of man. So only if a man is submitting to Christ will he continue his position as the head of the wife. Otherwise, he automatically will lose it. (Joy, 2016)

⁶⁸ The mean age at marriage for women in India 2018 was 22.3 years (ORGI, 2018)

In the quotation, Joy refers to an incident when she and her husband were applying for a loan which they were denied because Joy refused, due to her religious beliefs, to give a bribe to the banker. Her husband had tried to convince her to accept “the terms”, but Joy had stood fast by her decision and eventually they got the loan without giving a bribe. As her husband had not behaved “biblically” in the situation, Joy reasoned that she was not compelled to follow his lead even though he technically was “the head of the household”. Hence, in her opinion, a Believer needed to be critical and reflective about living life as a follower of Christ.

Nisha

The majority of the women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations were married or lived with their parents. Only a small number of women had moved to Gurugram on their own. Nisha was one of them. She was 32 years old and came from Sikkim in Northeast India. She shared an apartment with two friends, a Hindu and a Buddhist. When I asked Nisha if differences in religion had any impact on the relationship with her friends, she gave the following answer:

We are good friends. Both of them have (..) met so many people, they have traveled. One has even studied in UK. That [difference in religion] never had any impact on our (..) you know the difference in religion, do not have any impact on our friendship. We have all been respectful of each other. It has always been good. (Nisha, 2017)

For Nisha, it was important not to discriminate between people but to treat everybody with respect. She had herself grown up in an interfaith family. Her mother was Christian and her stepfather was Buddhist. During her teenage years, she had felt confused and unsure about her religious persuasion. Her parents had always told her that she was free to choose whatever path she wanted. In fact, it was not until recently that Nisha had decided that Jesus was the person she wanted to follow.

A role model for Nisha had always been her grandmother who was an active woman, involved in both evangelistic work and social work for those in need. Inspired by her grandmother’s compassion for the marginalized, Nisha had studied sociology and thereafter worked with several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Sikkim and New Delhi. However, a couple of years ago, she had felt that her professional life was not going anywhere. When a

friend asked her to move with her to Gurugram where there were supposed to be good job opportunities, she decided to give it a chance.

It turned out that finding suitable employment was not as easy as she had first thought. Lonely and confused, Nisha felt the need of a supportive community and started searching for a church. Through the internet, she found Church of All Nations, which held its Sunday service in the block where she lived. Nisha was looking for a church that was “multicultural and not conservative” which were two criteria she could see that Church of All Nations fulfilled. However, it was the teaching and the focus on personal growth that made her stay. At the time we met, Nisha had found a job and felt confident that she was on the right path in terms of both her spiritual and professional life.

Nisha attended Sunday service every week but did not regard church involvement as crucial for her Christian life. Hence, she would not attend the additional meetings that were held throughout the week. For Nisha, being a follower of Christ was foremost about being a compassionate and caring person. Jesus was her inspiration and she tried to follow his example whenever she interacted with people, whether it was on social media or in real life. Nisha expressed a desire to grow spiritually, to become more like Jesus, and to deepen her relationship with God.

Nisha enjoyed the convenience and fast pace of Gurugram but often felt lonely living so far from her family and relatives. She also struggled with what she called “performance anxiety” fearing that she would not live up to the company’s expectations. In her diary, she frequently wrote that she missed her loved ones and was worried that her job reports would not be good enough. The church and her personal relationship with God were important sources of strength for handling these emotions.

However, to a certain extent, Nisha struggled to fit in to the church’s norms of what a Believer should and should not do. For example, in Sikkim it was common that Christians drank alcohol and even smoked. In Church of All Nations, nobody knew about her habits of having a glass of wine and cigarette now and then. Even though Nisha was confident that God did not judge her, she felt guilty for hiding parts of her life from other members in the church. In fact, through my other interviewees, I knew that Nisha was not alone in occasionally drinking alcohol. It was just one of those subjects that was not talked about publicly as it could potentially be controversial. We shall see when I will come back to this later in this chapter, when it came to lifestyle habits (e.g. how people dressed, spent money, used social media, or used their

leisure time) there was no agreement in the two churches about how a Believer should behave and or conduct herself.

Becoming a Believer

As these four women's stories indicate, the majority of the participants were first-generation Believers in the sense that they had not been born and raised in Pentecostal families. For this reason, changing religious affiliation was the predominant religious trajectory among the women. Around a third of the women came from Hindu backgrounds and another third from mainline Protestant or Catholic backgrounds. The rest came from Orthodox, Mar Thoma or Pentecostal churches, or had parents that belonged to different religions.

For most participants, the process of becoming a Believer had been slow and tortuous. It was certainly not a sudden and radical break from one religious position made by abruptly switching to another, rather it involved a gradual exposure to Pentecostal Christianity together with a series of significant events and experiences. Christian schools (both Protestant and Catholic) as well as Christian relatives and friends stood out as particularly important features in the women's stories of how they became Believers. They provided long-term contact spaces for learning about Christianity in general and Pentecostal Christianity in particular. The step to first attending a Pentecostal church was often done late in the process. In other words, to join a Pentecostal church tended to be an outcome of a course of events rather than something that initiated change in religious affiliation.

In the process of becoming a Believer, certain changes in beliefs and practices stood out. First, there was a movement from the acceptance of saints or many gods to a conviction that there is only one true god and that trust and prayers are to be directed exclusively to him. Second, many participants recalled how they had become gradually "aware" that the Bible, rather than any "tradition", contained true knowledge of God and how one is to live as a Believer. Participants from Catholic and Orthodox backgrounds tended to put particular emphasis on this matter. They often complained that, though they had attended church throughout their childhood, they had not been given proper teaching about the Bible. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the women described how over time they had deepened their relationship with

God and learnt to trust, as well as depend on, him. This process involved leaving behind the understanding of religion as a tradition with rules and rituals that needed to be followed and instead learning that being a Believer was, first and foremost, about living in relationship with God.

The majority of the women I interviewed had, after becoming Believers, been baptized (or re-baptized) in a Pentecostal church⁶⁹ although few seemed to regard this event as particularly important on the path to become a Believer. In fact, many did not mention their baptism if I did not ask them specifically about it. My impression was that many of the women regarded it as ceremony a Believer needed to undergo in order to take part in communion.⁷⁰ At the same time, they were aware that outsiders, especially Hindus, understood baptism as a rite de passage, an event that signaled that a “conversion” had taken place. Therefore, many participants had taken baptism in secret, without first telling their families, as they had worried about how they would react.

Another feature that rarely emerged in the women’s stories about how they became Believers was baptism in the Spirit. While some participants could point to a particular occasion when they had been filled by the Spirit in a special way, had been “anointed” or received the gift to speak in tongues, the majority mentioned no such event. In general, baptism in the Spirit was not a cardinal experience for the participants. It is worth noting that Bergunder (2008) makes a similar finding in his study of the South Indian Pentecostal movement. He further remarks that, in general, Spirit baptism is not seen as necessary for salvation in South Indian Pentecostal churches. My material supports this observation: what saved a person, according to the women in this study, was that he or she acknowledged Christ as his or her savior and established a relationship with God.

There were important other experiences that featured every so often in the women’s stories about how they became Believers, namely “miracles”. Miracles were held to be instances of divine intervention where God showed that he was an active and powerful being. According to the pastor couples in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations, it was uncommon that somebody became a Believer if they had not had at least one extraordinary

⁶⁹ The only baptism considered valid in Indian Pentecostal churches tends to be Believers’ baptism by immersion (Bergunder, 2007). Hence, those participants who had been baptized as infants had taken a second baptism.

⁷⁰ It is a common practice in Indian Pentecostal churches that a person needs to be baptized in order to receive communion.

experience of how God had changed their life. While I heard many stories about how God had suddenly and unexpectedly intervened, even more common were narratives about how God had slowly turned around a negative course of events or led the way to success and prosperity. Rachel and Aron's experience of coming out of their financial crisis, and Parvati's experience of how her prayers to Jesus helped her to reach top grades, were typical in this regard.

The final step of openly declaring that one was a Believer typically took place in the period after finishing higher secondary school but before marriage. This was a period when the women were enrolled in higher studies and in paid labor. It appears that those years provided a window in time, a gap of independence and opportunity, for the women to make the crucial decision to choose their own religious path. Tellingly, this was the only period when many women did not live together with a male authority figure (father or husband). The women who came from Hindu, Buddhist, Catholic, or Orthodox backgrounds would normally describe their change in religious affiliation as "conversion", while participants from mainline Protestant backgrounds framed it as a "transformation".

An important explanation as to why it took many of the women so long to define themselves as Believers is, of course, that changing religious affiliation is a very sensitive matter in India (Bauman, 2015; Kim, 2003; Sahoo, 2018). As indicated in the accounts of the four women I have introduced here, change in religious affiliation often gives rise to strong emotions and also to conflicts and long-term tensions with one's family. Several of the participants pointed out that there is a social stigma associated with becoming a Christian in India and also, in families belonging to established churches, associated with becoming a Believer. There are several reasons for this though one that stands out is that Christianity in general, and Pentecostal Christianity in particular, is associated with the poor and low castes, and becoming Christian/Pentecostal tends to lower a person's social status. This is likely to make it difficult to find a suitable spouse, and to change one's religious affiliation is, in general, regarded as an act of disrespect towards one's parents, religion, and culture. Hence, it took courage and a deep conviction to, so to say, come out as a Believer.

The women tended to emphasize that the hardest part of becoming a Believer and living as one was that relationships with one's family and friends were affected in a negative way. Many women made a strong effort to sustain and repair these relationships after their change in religious affiliation. Other

scholars of Indian Pentecostal Christianity have noted a similar reparative tendency (Roberts, 2016; Shah & Shah, 2013; Yadala Suneson, 2019). Pentecostals in India often continue to live close to nonbeliever family members, friends, and neighbors after conversion. As Yadala Suneson (2021) puts it, “the break with the past that follows conversion is theological rather than social”.

In living as Believers, the women were in agreement that it was vital to be part of a church although what was important was not to be part of a “Pentecostal church”, but rather, a “living church” or a “biblical church”. The women tended to define a living or biblical church as one that emphasized God as a powerful and active god, encouraged dependence and trust in him, addressed “real” problems, and put the Bible at the center of the teaching. Other important markers were energizing worship, a caring pastor couple, and a loving community.

Only a few women had joined Loving Assemblies of God or Church of All Nations specifically because they were Pentecostal churches. Moreover, it was uncommon among the participants to use the category “Pentecostal” to describe themselves. Consequently, being a Believer should not be equated with becoming a Pentecostal in terms of identifying with a particular church, denomination, movement, or tradition. The majority of the women did not have a clear idea which churches could be defined as Pentecostal or what typical Pentecostal beliefs or practices might be. This points to one of the problems of using Pentecostalism as an overarching term to describe the Pentecostal movement in India, that is, that the term is not meaningful or significant for most ordinary adherents.

It is possible to find both similarities and differences when comparing these middle-class Believers’ religious trajectories with findings from previous research focused on conversion among the poor. A common finding in such research is that Pentecostal pastors play an important role in the conversion process. Often, individuals and families turn to a pastor as a last resort in search of help for a particular problem. That the pastor is able to offer some sort of support or relief (ideally by performing a miracle) as well as showing love and care tends to play a crucial role in moving individuals or families to convert (Bauman, 2020; Lukose, 2013; Roberts, 2016; Sahoo, 2018). As discussed above, among the women in this study, to join a Pentecostal church tended to be the outcome of a long process rather than something that initiated change in religious affiliation. Moreover, it seems, from the women’s stories, that it is uncommon for middle-class Indians to seek out a Pentecostal pastor when

facing problems. Most often, pastors had little to do with the participants' conversion/transformation. Rather, it was the "discovery" and experience that God was loving and powerful and could actively intervene in their lives that made the women become Believers. It was typically a relative, friend, classmate, teacher, or colleague that introduced them to this idea, rather than a pastor.

Another striking difference is that almost all participants in this study became Believers before marriage while research among the poor points to people converting after marriage. Research suggests that, most commonly, poor women approach Pentecostal pastors with specifically family-related problems such as infertility, a sick child, or an abusive husband (Roberts, 2016; Sahoo, 2018; Shah & Shah, 2013). As mentioned above, most women in this study changed religious affiliation while enrolled in higher studies or afterwards while working; that is, during a period of time when they were relatively independent and often did not live with a male authority figure. Obviously, very few poor women have such a period in their life as they tend to marry early and rarely have an opportunity to enroll in higher studies. As a result, the recruitment pattern seems to be different between middle-class Pentecostal churches and those that accommodate the poor.

In terms of similarities, it is apparent that it is a challenge to come out as a Believer irrespective of one's poor or middle-class status. The family typically reacts strongly and negatively and the relationship with relatives and friends becomes strained, sometimes even resulting in social exclusion. Nevertheless, Believer-converts tend to do their best to repair and sustain these relationships rather than seeking to make a break with their social past. Another similarity is the importance both Believer-converts of all classes place on "miracles". While the type of miracle tend can differ, the experience that God is a god of miracles is revealed to be equally important for these groups.

Wearable Religion

I would now like to come back to the question of what we may learn about the participants' lived religion from the four women portrayed above. When looking at their religious lives, it becomes apparent that heterogeneity rather than homogeneity better explains how the women expressed and experienced their religion. Even though these women belonged to two quite similar churches (regarding the theology, core values, and social composition) whose teaching

they largely agreed with, they, to some extent, actualized four different ways of expressing their religion. Rachel was a strongly devoted Believer whose faith influenced most areas of her life in a profound way. While she was involved in Church of All Nations, she had also taken an individual initiative to run an ecumenical women's group and a charity program. For Parvati, it was commitment and loyalty to Church of All Nations and participation in the church's activities that constituted the core of her lived religion. Joy was rather independent in her pursuit to live as a Believer. It was her personal understanding of the Bible, which was by inspired Rajkumar Ramachandran, rather than the teaching in Loving Assemblies of God that guided her religious life. Nisha believed that the most important quality for a Believer was to show love and compassion towards other humans. She appreciated Church of All Nations as a supporting community where she could grow spiritually but did not regard church involvement as crucial. The religious orientations of these four women were noticeably different. Accordingly, there was no standardized way to live as a Believer among the participants.

The pastors of Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations did try, of course, to guide and influence their flocks. They encouraged churchgoers, among other things, to be committed members of the church, to pray and read the Bible daily, to share their testimony with nonbelieving family members, friends and neighbors, to raise their children as good Believers, to pray to receive the gifts of the Spirit, to devote themselves to spiritual growth, and to give tithes. The participants were well aware of their pastors' understanding of what made up the "good Believer", as well as in what areas they fell short. However, they also indicated that these standards were unattainable ideals that needed to be adjusted to fit the circumstances of their daily lives, personal convictions, and personal strengths and weaknesses.

This finding is in line with what Meredith McGuire (2008) states in her book *Lived Religion* which is that individuals do not commit to religious packages of beliefs and practices when joining a religious group. Even though religious leaders and organizations routinely try to exert their authority by distinguishing what they regard as proper religious behavior, it does not necessarily follow that people actually do what they are told. Put in others words by Yonatan N. Gez et al. (2017), "the idea of perfect correspondence between institutional religious prescriptions and actual individual practice is, in fact, something of a myth" (p. 145). Looking at the religious lives of the participants, it is clear that they were not passive followers of the churches' official

teaching. The way they expressed their religion was affected by multiple factors.

First, as pointed out by Nimi Wariboko (2018) in his book *Split God*, the pastor is seldom the only religious authority and source of religious knowledge in adherents' lives. Wariboko, whose book focuses on everyday forms of theology among Nigerian Pentecostals, argues that people appropriate products from the "pulpit industry" to "creatively produce their own *wearable* theology to further fit their 'bodies', their lifestyle in the here and now" (p. 157). He shows how ordinary Pentecostals "collect a bricolage of resources" (p. 15) to produce meanings and evade the disciplinary efforts of religious authorities. The purpose of this is not to overturn the religious social and epistemic system but to create a space where theology and everyday life can interconnect.

While the participants in this study certainly respected and regarded their pastors as religious experts, they all stated that they, in one way or the other, engaged with Christian teaching from elsewhere. Overall, the middle-class preoccupation with education informed how the women related to their religion. The women demonstrated a hunger to learn, grow, and gain more knowledge about their religion. Many women watched Christian television channels such as God TV or Angel TV on a regular basis. It was also common among the participants to listen to sermons and Bible studies on YouTube for guidance on particular issues or in order to learn more about a specific topic. As well, some of the women read Christian books or Bible commentaries. Through social media, especially Facebook and WhatsApp, the women were also exposed to short Christian messages through memes, video clips, and written messages. Accordingly, on their own initiative the women tried to learn more about their religion from various channels which meant that their pastor was one source of religious knowledge among many.

Another factor that influenced the participants' understanding of what it meant to live as a Believer was their personal backgrounds and past experiences. For example, as described above, Nisha's Christian role model since her childhood had always been her grandmother who had devoted her life to people in need. Thus, even though helping and caring for the poor was seldom emphasized in Church of All Nations, it lay at the heart of Nisha's lived religion. Similarly, even though Rachel now was a committed Believer, she had stayed in contact with friends from the mainline Protestant church she previously attended. By organizing an ecumenical women's group, she and her

friends continued to learn from each other as well as practice their religion together.

A third factor affecting how the women practiced their religion was the existence of everyday practicalities and conditions. As Girish Daswani (2013) has argued, although people are, in general, aware of church norms and rules, they need to balance these with other responsibilities, commitments, and roles. People need to negotiate what they find “right” with what is possible and what best fits the situation. The participants had many roles to play apart from being Believers which could involve them in being mothers, wives, daughters, neighbors, friends, professionals, and so on. All of these roles came with various expectations and responsibilities. As in the case of Parvati, it was perhaps not surprising that she struggled to find time for personal prayer when she juggled taking care of the home and a child, a career, and involvement in the church. Adapting Wariboko’s notion, she (along with the other participants) needed to make her religion wearable in order to make it fit her day-to-day life.

I would like to emphasize that the discrepancy between the pastors’ teaching and the participants’ lived religion need not be understood as a critique of the church. In fact, very few participants expressed any strong critique of their churches and did not differ in any significant ways in their core convictions. For example, they all regarded Jesus as their personal savior and considered it vital to have a personal relationship with God. They also believed in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, regarded the Bible as an authority, and considered it important to be part of a living and biblical church. However, concurrence in belief did not result in conformity in religious practice.

While I agree with Wariboko (2018) that ordinary believers are actors who creatively try to bring together religious ideas with their lifestyle and everyday conditions, the findings from my material and analysis suggest that ordinary believers do not alter the theology to a significant extent, rather they put the teaching into practice differently. The women in this study did not so much create a wearable theology but adjusted the way they *practiced their religion* to fit the “body” comprised of their day-to-day circumstances, lifestyle, past experiences, and personality. In other words, it was not primarily a matter of altering theological ideas but more a process of attuning norms of correct practices to day-to-day conditions, of creating a wearable religion.

Lifestyle Choices and Habits

In their teaching, Pastor John and Sunil rarely expressed opinions about what they regarded as appropriate behavior for a Believer in the matter of lifestyle choices and habits. They seldom made it clear what they considered as acceptable or unacceptable forms of behavior in relation to, for instance, what members did in their free time, how they spent their money, used social media, dressed, what music they listened to, food⁷¹ and drinking habits (including the consumption of alcohol). The only clear advice given by the pastors was that a person's way of involving herself with "the world" should not interfere with her relationship with God or commitment to the church. For example, if a person spent half an hour scrolling on Facebook when the plan was to read the Bible, it was a problem. Likewise, something was wrong if a person decided to go to the movies instead of attending their prayer group. Overall, the pastors were more concerned with fostering Believers who were devoted to God (and the church) rather than trying to intervene or control in how churchgoers lived their day-to-day lives.

In keeping with the foregoing, when I started doing interviews I had little clue how the participants would position themselves as Believers regarding various lifestyle choices and habits. I was also a bit confounded by the pastors' seeming lack of interest in these issues since research into Pentecostal Christianity around the world (Anderson, 2014; Martin, 2002; Robbins, 2004) as well as in India (Abraham, 2017; Abreu, 2020; Sahoo, 2018) tends to highlight that Pentecostal churches often promote rigid behavior codes, commonly making a connection between sin and worldliness.

Based on interviews with women, two tendencies were notable in relation to lifestyle habits and choices. First, the participants' positions on lifestyle issues did not diverge in any significant way from what, in a broad sense, would be expected for a respectable middle-class way of life in India. In their way of living, they were guided by middle-class ideals and norms, such as, being modest, family orientated and trying to balance being "modern" and "traditional". There were some regional variations; for example, participants from South India tended to be more conservative in their ways of dressing while participants from Northeast India were more liberal in their relation to eating meat. Apart from such minor differences, as a group, their way of living largely resembled that of middle-class Indians. The only thing that I could find

⁷¹ In India, religion tends to influence and regulate what and how people eat.

that separated the participants from other middle-class Indians was that they were somewhat more selective in their media consumption. For example, many women refrained from or limited how much non-Christian music they listened to and were careful to choose what they watched on television. There was a certain concern that an excessive and careless consumption of non-Christian media could disorient a Believer.

The other notable tendency was that, even though the participants tended to live their lives within the boundaries of middle-class respectability, there was little agreement on how a Believer should conduct herself concerning particular matters. In fact, I became rather surprised at the wide range of positions and rationales for them that I found among the thirty women I interviewed. I expected there to be more concurrence, considering that they were part of two quite similar churches. To take a concrete example, let us look at how Rachel, Parvati, Joy, and Nisha reasoned about drinking alcohol. Joy spoke of how she, until recently, was convinced that drinking alcohol was not a problem for a Believer since the Bible mentions that Jesus drank wine. She had to rethink this when a friend recently pointed out that there is a big difference between the wine Jesus drank and the wine that is produced today. This had made Joy unsure about how to reason and, for the time being, she refrained from drinking. Rachel told me that she had a glass of red wine from time to time “for health reasons”. Parvati’s (Hindu) parents had taught her that it was wrong to drink alcohol. Now that she was a Believer, she was even more convinced that it was a sin. Nisha did not see a problem in drinking a small amount of alcohol and stated that what she saw as problematic was using drugs.

The lack of agreement on lifestyle habits reaffirms the finding that heterogeneity rather than any kind of behavioral uniformity better explains how the women express and experience their religion. There was simply no standardized way to live as a Believer in the two churches. This finding also supports Bergunder’s (2008) conclusion in which he rejects most other research into Pentecostal Christianity in India by arguing that not much remains of what were once radical ideas of holiness among South Indian Pentecostals. According to Bergunder, separation from the world is now limited to abstaining from smoking, drinking alcohol, cinema viewing, and any form of sexual promiscuity. The findings from my material study even suggest that these criteria of holiness are under negotiation.

Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced four participants with the aim of building an understanding of the women who are part of this study. The analysis has shown that the female members of Loving Assemblies of God and Church of all Nations came from various religious backgrounds and that the process of becoming a Believer tended to be slow and fraught with tension within their families. According to the participants, the most important aspects of becoming a Believer were to establish a relationship with God, to learn to trust in him, and follow the example of Christ. The women did not equate becoming a Believer with becoming a Pentecostal in the sense that they started to identify themselves with Pentecostal Christianity as a movement or tradition. The majority of the women only had a vague understanding of what being a Pentecostal might involve.

In terms of the women's lived religion, it was clear that their religious lives were not microcopies of the churches' official teaching. In fact, there was no standardized way to live as a Believer in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations. Diversity rather than conformity and uniformity characterized the way the women practiced their religion. The tendency to organize one's religion around a relationship rather than a tradition or set of practices and beliefs created plenty of room for individual interpretation and adaptation. The women also adjusted what they considered "correct practice" to their day-to-day circumstances and various responsibilities thereby making their religion wearable.

Chapter 5. Together with God

In the previous chapter, I argued that there was no standardized way of living as a Believer for the women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations. At the center of their religious lives stood their relationship with God rather than a fixed set of practices and beliefs or faithfulness to a particular religious tradition. Nevertheless, while the participants lived their religious lives in various ways, it was possible to distinguish some common features of their everyday religion. In this chapter, I focus on four such defining aspects that were salient among the women, namely: (1) a desire to live a life in accordance with God's plan; (2) the recognition that the relationship with God must be tended; (3) a belief that everyday challenges and problems could be overcome with the help of God; and (4) the understanding that being a Believer was an ongoing transformational project. Taken together, these four features created a recognizable religious *modus operandi* that defined Pentecostal Christianity as a lived religion among the participants.

In this chapter, particular analytical attention is paid to the dynamics of *agency*, that is, how the women engaged with their religion. In accordance with a lived religion approach, I proceed from the idea that practitioners are religious agents, that they have an active role in modeling and shaping their religious lives.⁷² A central argument in the chapter is that, in order to understand how the women engaged with their religion, it is necessary to acknowledge that they experienced God as an active agent in their day-to-day lives. God personally guided them, surprised them, strengthened them, corrected them, and intervened when required. The women's way of "doing" religion was contingent upon this belief in the actions of God. I have conceptualized this form of agency as *collaborative agency* by which I mean a process

⁷² Having said that, I do not regard individuals as autonomous, free, and self-governing subjects. I proceed from the poststructural position that the subject is constructed but that there is a possibility for subjects to combine and engage with social and cultural codes and conventions in unexpected and unpredictable ways.

in which the women were engaged in a common effort together with God to realize shared goals.

The chapter begins with a short introduction to how agency has been conceptualized and operationalized in religion and gender studies.

Agency

Within studies of religion and gender, the question of agency has been a central and much-disputed topic (Bilge, 2010; Burke, 2012; Dokumaci, 2020; Dunn, 2017; Parashar, 2010; Prickett, 2014; Rinaldo, 2014). Up until the 1990s, a liberal understanding of agency dominated the field. In this paradigm, agency was typically understood as intentional action striving for autonomy against a tide of religious customs, norms, rituals, traditions, and beliefs. As a result, agency was framed as resistance, subversion, or strategic compliance (Burke, 2012).⁷³ Scholars of religion and gender, inspired by the liberal paradigm, tended to proceed from an understanding that religious commitment ran counter to women's agency. The main quest among these researchers was to understand and explain why modern, educated women would choose to belong to conservative and patriarchal religious movements (Bilge, 2010). In research on the Pentecostal movement, this query has been termed "the gender paradox" (Martin, 2001: 53) and was first brought to the fore in Elisabeth Brusco's (1995) pioneering study of evangelical conversion in Colombia. Brusco argued that women were attracted to evangelicalism because it was a religious tradition that facilitated the domestication of their husbands since, when they converted, men tended to take greater responsibility for home and family and this brought about a notable improvement in women's living conditions.

This operationalization within religion and gender studies that aims to explain agency as resistance has contributed considerably to the understanding of women's participation in religious movements, but it has also attracted considerable criticism (see Bilge, 2010). Relevant to this study is the postcolonial critique which claims that scholars have been misattributing (Western, white,

⁷³ The resistance-oriented approach has its origins in the classical sociological debate over the primacy of structure or agency in shaping human behavior. The agency-structure dichotomy has given rise to two main models of analysis. In the structure-model, there is an emphasis on the primacy of social structures in shaping individuals' behavior whereas in the action-model individuals are perceived as being able to act upon structures as independent agents.

middle-class) feminist aims to religious women that might never have crossed their minds (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Belliappa, 2013; Joy, 2004). Postcolonial theorists have also asserted that resistance-oriented studies often fail to capture how local contexts constitute vastly different conditions for agency as well as enabling different forms of it (Asad, 1993; Gandhi, 1998; Mohanty, 1988). For example, even though the women that are part of this study lived in a markedly male-dominated society, they did not experience that they were, in general, discriminated against due to their gender. In fact, the participants regarded themselves as privileged, as belonging to a rather small minority of the Indian population that had access to benefits such as higher education, well-paid jobs, high standards of healthcare, and good schools for their children. Added to this, most of the participants lived within safe and comfortable housing complexes, owned a vehicle and a considerable quantity of jewelry,⁷⁴ had part-time domestic help, and enjoyed a relatively stable economic situation. These women had opportunities and possibilities that were beyond the reach of the vast majority of the Indian population. Even though they did not deny that Indian society was male-dominated, they did not personally experience severe oppression on the basis of being women. Hence, to apply in their case a resistance-oriented approach to agency would be to overlook these women's own understandings of their lives.

In the last two decades, many studies have been produced on religion and gender that aim to go beyond the liberal paradigm's understanding of agency. Saba Mahmood's book *Politics of Piety* (2005) has been particularly influential among these scholars. Building on poststructuralist ideas about the subject,⁷⁵ Mahmood problematizes the coupling of agency with autonomy and resistance by arguing that agency should not be limited to acts that resist norms, rather it should include "the multiple ways one inhabits norms" (p. 15). Mahmood locates agency in the construction of a pious self through the cultivation of bodily practice and she argues that agency can be expressed through docility. Accordingly, it is now common within the study of religion and gender to operationalize agency as engagement with, or reproduction of, religious

⁷⁴ Jewelry, especially golden jewelry, is important in a variety of ways for women in India: as savings (since it is not as subject to inflation), property (normally the only form of wealth controlled by women), and status (the number and types of pieces usually relate to a woman's wealth and power) (Jørgensen, 2012).

⁷⁵ According to a poststructuralist view, the subject is constructed by such influences as ideology (Althusser), language (Lacan), and discourse (Foucault). Therefore, the subject can never, in an absolute sense, be independent or autonomous (Bilge, 2010).

norms and discourses rather than as resistance or subversion.⁷⁶ Moreover, the idea that agency necessarily involves striving for self-government has lost ground, allowing for acts that are motivated by religious goals (such as pleasing God or living according to the Bible) to be understood as instances of individual agency.

While being inspired by the engagement-orientated approach in that I regard the subject as constructed (rather than autonomous and free) and agree that agency can be expressed through docility, I would like to take the analysis in a different direction from that of Mahmood. Rather than focusing on how compliance with religious codes and conventions can be a self-authoring project, my concern is with the construction of religiosity.⁷⁷ In line with a lived religion framework, I operationalize agency as “doing” religion and by this I mean the practices by which an individual expresses their religion in day-to-day life as well as the manner in which they engage in those practices. Therefore, rather than starting the analysis by looking at religious affiliation and how the participants engaged with the churches or common Pentecostal codes and conventions, I direct my attention towards the concrete practices that made up their everyday religion and their involvement in them. In this endeavor, I aim to “see” and understand the world of the research participants. This means that I do not look at women’s experiences as, for example, *narratives* or *discourse* but take their experiences to be “real” in order to access their religious perspectives more directly.⁷⁸

Following God’s Plan

The participants in this study shared a common all-encompassing religious goal which was to live their lives in accordance with God’s plan and their eagerness to follow this goal influenced their actions and choices. As Grace put it, “I think this is the primary thing in my life; I want to do his [God’s] will. Whatever he wants, I have to do that, fulfill that, with the grace of God and with the help of people of Spirit”. As the women understood God’s plan

⁷⁶ See e.g. Dunn, 2017; Honkasalo, 2015; Jacobson, 2006; Kupari, 2012; Longman, 2008; Parashar, 2010; Rinaldo, 2014; Shively, 2014.

⁷⁷ A similar approach is taken by Orit Avishai (2008) in the article “Doing Religion in a Secular World” in which she examines agency as “religious conduct”.

⁷⁸ Compare Annelin Eriksen (2017) and Jon Bialecki (2014). There is also a growing discussion among ethnographers in general about how to deal with the agency of God, see Apffel-Marglin (2012), Ram, (2013), and Schielke (2019).

to be unique for each person, they needed to try to figure out what God had in store for them as individuals. This quest became a project in which they tended to be deeply engaged during their day-to-day religious lives. It was a concern regularly raised in formal church meetings (cell group meetings, Women's fellowship, Couple's meeting, and so on), a common conversation topic, and a subject matter that most of them discussed during the interviews. Notwithstanding this, to be a person who tried to follow God's plan was not a matter of being micromanaged but of making sure that vital decisions were in line with what God had in mind. The women searched for God's will when it came to questions of whom to marry, whether to quit a job or not, what church to attend, which part of the city to inhabit, what school to choose for their children, and whether they should stay or leave Gurugram.

The mere fact that they were in a position to negotiate these issues points to the participants' relatively privileged economic and social position. As members of the middle class, they had sufficient income to live beyond the level of mere survival and to make choices about, for example, the school in which they should enroll their children or whether to change jobs. That the participants, despite their gender, had a say in these issues also reflects the increased decision-making power of middle-class women in India (Belliappa, 2013; Derné et al., 2013; Rangwala et al., 2020). The majority of the participants who were married stated that they and their husbands had a discussion and prayed together before any important decision was made. Nevertheless, in most marriages the husband was left to make the final decision.

The notion that God has a plan for each person is, of course, not unique to a middle-class Indian Pentecostal context but is a common conviction among Pentecostals worldwide. It is an idea that draws inspiration from biblical narratives⁷⁹ as well as individual Bible verses.⁸⁰ In these narratives, which inform Pentecostals' expectations about their life trajectories, hardships and obstacles are overcome with God's help. However, although he wants good things for his followers, not only prosperity and happiness are guaranteed. In an article about evangelical Asian exchange students, Roman R. Williams (2013) argues that the notion of God's plan offers a way to interpret the past, navigate everyday life, and pursue a meaningful future. Williams shows how the belief in God's plan infused worldly work and challenges with other-worldly meaning

⁷⁹ For example, the stories about Abraham, Joseph, Esther, Jonah, Mary, and Paul.

⁸⁰ For example, Jer 29:11, Isa 65:1, John 15:16, Rom 8:28, Philem 3:14, 1 Pet 2:21.

and significance. This was also very much the case for the women in this study who would not only expect obstacles to pop up but also endowed them with significance.

In order to deduce what the next step in God's plan might be, the women were in a dialogue with God who had various means of revealing his intentions for them. He might, for example, speak to them through another person, through the Bible, through dreams and visions, by way of a song, a Facebook post, "signs" in their surroundings. God's will could also be revealed through emotions such as a longing to move to a certain place or a strong conviction that it was time to quit a job. In a study of evangelical volunteers in Israel, Aron Engberg (2019) similarly highlights how God tends to be depicted as a prime agent in his informants' "coming-to-Israel stories". From these narratives, an understanding of agency emerged that privileged "the dialectical relationship between human and other-worldly forces" (p. 117). Engberg describes how this understanding of agency is dialectical in the sense that there is a forward movement between human and divine agencies but also because these opposites are integral components of each other. The experience of the women in this study bore this out.

The women made decisions and acted on the basis of this interplay with God. To follow his plan was a matter of collaborative agency; they were engaged in this quest together with God. Apart from speaking to them, God would, as part of his engagement, "open and close doors", that is, present or prevent opportunities. For example, when Nisha, whom we met in the previous chapter, started to doubt the decision to move to Gurugram because she could not find a job, God suddenly intervened. By a "coincidence", on the metro Nisha bumped into her roommate accompanied by a friend. They started to talk and, during the conversation, Nisha mentioned that she was looking for a job. It turned out that the company employing her roommate's friend was looking for a person with Nisha's qualifications. The friend asked Nisha to send in an application and she was employed soon after. Nisha found confirmation in this experience that she was on the right path and saw it as a sign that God would be there to support her along the way.

While the idea that God's plan was unique for each individual was prevalent among the participants, in practice it was a truth with modifications. Firstly, there were certain elements that all women expected God to have in store for them. Most prominently, they all expected that God's plan for their life included marriage (and presumably motherhood). I never heard a participant state, explicitly or implicitly, that there might be an alternative option for

themselves or any other woman. Consistent with the Indian dominant norm for women's primary social roles as wife and mother (Belliappa, 2013; Puri, 1999; Radhakrishnan, 2009), marriage and motherhood was put forward as the self-evident way of living as an adult woman. In fact, I received many worried questions about my "health condition" since my husband and I, despite having been married for almost 10 years, did not have any children. When I responded that we had not felt that the time was right yet, I was met with questioning comments. This suggested that there were limitations to how individualized God's plan could be.

Secondly, in practice, married couples were inclined to treat their families as a unit when they reflected upon their future. It would not make any sense if God told the wife one thing and the husband another. This predicament meant that God tended to become a third party in marriages when it came to decision making, a situation that often enhanced women's negotiating space since husbands could not insist on having the final word. Sameera, for example, a woman in her late twenties, found herself disagreeing with her husband, Praveen, over whether or not it was God's intention for them to move to Dubai. Praveen had been offered a job in Dubai and was eager to accept it. Sameera, however, did not feel convinced that this was part of God's plan for their family or at least God had yet to confirm it. Sameera worried about not being able to find a good church in Dubai and about the restrictions to which she might be subject as a woman living there. I spoke to her about the situation on several occasions and it was a recurring topic of prayer in the Women's Fellowship. The pastor couple encouraged Sameera and Praveen to seek God's will together and not to make a hasty decision; consequently, at the time of fieldwork, Sameera and Praveen had come to a standstill and were waiting for God to reveal his plan for them.

Adjusting Emotions

The participants were, in general, convinced that it was not by accident that they or their husbands had got a job in Gurugram; it was part of God's plan for them. This conviction gave meaning to their everyday life in Gurugram which was a life many experienced as challenging. The majority of the women spoke of their first years in Gurugram as marked by feelings of alienation and homesickness. To be able to fall back on the conviction that God had a purpose, despite their feeling lonely and estranged, made the transition easier. With that said, many women struggled to change their feelings towards life in

the city. Elina, a woman who had moved to Gurugram from South India together with her family, gave the following answer when I asked her to describe how she felt about living in Gurugram:

I really thought that we made a wrong decision in coming to this place [Gurugram]. Because (..) there was nobody here. Because mine is a big family, I have six elder sisters, and brothers-in-laws and nieces and nephews . . . So it is a big family, and every Sunday was like a (..) a festival for us (..) When I came here, I started to feel lonely. And the climate conditions were really, really bad. In winter, I used to struggle, because I always used to have cramps in my legs. I wore so many clothes, you know, coats and sweaters, it was very uncomfortable. But year after a year, God really made it a point that this is our city; made it clear that he brought us here for a purpose. It was not the job that brought us here; it was God who brought us here. It was his plan for us to be here and do ministry among the youth and in this neighborhood. (Elina, 2016)

Elina, like many other participants, had done a lot of emotional work to adjust her feelings to be in line with what she believed was God's plan for her family. Accordingly, even though the women were convinced that a certain outcome was part of God's plan for their life, it did not necessarily follow that they felt good about it. In certain cases, it could take months, even years, before the participants' feelings harmonized with God's plan. As a result, the women were not only engaged in the quest of figuring out what God had in store for them but also put a lot of effort into attuning their feelings and attitudes to be consistent with God's will.

As for the particular case of living in Gurugram, the pastors in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations played a key role in transforming their members' feelings and attitudes towards the city. Both Pastor John and Pastor Sunil mentioned regularly in their sermons that Gurugram was a city in need of God and that God calls all Believers to be his agents in Gurugram. They emphasized that each Believer made a difference because the Christian population in the city was small. Moreover, they stressed the strategic aspects of spreading the gospel in a migrant city like Gurugram. If the churches were able to spread the gospel in Gurugram, it was possible to influence not only the city per se but other parts of the country, even other countries. Indeed, my presence as a Swedish researcher was interpreted as a sign that God had more than local plans in store for the churches.

Living in Relationship with God

When I asked Isha what it meant for her to be a Believer, she told me, “It is a walk with God, it is a relationship with God”. Likewise, Alisha stated, “Christ is my religion” and Elina elaborated further: “You know, when you talk about Christianity it is mere relationship with Jesus Christ. It is not a caste, it is not a community, and it is not a . . . a kind of . . . what do you say, it is not a culture. It is just a relationship”. From the interviews, it was clear that for the participants the relationship with God lay at the heart of their lived religion.

The participants understood God to be a relational being, they believed in a god who wanted to be in close relationship with human beings. To be a Believer was to accept that invitation and enter into a personal relationship with God. As the women understood it, the relationship with God formed the basis for an individual’s religion and could not be replaced by anything else. Even if a person attended church every week, read her Bible daily, and behaved in a pious way, she was not a Believer in a definitive sense if she did not have a personal relationship with God.

Interestingly, Roberts (2016) found a similar tendency in his study of Dalit Pentecostals living in an Indian urban slum. His informants defined religion as a relationship between humans and gods. In contrast to the women in my study, the Dalits’ relationship with God was understood primarily “as a disciplinary one, in which obedience [towards the demands of God] and worship were exchanged for blessings and protection” (p. 178). In addition to worshipping and following the demands of God, they considered it essential for a “devotee” to demonstrate commitment to God and declare their dependence. Among the women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations, the priorities were reversed. They regarded it as most important to show love, devotion, and trust towards God, to prioritize this relationship before anything else in their lives. While they did also believe that God would reward the faithful and obedient, this exchange did not stand at the core of their relationship with God. The basis for the relationship between God and Believer was mutual love.

Bonding with God

The women agreed that the relationship with God needed to be tended in order to be kept vital and strong. As such, the women invested time and energy in caring for their relationship with God who, of course, also did his part. The

women experienced the maintenance of the relationship to be a shared activity. God was described as a dynamic being who took initiatives, had plans, listened, responded, surprised, took action, and had his own will. God was also experienced as a being who did not interfere, who sought a real (freely chosen) relationship. God was after mutual love and thus a Believer was expected to make an effort to show God that she was committed to the relationship.

The participants had different ways and means of showing their commitment and tending to their relationship with God. Some were focused on learning more about God (for instance, listening to sermons online or reading Christian literature); others would spend a lot of individual time with God (such as by taking prayer walks or meditating); and others would emotionally express their love for God (for example, in worship or by showing compassion for the poor). Nevertheless, two practices related to bonding with God that almost all participants engaged in were “sitting” or “to sit” (a shortening of “sitting down and taking time with God”) and listening to worship music.

Most women tried to have a particular time during the day (or several times) when they would sit. Due to practical reasons, the women who were working would normally take time to sit in the morning or in the evening after work. Usually, the women would have a favorite spot somewhere in their homes where they preferred to sit. The important thing about sitting was not exactly what a person did but that she set aside time to focus on God. Sitting could involve prayer, sitting in silence, reading the Bible or some other Christian literature, meditating, singing, or making an effort to actively listen to God.

Nevertheless, sitting often involved the practice of praying which was a multifaceted practice. It could include praising God, putting forward prayer requests, speaking in tongues, listening, upholding others in prayers, confessing sins and mistakes, praise, and thanking God. A common technique used to intensify prayers was to integrate passages, verses, or promises from the Bible. By using God’s own words, the women experienced that their prayers were given greater weight.

On the topic of speaking in tongues which is often proposed as a key characteristic of Pentecostal Christianity, the women expressed notably different views and attitudes. Around half of the women told me that they regularly prayed in tongues but among them many thought of it as private prayer language that one should be cautious about using in public. Some of the women who did not speak in tongues expressed a desire to be given this spiritual gift, others were indifferent and some women were openly critical of the practice, especially when it was used during common gatherings:

The only thing, which I hear, is the same words from everyone. You know, “shabaraba” something. Everybody says the same thing. So, I searched in the net. What does this word “shabaraba” means? It is nothing but praising God, maybe in Hebrew language. Some people get it as a gift from God. But if they are speaking in tongues, they should share the meaning also. You know. I don’t believe they are really speaking in tongues, it is my opinion! Maybe I am wrong. But it really can worry other people. (Sameera, 2017)

Even though the majority of the participants talked about sitting as a vital practice in tending to the relationship with God, they were also rather honest that it was not always easy to find time to sit. As Ava, a working busy mother, expressed it: “Generally I try to get up by 4.30. Giving me at least 45 minutes to pray. I try. 40% [of the time] I succeed” or Esha, a retired woman in her sixties: “morning time I sit and pray, but sometimes I am in hurry (..) late I wake up, then I (..) (laughs) I go [directly] to the kitchen. Sometimes I will sit and pray”. The participants also mentioned that there were many possibly distractions to deal with while sitting including smartphones, children, worries, and the devil, all of which meant that it could be difficult to focus when sitting.

Another way in which the participants kept the relationship with God vibrant in their daily lives was by listening to worship music. In contrast to sitting, listening to worship music was done without a sense of duty and indeed it was a source of pleasure that brought joy and strength to their lives. When the women listened to worship music, they would more easily have a sensation of God being present and the music filled them with feelings such as love, comfort and trust that strengthened their bond with God.

There is a wide agreement among scholars that worship music plays a central role in the life of Pentecostal churches (Anderson, 2014; Ingalls & Yong, 2015; Lim & Ruth, 2017; Lindhardt, 2011; Prosén, 2021). Among other things, scholars have found that communal worship ushers Believers into the presence of God (Albrecht, 1999), is an important means to internalize theology (Hollenweger, 1997), and functions as a tool for divine intervention (Prosén, 2018).

However, the role of music in Pentecostals’ everyday religious lives is a topic that has not been given much attention. Findings by other scholars do suggest that music has a multifaceted role outside church walls. For example, in a study of the soundscapes in a favela in Brazil, Martijn Oosterbaan (2008) concludes that playing and listening to gospel music is an important expression of evangelical identity and a way to maintain a boundary with the “unconverted” (p. 138). His informants also reported that they felt that the music put them in touch with God and enabled them live a more virtuous life. A

similar finding was made by Jessica Moberg (2013) in her study of urban charismatic Christians in Sweden. Her informants listened to worship music throughout the day on their MP3 players and smartphones and reported that this practice altered their emotions in desirable ways. For example, it filled them with gratitude towards God and could shift their focus from sexual thoughts towards God.

For the participants in this study, worship music was a core element in their everyday religious lives. It was common to have worship music in the background at home while doing chores, spending time together as a family, driving, sitting on the metro, or working and studying. As mentioned above, the women reported that they often felt the presence of God while listening to worship music, which reassured them of his omnipresence. Dinah, a woman working as a physiotherapist, had the habit of playing worship songs on her way to work. She described the experience in the following way:

In the morning, while I am driving, I just keep listening and singing songs and that itself strengthens me, in a way that I do not even know. But that really gives me a positive vibe for the rest of the day. It is the presence of God, which I feel. (Dinah, 2016)

Worship music did not only evoke the feeling of God's presence, it also put emotions into words while encouraging feelings of love, trust, and adoration. There are many types of contemporary worship songs but usually they tend to express strong feelings that either stress God's love for humans or human longing for, and adoration of, God. Rather than singing about God, contemporary worship music is about singing *to* God (or Jesus) or expressing heartfelt love for God. Like popular love songs, these songs tend to make the most of the music to create an emotional ambience (Lim & Ruth, 2017). By daily listening to and singing along with worship songs, the participants' relationship with God gained a clear emotional dimension. This made the relationship feel more real and dynamic, making it less an abstract idea and more of an embodied experience. Worship music brought life to the relationship with God.

God Talks Back

A central argument in this chapter is that, in order to understand how the women engaged with their religion, God needs to be acknowledged as an actor. The importance the women placed on the relationship with God only

makes sense in light of the fact that God was experienced as being engaged and committed. The relationship became meaningful because God would regularly talk back to the women. While God would not necessarily respond with words, he would demonstrate in various ways that he had heard the women's prayers and seen their struggles.

Tanya M. Luhrmann's (2012) book *When God Talks Back* has become an important work for understanding how charismatic Christians learn to hear God's voice. The book describes in a systematic way how converts learned to cultivate an intimate relationship with God and believing in the communication. This makes their hearts and minds ready to listen and, through practice, they learn to distinguish God's voice from their own thoughts. It is a fascinating study that shows how religion can be learned and explains the importance of emotion in charismatic contexts.

In my study, few participants stated that God spoke to them through divine thoughts crossing their minds even though it is likely that they went through similar steps as they learned how to hear God's voice. God would normally speak to the women through the Bible, through dreams or visions, through other people, or by responding to prayer through action.

As such, to read the Bible was not just a matter of learning about God, a narrative or a topic but, perhaps more importantly, about listening. When a Believer opened the Bible, it was an opportunity for God to speak to her. Through the Bible, God would provide answers, comfort, encouragement, and correction to the women. Most participants read the Bible (either directly or through books of daily meditation) on a daily basis, which gave God a regular opportunity to communicate with them.

God spoke to the women through the Bible in two main ways. Either he would lead the women to a certain passage that would speak to their situation or he would make a verse "come alive" to them, making it stand out and touch their hearts. Joy described it in the following way:

You know, God's word is encouraging, soothing, comforting. You might be having a hard day (..) I have read somebody saying, "The Bible is the only book where the author is with you". I literally see the word come alive to me. So many times, in the situation that I am going through, a verse that comes alive for me. [[It speaks to you?]] It speaks to me. It speaks encouragement, strength. (Joy, 2016)

The participants often referred to the Bible as "a living word", in the sense that it would come alive to them and was living inside of them. The verses and narratives they knew by heart were like assets that God could use to speak

with them when needed. As Rachel put it, “At a given situation, whenever you are facing challenge, or maybe in the morning, when God wants you to do something. A word comes alive in you; he speaks to you through the Word.”

Another way in which God would speak to the women was through people in their surroundings. The participants believed that God could speak through anybody, even non-Christians. However, it was apparent from the stories the women told me that God most commonly spoke through people they were close to and with whom they shared their struggles and worries such as the pastor couple, a leader in the church, or a Christian friend. Interestingly, very few participants stated that God spoke to them through family members (though these were also people they shared their problems with). As the women put it, there was nothing sensational about God talking to them through the Bible or another person. Most often, it was mentioned in passing when the participants shared with me a testimony or spoke about their day-to-day lives as Believers.

A third way in which God communicated with the participants was through dreams and visions. These usually provided a clue about the future or were a way for God to correct the women. Visions and dreams tended to make a strong impression on the women and could impact a person for years. For example, Anusha told me how she had had a dream of her late husband’s death just a few days before he died in a car accident. The marriage had been difficult (her husband had been an alcoholic and had taken a second wife) and Anusha saw the dream as a way for God to show her that better things would come even though becoming a widow was difficult. When her Hindu friends suggested that it might be a good idea to look for another god, the dream had helped Anusha to keep trusting God. When I met her, she was happily remarried and she saw her marriage as a fulfillment of God’s promise to her.

God’s messages through dreams and visions were seldom as dramatic as the above example, rather they usually concerned matters in the women’s day-to-day lives. In an interview with Tamara, a woman in her thirties, she told me that during the last weeks she had spent her spare time in the evenings reading novels. She enjoyed reading but at the same time felt that she was “stealing time from God”, that she could have spent the time reading the Bible or some Christian literature. A few days before the interview, God had confirmed her qualms through a dream. In the dream, she was standing in her kitchen and there was garbage everywhere. She could not understand why the garbage had not been thrown away. Suddenly she understood that this is what would happen if she did not prioritize God: garbage would pile up, her life would become

unclean. Tamara was now praying that God would help her to steer her heart and mind towards him.

The most powerful way in which God would talk back to the participants was by answering their prayers through direct interventions that brought a solution to their problems. When God responded in this way, it was often referred to as a “miracle” and the story was made into a testimony. A testimony was a story that confirmed God as an active god and did not necessarily have to be grand or spectacular. In fact, many participants made a point in telling me “everyday testimonies”, stories that showed how God also cared about minor difficulties such as a broken car, an inconvenient cold, or risking being late to a meeting. That God was a god that helped the women overcome problems was such a vital part of their lived religion that it deserves to be treated as a separate feature. It is the theme of the next section.

Overcoming Problems

A third central feature of the participants’ lived religion was dealing with, and resolving, day-to-day problems. The term used to describe this practice was “to overcome”. To overcome a problem was something a Believer did with the help of God, a shared action. It was a matter of collaborative agency and problems that the participants handled on their own would not fall into this category. Overcoming was such a central practice in the churches that the pastors would now and then refer to their members as “overcomers”. During my fieldwork, I heard numerous stories of how God had intervened and helped the women to overcome struggles in their day-to-day lives. These struggles could involve finding a car parking outside a busy mall, handling conflicts at work, passing an exam, healing a broken marriage, dealing with health issues, to warding off black magic. Nothing was too small or too big for God. As the participants understood it, one of the privileges of being a Believer was to have somebody to turn to regardless of the nature of their problem.

The term “to overcome” is, of course, typical in prosperity theology discourses (Bowler, 2013) and connects the women’s religiosity to this global trend within the Pentecostal movement. While the prosperity gospel has been claimed to appeal to the poor as it promises some security in the face of insecure and unpredictable economic circumstances (Robbins, 2010), Gerardo Marti (2012) has shown how prosperity teachings can be adapted to be equally appealing to the middle class. Building on the theories of Ulrich Beck, Marti

argues that in the modern world and market-driven economy, the responsibility for economic success and happiness has come to rest heavily on each individual. While the traditional support from family is still important, there is increasing demand on individuals to run their own lives. Marti found that the pastors in the church he studied did not reject this focus on the self as the basis for prosperity but moved the members towards a collective vision that still affirmed the ego. Namely, one integrated oneself successfully into society by holding influential positions so that the message and reputation of Christianity was extended and enhanced. The church negotiated social change through its prosperity teaching by providing religious identities such as “champion” and “overcomer” that encouraged members to be courageous and ambitious.

Both Pastor John and Pastor Sunil had a vision that their churches should be important players in transforming Gurugram; however, not through social projects, but through members who thrived and were living proof of God’s sovereignty, in other words, who lived as overcomers. This teaching appealed to the members of the churches who in their everyday lives struggled to navigate Gurugram’s competitive job market and who had come to the city to pursue a career. To be an overcomer was to be somebody who prospered because of teaming up and working together with God. This practice was not simply about being successful; overcoming was more importantly about being a person who confidently encountered challenges together with God. It was an approach to life and its difficulties.

The women regarded prayer as the most vital means and efficient technique for overcoming problems. As the circumstances of life ultimately were in the hands of God, it made sense to turn to him in the face of problems. If the women needed guidance, they would take some time to sit in silence prepared to listen to what God had to say, and/or at such times, they might also read the Bible in search of direction. Many women included promises from the Bible in their prayers as it was considered an efficient technique to turn God’s heart toward them. This practice, often referred to as “positive confession”, is common in prosperity milieus and in the most extreme versions is considered to be a way to release Believers’ divine right to wealth, health, and fortune (Wariboko, 2012). However, in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations there was a general agreement that prosperity was not a divine right and that humans were not in a position to tell God what to do. Using promises in prayers was instead considered a way to attract God’s attention.

The next step in the overcoming process tended to be either doing “acts of faith” or “waiting on God”. The latter simply meant being in a state of trust,

praying, and waiting for God to intervene. As the women believed that God knew what was best for them, they were confident that he would intervene when the time was right. Even so, there seemed to be a lot of waiting involved in women's lives. Several of the participants told me that they needed to become more patient in order to avoid becoming so frustrated when God's response was slow in coming.

Doing acts of faith is not to be confused with taking a "leap of faith". As the participants understood it, to take a leap of faith involved making a radical decision or undertaking not knowing what the outcome would be. Doing acts of faith was rather about taking steps that were considered to be in line with what was taught in the Bible such as obeying God's word in one's actions and trusting that it would pay off in the end. It could be a matter of being humble and loving towards an arrogant colleague or tithing even though one was under economic pressure. Acts of faith constituted a more active approach to the overcoming process.

Whatever approach the women took in the overcoming process, it always (by default) ended with God's intervention. The women tended to be taken by surprise by these sudden resolutions and shared them as testimonies during various church gatherings. Jon Bialecki (2014) has argued that the aspect of surprise is an important feature in Pentecostal spirituality as it allows Believers to experience that they are dealing with an agentive alterity. The unexpected is part of creating a sensation that one is acting with a separate being whose actions are impossible to predict. My material very much supports Bialecki's argument. The experience that an outcome was unexpected, that something out of the ordinary had happened, reinforced the belief in an active and engaged God.

Working on the Self

In his sermons, Pastor John often stated that if a person who calls herself a Christian has not changed in 30 years, something is seriously wrong. At times, he even added that such a person should not be so sure that their place in heaven is still vacant. This attitude, that a Believer should never be fully satisfied with her present self, was a salient feature of the women's lived religion and gave rise to a cluster of everyday religious activities. To be a Believer was considered an ongoing self-formation project. I will refer to these practices as

“work on the self”. In order to carry out this work, the women devoted both time and energy to scrutinize, reflect, and act upon themselves.

Importantly, to work on the self was not about “disciplining the body” by developing behaviours in line with a given culture, rather it was about personal growth. The women linked “growing” to healing and self-improvement rather than to the cultivation of a pious self. To heal in this context was not about physical healing but about experiencing an “inner healing” which meant being emotionally restored from experiences of trauma and distress. As a self-improvement practice, it was possible to see connections to a prosperity ethos. To live a prosperous life was to thrive in every area of life and so was not simply about being wealthy.

The practice of working on the self can be linked to the theological theme of “transformation” that surfaced within the global Pentecostal movement. Since the movement’s inception, the experience of personal change has stood out as a core matter in churches and has been expressed in a number of terms such as “born-again”, “new life”, “redemption”, “sanctification”, “healing”, and “re-birth” (Jacobson, 2006: 60). In the global Pentecostal movement, transformation is a term with positive connotations. Transformation is associated with hope of a new beginning which, according to theologian Harvey Cox (1994), is an essential part of the movement’s appeal and reason behind its growth. Depending on context and orientation, Pentecostal churches seek, offer, and work for achieving change in various areas (e.g. moral, spiritual, physical, material, political) and levels of society (individual, communal, or societal).

In Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations, it was repeatedly stated that the church was to be a vehicle for the transformation of Gurugram. This vision of the church was based on the call in the New Testament to spread the kingdom of God to the world. However, even though the women often talked about the need to transform Gurugram, they laid even more emphasis on the need to transform themselves, to “grow” and “change”. To work on the self was an individual concern that the participants were involved in together with God. The women described God as playing an active role in the process of working on the self. He was someone who pushed and encouraged the women to initiate change, guided them through the process, strengthened them when things were difficult, and stood proud when they had succeeded. Several women told me that they would never have found the courage or strength to carry through certain changes alone without God. The support they found in

their relationship with God could never fully be compared with the backing they received from their husbands, friends, or the pastor couple.

While there is a wide agreement among scholars that transformation is a core concern in Pentecostal spirituality, there are different opinions about how individuals achieve change. Joel Robbins (2010) has been important in promoting the idea of “radical discontinuity”, that is, an understanding that Pentecostals are reforming their lives by effecting a series of ruptures rather than being engaged in slow processes of ongoing transformation (p. 159). Others, such as Ruth Marshall (2009) argues that to *become* a “Born-again” might be an event of a rupture but *being* a Born-Again is a gradual ongoing existential project (p. 131). In other words, for Marshall, there is a constant movement ingrained in living as a born-again individual, a continuing makeover. My material supports findings in line with this view. The participants in this study were engaged in a process of transforming themselves through hard work and patience. To become a Believer was a matter of slowly becoming something new, of gradually realizing more and more what God wanted and being ready to act in accord with this.

While doing work on the self was an individual concern, the church, especially the pastor couples, played a central role in the process. The pastor couples were available for counseling as well as “upholding” members in prayers and it was not unusual for meetings, such as Bible studies or Women’s meetings, to turn into a sort of group therapy. During such meetings, there was a possibility of sharing one’s concerns, receiving advice, and being prayed over. As many participants did not feel comfortable with opening up in a mixed-gender setting, the Women’s meetings were especially important forums for the participants when it came to achieving change.

In these ways, work on the self was carried out in partnership with God and with the help of the church. To illustrate this I will give two different examples of such processes, one dealing with a traumatic past and the other with a personal trait that was experienced as a problem. Despite differences, they point in the same direction: the importance of God as an actor in the women’s religious lives.

Tara

Tara was a woman in her late twenties who came from a Hindu background. During her teenage years and early twenties, she had been sexually abused by

several men. These experiences had created deep emotional scars and a distorted understanding of what it meant to live in a relationship with a man. Her life took a sudden turn when a close friend became her boyfriend. He was gentle and treated her with respect and this made Tara start to realize how badly she had been treated. During a trip to South India, Tara shared her story and feelings with a Christian friend. Her friend prayed for her and confirmed Tara's new realization that sexual abuse was never acceptable. Later that night, after crying for hours, she had a strong experience of Christ visiting her room and, like her Christian friend, he condemned the perpetrators who had abused her. Soon after this, Tara decided to become a Believer. This made her family furious and led to a break-up with the man she thought was the love of her life. When I met Tara, a year had passed. Even though she had days of doubt, she was convinced that emotional healing was possible and that God could help her to overcome her past. Tara wished to regain her self-respect and have a future healthy marriage. She spent a lot of time reading and listening to Christian teaching about marriage; recently God had encouraged her to share her experiences and seek support from the pastor's wife who was now counseling her. During days that were especially difficult, Tara would spend hours with God, crying out to him, finding strength in his presence and promises. She knew that it would take time to move forward, but at least she was on her way, and she was not alone.

Several of the participants had, like Tara, gone through some sort of traumatic experience that influenced their daily lives. The most common traumas were sexual or physical abuse, a tragic death of a close family member, or being socially alienated by family and friends due to conversion. For these participants, moving to Gurugram provided an opportunity to process past experiences. The churches provided a safe space to start this process; they invited members to reflect upon their lives and supported them through their struggles.

Even though it was not unusual that working on the self involved processing and overcoming a traumatic past, most women were trying to grow and change in areas that were more mundane. For example, they were trying to become more grateful, establishing good habits around sitting or tithing, becoming more outgoing, growing as a leader, or seeking gifts of the Spirit. Working on the self also included areas that were not apparently religious such as weight-loss or habits around using Facebook. Kalinda's story is an example of a less dramatic form of working on the self.

Kalinda

Kalinda came from Tamil Nadu. She was living in Gurugram with her husband and their two children. She described herself in the following way:

I am not at all a talkative girl. I was very (..) shy girl. I did not open my mouth when I was studying in school and college. I use to keep quiet all the time. Nobody knew Kalinda is there, in the classroom . . . I don't have that kind of confidence that I will speak. That I am wise. I would never think like that. I used to say that I am a fool. Why should I open my mouth? These kinds of things used to come to me. (Kalinda, 2016)

Kalinda described how she had struggled with low confidence and shyness, which had been a hindrance for her in social situations. In her former church, which had over 1,000 members, she said she could be anonymous and quiet. Things were different in Loving Assemblies of God which was a much smaller church and it was difficult to go unnoticed. For this reason, Kalinda felt the need to work on herself in order to overcome her insecurity which often felt like a stumbling block. How was she going to share the gospel with her neighbors, pray out loud in cell groups, or share her testimony in church if she did not dare to raise her voice? In a conversation with God, he told Kalinda that she would soon be given an opportunity to be a blessing to the church. It so happened that pastor John announced that they were going to have a service in which four ordinary members were to be responsible for the sermon.⁸¹ Kalinda told me how John had encouraged the members to step out of their comfort zone and be a blessing to their fellow Believers. He asked members to give their names for this. Kalinda felt a sting in her heart, that God was trying to encourage her to take the opportunity but her shyness stopped her. To give a sermon meant not only speaking in front of people but speaking before men and giving them spiritual guidance; these were things she did not feel comfortable doing. Afterwards, she felt bad for not taking the opportunity. She shared her feelings with a relative who said that it was advisable to ask God for forgiveness and prepare to be ready when God gave her a new opportunity. During the coming months, she prayed regularly about the matter and felt that God was giving her more and more confidence, that he was transforming her. The next time John announced that a similar service was planned and members were to give their names, Kalinda was the first person to volunteer. She was

⁸¹ A sermon was normally about 45 minutes so this meant preaching for about 10 to 15 minutes.

very proud to tell me that she actually had done it, that she, the insecure and shy girl, had been used by God as a blessing for the church that Sunday.

Kalinda's story is a good example of how the participants were inspired to change through involvement in the churches' activities and through encouragement from the pastors. In fact, both John and Sunil regularly encouraged their members to go out of their "comfort zones". The call went out to men and women alike but was often more radical for female members as it tended to involve being outgoing and unreserved. Many participants had been taught since childhood not to be impulsive, to be aware of how they spoke in front of men, and not to think too much of themselves. In the churches, they were encouraged, among other things, to take opportunities to share testimonies with strangers, to be leaders, to express their emotions in worship, and to be confident that God could use them to be a blessing to others, both men and women. We can see from the foregoing that many of the participants were modifying their understanding of what a respectable femininity entailed.

Collaborative Agency

In exploring how the women "did" religion, how they expressed their religion in practice and engaged in those practices, it has become evident that their way of behaving assumed that God was a vital and active being in their everyday life. God was not a side character in their lives or somebody they merely worshiped but was experienced as playing a leading role in their day-to-day lives as he joined forces with the women by strengthening them, guiding them, and intervening when necessary. The women experienced God to be a dynamic being who took initiatives, surprised them, had plans, responded in unexpected ways, and had a will of his own. As we have seen throughout this chapter, to live as a Believer involved being in relationship and acting together with God towards various goals. The women teamed up with God to overcome problems and challenges in their lives and, together with God, they searched for ways to strengthen their relationship.

The women's way of "doing" religion challenges us to think about the subject's capacity to act as something that stretches beyond the individual. In order to understand this phenomenon it might be helpful to take a step back and look at how the women think about the Believer-subject. A common way to understand how individuals construct themselves as subjects is by processes of exclusion and differentiation. This process starts when the infant undergoes

differentiation from the mother (or main caregiver) and continues this by taking a position distinct from other significant persons, other others, and the Others (Carlson, 2000). By contrast, as we saw in the previous chapter, the women understood the Believer-subject to emerge through the establishment of a relationship, that is, the relationship with God. As such, the Believer-subject is, by definition, relational. The Believer-subject's agency, her way of engaging with her religion, emerged within the bounds of the relationship and was experienced accordingly as a shared activity. I have conceptualized this cooperative interaction, which takes place between Believer and God, as collaborative agency.⁸²

This finding suggests that operationalizing agency as resistance against religious customs, norms, beliefs, or a transcendental being, which is often done in the study of gender and religion, might stand in stark contrast to how religious practitioners themselves experience their room for action. By acting together with God, the women experienced that things could be done, that situations could change, that "all things are possible". Their capacity to act stood in relationship to God's capacity to act.

The concept of collaborative agency further points to something that researchers of the Pentecostal movement for long have noticed which is that there is an inherent instability about the source of agency among Pentecostals. On one hand, the movement is influenced by an attitude to holiness that suggests it is possible to bring down divine power through various "techniques" (e.g. through prayer, fasting, or a strong faith). On the other hand, there is widespread belief that everything resides in God's hands and that a Believer needs to trust God to act when the time is right (Marshall, 2009: 156). Both these ideas were prevalent among the participants but they were not considered to stand in opposition to each other. Rather, the fact that both these forces were at work at the same time made the women experience their relationship with God as something real since it brought an unpredictable element to the relationship that made it dynamic.

⁸² This concept draws inspiration from Mary Dunn's (2017) article "Rethinking Agency after the Relational Turn". Dunn argues that the subject is not only formed within the norms, adopted and adapted in the service of self-realization, but through the encounter with and response to multiple others. She further argues that agency is perhaps most productively understood as fractured between "a multiplicity of mutually dependent subjects constituted in dynamic relation to each other, rather than as belonging to a single subject" (p. 358).

Summary

In this chapter, I have identified and discussed four defining aspects of the participants' lived religion, namely: (1) a desire to live a life in accord with God's plan; (2) the recognition that the relationship with God must be tended; (3) a belief that everyday challenges and problems could be overcome with the help of God; and (4) the understanding that being a Believer was an ongoing transformational project. Taken together, these four features created a recognizable religious *modus operandi* that defined the participants' lived religion. Particular analytical attention has been paid to the dynamics of agency, that is, how the women engaged in the above-mentioned practices. The analysis suggests that the participants do not experience that they act as stand-alone religious agents when they "do" religion but work towards various goals together with God. To live as a Believer involved being in relationship and acting together with God. As such, the women's lived religion became a product of activity shared between Believer and God. I have conceptualized this form of agency as collaborative agency by which I mean a process in which the women were engaged in a common effort together with God to realize shared goals.

Chapter 6. Pious Emotions

While the women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nation dismissed rigid and ritualistic behavior codes, they were in agreement that it was important for a Believer to live a holy and moral life. Initially, I found this confusing and wondered how they as Believers navigated as moral subjects. The short answer to that question was not, as might be expected in a Pentecostal setting, that they were “guided by the Spirit” but rather that they strived to live “like Christ”. To live a holy and moral life was not primarily about avoiding or rejecting things of the world, nor was it about remembering to pray and read the Bible daily or attending church on Sundays. To be Christ-like meant adopting an emotional posture that resembled that of Christ’s. It was about being loving, humble, and grateful. To put it another way, the participants molded themselves into holy and moral Believers by remodeling and regulating their emotional lives.

While it is hardly controversial to state that emotions have a significant place in Pentecostal Christianity (see e.g. Anderson, 2014; Corten, 1999; Cox, 1994; Martin, 2002; Meyer, 2010a), there are few studies dealing explicitly and systematically with the role of emotion in adherents’ everyday religious lives. That Pentecostal Christianity is an emotionally expressive religion that has a sensational appearance is hard to miss and so it is worth noting that relatively few scholars have looked beyond these appearances. Perhaps the research community has been overly dazzled by the emotional atmosphere in churches or afraid to reinforce the stereotypical picture of the “over-emotional Pentecostal”. Regardless of this, there is much to be learned by looking at emotion beyond church walls.

Reevaluating Emotions

In recent decades, a reevaluation of emotions has taken place within a range of disciplines, from neuroscience and cognitive science to ethics and philosophy (Damasio, 2005; De Sousa, 1987; Fridja, 1986; Nussbaum, 2001). A main

outcome of this reevaluation is that emotions are no longer considered to stand in opposition to reason but play an important role in how people navigate the world, make sense of it, and make judgments of truth and value. The view that emotions are irrational disturbances derived from the “animal” part of our nature, and that they push a person around, is slowly fading.

Robert C. Solomon’s *The Passions* (1976) became a starting point for the debate about emotions within contemporary philosophy (Lemmens & Herck, 2008). In this book, Solomon questions what he calls “the myth of passions”. According to this myth, it is reason that constitutes our true self while emotions are considered forces that cloud our minds; we “fall” in love, are “overwhelmed” by joy, and are “paralyzed” with fear. In keeping with this, emotions are understood to be anti-rational forces that need to be controlled by reason, a threat to the moral and spiritual self as well as to social life. In *The Passions*, Solomon claims the opposite: emotions are forces that give meaning to our lives, “move” us to action, help us understand other people, and function as evaluative judgments. For example, to be angry involves a moral judgment that someone has wronged us or somebody else, and anger can “move” or motivate us to change the world for the better. Emotions are not an enemy of reason but more of an assistant or an actual guide. Solomon has not been alone in reevaluating the role of emotions in philosophy; among many others, Ronald de Sousa, William Lyons, Patricia Greenspan, Martha Nussbaum, and Robert Gordon have made important contributions.⁸³

The historical distinction between emotion and reason has incorporated numerous dichotomies that have structured Western thought in the modern era: active versus passive, intellect versus body, control versus chaos, objective versus subjective. As feminist researchers have pointed out, these dichotomies have in turn been associated with a binary construction of gender. Men have tended to be viewed as more rational, active, and objective, while women have

⁸³ Discoveries in cognitive science have further questioned the distinction between reason and emotion and called for a reevaluation of emotions (de Houwer & Hermans, 2010). Traditionally, reason has been commonly associated with mental processes such as perception and attention, memory and learning, comprehension, and the production of language. However, in contemporary cognitive science, the distinction between cognition and emotion has become increasingly blurred and these processes are now considered as dependent on “cognitive-emotional interaction” in the brain (Okon-Singer et al., 2015). For example, emotions help us to quickly respond to environmental stimuli and narrow our attention to object-relevant information, emotional states influence how we understand and interpret what we perceive, and emotional content can change the recollection of a memory, as well as help us better remember it.

been looked at as emotional, passive, and subjective (Maiese, 2016). As well, a hierarchical ordering has regulated these binary pairs. The supposed rational objective man who is able to control himself has been considered more suitable to hold positions of power. For this reason, the subordination of emotions has been used to rationalize the subordination of women as well as other groups that have been considered “emotional” (e.g. people of color and people from lower social classes). Strong emotional displays have often been looked down upon, considered inappropriate, or even categorized as part of various disorders (Ahmed, 2004).

The negative connotations linked to being emotional have had a considerable influence on Pentecostal studies. In 1968, Walter Hollenweger, one of the earliest scholars of Pentecostal Christianity, wrote the following lines about how contemporary theologians tended to look upon the Pentecostal movement:

They differ in their judgment about the Pentecostal movement; some see in it a return to the charismatic church of the primitive Christianity. Others believe it displays demonic imitations of the true life of the Spirit. Most regard it as mental over-activity, or as an illusion essential to the lives of some people, which should not be resisted or ignored (Hollenweger, 2012:xviii)

As Hollenweger suggests, the Pentecostal movement with its strong expressions of emotional display has, since its inception, both provoked and confounded scholars. In early studies, Pentecostal Christianity was often described as an ecstatic movement, characterized by “primitive emotionalism”. In the psychology of religion up to the 1960s, Pentecostal Christianity was even widely considered to be “an expression or direct consequences of abnormal psychological processes and mental disorders” (Huber & Huber, 2010: 135). A psychopathological framework was used, including concepts such as hysteria, regression, emotional instability, immaturity, and neuroticism. Later studies have been more sympathetic, having a more distanced and nuanced approach to the strong emotional expressions that one may encounter in Pentecostal churches.

Nevertheless, for a long time scholars tended to couple emotional display with various deprivation theories. Pentecostal Christianity was considered to be a religion of the poor and marginalized. It was argued that the “disinherited” found in the Pentecostal movement a space where they could forget or get new perspectives on their suffering, rejoice together, and feel strong and confident as they were filled by the Spirit (see e.g. Anderson, 1979; Bloch-

Hoell, 1964; Stoll, 1990; Willems, 1967; Miller, 1996). Deprived of social status and a decent standard of living, “the poor”, it was argued, found an attraction to the Pentecostal movement in which they were uplifted with joy, regained hope, and felt empowered

In recent decades, when Pentecostal Christianity started to take hold of the middle class in various parts of the world, emotionalism has been less associated with escapism and recognized as a trait that attracts people from all classes and backgrounds. Nevertheless, a thorough reevaluation of emotions in this context is yet to take place. Few scholars of Pentecostal Christianity have looked seriously at emotion as something that helps adherents navigate the world, make sense of it, and make judgments of truth and value.⁸⁴ Moreover, if we are to understand the role of emotions within Pentecostal Christianity in a more comprehensive way, we need to look beyond what takes place within Pentecostal churches. In this chapter, I will explore the relationship between the participants’ lived religion and their emotional life by directing attention to their views on morality and how they navigate as Believers. For my purpose, I understand emotions to be psychological states that are felt in the body and are connected to social contexts and to human beings’ cognitive and volitional capacities.

Regulating Emotions for God

As described above, the Pentecostal movement has become renowned for accommodating strong emotional expressions and experiences. Therefore, it was somewhat surprising to learn that in the participants’ everyday religious lives an essential skill was to be able to hold back, adjust, and let go of emotions. To be able to regulate emotions (both “up” and “down”) was a necessary quality for a Believer to possess since the women understood a Believer’s emotional life to be closely connected to her moral life. That a person could let go of anger and resentment, feel love and compassion, and be humble pointed to their spiritual maturity. In addition, a common assessment was that being able to release or intensify certain emotions was essential for preserving a close relationship with God.

⁸⁴ There are, of course, some studies that have started to tackle these questions. A few worth mentioning are Thomas J. Csordas (1994) *The Sacred Self*, Tanya Luhrmann’s (2012) *When God Talks Back*, Jens Köhrsen’s (2016) *Middle Class Pentecostalism* and Judith Casselberry’s (2017) *The Labour of Faith*.

Anger, pride, or impatience were emotional states that did not reflect the gratitude and awe a Believer should feel before God. For example, Rachel gave the following answer to why she thought it was important for a Believer to be able to let go of anger and bitterness and be forgiving:

Because, when you walk with the Lord, when you are in this relationship with God, you know, it is not a smooth walk. Especially when you strive to please God, so many things will start coming. Especially the interpersonal relationships, with your husband, with your children, with everybody around you. So you have to be constantly forgiving others. Otherwise that relationship, if you are holding on to bitterness and all, that will hinder your walk with the Lord, your actual communion with the Lord. So Christians have to be forgiving. You have no other way but to forgive. (Rachel, 2017)

Here, Rachel states that a person who is not able to forgive others and let go of bitterness may encounter obstacles in their walk with the Lord. As has been argued in previous chapters, the relationship with God lay at the heart of the participants' lived religion and to keep this relationship strong and healthy was vital. Emotions were forces that could either strengthen or hurt the relationship with God and so it was important that a Believer was able to manage her emotions.

Within the field of psychology, the ability to influence, control, and adapt emotions has been a much studied topic since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Though various terms have been used to describe these processes, "emotion regulation" has become a widely used concept (Vandekerckhove, et al., 2008). Emotion regulation has been defined as "the process by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions" (Gross, 1998: 275). Without going into the complex terrain surrounding this research, I will outline some of the basic ideas of the concept and then use it as an analytic tool to explore how the participants dealt with emotions in their day-to-day religious lives.

Emotion regulation is a skill that may be automatic or controlled, conscious or unconscious. As we interact with people, we need this skill to be able to dampen, intensify, or simply maintain our emotions depending on the context and situation (Gross & Thompson, 2008). Emotion regulation acts as a modifier for the hundreds of emotion-provoking stimuli we encounter every day: from being woken up way too early by our kids, to discovering that our partner has forgotten to buy bread for breakfast, to being late for our morning meeting, to discovering that that meeting has been cancelled, to having a full mailbox, once again hearing an inappropriate joke from a colleague, to being stuck in

traffic, to realizing that the last electricity bill has not been paid. Importantly, this is not only about holding back feelings but also the ability to intensify emotions so as to be able to receive an unsought gift with gratitude or get into a party-mood even if we would have preferred to stay at home.

To be able to regulate one's emotions is also an important skill because emotions do not only make us feel something, they make us feel like *doing* something, they "move" us to act (Fridja, 1986). To feel passionate about God is not only about having affectionate feelings, it also wanting to do things that would make him happy or please him. To be filled by the Spirit makes people feel strong and confident, prepared to do things they otherwise would not dare, like presenting a prophecy before a big crowd or asking their sick Hindu neighbor if they could pray for their healing. As we will see in this chapter, the women took their feelings seriously being well aware that emotions direct actions. They did not understand emotions to be anti-rational forces but as forces that could steer their action in wanted and unwanted ways as well as provide them with important information about the world.

I would like to stress that even though emotion regulation often refers to the individual's ability to control emotions, cultural contexts and social environments are what set the stage for the regulation of emotions (see e.g. Mesquita & Frijda, 1992; Qu & Telzer, 2017; Vandekerckhove et al., 2008b). Depending on the culture and social context, various emotions are sought after or despised. Strong expressions of certain emotions might be acceptable while the display of other emotions can be regarded as disturbing. Also, depending on culture, there are variations in how people express emotions and how they share them with others.

For example, a common finding from cross-cultural comparisons of emotion is that in Asian cultures the experience and expression of emotion is significantly shaped by consideration of others while in Western cultures the experience and expression of emotion reflects a more independent self (see e.g. Crowe et al., 2012; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Raval et al., 2007). To regulate one's emotions to maintain group harmony and the well-being of others, avoid creating a negative impression of the self and family, and adjust emotions to preserve interpersonal relationships is more common in cultures like India's where interdependence rather than independence constitutes the basis of the self. This is not only a matter of regulating down feelings like anger and frustration but of promoting positive feelings (e.g. gratitude, sympathy, and joy) to foster interpersonal relations and group harmony.

One must also bear in mind that emotional expression in India is affected by the fact that it is a multiethnic and multicultural country highly stratified by caste, class, and gender. India as a cultural context is highly diverse and my own experience of living and traveling there is that North and South India provide two very different emotional contexts. In North India, people are more emotionally reserved towards strangers, they rarely smile at those they do not know, and they tend to communicate in a rather harsh manner. Warm feelings are shown mainly towards familiar people. In South India, the emotional atmosphere is more open and welcoming. It is considered polite rather than inappropriate to be friendly towards strangers. The South Indian participants in this study often brought up this cultural difference between South and North India and worried that their children would become rude and arrogant after living in North India. Despite these challenges, they also found what was positive in the “cold” North Indian attitude such as that people had stronger integrity and were self-confident.

Nevertheless, even though the women came from various parts of India and had been brought up in different emotional cultures, they had at least one common social environment that set the stage for the regulation of emotions and this was the churches. This factor might explain why there were commonalities regarding which emotions would be encouraged and which were despised. The focus of the following analysis is, however, on how emotion regulation is connected to the participants’ moral lives rather than the emotional culture of the churches.

To Forgive

According to the participants, an indispensable quality for living a Christ-like life was to be able to forgive. While a few women pointed out that Jesus had commanded his disciples to forgive, the most common reason given for why it was important to forgive was that it reflected what God had done for humanity. In the process of forgiving somebody, the participants needed to regulate unwanted or “bad” emotions such as anger, bitterness, disappointment, and resentment. These were emotional states that needed to be managed and corrected. Importantly, in order to forgive, the participants also had to deal with feelings of having been hurt or let down. Hence, to forgive was a practice that required a great deal of emotional work.

The participants often pointed out that a Believer should be careful to forgive others given that God himself did not hold sins against them. He was

always ready to forgive and forget. It would be inconsistent if a Believer expected forgiveness from God but denied other people the same. As such, to hold strong negative emotions towards somebody was practically regarded as unethical, a sign of a double standard. It was also considered a hindrance for attracting people to Christianity since who would believe that God had sacrificed his son to forgive humanity if his followers were bitter and resentful? As Alisha put it, “To forgive is actually to make a statement for Christ”.

At the same time, the women remarked that it was difficult, and at times painful, to forgive others. Several women admitted that they had difficulties or were not able to let go of “bad” feelings they felt towards certain people. Dinah was one of the participants who spoke honestly about this struggle:

This is one thing [to forgive others], which I really struggle with, even until today . . . There are times when I think: “How can they do this to me? How can they betray me? How can they plan against me?” But the same thing was also (..) done to Christ. But he was never with that attitude. If somebody is planning against me or somebody is betraying me, I am still not able to go and love them and hug them. I do not say anything to them though, I just try to keep away from them. Which is not right, I should not be like that. But that is the reason why forgiving is very, very important. We need to inculcate this into [our life] a lot. (Dinah, 2016)

Like Dinah, many other participants told me that a common strategy they used when they were not able to prevent “bad” feelings and forgive was to try to avoid that particular person as much as possible. In that way, they were able to control their feelings to a certain extent and reduce the risk of acting on “bad” feelings. This strategy was not always an option when, for example, one had to deal with parents-in-law.

As for many other women in India, it was common for the participants to have complicated and somewhat tense relationships with their parents-in-law, particularly mothers-in-law. While middle-class women’s exposure to ideals of equality seemed to have affected their marriages, the position of a daughter-in-law in middle-class families is still largely that of an inferior (Allendorf, 2017; Belliappa, 2013; Puri, 1999). In-laws tend to expect conformity and deference, as a rule women respect the traditional norms associated with their status as daughter-in-law and behave accordingly. Nevertheless, research also shows that middle-class women find it challenging to adjust to these norms. The relationship with parents-in-laws, especially in the early years of marriage, tends to be experienced as challenging and conflict-ridden.

Most women in this study had experiences of being hurtfully or disrespectfully treated by their parents-in-law which some women struggled to forget and forgive. As they could not avoid meeting or talking to their parents-in-law (and in most cases desired to rebuild the relationship) the women had to find another way to deal with feelings of anger and resentfulness. A common tactic in these situations was to replace feelings of anger with feelings of grief. In other words, rather than focusing on the parents-in-law's hurtful behavior (which angered them), the women focused on the grief they felt for not having a working relationship with their parents-in-law. As feeling sad was an acceptable emotion for a Believer, the women were capable of emotionally relating to their parents-in-law as emotionally moral Believers.

To Be Humble

The participants considered humility to be an appropriate default emotional state for a Believer. It was regarded to be the correct attitude to have before God and an emotional state that paved the way for moral behavior. When the participants talked about the importance of being humble, they often quoted passages in the Bible such as James 4:10, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up" and Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goes before destruction". There seemed to be a general understanding that God had strong feelings about "the humble" and "the proud". As Tara put it, "If you are an arrogant person, he will first bring you to your knees". To be pretentious or overconfident before God was considered unsuitable; these were feelings that a Believer needed to regulate.

Many women remarked on this in Gurugram since it was a city that attracted many professionals who wanted to advance their careers and who tended to brag about their achievements and success. The participants found this attitude of complacency and self-satisfaction, and the resulting behavior, disturbing. As Believers, they tried to avoid adopting such an attitude and to remember, "I am not the person behind all this". To be humble was to recognize God's active role behind one's success and prosperity. As Nisha described it:

I know whatever I might have achieved, all the education, and everything, my parents, my family, everything that I have right now, is not (..) what I did. It is not because what I did, it is all his [God's] ways. And I should be humble enough to accept that. And whatever I have, it is not mine, it is being provided by him. And even if I have little bit of knowledge, if I have little bit of (..) like privileges that I enjoy, it is not because of me, but of his grace. And I shouldn't

go and be like “I did everything. I am the person behind all of this” . . . He [God] did it, it is somebody else’s work. I don’t have anything to be proud of myself, I should not carry with me that kind of pride. (Nisha, 2017)

However, to be humble meant not only correctly acknowledging God’s hand in one’s life but also behaving and living a life that reflected that of Christ’s. To think and behave as if one understood oneself to be superior to others was considered problematic. As the women saw it, a humble person was more inclined to treat people, regardless of their background and position, with respect. For example, a humble person would take care to treat the “helper” (domestic worker) or *dhobi* (washerwomen or men) in a considerate manner. Several participants added that a positive side effect of always being polite and respectful was that it often opened up possibilities of sharing the gospel or a testimony. As Elina put it:

You know, if you are being proud, people are not happy with you. People do not want to talk to you. Because they will say, “She is not bothering. She does not bother about what we are, or what we are going through”. We will not be able to help when we are not humble. So by being humble, I feel I have let myself (..) I have opened doors for people to come to me, to be a channel in their lives, to talk about my faith. Especially in this city, people feel that you are different [when you are humble]. (Elina, 2016)

Elina suggests here that to be humble was a way to stand out and be different from “people in the world”. Apart from its importance when relating to more distant others, humility was also regarded as an important quality to possess in close relationships. The women claimed that in order for a marriage to work both parties needed to be able to let go of their pride, admit mistakes, and say that they were sorry, all of which demanded humility. Likewise, the women insisted that humility made a person more open to listen to advice and alternative opinions and this tended to have a positive effect on relationships.

It is important to notice that humility was not equated with being weak or docile since to admit that one was wrong took courage, and to break hierarchical structures (even when one was in the upper position) demanded confidence. The participants believed, as the verse from James 4:10 suggests, that God would reward and exalt the humble. Christ was the prime example of this; he died as a criminal on a cross but was raised and sits in glory at the right hand of God. The assurance of a future reward (whether in this life or another) motivated the women to cultivate humility.

Being Patient

According to the women, a Believer should strive to have patience before God as well as with others. In order to be patient, they needed to control emotions like frustration, irritation and, of course, impatience. This could involve not being upset at an annoying colleague, not raising one's hand to a disobedient child, enduring the rage of one's parents after telling them that one would only marry a Believer, or confidently waiting for God to answer one's prayers.

While God was experienced as playing an active role in the women's everyday life, his ways and timing for answering prayers often puzzled the women. God usually made his followers wait. Tara phrased it in the following way: "I feel patience is important because (...) God is a god of, I would say, delay. (Laughs) He just makes you wait. For that you need patience and God teaches you patience." (Tara, 2017)

Several women emphasized that God is not a magician; a Believer could not expect immediate answers, God would answer prayers when the time was right and so patience was inseparable from trust that God would act when the time and conditions were appropriate. A person who lacked that trust in God could risk backsliding. Kalinda described this problem:

Because Christians lack patience, they (...) backslide. "God is not answering my prayers" "My sickness is still with me" "My poverty is still with me" "God has not answered". These kinds of thoughts should not come. We should wait patiently. (Kalinda, 2016)

Several women remarked that it had taken them years to accept that God's plans and timing were different from their own, and a few admitted that they still, at times, struggled to keep feelings of frustration under control. In Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations, the pastors repeatedly stressed the importance of learning to wait. Struggling with impatience appeared to be a common problem among the members of the churches.

Patience was not only important in relation to God but also when dealing with others. The women described how an impatient person would easily give in to feelings of anger and frustration. That in turn could lead to conflict or just the use of hurtful words. The participants highlighted that a patient person was better able to resist the impulse to always give their opinion and would be more open to other people's points of view. A patient person would not automatically assume they were right. There were thus many reasons why patience was an important quality for a Believer.

Scholars have remarked on a connection between Pentecostals emotional lives and their moral lives. For example, Marie Griffith (1997) has, in her study of the Aglow movement, described how the women in these communities found support when dealing with “bad” feelings. In these communities, anger was presented and treated as a sin that needed to be dealt with and overcome. For the Aglow women, to let go of anger was not only about forgiving others but, perhaps more importantly, about being emotionally healed. Members in the Aglow community were encouraged to share their painful memories, openly discuss and acknowledge their anger, and invite God to replace these feelings with love. Even when their difficult circumstances remained unchanged, Griffith’s informants felt delivered and empowered by letting go of their anger and replacing it with a positive feeling like love.

Similarly, Kelly H. Chong (2011) has brought attention to how evangelical middle-class women in South Korea are “helped” by their female cell groups to deal with negative and “bad” emotions. These women were encouraged to confess their emotional “sins” (such as having a negative attitude towards one’s marriage or being angry with one’s spouse or in-laws), surrender to God, and reformulate what a “proper feminine identity” is. While Chong finds that many women experience emotional healing in this process, she also argues that it is a process that results in a “redomestication of women” as women are thought to recommit to the traditional family and gender system (p. 101).

While the pastors in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations occasionally brought attention to how “bad” feelings could be a problem for a Believer, I seldom heard members speak openly about their unwanted feelings. I observed this to be a private matter which the individual Believer coped with together with God. However, as with Griffith and Chong’s findings, the participants described how they experienced a sense of “relief” or “peace” when they were able to control or let go of unwanted feelings. In addition, they emphasized the positive effects that their emotional work had on their relationships with others. As Indian women’s family responsibilities tend to include taking the main responsibility for maintaining and servicing family ties, it is likely that their capacity to regulate their emotions eased this work.

It should be noted that in contrast to the above-mentioned examples, the women in this study understood this emotional moral code to apply equally to men and women. For them it was clear that both women and men, needless to say, should strive to emulate the (emotional) life of Christ. Hence, while this emotional moral code might have encouraged the women to commit to traditional gender roles, it is likely that it felt more radical for men, who were thus

expected to live according to somewhat feminine emotional ideals. Moreover, when the participants in this study spoke about how to deal with unwanted emotions, they emphasized their own capacity to act in this process. To regulate one's emotions was not simply handing control to God or letting him replace bad feelings with desirable ones, rather it was something that demanded hard work from them as Believers.

Love and Gratitude

The participants did not just regulate emotions by holding back or letting go of them, they also intensified some emotions. Among the women, there were two emotions that were especially pronounced as important to reinforce: love and gratitude.

Love, including compassion, was regarded as a crucial motivating force for acting in a way that was appropriate for a Believer. The women echoed the Bible saying that to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself is the greatest commandment. They also emphasized that the love of a Believer should not be biased toward easy practices such as to love God, family, and fellow Believers. What mattered was that a Believer's love reached beyond that inner circle which, as one woman put it, was "the real sign whether we are his children or not". However, for most of the women, the other circle consisted of colleagues, neighbors, or acquaintances, rather than the poor. Few women seemed to see it as imperative for Christians to care for those in need or at least only few brought attention to this in the interviews or were involved in some sort of social outreach work.

Several women struggled with how to practically go about intensifying feelings of love and compassion. Naturally, love for strangers would not arise from nowhere. Many women prayed that God would fill their hearts with love, that the love God had for humankind would find a place in their hearts. This was also a common prayer during gatherings. Another strategy was to perform acts of love and hope that the performance of such acts would result in increasing love. Either way, it was important to express love, as Radha described it:

He is an unchanging God that loves us, who pours a lot of love in our hearts. We should be able to pour it out, to express it out. If we are not (..) God says: do not receive the grace of God in vain. If you are not able to love others, not able to exercise love (..) then, what is the difference? We are like any empty [sic] gong, just not having anything in us. (Radha, 2017)

As Radha points out, love should be more than a matter of the heart; it should be a way of acting. The women associated a lot of everyday behaviors with love, for example, not finding faults in people, not being crude or offensive, being careful about what jokes one shared, accepting people non-judgmentally, and caring for those in need. Indeed, love was not just a grand feeling that a Believer should obtain but rather a force behind everyday actions. Nonetheless, to actually feel love and compassion was important. A person who did not feel love risked performing “empty acts” that were done with the wrong motives such as to impress somebody or gain certain benefits. In short, the ideal state for a Believer was to feel as she behaved and behave as she felt.

Gratitude was another feeling that the participants insisted should be prevalent in a Believer’s emotional life. To be thankful was an approach to the whole of life; it was not enough to say a prayer of thanks now and then, but gratitude should pervade the life of a Believer. Joy described it in the following way:

I think being thankful is what drives your day. If you do not have an attitude of gratitude, I think you are a wretched person. 'Cause (..) the days I am grump-ing, or the days I am in a bad mood, it is just because I have not thanked God for a thousand of millions blessings he has given me . . . I think it is your thankfulness that really is the joy in your life. I mean, you can have all the blessings in the world, but if you miss out this one ingredient, that is thankfulness, it is almost like a cursed life. (Joy, 2016)

It was not only Joy who stressed that gratitude was a source of positive feelings like joy, peace, happiness, and contentment. Several women even used thankfulness as a conscious technique to handle days or situations when they felt emotionally low. When they felt depressed or sad, they would start thanking God for everything they were happy about and, as a consequence, they emotionally refocused mind and body to what was positive in their lives. They described how they felt more happy and peaceful after doing this.

Several women also pointed out that it was not appropriate for a Believer to always want more and more, or to constantly complain. The church should not be “a murmuring community”, like the Israelites had been in the desert, but one that praised and thanked God for everything he had done for them. Bearing in mind that God had sacrificed his son in order that men and women might have eternal life in heaven, there was no excuse for not being thankful.

As we have seen in this section, the participants were involved in highly demanding emotional work as they tried to regulate and transform their emotional lives to become Christ-like. It could be argued that the women were

involved in a process of (emotional) sanctification and that they were doing their best, with the help of God, to live holy lives in which they let their hearts, emotions, and actions be transformed to resemble those of Christ's. Worth mentioning is that the search for holiness was not related to salvation. It was not a matter of being gradually released from sin. As Bergunder (2008) notes in his study of the South Indian Pentecostal movement, although the idea of holiness is highly valued, it tends to be separated from the *Ordo salutis* and thus, among Pentecostals in India, to become holy is seldom related to a three-stage path to salvation (pp. 144-145).

While the importance of living a holy (and moral) life has been stressed within the Pentecostal movement since its inception, there has been a tendency since the publication of David Martin's (1990) *Tongues of Fire* to draw on the work of Max Weber when discussing ethics and morality among Pentecostals in the Global South (see Nogueira-Godsey [2012] for discussion). In other words, to argue that the Pentecostal movement promotes an equivalent to what Weber described as an ethic of inner-worldly asceticism encompassing virtues such as a disciplined attitude towards work and social life, as well as a rejection of "worldly" things (e.g. alcohol, tobacco, revealing clothing, and extra-marital sex). While I do not reject the idea in itself, this frame has narrowed the discussion of Pentecostals' moral lives to embody an ethic for development such that "the ascetic moral code" (Robbins, 2004) has led to economic and social upward mobility. Moreover, the Weberian approach obviously has certain limitations when it comes to the study of middle-class Pentecostal Christianity.

In his work on middle-class churches in Argentina, Jens Koehrsen (2017) observes that these churches tend to operate with a moral code that is rather open towards society. In contrast to "traditional, inward-orientated Pentecostalism", Pentecostal middle-class churches in Argentina seek integration within their social environments by reducing (but not fully dissolving) existing boundaries and potential tensions (p. 328). Koehrsen points out that the finding is in line with the sect-to-church transition theory (Johnson, 1957; Stark & Finke, 2000) which explains that, when improving their socio-economic status, sects tend to leave behind that which distinguishes them from churches, namely, tension-based characteristics. A similar tendency can be observed among the women in this study. As highlighted in Chapter 4, the participants tended to live their lives within the boundaries of middle-class respectability. Their positions on lifestyle issues did not diverge in any significant way from the middle class in general, which, of course, reduced tensions

with the social environment. As has been shown in this chapter, the participants operated in accord with a moral code that facilitated social interaction rather than set them aside from their peers and encouraged withdrawal from the world. Their ways of regulating their emotions to become Christ-like tended to help them overcome conflicts and strengthen relationships.

In the coming section, the analysis will shift focus slightly. While still addressing the question of how to live as a Believer, the discussion will move from the practice of emotion regulation to how the women used information from their emotional life to navigate as religious subjects and towards a good rapport with God.

“It is not all the time you are high up there”

Apart from shaping the participants’ behavior, emotions played an important role in providing information to them about their spiritual lives which could make the women aware when something was not quite right in their walk with God. The participants used emotional information to discern if they had done something that was wrong in the eyes of God, to know if their relationship with God was healthy and strong, and to be able to tell if they were making decisions that were in line with God’s plan. Feelings and emotions were important sources of knowledge as they tried to navigate life as Believers.

In the interviews and in conversations with the women, there were two particularly negative emotional states relating to their religious lives that they brought up. One was the experience of feeling “spiritually low” and participants in both churches used this expression. It referred to a state when one felt spiritually detached in some way or another due, for example, to doubts or feeling emotionally disconnected from God. The other negative emotional state was characterized by a feeling of failure, of being unable to live up to (one’s own) expectations of how a Believer should be, act, and feel. I have termed this emotional state *charismatic anxiety*. I use the term “anxiety” because this emotional state was dominated by feelings of angst, unease, bad conscience, and worry.

Charismatic Anxiety

As has been discussed in the previous two chapters, there was not a standardized way among the women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations to live as Believers and little common ground in lifestyle choices and

habits. The situations or circumstances that gave rise to charismatic anxiety varied. For example, some participants felt uncomfortable in a setting where others drank alcohol, while others were unconcerned about drinking beer or wine occasionally. Some women had angst because they could not speak in tongues while others were critical of the practice. Some women read several chapters of the Bible every day, but others were satisfied if they managed to read the Bible at least once a week. In other words, charismatic anxiety cannot be traced back to a particular behavior or phenomenon among the women as it was dependent on their distinctive understanding of how a Believer should live. It can be understood as a negative emotional state that alerted Believers that there might be a need to modify their behavior or way of life.

It was possible to categorize the circumstances behind the women's charismatic anxiety into three areas: (1) common Pentecostal religious practices (including prayer, acting out gifts of the Spirit, evangelization); (2) lifestyle issues (like using Facebook, watching Bollywood movies, and enjoy shopping); (3) unwelcome life events that made the participants confused about God's plan for them (events such as losing one's job or not finding a husband).

In the first category, we find the most common examples of charismatic anxiety such as having the feeling that one is not praying enough, not reading the Bible enough, or one has failed to tell friends and family about Jesus. The women gave various reasons as to why they were not able to live up to the standards they had set. Some of the most common explanations were not finding the time, being afraid (in the case of speaking about Jesus), not feeling like doing it, having a competing interest, or due to "bad habits". Kathrine describe her inability to pray and read the Bible as much as she wanted in the following way:

Before marriage, I used to pray on my knees every day, I mean, I was a strong Believer. But now, I don't get time to pray and all. Because of the kid. I don't know (..) Whenever there is a free time, I just watch TV. I should change it, I know that, I should change it. I read the Bible and pray, but not as frequently as I used to before. Because of the kid. I don't know if the kid is a [good] excuse. (Kathrine, 2016)

We can see here that Kathrine struggled with feelings surrounding her prayer life. On the one hand, her child was taking much of her time. On the other hand, her words suggest she had a bad conscience about watching television when she did find some spare time and felt that she should devote that time to prayers and reading the Bible. Kathrine wanted to change but was not able to

do so at that moment and this gave rise to feelings of anxiety due to her not living up to her image of how a Believer should live her life.

The participants also had different opinions about what constitutes a Christian lifestyle and how to maintain it. Some women would not watch television, use Facebook, wear “Western clothes” and jewelry, drink alcohol, listen to non-Christian music, or spend time at shopping malls. Other women felt that none of these actions threatened their idea of how a Believer ought to live, or else they would hold the position that only some of these behaviors were inappropriate. The frequency and intensity of charismatic anxiety was not related to what stand the women took on these issues. Rather, indications showed that the level of their charismatic anxiety was connected to their belief in their own judgment on whether something was right or wrong, and to consistency in their behavior. The only difference between those who had a stricter understanding of how a Believer should behave and those who had a more “liberal” approach was that the latter showed signs of a stronger need to justify their position (to say, for example, why it was okay to listen to non-Christian music).

The third cause of charismatic anxiety was when life took a course that seemed to go against what they believed was God’s plan for them. In hindsight, the women could often “see” that God had had everything under control (as with Parvati’s Abraham-and-Isaac story in chapter 4). However, at the time when they were going through difficult and unforeseen situations, it was not always as easy to see God’s hand in a course of events and this could lead to feelings of confusion and distress that one had perhaps gone astray or failed to follow God’s plan. This did not mean that they doubted that God was in control, rather it was related to feelings of being at sea.

Isha, a married woman with two kids, was going through such a phase during my fieldwork. She and her family had been living in Gurugram for four years, were one of the most committed families in Loving Assemblies of God, and strongly believed that God had placed them in the city for a purpose. Just a few weeks after my arrival, Isha’s husband, Amrit, lost his job. Isha was working as a teacher but her salary could not cover the family’s cost of living. The couple decided to trust that God would soon give Amrit a new job and, in the meantime, they would use their savings to supplement Isha’s salary. As weeks became months, doubts and worries started to overwhelm Isha. Eventually Amrit got a job in Chennai but it was difficult for Isha to accept that they had to move. Here is an extract from the diary I asked her to keep:

4.35AM Got up and prayed. Personal devotion time. Unable to pray. Amrit is leaving to Bangalore. Got a job there. My daughter Zareena is unwell, partially recovered. Want to pray, hear from God. Heart is heavy. Silently try to read Bible. 5.15AM Getting starting for the day's work. Prepare breakfast, lunch. Send my other daughter to school. I leave to school. Good day at work but want to go home. 12.15PM Take permission from coordinator to leave for home early, daughter unwell. I call Amrit who came and picked me up. Zareena seems to be fine. Just want to spend time with Amrit!! Time is running out!!

Evening we have weekly prayer at Ravi bro. and Dinah sis's house. I cry a lot. I tell Amrit to pray for me. I feel very weak and down. I need to be strong. If I keep crying, I may fall sick. I am praying for strength. Unable to come out. Amrit prays for me. I pray for him and other requests. I feel better. (Isha's diary, 2016)

From Isha's diary, it is clear that she was having a difficult time struggling to understand why this was happening to the family, why God was not answering their prayers. Was it not God's plan that they should live in Gurugram? Had they failed to understand his will? Isha found support in her husband's and other church members' prayers but still felt weak and confused. When the participants' charismatic anxiety was related to external circumstances, they tended to share their worries and angst with people in the church who would act supportively and keep the person or family in their prayers. The church did not place any blame on the person nor was guilt expected; rather, their anxiety came from inside, from the discrepancy between what they had believed was God's plan and the course life was taking.

Feeling Spiritually Low

If having charismatic anxiety was characterized by feelings of angst, confusion, and worry, to feel spiritually low was rather defined by feelings of depression, emptiness, alienation, and being dispirited. When a person felt spiritually low, it was common to have doubts, to question the meaning of things, and to experience God as being silent. Somebody described it as a feeling of "slowly drifting away from God" and another woman compared it to "being cut off from God". It was not off-limits to talk about feeling spiritually low; rather, it was acknowledged as something all Believers went through from time to time. Rachel made the following reflection about feeling spiritually low:

It is not all the time you are high up there. Even Elijah had those [phases]. You know, at one point he is doing miracles on Mount Carmel, getting the fire out of heaven. The next moment he wants to die. (Chuckles) But I believe that

portion is written to make us identify with that, you know (..) that nature of human being. But what if he had been consistent in praying, praying, praying. When the threat comes, he wants to run off. What if he would have said, “Lord, God save me from (..)” We need to be like that. But of course we are all human and we have our share of struggles and failures. Weaknesses. (Rachel, 2017)

Rachel took Elijah, a key figure in the Bible, as an example of a person venerated as a spiritual role model but who still could not resist feelings of despair. She speculated about what would have happened if Elijah had turned to God at that moment but concluded that it was probably inevitable for humans to feel like that at times. Nevertheless, it was considered necessary deal with such feelings of emptiness and alienation since they signaled that something was wrong with one’s spiritual life.

The most common way to handle periods of feeling spiritually low was to talk to a family member, friend, or somebody in the church. The women turned to people they trusted in order to share, seek advice, and be prayed for. Few women kept these feelings completely to themselves. Apart from seeking support from others, the women felt that it helped to cry in solitude, listen to worship music, and read passages from the Bible or some Christian book where they had previously “encountered God”.

Periods of feeling spiritually low could last from a few days to several weeks. For most women the feeling did not just suddenly disappear but would slowly fade. In the churches, members were encouraged to keep close to God (even if they could not feel him) when they were feeling spiritually low; advice was to pray consistently, attend meetings in order to draw strength from the congregation, and talk to somebody who was spiritually “ahead”.

Summary

In this chapter, I have looked at the connection between the participants’ lived religion and their emotional lives. The analysis suggests that emotional regulation is a moral practice that the women made use of in their pursuit of becoming Christ-like. In order to achieve this moral goal, the women regulated down emotions such as anger, bitterness, frustration, and pride in order to become Believers who were forgiving, humble, and patient. They also reinforced feelings of love and gratitude in an effort to have a proper posture before God and treat people in a Christ-like manner. The women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations were, on a daily basis, involved in this highly

demanding emotional work. It influenced how they interacted with their children, spouses, neighbors, parents, colleagues, friends, helpers, fellow church members, and God.

The analysis also suggests that the women used emotional information to navigate their lives as Believers. Their emotional lives provided them with important knowledge about the status of their religious lives and relationship with God. When the women diverged from what they considered appropriate or fitting behavior for a Believer, they felt charismatic anxiety and the sensation of feeling spiritual low made them aware that they needed to attend to their relationship with God. Rather than being anti-rational forces or pushing the women around, it emerged that emotions steered the women towards action, provided information about their religious lives, and guided them in their intention to live moral lives.

Chapter 7. Everyday Insecurities

While spending my time with the women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations, I was struck by how much of their religion revolved around dealing with worries and concerns. Feelings of insecurity and vulnerability haunted the participants. This came somewhat as a surprise since the women were well aware of their privileged economic position as middle-class and could afford a relatively comfortable lifestyle. For example, in contrast to the vast majority of the Indian population, they were able to put their children in reputable schools, pay for healthcare, travel in relative safety, go to a restaurant now and then, live in a “good” area, and obtain a loan. They also had university degrees and well-paid jobs. Even though, as they often stated, they “had been blessed”, clearly, money could not allay the feeling that the world was unstable and full of dangers.

As I started to delve into the women’s experience of insecurity, I noticed that, on the one hand, their religion could be seen as a resource that empowered and aided them in tackling uncertainties, but on the other hand, it fueled experiences of vulnerability. In other words, their religion was a doubled-edged sword that made their everyday lives more difficult while at the same time it helped them to deal with worries and dangers.

In this chapter, I will try to understand why handling insecurities had such a prominent place in the women’s everyday religion and explore what role their religion played in mitigating and reinforcing experiences of insecurity. In the analysis, I use *intersectionality* as an analytic tool to explore the women’s experiences.

Experience

In the academic study of gender, a key task has always been to bring attention and awareness to the experiences of women. Triggered by second wave feminism, scholars in the late 1960s, started to draw attention to the ways in which academic disciplines systematically excluded the perspectives, interests, and

experiences of women. At the time, the “male standpoint” was often taken as universal and findings from men-only research were generalized to women. In response to this, feminist scholars started to use the collective experiences of women as a means to formulate a critique of androcentric forms of science and, later on, to develop feminist thought (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004).

While early feminist scholars tended to emphasize how women’s experiences differed from those of men, feminist scholars have, since the 1980s, pointed out that differences and inequalities exist not only between genders but also within genders (based on, for example, class, caste, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality) (see e.g. Carby, 1982; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1984; Mohanty, 1988; Suleri, 1992). In other words, there is no such thing as a universal experience of being a woman. As such, using gender as a single analytical category risks overlooking differences among women. Consequently, in an analysis of experience it is important to be aware of individuals’ multiple identities and to consider multiple factors of advantage and disadvantage.

The concept of intersectionality references the importance of considering the various ways in which multiple social categories intersect to shape experience. Thus, social categories are understood to be conjunctive rather than disjunctive. The concept traces back to an article published by the Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989).⁸⁵ As a lawyer based in the US, Crenshaw criticized how antidiscrimination laws looked at gender and race separately. This practice could sometimes leave Afro-American women (and other women of color) with no justice since it could not be proven that they had been discriminated against based solely on their gender or color; it was the combination of the two that resulted in their unequal treatment. For this reason, Crenshaw argued that being a Black woman cannot be understood in terms of being Black *or* being a woman but needs to include the interplay between the two, that is, being Black *and* being a woman.

Since the publication of Crenshaw’s article, intersectionality has become an immensely popular concept (Collins & Bilge, 2020). As an analytic tool, it is used within a variety of disciplines (including sociology, economics, law, and philosophy), as well as among policy advocates and activists. While the concept in its traditional use aims to address experiences of subordination, in

⁸⁵ Although the term “intersectionality” is attributed to Crenshaw, its theoretical framework emerges years earlier in work by women of color (Collins, 2015).

contemporary adaptations it has become a “way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences” (Bridge & Collins, 2016: 2). Along the same lines, Joan Acker (2012) states, “the concept of intersectionality is a way to conceptualize the complex interweaving of analytically separated processes” (p. 219). While this might seem as a watering down of the original meaning of the concept, the insight that social categories tend to operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but rather build on each other and work together, has proven itself to be important for understanding and providing nuance to a range of phenomenon.

In the chapter, I use intersectionality as an analytical tool in trying to understand why the women’s religion, to a high degree, revolved around dealing with worries and concerns. While the women’s experiences of insecurity can be traced back to a variety of social categories, I focus on the four that were most salient in my material in relation to these experiences namely, being middle-class, being internal migrants, being women, and being Christian. I discuss these social categories in the context of experiences relating to participants’ economic situation, living far away from home, marriage, and belonging to a religious minority.

Money, Money, Money

The women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations had ambiguous feelings about their financial situation as middle-class. They found pleasure and pride in being able to afford a middle-class lifestyle, but they seemed to be constantly worried about facing downward mobility and feared that their income might not sustain their lifestyle. The financial situation of most participants and their families was insecure in that their income was linked to Gurugram’s unpredictable and competitive private labor market. As members of the “new” middle class, their financial situation was less stable than it was for the “old” government-employed middle class (Fernandes, 2006). The women and their husbands lived with a high pressure to earn and work in order to afford living in Gurugram. In Nisha’s words, to live in Gurugram was “like a survival of the fittest”. The risk of losing one’s job, of not being able to pay the rent or the children’s school fees and of ending up in a financial crisis, haunted the women in their daily lives. These issues were regular topics of prayer and of testimonies shared at the various meetings held in the churches. Moreover, the women who were pursuing a career feared that

they would be caught up in the “rat race” at work becoming selfish and arrogant and most unlike the Christ-like character they were trying to build.

Another source of worry for the women derived from their lack of clear insight into their family’s financial situation. In general, it was the men who took care of their family’s economy (even in families in which the women were working) thus obliging the women to trust their husbands to pay the bills on time and take care of how they spent money. Considering that I often heard stories of how men had burdened their families with financial hardship, it was not surprising that some women found it hard to be relaxed about finances.

Together with their distance from engagement in their financial affairs, many women were simply inexperienced in managing a household economy. Most of them had only lived with their parents or at a college campus before their marriage. Accordingly, even the women who made an effort and were allowed to get an insight into their family’s economy struggled to understand and keep track of incomes, savings, loans, and expenditure. For example, at a couple’s meeting, Rachel told how she had wanted more insight into the family’s financial situation and the family business. Her husband had agreed to be more open but it had not turned out well. Rachel said that she became even more confused and worried as she could not really follow when her husband tried to explain things to her. In turn, her husband became frustrated that she worried about the “wrong things” and did not see the overall picture. Eventually they had agreed that Rachel would ask if there was something specific she was wondering about, and her husband should only brief her when something significant happened. This shows that the participants’ worries stemmed not only from the instability of their financial situation as middle-class but also from experiencing that they lacked control over their family’s finances. These concerns emerged at the intersection of being middle-class and being women.

Apart from this, the women’s experiences of belonging to the middle class were shaped by their identities as Believers. In order to ease their worries about their family’s financial situation, the women tended to put their trust in God (rather than their husbands). They underlined that God was a good god who wanted the best for his followers. These statements were often followed by references to promises in the Bible about how God took care of and blessed those who were loyal to him. It was common that the women brought up issues related to money as prayer requests at various meeting. As all members of Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All nations knew how expensive it was to live in Gurugram, there was no shame in sharing, for example, the need

for a better-paid job or the stress that expensive school fees put on the household economy. Rather, it was common that they asked other members to pray for guidance and wisdom in the situation or turned to the pastor couple for advice. As narrated by Tamara:

We had some financial crises where she [the pastor's wife] was helping me to pray and she was standing with me in prayers. She was (...) telling, "Just ask God how to clear this problem". That way she had my back. [She was] like one of my sisters who would take care of me until I am better. Still she asks me: "Does he [your husband] spend the money correctly? Do you have balance? You have to keep it like that!" (Tamara, 2017)

Even though the participants worried a lot about their financial situations, they were careful to emphasize that their current relatively privileged economic position was all thanks to God. It was God who had brought them out of the slum, helped them (and/or their husbands) to connect with the right people, relieved them of financial debt, strengthened them when the work load was too heavy, guided them to make sound decisions, or blessed them (and/or their husbands) with a pay raise.

However, even if they described their financial position as a blessing from God they had unsettled feelings about the stability of this gift which added to their experience of insecurity. The story of Job for whom God gives and takes away seemed to inform their understanding of how God related to money and wealth. Even if they strongly believed in the goodness of God, that he wanted to bless his followers, God had never promised that life would be a simple success story, that whoever commits to him would have an abundant material life. There was always a risk that what had been given could be taken away.

This risk was believed to increase if a person did not have a "healthy", in the sense of Bible-informed, relationship to material wealth. While wealth and success were understood to be blessings, love for money was regarded as a serious sin. A Believer should always try to do her best at work but she was not to be caught up in the rat race of always wanting more. If this happened, it was likely that God would in some way or another teach the person to have "no other gods before him". The idea that God gives and takes away, and knows if his followers have their priorities right, can be taken as a way for these middle-class women to theologically relate to their economically unstable and insecure situation.

Research from other parts of the world suggests that middle-class Pentecostal churches are trying to help their members deal with the unstable economic situation of the competitive neoliberal market by providing theological

ways to relate to these conditions. For example, George St. Clair (2017) discusses how middle-class Pentecostals manage disappointment relating to the socio-economic conditions in Brazil where education and hard work do not necessarily lead to increased material wealth. His informants were taught in their church that lack of material success was likely to be a sign that they had made the right choice and had prioritized holiness and morality over “worldly” success. Economic failure was often seen as a test of a person’s resolute acceptance of limitations rather than evidence of a lack of blessing. Another example is Gerardo Marti’s (2012) study of Oasis Christian Center, a charismatic church in Los Angeles with a high number of members who were workers in the entertainment industry. Marti shows how the church, through its version of the prosperity gospel, helped members cope with an unstable and uncertain entertainment labor market. In Oasis, being prosperous was not primarily about succeeding in business but about being “champions” for God. In this way, the church helped members cope with the instability of their occupation by helping them redefine themselves as less concerned with their “Hollywood identity” and more with their religious identity. In a similar way, by proposing that there are healthy and unhealthy ways for a Believer to relate to money, the two churches in my study encouraged members not to focus too much attention on their financial situations but to trust that God would provide for them.

Financial Setbacks

That financial setbacks were part of life was something that was officially acknowledged in both Church of All Nations and Loving Assembly of God. The pastors made an effort to instill in their members the idea that they should not be disappointed in God if they encountered obstacles in their careers or went through financial hardship. Pastor John and Pastor Sunil seemed to fear that their members would backslide if they did not have realistic expectations of life with God. In Loving Assembly of God, Pastor John repeated every Sunday that for as long as we live on earth life would not be perfect. Everybody, Christians and non-Christians alike, had to face the consequences of living in a fallen world. What a Believer did not have to doubt was that God would be faithful in his love throughout our struggles. Pastor Sunil tended to put a stronger emphasis on facing problems as opportunities to grow spiritu-

ally. He stressed that setbacks do not mean that God is not with you. He encouraged churchgoers to approach their struggles as a learning process and focus on the reward to come rather than the problem.

About a third of the participants had experienced personal financial crisis (either as children or as adults) and so for them this anxiety was not an abstraction but was based on a tangible risk present in their lives. As (state funded) social safety nets are, for the average person, more or less nonexistent in India, people are heavily dependent on having a stable income. Middle-class households are in a sense especially vulnerable as they have considerable expenses (rent, cars, loans, school fees, and domestic help) and little capital.

Each story of financial trauma is certainly unique. Nevertheless, the stories I heard often had several common denominators such as alcohol abuse, naïve business decisions, loans taken without due consideration, loss of employment, or health problems. Interestingly, in most of these cases, women (mothers, daughters, and wives) were the ones who kept the families above water and finally managed to get their family out of the crisis, often by selling their jewelry or by finding a way to get a temporary loan. What follows is a specific, yet typical, story of what several of the women had gone through or feared would happen to them.

Financial Crisis: a Personal Story

Kalinda married Praveen in her mid-twenties. It was an arranged marriage and the only request that Kalinda had been allowed was that her future husband would be a Christian which she hoped would make him somewhat reliable and trustworthy. Initially, things went well and Kalinda was happy. Praveen even took out a loan so he could take her on a romantic honeymoon to Switzerland. Just two months after their European vacation, Praveen suggested that they should go to Singapore. Kalinda became hesitant and asked her husband if they really could afford going on another vacation abroad. He assured her that he would manage the money part. Kalinda trusted her husband without knowing that he had taken another loan to finance the trip and had started using a credit card to cover other expenses. Shortly after their Singapore vacation, Kalinda became pregnant and subsequently gave birth to a boy.

Two months later, Praveen surprised her with a plan to resign his job and go to London. He was frustrated that he had not received a promotion and told Kalinda that salaries were much higher in England. He would come back for her when everything was settled. When Praveen left, he stopped paying back

the loans since he did not have an income. Creditors started calling Kalinda and even knocked on her door and shouted at her. Kalinda stood there with her baby and did not know what to do.

When Praveen came back, he came with nothing, and nobody in Chennai wanted to hire him. He had been a bank worker but the banks had blacklisted his name. Kalinda prayed. Praveen prayed. They knelt down together and prayed that God would in some way or another help them out of the situation. In the meantime, Kalinda was providing for the family.

Eventually, a friend helped Praveen to get a rather well-paid job in Gurugram. The couple saw this as an answer to their prayers. Praveen moved right away and asked Kalinda to join him once he had found that he liked both the city and his new job. Kalinda felt cautious considering that if she were to move to North India she would have to resign her own job which would put the family in a delicate financial situation. In order to keep paying back their loans they needed two salaries. People around Kalinda told her not to leave; even her mother-in-law encouraged her to stay. Kalinda was confused and decided to seek guidance from a prophet. Despite weekly visits to the prophet, she was left without answers. Kalinda became irritated and told God, “If you do not want to speak through the prophet then you have to speak to me directly. Without your word, I will never move from this place. I will stay.”

One day when she was reading a magazine from the Indian Christian organization, Jesus Calls, she came across the question and answer section. A man was seeking advice as to whether he should bring his family to Dubai as he was worried that he would not be able to manage the expenses. The following answer was given. “Don’t worry about the financial situation. God does not want husband and wife to be separate. Bring your family, God will take care of the rest.” Kalinda told God, “I will take this as my answer”. The next day, Kalinda went to her boss with the intention of resigning her job. However, like a miracle, her boss told her that she had no need to stop working for the company and that he could just transfer her. He did not even ask her if she knew Hindi, which she did not. Overwhelmed by gratitude, Kalinda took her daughter and left for Gurugram.

Kalinda’s story makes it clear that, for the participants, financial insecurity emerged at the intersection of being middle-class *and* women *and* Believers rather than being solely related to their class position. This finding reveals that there is no uniform experience of being middle-class in India and that being middle-class cannot simply be understood as a “privileged position” because multiple factors of advantage and disadvantage affect an individual’s position.

Kalinda's story also points to how the role of religion in these struggles is ambiguous. Kalinda's religion both failed her and helped her through the situation. It turned out that marrying a Christian was not a guarantee of getting a reliable husband. Moreover, the prophet did not provide any guidance from God. On the other hand, God eventually "opened doors" of opportunity and gave her an answer that gave her courage to take the risk of resigning her job and moving to Gurugram. As we shall see in the next section, even with God's help, moving far from home and living as an internal migrant was not easy but was indeed a venture full of challenges.

Far Away from Home

The decision to come to Gurugram was a big thing. Because we have our family back there [in Maharashtra], we have our own house there. And we knew that this will be a totally different culture. So it was a big decision. We prayed a lot about it. (Isha, 2016)

The decision to move to Gurugram had, for most participants including Isha, been a big and difficult one. The women described the period before moving to Gurugram as filled with misgivings and worries about how it would be to live in such a distant and different place. Would they be able to learn Hindi? Would they find a good school for their children? How would they cope with the climate? Would it be safe? As India is such a vast and multifaceted country, the geographical distances and cultural difference between the states and regions are substantial. Many of the participants lived over 1,500 kilometers from their native homes and family, and in a culture they experienced as different from their own. Even though they, as middle-class professionals, were in a privileged position to establish themselves in this new city, being internal migrants often put them in positions that they experienced as vulnerable.

In this section, I will highlight two aspects of participants' lives as migrants that contributed to a feeling that life was unstable and insecure; namely, difficulties in communication and various forms of discrimination.

Communication

The official languages of Haryana are Hindi, English, and Punjabi. In Gurugram, English is widely spoken and one can usually get by knowing only

a little Hindi. However, local Haryanis' knowledge of English tends to be limited and many North Indians have Hindi as their first language. In this situation, the participants who did not speak Hindi fluently – around half of the women – felt disadvantaged in their day-to-day life. They also described how their limited knowledge of Hindi made them feel less safe in public and more exposed in social situations. Indeed, the combination of not knowing the language and knowing the safety risks women face made many participants uncomfortable when moving about on their own especially in certain areas or after dark. Most participants experienced Gurugram as an unsafe place for women. Many restricted their movements around the city and had limited contact with others. In the interviews, the importance of learning Hindi was often stressed. Many participants described how it was a challenge not knowing the language, as described by Tamara:

Well (...) I always had a hunger to learn Hindi, which I was not able [to do]. I was working with the local Hariyani people. These Hariyani people took a little advantage over me. Sometimes they made fun of me. I could understand that. But I was asking God to help me to learn the language. Initially, I really had a problem. But when I worked on it, God helped me. With those people who could speak English, I did not face many challenges. Because they are also educated, they can communicate with me in English. But with some Hariyani people I had some challenges. Because they spoke Hindi, which I couldn't speak. But later on God helped me to learn the language. And today I am able to some extent to communicate with them. So now, I am not having much of that problem. So (...) God helped me in that area. I had a hunger to learn Hindi, He helped me to learn Hindi in that very stressful situation. (Tamara, 2017)

Learning Hindi, Tamara pointed out, tended to be difficult though many participants found strength and courage in their relationship with God to overcome this challenge. Those participants who felt a divine calling to live in Gurugram were also more motivated to learn Hindi. They reasoned that if God had placed them in the city and had a plan for them there, it was necessary for them, as his agents, to know the local language. This helped them to find meaning in their struggles to learn Hindi.

Communication, for many participants, was not only a matter of language skills since they also struggled with “the North India way” of interacting. I often heard that North Indians “mind their own business”, were “selfish” or “independent”, and that the “sense of community was not as strong as back home”. When Kathrine described what a normal day could look like she made the following comment about interacting with her neighbors:

Actually, I am afraid of visiting people here. [[Because?]] South Indian and North Indian, there is a lot of difference in culture and all. I am not use to this kind of people, so I find it difficult to spend time with them. [[Is it different how you interact with people in South?]] Yeah. Here I have felt that people are very selfish. They mind their own business only. It is in fact actually good, but (..) we don't feel any closeness to them. (Kathrine, 2016)

Like Kathrine, many women from South and Northeast India had ambivalent feelings towards “North Indians”. They appreciated that their neighbors did not interfere in their life though they also felt insecure about how to interact with them which prevented their connecting with neighbors. The participants who were homemakers especially experienced this as a problem because they did not have as much of a chance to get to know people outside their neighborhood as those women who were involved in paid labor. The fact that they were Christians further complicated interaction. As will be discussed in the last section of this chapter, prejudice and negative attitudes towards Christians put the women on their guard which tended to hinder the women trying to get to know new people.

Consequently, not knowing Hindi and feeling uncomfortable with cultural differences made some of the participants somewhat socially isolated. In this situation, the churches played an important role in relieving their loneliness; the churches helped the women to find their place in the city and provided a social network. Additionally, the women found a safe haven in the churches where they could learn and share their experience of living in Gurugram while coming to grips with North Indian culture and practicing their Hindi. In Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations they did not have to fear that somebody would ridicule or take advantage of them for their limited knowledge of the local language. As well, in the churches they were able to meet people from their native states or at least somebody from the same region of India with whom they could connect on a deeper level.

While internal migrant churches have long been a recognized part of the Pentecostal religious landscape in India, there has been practically no research on these churches. This is somewhat surprising considering that the establishment of migrant churches is an important way in which Pentecostal Christianity has spread in the country (Abraham, 2017; Abreu, 2020; Bergunder, 2008). Migrant churches typically target migrants from specific states, a feature often reflected in the official language used so that, for example, migrant churches that target Keralites use Malayalam as their official language. In urban centers in North India, it is common to find Pentecostal migrant churches that cater to

migrants from South India as well as Northeast India. It is not yet known how common are those churches that reach out to migrants from different states in the way that Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations do. It does seem likely that churches that use English as their official language aim to draw a more diverse crowd. What is more, since Pentecostal migrant churches have not been studied in India, we do not know what role they play in migrants' lives though we can infer some conclusions. The findings in this study reflect what studies of religion and migrants in other parts of the world have found; that is, that religious communities tend to become a "home away from home" where migrants are able to find physical, spiritual, and emotional support. Additionally, religious communities tend to function as guides to the new society where migrants can "learn the rules of engagement with the broader society" (Frederiks, 2015).

Discrimination

Another difficulty that the participants faced in their daily life in Gurugram was a range of forms of discrimination. The women who originated from South or Northeast India tended to experience that they were perceived as outsiders. The general tendency was that women from Northeast India felt exoticized (sometimes even sexualized) and that women from South India felt that they were treated as intruders. On top of this, several women experienced discrimination due to their gender, and a few faced color discrimination.

Alisha, who was working at the UN, had struggled a lot with prejudice at her workplace, for being South Indian, a woman, and Christian. During her working years, she had often asked herself if having a career was worth the struggles she had had to go through. What kept her going, apart from being an ambitious woman with a strong sense of justice, was a deep conviction that God had placed her at the UN for a purpose. In recent years, she had felt a longing to go into ministry but had not resigned her job as she still felt that God wanted her to stay at her current job.

The struggles that I go through in my office, they are like crazy sometimes. So I keep asking [God], why me? You brought me here and I have to go through all this. Because here it is like North India versus South India (..) [[There are tensions]] A lot! The North Indians feels like South Indians come and take their jobs. Usually, the thing is that (..) people here think that South Indians do their work quietly. Meaning, whatever is given to them, they do. That is the image that they have. Because of that, more South Indians get picked here (Alisha, 2016)

In the face of discrimination, Alisha, like many of the participants, found strength in God and held the conviction that there was a purpose to God's placing them in a certain position. They believed that God always had their back and that they were not alone in their struggles. They also turned to God to overcome particular problems at their workplace. At the same time, it was rather common that they, as Alisha did, wondered why God had placed them in contexts and environments that were so difficult. Why would God want them to go through such challenges? Had they really understood God correctly? These were questions that the women found challenging and that would often give rise to charismatic anxiety. In some cases, these emotions were interpreted as God's way of saying that it was time to move on by changing jobs or moving to another city.

The participants not only experienced that they put themselves at risk of discrimination by moving from their home states but that this also affected their children. As mothers, they did their best to empower and support their children often with the help of their faith. Elina told me about the following incident:

They [North Indians] have this color discrimination. They will say "You are dark and we are fair." My oldest son would always come running to me and say, "They say I am from Africa, why do they say that?" I tell him: "It is okay, they say you are from Africa. Jesus do not care what color you are, Jesus only sees how your heart is. So if they say that, you say, "It is okay, God has given me my skin and I am happy you are saying I am an African." You should not accept the discrimination. (Elina, 2016)

Elina describes how she tries to impress on her son the belief that the color of his skin was given by God, that he was created just as God wanted him to be. Elina's son may have found personal strength in what he was told though he also found his own way around the problem in a way that probably worked better in the school grounds: he informed his classmates that he was dark because he was allowed to eat as much chocolate as he wanted.

Nevertheless, not all women experienced prejudice as being merely negative. For example, Mira, who had moved to Gurugram from Northeast India, spoke of how she was often approached by other parents at the playground who asked her where she came from. They tended to assume that she was from China or Korea and so Mira had to explain that she came from Nagaland. Even though she felt a bit frustrated having to clarify that she was an Indian, Mira also saw these conversations as an opportunity to make new friends and perhaps even to share her testimony.

Getting Married and Staying Married

“If I marry a Believer, do you think everything else will be sorted out?” Tara was driving me home after a Bible study when she honestly asked me this question. There was doubt in her voice but also a wish that the answer to the question might be, yes, she would be happily married if only she found a partner who was a Believer. Her experiences with men who were non-Christians had not gone well and so she put her hope in one thing, “the Believer-factor”.

Tara was not alone in her reasoning. All the non-married participants stated that what they valued most about a future husband was that he would be a Believer. There were, of course, other things they also hoped for in a future husband such as his being a good conversational partner and having good looks, and that they would feel emotionally connected to him. However, while these other qualities were negotiable to some extent, the religious identity of a future husband was not. The participants who were married had reasoned the same way in their past. Regardless of how their marriages had played out or whether they had been arranged or not, having the same faith was their primary consideration.

Abreu (2020) has noted a similar tendency in his study of neo-Pentecostals in Goa. In fact, he argues that neo-Pentecostal marriages are “endogamous” with regard to their own faith. In the churches he studied, marrying a person outside the Pentecostal fold was only considered acceptable if the person was ready to convert. As such, endogamy was shifted from caste to religious ties. The neo-Pentecostals Abreu interviewed claimed that caste did not matter in marriage arrangements in their communities since belonging to the same religion was considered by them to be the most important factor. In contrast to Abreu’s findings, several women in my study pointed out that caste mattered when it came to marriage though what seemed to be important for these women (and/or their parents) was not belonging to the same *jati* (sub-caste), but to a similar caste background.

The reason why the participants were so concerned about the religion of their future husband was that they were well aware that this relationship would have a major impact on their future. Indeed, arguably, no other relationship affected the participants’ lives as much as that with their husband. Even though the position of women has been strengthened in India, especially among the middle class, men are generally regarded as the head of the household. Men are not only perceived as the major providers and protectors of the family, they also tend to have more power in decision-making processes.

Women are expected to respect husbands and their decisions. Moreover, rights and obligations tend to be unequally distributed between husbands and wives, for example, with regard to access to and control of economic resources or household responsibilities (Chawla, 2020)

Considering that for the participants their choice of husband would unpredictably affect their married lives, it is not surprising that this gave rise to worries and doubts. In seeking a Believer-partner, they hoped at least that they would be able to practice their religion freely. Such a marriage would also lower the risk that their future husband would come with “bad habits” (such as smoking, drinking, or gambling) and increase the chance of building a strong relationship since certain core values would be shared.

Of course, deciding that one would only accept a Believer as a future husband was risky. To find a suitable match was not easy if one’s family was not Christian with an appropriate network. The pastor couple did their best to help young members and did manage to make matches, but it often took much longer than with the help of the family. This placed stress on the young unmarried women and was a frequent topic of prayer. Joy described how she had had panic attacks before her marriage for fear that she would grow old alone. Radha and Nisha, both over thirty, had dreamt of a love marriage but became “realistic” and hoped that the pastor couple would soon find them a partner. We can see from this that the participants’ experiences of looking for a future partner were affected by the combination of being women and Believers. Although their religious belief made the process complicated, to some extent it also eased their worries over finding a “good” husband.

Due to prioritizing religion as the common denominator, many marriages were inter-caste,⁸⁶ inter-class,⁸⁷ inter-regional, or a combination of the three. Adding to this complexity, many women’s parents and parents-in-law belonged to different religions or Christian denominations which meant that the women often had to fight hard and be very patient to get their parents to accept their choice of partner. Some of the participants had had to wait over five years before their wedding could take place. Conflicts around choice of partner

⁸⁶ As such, marriages between Believers diverge from the general marriage norm in India in which belonging to the same caste (rather than religion) is regarded as the primary concern (Kumar Narzary & Ladusingh, 2019; Ahuja & Ostermann, 2016). Only around 5-10% of marriages in India today are inter-caste marriages. There are, though, notable differences between urban and rural areas as well as regional differences.

⁸⁷ Inter-class refers to being between low, middle, and upper-middle class.

tended to cool down after marriage though they seldom disappeared completely. Many couples dealt with these tensions in their daily life and did their best to find solutions that would satisfy their parents or parents-in-law. For example, Alisha's husband continued to give his tithe to the mainline Protestant church that his parents were part of as compensation for changing church affiliation, and Kathrine decorated her house with icons to please her Catholic mother-in-law. Nevertheless, in some extreme cases, contact with the parents-in-law or parents had been broken. For example, Elina's parents-in-law accused her of converting their son who had been raised Hindu and they refused to have any contact with her.

Being Companions

As described in Chapter 3, to be family oriented is a vital component of modern Indian middle-class identity. To cherish and protect the family as an institution is often equated with preserving cultural values (Belliappa, 2013; Chand, 2008; Puri, 1999). However, even if the institution of marriage continues to be strongly upheld by the middle class, their understanding of it has undergone change. Love, understood as companionship, has become a vital part of what is expected from a marriage which is thus sometimes referred to as "companionate marriage" (Donner, 2016). Marriage among the middle class is at present not only a place for the bearing and raising of children since intimacy is also expected to be part of the relationship between husband and wife.

The participants' understanding of marriage was in agreement with these Indian middle-class norms. They considered marriage to be a sacred institution and, even though they did not regard husband and wife to be equals in absolute terms, they expected marriage to be based on affection, friendship, and mutual support. These views were also reflected in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations. The pastors stressed that husband and wife should treat each other with love and respect, and they encouraged couples to make important decisions together. Interestingly, Roberts (2016) in his study of Pentecostals living in Chennai slums, notes that Pentecostal churches are promoting similar ideals among the poor. Slum pastors consistently and authoritatively endorsed the idea that a marriage should be based on mutual respect and that women should expect their husbands to be faithful and take care of their family. While the majority of female members in these churches were married to nonbelievers and lived with husbands who did not live up to this

ideal, Roberts describes how the message in the church shifted the ultimate responsibility for the well-being of the marriage and household from women's shoulders. They taught these women that they were not to blame for marital problems but that it was their husbands who had failed them. In a similar vein, Pastor John and Pastor Sunil emphasized the importance of dividing the responsibility for sustaining the relationship between husband and wife.

The increased expectation of companionship as part of marriage raised new concerns; for example, the women worried more about drifting apart or being unable to connect. These were concerns that the women brought up in the interviews. Many of the participants struggled to connect with their husbands on a deeper level and felt unsure about how to bring about a companionate marriage. Moreover, the awareness that even in India more and more marriages end in divorce seemed to put stress on the women since the stability of marriage was no longer something that could be taken for granted. That many members struggled with their marriages was also something that Aditi, the pastor wife in Church of All Nation, brought up in one of our conversations. She described how many couples came to her and her husband for counseling. According to Aditi, people nowadays understood lack of intimacy to be a marital problem and that they wished to have a close relationship with their partner but found it difficult to communicate and connect.

Many of the participants experienced their religion as helping them to connect with their partners and bring them closer together as a couple. For example, family prayer was an everyday practice that many married women felt affected their marriages in a positive way. To have family prayer was not just about praying together but involved taking time to share and listen to one's partner's struggles and highlights of the day. It was a time to connect as a couple and show support for each other.

Family prayer could play an especially important role when couples were struggling with their relationship or were unable to agree on an important decision. It was a time to humbly come together before God and so conflicts tended to be kept at bay. To illustrate, Parvati, who was going through a turbulent period in her marriage, made the following remark about missing family prayer:

The days when we are not able to come together and pray, or not having that heart unity. We have seen that we have giving room for the enemy [the Devil]. And the enemy comes and just unnecessary puts those thoughts in my mind, like, "See, he is so lazy. You are the one doing all the work the whole day. He is just sitting and doing his own things". (Parvati, 2017)

Parvati went on to describe how she often gained respect for her husband when they were praying together as he was “a strong prayer partner” who strengthened and supported her with his prayers. While family prayer did not solve their marital problems, Parvati felt that it affected their relationship in a positive way.

Parents-in-Law

One of the most serious threats to a close bond between husband and wife, as the women experienced it, was the relationship with parents-in-law. Even if this relationship was well-functioning or affectionate, many participants struggled with having to meet the criteria of a “proper” daughter-in-law. This was a role requiring that a wife treat her in-laws with love and respect as well as show submissiveness. Normally, she is also expected to do the main household work, giving her mother-in-law an opportunity to take a step back (Belliappa, 2013). The room for negotiation, compromise, and alternative ways of doing things is usually less than in a woman’s birth family.

Those participants that had experiences of living together with their parents-in-law described it as challenging. For example, some experienced that they became so busy with household work that there were little time to rest, be with the children, and connect with one’s husband. Others had experienced that their parents-in-law tried to influence their son in ways that created conflict between the married couple. It was especially complicated for the women whose parents-in-law were Hindus or belonged to another Christian denomination since it was then also necessary to deal with religious differences.

Given these potential difficulties, many women appreciated living far from home as internal migrants since this meant that they did not need to meet with their parents-in-law as frequently. They noticed that their relationship with their husbands had been affected in a positive way since they had moved. Among other things, it was mentioned that this had increased their decision-making power, made husbands take more responsibility for the household and children, and encouraged them to try harder to meet their wives’ needs. Several participants also described how they felt more freedom to arrange their household as they wished knowing that their parents-in-law would not make unannounced visits.

Belonging to a “Foreign Religion”

In order to understand the participants’ experiences of living as Believers, it is of importance to remember that, due to India’s colonial history, there exist ambivalent feelings about Christians in India. Although Christianity has been part of the Indian religious landscape since at least the fourth century, it is a religion that tends to be labeled as “foreign” in public discourse. Significantly, Christianity is often portrayed as a cultural and national threat to the country, acting as a force that risks distorting what it means to be Indian and de-nation-alizing citizens (Bauman, 2015; Menon, 2010; Sahoo, 2018). Thus, to choose to become a Believer involves exposing oneself to a wide range of possible perils including social exclusion, the risk of not getting married, violence, and discrimination. As has been pointed out throughout this dissertation, the participants found strength, hope, guidance, joy, and inspiration in their religion. This does not diminish the fact that, as we will see in this section, religion was also a factor that complicated their social life and increased feelings of vulnerability.

Living Under the BJP

The women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of all Nations varied in their assessment of the situation of the Christian minority in India. They all acknowledged that the political situation in the country was worrisome but there were differences in how unsafe they felt as a result. This could be affected by the news they consumed, their trust or distrust in the BJP to keep India “a secular country”, personal experiences, and so on.

The women who had a general interest in politics tended to be more concerned about the minority situation as they often came across anti-Christian rhetoric and were updated about reforms that could impact the lives of Christians. However, most participants were hesitant in giving their opinion about how alarming the situation was for Christians. Some women considered themselves uninformed and others stressed that they felt unsure about such aspects as the reliability of reports of persecution. Joy gave the following response when I asked her if she felt the situation for Christians had changed at all since the BJP came to power:

Initially there were reports of increasing violence, but I am not very sure about it, how much it happens. Yes, on WhatsApp groups and all, you see a lot of these reports coming in. But (..) I don’t know if (..) how much of it is true and how much is not true. That I am not too sure about. Of course, the government

has, they try to issue bills of anti-conversion and all that. But (..) how it is effecting our day-to-day life (..) it does effect in some sense because now pastors are very afraid of baptizing. (Joy, 2016)

We can see from this that Christians shared details of persecutions on communication apps. In Loving Assemblies of God's WhatsApp group, people regularly posted reports and news about violent attacks. The trustworthiness of the information varied; persecution reports from Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) were posted alongside newspaper articles as well as screenshots without any reference to the source or the author. On one occasion, a screenshot of a news article featuring Christians who had been badly beaten turned out to have taken place in another country. These sorts of inaccuracies led to doubts regarding the trustworthiness of persecution reports. In Church of All Nations, there was even a rule against posting news and reports about persecution in their WhatsApp group. The leaders of the church had decided that the church's WhatsApp group was not the forum to share persecution reports as this could spread false information and give rise to unnecessary fear.

Most participants had not themselves been assaulted which was the main reason they did not feel personally unsafe despite incoming reports of increasing violence against Christians. Bauman (2012; 2015) has pointed out that those Pentecostals who are most at risk of violence live in rural areas and are often in socially marginalized positions. In rural areas, the presence of the police tends to be minimal which means that violent mobs can practically do as they wish without facing any penalties.⁸⁸ EFI persecution reports (2018; 2019; 2020) confirm that most violent attacks take place in villages or small towns. The participants in this study, who were members of urban middle-class churches, were probably right in believing that they ran little risk of being personally targeted. According to the women, while it was common that tensions now and then developed between Christians and Hindus, it was very rare that it led to something more than an exchange of harsh words.

Notwithstanding their sense of safety, the majority of the women who came from Hindu backgrounds had been subject to domestic violence in connection with their conversion. Curiously, they did not link these incidents with wide-

⁸⁸ With that said, from reading the EFI persecution report, the police seem to provide little security for Christians. They not only fail to protect Christians who face threats, they also seem unwilling to register cases of violence and, at times, they themselves use violence against Christians.

spread anti-Christian attitudes but considered it a family matter. The participants who had non-domestic experiences of anti-Christian violence expressed a stronger distrust in the government's ability or willingness to protect Christians and were more worried about political developments.

While few women worried about being exposed to violence, they were uneasy and uncomfortable with expressing criticism against the government. A fear that the "wrong person" would happen to hear the conversation was prevailing. The women were even careful of how they expressed criticism in their own homes. To give an example, during a discussion about politics at a dinner party, I was told by the host to lower my voice when speaking about such matters since she worried that the neighbors might hear our conversation. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I was taken aback by how members of the church censored their speech and feared to speak openly about politics. After a few months, I noticed myself that I too had internalized this anxiety and hesitated to talk about the BJP not least because I did not want to put the participants at risk.

Everyday Hindu-Christian Interaction

Putting politics aside, what worried the participants most was the widespread negative, sometimes even hostile, attitude towards Christians in society. This animosity was a matter that the women had to consider and deal with in their everyday interactions with Hindu neighbors, colleagues, relatives, and friends. It made them watchful and made them feel vulnerable. Participants who had migrated from South and Northeast India, where there is a higher percentage of Christians, expressed feeling uncomfortable with the strong Hindu dominance in Gurugram. They often drew attention to the fact that they were the only Christian family in their neighborhood. They experienced that negative attitudes towards Christians made it more difficult to establish themselves in the city and build relationships.

Despite these negative experiences, the people participants most encountered in their day-to-day lives were Hindus and did not cause them any problems. For the most part, differences in religion were not an issue or concern though in certain situations or conversations there were pitfalls that the women felt that they needed to navigate around when interacting with Hindus. They worried, for example, that they would stir up hostile attitudes by causing offence or that somebody would believe they were trying to convert them.

It was most common that people expressed anti-Christian attitudes in the beginning of relationships when it was first discovered that the women were Christians. For example, Isha told me about her first encounter with her neighbors in Gurugram:

Initially when I came, and I told them that we are Christians. They were like (..)“Are you Indian?” [[They asked you that]] Yes. Because Christianity is not a religion that (..) originates from India. So they are like, “It is not from here, are your forefathers from India?” Though they know we are Indians, [they say that] to tease us. So, I told them that I am very much Indian. (Laughs) I said to them, look at the skin, the color of my skin. How do I look, European? Or American or British? Neither African, my hair is straight. Then they were like, “You people try to change people, force them into Christianity”. I asked them if they believed that I really could force them to become Christians. One lady responded: “No, you cannot. You would not dare that.” So I told them that nobody would dare to do that. Who could? I cannot force a person to become a Christian. And if I give [you] ten lacs, you will be a Christian for a month or so. Afterwards you will go back. (Isha, 2016)

In this exchange, we see two of the most common prejudices that participants encountered: that Christianity is a non-Indian religion that is in conflict with “being Indian”, and that Christians force people to convert. According to the participants, these beliefs were prevalent among Hindus and could be encountered at work, at college, among neighbors, relatives, and friends. However, most women experienced that people’s prejudices tended to fade when the relationship became more established.

Even if most Hindu neighbors, colleagues, friends, and relatives did not express negative attitudes after this initial phase, almost all participants knew someone who was more rigid in their negative understanding of Christianity. For example, Anosha described how she often found herself in disagreement with one of her neighbors, and Alisha spoke of how she did not dare to ask her colleague to turn down the volume when he listened to recorded Hindu chants. In a previous study, in which I interviewed students at a Pentecostal college in Dehradun, a similar tendency emerged. The students made a distinction between “normal Hindus” and “strongly religious Hindus”, the latter being a type who would cause problems for Christians. The students were careful to underline that there were few such strict Hindus and that others would seldom trouble them (Kuhlin, 2015).

Nevertheless, situations quite regularly occurred that could stir up any Hindu’s negative attitudes towards Christians; for example, meal situations, during the distribution of *prasād* (consecrated food), and Hindu festivals. The

participants handled these situations in various ways that they described as a balancing act of trying to stay true to their own religion and beliefs while showing respect towards the religion of others and avoiding causing offense. Several of the women said that they hoped God understood that they sometimes had to make compromises. For example, they at times needed to accept *prasād* to avoid conflict when visiting their families during a Hindu festival, or they could not avoid Hindu rituals altogether if these were performed at work or at a wedding.

The most sensitive issue regarding everyday interaction with Hindus was probably that of sharing the gospel. As “conversion” has been a much-disputed and inflamed question in India for over a century, to share one’s testimony, invite somebody to church, or talk about Jesus are delicate matters accompanied by the risk of being accused of trying to force somebody to convert. Accusations of attempted conversion often accompany assaults and violence against churches, pastors, and lay Christians in India. Pentecostals have been especially exposed to this violence, partly because they emphasize and are more involved in evangelistic work (Bauman, 2015).⁸⁹

As part of the Indian government’s attempt to “protect” people from attempts to convert them, anti-conversion laws have been passed in several states. At the time of my fieldwork, Haryana had not passed an anti-conversion law and so the participants could not, while living in Gurugram, be legally accused of trying to convert anyone. Nevertheless, they were well aware of sensitivities over conversion and were usually careful not to provoke suspicion that they had attempted it.

However, even if participants regarded it as a high-risk endeavor to share their faith and invite people to church, most would still do this occasionally. There were, though, different ways of relating to the dilemma of obeying “the great command” in a hostile environment. A relatively small group in both congregations saw evangelization as the main task for a Christian. They tended to be persevering and resourceful in their endeavors and spoke honestly about their fear and the risks inherent in their activities while trusting God to protect them. A more common approach among the participants was to limit sharing of the gospel to close and established relationships. These participants

⁸⁹ However, Bauman (2015) is careful to point out that, although this is one of the reasons why Pentecostals are more affected by violence, other reasons are their marginalization by India’s mainstream Christians, the social location of Pentecostals, and the transnational flows of missionary personnel, theories, and funds.

saw little point in talking to strangers or acquaintances about Christ; the possibility that they would listen was small and the risk that the attempt would backfire was high. The third main approach to evangelization was to do it mainly through one's lifestyle and way of behaving which meant trying to be as Christ-like as possible.

In her dissertation on South Indian middle-class Protestants (including Pentecostals) and their religious other, Anita Yadala Suneson (2019) found similar patterns among her interview subjects though with some differences. Rather than stressing the danger of evangelizing in a hostile Hindu environment, her interviewees remarked on the difficulty of balancing the imperative to witness for Christ against social considerations such as care for other people's feelings, avoiding arguments, or maintaining friendships. Yadala Suneson's interviewees emphasized the importance of waiting for the right opportunity to arise which could be when someone else initiated a conversation about religion or when a friend faced a problem or crisis. However, as there was always the possibility that one might cause offense, some of her interviewees actually refrained from evangelistic endeavors. In sum, both my own study and Yadala Suneson's suggest that even though there is a strong emphasis in Pentecostal churches to reach out to nonbelievers, average middle-class adherents might not be as engaged in evangelization as one might expect, at least not outside their most close social circle.

Summary

In this chapter, I have tried to understand why the participants' everyday religion revolved, to such a high degree, around dealing with worries and concerns. Despite being in an economic position that enabled them to afford a relatively comfortable lifestyle, the women seemed to be haunted by a feeling that the world was full of dangers. By considering experiences from multiple social positions and taking into account how various social categories intersect, I have brought attention to how their lives were, in fact, rather unstable and unpredictable.

By way of illustration, even though the participants were in a privileged economic position as members of a middle-class household, their income was linked to Gurugram's unpredictable and competitive labor market. Moreover, as women, they tended to lack a clear insight into their family's financial status and had little control over economic assets. As Believers, in order to deal with

this insecurity, they put their trust in God and found comfort in the belief that he was a god who would provide for his followers. On the other hand, they feared that if they did not have a “healthy” relationship to their wealth God might take away this privilege. Overall, their religion turned out to be both an asset in their everyday struggles and a factor that complicated their lives. For instance, while as internal migrants they enjoyed a safe haven in the church, their religious identity made them feel like outsiders in their (Hindu-dominated) neighborhoods, and this in turn made it more difficult to build new relationships. Indeed, their religion was like a double-edged sword in their lives that simultaneously increased and decreased their experience of insecurity.

PART III. END MATTERS

Chapter 8. Ordinary Days

The lived religion approach has an ambitious research agenda, that seeks to provide new ways for us to understand religion. It shifts the focus from text to practices, from beliefs to the behavior, from elites to the laity, and from formal religious settings to workplaces, kitchens, and neighborhoods. A lived religion approach invites us to put individual practices at the center of our inquiry and to bracket our preunderstandings of what it might mean to belong to a particular religious tradition. Importantly, it is not simply about studying how individuals relate to institutional and official forms of religion, rather, it is about letting ordinary practitioners set the agenda for what religion is and where we might find it.

To study lived religion can be messy since it is a form of religion that is entangled in the everyday lives of people. While most people are able to recognize religion in the form of prayer, church attendance, or a cross worn around a person's neck, it can be more difficult to discern when it takes the shape of going to the gym, being a vegetarian, or inviting a lonely neighbor over for coffee. This is a matter that becomes even more complicated given that people differ as to what practices have religious meaning for them. Moreover, as I have argued, religion as it is lived becomes a *wearable*⁹⁰ form of religion, adapted to fit the "body" – the routine circumstances and competing roles – of its bearer. As a result, it is a form of religion that can be elusive or even contradictory since people need to balance their religion with other responsibilities and commitments.

In this dissertation, I have tried, nonetheless, to discern shared patterns of action in how the women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations expressed and experienced their religion in their day-to-day lives. In Chapter 5, I pointed to four aspects of the women's lived religion that together created a recognizable religious *modus operandi*, namely: (1) a desire to follow God's plan; (2) a recognition that the relationship with God needed to be

⁹⁰ A term borrowed from Nimi Wariboko (2018).

tended to; (3) a belief that everyday challenges and problems could be overcome with the help of God; and (4) the understanding that being a Believer was an ongoing transformational project. The women engaged in these activities together with God through what I termed *collaborative agency*; it was a shared project to live as a Believer. In Chapter 6, we saw that a moral principle that guided the women in their day-to-day lives as Believers was an attempt to be “Christ-like”, to be humble, forgiving, and patient. In accordance with this principle, they tried to regulate their emotions to resemble those of Christ and act accordingly. Lastly, in Chapter 7, I highlighted how contextual circumstances made the women experience their lives as unstable, a matter that was reflected in their lived religion through a preoccupation with handling insecurity via a range of religious practices.

In order to make these aspects of the participants’ lived religion somewhat more concrete, I will in this short intermediate chapter offer a fictional description of what an ordinary day in a participant’s life could look like. The purpose is not to extend the analysis but rather to show how the women’s religion was inseparable from their life in general. While this account is fictional in the sense that it does not reflect the life of a particular participant, it is a composite account based on what the women have told me about their everyday lives. In all interviews, I asked the women to describe a normal day and week and thereafter I asked supplementary questions. Moreover, eleven of the participants wrote weeklong diaries that provided insights about their day-to-day lives. As such, the following narrative can be understood as a “model narrative” (Vähäkangas, 2009), a reconstructed, overarching narrative based on multiple accounts of a specific experience. I have tried to keep the language in the narrative close to how the women expressed themselves. To help the reader discern the different lived religion aspects discussed throughout Chapters 5 to 7, I have marked out and footnoted them in the text.

It Is Tuesday

The alarm rings at 05.45. I get up to spend some time with God.⁹¹ I am too tired to read the Bible but take a few minutes to praise God and pray for my mother who is not feeling well. The last days I have been having a feeling that God is trying to tell me something about my mother’s sickness, but I do not

⁹¹ Living in Relationship with God (pp. 109—115).

really know what.⁹² I go to the kitchen, prepare breakfast and lunch for the kids and my husband. The school bus picks them up at 07.30 which gives me 20 minutes to make myself ready before I need to leave for work. The traffic is a nightmare in Gurugram; it takes me 40 minutes to drive five kilometers! I try to see it as an opportunity to practice patience.⁹³ (Laughs). I listen to music in the car, worship music; it makes me feel good and connected to God.⁹⁴

I work at a hospital as a physiotherapist. So every day I meet a lot of different people. Mostly they have come to work here in Gurugram; they come from different parts of the country. I meet every patient for around 30 minutes. It is a hectic job. I have appointments all day. I do my best to treat my patients with kindness, to show God's love.⁹⁵

Today I got a small break at 11.00 because a patient did not turn up. I scrolled through my WhatsApp messages. There were twelve missed messages in the church's WhatsApp group, one from my sister, and another one from a friend. Apparently, it is sister Leena's birthday. I message to wish her a blessed day. Also, brother Arjun is traveling to Bangalore and asks for our prayers. My sister writes that she has found another doctor that she thinks can help our mother. When I read the name of the doctor, I get a strong feeling that this is what God was trying to tell me. I confirm that I think it is a good idea for our mother to visit him.⁹⁶

The day goes on. I have lunch with a colleague. She shares with me that her husband has lost his job and that she is worried about their economic situation. I say a quiet prayer for the family while listening to her. The thought crosses my mind that this might be a good opportunity to invite her to church. But I don't, as I am unsure how she will react. Maybe she will think that I am trying to convert her.⁹⁷ From time to time I, like her, feel worried about how expensive it is to live in this city. Sometimes I even think that we should move back to Kerala.⁹⁸ But my husband has a strong faith that God has placed us here.⁹⁹

⁹² Collaborative Agency (pp. 122—124).

⁹³ Regulating Emotions for God (pp. 128—140).

⁹⁴ Living in Relationship with God (pp. 109—115).

⁹⁵ Regulating Emotions for God (pp. 128—140).

⁹⁶ Collaborative Agency (pp. 122—124).

⁹⁷ Belonging to a "Foreign Religion" (pp. 164—169).

⁹⁸ Money, Money, Money (pp. 148—154).

⁹⁹ Following God's Plan (pp. 104—108).

The last patient is a person who has been coming to me for some time. It is her last appointment. She thanks me for helping her and hands over a box of sweets. I smile and put the box on my desk. On my way out, I leave the sweets in the lunchroom as I am not sure if it has been placed before any Hindu god.¹⁰⁰

I pick the children up at 17.00. The helper is waiting for us as we arrive at home. Before she starts with the dishes and cleaning, I instruct her on what vegetables to cut for the dinner. I help the kids with their homework. Afterwards, I put on a cartoon show and call my mother. I tell her about the new doctor but leave out the part about how I think God told me that this doctor would be able to help her. She still becomes upset when I mention Jesus.¹⁰¹ I really hope that he will touch her heart soon. I thank the helper before she leaves and then start cooking dinner. My husband arrives home. He turns on some worship music on his phone. The kids sing along.

After dinner we try to have family prayer but there is no time today. My husband puts the kids to bed and I can hear that he, though it is late, takes two minutes to tell them a Bible story. It makes my heart happy. I clean up some toys and set the table for tomorrow morning. My husband and I chat for a while. Before going to bed, I decide to read a few pages from a book that the pastor's wife has lent me, rather than check my Facebook or watch TV. The book is called *Do It Afraid* and is written by Joyce Meyer. I have been asking God to help me better deal with my worries so I think he inspired *didi*¹⁰² to give it to me.¹⁰³ At 21.30 I feel tired and decide to go to bed.

As this narrative indicates, our ordinary lives are seldom spectacular and instead can appear to be static and uneventful. Nevertheless, daily life is also a context full of vitality. In this short account of an ordinary day, a glimpse is given of how the various lived religion components that have been discussed in this dissertation fit into the everyday lives of the participants. We can see how the principle of aspiring to be Christ-like helped the women navigate as moral subjects. The four central aspects that created a specific religious *modus operandi* are in evidence here as well as the sense that God was felt to be an active agent. This narrative also reminds us how the women felt that their lives

¹⁰⁰ Belonging to a "Foreign Religion" (pp. 164—169).

¹⁰¹ Belonging to a "Foreign Religion" (pp. 164—169).

¹⁰² Literally "elder sister", a term many participants used to refer to the pastor's wife.

¹⁰³ Collaborative Agency (pp. 122—124).

were full of uncertainties. Here, we can also see clearly how the women's lived religion was entangled in their middle-class lives. For example, for this composite narrator, taking a moment to connect with God by listening to worship music while driving to work in her own car, praying to God for healing while also seeking professional medical help, and reading Christian literature in English by an American author, were all normal parts of her religious life. This suggests that there are situations and ways of doing religion that differ from the ways Pentecostal Christianity in India is normally described in research. While I will further relate my findings to the research questions in the coming concluding chapter, I would now like to invite the reader to consider how religion as practiced by individuals in their day-to-day lives relates to religion as preached and as expressed in formal religious settings.

Layers of Religion

A common objection to lived religion as an approach is that it does not sufficiently acknowledge how religious institutions influence the manner in which people practice their religion. Indeed, lived religion scholars have been said to approach religion as a “noninstitutionalized improvisation” (Ammerman, 2020, p. 12). While lived religion scholars do emphasize that religious practitioners are not passive consumers of religious goods, nor are they religious machines programmed from the pulpit, I would be surprised if there actually are any lived religion scholars out there who believe that individuals, in their way of enacting religion, are unaffected by the religious contexts of which they are part. To argue that there is an important difference between religion as it is preached and as it is practiced by individuals does not mean that these are considered to stand in a dichotomous relationship. On the contrary, in various ways these two key aspects of religion can be seen to overlap.

It should be admitted, however, that scholars are generally overconfident in the capacity of religious institutions to influence how their members live their lives.¹⁰⁴ In fact, while it is seldom explicitly stated, scholars often seem to assume that there is a broad correspondence between religion as it is

¹⁰⁴ Note that I am not talking about belief here. The women in this study had very similar beliefs which to a high degree reflected the teaching in the churches. However, this did not result in conformity in practice.

preached and religion as practiced. The prevalence of this myth of correspondence is especially problematic in the study of Pentecostal Christianity since it is a religion that, from the pulpit, often makes strong directive claims for how a Christian ought to live. It is important to remember then that Pentecostals, like everybody else, need to adjust their religion to circumstances and their various competing roles in their everyday lives.

Among the women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations, there was only a very small number whose religious lives actually reflected, in a broader sense, the pastors' teaching on how a Believer ought to live. Rachel, who we meet in Chapter 4, was one of them. However, as highlighted in that chapter, the other women regarded her as exceptional. The majority had one or two areas in their religious lives where they lived up to the pastors' idea of the "good Believer", but in other areas of their lives they were unsuccessful or did not bother to do so. For example, Parvati was a very dedicated churchgoer, but she felt that it was difficult to find the time and will-power to involve herself in more personal religious practices. And Nisha did her best to be loving and compassionate in her actions, to be Christ-like, but regarded it as less important to, so to say, "perform well" in other areas of her religious life. Moreover, a number of participants in both churches preferred making up their own minds through engagement with different teachings on how to live as Believers rather than only following their pastors' instruction. Joy was one of these women; in her way of living as a Believer she was much inspired by the evangelist Rajkumar Ramachandran.

Joy's case also points to the problem of having too strong a focus on the religious institution closest to individuals as such a focus risks overshadowing the embeddedness of religious persons within the wider religious field. While the pastors certainly were important sources of inspiration for how the participants should live their religious lives, Believers encountered supplementary religious teaching through sources such as books, television, YouTube, blogs, social media. Through their internet-connected smartphones, they had access to a plentitude of perspectives and understandings of what it means to live as a Believer. Hence, the pastors were in a competitive situation when it came to presenting their understanding about how a follower of Christ should live.

It is important that we do not regard the lack of correspondence between religion as preached and religion as practiced by individuals as some sort of failure from the latter. It is not a matter of "authentic religion" and "corrupt religion" or "proper religion" and "half-hearted religion". The practical enactment of religion is not a watering down of religion as preached. Rather, we

can think of them as two layers of religion that work according to their own rules.

For example, in their day-to-day lives, the women in this study engaged in various activities that more or less demanded their attention, whether it was meeting a client, cooking, changing diapers, or reading a book. While their religion permeated their way of being in the world, it was not a feature of their life that was equally present at all times. Rather, their religion was something that actualized and faded recurrently during the course of a day. The actualization of religion could be triggered by such things as a feeling, a song, a memory, a WhatsApp message, an incident, or a conversation. Depending on the situation, the resulting enchantment of time and space would last or swiftly fade.

Another condition that affected how the participants practiced their religion was the unpredictability of day-to-day life. While everyday life can display routinely predictable characteristics, it is also full of unforeseeable turns and surprises. That things seldom went as planned was especially emphasized by the women who had small children. Night fears, a cold, or a tantrum could override the normal routine and hinder them from engaging with their religion as planned. The aim might have been to have family prayer every evening, but for most families this was an unattainable goal. The women therefore needed a flexible approach to their religion in order to make it compatible with day-to-day circumstances.

A third condition that set the tone for the practice of religion in everyday life was the lack of the gaze of the pastor and fellow congregants. To know what one is “supposed” to do was one thing, to actually do it was another. Throughout the day, the participants came into various situations when they made context-based adjustments as to how they would practice their religion. The purpose of this was neither to alleviate moral ambiguities nor to overturn church norms, but rather it was a matter of being sensitive to the situation so as to avoid causing offense or unnecessary conflict.

I would like to propose that another layer of religion which works by its own rules is religion as practiced in formal religious settings. In working with this study, it has become apparent that even though visiting Sunday service or attending other types of church gatherings were in a sense routine (part of the participants’ weekly religious practice), the way people expressed their religion in these contexts did not straightforwardly correspond with how they enacted their religion outside church walls. In formal religious settings such as Sunday service, people gather with a common agenda to seek and worship

God. They do it in an environment distinct from the atmosphere of everyday life, an environment that invites people to act in specific religious ways. The gaze of the pastor and/or other churchgoers further encourages people to conform to the social rules of the occasion. Formal religious settings share the logic of separate spaces that become connected to a successful performance of specific acts such as reading in a library, working out in the gym, or laughing at a stand-up comedy show. All this clearly suggests that there are considerable limitations to what formal religious settings can reveal about how ordinary people express and experience their religion in their everyday lives.

The role of emotions is a telling example of how religion as practiced in formal settings might have overly influenced our understanding of Pentecostal Christianity. Without doubt, Pentecostal Christianity tends in formal religious settings to be an emotionally expressive religion. However, as this study suggests, the way Pentecostals related to emotions in their everyday religious lives might be very different. For the women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations, it was essential to be able to regulate and control emotions. As we have seen, they even associated this ability with being Christ-like. While this might appear contradictory, I believe it is just an illustration of how religion in practice can look very different and operate by different sets of preconditions in formal and non-formal religious settings.

Moreover, if we mainly study lived religion as it is performed in formal religious settings then there is a high risk that we neglect what individuals themselves consider the most important practices of their everyday religion. In formal religious settings, pastors and/or other leaders set the stage for what is happening, and this gives ordinary churchgoers limited opportunities to influence what take place. Lived religion, as it was first formulated by Hall et al (1997), was originally intended to be a from the ground up approach that shifted the focus from texts, institutions, and the religious elite to how ordinary people express and experience their religion. The aim was to get a renewed understanding of religion by letting ordinary practitioners give their version of what religion can be. This version need not to be radically different or opposed to how people express their religion in formal religious settings. As we saw in Chapter 5, the four defining features of the participants' lived religion were also part of the spirituality that was manifest in church at Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations. However, the emphasis and way of expressing these aspects differed. In order to accord with the original aim of the lived religion approach, we need to continue to explore what ordinary people are doing in their non-institutional practice of religion.

To illustrate the difference between these levels of religion, let us look at a concrete example such as the practice of speaking in tongues. Within research on Pentecostal Christianity, the practice of speaking in tongues has been proposed as a defining characteristic of the movement (Anderson, 2010). As to the teaching in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations, the pastors agreed that speaking in tongues was a gift of the Holy Spirit worth seeking for every Believer.¹⁰⁵ The pastors referred to it as a love language between God and Believer that could both strengthen the relationship and enforce prayers.

As a religious expression in church, speaking in tongues was a common practice. In both Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations, one would hear people speaking in tongues during Sunday service as well as during smaller meetings such as cell groups and Women's meetings. People were speaking in tongues both from the pulpit and in their seats. If I had looked at this as a religious expression in the churches, I would probably have come to the conclusion that it is a well-established and accepted way of expressing one's religion.

However, in the interviews, the women expressed a range of attitudes to speaking in tongues. For some, it was a gift they cherished and that they felt strengthened their religious lives. Among these women, some did not see a problem in publicly speaking in tongues while others used it as a private prayer technique. Apart from this, more than half of the women did not speak in tongues. Among those, there were women who longed to receive the gift and others who reasoned that God gives different gifts to different persons and so they placed less importance on it. However, there were also participants who were critical of the teaching in the churches and of the way other churchgoers used the gift. They highlighted, among other things, that it appeared to be attention-seeking and that it gave rise to an "us-and-them-feeling". The majority of these women raised doubts about whether it was actually suitable to speak in tongues in public. To pray quietly was one thing but to speak aloud so that everybody could hear was, by some, regarded as problematic especially if no one translated the words.

¹⁰⁵ To complicate this even more, the official stand of Loving Assemblies of God, being an Assemblies of God church, was that speaking in tongues was the initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This could be read under "Faith and Doctrine" at the church's website. However, I never heard Pastor John make this claim in church.

Accordingly, if we are to discuss the role of speaking in tongues as a religious practice in Pentecostal milieus, there is a need to specify what form of religion we intend to study. Our focus could be on the way this spiritual gift is understood and described from the pulpit, how it is expressed in the churches, or how it is practiced in everyday life. Based on the material from this study, I could argue that speaking in tongues was a practice that the church leadership endorsed and that was relatively common during church gatherings. However, I could also argue that it should not be understood as a practice that was characteristic of how the majority of the women in these churches expressed their religion in their everyday lives.

What I would like to call attention to here is that as scholars of religion, we need to be aware of and consider what level or dimension of a religion we are studying. We should be careful not to confine religion to whatever dimension we are studying and be conscious that there might be significant differences between, for example, how religion is expressed within churches and in the day-to-day lives of ordinary practitioners.

Conclusion

In recent decades, the Pentecostal movement in India has not only grown significantly but has also become increasingly diverse. The rising presence of middle-class churches is changing the dynamics within the movement as well as its identity. While the majority of the Pentecostal movement's adherents still belong to marginalized groups within Indian society, middle-class Pentecostals are increasing in number and becoming steadily more visible on the Indian religious scene. This development is noteworthy since Pentecostal Christianity might be regarded as an untypical religious option for the middle class, bearing in mind its association with the poor and lower castes in India.

The purpose of this dissertation has been to study middle-class Pentecostal Christianity as a lived religion in India. Accordingly, it focuses on religion as practiced by individuals rather than on the congregational life of middle-class churches or on the normative teaching articulated by religious leaders. More precisely, the aim has been to explore how women in middle-class Pentecostal churches in India expressed and experienced their religion in their everyday lives. The analysis has centered on the concrete practices that make up the participants' day-to-day religion rather than how the women expressed their religion in formal religious settings. In addition, I have tried to understand what it might mean to be a Pentecostal *and* middle class in contemporary India. That is to say, in what way the women's class position was reflected in their religion as they lived it.

Previous research on Indian Pentecostal Christianity has primarily focused on reconstructing the history of the movement, on Pentecostal Christianity as an institutional form of religion, and on the issue of conversion and persecution. While that research is important for providing a framework for understanding Pentecostal Christianity in India, it does not provide much insight into how ordinary adherents express and engage with their religion in their day-to-day lives. What is more, scholars have, as yet, basically neglected the ever growing presence of middle-class Pentecostal churches. By and large, research on Pentecostal Christianity in India focuses on the movement as it has unfolded among the poor and marginalized. Hence, with this study, I have

aimed to broaden as well as deepen our understanding of Pentecostal Christianity in India.

Living as a Believer

The women in this study defined themselves as “Believers” rather than “Pentecostals”. In fact, the majority of the women only had a vague understanding of what might characterize a Pentecostal or a Pentecostal church. As such, to be a Believer had little to do with identifying with Pentecostalism as a religious tradition or historical movement, rather, it was mainly about acknowledging God as the one true god, establishing a personal relationship with him, and striving to live as his disciple.

By putting the relationship with God at the center of the religion, the importance of living up to the pastors’ understanding of what makes a “good Believer” was downplayed. As the women saw it, a Believer did not have to be flawless in terms of religious behavior; good enough was sufficient as long as the relationship with God was kept strong. This relational approach to religion allowed for differences in which part of their religious lives they prioritized, whether it be prayer, good works, evangelism, Bible reading, or commitment to the church. Emphasis on the relation with God also supported a flexible understanding of how a Believer should be in the “world” (for example, whether or not to be active on social media, drink alcohol, have a boyfriend, watch Bollywood movies, or listen to non-Christian music). To what extent the women’s practice of religion overlapped with the religion as preached in the churches varied from person to person. Among the women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations, there were only a very small number whose religious lives actually reflected, in a broader sense, the pastors’ idea of how an “good Believer” ought to live.

The majority of the participants came from Hindu, Catholic, Orthodox, or Mainline Protestant backgrounds. They had grown up in religious environments that they felt to be concerned with rules and regulations as well as the upholding of social hierarchies. They saw these religious milieus, in a way, as holding them back rather than providing a way to guide them as individuals and religious subjects in modern India. This experience was connected to their class position or, more precisely, to their belonging to the *new* Indian middle class, a section of the middle class that tends to be distinguished by partaking

in the global economy and culture. As participants in an economy that demanded flexibility and adaptation, while belonging to a culture that emphasized the value of individual choice and a “modern” lifestyle, they were attracted to Pentecostal Christianity which they felt to be a religion that was forward looking and open to change. For the women, to be a Believer represented a fresh understanding of what it might mean to be religious.

While diversity rather than uniformity and conformity defined the women’s lived religion, it was possible to discern certain commonly shared features of their religion. Most prominent were (1) a desire to follow God’s plan; (2) a recognition that the relationship with God needed to be tended to; (3) a belief that everyday challenges and problems could be overcome with the help of God; and (4) the understanding that being a Believer was an ongoing transformational project. Taken together, these four features created a recognizable religious *modus operandi* that defined Pentecostal Christianity as a lived religion among the participants. However, the women’s actions and ways of engaging with their religion were dependent on what they saw as the actions of God. It took two, one could say, to live as a Believer in the sense that their religious lives became a product of activity emerging from the relationship between Believer and God. I have conceptualized this shared form of agency as *collaborative agency* by which I mean a process in which the women were engaged in a common effort together with God to realize shared goals.

The participants believed that God’s plan for each person was unique. Hence, there was no need to order life in accordance with a standard or traditional path, there were no pre-established rights and wrongs in this regard. A Believer only needed to follow God’s vision for their life. As the participants tried to navigate their (new) middle-class life, which often diverged profoundly from the life of their parents, they found comfort and courage in the idea that they were just trying to follow God. It was God’s way of opening and closing doors that gave them an assurance that they were not going astray, that they did no wrong when they, to any extent, abandoned traditional ways of life.

The participants believed God to be a relational being who longed to stand in close relationship with human beings. To be a Believer was to accept God’s invitation to enter into a personal relationship with him. However, like any other relationship, it took effort and dedication to keep the relationship with God strong. To sustain and harbor this relationship, the participants involved themselves in various religious practices such as making themselves available

for God to speak to them and directing their emotions towards God through engaging with worship music.

A third central feature of the participants' religious *modus operandi* involved dealing with and resolving day-to-day problems together with God. This was what it meant "to overcome", a term used to describe this practice. Overcoming as a practice was primarily about being a person who assertively encounters challenges together with God, rather than a person who was successful in all her doings. It was an approach to life and its difficulties. The experience that God was on their side gave the women the confidence and courage to act in situations when they felt insecure or uncomfortable. As the participants understood it, one of the privileges of being a Believer was to have somebody to turn to regardless of what it might concern.

However, as we saw in Chapter 7, the women's religion was not only an asset in their everyday lives since it was also a factor that gave rise to difficulties. Being Christians meant that they had to deal with widespread anti-Christian attitudes and were obliged to handle social tensions with nonbelieving family members and friends. They risked not finding a spouse and that God would take away their wealth if they had an unhealthy relationship with money. Hence, even if the participants had God on their side, they faced challenges specific to their being Believers. As such, their religion was like a double-edged sword that both facilitated and complicated their day-to-day lives.

Lastly, to be a Believer was an ongoing transformational project. To "grow" and to "change" was essential for the participants. They considered it improper to be satisfied with one's present self. The women devoted both time and energy to scrutinizing, reflecting on, and acting upon the self. To be a Believer was a matter of slowly becoming something new, it meant gradually realizing more and more of what God wanted and being ready to act in accord with that. The participants in this study were determined to work hard over extended periods to achieve change.

While the women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations dismissed rigid and ritualistic religious behavior codes, they were, nonetheless, in agreement about the importance of trying to live a life that resembled that of Christ. However, in contrast to many other Pentecostal contexts, this moral imperative did not involve withdrawal from "the world". Instead, the women's understanding of what it means to live a moral life was connected, primarily, to their emotional lives. To be Christ-like was about adopting emotional habits that resembled those of Christ. In order to achieve this moral goal, the women regulated emotions such as anger, bitterness, frustration, and pride

in order to become Believers who were forgiving, humble, and patient. Moreover, they reinforced feelings of love and gratitude in an effort to have a right demeanor before God and to treat people in a Christ-like manner. The women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations were, on a daily basis, involved in this highly demanding emotional work. It influenced how they interacted with their children, spouses, neighbors, parents, colleagues, friends, helpers, fellow church members, and God.

Overall, the women closely monitored their emotions, not just for the purpose of acting in a moral way but also for the sake of getting information about their religious lives. When the women felt “spiritually low” or experienced what I have called *charismatic anxiety*, it was taken as warning sign that they needed to pay more attention to God, seek help from fellow Believers, or change something in their behavior.

A Middle-Class Religion

It could be argued that Pentecostal Christianity as a religion does not match the participants’ class position. One could say that it is odd that these middle-class women have chosen to embrace what in India is often referred to as “a religion of the poor”. However, a problem with this argument is that it fails to take into consideration what the participants themselves made of their religion. The women in Loving Assemblies of God and Church of All Nations did not regard themselves as being part of a clearly defined and circumscribed religious movement consisting of rich and poor and united by common beliefs and practices. They had no clear idea of what Pentecostalism as a form of Christianity might be and did not identify with the movement as such. Their experiences of Pentecostal Christianity were limited to middle-class contexts in which they had learnt what it meant to be a Believer. While Indian middle-class churches per se might have gone through a process of redefining their religious practices and behavioral standards to be more compatible with the middle class, the women had simply joined churches that had already been attuned to their class related needs and tastes. Accordingly, they had embraced a form of religion that had been adapted to harmonize with middle-class sensibilities and styles rather than “a religion of the poor”.

It has been pointed out that a reason for the recent rise of middle-class Pentecostal churches is that Pentecostal organizations, churches, and pastors are increasingly aiming their missionary efforts towards urban areas in general,

and the urban middle class in particular (Lukose, 2013). To this explanation I would like to add two points. The first is that with the growing presence of middle-class Pentecostal churches, Pentecostal Christianity is increasingly becoming a religious alternative for members of the middle class in India. At the time when almost all Pentecostal churches consisted of members from predominantly poor backgrounds, there were more consequences to becoming a Pentecostal for a middle-class individual or family. It involved crossing not only a religious line but also a class boundary. The existence of middle-class Pentecostal churches makes Pentecostal Christianity a more accessible and sensible alternative for the middle class in India today. My second point is that Pentecostal Christianity as a religious form seems to fit particularly well with the sensibilities, taste, needs, and challenges faced by the *new* Indian middle class. The new middle class tend to be more globally oriented in their lifestyle compared to the “old” middle class, as well as less concerned with traditional status symbols. It seems as though they find the global dynamics of Pentecostal Christianity to be attractive rather than problematic. Additionally, they are prepared to risk loss of traditional social capital on the grounds that they are joining a religion that they feel has higher religious efficacy in guiding and helping them deal with instability and insecurity in their lives.

As we have seen in this study, the middle-class nature of the women’s religion is noticeable in a wide range of ways and so I can focus on only a few in this section. First, as been pointed out in the Chapter 6, previous research has shown that middle-class forms of religion tend to strive to reduce tensions with the surrounding environment. Among the women, this middle-class striving was most notable in their understanding of morality. The participants operated with a moral code that facilitated social interaction rather than setting them apart from their peers and encouraging withdrawal from the world. Their ways of regulating their emotions to become Christ-like tended to help them overcome conflicts while strengthening relationships. By stressing, for instance, the importance of being loving and forgiving rather than observing a rigid behavior code, there was an allowance for flexibility and the possibility of adjusting to different situations. In addition, this approach to morality fitted well with a middle-class predilection for enjoying a certain amount of independence as to lifestyle choices and habits.

Another way in which the women’s middle-class attitudes were reflected in their religion was in the emphasis on learning and growing, reflecting the Indian middle-class preoccupation with education. While the women enjoyed listening to the pastors’ sermons on Sundays, few regarded this occasion of

religious teaching as sufficient to cater for their interest in learning about their religion or likely to satisfy their need to develop as religious subjects. The majority of the women took their own initiative when it came to deepening their knowledge on specific subject matters when they struggled with a particular issue or had an interest in learning more about a topic. This search for knowledge was not confined to a study of the Bible but involved reading Christian books and listening to sermons and Bible studies on their television and/or online (mostly through YouTube). The fact that the women engaged with religious teaching from various sources encouraged in them a reflective stand towards religion.

Third, as mentioned, a distinct characteristic for the new Indian middle class is their global orientation, observable, among other things, in patterns of material and cultural consumption and way of life. Among the participants in this study, this feature had spilled over to their lived religion and manifested itself, most clearly, through an enthusiastic participation in the global Pentecostal culture. This participation was made possible through a combination of knowing English (a middle-class marker) and owning internet-connected devices such as computers, tablets, and smartphones. The women listened to Hillsong and Bethel Music as much as they listened to Indian Christian music. They read American author Joyce Meyer in parallel with the South Korean pastor Dr. Yonggi Cho and Indian Jesus Call's minister Dr. Paul Dhinakaran. In addition, on platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram, as well as on their television, they could access messages and sermons from pastors and theologians from all over the world. The women in this study saw global flows as something that enriched their religion rather than something that threatened the Indianness of it (a common fear in India).

Lastly, the participants' middle-class views were also reflected in their lived religion through a preoccupation with class related concerns. For example, the importance placed on figuring out and following God's plan went hand in hand with the middle-class habit of cautiously planning for the future. To be a middle-class Indian means having the economic means, through careful planning, to choose such aspects of life as where one lives or where to send one's children to school. The participants turned these choices into a religious quest and gave them otherworldly meaning. Likewise, the struggle that middle-class women experienced in combining work and family life was something that their religion helped them to deal with. In order to know what to do, they looked for guidance in the Bible and Christian teaching.

In contrast to what previous research has shown (research that has mainly focused on the experience of Pentecostals in marginalized economic positions), the participants' religion did not revolve around dealing with suffering and exploitation. The women were in an economic position that enabled them to afford a relatively comfortable standard of living. However, while their relatively privileged economic position allowed all their basic material needs to be met, it could not allay the feeling that the world was unstable. In fact, the everyday religion of the women revolved to a significant extent around the handling of uncertainties and worries. The feeling that the world was unstable was, however, not only related to their class position (involving, for example, the fear of downward mobility or the struggles they encountered in their careers), it also intersected with their identities as women, internal migrants, and Christians. This finding reminds us of the complexity that comes to light when studying religion in everyday life.

List of Interviews

Loving Assemblies of God

Ava	2016.10.31
Alisha	2016.11.12
Anusha	2016.10.23
Ava	2016.10.31
Dinah	2016.11.06
Elina	2016.11.04
Esha	2016.10.16
Geetha	2016.11.20
Grace	2016.10.16
Hannah	2016.12.30
Heera	2016.12.11
Isha	2016.10.22
Jasmine	2016.12.11
Joy	2016.11.18
Kalinda	2016.11.23
Kathrine	2016.10.12
Leena	2016.11.09

Church of All Nations

Mercy	2017.01.18
Mira	2017.01.17
Neha	2017.02.05
Natasha	2017.02.04
Nikita	2017.01.13
Nisha	2017.02.14
Parvati	2017.02.09
Rachel	2017.02.20
Radha	2017.02.25
Sameera	2017.02.01
Tamara	2017.01.29
Tara	2017.02.11
Varuna	2017.02.23

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