Children's Perspectives on Religion

The Case of Christian Children in Tamil Nadu, India

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To me, religion is Jesus. Other Religions in India is Hinduism, Muslims and Christians. People need religion because they should be Christians. But we do not really need religion if we have Jesus.

(Matthew 9, participant child)

To my dear husband Joseph Baby for his unconditional love and support in life and in my academic career.

Acknowledgments

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Abstract

This thesis is about Christian children's perspectives on religion in Tamil Nadu, India. More specifically the thesis seeks to explore how children view religion and how they seek knowledge about religion in their daily lives, examine what role religion plays in their everyday lives and examine how children's perspectives on religion influence their social practices. Various theories and concepts are used to analyze children's perspectives on religion. A broadened conception of the sociology of religion together with a broadening up of the conception of sociology of childhood has given this study an advantage to shed a new light on children and religion.

A mosaic research approach involving multiple, qualitative methods of data collection have been used. The combination between several different participatory tools (see appendices) and the more traditional methodology of interviewing and observations provided me with a well-grounded understanding of – and factual insights into – children's perspectives on religion.

It has often been proved challenging for children to grasp what religion is. However, this study has found out that children's perspectives on religion were rather straightforward and related to something personal and everyday life experiences. Children in this research had their own personal experiences on religion and highly, idiosyncratic ways of thinking. Religion is constantly encountered in all the arenas of Christian children's lives in Tamil Nadu. This study has found that religion plays a major role in helping children actively negotiate their own religious lives in the overlapping spaces between children's and adults' worlds; spaces of play, school and friendships. It was found out that children's perspectives on religion influence their social practices, *and* their social practices influence their perspectives on religion.

Furthermore, the findings of this thesis reveal that viewing children either as human beings or human-becomings should be brought to the level of hybridism. From this study's theoretical examinations and empirical findings on both the social and religious aspects of children's lives, the artificial analytical 'being-becoming dichotomy' is both non-existent and fluid. Children are both human beings and social agents in their own right; and human-becomings in search of maturation seeking for changes and transformations in their social, spiritual/religious lives.

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List of Abbreviations

FGD	Focus Group Discussion
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NYP	National Youth Policy (India)
NOAD	New Oxford American Dictionary
NOSEB	Norwegian Center for Child Research
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

1.1 Background

Every society has their perceptions, knowledge and views about what children and childhood is and what it ought to be. Within most social and cultural settings we will find one or another agreement on what childhood is, although mostly childhood is perceived as the minority group in any given society. In the global context, the majority of the children therefore fare their lives within the adult-centered frame of marginalization. However, through the new social studies of childhood, children are now to a greater extent than before being regarded as social actors and acknowledged as social beings rather than adult-becomings (Qvortrup, 1994). Nevertheless, it is important to note that the question about what childhood is, and how children are perceived may still vary from society to society but within each particular society it is unvarying. In India, childhood is structured around the perception that children are primarily individuals but that they do have specific responsibilities in contributing to their families. Because of this, there is a tendency to prioritize family interests above individual interests (Verma & Saraswathi, 2002). Jenks (1996:7) makes clear that "childhood is to be understood as a social construct; it makes reference to a social status delineated by boundaries that vary through time and from society to society...childhood then always relates to a particular cultural setting".

The cultural setting of Tamil Nadu is located within the context of the developing world, in the global south. Here we find the category of childhoods which is often referred to as majority world childhoods. The term 'majority world' is often brought up when referring to the poorer countries of the world, and it implies that the majority of the world live in poverty whereas the minority of the world live in abundance (Ellwood, 1998). According to Punch (2003) it is problematic with a too simplistic distinction between the majority world and the minority world childhoods because "children's lives vary according to a range of factors such as culture, class, gender, age, ethnicity, disability, *religion* and birth order" (p. 279). In other words; we will find both common features and differences between these two childhood categories. One example of these differences can be seen in children's perspectives on religion.

Roehlkepartain (2006) has noted that there is a distinct difference in how children in the developed world and the children of the developing world believe in God and perceive him. In Western Europe on the one hand, young adults have low levels of belief in God and poor perceptions about God as important in their lives. But in the Asia/Pacific area on the other hand, young adults are more likely to believe in God, and place a higher value on religion than those in Western Europe. It is interesting how Christianity is increasing in the countries in the South, and decreasing in the Western countries. According to Keller (2008) Christianity's growth in the developing world has been explosive.

This is also true for Tamil Nadu. According to the Indian Census of 2001, Christians have now overtaken the Muslims in numbers and have therefore the second highest numbers of followers in the state after Hinduism. Furthermore, Tamil Nadu has a rich history of Christianity. It is claimed that St. Thomas visited the neighboring state Kerala in 52 AD and that he died and was buried in Tamil Nadu in 72 AD. Most Christians in Kerala and Tamil Nadu still believe that he is the father of Christianity in India (Bhatt & Bhargava, 2006).

1.2 Statement of the problem

On the parallel with the neglect of children within scholarly theology, there has also been an academic omission of children's own perspectives on religion within childhood studies. Religion might be seen as less important in the West today, due to the fact that many people in the Western culture do not associate themselves with any religious tradition but still profess to be spiritual (Meehan, 2002). However, children in the majority world like India are religious and religion shapes their outlooks, daily lives and practices in profound ways. The spiritual dimension of childhood and children's spiritual needs have gained much more interest than before. According to Adams, Hyde & Woolley (2008), the growing concern for children's spirituality is rooted in building resilience and a sense of well-being in children in addition to "reclaiming the voice of the child, and a desire to better understand the child's world – a world which is often perceived as being somehow different from the world of adults" (p. 9). As a result, it is not the spirituality that relates to religion which necessarily is in focus in the recent studies on children and spirituality. One reason for this could be that "a person *may* draw upon religion to give expression to their spirituality..." (Adams, Hyde & Wolley, 2008:14). In this particular study and

cultural setting, however, the children in fact *have to* draw upon religion to give expression to their spirituality. I would argue that religion could be much needed in order to understand children's spiritual lives also in many other settings than Tamil Nadu. In this regard it should be mentioned that spirituality was earlier known under the notion 'religious experience', but that 'religious experience' is more commonly termed today as spirituality (Ibid.). I am using the two terms more or less intertwined. Any confusion when it comes to religion vs. spirituality is dealt with in chapter 3.5.4.

We do not know much about children's understanding of religion, nor their spiritual lives. Moreover, and as indicated by Jackson (2007) there are doubts about how children view religion, and about how it relates to their comprehension. This thesis will therefore help to bring about a better understanding of children's perspectives on religion and an understanding about how their religious experiences affects their social lives.

1.3 Objective of the Study

1.3.1 General Objective

This study aims to explore children's perspectives on religion in Tamil Nadu, India.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- To explore how children view religion and how they seek knowledge about religion in their daily lives.
- To examine what role religion plays in children's everyday lives.
- To examine how children's perspectives on religion influence their social practices.

1.4 Importance, Extent and Limitation of the Research

This study will be a contribution towards finding the rightful place for children's spiritual lives within their social and cultural lives and within childhood studies, and further, acknowledge the

importance of spiritual education and that religion shapes children's lives. There is a need to have a more holistic picture on what childhood is and on what shapes childhood and children's lives.

Adams, Hyde & Wolley (2008) state that children's spirituality is often invisible to the adult world. That is why I want to investigate children's perspectives on religion. I would like to find out more about how they acquire knowledge about religion and how their religious experiences affect their lives in different contexts. In childhood studies, there has always been a special attention drawn towards the social and cultural aspects of children's lives but the spiritual and religious aspects of childhood have been under-researched. We all know that children go through a physical development, but fewer people seem to know that the spiritual dimension of childhood also plays an equally important role for children's lives and well-being especially in places where the society is predominantly religious.

I am focusing on Christian religion, although many other religions also have interesting views of the child and can also refer to scriptures which put children in the center. I chose the Christian religion because I am interested in it and also because, according to Keller (2008), "Christianity has within itself remarkable power to explain and expunge the divisive tendencies within the human heart" (p. 18). I think this is very interesting, and I would like to find out more about these 'divisive tendencies' in respect to the Apollonian/Dionysian models of childhood in relation to children and religion in Tamil Nadu. Theology's neglection of the child has been mentioned, but the main attention further is only drawn towards children's experiences within the notion of religion and to bring children's spiritual lives into the contemporary discussions within childhood studies.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

This master thesis consists of eight chapters. A short introduction is included in every one of them.

Chapter One: *Introduction.* Covers this chapter, and is presenting the background for this study, the research topic and summarizes the main objectives of the study.

Chapter Two: *Contextualizing the Research setting.* Gives an overview over the setting where the research has taken place. This includes both general facts about India, and the role of religion in India as noteworthy background information to this specific study.

Chapter Three: *Theories and Examination of Relevant Literature.* Presents and discusses different theories applied to examine and interpret the data. This chapter also serves as a frame for the topic and accommodates the reader with important background knowledge.

Chapter Four: *Research Approaches and Methods.* Deals with the research design, the methods chosen and employed for the data collection, and the ethical considerations for this study. This chapter also consists of a review and reflection upon the process of the data collection.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven: Instead of having one extensive analyzing chapter, three smaller chapters are equipped with the main investigations and commentaries of the data. In these three chapters children's views of religion and their stories from their everyday lives are presented. More concretely, **Chapter Five:** *Children's Ideas and Knowledge–Seeking about Religion*, presents children's associations with religion and their reasons to seek knowledge about religion. **Chapter Six:** *The Role of Religion in Children's Everyday Lives*, documents the role of religion in their everyday lives focusing on the different religious arenas in their lives and how they combine play and religious activities. The Dionysian image of the child has also been examined in more detail. **Chapter Seven:** *Religion and Children's Social Practices: With Main Focus on Friendship*, examines how children's religious experiences influence their social practices. Their peer-relations, other relationships, the risks attached to the social practices due to religion, and the children's agency in the wider society is being examined.

Chapter Eight: *Concluding Remarks,* briefly encapsulates the major findings, conclusions and further recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO
Contextualizing the Research Setting

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, facts, background information and the different socio-economic landscapes of India are presented with the specific emphasis on the social landscapes. The prominent social landscape, *religion*, is being presented in terms of which role it inhabits in the Indian society, the Indian family, and in this specific research context; among children in Tamil Nadu.

2.2 Facts about India

India is located in South Asia and has the second largest population in the world. The population is currently estimated to 1, 2 billion (UNDP, 2010) among which children and young adults age 0-25 comprise around 50%. The population is expected to reach 1.53 billion by the end of 2030. The major official language is Hindi, while English is the secondary official language. According to Indian Census (2001a) there are a total of 122 languages and 234 mother tongues in India, while there are 'only' 22 main languages. In Tamil Nadu (where this study has been conducted), *Tamil* is the mother tongue of most people. India has per 2012 a literacy rate of 74.04, whereas Tamil Nadu is ranked as number 11 with 80, 3 % literacy (Population of India, 2012). As per the Indian Census (2001b) the religious composition in India is as following: Hindus 80, 5 percent, Muslims 13, 4 percent, Christians 2, 3 percent, Sikhs 1, 9 percent, Buddhists 0, 8 percent and Jains 0, 4 percent. In Tamil Nadu the Christians comprise 6 percent of the total population (Ibid.).

India is a country of geographical contrasts. Mountains, hills, deserts, oceans, rivers and forests are surrounding the South Asian country; making the Indian climate also diverse in turn. There are eight climatic zones, but mostly India is dry, hot and humid during the summer months (March to June) and it cools down from November to March. From June to October the monsoon hits in especially over the south west coast then a little later over the south east coast.

In Tamil Nadu, and more especially in Tenkasi, it is hot and humid throughout the year with little variation from summer to winter. They do not get too much rainfall there during the monsoon, and the breeze from the sea makes Tenkasi a quite comfortable and pleasant place to be, weather wise.

Figure 1: Research Area. *Melagaram, Tenkasi in Tamil Nadu. Mountains and forest. Nice sea breeze.*

2.2.1 A brief Summary on the History and Economy of India

India has had one of the earliest civilizations known on earth, the Indus Valley Civilization around 2,500 BC. In fact, the word 'Hindu' derives from the river Indus, and it used to refer to the people who lived near that river and did not refer to any religious group in the same way as it does today (Rosen, 2006). This first civilization was identified by their interesting culture and artifacts and they also paved the way for the Vedic culture (around 1500 AC), as well as the caste system. Through history, India has been influenced by the Mongols under Ghengis Khan, and the Roman Empire under Alexander the Great. In later times, in the 1700's, the British colonized the country. Up to that time, India was a wealthy and independent country due to the well-known cotton-textile and spice trade with other European countries. But when the British came, both industries and wealth were exploited and destructed (Hunt, 2003). Finally, India would again be acceded its independence August the 15th 1947.

Today, India is one of the top-five industrialized nations of the world. However, being prosperous is not necessarily an indicator of being a rich country. 37, 2 percent of India's population live below the poverty line and the country is ranked as number 134 as per the 2011

Global Human Development Report (UNDP, 2010). On the micro-level, individuals and families in India are trying to cope the best they can, but at the macro-level the conflict between tradition and modernity is apparent (Verma & Saraswathi, 2002). There are more than 1 million young people in India "climbing heights that their parents could not have dreamed of. With more money to spend and more leisure to spend it, they are the apple of the eye for the consumer market" (Ibid, p. 134). Globalization has indeed increased the greed of people for more goods, but despite for all its newly found modernism; India still remains immersed in religion (Mahajan, 2006). Even people's livelihoods are being influenced by their religion. Religion in India is still often interrelated with the caste-system (see section 2.3.1) which gives people an identity and this identity may determine whether a person will become a rural farmer or a prominent business top. Most people in India and especially in Tamil Nadu belong to the former group. 70 percent of the population is engaged in agricultural activities for their livelihood (Government of Tamil Nadu). The main food crops are different grains for instance rice, in addition to a great variety of fruits, vegetables, spices, tea and coffee. It is expected that children should help their families in the livelihoods; however, the parents also diversify by putting a considerable emphasis on their children's school-enrollment and education. The strengthening of agriculture through higher investments supported by remittances from the government makes children's school attendance possible (Rani, 2005).

This closing paragraph of 'Facts about India', is devoted to the understanding of *what is Indian*? Indian is a contested national category that is marked by diversity and a multitude of experiences. According to Verma & Saraswathi, the contrasts of what is Indian "are so vivid that any attempt to generalize needs to be tempered with a caveat" (2002:105). Tharoor (2006:7) states that:

> ...it is true that no other country in the world embraces the extra ordinary mixture of ethnic groups, the profusion of mutually incomprehensible languages, the varieties of topography and climate, the diversity of religion and cultural practices, and the range of levels of economic development that India does.

2.3 The Social Landscape of India

The social landscape of India is even far more complex than the natural, historical and economic landscapes of India. Verma & Saraswathi (2002) state that "caste, class, gender, religion, and location constitute the social landscape for Indian adolescents" (p. 116). In this regard, castes, classes and gender have been taken a brief look at in this section. As children and young people "frame their expectations, ambitions, and aspirations from education" (ibid.), formal and informal education in India is also being mentioned as being central in shaping childhood experiences. Furthermore, since this study is focusing on children and religion, religion will be in focus and especially in the subsequent sections 'Role of religion in India', 'The Indian Family and Religion' and 'Children and Religion in Tamil Nadu' - the specific location for this study.

2.3.1 Caste system & Classes

The caste system in India is a 3000 year old long Hindu tradition of social institutions and consists of four main castes: Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaisias and Sudras. Below those castes are the 'untouchables' or the Dalites. The concepts of classes and castes in India have often given rise to discussions and misconceptions. According to Singh (2009) the caste system is a social custom and not linked to religion. "In religion there is no caste" (p. 12). Still, people like to believe that the caste system belongs to the Hindu religion and that other religions, especially Christianity falls outside the caste system. However, castes are not uniquely Hindu and they still exist also within religion; among Christians, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Muslims (Mines & Lamb, 2010). Within the different castes we find again segregation of people according to their standard of living, or their class. The social classes in India are usually divided into upper, middle and lower classes and we find all the religions within all the classes irrespective of their original caste. One of my informants, a Bible Teacher in Tamil Nadu said:

> For Christians in India it is not appreciated to make known that you or others belong to a caste or a certain class, for the Bible says that we are all equal before God.

I will not go much further into details about castes and classes as this is something that is not approved among most of the Christians and the informants in this study. Nevertheless, it has to

be mentioned that about 80% of the members of the protestant Church of South India (CSI) are originally Dalites. They have converted from Hinduism to Christianity in order to have better access to schools and universities ran by Christian churches and missionaries (Natander, 2003). As we shall also see later under the headline *Education*, it is not hard to see the correlation between a good education and a higher social and economic status.

2.3.2 Gender

The concept of gender is often being discussed as socially constructed and "refers to the roles and responsibility of women and men that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures" (Mathu, 2008:14). The Indian society create social norms which the families and societal members are obliged to follow. Boys are more valued in India than girls because they are expected to be breadwinners for the entire family, owners of property and more active than girls in professions, politics and within religion. Additionally, families do not have to spend a huge amount of dowry when their boys marry. Conversely, the girl children are often "deprived of adequate nutrition, health care and access to education, knowledge and respectability" (Ibid, p. 17).

Religion is one of the several social institutions in India with a patriarchal structure. According to Mathu (2008), almost every religion considers women to be inferior, impure and sinful. Doing research with children in India, it is important to understand the impact of these social norms on the lives of the children. Fortunately, I did not see much difference between boys and girls in the research setting in Melagaram, Tamil Nadu. There was even a Bible College next to the campus where the female students were encouraged to teach. The reason for this is the influence this village has had from missionaries and the British colonists; "British rule weakened some of the cultural norms impeding equitable status of women" (Localizado, 2003:94).

2.3.3 Education

As stated by Verma & Saraswathi (2002), and as already mentioned in the introduction of this section; adolescence in India frame their expectations, ambitions, and aspirations from education. In fact, education can be seen as the backbone of a young person in India because all their hope of a good and bright future lays in a good education. However, despite having one of

the largest school systems in the world, India also has the greatest population of children and young people not enrolled in school (Ibid., 2001). The main reason for this is poverty. Moreover, as Verma & Saraswathi (2002) argue, "colonial educational system enabled the creation of a selective demand for education from those sections privileged by class (upper), caste (high), and gender (male)" (p. 116).

Before the colonial period, historically; the aim of education in India was liberation and discipline but most important religion, as religion was dominating every sphere of life. Even today religion plays a crucial role in the lives of the Indians and this still affects the school system in various ways. Even for Christians, knowledge is something that is very important as Tamil Nadu has to a certain extent been influenced by Thomas Aquinas orthodox theology where knowledge plays the most significant role in the Christian life, and not faith like in the theology of Emmanuel Kant. However, Mohanty (1991) argues that it is desirable to make a distinction between 'religious education' and 'education about religions'. B. R. Ambedka in Mohanty (1991) explains that the concept "'secular state' has remarked 'freedom of religion as fundamental to a secular state' – no instruction in religious dogma will be given in any public school". (p. 29). As noted by Chandra & Sharma (2004), it is necessary for a multi-religious democratic state to promote a tolerant study of all religions, so that its citizens can understand each other better and live peacefully together.

2.4 The Role of Religion in India

Although the role of religion in the Indian society has been debated widely, as Robinson (2004) points out, systematic and methodological sociological studies of religion and its functions in Indian society has not yet been developed. Religion in India is a sensitive topic because for most Indians religion is not about faith or beliefs but rather about wisdom and 'a way of life'. This is also in accordance with Verma & Saraswathi (2002:114): "It must be mentioned that Hinduism is usually defined as a way of life, rather than as a religion, and has a strong philosophical base". When we know that 80, 5 percent of the population in India are Hindus we understand that it is quite controversial trying to proclaim that there is one God, one religion and one caste for all humanity. Sree Narayana Guru from Kerala, a Hindu saint (1856-1928), propagated religion in such an integrating way. People had various opinions about his philosophy, and many opposed

him. How can we possibly try to make use of religion for the sake of integration by taking away people's way of life? The role of religion in India is still being discussed extensively as India continues to be a multi-religious society where religion has a predominant position held in the *individual* lives of the people. Religion can be a strong force which can change social structures and norms into something better, but it can also have the opposite effect. European and American scholars have therefore extensively discussed the conditions of religion in India and if religion plays an integrative or disintegrative role in the state. J. M. Yinger from America, an outstanding sociologist of religion, is very clear in his summary on this topic: Religion, under the conditions prevailing in India today will play a disintegrative role" (Robinson, 2004:66). Moreover, as the subsequent discussion reveals, secularization in India is comprehensively recognized as the best option for the state.

2.4.1 Secularization

Religion constitutes an important element in the Indian culture. It exercises a very significant influence in Indian civilization. But it is a mystery to many how the independent India declared herself a secular state? By becoming secular, India has not been anti-religious or irreligious. Rather she wants to be independent in her attitude towards all religions; her age-old tradition of tolerance, magnanimity, free thinking and universal brotherhood has been amply reinforced by constitutional provisions (Mohanty, 1991:29).

Even after Hindu fanatics and politicians have tried every effort to place the Hindu religion on the top of the hierarchy of religions, the constitution of India still declares that India is a secular state which implies equality of all religions and religious tolerance (The Constitution Act, 1976). Article 25 in the constitution of India declares that every citizen has the right to "freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice and propagate religion" (Hoveyda, 2010:152). But how this freedom of religion is defined and how it looks like in reality, varies in the same way as secularism has several interpretations and implications for the citizenry. However, it should be made clear that a secular life-style has not replaced religious life. Despite the growth of modernization in India, secular and religious life tend to co-exist in some form of a mosaic manner.

According to the New Oxford American Dictionary (NOAD, 2005), *secular* denotes attitudes, activities or other things that have no religious or spiritual basis. Others have indicated that secularization is "separation of religion from public life, decline of religious belief and practice" (Vanhoozer & Warmer, 2007:18). However, it is not unusual in India that the word secular is given another meaning, often a meaning that implies basic respect and tolerance for every religion (Lidberg, 2003). By this, we understand that the Indian understanding of the concept 'secular' is quite different from the European understanding. Despite of being secular, India is indeed a country which is imbued by religiosity through all institutions of its society. In the following, the social institution of family is examined in the light of religion, and more especially, the Christian religion.

2.5 The Indian Family and the Christian Religion

Christianity has been incarnated in a great variety of cultures since its inception as a distinctive religious movement approximately two thousand years ago. This means that Christianity has entered into a living relationship with diverse forms of the family (Anderson, 1996:31).

The notion of family within Christianity is utterly different from that of other religions. It is not by mistake that Anderson (1996) states that Christianity has entered into a living relationship with diverse forms of families. Traditionally, the Indian family has been characterized by being patriarchal and extended; often there could be more than 50 family members living under the same roof! The women's responsibilities were aimed only at homemaking; cooking, cleaning and child-rearing. But many of these families, coming in touch with Christianity, have gradually changed to something quite opposite. Christian influence on Indian families is evident in "the breakdown of the joint family, growth of progressively smaller families, reduction in male dominance within the family, growth of independence of women and general instability of the family institution as such" (Sharma, 2004:140). Despite the fast pace of social change, the Indian family continues to play a major role in the socialization of children (Verma & Sarawathi, 2002).

However, India also has different categories of families. India, the biggest democratic country in

the world, with 28 states and 7 union territories, is known for its diverse and contrasting cultures and traditions. For instance, the ways of dress, food, customs and family forms and family compositions in the country can be found as different as day and night. In what follows, three different childhood categories within the village Melagaram in Tamil Nadu are presented.

2.6 Children and Religion in Melagaram, Tamil Nadu

As per the Tamil Nadu Social Development Report from 2000, there were about 2 milliards children (0-14 years) in Tamil Nadu in 1991. This constitutes 35 percent of the state's total population. Most of the children live with their families, either in big extended families or in nuclear families. However, the latter type of families are becoming more and more usual. Other than that, it can be said to be three categories of children in India. One category is comprised of those children with absent fathers. They do not see their fathers often as they are working abroad for extended periods of time to earn a greater income for their families than they would have had in India. A second category of children are those who have parents, but have been sent away from the home at an early age to study or work somewhere else within the state. Some of these children can also be considered as child labor migrants, and might even have left the family without letting their caregivers know. The last and third category represents those who have neither parents nor relatives to take care of them; parentless children. In the south zone of India (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala & Tamil Nadu) there are about 3.6 million orphans (Hindustan Times, 2011), and a few of these grow up in orphanages.

These three different categories of childhood are also representative for the Melagaram village in Tamil Nadu, and also, more specifically; for this study. Only two of the children in this study lived together with both of their parents. Although different family situations, all of the children in Melagaram have at least something in common; the sense of being part of a village, a community. According to Vatsyayan (2002) there are certain common features of an Indian village. First of all, it is community where people are self-supportive through unity, farming and cultivating. Second, it is a primary institution where development depends very much on the knowledge they have. Third; it is a neighborhood with intimate relations where people are often in need of each other's help. Fourth; there are many joint families with full control over the individual (even for some of the orphans in this village, who grow up in a small orphanage ran in

the same way as a joint family). Fifth; there are a strong sense of group feeling, and people are afraid of being publicly condemned and criticized. Sixth; 'simple life and high thinking' is one of the mottoes for a simple and plain life.

The Christian children, however, might have a different approach to life than their age and village-mates with other religions. There are an umpteen number of different churches in their village, and even within the same churches we can find slight differences in the 'way of life'. For this reason, childhood and religion in Tamil Nadu is being briefly explained more in general.

For the Tamils, religion is so important because through religion they gain understanding, wisdom and knowledge. Knowledge, according to Tiruvalluvar in Panneerselvam (2008:745-746) is that which saves a person from evil. Tiruvalluvar further installs the significance of knowledge through his belief that one person's knowledge can guide others in the same way as a lamp that is lit can light other lamps. And if the children have knowledge, he says, they contribute to their parents' happiness and also to the delight of the entire world. This apprehension is also seen in the village of Melagaram, together with a more orthodox Christian theology which includes the view that children have the responsibility to help the Christian family in the area to become a 'little church', so that they all can serve God better. As stated by Anderson (1996) children in the Christian family "teach their parents humility, tolerance, patience, and how to deal with their own limitations" (p. 39). In this study, where many of the children do not live with their biological parents, this view can still be seen in the relationship with other elders. The adults value the children equally independent of their background, and view them as beneficiary for their (the adults) own spiritual lives. Still, the children's own views and perspectives are often being silenced for the advantage of the adults. For instance, the children are seldom asked about their opinion on a topic, for instance, what they think about religion and spirituality. Thus, they are expected to possess a spirituality on line with adults.

According to interviews and observations conducted at the research site, adults see children and childhoods as all the same within their society with little room to look at the situation of one particular child. This is similar to a 'social structural child approach' which sees children as one universal category. In the next chapter, the theory chapter, the new social studies of children and childhood and the different 'child-approaches' are one of the issues first being discussed, among many other theories which are being examined.

Theories and Examination of Relevant Literature

3.1 Introduction

In any research, it is necessary to use existent theory as a framework of thinking and in the analysis of the empirical data. The importance of theory is often underestimated in social research (Hall, 2008). Hall argues that "the role of theory in research is closely related to the methodological perspective adopted" (p. 57). In other words, how we have chosen to approach our social research has to be taken into consideration in connection with already established social theories. That does not mean that a complete agreement with previous literature will take place. But already established literature will play a crucial role and give relevant guiding into the research process. In other words, previously established theories will be challenged by the constantly new and emerging understandings and enlightenment obtained by the researcher. It is also necessary to use a wide range of theories, in order to capture the entire reality of the children's lives and the study as a whole. As established by several scholars within childhood studies, there is a new approach to childhood studies which includes a broadening of interest in children's lives across a wide range of disciplines than in the past due to increasing concern with agency and context in the social sciences (Ansell, 2005; James & James, 2008; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). To examine children's perspectives on religion, different theories are looked into; both from the new social studies of children and childhood and other social sciences relevant for this study. The new social studies of children and childhood are being introduced as a starting point in understanding the child approach applied in this study. Moreover, issues of childhood and globalization and childhood and sociology are discussed before the concept of religion is being implemented in the social studies of children and childhood.

3.2 What Child Approach am I using?

The main feature of the new social studies of childhood is that, by taking children's views seriously; it focuses on the child as a social 'being' in the here and now rather than a more future-oriented view of the child as 'becoming' (Qvotrup, 1994). Thus, the new social studies of childhood is shedding light on children's active role in constructing their own social lives, and as

stated by Corsaro (2005); children produce their own unique children's culture "while simultaneously contributing to the production of adult societies" (p. 3). Previously, this minority category consisting of children was frequently a victim of paternalistic adult decisions in the name of children's 'best interests'. Children were passive objects of research within both socialization theories and developmental psychology (James & James, 2008). Seeking to modify this trend, the researchers and professionals within the new social studies of childhood have stressed the importance of children's agency and how children as social actors have the capacity to shape their own lives and the society in which they live.

However, the new social studies of childhood have not come without questions and discussions. For instance, and as stated by Sommer, Pramling & Hundeide (2010:29), "childhood sociologists themselves have drawn on the new sociological paradigm of childhood and have used it heuristically as a legitimate representation of a child perspective". Although the new paradigm of children and childhood has been derived from various theories and sources, as Qvortrup (1994) argues, there is an agreement on three fundamental views. The first one is that childhood is something that can be perceived as seeing children as beings instead of becomings. The second is that childhood is a component in the social structure, and the third and last one is that children are important social actors in their own circumstances and in their society's development.

On these premises, there are four different approaches developed by James et al. (1998) as ways of studying present-day children and childhoods. James et al. have in their work keyed out 'the socially constructed child', 'the social structural child', 'the minority group child' and 'the tribal child'. The socially constructed child approach views children and childhoods as varied across space, time and cultures. On the contrary, the social structural child approach perceives children as one universal category but affirms that "manifestations may vary from society to society but within each particular society they are uniform" (James et al., 1998:32). In the two next approaches, the minority child approach and the tribal child approach there are elements of both the socially constructed child approach and the social structural child approach. James et al. (1998) advocate that the four approaches do correspond with each other, but it is rather rare with a movement between the minority group child approach and the tribal child approach.

The tribal child approach sees children as different from adults and therefore they inhabit a

separate world than adults. The children have their own special children's culture, and many studies have been conducted using this approach by focusing on children's culture in relation to other children. Yet, it has been argued that this "can lead to a simplification of the child's social world as separate from adults, ignoring the fact that in households or at school children frequently interact with adults, parents and teachers" (Punch, 2003:280, adapted from Alanen & Mayall, 2001). The minority group child approach is the 'adult-child' approach which recognize children "as essentially indistinguishable from adults... they are seen as active subjects" (James et al., 1998:31). They are seen as similar to adults, but the world they inhabit, in spite of this, is adult-centered which means that the children are often being forced into marginalization. As a result of this, the children are more likely to be exploited.

According to Punch (2003) children of the majority world tend to be studied from the perspective of the minority group child "because most of the sociological and anthropological literature about their childhoods is located within the context of children's work" (p. 281).

Nevertheless, there are instances where a combination of the tribal child approach and the minority group child approach has been used to discover overlapping areas of children's everyday lives. Punch (2003) has demonstrated in her study about children's play and work in rural Bolivia how a holistic perspective using a combined approach could be more appropriate for understanding children's childhoods (p. 277). She also argues that an almost exclusive focus on the children's working lives "has led to an obfuscation of more ordinary everyday aspects of majority world children's childhoods" (p. 281). For instance, it is easier to focus on children's work and street-lives because they are very visible, while other ordinary everyday aspects of children's lives such as their spiritual lives are almost invisible. Hart (2003) affirms that children's spiritual lives have been kept largely under-researched. Thus, there has been a scarcity of literature within childhood studies on this topic, especially when it comes to the majority world childhoods.

For this study, I have therefore found it appropriate to combine these two approaches which focus more on children's agency; the minority group child approach and the tribal group child approach. In combining these two approaches, all the arenas of the children's lives including school, home and church will play their part to give an understanding to how the children

integrate all these contexts and transform their experiences from these contexts to other elements of their lives, such as religion. The children are both inhabitants of their own children's worlds, and adult-centered worlds. Punch (2003) demonstrates how children do move in and out of adult and child-centered worlds, almost instantaneously in different contexts and with different people (p. 282).

Hence, children's real lives are looked into in order to grasp and understand their perspectives on religion. As the children of the majority world often are expected to work like an adult, so are also the children in the majority world expected to acquire the spirituality of an adult from an early age. At the same time, they also have their own children's culture with games, play and even their own children's–spirituality. According to Moore & Wright (2008) there has been a narrow conception of children in contemporary Christianity. Both the Christian theology and spirituality have been extremely adult-centered. Notwithstanding the fact that children are often being spiritually marginalized, they are simultaneously viewed as social and competent actors in their own lives. This is in line with an increasing concern on how children's voices can be heard in spiritual matters. Several scholars within this topic have pointed out the ongoing need to listen to children's own words and perspectives to ground theory in their experiences (see Roehlkepartain, 2006).

3.3 Models of Childhood & Globalization

The different approaches or sociological models of studying childhood examined in the previous sub-heading, stem from one of the three theoretical models of childhood reviewed by James et al. (1998); the 'transitional model of childhood'. According to James et al., there are two broad categories of theoretical models of childhood. The pre-sociological and the sociological. The pre-sociological model is ignorant of the social context where the child lives whereas the sociological model of childhood is more aware of the children in their specific contexts. It is based on the transitional model of childhood which is an additional theoretical model that serves as a break between the other theoretical models. It demonstrates "the awakening of social theory's concern with childhood, a concern fully realized in four sociological approaches" (James et. al., 1998:4). The four different approaches which have been described in the previous section are expected to give understanding for further research with children. (Socially constructed,

tribal, social structural and minority group).

All these theoretical models have their background in two four-centuries-old predominant yet contradictory images of childhood. Both the Dionysian and the Apollonian image of the child have close connections with the social structure of the society, but in very different ways. The Dionysian image of the child is an instance of social structure; a society where people are less different (Jenks, 2005). It perceives children as 'little devils', it is supposed that they "enter the world as a willful material force, they are impish and harbor a potential evil" (Ibid. p. 62). Because of this, they are in need of strict moral guidance for the sake of saving children from themselves. Moreover, the Dionysian image of childhood is preoccupied with the ideas that children should be seen and not heard, children need protection from themselves and childhood is a time to learn discipline

The Apollonian image of the child is another instance of social structure; a society where people are more different and isolated, with more difficulties to operate within a sense of shared values (Jenks, 2005). Contrary to the Dionysian image of childhood, the Apollonian image sees childhood as a time for play, protection and innocence. This image views children as 'little angels', there is no need to beat them into submission; all they need is encouragement and support (Ibid). They are natural beings, with natural moralities and characters. Stated by Ansell (2005), "viewing childhood as a natural state has contributed to a tendency to universalize Western concepts (Jenks, 1996), assuming they apply equally to non-western context" (p. 13).

In other words, it is this Apollonian image which has given rise to the global model of the child: "Western constructions of childhood, especially childhood as a time of innocence where children must play and be protected from the adult world, have been exported to other countries, raising the question of whether there is now such a thing as a 'global child'" (Woodhead & Montgomery, 2003:68). It is important to mention that this Western model of childhood, 'the global child' has been effected through globalization processes such as colonialism and imperialism, development work of international aid organizations and NGOs. Missionary activities and migration have also played their part in this process.

The global model of childhood is an ideal to which people are to aspire, but it fails to explain the

lives of the children where it is exported to in a satisfactory way (Ansell, 2005). Especially, it fails to look into their real life-worlds and to describe their experiences. Based on the review by Boyden and Ennew (1997), one of the global notions of childhood is that it is superior to all other childhoods. Ansell (2005) has noted that the global model of childhood has failed to describe young people's experiences, but "yet as an ideal, it has had significant material impacts on the lives of the young people around the world" (p. 23). In this connection, a short exploration of the global model's relevance for the *spiritual* impacts on the lives of the young people is of paramount importance. According to Hill & Pargament (2003), in the global view, the spirituality of children is related specifically towards the area of health issues. Poverty and sickness can overshadow the importance of spirituality in a young person. The material impacts on the lives of children will also have spiritual impacts on their lives. Not having enough food to eat and having insufficient health will impact the child's possibility to nurture his/her spirituality no matter how much he/she is exposed to religion and religious activities. This study does not focus on health, but it acknowledges the significance of the connection as worth mentioning.

Furthermore, the traditional 'Western image' of the spiritual child claims that children are only spiritual if they are engaged in religion or religious life (Goelman, Marshall, & Ross, 2004). That is to say, those children not having access or possibilities to participate in religious activities are not spiritual. But, as stated by Goelman et al.; "it is now possible to imagine a spiritual child who may not express or experience his or her spirituality in a religious way" (p. 171). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), also supports a view different from the traditional 'Western image' of the spiritual child. In the UNCRC, religion and spirituality is being separated by distinguishing children's religious life from their spiritual development (UNCRC, 1989). In articles 14 and 30 the child's right to have religious experiences is stated, whereas in several other articles the UNCRC declares that children have the right to develop and nurture their own spiritual lives (for instance, article 27). This implies a focus on children's spiritual development, without focusing on their real everyday life experiences when it comes to religion. The UNCRC also conveys a central aspect of international agreements. However, the religious experiences of the children in the Global South might not fit into the category of the 'global child' as assumed by the UNCRC. As a matter of fact, the UNCRC has been critiqued to focus merely on the global child and to make up one universal childhood while simultaneously focusing on individuality. Anderson (1996) asserts that

"the moral framework of rights reflects and carries several of these assumptions, including the premise that human beings are first of all individuals and only secondarily members of communities" (p. 50). But the Christian understanding of individuality is quite different in that God created human beings to be both members of communities and individual beings (Ibid.).

Therefore, the globalization of Western notions of childhood often practically ignores the Christian children and children in the South as they do not always fit into the framework of the global model. The dilemmas of transporting the global model of childhood to every childhood and context are many more than that. Ansell (2005) argues that through ignoring the social and economic context in which the children live in, children who do not fit into the global model are seen as abnormal. According to the global model, it is also abnormal to spend childhood outside the nuclear family. Then, what about those children who grow up in orphanages or spend most of their childhood in school hostels? Actually, this is something that seems to be more and more 'normal' in India.

The 'hyper-individualism' of the Western Enlightenment is also problematic, in that it asserts that "…we are fully human only when we are free from dependence on others and that freedom from dependence on others means freedom from any relations with others except those relations which the individual enters voluntarily with a view to his own interest" (Anderson, 1996:43). In reality, this means that a person in the West is no longer dependent on others and that they can disconnect with their family if they wish. However, in India it is still much harder to disconnect with the family and enter into relations out of personal interest. The individual is to a greater extent attached to the family/extended family and the entire community where he/she grows up. When exporting the idea of 'hyper-individualism' to the Global South, there is a risk of undermining the importance of the community's role in the nurturing of children's social lives and their religious experiences – spirituality. The sociology of childhood is a much debated topic within childhood studies. In the next section, children as social resources that inhabit a valuable social capital for their own lives and the society as a whole are discussed, followed by a more detailed examination of religion as a vital concept within sociology.

3.4 Childhood & Sociology: Social Resources

The sociology of childhood is particularly focused on the way children orient themselves in the society, how they as social actors construct their own lives as well as the different life-worlds they create and take part in. They are active participants in their own lives and communities. In light of this, I view the child as a social resource, who inhabits a plentiful social capital in their 'here-and-now-life' and also in what is to come (see section 3.8). Although the community and social networks play an important role in the children's social lives, children's own role as social resources is in focus with paramount significance both for the child him/herself and the society both here and now, and in the future.

Seeing children as social resources signifies that they have something within them, something valuable and useful for themselves and the common good. I suggest that this social resource in which children already inhabits can also be called 'social capital'; in that several scholars have explained social capital as a set of social resources integrated in relationships (Burt, 1992; Lin, Cook & Burt, 2001). The hypothesis behind the notion of social capital is, according to Lin et al. (2001), as simple as "investment in social relations with expected returns" (p. 6). Lin further refers to the various definitions of social capital as social networks or "the social relationships between individual actors, groups, organizations, communities, regions and nations that serve as a resource to produce positive returns" (Ibid.). Other scientists have underlined the role of individual and societal structures in anticipating individual progression and common agency (Bourdieu, 1986, Coleman, 1990). By contrast, Putnam (2000) has promoted the idea of association and community activities as a foundation for social integration and well-being. He expresses that individuals can also exert influence on other individuals and groups by directing social capital as "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (Putnam, 2000:19)." In effect, this suggests that children should also be able to participate in these social networks and be benefited from the trust that transpires from the system of social capital. But, since the theories on social capital tend to be adult-centered, there is a need to accommodate them into the realities of children (see Rantalaiho & Teige, 2006). However, it is hard to apply the notion of social capital into children's everyday lives, as they are repeatedly being denied access to social networks.

Putnam (2000) distinguishes between bridging and bonding social capital. Bridging social capital helps us to work with others outside our close social relations. Bonding social capital focuses on cooperation within our close relations; but this form for social capital can turn ugly when it avoids bridging and focuses rather on tools of exclusion (Berger & Redding, 2011:33). As a solution, I suggest that researchers should recognize the need to analyze children's social capital. According to Lin et al. (2001) two central points for analyzing an individual's social capital is: "1) how individuals invest in social relations, and 2) how individuals capture the embedded resources in the relations to generate a return" (p. 8). By doing so, not only the informal arenas of children's lives are being considered, but also the child's role as an individual and a social actor that construct his/her own life. Through the consideration of analyzing the child's social capital, the child is being assured his/hers value and worthiness. "Being assured of one's worthiness as an individual and a member of a social group sharing similar interests and resources not only provides emotional support but also public acknowledgment of one's claim to certain resources" (Lin et al., 2001:7).

When it comes to the area of religion and spirituality, it has not been proved easy to combine spirituality and sociology. Flanagan (2007) advocates that the upsurge of theories of social capital has developed into concerns with spiritual capital, and the "subsequent openness of sociology to non-material reality" (p. 34). Berger & Redding (2011) takes it further in defining spiritual capital as "the deep culture beliefs that underlie the ideas of association in any society", underlining that it is the religious beliefs "that are the most dominant carriers of these deep cultural belief structures" (p. 34).

Some of the Christian cultural and religious beliefs are anchored from the Bible. When it comes to children, Jesus from Nazareth put children in the center by professing: "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children" (Mark, 10:14). But it has been proved challenging even within the notion of spiritual capital to apply this to children's lives as the children are being repeatedly denied access to spiritual and religious arenas. According to Berger & Redding (2011), spiritual capital is a variant of social capital but associated with religious social network that should promote "honesty, trustworthiness, the respect for property, the appreciation of talent, and the recognition of universal humanity and the need for forgiveness and hope for future" (p. 34). However, using

spiritual capital to encourage these above-mentioned qualities into children's lives will prove meaningless while children's own spiritual resources are being ignored.

While children in the sociology of childhood are now seen as active participants and social actors in their own lives and societies, children ought to be seen as social actors and resources also within the sociology of religion and spirituality. Religion and spirituality do play a considerable role in children's lives.

3.5 Children & Religion as a Scope of Research

The interests in children and religion have generally not been coined towards children's own perspectives on religion but how children's religious development occurs in different stages, phases and areas in life. Children and religion as a scope of research can be divided into three research approaches: Research with focus on their religious development, research with focus on religious socialization and research with focus on the content of children's religiosity (Birkedal, 2001).

The starting point for the interest in children and religion was within psychology. The child as a social actor was not in focus, but the general interest in how the human-kind develops its religious life was the focal point. In 1927 Sigmund Freud published his book, 'The future of an illusion'. He was interested in psycho-analysis and in the human kind's infantile wishes and dreams and how these develop through different processes. His work was a starting point for other writers when it comes to the early development of personality and the psychological reasons for the man's religiosity (Bergstrand, 1984). According to Erik H. Erikson, the importance of the image of the parents is evident in the image of God. Along with that, he showed how important the child's surrounding culture was for the development of faith (Ibid., 1984, 1990). Piaget and Kohlberg were also interested in the child's development and how children's thoughts and moral could be related to the child's religious development. James W. Fowler was inspired by Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg in that he developed seven stages in order to understand children's development when it comes to faith and religion, although he also noted that these stages of faith did not necessarily have anything to do with religion. It is not my task to elaborate on these stages, as I am not interested in finding out at what stage an individual child is

at, but in this section; to briefly review earlier theories concerning children and religion.

Other scholars to be mentioned within the developmental approaches are Ernest Harms, Ronald Goldman, Theophil Thun and especially Goldman (1964) who was influenced by Piaget, and was interested in children's religious thinking from childhood to adolescence. Ernest Harms was interested in children's development of religious experience whereas Thun (1959) was into children's religious concepts, and how these change with development. A more recent study on children and religious development was carried out by Tamminen in 1991 and 1994. His study aimed to have a more total picture on children and young people's development (1991). Birkedal (2001) has noted that research on children and religion with focus on development does not capture every aspect of children's preconditions for religion so this kind of research has to be applied with care.

Research with focus on socialization is similar to the developmental researches, but with socialization more weight is put on the social relations. In this regard, scholars such as Hjalmar Sunden, Oddbjørn Evenshaug, Dag Hallen and Sigmund Harbo are being mentioned. Sunden is focused on that children's religiosity should not occur on the intellectual level, but they should develop religiosity through experiences whereas Evenshaug and Hallen believe that religiosity is something that we are all born with, but also comes from the outside: The child needs to be socialized into it (Ibid.). In other words, this research tradition sees the importance of exposures of religion from the outside. It does give us some hints on which conditions children have for religion and for the interpretation of life.

The latest of the three research trends within researches on children and religion has been to understand the content of children's religiosity in the way which children themselves express it. This has put the child more in the center of the research, especially through Sven G. Hartman (2007) who argues that the researches within psychology of religion can seem discriminating towards the children and do not take them serious as human beings. In his work, he analyzed Swedish children's thoughts about religion and their life questions. Similarly, Hart (2003) "points to the ongoing need to listen to children's own words and perspectives to ground theory in their experiences" (Roehlkepartain, 2005:108). In accordance with this, Smith's (2005) study focus on schoolchildren's perspectives on believing and belonging in Great Britain.

Although different, what all these research traditions have in common is that they study children in the Western setting and cultures. There have been few studies on children, religion and spirituality in other cultures. However, Gottlieb (2000) did a comprehensive description of spirituality in Beng society, suggesting the rich possibility of exploring children's spiritual lives in other cultural contexts on all sides of the globe.

This particular study does not focus on children in the West, children's religious or spiritual development, socialization nor the content of their religion. In contrast, it aims to understand children's perspectives on religion and their life-experience here and now, *and* in the global south. Unlike many previous studies on children and religion, this study makes use of children as social resources that already inhabit a valuable social capital as a framework for the analysis. I suggest that using social capital when it comes to children and how they view religion can help us to understand the vigorous drifts of the children's social lives and how their social lives again influence their perspectives on religion. This reciprocity can work as an aid in being aware of children's spiritual resources, while analyzing how children view religion and how their perspectives on religion fuel up their engagements with social practices. The study is also heedful of children's participation in both child-centered and adult-centered worlds through combining the two approaches of the minority group and tribal group child. Unlike other studies on children and religion, an actor-oriented approach is used in this study; the children are not viewed from the top-down for the sake of adults' interests, but from where they are in their real everyday lives for the sake of what the children themselves are interested in when it comes to religion. It is a study together with the children, neither for them nor on them.

3.6 The Concept of Religion

Since the words 'religion' and 'spirituality' are mentioned several times in this study; the following section will take a look at what these concepts imply and how they are applied in this research. Religion is in the main focus, while later in this section 'religion vs. spirituality' have been elaborated on.

The word *religion* has derived from the Latin word *religare*, (re as in re-turn or re–peat), *ligare* meaning 'to tie, to bind' (Pearce, 2002). Looking at the origin of the word *religion*, Pearce argues

that it will mean that we bind or surrender some parts of our being for something outside ourselves. According to The New Oxford American Dictionary (NOAD, 2005), the definition of religion is: "The belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods". This indicates that; 'that something outside ourselves' is for most people a personal God or gods. However, religion is also a spacious concept that is not easy to embrace in one breath. A multitude of disciplines have discussed religion and religion's importance and functions for human beings; including pedagogy, theology, philosophy, history, anthropology, psychology and sociology. The first starting point of a scientific study of religion was within psychology, where people's religious experiences were in focus. While the interest in general psychology increases, religion is still remaining as one of the prominent concerns of mankind (Allport, 1950). In this respect sociology of religion is being brought up here as one of the disciplines most concerned with religion and mankind when it comes to the individual social agent *and* societal forms. For that reason, religion is particularly seen from the sociological perspective in this study.

3.6.1 Defining Religion

Religion is being defined in manifold ways with no common agreement. The discussion does not revolve around questions of religious truth, rather sociologists and psychologists tend to focus on how fruitful the definition is (Furuseth & Repstad, 2003). This indicates how successful a definition is in describing the features of religion in a specific cultural context. A definition of religion in Norway might have to be exchanged for another definition of religion in the study of children and religion in Tamil Nadu, India. "Various definitions of religion will influence groups differently, especially when the definitions have an ethnocentric form, that is, when they are based on local standards for what is considered to be religious" (Ibid., p. 16). To find the most suitable definition of religion for this study, both substantive and functional definitions have been studied. Substantive definitions aim to characterize the content of religion or the object of a person's faith; while functional definitions aim to look at the effect that religion is supposed to have for individuals and/or society (Ibid.). Considering the fact that India is a multi-religious country, the children in this study live their everyday life in a context where people hold various strong beliefs with the hope that religion should affect them in positive ways. For instance, religion in India is often seen as a means to gain economic and societal benefits. Through

participating in religious activities, using different strong symbols and rituals individuals acquire wisdom about right and wrong, about reality and a super-natural reality which they believe can help them to come to the ultimate and prosperous freedom in life. Thus, my definition of religion takes this complexity into account and draws on Michael Hill's (1973) definition of religion as:

> The set of beliefs which postulate and seek to regulate the distinction between an empirical reality and a related and significant supra-empirical segment of reality; the language and symbols which are used in relation to this distinction; and the activities and institutions which are concerned with its regulation (Hill, 1973:42-3).

Michael Hill's approach to defining religion entails a mixture between substantive and functional elements. One main advantage of his definition is that it includes beliefs, language, symbols, practice and institutions (Furuseth & Repstad, 2003). Another advantage, I would suggest, is that this definition is relevant for and encompasses understandings of several religions. For instance, nearly all Christian people will combine both prayer (supra-empirical segment of reality) and rational (an empirical reality based on everyday factual experiences) behavior when they are having a hard time in life.

Still, it is also often argued that Christianity is not a religion but an intimate relationship with God as a savior and father. An example; the Swiss theologian Karl Barth argued that "the revelation of God is the abolition of religion" (Fowler, 2008:2). Interestingly enough, Hinduism is also often seen 'as a way of life' and not a religion. The underlining implication is that: Depending on how we define religion, both Christianity and Hinduism can still be set into the category of religion. This is done in this study, while also taking the individual's definitions and perspectives on religion into focus. It depends to a great extent on how the children define religion, but also how the children are exposed to and also choose to weigh the different dimensions of religion into their everyday personal lives as social actors in the society.

3.6.2 The Sociology of Religion

Sociology of religion is a complicated field because individuals and society are changing and living human beings constitute part of the object of study (Furuseth & Repstad, 2003). Theorists

within sociology tend to be either actor-oriented, or structure-oriented. Actor-oriented theorists see sociology from below; the human actor's capacity to act and change social structures. Structure-oriented theorists see sociology from above; how the society shapes the individual. These two different positions are also evident in the sociology of religion, in that they have consequences for the interpretation of religion (Ibid.). Most structural theories tend to emphasize the significance religion hold for *societal* needs. Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Emilie and Talcott Parsons all argued, but in slightly different ways, how religion holds specific functions for the society. Through their interpretations, it is understood that "religion is a phenomenon that is an effect of external conditions, and that exists because it fulfills some type of societal purpose" (Ibid., 2003:47). Here, an ignorance of the *individual's* purposes for participation in religious rituals or groups is evident. Quite opposite, within the action theories, the aim is to understand the actors' actions and participation within religion and religious rituals. By this, we can also understand the actors' perspectives on the phenomenon religion, and how their need for meaning in life influences their perspectives on religion. According to Max Weber, religion is connected to the individual's need for meaning, and not to society's call for sustenance. And likewise, Georg Simmel and George Herbert Mead agreed that religion originates in social interaction between individuals (Ibid.).

There are distinct contrasts between these two theories within the sociology of religion, but in spite of that, the differences are still not definite. The two theories can therefore be used combined or alone in different types of contexts. In this particular study, I tend to have a more actor-oriented viewpoint of religion where religion accommodates the individuals' needs and also where religion plays a crucial role in the interactions between the individuals.

3.6.3 Dimensions of Religion

Many scholars within different disciplines have tried to mark out different dimensions or elements of religion in order to have a better grasp on the concept of religion. Ninian Smart (1996) writes about seven dimensions of religion. The 1) ritual or practical dimension, 2) the doctrinal or philosophical dimension, 3) the mythic or narrative dimension, 4) the experiential or emotional dimension, 5) the ethical or legal dimensions, 6) the organizational or social component and 7) the material or artistic dimension (p. 10–11). Yet other scholars argue that

there are only two dimensions of religion, being 'meaning' and 'belonging' (Botvar, 2001). On the other hand, Stark & Glock (1968) outline five dimensions of religion in a more individualistic sense; and that are more focused on personal religiosity than religion in general. These dimensions operate with the 1) belief dimension; what a person believes, and not just that they believe, 2) that religious practice include two forms; ritual and devotion, 3) the experience dimension has to do with a feeling of divine presence, 4) the knowledge that is expected to be had on dogmas, rituals and religious texts, and 5) the consequential dimension which is about the effects that religion have in the everyday lives of the individuals.

All the different dimensions mentioned here are found to be existent elements in the concept of religion. In this study, all the dimensions are noticed (and especially those of Stark & Glock) but the experiential dimension of religion holds a significant place in that it will also be aware of the spiritual aspects of the children's lives. According to Roehlkepartain (2006), the other dimensions of religion are categorized as belief systems and rituals, while the experiential dimension of religion is connected to spirituality. I suggest that spirituality should be seen as the main aspect of religion in the sense that it also instinctively captures all the other aspects of religion. The distinction between spirituality and religion is elaborated on below.

3.6.4 Religion vs. Spirituality

It is impossible to carry out a study on children and religion in India without having mentioned 'spirituality'. As already seen, religion is indeed connected to spirituality. But there are many discussions and controversies on how these two are connected and related, depending on both the definition of religion and the definition of spirituality. I have suggested that spirituality is the main aspect of religion which also captures all the other aspects of religion. Putting it very philosophically, that is to say that religion is spirituality, and spirituality is religion because they capture the dimensions and some of the functions of each other. But it might not be possible to argue that these two are the same without having reflected on what other authors have said about this matter. Rodgers (in Best, 1996), indicates that religion is about morality and spirituality, but spirituality is still not synonymous with religion; nor is it opposed to it. Another scholar, Roelhkepartain (2005), has described religion vs. spirituality in simple terms: "Religion is often seen as institutionally oriented, while spirituality is viewed as more personally oriented" (p. 400). To advance upon Roelhkepartain's theory: Religion is more formally structured and can be

seen as more social integrating through practices and rituals. Spirituality is more personal and individualistic in the sense that it is identified with such things as personal transcendence, supra consciousness, sensitivity, and meaningfulness (Zinnbauer, et. al., 1997). In this sense it is understood that spirituality has to do with feelings, the power that comes from within us while religion is about the power that comes from the outside and can again shape the power, or the spirit within us. This implies that we need both of them; and that religion *and* spirituality are intertwined. However, in many settings, especially in many Christian churches, there has been a tendency to separate religion and spirituality, emphasizing religion as something bad and spirituality as something good. This is grounded in the Bible and Jesus from Nazareth's words in Matthew chapter 23:1-35 where Jesus criticizes the religious leaders, take for instance verse 23a: "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens (religion), but you ignore the more important aspects of the law – justice, mercy and faith (spirituality)".

Despite that, "a new wave of definitions is predicated on finding a common denominator that can bind religion and spirituality together and at the same time demarcate their differences" (Roehlkepartain, 2005:5). The concept of the sacred is the anchor point in which religion and spirituality both are grounded (Ibid.). Spirituality is through this notion perceived to be an individual's pursuit to engage with what she or he considers as sacred. Similarly, religion also seeks for the sacred but by creating doctrines, beliefs, and rituals that bind believers to the sacred and to each other (Miller & Thoresen, 2003).

Still others argue that spirituality is like the wind; it is impossible to grasp, or capture what it really is. (Nye, 1999). Nye also states that it is easy to misrepresent the complexity, depth and fluidity of spirituality when trying to define it. For this reason, it becomes essential to go to straight to the specific cultural context in order to represent spirituality vs. religion in a more respectable way.

"Religion has been recognized for rich ideological, social and spiritual contexts that may promote identities that transcend the self" (King, 2003, in Roehlkepartain, 2005:386).
India can be recognized for rich ideological, social and spiritual contexts that may promote identities that transcend the self. In this way, India is understood to be a very religious setting but

according to the Hindu disciple, Swami Vivekananda, the life-center of Indian culture is spirituality and the land of spirituality is India (Swami Vivekananda, in Bhuyan, 2003). Through my own observations from the fieldwork (2011), people in India seem to be first and foremost very religious. Both Hindus and Christians make sure that they please their God(s) every day through prescribed rituals. However, their desire to do this comes from their hope to become spiritually matured. It seems to be important to gain self-transcending identities in order to exceed oneself and hopefully become something better in their next life (Especially in Hinduism; incarnation). Opposite to the Western notion of spirituality as something we are all born with, spirituality in India is rather something they have to mature into (already starting from an early age) and when they finally have attained the spirituality that they have desired; respect is gained. This understanding of maturity in spirituality will therefore have an impact on our view of the child as both being *and* becoming (see more under section 3.8: 'At the Interface of Sociology of Religion and the Social Studies of Childhood'). In this regard, it is to be understood and concluded that the focus on spirituality and religion is quite different in an Indian setting than in a Western one.

Consequently, my definition of spirituality and religion resonates with those of Roehlkepartain: "*Spirituality* refers to the personal and experiential dimension; *religion* is the shared belief and social structure within which, for most but not all, spirituality is primarily shaped" (2005:139). Spirituality includes the experiences of good and evil, belonging, meaning and purpose, while religion is the ground where most people shape their spirituality. Once again, it is implicit that they both are needed in an intertwined sense, at least for most people and at least for this specific cultural setting.

In this regard and as reviewed earlier, the UNCRC have a different understanding of religion vs. spirituality in that it clearly separates the two. Now, let us see what two different articles have to say about religion and spirituality:

Article 14 (1)
States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and *religion*.

Article 27 (1)

States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, *spiritual*, moral and social development.

These are the two articles in the UNCRC reading about religion and spirituality in more general terms. Other articles also mention about religion and spirituality, but the terms are found in separate articles and not in relation to each other. It has been suggested that children do not need religion in order to develop their spirituality (Goelman, et al., 2004), but in the words of Roehlkepartain (2005:139) most people do. I have also come to the philosophical viewpoint that religion and spirituality could be the same thing.

Although there have been many definitions employed, and even the UNCRC has been mentioned; there is a strategic importance to develop one's own standpoint when it comes to religion vs. spirituality. The differences and similarities between the two can still be somewhat vague, and for that reason, the final standpoint for this study has been nailed down in conformity with Roehlkepartain's encouragement (2005:6): "All authors have been encouraged to articulate their own approach and assumptions (about religion vs. spirituality), in hopes that the resulting diversity enriches the dialogue and understanding".

My standpoint is that religion and spirituality are the same, but only depending on how an individual views religion. In India for example, spirituality is more connected to religion than in the West. In the West, one can be spiritual without worshiping any God(s) or having any other forms of religion. It is hard to differentiate or draw a line between religion and spirituality in India, because religion and spirituality are the two sides of the same coin. And how can we divide a coin into two parts? If we attempt to do so, none of the two sides of the coin will be of value. But if we keep the two sides (religion and spirituality) of the coin together and capture them as one, the coin will be of great value.

Thus, religion and spirituality have been used in an intertwined sense in this study. This is also in line with Wuthnow (1998) who argues that belief and tradition (religion) are dynamically intertwined with the experiential (spiritual). This final standpoint is not necessarily accurate from a religious or theological perspective, but it is the most suited definition and understanding of religion vs. spirituality for my research.

3.7 The Spiritual Child or the Religious Child?

Since children in India are not seen as especially spiritual, it is challenging to talk about the 'spiritual child'. In a setting where most people see children as merely human-becoming's, it is rather controversial to prove that they are also human beings. Actually, in India a huge number of people are seen as human-becoming's, as they are always on the search for something more independent on age. Their goal is to develop into something more and something better in their next life, in other words; incarnation. According to Best (1996) spirituality is about discovering how to become more fully human.

At the same time as the children is not seen as special spiritual, it is expected of a child to start the process of maturing their spirituality as early as possible, by bringing the children forth to a religious ground. I will suggest that this actually kind of traps the child, in between being spiritual and being religious. They are expected to be spiritual, however they are not viewed as spiritual from their birth unless they are born with two heads and are worshiped like one of the 33 million Hindu gods.

But most children in India, and in line with Vailant (2002, in Roehlkepartain, 2005:46-47), "religion is said to be acquired in childhood and youth, and if all goes well, empathy, the appreciation of context, and dialogue with others later lead to spiritual maturity". For this reason, we should say that a child is viewed as 'a religious child' rather than a 'spiritual child' in the Indian context.

In contrast, Coles (1990) claims that spirituality is an inbuilt quality of the human kind that unfolds from the very start of an individual's life. Additionally, and as argued by Benson et al. (2003) "spirituality is shaped both within and outside of religious traditions, beliefs, and practices" (p. 207). It is also something that involves everyone; included children. Best (1996) proposes that 'being a person means being a spiritual being'. In this way, a child may be seen as 'a spiritual child' rather than 'a religious child'. This also reminds us of what Goelman et al. (2004) said about the spiritual child: "It is now possible to imagine a spiritual child who may not express or experience his or her spirituality in a religious way" (p. 171).

Children do have both spiritual and religious experiences and interests, and the child's spirituality and religiosity certainly overlap (Coles, 1990). Thus, they are both spiritual and religious, and we have to talk about the child as both a 'religious child' and a spiritual 'child' irrespective of the cultural and the religious setting. This implies that children are to be viewed as both beings here and now (the religious child) and as becomings; reaching for a higher level of spiritual maturity (the spiritual child).

As reviewed in section 3.5, many researches and studies concerning children and religion/spirituality have been carried out, but little is known about children's perspectives on religion. How children view religion, how they come to regard it and to understand it and applying that understanding into their lives and surroundings have first and foremost only been recognized within psychology and within the sciences which focused purely on development, perceptual development and socialization. In contrast, this study aims to see the child's perspectives on religion independent of their developmental processes and what faith stage they are in, and independent of their socialization processes. This might sound somewhat challenging, but in the next section a suggestion is given on how childhood studies and the study of religion (in children's lives) can cooperate.

3.8 At the Interface of Sociology of Religion and the Social Studies of Childhood

This section recognizes the relationship between childhood studies as a social science *and* religion, and aims to raise the awareness on how these two 'can do business with each other'. It is stated by Allport (1950) that "a narrow conceived science can never do business with a narrowly conceived religion. Only when both parties broaden their perspective will the way to understand and cooperation open" (p. 43). This is why a broadened conception of religion where it gives space to children's religious and spiritual lives from an actor-oriented viewpoint is considered. At the same time, the importance of broadening up the conception of sociology of childhood to contain more than experiences of self–transcendence gained in interaction with others is recognized. According to Joas (2008), experiences of self-transcendence are those experiences where we become captivated by something outside ourselves. Therefore, in interactions with the sacred experiences of self-transcendence does also occur in that it may bring us 'outside

ourselves'. How religion is accommodating for children's needs and the function of religion in their lives, in addition to how they see this religion in their lives, is in focus. It is not my task to consider how religion is utilized, but to understand religion from the children's point of view. This is also in connection with Joas (2008) who recommends that the question should not be that 'is religion useful'? But, 'Can we live without the experience of self-transcendence articulated in religion?' Further he argues that our interaction with other human beings can involve similar experiences. This might be the reason why some of the social sciences ignore religion as an integral part of children's lives and as a scope of study.

Another reason, I suggest, might be that the sociology of childhood focuses too much on children in the here-and-now-life (human beings) and totally ignores the fact that they are also in the process of becoming something (human-becomings). Hill & Wager (2009:1) states that:

> It has been argued that children are devalued when viewed largely as future adults (becoming) rather than as individuals whose current capacities, priorities and activities are important (being). This is a useful corrective to developmental frameworks, but presents a false dichotomy.

In further shedding light on this false dichotomy, the sociology of religion has a significant contribution to make in that religion elaborates on the importance of gradually maturing in spirituality and developing a meaning for the future. This implies: *becoming* something for the future and/or the afterlife. Although the sociology of religion often brings up an actor-oriented view, it still disregards children and focuses rather on the adult-dominated world. It can be said that the sociology of religion sees adults as human beings, but as human beings who are capable of becoming something more, while children are only becomings and not even capable of becoming something more; at least not yet.

Here the sociology of childhood is much needed in helping the sociology of religion in 'zooming' the focus out of the adult-world and into the child-world where children are indeed more than merely human-becomings. It is now obvious to see that children are both beings and becomings. This is also in line with Uprichard (2008) who argues that children are both *being* individuals with present-day lives, but they are also *becoming* older and moving towards adulthood.

In linking sociology of religion with the sociology of childhood, I have therefore now arrived at a conceptual hybridism. This means that the perspectives on children as both beings and becomings are combined and mixed. They are both needed and we cannot separate the two. What the sociology of childhood lacks is supplemented by the sociology of religion and vice versa: The sociology of childhood tends to correct the sociology of religion's adult-centered view.

I suggest that this conceptual hybridism in my study has shed, and is shedding a new light on children, both theoretically (in this chapter) and empirically (see the last four chapters of this study). This new light combined with the empirical examination of children's perspectives on religion is regarded to be relevant, *and* additionally: to aid in filling the gap between the sociology of religion and the sociology of childhood with new knowledge.

CHAPTER FOUR
Research Approaches and Methods

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the body of theory related to children and religion was thoroughly reviewed. This chapter is therefore concerned with *what* out of that theory is to be researched, and which techniques or methods are appropriate in order to gain the most genuine understanding and knowledge about children's perspectives on religion.

4.2 Research Design & Choice of Methods

There are many ideas and writings about what methodology is and refers to, but Connolly & Ennew (1996) states what methodology is in short: Methodology is "the body of theory that determines what should be researched and what research techniques are appropriate" (p. 141). According to Creswell (2009) there are three types of research designs; qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods which is a combination between qualitative and quantitative research design. Newman & Benz (1998) states that the two paradigms of qualitative and quantitative methods have been assumed to be two polar dichotomies, but we have to understand science more broadly than either of these two opposites indicate. This study is qualitative with special emphasis on ethnographic methods and phenomenological or philosophical approaches. In other words, the interest of this study is to understand the lived experiences through studying a smaller number of participants in their natural environment so to develop relationships of meanings and understanding. This is a process in which the researcher sets aside his or her own experiences in order to understand the experiences of the research participants (Mendes, 2011). As this specific study aims to understand and acquire knowledge about the ways children view and experience religion, the advantages of the qualitative methodology become more apparent than with a quantitative methodology. A quantitative methodology would not be able to generate meanings beyond its numbers.

Alike with Punch (2009), research methods are in this study seen mainly as tools that act as a means in answering research questions. Punch argues that it is better to adapt both design and

methods to the research questions than to adapt the research questions to the research design and methods. Nevertheless, in many studies research questions are being changed throughout the research process so to fit with the methods being used. In this research, the research questions have not been changed entirely, but have gradually been adapted to match the mental grasp of the children.

Ethnography is often used as one of the most appropriate methods when doing research with children and understanding the world of childhood. Consequently, to answer the research questions of this study, three main methods within ethnographically inspired methods have been chosen: participant observations focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. As a part of participant observations, other methods such as drawing and writing-activities, photo-essay, and neighborhood walk have been chosen in order to explore the subject of religion together with the children in a very non-authoritative way. The methods have been adjusted and new methods adapted in accordance with children's interests, personalities and capabilities. In other words, I have approached the methods chosen for this study in an eminently mosaic way by combining the traditional methodology of observation and interviewing with participatory tools. Clark, Kjørholt and Moss (2005) assert that the mosaic approach is a "strength-based framework for viewing children as competent, active, meaning makers and explorers of their own environment" (p. 29). Through the use of multiple methods which all have children's experiences and perspectives in focus there will be a higher validity of the findings completed by the fact that one method's gap will be filled in by one or more of the other methods. The term 'methodological triangulation' is often referred to as the use of several methods in a research. Using more than one method "will open up several perspectives for promoting quality in qualitative research compare to a single–method study" (Flick, 2007:54).

4.3 Informants and Research Site

In order to find and decide on a perfect research site based on the topic of the research, there is a need to look into both the possibilities and boundaries, and also the researcher's advantages and preferences. Not always will the researcher's preferences and the culture's preferences collaborate. As argued by Alderson (2004) getting access to a research site is one of the hardest stages of research with children. Both the children's gatekeepers and the culture's specific

preferences can set a stopper for our good intended plans. While I chose the first research site for this study, the cultural boundaries were accidentally ignored until my research assistant and I shortly after making of the first research plan realized that doing research in a church while we were still only engaged and not yet married was not preferred in this cultural setting. For that reason, I canceled the plans I had for doing research in the church and proceeded by looking into new possibilities. I ended up with a better alternative concerning research site, whereas I also postponed the fieldwork for a couple of weeks. This turned out very well, as I soon even found that the new plans and the new research site were more suitable for both the topic and also for my preferences. The new research site I chose contained a school, orphanage, hostel and a church, and I also knew that it was possible to find informants within each and one of these instances as well as informants who spend parts of their lives within two or more of these sites. These different cases would therefore turn out to be more non-representative for the topic religion, which also would help to increase the validity of the research outcome.

The research site for this study is the Melagaram village located right next to the city of Tenkasi, the 47th largest city (adapted from Census of India, 2001) of Tamil Nadu (see more contextual information about the research site in chapter two). I chose Melagaram as a research site because my research assistant is well-acquainted with the village as well as the school, the orphanage and the church. In addition, I was offered a convenient accommodation at the orphanage where I also would be spending 24/7 with many potential research informants (see section 4.8 for reflections concerning staying under the same roof as the research participants).

Finding informants can be as easy as approaching someone we know or as hard as browsing the internet, a telephone directory or an entire village to find appropriate informants. Indeed, obtaining suitable informants that can to the highest degree provide us with the data needed for the research is among the most central issues that a researcher is occupied with. Especially in the start, careful reflections and considerations are needed both in the search for a suitable research site and in the recruitment of research participants. However, qualitative research designs does not have any consistent and strict set of rules and procedures in the recruitment of research informants, and there is no specially requirements for participants other than that they can provide us with data needed for the study. It is highly up to the researcher, but it would still be wise to use the acquired skills as a professional carefully. For that reason, a small number of

appropriate informants are cautiously chosen in this study. In the preparation stage of this research, I concluded that 10-15 children would be adequate plus a maximum of 3-4 adult informants.

It could be hard to choose a small number of informants especially if living under the same roof with 50 potential informants. Who of those 50 should be chosen to participate? And when should we stop taking in new informants? Mikkelsen (2005) argues that there is a need to have some guiding criteria to decide a sufficient number of samples. Concerning the selection of participants for this study, the most important criterion was to select the samples of children fairly. From that one criterion, measurements were taken to include children of both genders and with a wide range of ages, various abilities and social backgrounds.

In the preparation stage of the fieldwork, it was resolved that the children should be between ages 8-12, yet this was not an absolute. Many children from the orphanage did not even have an exact age, but their age was assumed by their godmother (the female guardian of the orphanage and the hostel). It became more crucial to include those of the children who actually wanted to participant rather than focus on their age. The sampling criteria were shared with the godmother, who accommodated me giving me the names of potential informants. Based on the criteria, she immediately gave me a list with 13 names. There were six girls and seven boys from age 7-13, half of them from the orphanage, four from the school hostel and three from the village. I went and asked them, and they were all happy to join in. I did not face any difficulties using the godmother as the gatekeeper. She trusted me, and gave me all the freedom to carry out my research on my premises and according to my research plan. However, in qualitative research, there might be issues with gatekeeper(s) bias (see Groger, Mayberry & Straker, 1999).

Four adults who were directly in contact with the children and who were in charge of providing schooling and/or religious training were also asked to take part. The choice of the adult participants included the godmother, the principal of the school (who is also the pastor of the church), one teacher and one youth leader who were all interviewed both formally and informally (see section 4.5.3; 'In-depth Interview').

4.4 Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary sources have been used to obtain data for this study. The primary materials were collected during June and July 2011 and include data from participant observations, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews as well as other methods such as drawing and writing-activities, photo-essay, and neighborhood walk. The secondary data include available literature from books, journals and other research publications both published and unpublished.

4.5 Data Sources: Primary Sources

Ethnography is the primary method used in this study. According to Hammersley & Atkinson (2007) ethnography usually involves the researcher to participate in "people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said" (p. 3). In other words, both observing and listening are integral parts of this overall method, but these two qualities have also inspired the other methods applied in this study. In the following section utilization of the methods used in this study are being discussed in detail. (See 'Appendices' for an overview over the methods, and samples of all the tools employed in this study).

4.5.1 Participant Observation

It is not an accident that I start out this section with 'participant observation' as this has permeated the fieldwork from the beginning until the end. Warming (2005) states that participant observation is an ethnographically inspired methodological approach, and its aim is to learn about the ones we are observing by participating in their everyday life. We watch while events and episodes at the research site unfold and develop, whilst interpreting what is really happening and why it is happening. Participant observation assisted me mainly to look at how the children combine play with religious activities, and how the children are interacting with each other in their everyday life. In addition, I also observed how adults consider children in this particular research setting since adults' views and treatments of children often can explain why children think and behave the way they do. Children do not go unaffected by the social network and the atmosphere surrounding them. Hence, my main interest was to relate all these situations to how the children view religion and how I could use these social situations to understand children's perspectives on religion.

As mentioned earlier, I participated in my informants lives from morning to evening. In the morning I observed many of them in the morning devotion and while they got ready for school. I did not have to make any arrangements with them other than contacting their teacher if I wanted to visit one of their school classes during the school-day. After school and after their regular chores they always wanted to meet me for some time before they proceeded with their free-time play and hanging out with friends. Several times they invited me into their own special social worlds which included playing throw-ball, volleyball, cricket, hide and seek or other more impulsive games. Other times I observed them from a distance. Later in the evenings I observed them in the different happenings at the campus, such as Bible studies, prayer meetings, etc.:

Figure 2: Different places for Participant Observation.

Everyone knew why I was there, as this had been explained to them thoroughly at the first meeting with them. As the first few days went by the children became relaxingly comfortable with me. I did not have to carry out systematic observations in the sense that I had to set up a certain time and place with the children. Rather, as mentioned before, I was a naturally part of all

the different settings in which the children spent their everyday lives. However, after some time spent with them, I started to get a hold of what was going on and what I should look for and watch out for. The natural, participant observations were therefore slowly being transformed into more systematic observations but the focus was always "to learn about the other" by participating, as adapted from Warming (2005).

4.5.2 Focus group discussion

One of the other main methods used in this study is focus group discussion (FGD). According to DeLyser (2010) it is generally recognized that FGD is a valuable research method for exploratory and confirmatory reasons. Discussing the topic in plenum would give me more background information while clarifying some of the ideas the children beheld. In addition, and in line with what Skop (2006) states, it could help me "develop more and further questions, and understanding group reactions to particular problems, processes and patterns" (p.114). While carrying out the FGD, it was clear to see that this was a child-friendly method as it encouraged most of the children to talk freely about the topic without fear and without being reserved. One child reminded another child about an issue to bring forth. As stated by Kitchin & Tate (2000) group discussions "often bring out feelings and experiences that might not have been articulated in a one-to-one interview" (p.215).

It was easy to find a suitable place for the FGD since the school at the research site had many available classrooms in the afternoons. A classroom located far from the road and other noisy activities was chosen. At first, I thought that a classroom might have an authoritative atmosphere, but the children were actually happy to meet in this particular classroom as it was used for older students during the day. Also, I put the benches in a circle and I did not sit up front in the room but within the circle all the way in the back.

Another concern was the research topic, religion. Most of the children are churchgoers, and all of the children attend a Christian school. I was prepared that the children might think that my intention was to teach them something about religion and God, similar to a Bible Study like what they are used to from school and church. Keeping this in mind, it made it easier for me to constantly focus on children's experiences and not on the facts and teachings of Christianity and

the Bible. Naturally, the children wanted to share with me what they *knew* about religion and about God, but I encouraged them to share their more *personal experiences* of religion and God.

According to Bedford & Burgess (2001) a focus group discussion is: "a one-off meeting of between four and eight individuals who are brought together to discuss a particular topic chosen by the researcher(s) who moderate or structure the discussion" (p. 121). In this study, it was not a one-off meeting, and there was also more than eight individuals presented at the FGDs. A focus group could also meet several times, and as stated by Sprenkle & Piercy (2005) "researchers should use a larger group when participants may have a lower level of involvement with the topic" (p. 89). The fact that all the participants in this study were Christians does not necessarily have to conclude that they had reflected upon the issues of religion in their everyday lives and that they had a close involvement with the topic. Practically, it seemed like they had not reflected much about the topic religion at all; in a way they probably would have been reflected on a more sensitive and personal topic as for instance corporal punishment. For this reason, it was important to bring together all the thirteen children so to generate a diversity of ideas, making the topic more interesting and personal. In this way, children would start thinking more about the topic, and gradually increase their involvement with the topic which includes relating the topic to their own personal experiences.

The first FGD was conducted three days out in the fieldwork, after the children were more familiar with me and with each other. This meeting also served as an arena to raise questions and start valuable reflections about the topic. I started out the meeting by informing them further about the research and confirming their consent once again by reminding them about the paper that they signed and that they can withdraw from the research any time. This seemed to be understood very well by the informants, since they all know how to read and write.

A guide was prepared for every FGD. Some of the prominent questions included: 'How do you understand religion?', 'How, when and where does religion 'help' you/does not 'help' you in your everyday life?', and 'Is there anyone influencing your understanding/perspectives on religion?' From these questions, I came up with new questions that were relevant and supportive of the study. My research assistant who has 9 years experience of working with youth in India and America was assisting me in asking the children additional questions. This was very helpful for

me in the process of redefining my research questions. Moreover, my research assistant helped me in translating some of the Hindi and Tamil words the children were articulating in between. However, the children spoke English quite fluently although it was not their mother tongue.

My role in the FGDs was to be a moderator and invoke discussion(s) among the informants. At the same time I strived to create an atmosphere where the children would feel comfortable and speak out freely. I gave each and one of the children enough time to talk without stopping or disturbing them, and I made sure that everyone who wanted to say something was given the opportunity. Each FGD I had (four in total) lasted about one hour. All the children were always on time, as they all live in the neighborhood and they were all generally punctual. However, I find it necessary to continue to point out some more of the good sides *and* also the weak sides of the FDGs.

As mentioned above, I had in total four FGDs. Together with the informants, I decided to have three additional FGDs as new topics emerged and new discussions and reflections were necessary. Throughout the FGDs children were given time to openly share their thoughts. I received many valuable ideas from the children, while I could also see that during the first FGD (especially in the end) there was a tendency to lose focus off the topic. Additionally, I noted that some of the children (mostly girls) did not participate in the first discussion at all. That prompted me to divide the group into two groups; one FGD with six girls and one FGD with seven boys. I found that the girls were more spontaneous and less shy when they were separated from the boys. The Indian society is a male dominated society, and as a consequence girls are often more shy in the presence of many boys. After separating the participants into two groups I also got a better grasp of all the children's perspectives on religion and how it varies by gender.

The familiarity of some children to each other contributed positively to the process of data collection. Some of the children (especially in the boys' group) were close friends and even shared the same rooms. They encouraged each other to open up, and they reminded each other about incidents and experiences from their religious life. But it also caused problem with the continuous laughter and jokes in the boys' FGD. However, these jokes and laughter also gave me valuable information about their perspectives on religion since these jokes and stories was not totally without content and not totally out of context.

Towards the end of the fieldwork I had a closing FGD with the entire group again where the children were given the last opportunity to share and discuss the issues that were on their mind. At this time, the girls were also more relaxed in the presence of the boys. Moreover, the last FGD was very fruitful because the children took turns in answering research questions and the discussion remained focused on the research topic

All in all, the FGDs gave me adequate and useful data containing both similar and diverse ideas as needed for this study.

4.5.3 In-depth Interview

In-depth interviewing has the benefit of letting the participants explain what is meaningful or important to them, using their own words (Klenke, 2008). Further, Klenke states that in depth-interview "provides high credibility and face validity and allows investigator the flexibility of applying their knowledge, expertise, and interpersonal skills to explore interesting or unexpected ideas or themes raised by participants" (p. 130). The in-depth interviews provided me with detailed information on how the individual child views religion and what role religion play in their everyday lives. This includes assessing how the children use religion and how religion affects their lives in different dimensions. All the thirteen children were interviewed one by one. I carried out the in-depth interviews towards the end of the fieldwork so that the children would feel more comfortable. Yet, a few of the children were shy but they gradually warmed up during the interview.

Other than the children, two teachers were interviewed. All the interviews were conducted at the same location as the FGDs. The children and the adults were asked to come after school hours as they were all busy during the day. After conducting the interviews with the children and the two adults, the principal of the school was interviewed. His wife was also present. (She is the 'godmother' of the orphanage and a teacher at the school). I asked questions to understand more about why they do what they do when it comes to the spiritual/religious education and upbringing of the children. The focus of this interview was to get a better handle on the issues concerning children's spiritual lives.

During the in-depth interviews I was still with my research assistant who assisted me in asking additional questions and taking notes. Whenever the interviewees spoke Hindi, Tamil or Malayalam he operated as an interpreter. I was in charge of the voice recorder. Both for the FGDs and the in-depth interviews consent was given for recording. This made it a lot easier for me, as we did not have to take many notes other than writing down facial expressions, moods and motivations.

All the interviews were carried out using the interview guides which were arranged in accordance with the research questions. According to Stier & Clark (2011), it is important to start with broad interesting questions in less structured interviews. I presented each question for the interviewees, and they were asked to give their responses. Their excitement in answering the broad questions triggered my curiosity by asking additional interesting queries. This also helped to strengthen and support the data.

While listening to what the informants share, it is crucial to keep in mind the importance of listening. Gudmundsdottir (1996) states that we have to learn to listen at three levels which includes listening to the content, listening to the words the informants have selected, and while listening in these two levels we have to gradually build up a larger image of what we think is their meaning; level three. In our case, I used Gudmundsdottir's two first levels of listening *together with* earlier data from each individual child to reflect upon what I think is their meaning. This also highly contributed to validate and back up the data from the in-depth interviews even further.

4.5.4 Drawing and Writing Activities

Task-based, creative methods were also applied in this study. On request from the children, they met with me daily after the school-day to write and draw. Drawing was their favorite; everyone enjoyed it. I took advantage of this, "because children's drawings can often give adults a deeper insight into a child's faith and thought than their words" (Herzog, 2005:132). Moreover, drawing is a child-friendly method in the way that it does not rely on children's verbal or literacy skills. However, I was aware of the critiques Harms (1944) was faced with when he asked the children to draw God. Instead I asked them to draw whatever they think about when they hear the word

'religion'. Later I advanced the drawings to 'a religious experience', 'where do you meet your friends', and 'what do you do together'; etc. Prior to handing their drawings to me, they were asked to explain to me what they drew, and why they drew what they drew. This helped me to get *their* interpretation of their drawings, which is essential in order to utilize the drawings as a valid data. According to Ennew et al. (2009), the children must be asked to explain what they have drawn because the adults' interpretations of children's drawings are almost always incorrect. I told the children that I could photocopy their drawings, but none of them wanted to keep a copy for themselves.

The writing activities were designed to capitalize on the children's emerging writing skills. The activities included sentence completion, recalling (day, week, year and life) and essay writing. Most of the children were comfortable with writing but two of the youngest children preferred drawing. Therefore, I did not force them to write but encouraged them to draw something related to the topic instead; which they were happy about. The older children found all the writing activities easy and interesting and asked me even for more writing activities!

Sentence completion was chosen as a supplement to the other methods, because, as explained by Ennew et al. (2009) they are fast and quite easy to analyze, and we would be able to explore a number of issues in one research tool. Recalling was used to map out and to inhabit yet another angle of understanding children's perspectives on religion through time and space. Essay writing was conducted with the children who wanted to participate, that was; all the children except one of the younger girls who rather wanted to draw. As stated by Ennew et al.; "essays can provide new insights into the activities and ideas of children, especially their own views, priorities and concerns" (2009:5.32). The children were asked to write about their understanding and associations with religion, and also to write a few sentences on any religious experience they may have had. But I also told them that they could write anything they wished as long as it was related to religion. It seemed as if the children enjoyed writing about their religious experiences and perspectives, although most of them did not write a whole lot.

The data collected using creative multi-methods gave me useful and important data to add to, and back up the participant observations, FGDs and in-depth interviews.

4.5.5 Photo–Essay & Neighborhood Walk

The first part of the photo-essay was conducted early in the fieldwork, so that we had enough time to order the photos and make nice charts out of them. I gave the children disposable cameras to take photos of important places in their Christian life. Three and three children (one group of four children) shared one camera, but I made sure that only one group walked out to take photos at a time. The other children remained in the classroom (the after-school classroom where we always met for drawing and other activities) to draw, talk and hang out. It worked out very well; when the children came back from their photo shooting I found that the children had taken nine photos each and they were all satisfied and already caught up in lively discussions. A few days later, when the photos were developed, the children were given a big sheet of paper each. They glued their own photos on the paper and made an essay, or a description under each photo to complete the illustration of the religious aspect of their life. Since all of the participants were Christians, we looked at the photo-essays together and everyone shared and talked about their own flip-chart in a confident and interesting manner.

This method gave me a special insight into the children's religious life as they opened up and talked frankly about their day-to-day religious experiences at specific times and places.
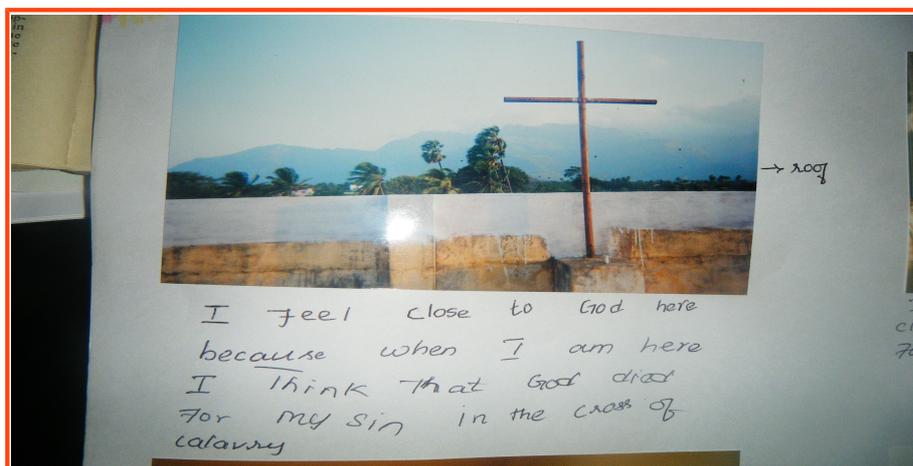
Figure 3: Sample from the Photo–Essay

Neighborhood walk was first planned to be carried out with many of the children and at different places, even outside the campus. This did not work out, since the children had restrictions to stay

inside the campus. Nevertheless, I did one neighborhood walk with two girls inside the campus. They showed me the different sites at campus and the places and rooms which were extra important to them. Doing neighborhood walk with these two girls actually opened up my understanding of childhood in general at this location, and gave me a feeling of allowance to enter into these children's worlds.

Figure 4: Photo from the Neighborhood Walk.

As mentioned before, by using multi-methods, one of the intentions was to obtain a higher validity of the findings. Throughout the processes of this mosaic approach, I did experience that one method's gap was being filled in by one or more of the other methods.

4.6 Data Sources: Secondary Data Sources

Available literature from (mostly) books, journals (printed and electronic) and other research publications both published and unpublished have been utilized as one of the major sources for the secondary data in this study. But I have also kept in mind this quote from Alvesson: "The risk with too much book-learning is to become over-dependent on earlier authorities and tangled up in all the old problems, so that it becomes difficult to see new possibilities" (2000:17). This does not mean that we should be aware of attaining too much knowledge from the books, but we should be aware of applying all of our 'book-learning' knowledge in the best way. The secondary

sources in this project have therefore mainly provided the background and theoretical information on this topic and it has also helped me in framing and contextualizing my research within the broader social, cultural and economic life of the study area. In the analyzing chapters previous researches on the same topic and issues have been acknowledged, but it has been sought to see new possibilities.

4.7 Ethics

According to Fraser, Lewis, Ding, Kelett & Robinson (2004) "ethics is about helping the researches to be more aware of hidden problems and questions in research, and ways of dealing with these, though it does not provide simple answers" (p. 99). In other words, ethics is a set of tools used to reflect and act upon challenges. Ethics includes both ethical rules and ethical considerations. Ennew et al. (2009) states that it might be time-consuming and not always easy to stick to the 11 ethical rules (see manual 2), but they must be kept. Robson (2003) argues that we cannot be perfectly ethical in an imperfect world; but in my opinion we have to try as best as we can at all times and not use that as an excuse.

Some extra ethical considerations should be sought-after in research with children and minors. As it is argued by Punch (2002) this must be so because "research with children is potentially different from research with adults mainly because of adult perceptions of children and children's marginalized position in adult society but least often children are inherently different" (p. 321).

While carrying out this specific study, the ethical considerations (in addition to the rules) with special emphasis were given to the events of voluntary participation inclusive the informed consent, and confidentiality, inclusive anonymity. The right to withdraw from the research at any time, and sharing of the research findings was also explained in detail.

Through informed consent the children got to know, among other things, that they can participate voluntarily, that the research is anonymous and confidential, and that it is possible to withdraw from the research at any time. I ensured that the children were informed about this in a comprehensible fashion, and at an understandable level so they knew for sure what they agreed upon. As elaborated by Fraser et al. (2004), the importance of a freely given consent support the

view that a research "should always explain fully the purpose, process and intended outcomes of research and seek consent on that basis" (p. 50).

Two levels of consent were undertaken. The first level off included a brief information and the first recruitment of the informants. During the last information meeting about the research, I found out if anyone had misunderstood the research. For that reason, I spent some time to ascertain that everyone was now fully informed and aware about all the aspects of the research. Also, informed consent was read, understood and signed (written) at the last level of consent. In line with what Valentine (1999) argues; this was a useful way of giving the children a sense of control, independence and privacy while giving them a possibility to learn how to read a written document and from that make reliable choices.

Assurances were made for how their oral and written words throughout the research are going to be used. We made clear that whatever they shared with us would be kept confidential and no one would be able to track who said what. But no one asked more questions about that. Still, particular permission to tape-record was asked. Both the children and the guardians (the principal and the godmother for the orphanage and hostel and the parents to the children living outside the campus) were asked. It was also perfectly fine for the guardians that the children could be interviewed using tape recorder as long as it was OK with the individual child. In other words, no authority came in between the children and the children's decisions. Yet, Fraser et al.'s (2004) elaboration on this was kept in mind; "where children can understand enough to distinguish research from other interventions, and to understand the impact on them of participating, it may be more ethical to act on their consent than to require the fully informed consent of a parent" (p. 50).

Active observation was made to ensure that the children were always comfortable. Throughout the fieldwork I never saw any child feeling uncomfortable or having the feeling of being forced to do or say something he/she did not want or did not agree with. The nature of the topic was not of a sensitive one, but still I made sure that the individual child was not being harmed in anyway by participating in the study. As mentioned before, one of the younger girls was not forced to write and talk but rather encouraged to draw something related to the topic. When she finished

her drawing she would explain for me what she drew with great enthusiasm in a comfortable and relaxed way.

Incentives were given in form of candies, a love feast and a special personal gift at the end of the fieldwork. But it was made clear that the incentives should not be the reason for them to participate. Also, I did not mention anything about any incentives in the beginning of the research, fearing that they would participate for wrong reasons. About every other afternoon, I gave them some sweets they could enjoy together with their chai. In India, chai (tea) is enjoyed both of children and adults twice a day. In addition to some sweet treats, a love feast was arranged towards the end of the fieldwork where all the children living at the campus and the staff were invited. The thirteen children participating in the fieldwork were actively involved in the planning of this event and got to choose what food to eat and the program for this get-together. About halfway out in the research, I asked the children what would be their ultimate wish for instance for a Christmas or a birthday. I wrote a list of what they liked to have, and the list contained watches, dolls, teddy-bears and so on. These things were also very reasonable to buy in town, so it was easy to get them exactly what they asked for! Not knowing that I did this for them, (I was just asking them random questions about what they would have wished for a Christmas) the children were thrilled of joy and tears when I presented the small gifts for them.

Money was not given to them, as I did not see it as the right reward for time and labor spent in this particular research setting. These particular children needed other incentives rather than being compensated through money. Concerning provision for incentives or compensation, two opposite arguments are often being presented. Either that incentives may influence the interviews too much (as of Mikkelsen, 2005), or that giving incentives for instance in form of money is logical as a reward for time and labor spent and to encourage the children's sustained participation (Abebe, 2008). In his article from 2009, Abebe further makes clear that short-term reciprocity should be effected but that children can be compensated in different ways. Having mentioned this, we have to keep in mind that the importance lies in finding the most suitable incentives for the respective research and informants.

Shukla (2005) emphasizes the urgency to extend the ethics of carrying out research with children past the issue of "securing informed consent and respecting children's views" to "appropriate

ways of collecting, interpreting, and disseminating-without distortion-findings" (p. 32). Children's voices in this research should therefore be made known in a truthful manner and within appropriate channels. In line with this, I am also obligated to contribute to the awareness of children's spiritual conditions founded on the knowledge gained throughout this research process.

4.8 Data Collection Review & Reflection

The data derived from the different methods explained earlier in this chapter, were collected using several devices. Interview guides, FGD guides, sentence completions, ranking charts, blank paper sheets in numerous sizes, crayons, pencils, glue sticks and disposable cameras were all some of the means to gather the data. The interview guides and FGD guides were edited and improved after each interview and FGD so to become more child-friendly and to be further adjusted towards the main research questions. The other instruments used to collect data during the fieldwork were all found to be suitable for the children and did not have to be edited nor changed.

Notebook, tape-recorder and a photo camera were used to capture the data. Photographs were taken as a reminder about special incidents and moments with the children. When having something visual to look back on, it is easier to remember the stories that were told and the words that were said. Of course, photographing and tape-recording were based on the consent of the informants. Notebook was used to write down moods and motivations, attitudes and so on. And in the evenings a detailed field diary was written. I did not want to spend too much time with my head and hand in a notebook while spending time with the children. Tape-recorder was therefore found to be more useful, because I did not have to write down everything the respondent said. Rather I could focus purely on listening, and also take my role in the field into more consideration. To me, the most important is not to collect a huge quantity of data, neither to capture these data in the most complex ways. That is to say, the main focus should be held on what role the researcher plays in the field and the researcher's capabilities to listen. Only then we will be able to both collect and capture the most prominent and relevant data.

Hence, as a former pre-school teacher, I have been doing some serious reflection upon my professional academic role in the field. Knowing that there are similarities between teaching and researching, I was aware of not using my role as a pre-school teacher. Clark (2005) states in the beginning of her introduction of the 'Mosaic Approach' that the distinctions between research and teaching can blur (Clark, Kjørholt & Moss, 2005:29). She goes on explaining how the actions of instructions, assessment, documentation and research come to contain each other and cannot be pulled apart because they are one piece (p. 29). According to Clark et al., within the Reggio Emilia schools, they actually emphasize the teacher as a researcher, engaged in a constant process of constructing knowledge about children and learning (Clark et al., 2005). Seeing that researching and teaching can come to contain each other, I was very much aware that I was not there to teach the children about religion, but to philosophize together with them and equally share knowledge. Rinaldi (in Clark, et al., 2005) states that sharing our knowledge with others is a response to uncertainty, an uncertainty which needs to be expressed, communicated and most important listened to. Listening is thus defined and explained in a variety of different ways and in my point of view, listening is the most important aspect in any research and throughout any method we choose to use in any research and in any fieldwork. My role in the field can thus be said to be more of a friend, a friend who listened to them and explored the issues of religion in everyday life together with them. This eradicated the power relations between me and the children, while it also built up their trust in me. The children uninhibitedly opened up and their experiences of religion were brought to reality.

Although using many tools and methods in researching with the children, surprisingly enough; not any ethical, practical, moral or methodological dilemmas occurred. The reasons for this might be my well-reflected approach of listening to the children combined with my research assistant familiarity with the culture and customs. Furthermore, living under the same roof with eight of the children gave me some additional advantages. I got to know my research subjects more fully and they requested to meet me more often than I had planned. This gave me the benefit of getting more data than first expected in this short fieldwork-period. I did not encounter any unforeseen ethical, moral and practical challenges with this living arrangement. The reason for this is that I was very clear with the children in creating boundaries, as well as having an open communication with them in sharing appropriate times and places to meet.

The result of my research will consist of four closely integrated elements; observational data, conversations, the stories that I hear and theoretical models. Gudmundsdottir (1996) claims that a good research report is achieved by a delicate balance among all four elements where all of them have been given its appropriate weight. I have come to realize that the concrete data from the informants is not the only thing I should consider when it comes to 'finding results', but the whole process of the research seen as one unit. In all kinds of research, we have to adjust ourselves in thinking in terms of reflexivity. As Hardy, Phillips & Clegg (2001) say it, we have to reflect "in the way in which research is carried out and understanding how the process of doing research shapes its outcomes" (p. 531). All the data are therefore dealt with consecutively, and the research report is arranged in accordance with the three objectives of the research.

CHAPTER FIVE
Children's Ideas and Knowledge-Seeking about Religion

5.1 Introduction

This brief chapter is seen as an opening chapter to the subsequent three chapters (five, six, seven) that together aim to discuss the findings of the study. Chapter five (this chapter) sketches out and presents children's views and main associations on religion and their reasons to seek knowledge about religion. It is crucial to keep in mind that the children were asked to write, draw and talk about religion without being given any hints and pre-conceived notions of the subject and the concepts of religion.

5.2 What Children Associate with the Term 'Religion'

Several studies have indicated that children's ability to understand religion is highly dependent on age and their mental development (Harms, 1944; Goldman, 1964; Thun, 1959). Although, this study does not focus on the children's mental development, it seeks to understand how children understand religion independently of their mental grasp. In this study, what the children think when they come across the term 'religion' vary, but interestingly, the varieties of answers are not dependent on their age and development. Most of the children associate *religion* with Jesus and his attributes, and especially their feelings towards Jesus. Many also think about praying, worshiping, different other religions and the Bible whenever they hear the word religion. There was a slight difference in what children from different backgrounds associated with religion. While most of the children independent on their background mentioned Jesus as the main association with religion, there were more deviations when it comes to concepts such as praying and worshiping.

Praying is one of the dimensions of religion and comes under the category of the practical dimension of religion. The practice of praying is being found both within devotions and rituals. Praying was something that the hostel children and orphanage children stressed as more important within the concept of religion than children living with families. When explaining about her perspectives on religion, one of the girls (11) in the orphanage said:

When I think about religion, I think about praying. God helps me in many different ways when I pray.

According to Morris (1987) rituals (that includes praying) function not only to strengthen the bonds attaching the believer to God, but they also strengthen the bonds attaching the individual to the social group. It was observed from the children that the children not living with their biological families had a greater need to connect to a superhuman being, or the sacred, while they also saw praying as a means to connect to each other.

Another practical dimension of religion that was mentioned by a few of the children was *worshiping*. The older girls, across all the different childhood categories associated religion with worshiping. One of the girls (12) living in the hostel mentioned that:

To me religion is about worshiping. I worship Lord Jesus by praying to him and singing for him.

Indeed, almost all of these older girls mentioned Jesus in the connection with worshiping. And, all the children in this study think about *Jesus* when they hear the word religion. They all mention about Jesus' attributes; how good he is and that he is love – in addition to confessing their faith and love for Jesus. As one of the boys (9) in the orphanage put it: 'I think Jesus has more power. Jesus is good. And I love you Jesus'. Melford Spiro (1966) defines religion as "an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings" (Spiro, 1966:96). When the children think about religion, we clearly see that they associate it with an interaction between themselves as religious persons and the religious-being which in their perspectives is Jesus.

Especially the children in the orphanage focus on Jesus and his attributes when they talk about religion. They do not mention anything about other religions. They live stricter and cannot leave the orphanage without special permission. Also, they are a little bit younger than the hostel and family boys and girls. Moreover, the orphanage is affiliated with a Christian missionary organization.

Only girls (but from all the different categories) mention about the *Bible* in relation to religion. A girl in the orphanage said that: 'The Christians read the book called Bible, or the Holy Bible. I too read the Bible' (Girl, 12).

When they were asked to draw what they think about when they hear the word 'religion', most of them drew a cross and/ or a church. They did not draw Jesus, although he was the first thing they mentioned when talking and writing about religion. Symbols are easier for the children to draw, whereas activities, feelings and persons are easier to talk or write about.

Some of the youngest children indicated that it is hard to understand what religion really implies. That is not to say that they did not have any perspectives on it. In fact, they had valuable insights on the matter. One of the youngest participants in the study (boy, 7), wrote and drew his perspectives on religion, but when it came to talking about it he had a hard time to explain his views. However, he explained about religion from the angle of spirituality:

> Spirituality is God's word. I am spiritual, and when I am spiritual I think about God. I think about God often.

It is intriguing to explore how a view like this has been formed and who has influenced and taught him these things. When he was asked, he said that his older brothers at the orphanage had taught him these things. But where did his brothers get it from? In chapter seven section 3, it is examined in more detail where children's associations and perspectives of religion originate from.

The children's associations with religion were all clearly based on their faith. One important point to make is that all the children were highly religious and they all called themselves Christians. Their perspectives on religion are not dependent on their mental development, but more on personal, highly idiosyncratic ways of thinking and interests. It is obvious that they associate religion with something personal, everyday life experiences and feelings – although religion is usually a more abstract concept which often has been proved challenging for children to grasp. The children in this study knew how to associate and give clear definitions and perspectives on religion out from their real life experiences.

5.3 Reasons to Seek Knowledge about Religion

A number of religious studies have brought up knowledge as a treasure, and the easiest way to paradise (Ruppel & Schreiner, 2003; Ghali, 2004; Gurnall, 1862). It may be maintained that many people from different religions seek knowledge about their religion mainly in the hope to one day enter into paradise. In this study, however, children did not talk about their future nor paradise. Only one girl (11) said that 'knowledge of religion is needed so that we can go somewhere after we die'. The other participants were more into the present-day activities and challenges they face from day to day. The majority of the children, interrelate religion with *Jesus* or God, and their reasons to seek knowledge about him is first and foremost to prosper into a relationship within him in order to know what is right and wrong:

> We need someone who can say what is right and what is wrong (Girl, 13).

Several other children indicated that through having a daily interaction with Jesus/God, he will reveal to them how to be a good person, how to gain wisdom, help them getting good grades at school and bring a good name to the parents or guardians. The children also mentioned that religion helps them to build up a stronger character.

> We need knowledge about religion so that we can be more spiritual. Spirituality is; proportionally we are worshiping God and proportionally we are spending time with God. It is about having a strong character (Girl, 12).

That is to say, this girl seeks knowledge about religion so that she can mature spiritually. It is interesting here to see how she has a clear picture on what spirituality means. As mentioned earlier, people in India are generally very religious and have a strong conviction to mature their spirituality. Referring to Roehlkepartain (2005), religion is the ground where most people shape their spirituality. This 12 year old girl has also recognized knowledge about religion as something important in order to have a strong character, or spirituality.

Most of the other children have a somewhat similar approach on why they would like to know more about religion. They seek knowledge about religion so that they know what is right and

wrong and to discern between good and evil. This is also in accordance with Panneerselvam (2008) who argues that knowledge is that which helps us to distinguish truth from falsity, real and unreal, right and wrong. Several of them said that religion is needed to be a good person, and one boy (8) said that 'spirituality means being nice'. A girl (11) said 'if we do not know anything about religion, we will fight each other and there will be no peace on the earth'. Another girl (12) said that 'we need to know more about religion, only then we can have wisdom'. Actually, a number of children mentioned wisdom as one of the reasons to be occupied with religion. If they have more knowledge about religion, they will know Jesus/God more and God will give them wisdom. This wisdom was something they explained which helped them through their daily lives and challenges they may face. For instance, something that was frequently being mentioned was that 'we need to seek knowledge about religion to study well and to get good marks' and 'God helps me in my studies'. One of the girls stated that: 'if we do not know about religion, we will get bad marks and scolding'.

One peculiar reason to seek knowledge about religion which was brought up, was the need to understand religion more for the sake of finding out whether they need religion or not:

> We need to know about religion in order to find out who is the one living God. Other religions worship God, but they do not know the living God. And they make God according to what is in their mind. But Christians are not like that. That is a living God who came into the world. It is written in the Bible. We do not need religion. Only the Christian religion, but not as a religion. He gave His life for us, so we have to worship Him. And we have to pray every day. Like that... we have to keep the relationship with Him! In that way we take His spirit into our hearts. (Girl, 12).

Several of the children pointed out that they needed Jesus, but that did not mean that they needed religion. 'Even if there was no religion in the world, Jesus would still be there' (Girl, 11).

From this point of view, it was more vital for the children to seek knowledge about Jesus/God than knowledge about religion. When it comes to the reasons why they want to know more about religion, they are influenced by the culture they grow up in. Other studies have concluded, with the example from Allport (1950) that man seeks knowledge about religion in order to try "to bind

himself/herself to creation and the Creator. It is his/hers ultimate attempt to enlarge and to complete his own personality by finding the supreme context in which he rightly belongs" (p. 142). Allport probably did not have children in mind while stating this, as his understanding of the religious child was that children only imitate the adults. However, the children in this study have proved that they are not only influenced by the culture they grow up in, but that children also reflect upon religion and that they also know why they seek knowledge about it. Looking at their associations with religion, most of the children associated religion primarily with Jesus/God. Other than that, some children associated religion with praying, worshiping and the Bible; which all can be seen as means used by the children while attempting to bind themselves to Jesus/God – or the creator. All of the children viewed religion as a means to fulfill their ultimate attempt; the ultimate attempt of understanding what is right and what is wrong and to grow into a mature spirituality. In other words, their understanding of religion can be seen as a starting point for their further reflections upon why they seek knowledge about religion; or why they need religion. It was found that the children's knowledge-seeking about religion was related to their everyday lived challenges as *beings* here and now, but *also* related to maturing into a relationship with Jesus or the Creator for the sake of *becoming* something more: Gaining of wisdom, developing a stronger character and growing spiritually.

Children are knowledgeable human beings who are able to articulate what they know about religion, why they need religion and how they seek knowledge about it. They are confident of their own knowledge-seeking about religion as both human beings *and* becomings as they even are aware of the fact that they could use their knowledge about religion (or Jesus, because most of them associate religion with Jesus) to develop and grow into the place in where they 'rightly belong'. In the next chapter, the role of religion in their everyday lives has been explored.

The Role of Religion in Children's Everyday Lives

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the role of religion in children's everyday lives. Children's everyday lives in this research setting have been divided into the three arenas where they spend most of their time; home/free-time, school and church. Within all these three arenas, it has been observed that the children inhabit both adult-centered and child-centered worlds and go easily in and out of these worlds depending on the context and the people. Therefore, a further exploration has been done in respect to understand children's perspectives on religion throughout their daily lives with focus on both how they are exposed to religion (the daily religious activities they have to participate in) and their own personal religious experiences. Moreover, how they combine the adult-centered religious/spiritual world with the child-centered religious/spiritual world is emphasized in connection with how they combine play with religious activities. The challenges related to this combination of worlds and activities are discussed under section 6.4; 'The Dionysian Image of the Child & Children's own Identities', where three voices are presented. These are how adults view children in this setting, the perspectives from the Bible/Christian religion, and most importantly – children's voices. Children's faith-based identities are also discussed as an example on how they view themselves and the world around them based on their discernment of good and evil, right and wrong.

6.2 The Different Religious Arenas of Children's Lives

In this research religion has been observed in different aspects of the children's lives. This is in accordance with James & Prout (1996) who argue that children have different experiences from different arenas in their lives. Looking at the specificity of this study, the children do have different *religious* experiences from the different arenas of their lives, although, and consistent with Verma & Saraswathi (2002) religion appears to be rather omnipresent in young Indian's lives.

The children in this study have their own religious experiences while they are also exposed to religion in multiple ways throughout their day. All these exposures to religion depend on how adults view children and what place they think children should have within the frame of religion at home, school and church. One of the adult informants at the orphanage stated that:

> Adults influence 100% percent when it comes to children's religious and spiritual aspects of life. I am sure that children need to be exposed to religion in all the areas of their lives in order to become religious and spiritual. Either from adults around them, or friends. They are not born with spirituality but a need for searching for meaning. In that way they will search and find, but what they find is dependent on how they are exposed to different religious matters.

6.2.1 Home and Children's Free-Time

Observation of the children living in the orphanage *and* of the children living in the hostel reveals the following time regimes. They had to start the day with a morning devotion and prayer at 5:30 in the morning before they proceeded to daily chores prior to school-start at 9:00 am. Discipline was observed to be one of the main agendas for the religious up-bringing at the home arena. For the children staying with their families it was known that their parents also emphasized the need of religious discipline, but morning devotion at 5:30 was not something they practiced. Within the groups of orphanage and hostel children it was understood that they also had their own experiences of religion outside the exposure to religion they had through morning devotion. Especially the children living in the orphanage shared about their experiences with God in the early morning: 'I talked to Jesus in the morning because I experienced His protection throughout the night' (Boy, 9). The children living with their parents did not talk to Jesus in the morning, but rather their siblings or mother/father. The morning devotion at the orphanage/hostel might therefore be an enhancing factor for those children's religious experiences.

After school they had homework and they also had to continue with the daily chores in which they did not finish in the morning. The time for free-play usually lasts about 1, 5 hours from 5:00 – 6:30 pm. At 7 pm there was a mandatory prayer-meeting which was also often attended by the

children living outside the orphanage and hostel campus. The children usually had their dinner around 7:30. A meal-time prayer was conducted by an adult. After the dinner they had to continue with their homework or do something else that was useful as 'an idle mind is the devil's workshop' (frequently being heard at the church services, and written on the Church wall). All groups of children (home, hostel and orphanage) seemed to have busy lives at home, firmly organized and disciplined by adults. However, a few children did not mind this and especially one girl (11) who negotiated her role in between the adult and the child-centered world by participating as much as she could in doing the domestic chores. According to Hungerland (2007:75) "children who substantially contribute to domestic work enjoy more power through which they negotiate their position and gender identity in the inner world of the family". This 11-year old girl negotiated her position in the 'orphanage-household' through contributing to domestic work, as it was observed at different occasions that she was the 'boss' among the children at the orphanage. Moreover, she said she liked cleaning as it also gave her a divine power which brought her closer to God: 'I feel close to God by cleaning, because God gave me health and strength from above'. The power and the strength that she got from cleaning was used in her free-time play as she was seen to be one of the few children who really enjoyed her free-time and organized different games and playing activities for the other children. It was inevitable to see that she aimed at taking the best from the two worlds (adult and child-world), and her view of religion and God played a vital role in helping her doing so.

Another girl (12) said that she liked being disciplined at home: 'I need to be disciplined to know what is right and wrong and grow in the Lord' (Girl, 12). During fieldwork, I learned that there was a kind of competition among the children, a competition with its own rituals and rules and where the goal was to be seen as the most religious or spiritual child. If not in the eyes of the parents/guardians, then at least in the eyes of the other children and siblings. The children had their own culture, a child culture immersed in religiousness and in the goal of 'giving a good name' to their parents/guardians. This religious child culture they inhabited on the home arena was therefore not totally separated from the one of the adults, but still, it was observed on several occasions that the children did not meet the adults' expectations to them. For this reason the children created their own culture, however, there was no doubt that they were influenced by the context they live in. This is in line with what Jenks (2005) argues; that children are affected by their surroundings. Yet, the children did not mind being affected and influenced by the adults at

home as it gave rise to their understanding of what role religion play in their lives. For some of the children, religion came to play a vital role in their lives and especially in their lives at their home, or their dwelling place:

> Without God my life will be sad and foolish. I won't have a father, because God is my father. He helps me study well. God is my family. God is my everything (Boy in the orphanage, 9).

Another boy at the same age and dwelling place said this on several occasions:

> Do you want to know my favorite Bible verse? It is Psalm 27:10: Even if my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take care of me'. And I have experienced that, I always feel God's comfort and protection.

His face shined up every time he shared it, he was full of enthusiasm. Other children, living with their parents and having their parents alive shared similar experiences but the focus was less on God as a father but rather on how God's presence in their lives help them not to go in wrong ways:

> I was about to go in the wrong way one morning, but then I felt God's hand touching me, turning me around to go in the right way (Girl 13, living with her parents).

Even though most of the children enjoyed the very obvious place of religion in their homely lives many children still mentioned that they wish they had some more free-time to play or do whatever they feel like. From their tight schedule at the home-ground, it was realized that the children did not have much free-time to play or do things they liked to do outside the adult-centered worlds. In spite of that, and as already touched upon, some children found space for their child-centered worlds and their own religiousness.

Through conducting a photo-essay with the children, a more detailed overview over all the children participating in this study was accomplished looking at the places around their home and free-time where they practiced religion and felt closer to God from their own views and

experiences. Some of these examples from the photo-essay are looked at in connection with section 6.3 'Combining Play and Religious Activities' but for now a short summary is given: most of the children feel close to God and like to pray, sing almost everywhere around their dwelling places and independent on the already mandatory religious activities in their homes (see section 6.3 on how the children combine singing, play, relaxation with their religious activities/duties). Particularly, many of the children had taken a photo of other children and younger children than themselves, explaining that they feel extra close to God when they pray for other family members.

Interestingly, all the children had at least 2-3 photos (of a total of 9 photos) in their photo-essay of a classroom. This indicated that even when they are at home and having their time off from school, the classrooms where seen as an important place to come and worship God and talk to him about issues and worries concerning school and studies. Verma & Saraswathi (2002) have stated that most homes in India have a place of worship, but the youth's participation in worshiping is most common during examination weeks. In this study, it was frequently being mentioned how God helps them to study well, and how he helps them to do well in school tests and exams.

6.2.2 School

The children's everyday life at school was observed both outside the classrooms and inside the classrooms. The school day started with a school assembly where all the 700 students at the school were present. Most of the students at the school were Christians, but also a large number of Hindus and Muslims were represented. Still, everyone had to be present and join in the school assembly which also included a couple of Christian songs and a short morning prayer. However, those children who were not Christians did not have to actively participate in the songs and prayer. Not even in the classroom prayer which was conducted right after the school assembly when all the children went to their respective classes and rooms. The Christian children participated willingly in the songs and prayers; as it was not a problem for them to be obedient both to their religion and to the school authorities. The school authorities expected all the students to be obedient when it comes to general matters, but they could not force children from other religions to participate in the Christian songs and prayers.

Other than that, the children did not experience any additional, direct exposures to religion from the adults at school. They had something called 'Moral Class' in which the teacher touched upon different religions and taught the students different ways of morality. One of my adult informants (teacher) indicated that they had to be careful while teaching the children about religion, because 'there are so many religions present and they do not want to start arguing about each other's religions'. She further explained that *when* they teach the children about Christianity they do not use books but rather memory verses and songs 'cause that speaks more to them'. It was also understood that parents to the Muslim children would not be happy if their child(ren) came home with printed Christian materials even if they were aware of the fact that their child was attending a Christian school. This school is affiliated to, and supported by an independent Christian Church, but has been approved by the government of Tamil Nadu. However, the approval is based on the rules and regulations of the government. Christian schools in India are obliged by law not to preach nor convert any students to Christianity. If they do, they would have to face penalties or/and being denied support from the government. The teacher I interviewed had therefore her own approach to how she could share the Christian gospel with both the Christian children and the unconverted children:

> If I want some children to know Jesus I can be a good example, that's enough.... they will know Jesus through me... simple as that... remember always that children are watching you... when they look at us they will adopt some of the things... so I believe when I am being a good example the children will follow it... (Female teacher).

Other teachers had a somehow different approach. Through observations it was known that discipline was the most common way to mold a student. This is also normal practice in the public schools in India, but this Christian school used the instance of discipline grounded in their religion: 'Those who spare the rod of discipline hate their children. Those who love their children care enough to discipline them'. (From Proverbs 13:24, often being mentioned at their church services).

As already mentioned, some of the children did not mind being disciplined. Nevertheless, most of the children agreed that they would like to be disciplined in a more loving way. It was repeatedly being heard among the children 'I am so happy, the teacher did not scold me today', or

'God protected me at school today cause the teacher did not scold me'. This topic was a frequent theme in the children's conversations, and the children also discussed strategies to prevent the teachers from scolding/beating them. One of the boys dealt with the teacher's beating in a quite interesting way. He tried to see the teacher separated from the act of beating, but rather putting the blame on Jesus. When being asked what he was most scared of in his life, he replied: 'I am very scared of Jesus, because Jesus will tell the teacher to beat me!' (Boy, 9). His reaction differs from the other children's view on Jesus and how they were sure of his help and protection from beating throughout the school day. A girl from the hostel (12) shared one experience where the teacher withdrew from the scolding/beating in time:

> Once at school, I was in the midst of trouble, I had done a mistake and the teacher was about to scold me. But because I had faith, I prayed to God and He did a miracle. The teacher changed his mind to scold me (Girl, 12).

The children's own culture was harder to recognize at the school arena in India than what would have been the case in a Western setting. At school children are supposed to be under strict discipline throughout the day, with little room for play and their own child-world. Nevertheless, their child-culture was present there. The children took advantage of every opportunity in which the teacher had to leave the classroom. For example, they organize child-led games and activities instantaneously and keep it going until the teacher comes back. I observed how all the children ran back to their desks, sat down quietly and pretended that nothing had happened. In this arena of the children's lives, the two worlds of adults and of children were veritably separated and with the children's world almost being non-existent; at least in the eyes of the adults. In spite of this, the children knew how to quickly enter back and forth into the two worlds. Moreover, the children's own spirituality was deeply entrenched in their everyday school situations. The children's spiritual worlds were of course invisible to most of the adults, but I let the children open up and talk freely about their religious experiences from their school day. One example was the girl who prayed to God so that the teacher would change his mind to beat her. Another girl (12) was a little bit late for school, and then she prayed: 'God, please help me so that the school gate won't be closed and the assembly did not start yet!' She shared with me that God truly heard her prayer; 'it was like a miracle', she said.

The religious experiences of the children reflect the role, utility and manifestations of religion in their school setting. And how they view religion affects their everyday school situations. Through seeing religion and Jesus/God as something omnipotent that can help them face different challenges at school, the children's understanding of religion becomes imperatively important as it plays a crucial role for the children's well-being throughout the school-day. This means that children's worlds of school and religion are closely intertwined and for that reason, as Jackson (in Greenavalt, 2005) argues, schools should pay seriously more interest in to children's religious understandings than most of them do now.

Schools are generally known to be places where children learn academic knowledge. However, through the data obtained from the school in this research setting, *both* academic knowledge and religious knowledge (proper behavior, morality and ethics) were taught the children using different tools of discipline. As reviewed earlier in this section, the children wish that they could be disciplined in a more loving way. This could be seen as yet another indicator on why schools should pay more interests in to children's religious understanding and how the children view religion.

6.2.3 Church

At church children are expected to acquire the spirituality of an adult from an early age. They are supposed to sit quietly, sing, praise and worship like an adult. They cannot move much, and if they are falling asleep or attempting to leave the service they might be beaten or pulled by their ear.

One adult informant (female teacher) from the school stated that the children should be involved in every church activity. She explained how the children are being exposed to religion in their church in India as opposed to a church in America using the following example:

> Here children are being involved throughout the church service, not like in America where they put the children in a separate class while there is worship only for adults. I think if we keep the children involved in things they will know more about God, and they will be away from all the bad things.

It was observed that many children seemingly enjoyed the church service, although some children were also falling asleep. From the photo-essay it was understood that only a few of the children felt close to God in the church and at the church services. And fewer religious experiences were noted from this setting, although the church was the place where they got more formal practices of religion and tons of exposures to religion. Besides the normal Sunday service and Sunday school, every Friday there was a fasting prayer, once a month a fasting prayer on Saturday and fasting every Sunday until after the church service. Actually, no religious experiences were recognized among the children in relation to the church arena. Instead the opposite was mentioned: 'My faith will always be so weak on Saturday's and Sunday's because I am fasting and I cannot eat anything. I am so hungry'. (Boy, 9). Another informant said that she did not need to go to church to feel God's presence. This is in contrast to Smith's (2005) study on children's perspectives on believing and belonging where he states that the church, or "religious buildings had a sacred and almost supernatural significance for children" (p. 49). Additionally, at church, they were encouraged to read the Bible in one year and if they accomplished that they would get a prize. This observation is important to take into further consideration and understanding whenever the children talk about the Bible as something important for them. Was the Bible important for the children because they would get a prize after they read it? Or was it important because it had a more personal value for them? Clearly, a few children mentioned how a Bible verse heard at church or a Bible verse that they had to memorize had become so pivotal in their life. A girl (12) said that: 'Whenever I come to church, I like to read the Bible verse; my presence shall go with you, from Exodus 33:14. I take it to me, and I know that Jesus is with me also at those times I am not at church'.

Consequently, it is clear that the church arena does not give space for much child-centered culture, but the exposures that the children have to religion are being brought from the church to other areas of their lives. Something heard or learned at church may give rise to the children's experiences with God at school and at home.

The children themselves had their own opinions and meanings on how they wished to be exposed to religion, and what role religion should have in their lives. From the FGD's it was learned that most of the children wish that they could sleep in a little longer, and that the prayer meetings did not last too long 'cause we will fall asleep'. They all agreed that they liked to be

exposed to religion 'more short and sweet' and that the adults should discipline them in a 'more loving way'. In this way, they said, 'our motivation for worshiping can grow'. It was understood that the children rather preferred advice and personal influence from the adults in their day-to-day-lives, than too much discipline and religious rituals to participate in. That is not to say that they were not interested in any religious exposure but they were interested in the right kind of exposures, suited to their needs and voices. Allport (1950) argues that when it comes to religious exposures, children need first and foremost personal influence, then fear. I will suggest that he to some extent may be right, but adults still do best in listening to the children's own voices and taking them serious.

To sum up the different arenas of children's lives where the role of religion play a vital part reveal two elements which works as an enhancement of the children's views or perspectives on religion. There are the 1) social rituals of religious practices and the transmittance of religious knowledge (separated from children's own knowledge – seeking of religion), or their exposures to religion; and the 2) private expressions of religion and spirituality, or their religious experiences. Children are involved in these two aspects of religion in different ways, and how they sometimes are negotiating space for their own child-centered religion and experiences in their everyday lives are situational to home, church and school contexts. It was learned that there is a kind of complicatedness of these different circumstances, but as Smith (2005) argues; "it does not mean chaos or that there is no pattern worthy of investigation" (p. 66). The empirical material from the children suggests the complexity of their religious experiences in overlapping spaces of children and adult. The following sections of this chapter explore more in detail how the children in this study combined play with religious activities.

6.3 Combining Play and Religious Activities

Through observations and conversations it was found out that the children had a strict routine for religious activities. In this study, children's religious practices and activities can be divided into two categories: 1) their everyday schedule in which they have to follow and are exposed to, sometimes against their own will, and 2) that of their personal interests. Their religious stories and experiences were recorded in most of the areas and activities of their lives, and next I will turn to the particular activity of playing.

According to Mimi Brodsky Chenfeld in Clements & Fiorentino (2004) "for children, play is as natural as breathing – and as necessary" (p. 192). When it comes to religious activities on the other hand, it might be necessary for children in different ways, but it has been observed that the latter does not always come as easy as breathing. Many children expressed their frustration of not having enough time to play.

Play has often been defined as the opposite of work, but religious activities cannot be defined as the opposite of work nor play. Even so, as children can come to respect work through playing and games, children also, in accordance with Chappell (2010), express their respect for religion through games. This was also something which was seen in this study. Several photos from the photo-essay were taken at the playground, and many of the children shared how they sang songs, talked with God and prayed while they were playing. One girl (12) said that 'when I am playing on the swing I like to sing to God and I always pray for his protection that I will not fall down'. From the other photos, it was identified that the additional places in which the children practice their religion and feel more close to God varies, but that they made use of different spaces in their environment to make their own personal religious activities become more pleasurable, like when they play. They also used these same spaces for pure game, or play activities, and sometimes the border between playing and a religious activity was hard to draw. As with one example when a group of 5-6 children were on the roof of the school during their free-time, a boy suggested that they do mimicry; playing Adam, Eve, God, the snake and the fruit tree. The same space was used for personal prayer, as there was a cross on the roof. Alike with many other children, one boy said that he liked to come to the roof both for playing and for praying 'because the adults do not usually come here often'.

It was made clear from the adults that they preferred the children to either be at the playground, or watching television in their free-play period. (Television programs and movies in India are more modest and do not influence the children to the same degree as it may do in a Western country). In line with James & James (2008), the children may find these two spaces more restricting, "preferring to create their own places on their own terms" (p. 131). The children had their own spaces in the same way as they had their own children's culture with games, play and even their own children's religious activities. At the same time, their more mature spiritual lives and expectations from adults were being evident in their free time and in their playing. In other

words, children's interactions with each other when it comes to playing facilitated the process of interpretive reproduction. Drawing upon the work of Piaget and Vygotsky (in Shaffer & Kipp, 2010), who saw the child as playing an active role in his/hers own development, these children developed their own spirituality/religiosity through turning the adults' expectations to them into something fun or negotiating these expectations into their own children's culture of playing. Through this, the children themselves participated in the process of socialization, a process that helps reproduce society (James & James, 2008). Although the children had different views on religious activities vs. play than the adults had, the children still found their own ways (very often through play, but also through other social practices as we shall explore more in chapter seven) to be aware of and to learn about the religious aspects of their lives. This awareness and knowledge the children gain about religion, will for sure also have given rise to their perspectives on religion.

Having seen that the children had their own ways of combining play and religious activities, we also understand that the boundaries between children's play and children's practices and activities connected to religion is hard to draw. Sometimes the children themselves do not even distinguish between play and religious activities as they sometimes pray while they play, or sing while their pray. Thus, they combine relaxation while at the same time fulfilling their religious duties, and sometimes they do this not even being aware of it. The children's 'playing' or 'praying' therefore has to be understood in conjunction to the relative weight given to either of the activities, although both could happen in the children's practices simultaneously.

This might be one of the reasons why children's combinations between play and religious activities did not always come without challenges and conflicts. One example is when the children were playing Adam and Eve on the roof. The adults were so angry with them, saying: 'come down, stop making that noise' not being aware of the fact that this mimicry would help the children understand their religion better. The importance of children's play is often underestimated, and this does also apply to the Indian culture. Children's play does not always have the support of parents in India; they prefer their children rather working or studying – for future gain (Ansell, 2005).

In this study, it was found that the children should do schoolwork, pray or attend worship services rather than playing. This is grounded in most of the adults' views of children and childhood in this cultural setting; childhood is preferred to be seen as a time to learn discipline than a time of playing. In the next section more details of the Dionysian image of the child is touched upon.

6.4 The Dionysian image of the Child & Children's own Identities

As already mentioned in the theory chapter, the Dionysian image of childhood sees children as 'little devils' who are born into this world with original sin and who are in need of strict moral training and guidance while the Apollonian image of childhood sees childhood as a time for play, protection and innocence (Jenks, 1996; Jenks, 2005). It was clear that adults in Tamil Nadu view children in a Dionysian way, operating within a sense of shared values. The children were to be seen, but not heard. Their voices were being silenced. Not usually being given an opportunity to share their views and perspectives in life with an adult, the children were thrilled to be able to open up to me and my research assistant. It was known from the FGD that the adults rarely listened to them, and if they did, it was not for the sake of hearing – but for the sake of seeing where they could correct them or beat them, if necessary. "The offending, or evil, child has to be beaten into submission: an external and public act that celebrates and reaffirms the shared values of their historical period" (Ibid., 1996:70). Although this historical period may have fluid borders, it was understood from the fieldwork that 'the beating and disciplining of the child was much worse in the past' (adult informant, Bible teacher from Tamil Nadu). Still, it will be understood from Western lenses that many children in a setting like this, even today, "sacrifice their childhood to the cause of the collective adult good" (Ibid.). However, and in line with James & James (2008), childhood's innocence (and the Apollonian image of childhood) is now becoming more essential to the ongoing, global social construction of childhood. Influenced by Western Missionaries and new ways of interpreting the Bible, this will slowly also come to have an impact on the children in this particular research setting. It was learned from the Church services that the Bible sees children both as good and evil, innocent and guilty. As quoted in the introduction of this study; "Christianity has within itself remarkable power to explain and expunge the divisive tendencies within the human heart" (Keller, 2008:19). Not going in details

on how that can be done, or how it is being done, two examples from the Bible and the fieldwork will suffice: 'The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is' and 'A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart' (Jeremiah, 17:9 & Luke, 6:45; quoted at a Church Service). Although Christianity has a remarkable power to explain the divisive tendencies, it was harder for the adults to explain these divisive tendencies, being confused with the several Bible verses on this topic. One Bible verse states that the human heart is desperately wicked, while other Bible verses (like the latter of the ones above) explains that a good person can have a good heart. There are a multitude of Bible verses about the human heart, and also verses that explain why disciplining of children is important. As for instance: 'No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening – it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way' (Hebrews, 12:11). It was observed that the adults sometimes disciplined the children with love and understanding, and sometimes physically with a stick seeming to be disoriented on which one was the best. To them, it seemed like no matter how the discipline was conveyed, it should not be enjoyable (like in Hebrews). Thence, the principle focus was held on the outcome of the discipline.

Children themselves were very much into trying explaining the divisive tendencies within the human heart and coming to the state of finding wisdom and 'the right living'. They were indeed influenced by their religion; Christianity. Religion or knowledge about religion, as we have seen before, functioned to help children to explain what is right and wrong, and also it helped them to understand what is important in life. It helped them to understand and see who they are in their life, in other words, we can say that it played its part in shaping their identity. Through their everyday religious experiences new impulses influenced them, together with the culture surrounding them. How adult viewed them, in the same way they also viewed themselves and other children: 'If someone older than me beats me, I cannot beat him back. I will just cry. But if a child smaller than myself beats me – then I will beat back' (Girl, 12). It is like the children themselves also see the benefit of having shared values, that is to say; already participating in the collective adult good. Another child-informant frequently mentioned how he knew he was a bad boy, and that he wants to be a good boy. It seemed like it was very prestigious to get a 'good name' among the adults, thus the children worked hard for this. Therefore, it has to be understood that the children's identities and identity work was being constructed primarily in the light of the

perceptions of other groups, such as the group of adults. How adult viewed them and their childhood, this was also how they came to see themselves. On the account of how they saw themselves in the world; as good or as bad – came also to determine how they viewed the need for religion in their lives. In relation with being 'bad' and having a 'bad heart', a few of the children expressed some concerns with sin and its consequences and how religion/God helped them: 'God helps me not to go in a bad way' (Girl, 13).

Berger (1993) argues that no one is born with a particular religion or religious identity, rather the interpretation of life is being embedded in the encounter with life itself. That is to say, children are not born with a religion and a belief, but these are added from the outside. In this study, it was known that the goal of the adults was to equip the children with an identity which integrated values and perceptions of life as a fixed whole. The identity work was looked at as more simple than it would have been in the West, where identities are more complex and constantly changing. However, the religious identities the children attained seemed to be a matter of pride, with no urgency of changing:

> If I did not have my religion in my life it would have been so bad because God is not in my life. Without God I will be dead (Boy, 7).

This is also in line with Smith's (2005) findings, that religious identity is a paramount matter of pride in children's lives. In this study, children even as young as 7 years have already established and grounded their identity in religion. According to Roland (1988) in Verma & Saraswathi (2002), Indians are adjusted toward the rich inter-dependencies of hierarchical relationships. The Indian identities are "evolving around 'we', 'us', and 'ours' rather than 'I', 'me', or 'mine', reflecting a relational self" (p. 110). In other words, a relational self is achieved in assimilation with significant others. Even so, children are both members of communities and also distinct beings with their own 'child-domain'. But sometimes this distinctiveness was hard to see when the shared sense of values was given more importance. Of course we should not undermine the rich, shared sense of values in an Indian setting, but we also ought to keep in mind children's own role as social resources and participants constructing their own lives, on their own premises. The individual is a participant in his community; it does not passively absorb the social world, but acquire it actively (Berger, 1996).

The data from this chapter suggests that religion was omnipresent in all the arenas of the children's lives; however, the presence of religion was not only led by the adults but also children themselves. Using religion as a means, children actively negotiated their place in the world. The children had their own culture, but it was not totally separated from the adults. Thus, religion played a vital role in their everyday dilemmas and challenges in life, and especially at school where God protected them from all the disciplines and the challenging expectations from the adult-world. The religious exposures from the adults influence the children's understanding and views of religion to a certain extent, but children also have their own child-centered worlds with their own understandings and their own spirituality.

When the children can live out their spirituality or their religious experiences on their own premises, we see that they have their own spiritual lives, independent on the exposures from the adults. The children had their own opinions and meanings on how they wished to be exposed to religion, and what role religion should have in their lives. That is not to say that they were not interested in any religious exposure, but they were interested in the right kind of exposures - suited to their needs and voices. The children were actively constructing their own religious lives in all the different overlapping spaces of the children's and adults' worlds – *and* as beings in their own right.

Religion and Children's Social Practices: With Main Focus on Friendship

7.1 Introduction

The discussions and presentations in this chapter explore how children's perspectives on religion fuel up their engagements with diverse social practices. The chapter aims to answer the third specific objective of the study which states: 'Examine how children's perspectives on religion influence their social practices'. In chapter three; under the subtitle 'Theories and Examination of Relevant Literature' I suggested that using *social capital* when it comes to children and how they view religion can help us understand the vigorous drifts of children's social lives and how their social lives again influence their perspectives on religion. My approach of doing so is in line with Lin et al.'s (2001) technique of analyzing an individual's social capital, and attempts to see: 1) how the children in this study invest in social relations, and 2) how the children capture the built-in resources in the relations to generate a return. Through this, a credible portrait of children's social lives and practices is established as a foundation of seeing how this influences their perspectives on religion.

7.2 Children's Peer Relations

According to James & James (2008), peer group and friendship should not be regarded as synonymous. While a peer group is "a group of equals, defined in terms of either social status or age"; friendship is "children's affective social relations with their peers and others" (Ibid. p. 95 & 60). Albeit, we see the distinctions. Peers do not have to become close friends, but still, the peer group does provide "the context within which affective relationship of different kinds develops" (Ibid. p. 92). Although the participants (children) in this study were not of the same age and gender, they were all surrounded by peers in their everyday lives whom shared certain characteristics like age and gender. This did not necessarily mean that all the children participating in this study had close friends. However, it was understood from observations and individual interviews that all of the children made or had made an effort to invest in social

relationships with their peers.

7.2.1 Investing in Social Relationships within the Peer– Group to Build up Social Capital & Spiritual Capital

'Invest' in this connection and this study applies to the first process in which the children lay siege to a potential friend within their peer group. It is concerned with the first step of their investment which includes where and how they invest (find/make friends), whereas the next step of their social investment is how they generate a return from these invests.

7.2.1.1 Where do Children make Friends?

Nearly all of the children in this study find, and make it also their first priority finding friends at school. They spend most of their time there, and there are more children in the same age groups within the school-setting. This is contrary to many studies on the role of peers for Indian children and youth; for instance Verma & Saraswathi (2002) who argue that the role of peers is subservient to the family and that most children make friends and should make friends with peers who not only share the same age and gender, but most significantly, peers who share family bonds. One of the girls (8) said that: 'I make friends only at school, because there I learn to be in unity'. Like a British school described in Adams, Hyde & Woolley (2008), the school in this study is also seeking to address challenges and issues of interconnectedness and to nurture spiritual connections between children in the school. This specific school also seeks to promote the concept of 'Unity in Diversity', which has been India's ethos for ages.

Most of the children said that it is not of any importance to them where they make friends, and even if all the children in this study were Christians, they did not have to find their friends at church. It has been found in other studies on children, religion and friendship that "shared activities and shared meanings are likely to promote opportunities for friendship" (Roelhkepartain, 2005:315). However, this study shows that having common religion was not important and for many children the fact that their friends had the same religion and shared some of the same religious activities as themselves played a small role. As one of the informants stated: 'I prefer my friends to be unbelievers (from another religion), because then I see their mistakes, and my faith in Christ will become stronger' (Girl, 12). This is also in accordance with

Verma & Saraswathi (2002) who state that "religion and caste are not barriers to friendship" (p. 114). Actually, none of the children minded what religion a potential friend belonged to, and several of the children (like the example over) were happy to have friends outside their own religion 'so that we can win them for Christ' (Girl, 11). Most of the children said that they think about God, even when they are with non-Christian friends. Smith (2005) found in his study that gender and age group played a large part in shaping friendships before religion played its part. This study confirms that gender and age group played a major role in children's lives and experiences, and religion was not an issue at all when it comes to make friends. Although Smith's study found that when it came to school meals children from different religions had a hard time to mingle as they had different religious convictions when it comes to food, this was not the case in this study as the children brought their own food from home. They did not eat the same food during lunch, but they still shared the same experience of eating. Gottman (1983) has argued that friendship is founded on mutual ground experiences. This argument on 'mutual experiences' can also be transferred to 'religious experiences': In spite of not having the same religion, children may in fact be capable of sharing religious experiences with their friends at school, and also practically make and negotiate friendship through sharing religious experiences despite the fact of two very different religious backgrounds. In the next sub-section, examples from the fieldwork have been examined to show how they construct such a possibility within their social worlds at school.

7.2.1.2 How Children make Friends and Negotiate Friendships

Negotiating friendship is seen as how children get past the obstacle (yes, from the children's point of view it was seen as an obstacle and difficult to make friends; see section 7.5.3) of making friends successfully. One girl (12) stated that: 'I make friends at school, through sharing about God'.

The children are human beings, but from a religious viewpoint they can also be seen as becomings – developing into a higher state of maturity and spirituality. However, they are real children, they have real experiences of being a child, and thus they ought to be seen as social actors (cf. James, et al., 1998). They already even inhabit a spiritual capital which entails being nice to each other; honest, trustworthy, and so on – *and* they are in fact using this resource to invest in friendships: 'Jesus will help me to be nice to others, and then I will have friends'

(Boy8). Another informant said that: 'I am getting friends when I pray for my classmates at school. Once a girl in my class came to me, she said she had a headache. I said I can pray for her. She was happy, and she became my friend' (Girl, 12). Here, this girl was sharing a religious experience (the experience of God answering prayers) with another girl in her peer group. They were not very close friends from before, but when peers engage in many mutual activities (like these two girls at school) they will become more sensitive to each other's needs and when acting upon each other's needs in different ways they will come to feel a strong attachment to each other (cf. Gottman, 1983). Hence, the girl's (12) spirituality helped her to act upon her classmate's need for relief of headache.

Friendships among children are nurtured and cultivated through sharing certain activities or practices like praying. Most of the other children mentioned that they mainly negotiate friendships through praying; both praying for a friend's healing and praying to God to give them a nice friend. Adults' or parents' involvement in the choice of friends is minimal. Only one informant, girl (12), said that she talked to her parents/guardians when she wanted to make a new friend. This is therefore contrary to what Verma & Saraswathi (2002) argue; that parents in India usually monitor their children's choice of friends. In this study most of the children did not live with their biological parents, but they all had legal guardians to care for them and whom they called 'parents'. It was observed that the parents/guardians were careful in monitoring their children's lives but this was not the case when it came to the children's 'making of friends'. Twelve out of thirteen children in this study said that their parents/guardians do not have any influences over whom they should make friends with. The parents/guardians knew that the children were praying for making nice friends, and trusted that God would give them that.

Through this we know that children negotiate friendship in terms of being nice to others, help others, pray for others, and seeing the needs of others. Additional approaches of making friends which was noted was through talking to each other, telling each other a new game, singing, playing and getting friends by giving religious tracts to and calling peers to church. It is obvious that the children's in-habitation of a social resource *together* with their disposition within religion, and how they see religion affected the ways in which they came past the obstacle of making friends.

Even for people and children who already inhabit the resources needed for further building up their social capitals, still it will often take time and investments to build up a social capital, at least a social capital which involves trustworthiness and reciprocity. In the next section, the 'reciprocity-part' of the social capital has been elaborated in short, looking at how the children usually generated or expected a return from their friends.

7.2.1.3 How Children Generate a Return from their Friends

Corsaro (2003) advocates that friendship knowledge is situated, and like all social knowledge it develops in interaction with others in a range of different social settings. In this study, there are different social settings in which the children learn about friendship and its qualities. As we saw earlier, at school, children learn how to be in unity. Additionally, the children are exposed to different Christian activities and Church Services throughout the week. According to Roelhkepartain (2005), most religions teach children how to be responsible and effective friend. This is also the case with Christianity. It (different religions) gives "children the tools needed to be competent and effective friends" (p. 315). Take for instance Proverbs 13:20: 'Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble', and Luke 6:31: 'Do to others as you would like them to do to you'. These things are something that the children hear often, and it is even written on the walls in the church. Especially the last verse was something that the children were very much aware of.

We have already seen what the children do to make friends, or what they do to others. And certainly, the children expect the others to return back the good deeds they did to the others. As for instance, see their needs and act upon their needs, help them, trust them, do things together and so on. Unfortunately, a reciprocity like this is not always the case as one-way friendships may also often be likely to occur among the children. One of the boys was aware that sometimes he would not get anything back from a friend, at least not in a long time:

> Sometimes I want to share my food, because I want to help the sick. I do not need anything in return(Boy in orphanage, age 9).

He explained that he had heard the Bible talks about the 'Good Samaritan', and that 'it is better to trust the Lord, than to put your trust in man'. He knew that he could not always expect return

from his friends, but by being a good friend himself he made the chances greater, at least. The same boy also said: '….and when I do mistakes, my friends can help me by correcting me. The Bible says that we should get all the advice and correction that we can, so we can be wise for the rest of our life'. I was surprised to learn how much Bible knowledge many of the children had, and how they applied that knowledge and their view of that knowledge into their lives, and into how they make friends and what they expect from a friend. But being aware of the fact that the children are regularly exposed to these verses and teachings, it becomes more uncomplicated to understand how the children connect different learning with their real life experiences. As mentioned several times before, children are being influenced and affected by the social reality in which they spend their childhood (Jenks, 2005).
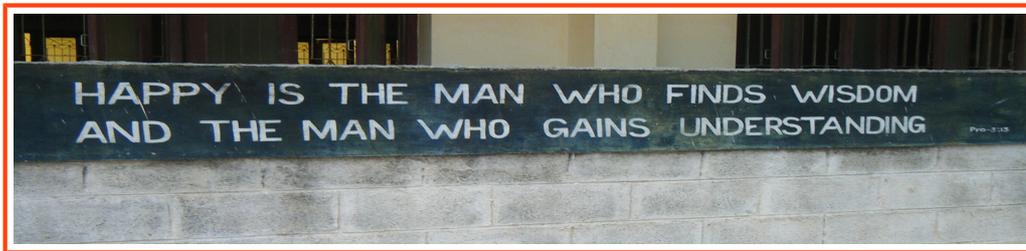
Figure 5: Photo from outside the church.

Thus, it can be concluded that the children generate expected returns from their friends from what they have been taught and from what they have read in the Bible. Moreover, it was understood that the children did not usually see friendship according to the pleasure or utility it provided, but in line with what Roelhkepartain (2005) has found among older children and adolescents; the emphasis on friendship "as a form of goodness..., ...as an opportunity to make a positive contribution to (i.e., to promote goodness in) the life of one's friends"(p. 315). Although not all the children in this study were 'older children', this would still apply to most of the children independent on their age and family arrangements. It is likely to be understood that these children have come to understand the transcendent quality of friendship, in that "a friendship needs to look beyond the self and see the self's position in something larger than it" (Ibid., p. 316). This perspective leads us to see the connection between friendship and other aspects of children's lives like religion or spirituality/religious experiences. This issue is explored in greater detail under section 7.5, and in the following section I will focus on children's relationships with their role models in their families and communities other than their peers.

7.3 Other Relationships & Role models

In addition to children's peers and friends, the children also had other people in their lives that they interacted with on a day-to-day basis. At home they had their parents/guardians, and older relatives. At school they had their teachers and different adults working at the campus. At church in the weekends and many evenings during the week, they had the Bible teachers and the pastor. Hence, we see that they were surrounded by adults from morning to evening.

7.3.1 Investing in Social Relationships with Adults

Quite opposite on how the children chose their friends among their peers, the children could not choose which adults they wanted to 'hang out with' and spend more time with. Of course some of the children had a good relationship with their parents/guardians, but the relationships with adults were not chosen in the same way they chose to invest in a relationship with a potential friend. The adults in the children's lives are more ordained in the position they occupy. Thus, the power relations between the adults and the children are becoming more apparent, and this again is resulting in children viewing adults as being very different from children. Several of the children were highly aware of these differences between children and adults; mentioning both the negative and positive things about child-adult relations. A few children said that the adults know more, they understand more and they argue less than children. Moreover, it was mentioned very modestly by one girl (11) that adults are kind 'and they pray for us'. Only one boy (9) felt that the adults would listen to him. Most of the children viewed adults – and the differences between adults and children – in a more negative way. One of the girls (11) in the orphanage said that the adults are too often interfering with what the children are doing, without really listening to the children first. She, and also another girl (13) said that children will never worry about the next day, whereas the adults are always serious and full of worries:

> I think the Bible says... be like children... Because they do not worry about tomorrow
> (Girl, 13).

Another girl (12) said that she fears the adults, and that it is very hard for her to share with them her experiences with God. According to Corsaro (2005), children do interact with different people, of different ages, in different ways and the understanding children have and the ways

they choose to interact with the different people may be seen as children's social competence. In accordance with Semrud-Clikeman (2007), "social competence is the foundation upon which expectations for future interactions with others are built..." (p. 2). For these children in this study, it was supposedly not expected to invest in future interactions with the adults, unless they played a solid role in the children's lives. As for instance, being a special and unique role model, and different from all the rest of the adults. Several of the children had pointed out such a role model(s) in their lives; sharing openly about whom that/those person(s) was/were and why they had interest in making an effort to involve themselves more into those adults' lives than other adults' lives.

7.3.2 Role Models

According to NOAD (New Oxford American Dictionary, 2010), a role model is a person looked up to by others as an example to be imitated. This was also in line with the children's notion of a good role model. As stated by one of the girls (13):

> My role model and good example in life to follow was my grandfather, because he taught me many things from a young age and especially one thing; to pray more and to serve people. I want to imitate him by being a good example in my class and surroundings. That's what I am praying, but I do not know God's plan.

Her role model was already passed away, but the other children had role models whom were still alive. Mostly the children mentioned their parents/guardians as role models, and the pastor at the church: 'Because he gives us nice messages'. One boy (9) said that his English teacher was his role model, because 'she teaches me nicely, and she is nice to me. Through her I learn to be nice to others'. Others mentioned different role models in connection to how these role models 'do a good job' in exposing them to religion. Take for instance a boy (12) who said; 'My father is my role model because he takes me in a good way. It helps me have a strong faith in God'. Likewise one girl (13) stated: 'When my grandfather died I decided to follow Jesus like he did and come more close to God'.

However, the children themselves stated that they have several good role models, both adults and

other children who are exposing them to religion and God. In fact, most of the boys (in the orphanage) talked about Thomas (also in the orphanage, 9 years) as their best friend: 'He is a good role model, he is a good boy, he teaches us the right things. He won't beat, he will only help and give us things. That will make our faith stronger'. Likewise, a girl (11) stated that: 'My Hindu friend Shiva is my role model, because she is very nice. Through her I have a stronger Christian faith'. Although the children see both Thomas and Shiva as their friends, they are also their peers. This means that also peers can be role models for each other. According to Punch (2003), some children take on adult roles. And through their responsibility of taking on a mature role we can clearly see children as social actors whom influence their surroundings (cf. James & Prout, 1996). In that, we see that some of the children themselves are providing "the arena within which children and young people offer help and support to each other that are lacking in their relationship with adults" (James & James, 2008:97).

Corsaro (2005) argues that the involvement children have in different interactions, have implications on both the children's and the adult's social worlds. I will suggest that one of the implications was found in the girl's (12) statement: 'I fear the adults, and it is very hard for me to share with them my experiences with God'. Hence, this girl did not want to involve herself too much in interactions with adults; at least not when it comes to sharing her spirituality and religious experiences. For her, and for several other children in this study, it was more important to have friends whom were good role models and whom they could share their spirituality with. According to Schwartz's (2006) study, it was important for children and adolescents to have friends who shared about their religious experiences because it was related with higher self-reported belief and commitment to their faith than those who had friends who did not share about their faith.

Interestingly, one of the girls (12) stated that: 'To God there is no difference between boys and girls and between age and age. Every person is the same to God'. From her point of view, anyone could be a role model, and it did not necessarily have to be an adult. To many of the children it did not even necessarily have to be a friend, or a peer as long as it was someone who were a good role model and could share a testimony. As one of the boys (8) declared: 'God is my role model. And then Jesus, and then my friends James and Thomas'. This reflects the children's view of religion, and how this view has implications on how children in this study interact with

different people in their lives – in the different areas of their lives.

7.3.3 How Children Generate a Return from their Role Models

By having invested in one of the role models mentioned above, it was found that the children expected the role models to give them a stronger religious commitment, whether it was an adult or another child they looked up to. And by having a stronger religious commitment, they knew that they would in turn be capable of being a role model for someone else in the same setting. From the children it was known that a role model was someone that they can trust, count on, and even depend on to a certain degree. Often these role models, or adults, are dependent on the children as well. The children help the adults by doing chores, errands and other things around the campus and in the homes. This is also in line with Punch (2003) who argues that children and adults are dependent on each other in different ways, and often when it comes to the responsibility in the homes. Many of the children, and especially one of the girls were aware of this interdependency, and seemingly used it to generate a return from her adult role models. By doing her chores nicely, and helping the adults out in different ways she knew she would get a much wanted return. This would be in terms of adequate guidance for the future, protection and in terms of being given a voice and having the adults speak up for her.

But it was found that many of the children did not have these kinds of role models in their lives. They had not found the secret of inter-dependencies (like this one girl) which could even out the power-relations. And if the children opened up to the adults a little too much, they could face the risk of being punished. For this reason, it seemed like most of the children did not expect any returns from an adult, but they were still aware that the ones that they saw as good role models *could have* something in store for them. These were the people important in their lives, and whom the children were aware of the fact that they *might* generate a return from. 'Trust only God. We cannot trust the people around us' (Girl, 13).

7.4 Children's Agency in the Society

This section aims at providing an understanding of how children use their competence and agency in the wider society. The wider society in this study refers to the community of people

living in the region of Tamil Nadu, and more specifically in the village of Melagaram. People in Melagaram share common social, cultural, economic, and political environment. (For more background information on the context, see chapter two). Already having seen and recognized through children's social relations with their peers and others (in the two previous sections) that they inhabit rich social competencies and that they have agency, it is now time to turn to how they use their agency in their wider society. According to Panter–Brick (2002), children's agency refers to children's use of their competencies and abilities as social agents, and their competence to participate and to express their views. Thus, children have both voice, and agency (cf. Pufall & Unsworth,2004) and they should be understood as social actors who are being shaped as well as shaping their circumstances (James et al., 1998). As James & Prout (1995) argue:

> Children might employ a variety of modes of agency within and between different social environment...the possibility that children locate themselves flexibly and strategically within particular social contexts and that, through focusing on children as competent, individual social actors, we might learn more about the ways in which 'society' and 'social structure' shape social experiences and are themselves refashioned through the social action of members (p. 78).

The mode of agency that children in this study employed was not related to their rights and their needs to be heard. It was mentioned above how children wished that 'the adults could listen to us more, and discipline us with love rather than beating'. But when it came to the wider society, children were rather occupied with how they, as social actors are changing or could change their society to something better here and now, and also for the future. This is an interesting paradox because it demonstrates how children negotiate agency in subtle ways. It shows that although the societies in which children live tend to accord power to adults, children's contributions in – *and* capacities to reproduce the economic and cultural practices of society is also indirectly acknowledged.

The children in this study had different approaches on how they are changing their society, or how they would like to change it. Mostly their approaches were religiously oriented; the children mainly talked about changing their society either by praying for others or sharing the gospel with others in their surroundings: 'I want to share to them about God, and take people in the society to

church so that they may not go to hell. That's how I want to change my society' (Girl, 11). Some of the other children mentioned how they are making people around them happy by helping them and being a good example to them. This is one example on how one of the girls is changing her surroundings:

> Near my place, one girl was there, I shared the gospel with her, prayed with her, taught her new songs... and that helped her to understand the living God, and now she pray every day and read her Bible. That's how I usually make a difference in my society (Girl, 12).

Another informant (boy, 12) shared that 'we are going to tell people that they should not spend money for alcohol, drinks and cigarettes. But for buying slipper it is ok':
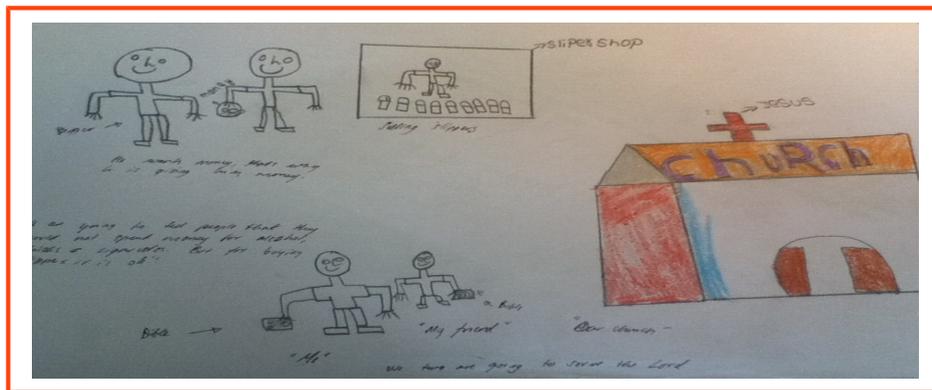

Figure 6: Changing the Society.

From the children I learned that they were all eager to participate in the society as social actors; either alone or together with their friends. It was unmistakable to see that the children possessed a spirituality, a spirituality which involved the transcendence of self, fueling or stimulating the development of the commitedness of contributing to others and institutions beyond self in time and place (cf. Roehlkepartain, 2005:386). The same author further argues that: "As such, spirituality nurtures a sense of thriving in young people by providing the awareness of responsibility and the passion to initiate and sustain commitment to agency" (p. 386). This commitment to agency can be seen as how they are committed to use their competences and how they are committed to use their voices in the society. However, it is not always that the children are able or are even permitted to use their voices within the society. Fortunately, there were not

observed many instances of that, but one boy noted that: 'Sometimes I am naughty and sometimes good. When I am good, I am silent' (Boy, 9).

As pointed out in the theory chapter, social capital 'can turn ugly' when it avoids bridging and focuses on tools of exclusion. There could be several reasons why adults sometimes exclude children from participating in their neighborhood and environment. It is not always easy to understand the cultural politics of childhood, but if we try to make an attempt, it could help us "understand childhood as the product of the relations that adults have with children, which are also located within the broader, social, political and economic frameworks that shape society's institutional arrangements..." (James & James, 2008:40). One of the political frameworks when it comes to young people in India includes the 'National Youth Policy' (NYP, 2010), which sees young people as a vital benefit for developing human resources. Yet, and in line with Verma & Saraswathi (2002), sociopolitical and cultural factors have formed and continue to impact young people in India in profound ways. This is also likely to occur in both positive and negative ways, often calling for innovative support systems to empower the children. It has often been argued that religion could be such a support system which could strengthen the children and give them a voice. My findings suggest that children use their faith and religious views to negotiate and make up strategies on how they could use their agency as spiritual social actors in the wider society.

The notion of reciprocity, enable us to learn more about the manners in which 'society' and 'social structure' (here, the social structure of the 'Christian-life' and religion) shape social practices and experiences, and are themselves refashioned through the social action of members (see James & Prout, 1995:78). In the next section this is being discussed, with the main/final focus on one interesting finding.

7.5 Reciprocal Relationships between Children's Perspectives on Religion & Social Practices

According to Roehlkepartain (2005) friendship contributes to religiosity, and religiosity contributes to friendship. This reciprocity draws attention to the fact that the children, and also religious children are social beings, members of their society and are capable of constructing their own lives – plus making a change which anew affects their social relations. In this section, I

demonstrate how children's social practices influence their view of religion, and their view of religion influence their social practices.

7.5.1 Children's Social Practices Influence on their Perspectives on Religion

This sub-section will give a few examples from the findings and see how these examples are connected to children's perspectives, or view of religion. As mentioned in the theory chapter, Georg Simmel and George Herbert Mead (Furuseth & Repstad, 2003) agreed that religion originates in social interaction between individuals. Several of the children, as noted earlier, mentioned different role models in connection to how these role models 'do a good job' in exposing them to religion. Additionally, it was found that several of the children preferred, or were happy to have friends from other religions so that their conviction of, or the view of their own religion could help them widen up their horizons. They could even share religious experiences with friends who belonged to another religion. One example is the girl who prayed for her classmate, and had sympathy for her and her headache (section 7.2.1.2). It could be discussed that participating in peer groups and friendships, accommodate for the opportunity to become connected to something bigger than oneself or something transcendent "which forces us to see outside ourselves, and to have compassion and affection for the other" (Roehlkepartain, 2005:314).

Through this, we see the connection between friendship and spirituality, as spirituality refers to the experiences we have outside ourselves. Thence, social practices (and especially with friends) may turn into an essential basis of reasoning where children appear to engage themselves with the ideas, rituals and pursuits of their religion; and in that way: develop their view of religion.

7.5.2 Children's Perspectives on Religion's Influence on their Social Practices

Children's perspectives on religion have been found to be much related to what they have seen, heard, read and what they have adopted from social relations. This is also true on how they look at their social practices. Like the boy (8) in section 7.2.1.2: 'Jesus will help me to be nice to

others, and then I will have friends'. As Roehlkepartain (2005:315) argues, most religions teach their children how to be responsible and effective friends with focus on tools of equality, regulation, charity and compassion. These tools may be seen as resources to produce positive outcomes, like in social capital. In Christianity and in the Bible there are numerous stories and verses on friendship and what a good friend is. Take for instance: 'A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need' (Proverbs, 17:17). As this is something the children frequently will hear at church and other religious gatherings throughout their week, it is audible that it influences their perspectives on religion which in turn influence their social practices. My findings indicate how children used their faith and religious views to negotiate and make up strategies on how they could use their agency as spiritual, social actors. Similarly, Roehlkepartain (2005) argues that "the confluence between one's social-cognitive understanding of friendship with the emphasis on friendship in religion is likely to facilitate one's participation in religion" (p. 315). And when engaging and participating actively in a religion, the religious perspectives will influence the children involved immensely, and to the extent it helps them to have a different outlook on life. Even when the children faced risks and challenges in their social relations, their view of religion as something helpful, needed and as a way of coping was applied.

7.5.3 Challenges linked to Religion and Social Practices

For many children, making friends was seen as an obstacle and something challenging. However, this was usually not due to intolerance towards the Christian religion, as most of the children stated that they did not face any risks or no one had ever teased them for their faith. Only one girl shared an experience where Hindu classmates had mocked her for her faith: 'One time I was singing and praying and suddenly one girl scolded us saying, why are you worshiping this God. It is not real. And they were making fun. But my other friend and I we were comforting each other'. Mocking children based on their religion was not something that happened often, but still, most of the children had recognized both the benefits and challenges that friendships present, and for many children it was difficult to make friends. Smith (2005) found in his study that "different obligations and choices on the use of time, which are shaped by religious affiliation or culture, may present barriers to regular association and the development of strong bonds of friendship" (p. 38). This study shares this argument. The children did not have much time outside the school

setting to hang out with their friends, and even at school the time was limited. Many of the children often talked about loneliness, and how they used to pray to God in times of adversity. A girl (13) said that 'I don't have many friends. To get friends is very difficult. I have gone through so many problems in life. God is a good friend to me'. This statement, takes us to the next and most prominent finding from the fieldwork:

7.5.4 Religion is Jesus & Jesus is our Friend

It has already been known from children's associations and understandings of 'religion', that when they think about religion, they think first and foremost about Jesus of Nazareth and his attributes (see chapter five on children's associations and knowledge about religion). And one of Jesus' most important attribute is that, according to the children, that he has all the attributes of a good *friend*. Thus, this section is not a repetition on children's knowledge about religion, but aims to describe how their knowledge *of* religion (Jesus) is connected to the way they look at their social practices and friendships. The majority of the children said that Jesus is their friend, and many of them said that he was their best friend:

> I love God so much, and Jesus is my best, best, best, best, best, best, best, best, best, best, best friend (a). Jesus only is the true friendship. God only is my everything and He is my father (b) (a, boy in the orphanage, 9; b, boy in the orphanage, 9).

These two boys were spending their childhood without their biological parents, but interestingly, almost all of the boys saw Jesus as their very best friend, independent on their family backgrounds and living situations. It is affirmed by Frosh et al. (2002, in James & James, 2008:61) that it "remains difficult for boys to form intimate relations with other boys, given the stereotypes of masculinity which pervade boys' culture". Maybe this would be a valid explanation on why the boys professed a closer relationship with the sacred; Jesus. However, one of the girls also testified of her relationship with Jesus: 'God is close to me. I talk to God just like talking to my friend' (Girl, 13).

It could be understood the children focused on the function of religion; what religion and Jesus could do for them and how religion could help them to find meaning in life. Like how Max Weber saw religion; it should act as a resource to find meaning in the individual's life, and not

for the maintenance of the society. In that it was sometimes hard and challenging to make friends, religion, or Jesus was almost seen as a comforter and pacifier. Or in better words, a coping strategy; a way of developing resilience and overcome hardships. According to Cook (2000), religious affiliation have been shown to develop resilience in children by both providing positive role models and offer social relationships characterized by unconditional love and support. One of the children's perspectives on religion (as a relationship) became a means to cope with difficulties and obstacles in their everyday lives. Roehlkepartain (2005:357) argues that a relationship with a spiritual divinity has the potential to provide a profound sense of security and well-being. By the same token, Hill & Pargament (in ibid, p. 357) frame that:

> People who experience such a relationship with the divine, particularly in the form of a caring and compassionate figure, can experience strength and confidence in life and appear to cope better in stressful situations as a result.

Consequently, we understand that the children invested in relationship with Jesus or the sacred with expected returns. Most of the children have understood that many other social relations do not give them any return. Jesus became their only hope and the only one who gives them something back. They are often not recognized as valuable individuals, only by Jesus. The children used to quote different verses to defend their statements and to demonstrate how this view of Jesus/God could be valid: 'Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you', and 'It is better to trust in the Lord, than put your confidence in man'.

All these are reflecting what the children think and how they view religion. The children see religion as friendship, *and* relationship, and they see friendships and relationships grounded in religion – through the super-human being – Jesus. In one way, and completed by all this, it was first believed that the children looked at religion in a positivistic way. But many children communicated that they did not need religion, only Jesus: 'Religion is not important to me, because I have Jesus' (Boy, 12).It was the relational part of religion that they needed, and having found that in Jesus, they did not need any other dimensions of religion in their lives. But the findings of my study suggests that there is a spacious gap that needs to be filled in order to further listen to children's voices on religion, and to further locate the secret spiritual lives of children.

CHAPTER EIGHT
Concluding Remarks

8.1 Introduction

This last chapter of the thesis brings together the main research findings and poses the overall conclusions mandating from the study. Additionally, it provides some recommendations supported by the final results of the study.

8.2 Summary & Implications of Major Findings

This research project has explored Christian children's perspectives on religion in Tamil Nadu. It aimed at examining the different ways in which the children viewed religion and what role religion played in their everyday lives. The focus has mainly been held on how children's perspectives on religion influence their social practices. A mosaic approach involving multiple, qualitative methods of data collection have been used. The combination between several different participatory, task-based tools (see appendices) and the more traditional methodology of interviewing and observations provided me with a well-grounded understanding of – and factual insights into children's perspectives on religion.

The first specific objective of the study was to explore how children view religion, and how they seek knowledge about religion in their daily lives. It was found that there were various ways in which the children viewed religion, but all of the children – though in different ways, associated religion with Jesus/God and his attributes. Children viewed religion as an interaction between themselves as religious persons and the superhuman being; Jesus/God. It has often been proved challenging for children to grasp what religion is, but for these children religion was linked with something personal, and everyday life experiences. These day-to-day-experiences led them to seek more knowledge about religion in order to have a greater connection with Jesus/God, so that they could gain more wisdom and know what is right and wrong in life. This would in turn give them a stronger character, and mature their spirituality. It was learned from the children that it was more vital for them to seek knowledge about Jesus/God than knowledge about religion.

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Thus, the children's views of religion is related to their ultimate attempt of binding themselves to the sacred (Jesus) or/and have a stronger relationship with him. Children's knowledge-seeking about religion in India is related to their everyday lived challenges as *beings* here and now, but *also* connected to maturing into a relationship with Jesus for the sake of *becoming* something more.

The second specific objective was to examine what role religion played in children's everyday lives. Religion played a vital role in the children's everyday lives, and the role of religion was evident through all the three arenas of their lives; home, school and church. It played both a direct and indirect role in their lives. Direct in that sometimes there were no intervening factors for children's experiences and expressions of religion and spirituality, and indirect in that some of the exposure's to religion were brought from one area of their lives to another (for instance, from church to school). Through combining play with religious activities, the importance of religion in their lives became predicated by two facts: 1) They made use of different spaces in their environment to make their own personal religious activities become more pleasurable, like when they play. 2) When they played they used those same spaces and sometimes their playing consisted of religious elements; like mimicry of Adam and Eve. Thus, the border between play and religion was often hard to draw, and we see religion as entrenched in their everyday activities; even in their free-time play. Other than this, religion played a critical role in helping the children go through every-day challenges and teaching them to go in 'right ways'. However, they all agreed that they liked to be exposed to religion 'more short and sweet' and that the adults should discipline them in a 'more loving way'. Furthermore, the role of religion was found to both have an individual importance, and in addition, it implied a sense of shared values.

The data obtained from the second objective suggests that religion is constantly encountered in all the arenas of Christian children's lives in Tamil Nadu, and that religion plays a major role in helping children actively negotiate their own religious lives in the overlapping spaces between children's and adults' worlds. In a culture where power-relations between children and adults are more visible, religion can be said to be of prominent importance in indirectly emphasizing children as individual beings in their own right, *while* also strengthening their position within the community throughout their everyday life experiences. Although religion focuses mainly on

'developing into something more'; religion *has* the power within itself to give children in India a voice, and find the rightful place for these voices.

The third specific objective was to explore how children's perspectives on religion influence their social practices. It was found out that children's perspectives on religion influence their social practices, *and* their social practices influence their perspectives on religion. And, as noted above, children view or associate religion with Jesus, and this influences their social practices tremendously in that they see Jesus himself as a friend (and many of the children stated 'best-friend'). 'Religion is Jesus, and Jesus is our friend'. In other words, children see religion as friendship, and a relationship, and they see friendship and relationship grounded in religion – through the superhuman being; Jesus.

The reciprocity between children's perspectives on religion and their social practices draws attention to the fact that children and also religious children are social beings, members of their society, and are capable of constructing their own lives while making a change which again affects their social practices. It is obvious that children's in-habitation of social resources together with their disposition within religion and how they see religion, affect the ways in which they come past challenges in social practices. The Christian children in Tamil Nadu's social practices may turn into an essential basis of reasoning where children appear to engage themselves with the ideas, rituals and pursuits of their religion. And, in that way: develop their view of religion.

According to the findings related to the third objective (how religion influences children's social practices) it is the relational part of religion that children need, and finding that in Jesus, they do not need any other dimensions of religion in their lives. But, and as mentioned earlier, the findings of my study suggests that there is a spacious gap that needs to be filled in order to further listen to children's voices on religion and to further locate the secret spiritual lives' of children both within childhood studies and the sociology of religion.

Theoretically, this gap may be filled in through an extended academic focus on the conceptual hybridism between the social studies of childhood and the sociology of religion as explained in the theory chapter. My study has revealed that religion does have the power within itself to give

children in India a voice, but it needs support from childhood studies. Childhood studies can fill in for the shortcomings of sociology of religion, and the sociology of religion can supplement for what childhood studies lack. This further implies that there is no dichotomy between children as *beings* and children as *becomings*, the two should be seen as combined and mixed *and* be seen as two cooperating truths for children's best interest both in India and elsewhere.

Through the empirical examinations/findings of children's perspectives on religion in this study, this non-existence of the dichotomy between being and becoming has also been disclosed. Hence, some new and interesting findings within the study of children and religion have emerged. It is found that children is more into here-and now experiences (beings here and now) rather than focusing on the after-life (what they are to become). Still they are also aware of the positive effects of 'becoming better' – maturing spiritually – in order to improve their resilience in their everyday lives' challenges. Children do employ a variety of styles of agency within different social and religious surroundings. Children are both occupied with how they as social actors in the being can make a change in their society, while they simultaneously seek to mature as *becomings* into a spirituality which would give them a return both here and now – and in the future. This is an interesting paradox in that it demonstrates how children negotiate agency in subtle ways; both as beings and becomings.

The findings from this research has further revealed that children's perspectives on religion is dependent on a combination of personal, highly idiosyncratic ways of thinking, interests and experiences *and* social obligations, cultural and ritual practices exposed to them from the outside and from the adult world. Furthermore, children's perspectives on religion are not necessarily the same as for adults, and so the adults need to listen more to the children's voices and let the children reveal their inner, secret, spiritual/religious lives. Children had acquired a somewhat positive view of religion, however, many of the children emphasized that religion was not needed as long as they could still have a personal relationship with the sacred as both being and becomings.

8.3 Conclusions

There has been an academic omission of children's own perspectives on religion within childhood studies. Although childhood studies have given special attention towards the social and cultural aspects of children's lives the spiritual and religious aspects of childhood have been understudied. It is believed that the knowledge generated from carrying out this study is relevant in contributing to fill in the gap between the social/cultural aspects and the spiritual/religious aspects of children's lives. Thus, the empirical findings have implications for the further theorization of children's lives in that religion needs to be brought into the contemporary discussions within childhood studies.

Religion or religiosity, in brief, is about binding or surrendering some parts of ourselves for something outside ourselves (Pearce, 2002). The same can be said about the social and cultural dimensions of our lives; that we interact socially and culturally in order to bind ourselves to something outside ourselves. The first is with the sacred, or a super-human being, the latter through social interactions with the people around us. Although both may give children the experience of self-transcendence in very different ways, children need them in order to find meaning and support in life. This experience of self-transcendence is also often called spirituality. Spirituality has to do with feelings, the power that comes from within us while religion is about the power that comes from the outside and can again shape the power, or the spirit within us. Children have a power within them; a spirit in which they use to be social actors and in which they use to affect their surroundings. But at the same time they need a power that comes from the outside, which can continue to shape and nurture the spirit within them.

Religion is experienced in a real sense in the lives of the children, and might be different from how we think or have constructed the meaning. It often plays a more social role than a religious role, in that the children often focus on the social aspects of it. Still, the reciprocity of religion and social practices may be found useful in understanding the importance of religion in children's everyday life.

Children's perspectives on religion changes, according to the condition of the children and their everyday lives challenges. This leads the children to have very personal perspectives on religion.

They relate it to something very personal and down to earth. Religion is usually far from simple, and can be seen as having plenty of different elements. But this study indicated that children's perspectives on religion were simpler and that they focused on the social elements of religion, rather than seeing religion as something ritualistic. In that, we may need to focus on children's private expressions, and less on the social rituals within religion.

Keeping in mind both the similarities and differences between the social studies of childhood and sociology of religion, the new analytical framework brought up in this study containing hybrid conceptions of both disciplines may help us to theorize childhood in new and fruitful ways.

8.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations are meant to be seen as a broadening up of our own perspectives on religion in order to understand children and their perspectives on religion. The recommendations also contain ideas concerning new policies when it comes to children and religion.

First, we have to acknowledge that socio-political and cultural factors have an impact on children's lives in both positive and negative ways. As a solution for the negative ways in which it affects children, we have to invent support systems that empower the children. Religion itself could be seen as a support system which could strengthen children and give them a voice. Although religion focuses mainly on 'developing into something more'; religion *has* the power within itself to give children a voice, and find the rightful place for these voices. This study has revealed that religion can offer positive role models and social relationships characterized by unconditional love and support. Additionally, religion can build up resilience in children by letting children use their faith and religious views to negotiate and make up strategies on how they can use their agency as spiritual, social actors. Furthermore, by diversifying our own perspectives on religion and in keeping in mind that children are both social and religious/spiritual actors in their own right and are able to articulate views on issues that affects them, it will also be easier to understand and apply the notion that the children ought to be listened to.

Second, it is indispensable for the adults who see themselves as responsible for the religious socialization of children and organizations that arrange religious instruction or other religious activities for children, in addition to adults who are responsible for children in other cultural or social ways – to carefully ponder upon what they are doing. As reviewed in chapter six under section 'school', children's worlds of school and religion are closely intertwined, and because of that, as Jackson (in Greenavalt, 2005) argues: schools should pay seriously more interest into children's religious understandings than most of them do now. Issues of power-relations and methods used to promote discipline and learning in children are often the greatest challenges, and makes the largest breaches between children's worlds and adult's worlds. In this respect, we need a renewed and full realization of children as human beings vs. children as human-becomings. This dichotomy between seeing children as human beings or human–becomings is "a product of historical development and that, as such, it is open to change" (Lee, 2001:6). Completed by this study's theoretical and empirical findings on children's perspectives on religion; any kind of change cannot be accepted. The dichotomy between seeing children as human beings or human-becomings should only be open to a change which leads us to theorize and understand childhood in new and improved ways.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Overview over all the Methods applied in this Study

Appendix 2: Examples of all the Task-Based Tools used in this Study

       -Writing

       -Drawing

       -Recalling

       -Sentence Completion

       -Ranking

       -Photo-Essay

Appendix 3: Focus Group and In-Depth Interview Guide for Children

Appendix 4: In-Depth Interview Guide for Adults

Appendix 1: Overview over all the Methods applied in this Study

(An overview of the methods has been made in order to simplify this section of appendices. Not in chronological order).

Methods used	How many children	Method used to find out:
1st Writing activity	6 boys & 6 girls	Children's thoughts/associations on religion.
2nd Writing activity	7 boys and 6 girls	How children see themselves, how they think adults see them and their peers.
3rd Writing activity	7 boys and 5 girls	To find out how they are active agents in the society. Do their perspectives on religion influence them?
1st Drawing	6 boys and 6 girls	Children's understanding of good and bad behavior, or good things and bad things. Getting to know them.
2nd Drawing	6 boys & 6 girls	Children's thoughts on religion.
3rd Drawing	7 boys and 6 girls	To find out how they are active agents in their society (surroundings).
1st Recalling (Hour & day).	6 boys & 9 girls	If the practice of religion vary from day to day/ situation to situation.
2nd Recalling (Last week).	6 boys and 9 girls	If the practice of religion vary from week to week/situation to situation.
3rd Recalling (Past year).	6 boys and 5 girls	If the practice of religion vary from month to month /situation to situation.
4th Recalling (Lifeline).	6 boys and 5 girls	If the practice of religion has varied throughout life.
1st Sentence completion	6 boys and 6 girls	Was used to get to know the children more, their likes and dislikes and what role religion and God have in their lives. How religion shape their identity and everyday actions.
2nd Sentence completion	6 boys and 6 girls	Aimed to see children's social practices and their preferences when it comes to making friends.
Ranking (3: 'Free-time play', 'Doing at church/religious gatherings' and 'Most fun/boring').	7 boys and 6 girls	To see what free time activity's they prefer and how they combine religious activities with play.
Photo Essay	6 boys and 6 girls	To find and understand where the children practice their religion.
FGD's & In-Depth Interviews	4 FGD's: 1st: The whole group 2nd: Only the girls 3rd: Only the boys 4th: Last FGD: Everyone In-Depth Interviews: 7 boys and 6 girls	To understand their perspectives on religion in several areas of their lives. (How they form ideas about it, what place religion has in their lives and who are influencing them and how religion affect their social practices in home/church/school and the wider society.
Participant observation		Filled in the gaps of and understood the findings of all the other methods.

Appendix 2: Overview over all the Task-Based Tools used in this Study

*(One example from every method used. Not in chronological order.)*

<u>Writing</u>

The children were asked to write the first thing(s) that come to their mind when they hear the word religion:

1. Religion means that people worship is called religion.

2. God is everywhere.

3. I pray to jesus.

4. God is Good

5. O. taste and see that the lord is good.

6. I love jesus

7. He is my father.

8. I think about jesus.

9. He created this world so beautiful.

10. The love of god is so wonderful
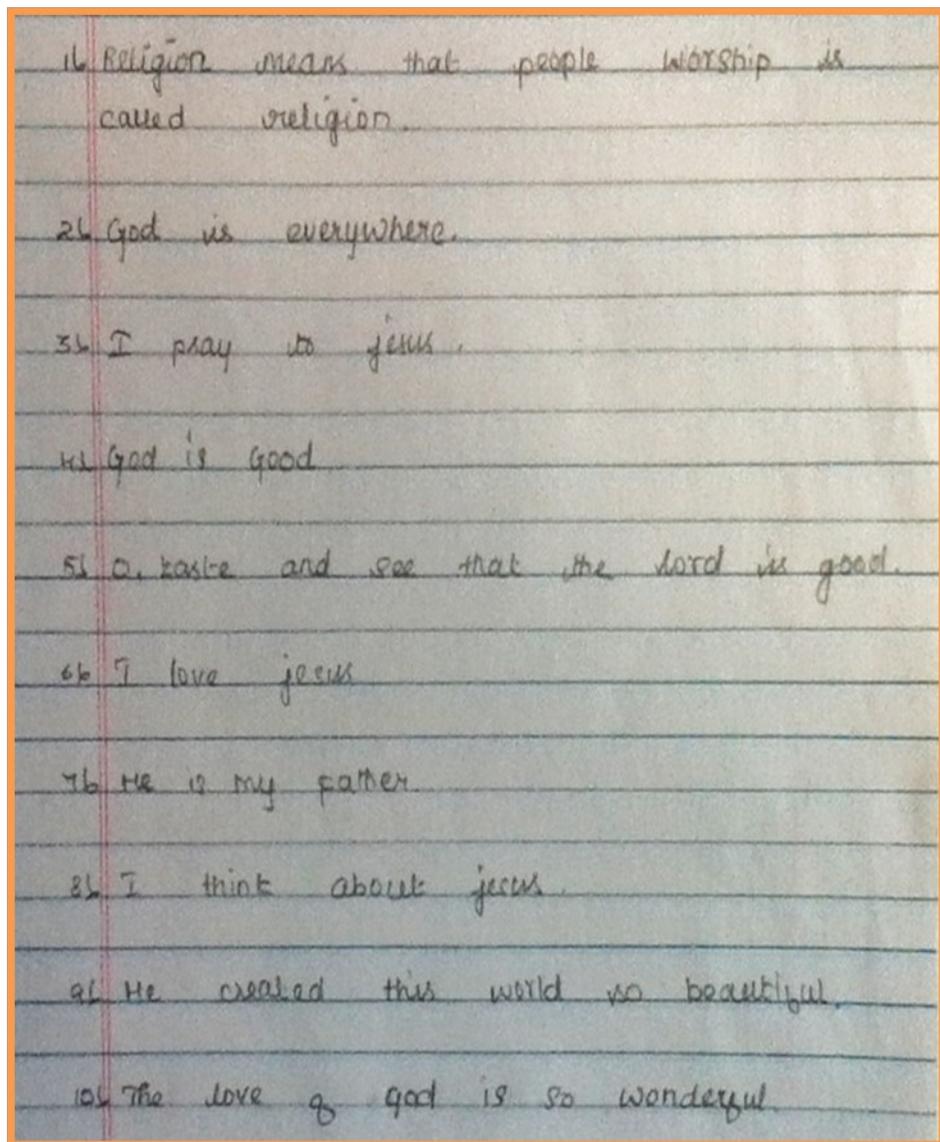
(Girl living in the orphanage, 12)

Drawing

The children were asked to draw the first thing(s) that come to their mind when they hear the word religion:
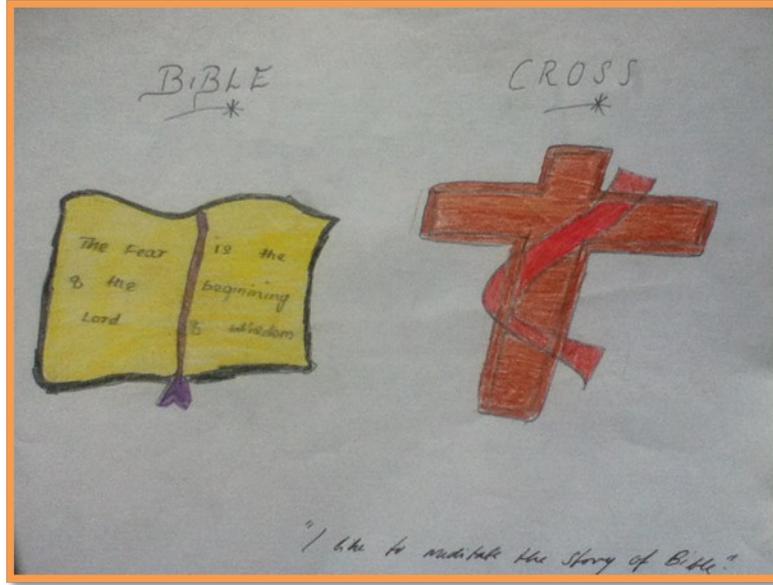
'I like to meditate the story of Bible' (Girl living in the orphanage, 11).

Recalling

(Boy living in the orphanage, 9).

Sentence Completion

This is a sample of the first sentence completion, where the goal was to get to know the children more (see the overview over the methods).

Sentence completion

I am good at _Drawing, playing etc....._

I am not good at _studying Tamil_

I like _to dance._

I don't like _to clean._

I am afraid _of darkness and snakes._

I am not afraid _of lizards and insects_

I wish _to become a Engéner_

My favourite thing to do _share gospel to my friends_ because:

They are non-christian and my desire is that

The most boring thing to do _is studying_ because:

It is very hard and more to study.

I see myself as _beautiful and weak_

When I grow up I want to become _a moral teacher_ because:
through that I can share gospel to them

(Girl living at the orphanage, 12).

Ranking

LAST RANKING:

Make a list of the 10 most funthings to do and 10 most boring things to do from both of the rankings!

| Most fun	Most boring
1. Throw Ball ...	1. Study
2. playing at sunday school	2. sit alone
3. Drama	3. listen history miss class
4. Evening service	4. to get scholding
5. Dance	5. to do work
6. Swing, see saw	6. complain about others
7. Kho kho	7. to hit others
8. Chess	8. disturbing others
9. Carrom	9. make others sad
10. running race	10. listening others

(Girl living in the school-hostel, 12).

Photo-Essay

This is a sample from the photo-essay. The children were asked to take photos where they practice their religion and feel close to God.
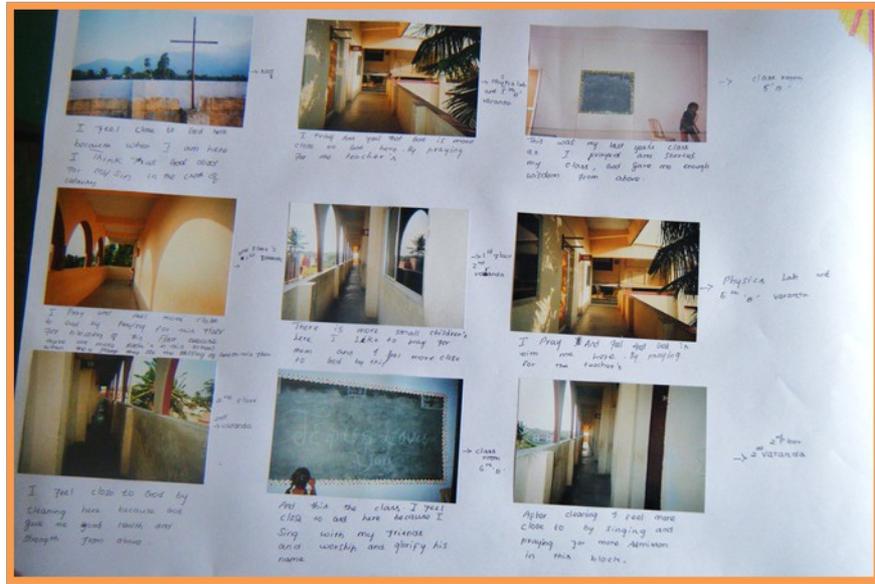
One of the photos:
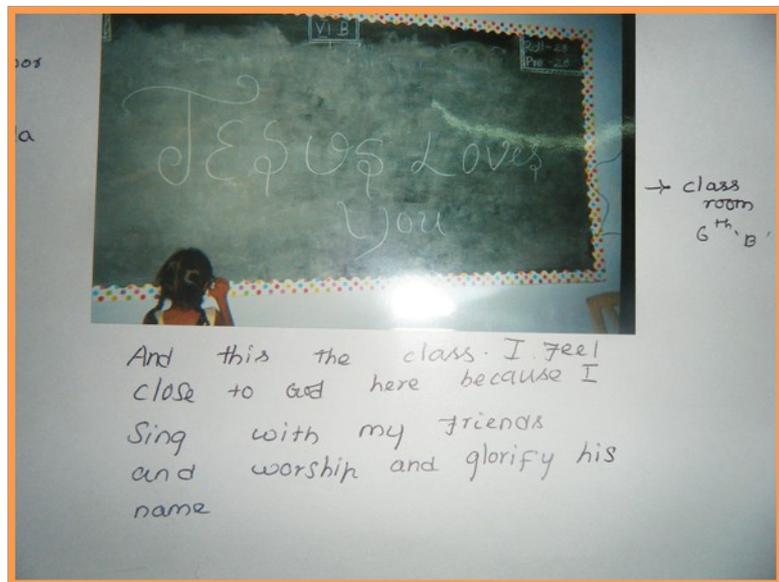
In the classroom: 'I feel close to God here because I sing with my friends and worship and glorify his name' (Girl living with her mother, 12).

Appendix 3: Focus Group and In – Depth Interview Guide for Children

(The questions were articulated and adjusted according to the children's age and correspondence, thus this is to be seen as a <u>guide</u> for the interviews).

Background information-

Name-

Age-

Sex-

Reason to attend the church-

How long attended the church-

Family Livelihood-

1. How do the children form their ideas about religion

   - What meaning does religion have according to the children/their association definition of religion/how they understand religion

   - How, where and when do they practice & seek knowledge about religion in their everyday lives

2. What role religion plays in their everyday lives

   - How do they identify themselves/worldview

   - How does/does not religion help them in everyday life/ how do they view their life in relation to their religion

   - How is play combined with religious activities

3. How children's religious experiences influence their social practices

   - How, and where do children find their friends, and how are they interacting

   - Anyone influencing your perspectives on religion (role models)

     - If yes, who? And in what way?

     - If no, what do you think could influence you?

   - Do you face, or have you ever faced any risks or challenges because of religion?

     -If yes, what?

     -If no, can you think of any difficulties you could face?

Appendix 4: In-Depth Interview Guide for Adults

(Was conducted in order to find out adults' views and understanding of children, and children's place within religion and religious activities).

1. Do you think Christian children practice religion differently here in Tamil Nadu? For instance boys and girls?

2. Can you say anything about adults' influence in children's spiritual development?

3. In your opinion, are children born with spirituality? If yes, why? If no, why not?

4. Do you think there are any differences in growing up in India today, and how it was when you were a child? Please explain.

5. What place do you think children should have within religion and church?

6. What do you think is the 'best way' when it comes to exposing the children to religion? (Adults' role in children's spiritual lives).

7. What books and courses/subjects at schools here in Tamil Nadu mentions about religion?

8. Anything else you want to add?