Shanti Mandir

Authenticity, Economy and Emotion in a Yoga Ashram

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Except where cited in the text,
This work is the result of research carried out by the author.

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Abstract

The sociological question of what holds groups together fascinates me. The ‘glue’ of solidarity is considered to be affective emotional experiences experienced during the performance of collective enterprises. The reciprocity of emotion and subsequent exchanges of capital are found at the centre of the guru-disciple relationship. The focus of this relationship is the transference of grace (śaktipāta) from the guru to the disciple. Therefore, in order to understand how a legitimate yogic identity is constructed, contested and expressed this thesis focuses on exploring the various exchanges, reasons and ways that people join the Shanti Mandir (Temple of Peace) global community of yoga aspirants. This is done to understand the structural, cognitive and emotional aspects inherent in the micro-translation of macro sociological processes related to the construction of authenticity and accumulation of legitimacy.

The primary good of salvation produced by Shanti Mandir and consumed by the disciples is the opportunity to emulate the ideal knower’s disposition (i.e. the guru). I identify the guru’s disposition as that of an ‘embodier of tranquility’ (śāntamurti). This opportunity to emulate is a result of repeated positive interactions that produce emotional solidarity through the transference of affect that occurs formally at the ritual level and informally at the social level. Formally, this occurs during the twice-daily ritualised performance of satsaṅga (confluence of truth) where the palpable aesthetic mood of śānta (tranquility) is temporarily cultivated and legitimised as an expression of the ‘divinity that dwells within’. Individuals also gain respite from their anxiety and doubt through a collective sense of community, purpose and shared identity. This is achieved by participating in the daily religious practice, which focuses on the devotional aspects of the guru-bhakti tradition and functions primarily through non-market (emotional) labour in the form of gurusevā (volunteer service to the guru). Individuals engage in this system in order to experience a ‘Vedic way of life’ through a syncretic form of neo-Hinduism. The principal goal of which involves possibly attaining liberation in this lifetime (jīvanmukta).

The three groups that comprise the disciples: Renunciants, Scholars and Patrons work together investing various species of capital (social, cultural and economic respectively) to support the guru’s saṅkalpa (intention), which is centred
around promoting a ‘Vedic tradition’ and ‘guiding seekers to the direct experience of divinity’. While the guru’s intention is quite often misrecognised as a disinterested promotion of divinity and a palpable experience of tranquility, when contextualised by the transglobal yoga and spiritual tourism industries these exchanges of capital take on new meanings. The aim of this research is to understand the symbolic struggles for recognition that occur at both individual and organisational levels regarding what represents an ‘authentic’ yogic identity within this community. By identifying Shanti Mandir as a new religious movement and non-profit business within these multi-billion dollar industries, combined with analysing the guru’s discourse and the organisation’s marketing strategies this thesis highlights how legitimate participation is characterised, how access and ascension through the social network is achieved, and how the market forces of globalisation and subsequent transcultural flows of knowledge continue to shape and reproduce legitimacy and authenticity within this yogically-inspired community.
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Notes on Transliteration

Place names and proper names are spelt in their English transliteration. For example, instead of Svāmī Nityānanda Sarasvatī I use Swami Nityananda Saraswati. Non-English words are marked in italics. Unless quoting directly I have chosen to use the Sanskrit convention instead of the Hindi transliterated convention. For instance, instead of using the Hindi term satsaṅg, I have chosen instead to use the Sanskrit lexeme satsaṅga.

Some of the Shanti Mandir (2015) references have symbols instead of letters. For example, after Shanti Mandir (2015z) some references appear as Shanti Mandir (2015{), (2015-), etc. These are not typographical errors. Instead they reflect the limits of the Endnote referencing software and the English alphabet only having 26 letters.
### Primary Texts mentioned

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Preface — Origins of Thesis

How a man should behave depends upon his profession. A postman, for instance, should knock at all the doors in a street at which he has letters to deliver, but if anybody else knocked on all the doors, he would be considered a public nuisance.

Bertrand Russell (Grayling 2002: 26)

The Other is also a reflection of the self, at times resented, at other times emulated.

William Sax (2002: 204)

I begin this thesis with these quotes from Bertrand Russell and William Sax because in a certain way they sum up my experience of conducting ethnographic research in the Shanti Mandir ashram. They also sum up the overall aim of this thesis, which is related to understanding how the individual learns to adhere to the prescribed, normative standard of behaviour within the Shanti Mandir community. Just like the postman, I have knocked on the doors of the devotees of Swami Nityananda to understand the ways in which the Other is accepted, resented and emulated through discourses that generate authenticity and legitimacy.

From my interest in yoga, which initially stemmed from illness in childhood and a doctors recommendation to include stretching in my treatment regime, I later became interested in all things related to yoga, meditation and spirituality. By the age of twenty I was teaching several classes of yoga each week. Having worked over the past fifteen years as a yoga and meditation teacher in several countries I am aware of the symbolic role Sanskrit has in developing prestige and distinction for knower’s of various transglobal and local yoga traditions. I am also aware of the symbolic dimensions and strategies used by individuals and organisations to generate distinction, prestige and legitimacy within this highly competitive industry.

An ashram (aśrama) is a noun from the verbal root व्यर्थम्. This root connotes meanings of weariness, fatigue and also an ability to overcome obstacles or subdue
something like one’s desires or fears. The ā prefixing śrama implies a locus where this might be possible. Nityananda describes the concept of an ashram as:

a place where people can come, to chant, to meditate and sit. It's a sort of retreat, or even a resort. But it's not an external resort or retreat. It's where you are just enjoying your own company. Learning to be with other like-minded people and thus slowly raising the vibrations by being in that space of love with yourself. (Mandir 2013b)

The origins of this project began with three month’s fieldwork that I conducted in the Shanti Mandir (Temple of Peace) ashram in 2009. This was towards a master’s degree in applied linguistics, which focused on exploring sociolinguistic issues related to spoken Sanskrit. I chose the Shanti Mandir ashram because it has a vibrant community of Sanskrit speakers. I had heard from some devotee friends that this was due to the Sanskrit college in the ashram. I was looking for a group of Sanskrit speakers where I could explore the linguistic vitality of Sanskrit and how it mixes with Hindi on a daily basis. This previous master’s project has developed into the current doctoral thesis that has, as one of its aims, to understand the symbolic capital of Sanskrit and its relation to the authentic and legitimate yogic identity.

I define a legitimate identity as one that is sanctioned, approved and allowed by a community, and, which is essential for acceptance. In order to gain access into a group one must understand the enculturation process and the performativity required to gain peoples’ trust. At the heart of this thesis is the fact that within the transglobal yoga industry there exist a seemingly infinite amount of distinct styles and lineages of yoga and, therefore, an almost infinite choice of legitimate yogic identities also exist. As the transglobal yoga industry has matured we have seen an incredible diversity of divergent styles of yoga develop. However, throughout the history and development of various yogic traditions there has been a constant struggle for legitimacy between various groups. What we see occurring today around the world is merely a continuation of this. This is particularly the case when we consider how prominent the
physically oriented styles of yoga have become and how they continue to shape a
general conception of what yoga is or ought to be.

There is a spectrum of authenticity along which we can place these different
types of yoga. This spectrum runs between the more body conscious ‘sporty’ style of
Modern Postural Yoga that repackages spirituality for a body conscious consumer
within a secularised format, and the more ‘traditional’ or ‘devotional’ styles that have
a goal towards salvation or liberation as their ultimate focus and often include a
monastic context centred around learning directly from a guru. This type of yoga is
referred to as Modern Soteriological Yoga. It is considered a representation of a bigger
and more encompassing picture of what a yogic lifestyle and identity ought to include.
I assert that Shanti Mandir is an organisation that is soteriologically focused. However,
as this thesis shows, this has interesting consequences for individuals who are not
focused on salvation and are instead more interested in developing their ‘inner
warrior’.

This thesis only briefly explores the more salient features of the transglobal
yoga industry. It uses it as a backdrop to contextualise the specific ways in which
tradition is constructed by Shanti Mandir. In the competitive market place of
transglobal yoga the aim is to differentiate oneself from the illegitimate identities by
producing an identity the market considers legitimate, in the hope that the consumers
of yoga also agree and patronise one’s own organisation instead of the competitors.
The irony of this situation is that for a lot of people involved in the yoga world, this
lifestyle is seen as an escape from the competitive market forces of capitalism that
allows for a romantic and idealistic return to a less regulated and more spiritual world.
However, the commercialisation of this lifestyle has resulted in a multi-billion dollar
industry. This strikes at the very heart of what many people consider ‘yoga’ to be, and
so, what I explore in this thesis through this specific case study of Shanti Mandir are
the tensions that develop between commercialisation and the necessity to manufacture
authenticity through ‘ancient’ and ‘eternal’ legitimising discourses that are used to generate symbolic power and create Shanti Mandir’s legitimate and authentic identity, not only for the organisation but also its members.

The idea for this doctoral research began one day while sitting in the temple in Shanti Mandir ashram. As I watched the distinct groups take their turn to approach the guru for his blessing, I began thinking about what the markers of distinction are that separate and distinguish these groups from each other and what the symbolic dimensions involved might be. This led me to consider how these groups interact, what the various exchanges of capital are that occur, what the various symbolic competitions are that people engage in, and the strategies they use to negotiate access and ascension through the various hierarchies. It became clear over time that distinctive groups of people had characteristic levels of access and proximity not only to the guru but also to various domains within the cloistered community. I asked myself, ‘what must I do in order to be able to sit amongst the symbolic elite in this community? Is it possible for me to attain such distinction for myself and migrate into another group?’

I first met Swami Nityananda in 1998 when he visited Australia to perform Navarātrī Sādhanā (Nine nights of worship to the Divine Goddess). Nityananda is one of the successors of the Siddha Yoga founder and guru Baba Muktananda. Nityananda left Siddha Yoga in 1985 and founded Shanti Mandir in 1987. It was not until 1999 that Shanti Mandir took possession of the land and opened their ashram in 2000 where I conducted my fieldwork in Valsad District, Gujarat. I spent close to twelve months in the ashram attending the daily religious practice, conducting volunteer work with the other residents, and getting to know the motivations of the residents and visitors.

As a young and somewhat naïve yoga enthusiast and freshly minted yoga teacher, in 1998 I was invited by some friends to see an ‘Indian swami’ who turned out to be Nityananda. I was mesmerised by the performativity, choreography, and the
overall aesthetic of the temporary liminal space that was created to facilitate his visit. This space was beautifully sublime, and, at the time it seemed to be divinely inspired and sanctioned. I felt the gravitational pull of Nityananda’s charisma and his referent power that made me want to emulate his way of being in and seeing the world. The overwhelming feelings of peace and joy that I experienced in this domain seemed available only in that cultivated space. At least this is what people within this community asserted: that becoming part of this spiritual vanguard would enable rare access to a profoundly ‘true’ sanctuary where respite from the profanity of the modern, secular, institutionalised and hyper-regulated world beyond this liminal domain was possible.

The event occurred in a marquee set up in the backyard of a devotee’s property in Middle Park on the esplanade looking out over the Port Phillip Bay. As one entered this ‘sacred’ space it was possible to feel the sense of quietude it invoked in distinct contrast to the busy world outside. The smell of incense and sound of Sanskrit mantras enveloped the visitor in an intoxicating embrace. While the event was essentially free, there was a stall selling a variety of goods of salvation such as clothing, rosary beads (mālās), photos of gurus, cassettes and CDs of Sanskrit chanting, incense and other paraphernalia that might assist the spiritual aspirant. I distinctly remember there was also a donation box (dānapātra) and sign explaining the costs involved in hosting such a production, and an invitation to give. The ten days of worship exceeded AUD15,000. I wondered if the money was recouped, if a profit was made, and if not, how the various sponsors of the event felt regarding their investments and whether they expected some non-monetary return either in this life or the next.

I remember returning to this property some time after this event had concluded wondering what might have remained, like some presence or residue perhaps of these auspicious moments might still be there, lingering ethereally. But like the travelling
road show that this spiritual performance is, one must either go to its source, i.e., the ashram or wait for the guru to return once more.

The foundational texts of the Siddha tradition explain how this feeling of peace (śānti) does not last for the neophyte who is not established (siddha). These texts assert that one must enter into an intense relationship with a guru in order to attain a permanent state of śānti. Here we can see the interesting relationship that develops between the producers and consumers of this commodity (i.e., the legitimate ‘peaceful’ disposition) used by the guru Nityananda to distinguish his own brand of spirituality that is ultimately facilitated by himself. Regardless of any disinterested claims, the logic of the guru-disciple relationship is predicated by a fundamental exchange of capital that I explain below.

While all ashrams are unique in some way, as a New Religious Movement, Shanti Mandir is particularly interesting because it blends modern postural yoga, neo-Hindu soteriological (salvation-oriented) yoga and the politico-religious deśabhakti (patriotic) Sanskrit revival movement to create an appealing and perhaps unique product within the transglobal and spiritual tourism industries. With this fascinating blend, the supposed salvific and aesthetic benefits of both Sanskrit and yoga are combined to generate an image of authenticity that is central to the marketing strategy of Shanti Mandir and is directly involved in how the organisation accumulates capital.

The Location of Shanti Mandir’s ‘Magod’ Ashram

The Shanti Mandir ashram is located 200 kilometres north of Mumbai in Village Magod, Atul Tehsil, Valsad District, Gujarat. It is located one kilometre east of the Arabian Sea on the west coast of India. A journey by car from Mumbai takes approximately three hours and by train approximately four hours. The closest city to the ashram is Valsad, which is only ten kilometres. Figure 1 shows the location of the
ashram. Shanti Mandir has two other ashrams. One is in Haridwar, the holy city at the base of Himalayas where the Ganges (Gaṅgā) River flows out of the mountains entering the plains of north India.¹ The third ashram is located in upper New York State near the town of Walden in the Catskill Mountains. Shanti Mandir also has several yoga schools and meditation centres affiliated with it that are managed by its global network of devotees. Officially, Shanti Mandir has representatives in America, Mexico, Argentina, Singapore, India, Australia, Spain and Germany (Mandir 2015i).

![Figure 1: Location of Ashram](Source: Google Maps 2015a)

The organisation’s secretary and trustee, Naresh Desai, explained the history behind the current location of Shanti Mandir’s ashram. It began in 1971 when Muktananda first came to Valsad to facilitate meditation intensives at Tithal, the seaside district of city. At the request of the nearby town of Dharampur, a group of people went to Ganeshpuri to offer some land to Muktananda so he could build an ashram. However, he refused the offer and instead asked the king’s messenger if he himself had any land

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¹ Haridwar (hari — god + dwar — door) is the ‘door to god’ and is often colloquially referred to as the ‘Vatican City of Hinduism’.
to offer. Later, upon visiting a mango orchard owned by the messenger Muktananda prophetically decreed, ‘There will be an ashram here one day’. Even though, it was not until 1998 that Nityananda took some of the messenger’s own land to start an ashram with construction commencing the following year (Desai 2011). The land that Shanti Mandir now has for its ashram is approximately twenty acres. Since 2009, the property has been a certified organic and biodynamic mango, coconut and chikku sapote orchard. Further discussion of the ashram and its location occurs in section 3.7.
Acknowledgements

First of all I would like to sincerely thank Swami Nityananda and the Shanti Mandir community for letting me conduct my research in the Magod ashram. I would especially like to thank Devayani Cable who took, via email, the brunt of my questions and provided me with answers as promptly as she could. I have for the most part of two decades had the good fortune of getting to know some amazing people through my often times distant and sporadic involvement with Shanti Mandir.

Like a planet on its own orbit, at times moving closer to other planetary bodies, the ways in which the Shanti Mandir community meets in distant parts of the world to come together and celebrate life has been a source of ongoing inspiration. The last few years during this doctoral project have been an immensely fruitful journey of reflection and growth at both personal and academic levels. I am grateful to everyone within the Shanti Mandir community who gave freely their time and insights to make this thesis more buoyant with the voices of those that matter. In an effort to maintain privacy of my informants I have chosen to use pseudonyms in several instances even when consent was given. While the people whose stories will be familiar to some, this obfuscation of identities is no way detrimental to the telling of this story.

At the Australian National University I would like to sincerely thank my friends and colleagues in the School of Culture, History & Language. I would like to pay particular mention to my supervisory panel for helping to bring this thesis to completion. Without the guidance of McComas Taylor, Assa Doron and Alan Rumsey this project would not have arrived at its current state. The funds provided by the South Asia Research Institute (SARI) administered by Meera Ashar were also valuable for helping with mobility and attending conferences. I could not have navigated the administrative maze without the help of Jo Bushby, Pen Charlton, and Sharon
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The final days of writing this thesis were spent in New Delhi, itself. It is fitting that my dear friend Tanya Spisbah opened up her home to me. I will always be in her debt for her generosity that allowed me to sit down and complete this thesis under the cool embrace of her dining room’s airconditioner. Also, the endless chats with fellow sociology student Pallabi Roy were a significant boon that helped me to gain a clearer insight into Indian society.

It is due to my love of the Sanskrit language that this dissertation was written. One of the first verses I ever learnt with my dear teacher McComas Mahodayaḥ was the following. Whenever doubt or anguish began to consume me in those all too frequent moments it was this timeless advice that helped me to continue.

यद्यस्त्येव प्रतीकारो दौर्मनस्येन तत्र किम् ।

अथ नास्ति प्रतीकारो दौर्मनस्येन तत्र किम् ॥

If there is a remedy for a problem, why worry?

If there is no remedy, why worry?

Śāntideva (8th Century CE)

Finally, without the endless loving support of my family this thesis would never have been written. As it is, I dedicate this work to the Mothership, Monkey, Vinny, Harry and Holly.
Thesis Statement

I argue that the ‘glue’ of solidarity holding the Shanti Mandir community together is a result of affective emotional experiences. At the centre of the intense guru-disciple relationship is a reciprocal arrangement built upon emotion and subsequent exchanges of capital that is based on an economy where personal relations affect incentives and rewards, while rational decisions and actions are backgrounded in the pursuit of a shared identity and collective experience (Berezin 2005). Typifying or underpinning this relationship is the transference of the guru’s liberating grace (śaktipāta), or energy/emotion to the disciple. By focusing on the micro-sociological processes involved in the forging of reciprocity and the transference of affect, the macro sociological processes related to the construction of authenticity and accumulation of legitimacy within Shanti Mandir’s community becomes clearer.

My thesis is premised by the idea that within the transglobal yoga industry various competing claims for authenticity and legitimacy are made. Providers of yoga and meditation position themselves along a spectrum between the two poles of soteriological yoga and modern postural yoga. Broadly speaking, as the transglobal yoga industry has moved into the mature phase of its lifecycle, Shanti Mandir has incorporated into its identity a more obvious association with modern postural yoga to entice and recruit new members. However, it distinguishes itself from what it describes as the ‘partial’ modern postural yoga through aligning with a syncretic neo-Hindu based soteriological yoga that promises liberation (mokṣa).

Liberation, according to Abhinavagupta, a principal theoretician of non-dual Śaivism, is gaining awareness of one’s nature.² According to Singh the highest attainment is achieved through the descent of grace (anugraha), which is synonymous

² AbhT 1.156a mokṣo hi nāma naivānyah svarūpaprathanaṃ hi tat.
with the descent of śakti (energy). The aspirant has to earn the guru’s grace through attending to a discipline i.e., yoga or upāya (both terms refer in this context to joining).³

Therefore, I argue that central to the process of gaining legitimacy and the subsequent exchanges of capital in the Shanti Mandir community is through the embodiment of śānti. Learning to imitate the guru’s behaviour and outlook form the basis of the legitimising principle found within this community. The way to gain legitimacy is based on back-grounding specialised knowledge. Instead emulation of the ideal knower’s disposition serves as the basis of achievement and ruler by which legitimacy is measured. This serves two purposes. First, the temporary experience of quietude (śāntarasa) that is felt in the presence of the guru is based on the production of a particular aesthetic mood that is consciously cultivated. This serves to reinforce the belief in his ‘divine’ authority and potency and also to attract potential proselytes. As the experience of quietude is often fleeting, repeated visits to the ashram or darśana (exchange of glances) of the guru are required over a sustained period of time so that the potentially permanent state of jīvanmukta (emancipated while still alive) can be cultivated. The reason for this is made clear by Nityananda’s own assertion that darśana is not just seeing a statue or person sitting or standing, but instead, it refers to recognising the state in which that being dwells, or rather their disposition (Mandir 2014i: 4).

Through an experience of contentment and quietude in the presence of the guru, the seeker is invited to adopt the spiritual practices that have been shown can result in the relief of their doubt and anxiety. This is said to be due to the direct experience of what Shanti Mandir asserted is the ‘divinity that dwells within’ (Mandir 2014a).

³ Discussed more in section 2.9.
Second, various groups exist within the community serving different functions based on the distinctive species of capital they are able to invest. Individuals within each group compete internally (i.e., within their own group) as they are unable to compete symbolically with individuals from the other groups because each group has a dominant species of capital that distinguishes their legitimacy and function. These disparate groups/hierarchies work together using bridging social capital to support their guru’s mission. In short, by imitating the guru’s behaviour, outlook and responses one becomes like the guru.

Through emulating the guru in the way his or her group is authorised to, the individual can gain legitimacy within this community. I argue the legitimate disposition is an ideal represented by the ideal knower, which in this context is the guru. However, the devotees of the guru are not able to achieve the same level of legitimacy as their guru, as this would cause the hierarchical system to collapse. If one were to be elevated to the same level as the guru and share in the prestige this distinguished position allows, would this individual need or want to willingly subordinate himself or herself to the guru and engage in the emotional economy that underwrites it?

Even though several people within the Shanti Mandir community assert an egalitarian utopia exists where everyone is equal, there are obvious distinct vertical hierarchies of various types of knowers. This distinction is based on the acquisition of institutionalised cultural knowledge and embodiment of the legitimate disposition, or at least variants of it. The three groups, which I discuss in detail below in chapter four are the Renunciants, Scholars, and Patrons. For the purpose of reducing conceptual ‘noise’ I have chosen to use English lexemes instead of local Sanskrit terms for these groups. However, to demonstrate my familiarity with local linguistic conditions we could instead use the following terms saṃnyāsins, pāṇḍitas and māthavas respectively.


Aims and Outline of Thesis

Through using Shanti Mandir as a generalised case study, this thesis aims to explore how authenticity and tradition are cultivated within the Shanti Mandir community through a sociological analysis of the community’s emotional economy. I do this to understand how people within this social institution and transglobal social network interact and shape one another’s experiences of yoga and the subsequent identities this generates (Granovetter and Swedberg 2011).

From a sociological perspective I aim to discover the social glue that binds this community together. By moving beyond rational choice theory I also aim to understand what the cost of commitment for the individual considering joining this community is; and what level of control is exerted by the organisation regarding an individual’s consumption of a religious-spiritual lifestyle. I do this from within a discussion of globalised public religion and identity politics (Kelley 1977, Kitiarsa 2008, Turner 2010).

I locate Shanti Mandir within the transglobal (i.e., an enterprise extending across the world) yoga industry and focus on the legitimising discourse of Shanti Mandir’s master narrative and how it is used to construct an identity as part of an esoteric and ancient wisdom tradition. I show how this ‘secret knowledge’ is produced as part of an ‘authentic’ and ‘genuine’ yogic tradition (Kilcher 2010); while also exploring the exchanges of capital and transference of affect that are central to the guru-disciple relationship, through exploring how the cultivation of the aesthetic mood of tranquility (śāntarasa) is central to the identity and religious practice of Shanti Mandir.
As a result my study has turned to the exploration of the symbolic capital of the ‘yogic’ episteme and its relation to Sanskrit and capitalism. An episteme refers to bodies of knowledge that are justified as ‘true’ (Foucault 1970: 168). This is contrasted by the term ‘doxa’, which is associated more with the theoretical work of Bourdieu. Doxa refers to a common belief or opinion that is considered an unquestionable orthodoxy that is mistakenly operating as if it was an objective truth (Chopra 2010: 419). I am interested in following the epistemologically unconscious threads that are mingled together and exposed in discourse. I explore the invisible yet fundamental assumptions taken for granted by the individuals operating within this social network to fathom how opposing themes can co-exist within this heterogenous social field, thereby, impacting on the ‘authenticity’ of various yogic identities.

I am influenced by the German Indologist Paul Hacker (1913-1979), who was also intrigued by the problem of authenticity and sought to understand and question what he used to call ‘Neo-Hinduism’. Like Hacker, I am a committed participant in the continuing encounter and dialogue between India and the world (Hacker and Halbfass 1995).

For millennia the terms ‘yoga’ and ‘yogin’ have been used by various groups to define a vast array of practices and identities (Lindsay 2013, Madsen 2013, Michelis 2005, Singleton 2010). Today, this tradition of reinterpreting and adapting yoga to meet specific spiritual and somatic needs continues within globalised transcultural flows of knowledge. Quite often these identities overlap creating tensions between groups as they assert their own claims to legitimacy within a crowded imaginary (Froystad 2009). The authentic ‘yogic identity’ floats upon a sea of disparate voices as an empty signifier that allows different groups to use the yoga sign for their own profit, symbolic or otherwise. An example or result of this tension is The Hindu American Foundation’s ‘Take Back Yoga’ campaign that claimed Western consumer capitalism had perverted yoga (Shukla 2012).
I use the terms ‘Modern Postural Yoga’ by Michelis (2005) and ‘Modern Soteriological Yoga’ by Jain (2014: 50) to clarify the two major poles within the transglobal yoga industry. One aim of this thesis is understand how Shanti Mandir positions itself along this spectrum and what the consequences are for individuals within their social network who are either encouraged or dissuaded by the organisation’s doctrinal commitments and organisational structure.

Shanti Mandir is a transglobal organisation that has branded its own type of yoga as Shanti Darshanam (Experiencing Peace) forging an identity for itself within a competitive ‘wellness’ market worth over forty billion dollars to the global economy (Kendall 2011). Shanti Mandir (ca. 1987) is a neo-Hindu New Religious Movement (NRM) that has several thousand devotees across the globe who financially support the organisation and its charitable works in exchange for learning how to adopt a particular yogically inspired lifestyle and identity. Here I try to unpack the pedagogical system within this religious arena where spiritual aspirants come to acquire specific knowledge regarding the yogic disposition they believe will arrest their doubt and anxiety.

The main aim of this thesis is to answer the following question: ‘How is legitimacy acquired, negotiated and expressed within the Shanti Mandir yoga ashram?’ The theoretical framework applied is a confluence of the sociology of education, knowledge and religion. I engage a methodology based primarily in ethnographic participant-observation and discourse analysis. In an effort to understand what constitutes legitimate participation, this research focuses on the symbolic exchanges of capital that determine how an individual gains acceptance within the community (Bourdieu 1977, 1986, 1989).

I situate Shanti Mandir within the transglobal yoga and spiritual tourism industries by demonstrating how Shanti Mandir promotes itself as a provider of a consumable lifestyle that spiritual aspirants can adopt through attending retreats,
workshops, meditation intensives, yoga teacher training and philosophy courses in their global network of ashrams. Therefore, by identifying the structuring forces of the guru’s discourse, and focusing on the marketing strategies and subsequent exchanges of capital and affective emotions, this thesis documents what the legitimate yogic identity promoted by Shanti Mandir is within the context of the transglobal yoga industry.

Focusing on the guru-disciple tradition’s main aim, which is to cultivate a profound inner transformation in the disciple, I have built my thesis around the idea that the legitimate yogic identity of Shanti Mandir can be conceptualised by the term śāntamūrti (embodiment or embodiers of ‘peace’ or ‘quietude’). It is worth pausing for a moment and explaining the etic and heuristic nature of this term. While Nityananda does indeed discuss the qualities of śānti and how to attain it, this term is not found in the corpus of his discourses. In a sense then, I am ‘inventing’ this concept to describe the ‘ideal’ disposition he describes. However, it is attested in the literature, including one text central to Shanti Mandir’s religious practice.4

Through analysing the guru’s discourse we come to understand that through devotion to the guru, Nityananda invites people to share in an experience of the world that is, in their words an ‘ideal environment for seekers to immerse themselves in a traditional way of spiritual life, as passed down from the ancient sages’ (Mandir 2014a). It is the quest for the embodiment of these experiences that underpins the

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4 SvayambhuP 10.58 śrīghana śrīmatim śreṣṭha śīlarāśim śivakaram / śrīmanta śrīkaram śāntam śāntimūrti namāmyaham // RāRSi 27 rājendra satyasandhaḥ daśarathananayananḥ śyāmalaṃ śāntamūrtiṃ vandolokāhīrāmaṃ raghukula tilakaṃ rāghavam rāvyaṃ // LSah 2 śrī vidyāṃ śāntamūrtiṃ sakala surasūtāṃ sarvasampat-pradātrim / sakuṃkuma vilepanā maḷīkacumbi kastūrikāṃ. samanda hasitekṣāṇāṃ//.
legitimate disposition and Shanti Mandir’s yogic identity within this competitive marketplace.

Knowledge is recognised as a social phenomenon, and can be seen as something in its own right, as the basis of education within a social field and not just as some essential truth or social power (Maton and Moore 2010: 2). The ultimate symbolic reward requires learning the established rules of the game that are influenced by individual dispositions and the overall structure of the homologous social space or field (Maton 2013: 29). Within any field contests and mechanisms exist by which social groups exert symbolic control through education. It is through a symbolic system that individual’s gain access and can ascend through the hierarchy. Access is regulated as the individual must learn what is essential to gain status and legitimacy (Maton 2013: 196). This allows for the exploration of symbolic domination and control in society through focusing on the interrelation of power, knowledge, and consciousness. This is because the focus is on how knowledge comes to be defined, contextualised, formed and what its effects are on potential knowers (Maton 2013: 28, 84).

The ‘spiritual’ education offered at Shanti Mandir operates axiologically rather than epistemologically. It relies upon the cultivation of a particular sentimentality instead of rationality and is essential for cultivating the disposition deemed essential to imbibe this knowledge. Therefore, I focus on how the individual gains (epistemological) access\(^5\) to this knowledge in order to gain legitimacy as an ‘authentic’ and ultimately legitimate knower of this tradition.

Shanti Mandir can also be contextualised as a ‘tribe’, which is a group of like-minded people clustered around a particular value system or cultural model. The social network is ordered by a code of conduct whose membership use legitimised artefacts,

\(^5\) Epistemological access is about being accepted and inducted as an insider through learning the ‘ways of being’. It determines entry and ascension into various fields of learning (Arbee 2012: 20).
idols and language to shape their ‘schema of perception’ (Strøm 2006). This schema plays an important role in representing widely held beliefs and values in not only defining but also helping to defend its identity and domain (Arbee 2012, Becher 1989, D'Andrade 1992).

I attempt to understand ‘authenticity’, invented traditions and the construction of imagined identities and communities (cf. Anderson 2006; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). I do this through appreciating how ‘traditions incorporate images, cultural ideals and longings, and enough scraps of a “real” past to meet crucial emotional needs and fulfill significant ideological functions’ (Nye 1985: 720). In part, what I am seeking to understand is what makes a tradition ‘authentic’ and ‘genuine’ as opposed to ‘fake’ and ‘invented’; and, more importantly who has the authority to arbitrate either way (Burke 1986b).

I attempt this through an exploration of the processes involved in legitimating specific cultural practices and identities related to Shanti Mandir’s tradition and their concept of the ideal ‘yogin’. As Sahlins explained, the cultural practices of various groups are ‘clearly a permutation of older forms and relationships, made appropriate to novel situations’ (1999: 406). Even though globalisation is seen as a precursive agent for marking cultural difference (Appadurai 1996), the quest, at least for the anthropologist, is to understand how the Shanti Mandir community creates ‘unique cultural space in the global scheme of things’ (Sahlins 1999: 407). Building upon Welbon (1986: 374), Larios asserted that:

Tradition is smṛti, what is "remembered"; but it is not simply a frozen, formal code from which is drawn a remembered element to meet the specifics of a given, current situation. Rather, it is a process, a style of transmitting and revealing an awareness of the transcendent structure and the discoverability anew of that structure's significance in the distinctive features of new situations, not today finding itself in yesterday, but today finding its sense — and the sense of its tomorrows — with yesterday's help.

(Larios forthcoming)
This requires emphasising the function of epistemic power to understand how knowledge can be considered real and how it has real effects and consequences for participants in the field of learning. Therefore, to understand the significance of education in social and cultural reproduction, I explore the manner in which educational practices reproduce and thereby legitimise the ideologies of power and control (Thapan and Lardinois 2006). For Bourdieu, symbolic violence is the crux of his theory of social reproduction. The violence referred to occurs when power is applied in ways that symbolically cause violence to someone’s world view and exerts pressure on them to conform to the behavioural standards expected from within the hierarchical structure. Jain (2006: 116) asserted that symbolic violence is used to create a belief in the legitimacy of domination. The institution of the guru must build a sense of legitimacy through manipulating the symbolic order to dominate his or her congregation. Therefore, this project explores the following phenomena:

1. How Shanti Mandir is situated within the transglobal yoga industry (Chapter two).
2. The legitimating practices of Shanti Mandir (Chapter three).
3. The various hierarchies and exchanges of capital (Chapter four).
4. The role of the formal pedagogical arena — satsaṅga — in the transmission of knowledge and emotion (Chapter five).
5. The role of darśana and epistemological access in cultivating the inner transformation (Chapter six).
6. The role of the guru’s ‘divine’ discourse in the setting the terms of legitimacy (Chapter seven).

As a visual complement to this thesis I have also created a 75-minute documentary film titled Ek Din Hamāre Āśram Mein (A Day in Our Ashram) (McCartney 2014a).
Throughout the thesis I refer to this visual evidence in discussions of various aspects of life in Shanti Mandir’s Gujarat ashram. While the footage is available on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZHJVkhVBpc), as an example I use the following referencing convention to refer to specific events and periods of time, (McCartney 2014a: 22 min 30 sec – 23 min 15 sec).

As is demonstrated throughout the thesis people come to Shanti Mandir to experience ‘peace’ and ‘joy’, in developing the aim of this project I explore the various ways and contexts in which the legitimate disposition is produced, marketed, legitimated, consumed and expressed. As an expression or emergent property of Shanti Mandir’s spiritual capital, the acquisition and embodiment of śānta (i.e. a śāntamūrti), is marketed, regulated and negotiated through various symbolic exchanges of capital. In any field of learning, access to the requisite knowledge and ascension within the social network’s hierarchies is often restricted. With this in mind, this project focuses on how individuals engage in symbolic struggles for social recognition in the pursuit of learning to become a śāntamūrti. It is also an attempt to understand how various groups work together to create meaning and community through various combinations of ‘bridging’ and ‘bonding’ capital (Jenkins 1992). A further aim is to go beyond a surface level circuitious explanation of this community’s habitus.

Instead of describing the disposition of Shanti Mandir based on observations of the religious practice and guided by an analysis of the guru’s discourse, I excavate to a deeper strata of being to describe, based on local ontological and epistemological theories, the internal structure of the śāntamūrti disposition.

As an NRM, which is generally defined as a religion, sect or cult that has become visible since the Second World War (Barker 2004, Mangalwadi and Enroth

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6 Chapter five demonstrates how these terms are synonymous.

7 Capital Theory is discussed in chapter one.
2005, Miller 1991, Thursby 1991); Shanti Mandir’s marketing strategy is analysed to understand how the organisation establishes itself as authentic and legitimate through the symbolic capital of empty signifiers such as ‘Vedic’ and ‘Yoga’.  

This research analyses the performance of Shanti Mandir’s religious practice, the marketing strategies of the organisation and the charismatic leader’s discourse to generate a clearer concept as to what the rulers of legitimacy are. This is done to demonstrate how social actors within the network of the Shanti Mandir ashram achieve authenticity, legitimacy and prestige. This is achieved through generating a typology of the distinct groups within the social network; by determining what is legitimate participation for each group; by clarifying which species of capital each group is able to use to negotiate entrance and ascension; how and by whom the principles of legitimate participation are set; and what the ultimate symbolic reward is.

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* See section 2.2 for more discussion of the term ‘empty signifier’.
Chapter 1 — Seeking Śānti
1.1 — Introduction

Every evening in the Shanti Mandir ashram, two queues of people form to pay respect to the various gods and gurus within the community’s pantheon. As the seekers of śānti (peace) make their way across the temple to take darśana they form what I describe as a shuffling web of devotion. As the circuitous route is completed the seeker is guided home to what Shanti Mandir describes as the ‘divinity that lays within us’ (Mandir 2014f: 1). The current living guru of Shanti Mandir, Swami Nityananda, explained that:

We come together to experience the divinity, the Truth, that dwells within us. As we sit here each day, we allow ourselves to go a bit deeper inside our own being. Some people find it fearful to go within. They don’t know what they will find, what they might experience. But the philosophy of yoga says that unless we go within our own being, we will not find the answers we are seeking in life. We always think ‘outside, outside!’ But yoga tells us, ‘No, look for it inside’. (Mandir 2014f: 1)

As the lines of worshippers grow, especially around peaks in the ritual calendar, the time required lengthens as each person prostrates in front of the statues and pictures. Respectfully placing their foreheads on the ground, people take darśana of this constellation of gods, gurus, and saints that form the nodes of piety within this particular web of belief. Due to their frailty, some elderly people may not make it to a full prostration laying on the ground face down, and, instead they invoke the grace (kṛpā) of their gods and gurus while standing humbly with heads bowed and hands, palms pressed together, in front of their hearts. At each station their hands reach out and touch the feet of statues (mūrtis) drawing back the grace of each deity sprinkling it into their hearts, eyes and on top of their heads.
The younger or more agile of the devotees may perform dexterous and complicated displays of piety. This may include full prostrations laying face down on the ground while kissing the floor with both eyes and mouth. Some individuals might include the criss-crossing of arms and legs as they rock from side to side reminiscent of scissors opening and closing like a pair of sharp bookends. Before arriving at the final destination of this circuit of divinity at the picture of Baba Muktananda, the penultimate destination is at the feet of Swami Nityananda. Nityananda is one of the successors of Baba Muktananda’s spiritual legacy.

The majority of devotees explain that the main, but not necessarily only reason they go to the ashram, is to ‘spend time with’ or ‘be in the presence of’ their guru. However, the overwhelming response to my questions about this is that they go so they can imbibe the guru’s wisdom as he is considered by the congregation to be a ‘true guru’ (satguru). A true guru, according to Shanti Mandir’s own quarterly e-publication titled Siddha Marg, ‘is established in the experience of divinity, well versed in the scriptures of his tradition, and able to give us a direct experience of that divinity which is within each one of us’ (Mandir 2012b: 5). Scripturally sanctioned, a true guru must demonstrate entitlement or eligibility (adhiṅkāra) by revealing the inner state of their own self-realisation. Having attained an ‘enlightened state’ (disposition), he or she should lead a disciplined life, living by his or her own teachings, while having the capacity to transform a disciple’s inner state of awareness (Sabharathnam, Brooks et al. 1997: 116). There are various ways of approaching divinity and ‘making sacred’. Whichever path the seeker is drawn to involves learning to embody a particular disposition and the legitimate way to be in and see the world.

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9 Aṣṭāṅga namaskāra (prostration where eight parts of the body are touching the floor — i.e., laying face down on floor with arms outstretched) or paṁcāṅga namaskāra (prostration with five parts of body touching floor — i.e., kneeling on ground and bending forward to touch forehead to floor).

10 I use the definition that a ‘disposition’ refers to the tendency of something to act in a certain manner indicating a particular mood, inclination or tendency.
Legitimacy is ultimately contingent on the context in which it is constructed. In the rest of this chapter I explain some of the salient features of the context in which Shanti Mandir operates. This moves into an introduction of the formal pedagogical arena, the cultivation of the legitimate disposition and fundamental aspects of Capital Theory, and my epistemological approach that underpins the analytical focus of the thesis. All of these concepts are discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.

1.2 — Building Context: Siddhas, Śānti and Sādhakas

The goal (sādhya) of the seeker (sādhaka) of spiritual wisdom is to gain a direct experience (vijñāna) of divinity. Dated between the third and fourth centuries CE the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad is considered to be a significant Śaiva text (Flood 2003: 86). It is a philosophical text aimed at understanding what causes suffering and how to avoid it. Inspired by this text, a principal aim of Shanti Mandir is to reduce suffering and increase peace or contentment. In verse 1.3, it is explained how siddhas, which Nityananda is considered to be by his own community, are individuals who have obtained through their spiritual practice and meditation the hidden (nigūḍhām) power (devātmaśaktim) located within themselves (Tyagisananda 1949: 17). It is believed that a feeling of indifference toward the world develops based on the revelation of knowledge.

In the Arthaśāstra, the term siddha is used to describe a religious virtuoso who is believed to be capable of doing extraordinary things. However, the Siddha Yoga and Shanti Mandir sense of this word draws from non-dual Śaivism. The Śiva Sūtra

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11 SvU 1.3 te dhyānayogānugatā apaśyan, devātmaśaktiṁ svaguṇairnigūḍhām; yāḥ kāraṇāni nikhilāni tāni, kālātmayuktānyadhitiṣṭhayekāḥ.

12 Arthaśāstra 1.11.16; 1.12.22; 1.21.24; 4.3.13, 25, 44; 4.4.3; 5.1.3; 5.2.39, 41.
provides the meaning that a siddha is freed by realising the subtle ‘inner throb’ of consciousness (Singh 2006a: 159).

As the principal exponent of the non-dualistic (Advaita) Vedānta philosophy, the medieval philosopher Śaṅkara (ca. eighth century CE), whose personality and theology is highly visible and central to Shanti Mandir’s soteriology and identity, suggests that the seeker is eligible for one of two paths — these paths are signified by an emphasis on either devotion (bhakti) or knowledge (jñāna).

The devotees of Nityananda come from as close as the adjacent village to as far away as Australasia, the Americas and Europe. Shanti Mandir is a transglobal organisation and provider of a particular yogic disposition that is distinguished by its emphasis in its promotional material on the cultivation of śānti. Central to the enculturation process is a particular aesthetic mood known as sāntarasa (quietude). The guru invites his congregation to imbibe his moral and epistemological template so that their particular web of belief can assist in the suspension of doubt and anxiety surrounding the aspirants’ subjective experience in the world. Nityananda offers a system of practices that facilitates living in this modern world with what he describes as ‘big hearts and minds’. The following response is from an email from the Vice-President of Shanti Mandir, Devayani Cable:

When Gurudev says “big heart,” he is referring to Bhagawan Nityananda’s teaching “Magnanimous heart” (Vishaal mana or Vishaal hrdaya), which means to be noble and generous. It means to not be self-centered and to consider the whole world as a family (“Vasudeva kutumbakam”). Sahrdaya is more related to aesthetics, as you also pointed out, so it doesn’t capture the same meaning. Big heart and big mind mean the same thing here. Your understanding of Saksin is correct and it is true that for one to be magnanimous, one has to be established in witness-consciousness and be neutral to all external circumstances. (Cable 2014)

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13 ŚŚū 3.13 evam sphurattāmakasaattvāśādanādeva asya yoginah, siddah svatantrabhāvah.
14 Compare MU 6.74b-75a yatsaṅkalparārtham tatsvayamevonnayenmanah vairāgyātpūrṇatāmeti mano nāśavaśānugam.
People are also drawn to the sense of community the ashram develops: of being part of a global family and network of devotees, who share a common interest in this tradition and the soteriological pursuit of salvation. According to Cable, people ‘come to experience peace… as Shanti Mandir means “Temple of Peace”. It provides a place and an atmosphere where people can come and experience inner peace and divinity’… because ‘every one seems to be running without a destination’ (Cable 2013).

1.3 — Satsaṅga — The Formal Pedagogical Arena

The formal pedagogical domain known as satsaṅga is a ritualised performance that focuses on moral edification and the transference of affect through uplifting conversation, music, dance, poetry, and contemplation. On a Durkheimian level this ritual shapes cognitions and invokes membership by charging particular symbols with emotional overtones and ritual significance allowing for the feeling of solidarity and the perception of trust (Berezin 2005: 111, Kemper 2002: 33-34).

This is done so that the senses of the audience can be internalised (prātyahāra) and create an affective emotional response (Masson and Patwardhan 1969). Promotional material from Shanti Mandir explained that it is ‘in the presence of Gurudev Nityananda through which one can find peace and contentment’ and that ‘[The] Yoga Vasiṣṭha refers to Satsaṅg [sic] as a doorway to liberation’ (Mandir 2014d). The non-arbitrary legitimating discourse rests on the assumed knowledge regarding the location of the absolute Vedāntic principle of Brahman. Nityananda said ‘We can start to really contemplate the Guru’s teaching that, “You are Consciousness. You are God. You are Truth. God dwells within you as you.” Still, something within us — the mind, the ego — stops us from directly experiencing this’ (Mandir 2010a: 4).

15 The convention for spelling the Sanskrit word includes the final /a/ vowel, i.e., satsaṅga. However, Shanti Mandir prefers to use the Hindi spelling that omits the final vowel.
Cultivated by the guru’s gaze, the aspirant embarks on the process of learning to look within themselves (sādhana). With the sensation of śānti comes an inclination to perceive that one’s pāpa (moral impurity) is replaced with punya (religious merit). Nityananda considers satsaṅga to be of two types.

I always say satsaṅ is of two types: satsaṅ is for the individual, and satsaṅ is for the group. Individual satsaṅ is what I do each and every day as my practice. Without doubt, I must do it every day. Group satsaṅ is when we gather once a week, or once every fifteen days. It’s a great way to see how stable we are, how wise we are, how much goodwill we’ve developed. (Mandir 2012d)

The practice of storytelling is central to this phenomenon of transmitting ‘truth’. Truth in this context could be summarised by the feeling of goodwill that is generated within the group. Narayan’s (1989) monograph on folk narratives in Hindu religious teaching and Schechner’s (2013) version of performance theory guide this aspect of the investigation that seeks to tease apart the finer workings of this cultural practice through a discursive exploration of metaphor and moods (i.e., the subjunctive and imperative linguistic moods and the aesthetic mood of śāntarasa). Through the context of performance, audience reception and discourse analysis the arena of satsaṅga is analysed to generate a clearer concept of just how one ought to be, what the identity or characteristics of this legitimate disposition are, how this disposition is learnt, embodied, and reproduced, and how Shanti Mandir’s institutionalised spiritual capital is created.

The manufactured peaceful aesthetic of the ashram, and the poetically styled discourses Nityananda delivers incorporates rhetorical techniques similar to any public discourse. His discourse uses the legitimacy of ‘the sages’ to suggest to the audience how to be in and see the world in a similar way to himself. This is achieved through mimetic adaptations based on the guru’s suggestions. By highlighting the panegyric passages (in praise of someone/thing) and references to certain saints and deities, in chapter seven I demonstrate the constituent features of his hegemonising discourse.
The divine space of the temple where the priests regulate rituals is where *satsaṅga* normally occurs in the ashram. Although *satsaṅga* can occur anywhere, it operates as a salvific (salvational) space regardless of location. The salvific rewards that motivate each individual’s attendance vary, but can generally be interpreted by Shanti Mandir’s offer to afford the seeker a direct experience of divinity (cf. Jacobsen 2013: 8-9). Shanti Mandir explained in their e-publication Siddha Marg that at *satsaṅga* a ‘true guru is able to give direct experience of divinity within us’; and that *satsaṅga* is where ‘we learn how we should be’ (*Mandir* 2012b: 5).

Through an interdisciplinary approach between ethnography and philology I present a novel conceptual bridge between sociology and Indology by problematising *satsaṅga* and operationalising Rasasiddhāntavāda (Doctrine of perfecting Rasa). In order to develop a sociological framework based on local theories for understanding the production, transmission, consumption and embodiment of knowledge by social agents wishing to become ‘authentic’ and ‘legitimate’ knowers within this community of practice, the specific focus is related to Śāntarasavāda (Doctrine of experiencing quietude).

In trying to understand the performative aspects and aims of *satsaṅga* I have engaged with primary Sanskrit texts on performance, perception and aesthetics to build a conceptual bridge with modern theories and methods concerning similar phenomena. This grew out of the fact that Shanti Mandir aims to provide people with an experience of śānti and does this through the performativity of the formalised pedagogical arena of *satsaṅga*. Therefore, I explore theories related to the production of śāntarasa — the particular aesthetic of experiencing quietude — to understand the legitimising discourse and practices of Shanti Mandir, thereby, demonstrating how this is central to Shanti Mandir’s identity and marketing strategy within the context of the transglobal yoga industry.
In Chapter four I provide a typology and detailed exploration of the various groups that exist within the ashram. Often, with an idealistic agenda different individuals within the community assert the various functionalist claim that ‘everyone is equal in the ashram’. One only needs to spend a little amount of time in the ashram to realise the tacit, and sometimes explicit conflicts do arise between individuals. Some, in fact, have simmered for decades. People consciously or unwittingly compete against each other for the symbolic rewards of learning to negotiate new patterns of identity based on emulating the ideal knower’s disposition. Through a combination of his divya drṣṭi (‘divine gaze’), morally edifying discourse, charismatic authority and referent power, the guru demonstrates the potential emancipatory rewards available by adhering to the discipline of the normative compliance system in the ashram. This normativising principle is based on the moral precept of virtue and morality (dharma).

While the guru sets the principles of legitimisation through his behaviour and discourse, the heritage of these principles is found within the tradition the guru claims to represent. The guru aims to demonstrate to his devotees the ontological and epistemological benefits of subscribing to and applying the knowledge he embodies, represents and transmits. As an ideal knower recognised within the Siddha and Smarta traditions it is the aim of the guru to use his ‘cultivated’ gaze to bring together the variegated dispositions of his devotees. This is done so they can share in his utopic vision built upon an ‘ideal environment for seekers to immerse themselves in a traditional way of spiritual life, as passed down from the ancient sages’ (Mandir

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16 Referent power refers to the power an individual seems to have that entices people to become like them imitating their behaviour, mannerisms and dress. Charisma refers to an individual’s ability to attract people towards them.

17 Smarta Brahmins are a particular Hindu sect discussed in chapter two.
2015a). However, at the same time, the dispositions of each group are distinguished and kept apart from the others so they can perform the various tasks required in the community.

The normative process of socialising actors into the habitus also involves the making of distinction. The disparate groups merge through being socialised into the general habitus of the ashram but diverge into the separate groups through the different gazes operating in the field (Maton 2013: 126-151). These gazes are discussed in more detail in chapter six. The devotees overwhelmingly informed me that they take *darśana* (Hindi — *darśan lenā* — to see or take a look) because they believe it will assist them providing support and protection against a modern and secular world. Most devotees believe that ‘modernity’ and ‘Western values’ have eroded tradition, meaning, morality and an affective sense of community for sterile profiteering and temporary satisfaction of desire (Eck 1985: 126-51, Hacking 1986, Pinkney 2008, 2013). Part of this religious enculturation includes learning to appreciate and imbibe what Nityananda refers to as the prescribed ‘antivirus’.

Viruses are of many kinds. Sādhanā, satsaṅg, practice, study, and contemplation all serve as our antivirus, if you understand what I mean. Often we read ‘Check that your antivirus is up to date.’ The moment a virus attacks — it could be from your satsaṅg friends, family friends, your own mind — if your antivirus software is out of date for whatever reason, a dissolution of śraddha —, of faith, occurs. (Mandir 2011i: 2)

It is worth noting the particular use of metaphors used by Nityananda here. Even though there is a collective disaffected feeling towards the homogenising effects of economic rationalism that seems intent on limiting diverse cultural representations to shallow expressions of consumption (Black 2009), the use of such images like ‘antivirus’, ‘software’ and ‘virus attacks’ shows how these biotechnological symbols are manipulated by the guru to create a conceptual bridge allowing audiences to grasp

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18 This is discussed more in section 6.3.
sometimes abstract information. This is a prime example of the guru’s epistemic capital, which affords the opportunity to share in the guru’s divyā drṣṭi.

This vision enables sharing in the possibility of an alternate utopian reality, which the guru creates through cultivating the belief within his devotees that he is a true guru ‘established in the experience of divinity, well versed in the scriptures of his tradition, and able to give us a direct experience of that divinity which is within each one of us’ (Mandir 2012b: 5). As siddhas, both Muktananda and Nityananda are considered equivalent to God and able to provide immediate experiences of divinity (Jain 2014: 51). While the spiritual aspirant aims to imbibe such an opportunity they must learn to emulate the guru’s disposition, because the structuring nature of the discourse asserted that the individual must develop him or herself through adherence to discipline and engagement with the practices of the tradition. Nityananda explained how:

our mind won’t have become subtle enough to be established in the experience of oneness. And of course the mind very easily forgets and wanders off. So we come to satsaṅga to remind ourselves. We return again and again to that space, the awareness that all is Consciousness. Through steady practice, we become imbued with that experience. This is what Adiśaṅkarā, one of the first sages of vedānta, calls aparokṣānubhūtī an experience seen through one’s own eyes rather than through the eyes or mind of another. (Mandir 2011f: 2)

This leads into a brief discussion of the legitimate disposition that I develop in more detail in the later chapters. For now it is worth providing an overview in order to help the reader appreciate the theoretical developments that follow.

1.5 — The Silent Witness, the True Connoisseur and the Embodier of Peace

In this section I formally outline my argument regarding the legitimate disposition that I develop later in the thesis. One aim of this thesis is to create a synthesis of local and
non-local theories of knowledge and perception. I will briefly explain the following three concepts and how they relate to my model of Shanti Mandir’s legitimate yogic disposition. In an attempt to provide more than a shallow description of the disposition based on an analysis of the external practices the community engages in, I have sought to excavate deeper into the architecture of this disposition by exploring what the internal structure of this disposition might consist of. I assert that it consists of the following two concepts: 1) the Silent Witness (sākṣin) and 2) the True Connoisseur (sahṛdaya). The third concept, i.e., the Embodier of Peace (śāntamūrti) can be understood as the organising principle. Throughout the thesis these concepts are referred to in the context of Shanti Mandir’s own discourse and marketing strategy.

The sākṣin is the foundation of Advaita Vedānta’s jñāna (knowledge)-yoga epistemology and, therefore, fundamental to Shanti Mandir’s legitimate disposition (Chatterjee 1982, 2003, Fort 1984, Gupta 1998). Within a legal framework a sākṣini is a witness who testifies. However, within the yogic epistememe the sākṣin is also considered an epistemological tool and also a ‘field of awareness’ where phenomena are experienced (Chatterjee 1982, Fort 1984). Somewhat similar to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, which was designed to create an epistemic break or, third-way, overriding the epistemic blind spots present in both structuralism and phenomenology, the sākṣin constitutes a similar epistemic break drawing the spectator into a relatively similar state to what Bourdieu refers to as ‘participant objectification’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). In the same way, the attitude of the witnessing approach (sākṣibhū) or gaze of the ‘disinterested witness’, as this term is quite often translated into involves the practice or method of taking an abstract step back to observe one’s own life as if it were like watching a movie that one does not identify with. Instead of observing the field directly, the seer (draṣṭṛ) also observes one’s own reactions, biases and shortcomings to the act of observing the field. Thus the agent’s own subjectivity is objectified and we arrive at a similar state comparable to participant objectification.
Sociology is ‘first and foremost, a way of thinking about the human world’ that is capable of generating sensitivity towards ourselves and others through learning to understand the shared universality of the spectrum of human experiences (Bauman 1990: 8). Sociology and sociological thinking helps the cause of freedom aiming to serve humanity through ‘the promotion of mutual understanding and tolerance as a paramount condition of shared freedom’ (Bauman 1990: 232). Bourdieu also claims that ‘in considering our present decisions, we are forever influenced by our past developments, but he does give us a chance for transcendence. Through knowledge, we can become conscious and aware, capable of overcoming our past to become completely free movers’ (Chen 2011: 4). I argue that this epistemological approach of sociology related to the idea of gaining freedom through knowledge is parallel to the aims of Shanti Mandir that we ‘May we all experience freedom within ourselves. May we all share that freedom, that wisdom, with everyone’ (Mandir 2011a: 7). I make this point explicit due to the consistent narrative of suspicion regarding sociology that I encountered within Shanti Mandir.

Kersenboom (2007) takes this epistemological approach one step further discussing the possibility of ‘participant participation’, which one could argue, is the next step on from participant objectification. This approach is defined by the invitation of carnal sociology that involves fully engaging with the practices within the social world of the community being investigated, while also being aware of one’s own limitations and biases (cf. Crossley 1995, Csordas 1990, 1993, 2009a, Manning 2009, Wacquant 2004, 2006). This, however, does not include ‘going native’ and forgetting about the research objectives (Narayan 1993).

As someone who has spent several years observing and interacting with the Shanti Mandir community I have come to realise that while the people involved do have noble intentions for the greater good, the personal soteriological aims are equally strong. Generally they are the principle motivating forces for initially getting involved.
People who become involved with the development/charity work of Shanti Mandir do so after they have met the guru and have become influenced by his charisma and referent power that urges aspirants to become like him and emulate his disposition. While part of the yogic habitus is steeped in developing a detached attitude of a witness (sākṣīn), part of the ashram game involves presenting one’s actions as disinterested acts of virtue as a strategy to assuage the negative social consequences of being too self absorbed by one’s own ‘spiritual’ development. This goes equally as much for the organisation as it does for the individuals. In the spirit of karma yoga espoused in the Bhagavad Gītā one should have no attachment to the fruits of one’s actions and instead serve selflessly.\(^1\)

The sahṛdaya concept is discussed in greater detail in chapter five, so the current explanation will remain brief. The essential characteristics of the sahṛdaya involve becoming sensitive to the literary artefact of śāntarasa and more compassionate towards other people. As the literal translation of sahṛdaya is ‘with heart’ it becomes clearer to appreciate how and why I use this term, especially as it is central to the performative and literary traditions of South Asia, upon which I argue satsaṅga is undoubtedly built.

With the aim of excavating deeper into the social relations of knowledge and particular dispositions to avoid the circular process of simply describing the disposition based on the observed practices of a community; demonstrated throughout this thesis, I argue based on analysis of the official discourse of Shanti Mandir that we conceptualise its particular legitimate yogic disposition as a fundamental embodiment of a peaceful disposition, which I refer to as the śāntamūrti. I should note that I have never come across this term in Shanti Mandir’s literature or heard it mentioned in satsaṅga. However, I believe that it encapsulates at least at a theoretical level, a local

\(^1\) See BG 3.9.
term that expresses the goal of embodying śānti, which I have already successfully demonstrated is central to Shanti Mandir’s goals and practices. The argument I put forth is that in order to become a śāntamūrti, the individual must cultivate the epistemological (sākṣin) and the ontological (sahṛdaya) components to achieve the Siddha tradition’s goal, and primary salvific good within the competitive transglobal yoga industry, which is a permanent inner transformation of the aspirant’s disposition based on emulating the guru’s disposition.

In the next section I provide a brief overview of Capital Theory and how it pertains to this research by exploring the different types of capital and how they relate to Shanti Mandir.

1.6 — Methods, Epistemology & Theory

In this section I first discuss the methodological implications regarding ethics and the epistemological challenges involved in becoming a reflexive social scientist. This is followed by a discussion of the four main methods I used for data gathering and analysis. Namely, a grounded approach combined with ethnography, discourse analysis and Legitimation Code Theory (LCT). While LCT is considered an analytical method it is also a practical theory, and for this reason I discuss it in detail in the theory section.

1.6.1 — Methodology

Shah (2006), Srivastava (1969), Srinivas (1952, 1977), Tripathi (2007) and Weber (1967) have been influential in helping to develop an analytical and methodological framework for this interdisciplinary project. Srinivas’ explication of the processes involved in Sanskritisation is seminal in understanding how various groups use the symbolic capital of the Sanskrit episteme. Where there are inherent flaws in the this concept it is still valuable to consider its effect on South Asian society (Charsley 1998, Jaffrelot 2000). Parry’s own work on prestige and exchange, which is also heavily influenced by Mauss and Dumont, has helped me better understand these phenomena (1986, 1998). While scholars such as King, Shah, Marriott and Deshpande have been influential in giving me the confidence to consider the possibilities of building my own conceptual framework and methods to suit this particular enquiry.

I begin by assessing some of the methodological problems I faced during fieldwork. Following this I will explore some of the methodological approaches I have adopted, either partially or peripherally. I have tried to engage with local and non-local theories to better prepare myself based upon Bourdieu’s assertion that ‘one cannot grasp the most profound logic of the social world unless one becomes immersed in the specificity of an empirical reality’ (1993a: 271). The researcher is challenged to become immersed in and embody the world of practice in order to be able to ‘walk in their shoes’ so to speak. Throughout the research I have moved between the poles of ‘objective’ outsider and ‘subjective’ insider generally facing criticism for either being too objective from the community of faith or too subjective from the academy. Narayan (1993) explained the difficulty of this deft balancing act when discussing the potential dangers for the researcher who may come to identify more with the object of analysis than as a researcher by becoming too ‘native’. There are also ethical implications to consider of being true to oneself and the community being investigated through not misrepresenting one’s endeavour. I have moved over time from being an
individual interested in participating in struggles for recognition within this community to one interested in classifying these struggles beyond the dichotomy of inside/outside and blind attachment/partial lucidity (cf. Bourdieu, Altglas et al. 2010: 2, 5).

I have developed rapport over the past several years within the Shanti Mandir community, however, my current identity as a researcher has also caused several problems directly related to distrust or ambivalence towards academic enquiries. While I have straddled the worlds of the insider and outsider it was with trepidation that I conducted this research. Was I too close to this community? Or, was I too far removed? How would my history with Shanti Mandir affect my approach and results? What about my own personal ‘struggle’ for symbolic capital and legitimacy? Over the past fifteen years I have attended public discourses (satsaṅga) with the guru in Australia and India. I have attended and helped facilitate several Shanti Mandir events. Due to this research project my position moved, in the eyes of some individuals, towards more of an outsider. As a researcher one is meant to be critical during the analytical process. This was often misrecognised by the community as an attempt to be negative and to redundantly engage in an ‘intellectual’ pursuit that was too often considered by several devotees as ‘limited to the lower mind’. My ‘intellectual’ pursuit certainly affected my standing in the community in both positive and negative ways. People either were pleased with my research, threatened by it, or completely ambivalent. I would say that most were ambivalent.

The methodology offered by Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology insists that theory must grow out of empirical research in a grounded approach (Birks and Mills 2011, Bourdieu 1977, 1990, Willig 2001). While guided by an embryonic form of the research question that focused on Sanskrit, power and hierarchy, I preferred to allow the analytical framework to grow out of the data that emerged through the processes of axial and selective coding (Benaquisto 2008). Axial coding is the stage of analysis
where concepts, narratives and ultimately categories begin to stand out as one sifts through the data. This is refined through the second phase where the data urges the refining or focusing of the questions being asked. The process of theoretical sampling requires identifying and pursuing clues that arise during analysis (Birks and Mills 2011: 69). I found the idea of entering the field with the constraints of a particular theory or method potentially limiting. Not to say I would have preferred to go in blind having engaged with little or no conceptual frameworks or methods, but rather, I hoped to remain open to possibilities being guided by intuition as much as logic and empirical results.

Bourdieu asserted that ‘the important thing is to be able to objectify one’s relation to the object’ (1993: 53). This involves developing a reflexive sociological method (cf. Ashmore 1989, Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, Christie and Maton 2011, Maton 2003). My reasoning is that I have an interest in collaborative approaches that respect local people's values and goals. I seek to include the voices of the people I have met during my research, allowing for their agency to be expressed, and not simply make them an objective analytical target. Here, I outline this methodological approach that seeks to go beyond focusing on a reflexive analysis of a social relation to knowledge, and instead, also include the epistemic relation.20

Being ‘reflexive’ means understanding how the researchers’ analytic focus positions themselves in relation to their object of study. Building upon Nightingale and Cromby (1999: 228), Willig explained that:

Reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher’s contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining ‘outside of’ one’s subject matter while conducting research. Reflexivity, then, urges us ‘to explore the ways in which a researcher’s involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research.’ (Willig 2001: 10)

20 These concepts are discussed below in section 2.3.
The researcher is part of the social world and must adopt a critical attitude to one’s own practice. By making one’s position explicit the taken for granted values and assumptions of the researcher are opened up to scrutiny making the validity of one’s own knowledge claims open to the same critical analysis and scrutiny as the research itself (Antonacopoulou and Tsoukas 2002, Carolan 2003). The researcher becomes part of the social world and must adopt a critical attitude to his or her practice. Maton (2003) laments the under-theorised nature of being reflexive in a practical sense and how this term is used as a status symbol and hegemonic tool within intellectual fields. In other words it is easy to say ‘I am a reflexive social scientist’ but what does that come to mean exactly? The linguistic turn that came to influence fieldwork in anthropology and the production of texts seeks to highlight the mutuality of the fieldwork and informant by privileging a focus on the social relation to knowledge (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). This refers to how the researcher is relationally positioned within a particular social field (Behar 1996, Clifford 1986, Deshpande 2001b, Gupta and Ferguson 1997). However, discussed below, we see that this has implications for considering one’s epistemic relation to the object regardless of post-modernist claims to the requisite need to deconstruct grand narratives (Rabinow 1984).

Building upon a Durkheimian perspective of increasing divisions of labour, Bourdieu’s relatively autonomous “worlds” enable a visualisation of variegated and overlapping social fields of activity (Bourdieu 1994: 73). From such a perspective a sophisticated analysis of social positionality is possible based on an individual’s relational position within various fields of practice and their awareness of such a position (Maton 2003). Willig explained the two types of reflexivity as personal and epistemological.

Personal reflexivity involves reflecting upon the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research. It also involves thinking about how the research may
have affected and possibly changed us, as people and as researchers. Epistemological reflexivity requires us to engage with questions such as: How has the research question defined and limited what can be ‘found’? How has the design of the study and the method of analysis ‘constructed’ the data and the findings? (Willig 2001: 10)

Maton (2003) identifies three types of reflexivity commonly applied in social science: 1) Sociological reflexivity focuses on the social relation of knowledge rather than its epistemic relation by focusing on the subject’s (i.e., the researcher’s) relation to the object rather than the object’s relation to knowledge; 2) Individualistic reflexivity promotes a humanist bias acknowledging the social and cultural positioning of the researcher ultimately has consequences upon data collection and interpretation; 3) Narcissistic reflexivity focuses on the author to the exclusion of other possibilities.

At different stages throughout this thesis I engage with these different types of reflexive writing. As someone generally accepted and perceived as a member of the community, but also someone who has dual academic and personal identities, I use the auto-ethnographic method of *autobiographical reflection* to explain my own approach and journey through the research project sitting somewhere between a complete member text and personal narrative (Ellis 2008). While in other sections I try to avoid the hermeneutic narcissism and symbolic violence that can result from the observer’s objectifying gaze by employing the voices of others to tell the story of the observed, while attempting at least to deny my own hand in the authorship of the constructed world of meaning.

The overcoming of the ever-narrowing circularity of one’s ‘objectivity’ is the epistemological break Bourdieu sought to prevail over with his emphasis on epistemic reflexivity (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, Maton 2003). This is a valuable model for exploring teaching, education and research not only from a researcher’s perspective but for also learning to understand the epistemic community and pursuits of Shanti Mandir. Shanti Mandir can also be contextualised as a ‘tribe’, which is a group of like-minded
people clustered around a particular value system or cultural model. The social network is ordered by a code of conduct whose membership use legitimised artefacts, idols and language to shape their ‘schema of perception’ (Strøm 2006). This schema plays an important role in representing widely held beliefs and values in not only defining but also helping to defend its identity and domain (Arbee 2012, Becher 1989, D'Andrade 1992). The legitimate identity is also dependent upon the methods and praxis recruited that ultimately cause introspection and personal internal growth of the individual. I will return to this model in chapter six as a way to explore the pedagogical domain of satsaṅga. Arbee explained the role epistemological access has in allowing entry and ascension into various fields of learning, whether they are academic or otherwise:

Being accepted as an insider to a discipline thus involves more than familiarity with its knowledge base; it also requires acquisition of the disciplinary values and ‘ways of being’. Acceptance as insiders to an academic tribe is important not just for academics but also for students; epistemological access involves being inducted into a discipline and taking on its characteristic ways of knowing and being. And because the social and epistemological aspects of disciplines are in practice so tightly bound together, lecturers often interpret students ‘non-compliance’ with disciplinary social norms as cognitive deficit (Ylijoki, 2000). (Arbee 2012: 20)

Arbee (2012: 38) refers to Webb, Schirato et al. (2005: xi) who explain that each field has a doxa (a set of core values and discourses) that articulates fundamental principles as inherently true and necessary. During struggles for recognition and accumulation of symbolic capital individuals and researchers alike attempt to impose their limited perspective on a field finding a necessary niche of ‘truth’ to distinguish themselves. The angst of the reflexive researcher urges one to consider the very real possibility that one’s imposition is limited and is merely reflecting one’s own biased standpoint. Through objectifying the relation of knowledge, the work of Bourdieu and Maton suggest another possible approach that looks at both the social and epistemic relations. Three principal biases in knowledge claims include the social origins of the researcher;
the researcher’s position in a field; and the intellectualist bias that results from viewing the world as a spectacle (Maton 2003).

To acknowledge cognitive interests and epistemic capital requires reinstating the significance of the epistemic relation to the production of knowledge, alongside (rather than instead of) its objectifying and social relations. This implies assuming social realist notions of a world independent of fallible knowledge and a focus on the relations between knowledge and these objects of study, in terms of the procedures required to access and achieve practical adequacy to this world. (Maton 2003: 62)

Sociology is ‘first and foremost, a way of thinking about the human world’ that is capable of generating sensitivity towards ourselves and others through learning to understand the shared universality of the spectrum of human experiences (Bauman 1990: 8). Sociology and sociological thinking helps the cause of freedom aiming to serve humanity through ‘the promotion of mutual understanding and tolerance as a paramount condition of shared freedom’ (Bauman 1990: 232). The invitation to become more reflexive involves the concept of participant objectification (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Regarding the epistemological claims of ethnographic research, participant objectification is explained as the distrustful empiricist’s compromise.

Bourdieu suggests that if it is not possible to think as one’s research subjects think, it may be possible to (a) imagine oneself doing what they do in the visible world of practice, and/or (b) extrapolate from how one’s own social world is produced as a practical accomplishment to the social world(s) of others. (Jenkins 1992: 116)

Bourdieu also claims that ‘in considering our present decisions, we are forever influenced by our past developments, but he does give us a chance for transcendence. Through knowledge, we can become conscious and aware, capable of overcoming our past to become completely free movers’ (Chen 2011: 4). I argue that this epistemological approach of sociology related to the idea of gaining freedom through knowledge is parallel to the aims of Shanti Mandir that we ‘May we all experience freedom within ourselves. May we all share that freedom, that wisdom, with everyone’
I make this point explicit due to the consistent narrative of suspicion regarding sociology that I encountered within Shanti Mandir.

**Ethnography**

During fieldwork I principally used a mixed methodology of ethnographic participant-observation, participation-participation and video/text analysis. I have also been inspired by analytical methodology of ‘Ethno-Indology’ that seeks to bring together text and the context within which various phenomena operate. I also relied on unstructured interviews and exchanges of email to gather information and verify my thoughts and the thoughts of my interlocutors. I conducted twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork in Shanti Mandir’s primary ashram in Gujarat, India. Within the global network of Shanti Mandir devotees this ashram is known as the Magod ashram because it is located within the larger village of Magod. I have also drawn upon the last seventeen years of experience with the Shanti Mandir community and the prior field work I conducted in 2009 (McCartney 2011). Due to the established rapport with Shanti Mandir, I decided to investigate these phenomena from within the confines of an organisation and location that I already knew. Instead of trying to find another potential field site from which to conduct research that would have required me to build rapport with a new community.

Social network analysis offers a way of focusing observations on the interactional links between people within a local area involved in regular face-to-face interactions with each other and engaging in the mutual exchange of rights and obligations. Involvement in close-knit networks came to be seen as a key factor in the development and reinforcement of communicative norms, conventions and values. In discussing Gumperz (1982: 42), Martin-Jones explained that:

> Whenever networks of relationships reflect long-term interpersonal cooperation in the performance of regular tasks and the pursuit of shared goals, they favour the creation of behavioural routines and communicative conventions that become conventionally
The symbolic link that Sanskrit has in determining the status of knowers of these conventions spreads to the concept of in-groups and out-groups. Gal explained that language choice influences ‘the shape of social networks, on the status speakers want to claim, and on the cultural association between linguistic varieties and social groups’ (1979: 17). In chapter four, I map out the hierarchical structures of this community to determine the relationship between status, rank and influence with regard to access and ascension through the social network.

I wanted to include as many perspectives as I could in order ‘to build up “a picture of the pictures” of the social reality that is being studied’ (Barker 2002). As I am conversational in Hindi, Sanskrit and English, while also able to understand Gujarati, I had initially, and rather naively, thought I would spend my days sitting with people and finding out their life histories, motivations for joining the community, and their general perspective on many things related to spirituality, religion, mobility, politics, yoga, etc. Unfortunately this happened with only a few individuals. I soon realised that even though the ashram is generally a peaceful place, this does not preclude the reality that the majority of people are kept busy throughout the day performing either their personal religious practice or engaged in some sevā yoga (volunteer service to maintain the ashram). The opportunities to sit and chat with even casual visitors was challenging because of the daily schedule, because if followed completely, it leaves very little time to be idle.

The ideology asserted that serving the guru is a ‘divine’ task that leads to salvation. This makes it challenging to conduct fieldwork in the ideal manner one might have read about in a textbook prior to entering the field. Instead of long conversations over several cups of tea and only a microphone between my interviewee and myself, I
had to radically alter part of my methodology that involved devising a handful of questions or themes for each day. In terms of sampling I was fortunate in the sense that I had a mostly captive group of people who rarely left the ashram compound. I tried to speak to as broad a cross-section of the community during my field work. With these questions I would then wander around the ashram and have a brief chat, weaving into the conversation my questions, with as many people as I could to get a general sense of the feelings people had for a particular topic. For instance, in the lead up to the 2012 elections, it provided a contextual camouflage to ask questions pertaining to people’s political affiliations. As best as I could I would keep a mental note of individual responses and, when necessary, I would scribble some notes between moving from one interlocutor to the next.

Even though it was well known within the community that I was there conducting research, the site of pen and paper or video camera and other recording equipment would immediately inflect the opportunity to gather data. Existentially my identity seemed fluid. The site of a camera, microphone, notepad and pen would morph me into an academic and out of the assumed role of a devotee. For the first two months I did not openly use any form of recording equipment until I felt that my presence would no longer cause too much disturbance. I also participated in as much of the daily schedule as possible, which consists of a majority of time spent in the temple engaged either in collective recitation of Sanskrit texts, collective silent contemplation, or collective silent reception of a public discourse generally given by the guru or another charismatic Figure. After these episodes of religious practice, people generally eat and then take rest. Outside of the religious practice, people are expected to participate through the routinised opportunities to engage in sevā. Even participating in sevā myself meant that I was not always able to focus on the research and make the time profitable from a research perspective. The problem was that if I was working alongside others in the orchards or helping to prepare the food for the next meal, there was
difficulty in keeping track of the conversation as we were focused on the task at hand. After lunch, most people retreated to their rooms. Only a few times throughout the day were there more opportunities such as at afternoon tea to engage with people in a relaxed manner.

**Methodological Approach to Analysing Discourse**

I take inspiration from *Wissenssoziologische Diskursanalyse* (Keller 2005). This includes analysing the variegated processes involved in the social construction of knowledge (i.e., production, circulation, transformation). This comprises the analysis of the symbolic order on institutional and organisational levels and arenas as well as the effects of such an ordering in different social fields of practice. My focus also draws upon the Foucauldian paradigm of analysing discourses within arenas of meaning production and practices of power and knowledge (Keller 2005). This perspective also covers the implication of social actors in the performance and ‘reception’ of discourse.

In order to understand the complex ways in which knowledge and power are (re)produced I explore in chapter six contemporary and pre-modern concepts related to performance and audience reception.

Bourdieu understands discourses as ‘structured and structuring structures’ that work to legitimise certain positions and identities while making others illegitimate (Bourdieu 1990: 277). Laclau’s position on discourse theory suggests that a hegemonic relation occurs when a certain particularity assumes the representation of a totality entirely incommensurable with it (2014: 6). The instrumentality of discourse is defined:

as identifiable ensembles of cognitive and normative devices. These devices are produced, actualised, performed and transformed in social practices (not necessary but often of language use) at different social, historical and geographical places. They unfold in time as well as they are embedded in historical contexts. Discourses in this sense constitute social realities of phenomena. At least they compete in the everlasting struggle over symbolic order. (Keller 2005)
Inspired by Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, Bourdieu's idea that the role of language is not as a mirror reflecting a pre-given reality, but as a *practice* that makes the world or at least determines how we understand it. This is central to understanding the way in which the guru’s discourse is involved in the recontextualisation of knowledge and serves as the primary focus of chapter eight. Through the suggestions the guru makes regarding the possibility of an alternate reality based on a ‘Vedic’, ‘ancient’ and ‘eternal’ context, we can begin to understand just what the role of language is in the creation of imagined alternate worlds and sociolinguistic utopias. As Keller suggests these worlds are:

realised by social action, i.e. by social actors' practices and activities. Actors need motivation to enter a discursive field, but we should neither imagine them as complete masters of a singular discourse nor as transcendental subjects beyond their concrete historical contexts. Social actors are embedded in the historical a priori of established symbolic orders and institutionalised power/knowledge-regimes. (Keller 2005)

Based on Laclau, Larios (forthcoming) employs the concept of the *empty signifier* to problematise the concept of the deepest strata of Hindu thought, i.e., the Vedas (Laclau 1996). Larios argues that the ‘Veda’ is devoid of distinct meaning. As an empty signifier, Veda or Vedic are term used in competitions for legitimacy by various actors within the trans-global yoga industry to accumulate symbolic capital related to ‘true’ knowledge and related corporal competency. Larios asserted that during struggles over alternative, multiple and sometimes contradictory representations, the contingent nature of the field’s heterogenous elements are stabilized through the accretion of identity around the two empty signifiers, namely ‘Yoga’ and ‘Veda’. Grenfell and James (2004) discussed how the principles of legitimation establish an orthodoxy or doxa based on what is thinkable and unthinkable, expressible and inexpressible and valued or not. This builds upon the Symbolic Interactionist tradition that describes the ways in which
proverbs, moral maxims and wise sayings function to generate legitimacy through symbolic processes that produce a temporal cohesiveness and a value system (cf. Berger and Luckmann 1967: 92-104). The sociology of knowledge approach of analysing public discourses aims to understand the social construction and representation of collective action or problems. I employ this method to assist with understanding how particular concepts eventually become habituated, reciprocated and institutionalised into Shanti Mandir’s symbolic universe, and how such statements are used to legitimise an institutional structure through a collective and plausible web of belief. In order to do this I adopted the methodology of corpus linguistics.

**AntConc and Corpus Linguistics**

To assist with the generation of meaningful and productive data I have relied upon the concordance program Antconc (Anthony 2015). A concordancer is a computer program that allows for voluminous amounts of linguistic data to be sorted in various ways by retrieving alphabetical word lists and key phrases. This powerful tool enables the efficient analysis of the guru’s discourse and the devotee’s responses. This assists in the axial coding of data. I have transcribed and digitised several hours of the guru’s public talks either from video published by Shanti Mandir on their YouTube channel and from footage I personally recorded, as well as from interviews conducted or emails received. The benefit of manually entering data is that I was able to generate a more intimate relationship with the guru’s discourse. This enabled the production of a manually derived concordance that paved the way for later thematically based searching using the computer program.

1.6.2 — Theoretical Framework
Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this project I have relied upon several theories. Some of these analytical concepts are used throughout the thesis in different chapters, while others are used in specific locations. The main theoretical approach has developed out of the Social Realist School of philosophy. As I want to understand how legitimacy is produced through knowledge production within specific fields of practice, I was attracted specifically to LCT due to its focus on understanding the transcultural flow of knowledge within the social field of learning Shanti Mandir creates, essentially as a neo-Hindu inspired education provider within the trans-global yoga industry (Altglas 2014, Jain 2014, Singleton 2010, Singleton and Goldberg 2014).

The Social Realist Approach

The social realist approach aims to identify the different forms knowledge takes and how it effects learning by also considering the knowers involved (Arbee 2012, Maton and Moore 2010). The social realist school of philosophy understands knowledge is social and that the level of sociality within a field determines, to a large extent, how knowledge is learnt or made accessible and insists that knowledge is real and has real effects on knowers (Vorster and Quinn 2012). Social realism sits between the idealist and empiricist perspectives. Idealism believes an objective external reality does not exist. While the empiricist perspective holds the position that objective reality exists independent of us and is only knowable via our senses. Positivism has assumed the position as the principal model of knowledge calling for a direct and unmediated sensory experience of power devoid of any social or historical context (Moore 2009: 2). Social realism aims to go beyond the false dichotomy or ‘epistemological dilemma’ that positivist absolutism or constructivist relativism tend towards choosing between analysing either the ‘formal and epistemological properties of knowledge or the play of power among actors in the social contexts of its production’ (Maton and Moore 2010: 10).
5). Approaches based on social realism acknowledge that as a social product knowledge is fallible. However, an objective reality exists nonetheless and, so, the purpose of knowledge is to reveal and understand objective reality that exists independent of ourselves. Knowledge is considered to be socially mediated and constructed, therefore, our understanding and representations of it are contingent upon power and privilege (Wheelahan 2010: 97).

Conducting research requires us to make assumptions about the world (i.e., ontology). We are also required to make assumptions about the way we have come to understand the world (i.e., epistemology). The social realist approach has grown out of critical realism. This approach was chosen to assist with one of the main goals of this research, which is to understand the ontological and epistemological assumptions that Shanti Mandir assert through its legitimising discourse. The reason for choosing a social-critical realist approach is that it offers a middle path between the extremes of positivism, post-modernism, post-structuralism and constructivism. These approaches often background and obfuscate the role of knowledge in favour of focusing on the play, machinations or external interests and structures of power relations (Madsen 2013: 17). This approach generally undervalues focusing on knowledge as an actual artefact and misses out on the opportunity to fully grasp the social nature of knowledge and its production in fields of learning. This is due to the relativisation of knowledge and a focus on the interests of those groups who construct it instead of focusing on the intrinsic properties internal to cultural fields of learning and knowledge. Whereas, social realism considers the ‘sociality’ of knowledge foregrounding knowledge centre-stage as an object of analysis because knowledge is considered to be ‘real, differentiated and possessing emergent structural qualities’ (Maton and Moore 2010: 7). Therefore, the social realist focus is instead on the properties of knowledge-producing fields of social practice (Maton and Moore 2010: 5). As this social realist approach has not yet been
applied to the arena of religious pedagogy or spiritual education, in this regard, this research presents a novel investigation.

There is a social character within any field of knowledge production that occurs within specific socio-historical contexts. Knowledge is neither merely relative nor absolute. Instead, it is often at odds with alternative versions that are based on an absolute and essentialised subjective representation of ‘truth’. This articulation of the neo-Hindu concept of ‘universal law’ (sanātana dharma), as Shanti Mandir translates it, demonstrates how this term is used to assert its legitimacy and relation to a specific socio-historical context.

**Legitimation Code Theory**

LCT provides a means for ‘revealing and contesting the mechanisms by which social groups exert symbolic control through education, thereby regulating access, ascension and what is considered to be essential to gain status and legitimacy’ (Maton 2013: 196). LCT is a continually developing multidimensional theoretical framework, a continually developing conceptual toolkit and an analytic methodology. It is sociological rather than philosophical. Its strength lays in its ability to analyse actor’s dispositions, practices and contexts. The strategies individuals engage with shape the ‘rules of the game’, which are influenced by the interactions between an individual’s disposition and the current structure of the field (Maton 2013). LCT ‘enables knowledge practices to be seen, their organizing principles to be conceptualized, and their effects to be explored’ (Maton 2013: 17). Regarding the social nature of knowledge production, some social groups are afforded greater access to knowledge, which allows them better access to opportunities, wealth and status. Moore (2009: 3) asks the questions, ‘What is knowledge and how is it made?’ ‘How is it transmitted and acquired and, so, distributed in society?’ When discussing knowledge and relations to it from a sociological perspective, the discussion
often becomes politically and ideologically charged, instead of focusing on the relationship between knowledge and social inequality. The benefit of adopting LCT as a conceptual framework is that it allows for a deeper scrutiny of the field and the role and form that knowledge takes within the field. Maton (2013: 15) refers to ‘knowledge economies’ that are based on the creation, circulation and consumption of information.

Knowledge forms a significant portion of the intangible goods of salvation that Shanti Mandir offers within the broader context of operating as a ‘divine enterprise’ within a religious/spiritual economy (McKean 1996, Stark and Finke 2000). The field of knowledge production and learning that this research focuses on is what Shanti Mandir refers to as the yoga of self-knowledge. Shanti Mandir assert that their aim is to ‘promote the use of such knowledge toward creating a society in which the values implicit in Satyam Shivam Sundaram (that which is true, auspicious, and beautiful) are foremost in human thought and behaviour’ (Mandir 2015z).

LCT builds upon Basil Bernstein’s Code Theory and Pierre Bourdieu’s Field Theory. Both theories place emphasis on different relations to knowledge. Code theory emphasises the translation of meanings across epistemic relations. Field theory emphasises the translation of meanings across social relations (Maton 2013: 199). LCT operationalises Bourdieu conceptualising what the organising principles of dispositions, practices and fields are through its legitimation codes. These codes act as a type of currency that is used to structure the field and determine relations between individuals. These codes represent an abstract interpretation of an exchange rate mechanism between these currencies or what comes to be considered legitimate behaviour (Maton 2013: 37). Social fields of practice and learning can be conceptualised as being shaped by the dominant (legitimate) codes. The investigation of social fields using legitimation codes assists in the determination of possibilities for various individuals. The use of specialisation codes (explained in chapter five) enables the identification of the different
groups within the ashram and how they operate to legitimise their own positions.

**Principles of Legitimation**

The principles of legitimation are the relations between the arbitrary and non-arbitrary dimensions of knowledge. Moore and Maton explain the arbitrary dimension is the way knowledge is related to historically situated social relations of power such as positivism, while the non-arbitrary dimension of knowledge is irreducible to such social relations of power like idealism and relativism (Maton 2006, Maton and Moore 2010). Essentially it is more difficult, if not impossible to critique, qualify or quantify the non-arbitrary dimension and this is why providers of goods of salvation often use it in their legitimation process. For example, discussions of metaphysics and theology related to various aspects of the energetic (cakra) system of Tantra-Yoga or the hierarchical evolution of the tanmātras (subtle elements) involve the non-arbitrary dimension as it is impossible to ascertain the validity of these concepts.

The modes of legitimation are formed by the different settings of the relations between the arbitrary and non-arbitrary dimensions, which have ramifications for the form taken by knowledge production and its social contexts. The more learning within a social field relies on the non-arbitrary dimension the more opaque are the rules for access and ascension. As the philosophies informing the social world of Shanti Mandir are based on romantic idealism, there is an emphasis on the subjective experience of the monist principle of Advaita Vedānta known as Brahman. It is worth keeping this in mind when considering the social and epistemic relations to knowledge and ultimately how legitimacy and prestige are accumulated because knowledge of Brahman would be classified as a non-arbitrary dimension.
Field Theory and Habitus

The social field of practice is a dynamic field of possibilities shaped by the relations between actors’ dispositions. Bourdieu described the field as the object, means and stakes of struggles, whereas LCT regards the Epistemic-Pedagogic Device (EPD) as the object of struggles, the specialisation codes as the means of struggles, and the structure of the field as the stakes of the struggles (Maton 2013: 84). The EPD generates a symbolic ruler of consciousness that is able to measure the legitimacy of truth claims and knowledge production. It allows for the exploration of symbolic domination and control in society through focusing on the interrelation of power, knowledge, and consciousness (Maton 2013: 84). The EPD enables a systematic examination of the nature of knowledge and knowers in a field and its associated practices in order to understand the ways in which pedagogy operates through exploring how a field constructs and legitimises knowledge and knowers and the relationship between them (Vorster and Quinn 2012: 72).

A field is defined as a structured system of social relations; as the object, means and stakes of struggles for social (symbolic) power; and by the rate of exchange between its species of ‘capital’ (status and resources). The struggles among actors are determined by the relative values of the types of capital exchanged and whether an actor has a legitimate right to use it (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 100, Maton 2013: 192). Therefore, the social field of practice is a dynamic field of possibilities shaped by the relations between actors’ dispositions (habitus), the competition to assert (or learn) which disposition is considered legitimate, and who has access to it.

Through an understanding of Bourdieu’s controversial idea of habitus, I seek to make explicit the symbolic role Sanskrit performs in this community (Thapan and Lardinois 2006). Thapan and Lardinios discuss how the habitus shapes present-day tastes and lifestyles, thereby creating ‘signs of distinction’ resulting in the transformation of economic capital into symbolic capital. Habitus, according to
Bourdieu is ‘the result of an organising action…a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination’ (Bourdieu 1977: 214). The habitus is based on the past and ongoing experiences that inform an individual’s disposition and the expectations of social groups that structure a field (Maton 2013: 88). It is a theoretical attempt to understand the relationship between subjective experience, agency and the potential consequences these objective structures might have on the individual. Bourdieu’s attempt to ground and explain practices in terms of both specific and general socio-cultural contexts requires placing his concept of habitus within a longer theoretical development of social capital theory that has continued to develop these ideas. An explanation of the link between pedagogy and how the social order materialises in the habitus is that:

The success of any pedagogical action depends on the degree to which pedagogical authority has become part of the common sense of the individual receiver even in the absence of any pedagogical transmission. Relevant to our discussion here, Bourdieu also talks of the habitus which lies at the interface between the individual self and the larger social organism. It is the means by which structures of the social order are inscribed, encoded or written onto the individual body in the most corporeal forms of gestures, accents, patterns of dress, etc. Through the habitus, political mythology of the social order is ‘made flesh’.  (Alam 2011: 175)

Verter (2003: 159) encouraged the analysis of religious practice in relation to both social position and individual disposition. Fundamental to accumulating, embodying, and demonstrating one’s accumulation of symbolic capital is the internalisation of certain schemas of perception (Strøm 2006). The embodiment of the ashram habitus/legitimate disposition is also offered as the potential symbolic reward for not only subjectively experiencing ‘peace’ as a teleological endpoint, but it is used for gaining status and prestige in the community through the performance of a culturally constructed ‘enlightened’ disposition that is modeled off of the guru’s own disposition.

Beliefs are encoded not only as mental representations or discourses. As
Bourdieu, Altgas et al. (2010: 6) explained, ‘religious fidelity is rooted (and survives) in sub-verbal, sub-conscious dispositions, in the folds of the body and turns of phrase, when it is not found in diction and pronunciation; that the body and language are full of sluggish beliefs, and that religious (or political) belief is firstly a bodily hexis associated with a linguistic habitus’.

Through an exploration of the processes involved in the acquisition of legitimacy I build upon Maton (2005b: 690) and Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 129). In chapter five I describe the internal structure of the ashram habitus, a term I use interchangeably with the legitimate disposition. The idea of habitus was generated to avoid descriptive circularity by bringing clarity and depth to a concept that has over the past three decades been described by several theorists as a ‘black box’ that muddles analysis (Wacquant 2013: 3). Conflating the idea of describing the contents of the habitus through a description of the visible practices provides insufficient and opaque analysis. In order to avoid muddling with the aforementioned ‘black box’ the internal structure of the ashram habitus needs to be isolated from a description of the practices that occur within the ashram. Wacquant reminded us that the concept of the habitus:

is a standing invitation to investigate the social constitution of the agent. It is not an answer to the conundrum of action – lately rephrased by invoking the equally enigmatic category of ‘agency’ — but a question or, better yet, an empirical prompt: an arrow pointing to the need to methodically historicize the concrete agent embedded in a concrete situation by reconstituting the set of durable and transposable dispositions that sculpt and steer her thoughts, feelings, and conduct. (Wacquant 2013: 4)

Due to the interdisciplinary and comparative nature of this project I have sought to find semantic consonance in Sanskrit terms in order to build a conceptual bridge between the often antithetical or arbitrary/non-arbitrary academic and spiritual discourses. In the next section I attempt to deshify the concept of the habitus.
**Deshiflying the Habitus**

Doniger describes deshification as an English noun derived from the masculine Sanskrit lexeme *deśa* (country, origin). This is built upon √deśī meaning *point, region, or spot.* Doniger refers to this process as a counterpoint to the process of Sanskritisation, where, for example, local gods would take on the name of a god in a Sanskrit text such as Murukan becoming Skanda (Doniger 2009: 6). I use this term deshification to refer to the cross-fertilisation of ideas. Cautiously imposing or comparing Sanskrit terms with modern sociological concepts may lead to imprecise semantic categories. While some may baulk at this comparative attempt to highlight semantic fields of similarity between French sociology and Sanskrit literary theory, regardless I continue because from a heuristic position this helps illuminate a path towards developing a conceptual bridge towards semantic consonance. Comparing the above definition of habitus to *vāsanā* (impression of anything remaining unconsciously in the mind) we can appreciate the similarity in Śaṅkara’s explanation in the Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya that the *vāsanā* is a conditioning of latent impressions, inclinations or tendencies of development that favour certain kinds of perceptions (Isaeva 1993: 180). It is through the manipulation of *vāsanās* (latent mental inclinations/dispositions) that are inherited from generation to generation, much like the concept at least of individual habituses, that the guru aims to create in his congregation a permanent state of quietude (*śānti*) through a manipulation of *vāsanā*.

The larger permanent feelings (*sthāyībhāva*) of the conscious mind correspond to the *vāsanā* (passed experience, acquired impulse or potential memory) of the unconscious mind. Virtanen (2006) explained the similarity of *vāsanās* to Jung’s *archetype* concept. They are considered potential functions of the mind (*cittavṛtti*). Therefore, one could say that the *vāsanā* form the content of a particular habitus, driving individual and group behaviour. The task of the guru, then, is to create an enlarged state of being within his audience that will, over time, entrain the various
dispositions of his devotees to a consonant doxic state where the structuring of the social world goes unquestioned appearing natural and as it should be (Bourdieu 1977: 164). As a replicant of Śaṅkara, the Advaita Vedāntic guru relies upon the aesthetic dimension of saṁskāra (deep conditioning, perfecting). Satsaṅga (discussed in more detail below in this section and in chapter six) evokes imaginative use of language to cultivate disenchantment with limited forms of enjoyment. Both terms saṁskāra and aucitya (habituation, state of being used to) fall within the semantic range of conceptualising the process of habituation. At least for Ānandavardhana, Abhinavagupta and Kṣemendra, the concept of aucitya was considered central to all literary creations and performances where the suspension of disbelief through suggestion of an alternate reality allowed for habituation to occur (Datta 2004).

Recapping, Maton (2005a: 68) explained Bourdieu’s definition of the field itself as a configuration of agents (individuals, groups of actors or institutions) competing for status and resources to maximise their position. The relative position of agents within the field is determined by the field’s distribution of capital. More specifically an agent’s position is determined by the species and volume of capital that is considered legitimate (Bourdieu 1993a). This highlights a second thinking tool: ‘capital’. Capital conceptualises resources that confer power, authority or status upon their holders.

In terms of this research the ‘field’ is the Shanti Mandir ashram. The physical boundary of the property is one identifiable boundary where the ‘spiritual game’ is played. However, the field is transposable onto other external domains wherever smaller groups of Shanti Mandir devotees congregate. For instance, at the beginning of my fieldwork most of the ashram’s residents were in the village of Ganeshpuri for approximately two weeks to begin the month-long celebrations of Nityananda’s 50th birthday. This extends to local congregations of Shanti Mandir devotees in their home towns, such as Melbourne, Australia, where devotees might meet on a regular Thursday evening to eat and chant together. While some of my observations have
come from such contexts, the bulk of my observations and ethnographic data have come from the field work conducted in the Magod ashram in Gujarat.

**Exchanges of Capital**

Beginning with Marx, capital theory provides a conceptual lens to understand the mobilisation of resources as objects of struggle to produce surplus value (Guest 2009). Bourdieu (1984, 1988a, 1988b) affords varying degrees of status to the different species of capital, which at a base level include cultural, social and economic.

Economic capital is realised as money and is institutionalised through property rights. Cultural capital can be converted into economic capital and is institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications. Social capital corresponds to resources and productive opportunities found within a durable network of institutionalised relationships that make certain opportunities possible (Bourdieu 1986: 248, Coleman 1988: 98). Social capital consists of social obligations (interpersonal connections). It is also convertible into economic capital and is institutionalised through titles of nobility like attaining the rank and identity of *sāṃnyāsa* (renunciation), which is the most prestigious position attainable within the Shanti Mandir field. Such a rank is crystallised through the act of institution that authoritatively signifies what an individual is and must be in order to be accepted into this order (Bourdieu 1986, 1991: 121). There are several Shanti Mandir devotees who aspire towards attainment of this title; however, Nityananda is quite conservative in bestowing this honour on people. This is explored more in chapter six.

The setting of status and principles of hierarchy depends on how the social field is structured and what species of capital are regarded as necessary to gain recognition (Bourdieu 1993a, Maton 2013: 58). Part of the ashram ‘game’ requires determining what species of capital one can use to negotiate with and also the volume of that capital needed to attain the desired status. Just because certain sub-species of capital
are present does not always mean the agent is able to use them in the same way that other individuals or groups can. As capital takes time to accumulate, and access to capital is not equal to all, these competitions or games, economic or otherwise, reduce the opportunity for spontaneous accumulation, resulting in the individual engaging specific strategies (disinterested or otherwise) to secure the subsequent status and recognition they desire. As a way to counter the structuralist approach that denies agency, Bourdieu introduced the term ‘strategy’ to emphasise the non-rational conscious decisions individuals make in their struggles for recognition (Swartz 1996, 1997). Individuals employ various species of capital as ‘investment strategies’ that occur consciously or unconsciously in the pursuit of other forms of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986, Skousgaard 2006, 2007). Two semantically similar species of capital are spiritual and religious, which are discussed next.

**Spiritual and Religious Capital**

Spiritual capital is regarded as a sub-species of social capital. It is distinct from but related to the concept of religious capital, which encapsulates the familiarity with religious doctrines, rituals, traditions and members, while enhancing the satisfaction and level of participation and shared sense of identity and community (Iannaccone and Klick 2003). Stark and Finke (2000: 120-25) define religious capital as ‘mastery of and attachment to a particular religious culture’. While Lillard and Ogaki define spiritual capital:

more narrowly as a set of intangible objects in the form of rules that govern how an individual interacts with other people and with the natural and spiritual realm. In addition, spiritual capital yields (perceived) benefits in both the short and long term (possibly after death). (Lillard and Ogaki 2005: 9)

Spiritual capital is not synonymous with religious capital in the sense that it is extra-institutional, individualistic, and encompasses an anti-religious dogma (Verter 2003:}
Bourdieu contends that only the religious specialists such as ordained clergy or renunciants can possess religious capital whereas anyone can, in principle, generate spiritual capital. This shows a limitation in conceptual clarity, as today’s de-regulated spiritual marketplace forces us to look beyond a simple binary, between the laity dispossessed of religious capital and the legitimacy caused by misrecognising their own dispossession as such (Bourdieu 1991: 9).

Religious institutions are mandated to produce and reproduce religious capital as a knowledge and competence that sustains the distinction between priest and laity (Bourdieu 1991: 10). This distinction is evident in the social network of the ashram where there is a distinction between the Hindu priests, who I define as Scholars due to the cultural capital they accumulate; the Renunciants (who accumulate social capital) and the laity (I define this group as the Patrons due to their investments of economic capital).

Both Stark and Finke and Iannoccone take a functionalist approach not identifying capital as an object or medium of conflict (Verter 2003: 158). Whereas I align myself with Guest (2009), who asserted that spiritual capital is a cultural resource that can be acquired and exchanged through various struggles for recognition. It is ultimately made tangible through the embodiment and continued performance of the legitimate disposition.

Verter contended that the efficacy of spiritual capital resides in it being mistaken for competence within a naturalised social order, such as through learning to embody the legitimate disposition and relevant practices conforming with normative representations of natural and supernatural worlds (Bourdieu 1991a: 22, Verter 2003: 159). Field (2003) asserted spiritual capital is a way of conceptualising the intangible or non-arbitrary resources of a community’s shared values, aspirations and trust. As is obvious, multiple definitions of spiritual capital exist. I summarise them as the power and privilege an individual gains through the practice of their religion to the benefits
accumulated through being part of a group (Malloch 2010). Perhaps, instead of treating religious and spiritual capital as separate, overlapping or mutually exclusive concepts it would be more productive to see these sub-species of capital as existing along a spectrum.

However, theoretically how do we disambiguate the symbolic distinction of the religious capital between the Scholars and the Renunciants? Chapter four unpacks this question demonstrating the species of capital that these groups primarily rely on to gain recognition. These species also help to form the various hierarchies that exist within the social network. As the various groups are ultimately trading in different species of capital we can see how the discrete hierarchies form that preclude external competitions between members of different groups.

Spiritual capital can be realised through the three forms Bourdieu developed for cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and institutionalised. Embodiment of spiritual capital is a measurement of position and disposition. It is ‘the outcome of explicit education or unconscious processes of socialisation’ (Verter 2003: 159). Spiritual capital is embodied in the habitus along with the recognition of social distances (Bourdieu 1989: 17). Predicated by self-improvement through internalising the symbolic systems (myths and ideologies) and competencies (mastery of specific practices and bodies of knowledge), I suggest that mastery of both categories is a possible approach to distinguishing between religious and spiritual capital. Within Brahminical Sanskritic Hinduism religious forms of capital deal with the esoteric or secret knowledge of the official priesthood and its ‘knowledgeable mastery’ of the mantras, rituals, and ability to perform the religious practice. ‘Practical mastery’ is a more general level of knowledge encompassing various schemes of thinking and action (i.e., the legitimate disposition) acquired by indoctrination, familiarisation and subjective experiences found in less formal or official pedagogical systems such as that used to acculturate the laity in the ashram.
The objectified state consists of the religious knowledge required to demonstrate a competency with the tradition translating into an understanding of legitimate ways to approach and consume fetishised goods of religious practice such as photos of the guru, statues of gods, burning of incense, and the wearing of garments. The difference between embodied and objectified capital is measured by acts of consumption as compared to the goods consumed. The institutionalised state of spiritual capital rests in the power organisations possess in determining the meaning of and access to the 'goods of salvation' (cf. Bourdieu 1986: 243-48; Guest 2009: 192; Verter 2003: 159). This species is what we can understand Shanti Mandir is trying to accumulate.

The consequences of knowing / not knowing Sanskrit, or, knowing / not knowing the surrounding cultural practices that have evolved out of this Sanskritic tradition, are involved in the creation and maintenance of a hierarchy of power that is mapped out in chapter five. The complicated ways in which various species of capital merge in an individual’s portfolio determine the basis of their negotiation strategies for legitimacy. Competency of a specific practice within a particular field generates a certain type of symbolic capital, which is then exchanged or misrecognised as a type of authenticity. Verter (2003: 159) encourages the analysis of competency within religious practice in relation to both social position and individual disposition. Fundamental to accumulating, embodying, and demonstrating one’s accumulation of symbolic capital is the internalisation of certain schemas of perception (Strøm 2006). I embark on this exploration of the processes involved in the acquisition of legitimacy by building upon Maton (2005b: 690) and Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 129). I argue that the embodiment of the ashram habitus/legitimate disposition is also offered as the potential symbolic reward for not only subjectively experiencing ‘peace’ as a teleological endpoint, but it is used for gaining status and prestige in the community through the performance of a culturally constructed ‘enlightened’, ‘yogic’ or
‘peaceful’ disposition that is modeled off of the guru’s own behaviour. However, in order to gain competency the individual must initially rely upon the guru’s epistemic capital and their ability to also accumulate their own stock of epistemic capital. This concept is discussed next and is followed by another necessary type of capital, that being emotional capital.

**Epistemic Capital**

We can extend our understanding of capital theory, and its application to Shanti Mandir, through the concept of epistemic capital. This type of capital is neither economic nor symbolic. Instead it can be understood as ‘the ability to better explain the (social) world’ (Maton 2003: 62). We can understand epistemic capital as a type of modal capital that allows for the experience of the guru’s suggestion to be expressed and more importantly understood. It is the guru’s ability to explain the social world and provide suggestions as to how one ought to best navigate through it. This is achieved by offering an affective experience of an alternative reality that forms a significant portion of his own charismatic authority and referent power. It is due to the instrumentality of the guru’s epistemic capital that his position is authenticated and legitimised acting as a gateway between tangible and intangible components of the symbolic domain as he demonstrates mastery between the arbitrary and non-arbitrary dimensions.

**Emotional Capital**

Emotional Capital is not something that Bourdeau ever discussed. I consider it a useful species of capital to help understand the transference of affect. It is another way of understanding the concept of emotional intelligence or the feelings and beliefs that enable an organisation’s employees or members of a community to form successful relationships for the greater good (Online 2015a). It is considered to be a type of
‘booster’ capital that fills the gaps and allows for social connections to be made due to its energising capacity (Gendron 2004).

The reason for highlighting emotional capital is because emotions are ever-present. Even amidst the most rational decisions when we think we are emotionally sterile and completely logical we cannot separate what we think and feel. As I demonstrate throughout this thesis, the social milieu of the Shanti Mandir community cultivates an environment where heightened emotions take precedence or have preference over rational and logical decision making processes. As I have already touched on briefly and will go into more detail below, global trends and market forces influence not only the external identity of Shanti Mandir but also how it operates internally at an interpersonal level and as a provider of practical ways to manage a particular type of knowledge. Emotional capital is seen as crucial to addressing the constant changes organisations and communities face in learning economies and, the ability to work together cohesively is fundamental to the success of any group. While it is often thought that cognitive skills occur independently as a type of pure thinking, Gendron explained how cognition and emotion work together, and that regardless of whether the learning outcomes are for academic or social/life purposes, developing the individual capacity to feel as well as think is essential in creating that social glue that binds people together in groups (2004: 31).

Jackson and Burke (2007) refer to Reay (2002) in a discussion of the gendered and classed nature of emotional capital. Reay argues that investments towards lifelong learning give higher returns in environments where economic capital can thrive. This translates to domains where economic security and high social status exist possibly enhancing emotional well-being, which I argue is crucial to removing anxiety and doubt so that śānti can be experienced. A potential site that includes all these possibilities is the Shanti Mandir ashram. Most of the people who come to the ashram are from the middle to upper-middle classes. They have the economic security that
affords them the luxury and privilege to remove themselves from their daily routines and devote time to their spiritual practices through either extended or concentrated periods of time in the ashram. During their stays the disciples are expected to perform ‘selfless service’ (karmayoga), which can mean unpaid voluntary work. This spiritual practice involves the regulation and expression of emotion either in exchange for a wage, for status or for the guru’s grace (cf. Hoschschild 1983). The particular sevā an individual is assigned depends on an individual’s gender, economic status and class. Generally, if an individual is considered to have higher class or status they will be assigned tasks that carry greater status or responsibility.

Organisations explicitly and implicitly prescribe what emotions are required and how they ought to be expressed. As Hochschild first explained, emotional labour is undertaken at a personal cost to the worker and is a direct result of the commercialisation of emotion. We can appreciate that central to the soteriological focus and commercial ambitions of Shanti Mandir is the attenuation of emotions. Kiely and Sevastos (2008) explain Hochschild’s view of emotional labour as predicated by the necessity to not feel or display genuine emotions. As a general yogic disposition has already been defined as one which is peaceful, unagitated and detached, it becomes necessary, at least initially, to inhibit certain emotional, physical and vocal outbursts that might be considered transgressive in an ‘unyogic’ sense. In a performative sense sustained displays of inauthentic emotions can result in ‘burnout’ or increased emotional exhaustion, dissatisfaction, anxiety, manic episodes, and depression (Montgomery, Panagopolou et al. 2006). When trying to keep up ‘yogic’ appearances becomes too much for individuals within the Shanti Mandir community, the answer, generally, is to intensify the focus on the guru and work on building a stronger relationship through the normative practices that focus on trying to emulate the guru’s disposition.
Symbolic Capital and Hierarchies of Knowers

An individual’s portfolio of symbolic capital (knowledge of tradition, relative economic vitality, gender) determine which group and, therefore, queue they can join in the temple (cf. Watson 2012). In this specific Shanti Mandir context, of particular importance is an individual’s stock of cultural capital, which includes an embodied knowledge and expression of a practical mastery of the tradition (Rudie 1998). This is based on the Sanskrit episteme and the ritual and linguistic grammars used in religious practice. These two dimensions: a knower’s disposition and the consumption/expression of legitimate knowledge operate in various modalities generating status and distinction. This is explored in more detail in chapter five, however, the various groups mentioned: Renunciants, Scholars, and Patrons have different modalities and ranges of accepted behaviours in which they are expected to operate. Access to this knowledge is not equal for everyone thus restricting the accumulation of legitimacy based on various standpoint theories of race, class, caste, and gender.

In the acquisition of status and cultural capital Bourdieu agrees with Nietzsche and Freud that all action is interested (Webb, Schirato et al. 2005: 14). Regardless of disinterested claims to the contrary made by various individuals within the community, each person is in a competition for the symbolic rewards offered by the guru and the Siddha tradition he claims to represent. What must be understood is that the ‘Siddha tradition’ is not an eternal unbroken monolith. Rather it is a constructed identity or bricolage of Baba Muktananda’s formulated to make a distinction between his own brand of the yogic lifestyle with his competitors (Altglas 2007, 2014, Jain 2013). Today, his successors, of which Nityananda is only one, continue to use this cultural capital and link to his memory to generate prestige. Shanti Mandir emphasises the guru
focused devotional practice of guru-bhakti yoga. At the centre of this devotion is Baba Muktananda. Nityananda explained that:

Meditation on the Guru is the basis of all methods of meditation. When I read in the Guru Gita (76): The root of meditation is the Guru’s form; The root of worship is the Guru’s feet; The root of mantra is the Guru’s word; The root of liberation is the Guru’s grace. I obtained my supreme mantra. I accepted it with great love and reverence. This form of meditation is, indeed, superior to all sacrifices and all forms of worship.

(Mandir 2010c: 7)21

Building upon Durkheim and Bernstein (2000) we can appreciate that specialised divisions of labour require specialised forms of consciousness (Maton and Muller 2007: 28). The Renunciants, Scholars and Patrons work synergistically in various divisions of labour to support the guru’s mission, which is to guide ‘seekers to the direct experience of divinity through Sanskrit chanting, silent meditation, study of sacred texts, the offering of service, and participation in sacred rituals’ (Mandir 2015a). From a distance we can view all the devotees (bhaktas) as a homogenous group. However, zooming in to the social network it becomes clear that the individuals within these groups consciously or unwittingly compete endogenously (within their own group) for the guru’s attention and grace. They negotiate their access and ascension through the various hierarchies of the network by investing, trading and accumulating various species of capital, which are specific and symbolically legitimate to each hierarchy. Part of learning the rules of the game is realising which group one belongs to, and what currency one can legitimately use within this symbolic system. For instance as a non-Brahmin, non-Hindu uninitiated male who has not studied Sanskrit at a traditional Vedic pāṭhaśālā (school), I will never be considered an authentic knower of the Sanskrit episteme. No external displays, such as dressing like a Brahmin and eating similar food in a similar manner will truly afford me the

21 GG 76 dhyānamālam guurmārtih pūjāmālam gurōh padam // mantramālam gurorvākyām mokṣamālam gurōh kṛpā ||.
perceived privilege of being acknowledged as a *vedamūrti* (embodier of the Veda) (cf. Larios forthcoming).

This section has provided a theoretical overview of various aspects related to the broader and more fundamental aspects of Shanti Mandir’s identity and philosophy providing a context through which to explore in an expanded format throughout the remainder of this thesis. I also provide an extended overview of Capital Theory and its relation to various knowledge hierarchies and the cultivation of Shanti Mandir’s legitimate yogic disposition. In the next chapter I begin by identifying salient features of the transglobal yoga industry and locate Shanti Mandir as a divine enterprise exploring how various market forces continue to shape Shanti Mandir’s identity.
Chapter 2 – Locating Shanti Mandir within the
Transglobal Yoga Industry
2.1 — Introduction

You of the West are practical in business, practical in great inventions, but we of the East are practical in religion. You make commerce your business; we make religion our business. Swami Vivekananda, discourse in Minneapolis, 1893.22

The aim of this chapter is to contextualise Shanti Mandir as an organisation operating within the transglobal yoga industry, the spiritual-health tourism and pilgrimage industry (or ‘wellness’ industry), and the saṁskṛti (culture) revival movement. Throughout this thesis various parts of the organisation’s own marketing strategy and discourse are analysed within a broader discussion established by the three contexts just mentioned. From an organisational point of view, due to various market forces, Shanti Mandir increasingly emphasises modern postural yoga through its ‘Shanti Darshanam: Complete Yoga Studies’ (Shanti-Mandir 2015v).

The construction of this part of the organisation’s identity is intimately linked not only to flows of capital, but also to the movement of humans who are enticed by the transculturality of the organisation’s marketing strategy. As a result more than 200,000 Australians travel to India annually within a global market of almost seven million tourists. In 2013 this generated an annual foreign exchange earning of almost USD19bn (Division 2014: 2, Saurine and Cornish 2013). Regarding spiritual matters, the Indian media and government continues to market the country as the ‘World guru’ that has a lot to offer the rest of the world (Chopra 2006, India 2014). For centuries people have travelled to explore the exotic cultural and spiritual opportunities of the subcontinent.

22 Altglas (2007: 223) cites Burke (1986: 160-61) for the location of this quote.
Soft power is a country’s attractiveness due to its cultural, political values, and foreign policy (Ramachandran 2015). Therefore, the transglobal yoga and spiritual-health tourism industries are intimately linked with the nation’s promotion of itself on the world stage. This chapter begins with a discussion of the transglobal yoga and spiritual-health tourism industries, followed by a discussion that focuses on the sanskriti revival movement, and, in particular how Sanskrit is used to generate symbolic capital, prestige and legitimacy for Shanti Mandir.

2.2 — The Transglobal Yoga and Spiritual-Health Tourism Industries

This section analyses yoga as a discourse within a particular cultural field. Discourses are capable of constructing social realities determining how reality is perceived through the transmission of symbolic meaning (Madsen 2013). In this section I build upon the work by Altglas (2005, 2007) and Jain (2013, 2014) regarding the ‘Guru’s guru’ Baba Muktananda and the successful global spread of his neo-Hindu movement,23 Siddha Yoga. The symbolic capital generated by Muktananda has assisted Shanti Mandir’s own growth within the context of the globalisation of religion, the commodification of spirituality, exchanges of capital, and the transcultural flows of knowledge embedded within the global yoga community.

It is illuminating to perceive yoga as a culture that ‘is a system, which generates meaning, categories, perception, power, distinctions, values and priorities’ (Madsen 2013: 38). Understanding yoga in terms of transcultural flows of knowledge and construction of identities rather than through markets and globalisation enables a richer understanding of the processes involved in knowledge transfer (Froystad 2009, Hauser 2013). From a sociological perspective Shanti Mandir is an offshoot due to the

23 The term neo-Hindu is discussed below in section 2.3.
Schism\textsuperscript{24} that occurred with Muktananda’s Siddha Yoga empire (Healy 2010a). Jain explained how Muktananda is described as an entrepreneurial godman who broke into the competitive spiritual market cementing his position in the 1970s by prescribing solutions for the perceived ills of modernity. The monolithic identity he constructed for his Siddha organisation offered a sense of re-enchantment and remystification of the world (Bogdan 2010, Stuckrad 2010). Through this process his status as a \textit{siddha} was established through the misrecognition of his divinity (Jain 2014: 50-1).

Shanti Mandir operates within the shadow of Muktananda’s spiritual legacy utilising a similar discourse of offering solutions to disaffected individuals seeking to replace the hyper-regulated world with a transcendent subjective idealism. As a result, since the beginning of Shanti Mandir the organisation has been on its own path to legitimise itself and carve out its own space in a competitive market due to the controversies that caused its formation.\textsuperscript{25} This may explain why Shanti Mandir has created an image that promotes a particularly orthodox expression of Hinduism (Michaels 2001, 2004).

Complicating this process is the market place of transglobal yoga within which Shanti Mandir operates. This market has transitioned from its growth stage to the mature stage of its industry/product line life cycle (Hitt, Ireland et al. 2001, Wild 2007).\textsuperscript{26} The Indian government values its own ‘wellness’ market at INR 490 crores (\textasciitilde USD8bn) (\textit{India} 2015b); while the global yoga market is valued at approximately USD42bn (Kendall 2011). Market research in Australia shows a revenue of USD750M (\textasciitilde AUD1bn) is generated annually and that this industry employs almost 12,000 people (Ibisworld 2015). Yoga has been commercialised to such a degree that there are now

\textsuperscript{24} Schism — a split or division between strongly opposed sections or parties, caused by differences in opinion or belief.

\textsuperscript{25} See section 3.7.

\textsuperscript{26} An industry or product line traditionally has a lifecycle that includes four phases. An introduction, growth, maturity, and decline.
specific clothing brands tailored to this industry. One of the biggest names in the yoga clothing industry is Lululemon Athletica. Since 2011 its sales have grown globally from USD711.7M to USD1.8bn in 2015 (Marketwatch 2015). In comparison, Shanti Mandir has its own range of clothing that is not necessarily focused on sporty yogically-inspired lifestyles, however, it is interesting to see where these clothes end up across the world at various gift fairs and music festivals (BeaconRiverFest 2015, Mandir 2015).

This competitive and highly profitable market often involves competing claims for authenticity regarding the identity of the legitimate yogin. Due to the stabilising effect of the ‘yoga’ sign a heterogenous blend of competing identities and practices exist within the same episteme (Alter 2006, Altglas 2007, Copeman and Ikegame 2012a, Gandhi 2009, Jain 2014). In short, there is simply no ‘one and only’ legitimate yogic identity, as ‘yoga’ has a ‘wider range of meanings than nearly any other word in the entire Sanskrit lexicon’ (White 2012: 1). Not to mention the heterogenous reality and seemingly endless multitude of yoga species from which the potential customer must choose depending on various factors such as inclination, age, and health. The following examples illustrate the diversity of the contest for legitimacy.

‘Nude Yoga’ is a postural focused approach where people practice naked in groups (Myles 2015). However, even though it does receive criticism for obvious reasons by so-called yoga ‘traditionalists’ as being a step too far or a cloth too few; there is a long tradition of practising yoga naked in South Asia by the naked (nagna) ascetics (Flood 2003, Fouce 2005). Another controversial development in the yoga world is ‘Doga’ (it is a portmanteau of dog + yoga) (Brilliant 2003, Reporter 2014, Sparks and Bryan 2009). Sparks and Bryan assert that ‘traditional yoga practices are about creating a union with the divine in all. Dogs are pack animals, and pack mentality is also about union: in that sense, dogs are natural “dogis”’ (Sparks and Bryan 2009: 8). Another evolution in modern postural yoga is called ‘High Intensity
Interval Power Vinyasa Yoga’. This is a combination of HIIT (High Intensity Interval Training) and Power Vinyasa Yoga. This type of approach and focus on physical strength and fitness is seen by groups such as Shanti Mandir to be the antithesis of what they understand yoga to be about. However, as the founder of this style Ali Kamenova explained, a body-focused approach does not necessarily preclude a spiritual component.

Namaste Beautiful Yogis,

INTERVAL YOGA IS A COMPLETE MULTI-LAYERED WELLNESS AND FITNESS SYSTEM THAT WILL GET YOU IN THE BEST POSSIBLE SHAPE EVER. BY PRACTICING THE INTERVAL YOGA SYSTEM YOU WILL TONE YOUR MUSCLES, DEVELOP STRENGTH, CORE STABILITY, BALANCE, SPEED, POWER AND FLEXIBILITY.

Interval Yoga classes are generally short to medium length yet the athletic and health benefits are greater than some longer sequences due to the vigorous nature and particular sequencing of the lessons. The secret is using varying levels of intensity to boost your metabolism, balance hormonal and glandular health and directly work on your muscle strength and fluid flexibility.

Ali Kamenova designs the sequences so that they are fun and stimulating yet calming and grounding.

BY PRACTICING INTERVAL YOGA YOU WILL TRANSFORM AND DEEPEN THE CONSCIOUS CONNECTION BETWEEN YOUR BODY AND MIND.

Let’s be quiet for a moment each day and contemplate in stillness!

NAMASTE

[Capitals in original] (Kamenova 2015)

One final example demonstrating the way in which the yoga sign continues to evolve is Dirty Yoga®. Dirty Yoga markets itself for the no-nonsense corporate lifestyle. Dirty Yoga is ‘one percent meditation, and 99 percent perspiration. Dirty is an all practice, no theory, online yoga practice’ (Rajah and Gronholm 2015). Its format takes the yoga class to a completely online domain. There is no physical yoga class for one to commute to and attend. It is literally 24/7 access that uses for its symbol a martini
glass with a yoga mat rolled up in place of a stirrer. According to their website, dirty yoga is:

for people who make sh*t happen. Dirty is yoga served up so that it won’t slow you down. It’s yoga for people going places. Yoga for creators, inventors, entrepreneurs, self-starters, and agitators. Yoga for people with better things to do than yoga. People who want to get in, get their exercise, and get out. If that’s you, get dirty. Then get going.

Cheers.  

(Rajah and Gronholm 2015)

While Kamenova’s HIIT Power Yoga does incorporate aspects of spirituality into an arguably fitness oriented posturally focused style of yoga, when compared to Dirty Yoga, which we can almost assume is the end game of the commercialisation of yoga into an online pure fitness regime, HIIT Power Yoga retains a soteriological or at least spiritual edge to it. However, as is explored below, the battleground of authenticity in the transglobal yoga industry is between soteriological and modern postural forms of yoga. As the industry has grown and matured the innumerable styles of yoga base their claims for authenticity depending on what their intentions are within the market.

Shanti Mandir has over the past decade worked consistently to increase its market share of the postural yoga field, but in order to retain its authenticity it leans upon its soteriological credentials and focus.

These few examples are used to show just a sample of the broad application of not only the yoga sign but also the yoga practices available. As demonstrated, each sub-species use a similar legitimising strategy aimed at demonstrating their link to a system that creates stillness, health and inner transformation. Although even within the postural yoga community a religious discourse is used by some and avoided by others who do not want, for several reasons to be involved with a religion, this narrative is used especially by transglobal yoga franchises that seek to avoid the payment of tax through gaining religious exemptions. However, the debate regarding the unstructured nature of spirituality and lack of religious obligations is also used to brand or market
yoga as having more universal applications and market transposability (Jain 2014: 97-8).

As a general theme involved in the process of legitimising the ‘history’ of the yoga tradition, this signifier is often falsely represented as an essentialised monolithic and unbroken tradition connected to the Vedic culture and, even earlier through the controversial interpretation of one particular Harappan seal, known as the Pashupatinath Seal. Due to the seated position of the figure the assertion that is quite often made is that this seal represents the origins of yoga and is a ‘proto-Śiva’ who is the first yogi at the beginning of a 4000-year old tradition (Nicholson 2013, Samuel 2008, White 2009). However, based on linguistic and archaeological evidence several prominent scholars do not support such an assertion that there is a continuous cultural development between the Vedic and Harappan cultures (Bryant 2001, Possehl 2002, Witzel 1999, 2000). As Nicholson suggests this ‘may tell us more about modern longings than it does about the existence of yogis in the Indus Valley civilization 4,000 years ago’ (2013: 497).

Within the various texts of Indian literature including the Mahābhārata and other texts specifically related to yoga, there is no real unifying consensus as to what ‘yoga’ actually means. As Magden (2013) explained, from about 700 CE, yoga came to mean more generally a diligent spiritual practice (sādhanā) as opposed to a system that could reveal inner ontological states. There is an entire supernatural yogic world just beyond the distorting lens of ‘classical’ texts where it is mentioned quite specifically even in the third section (Vibhūti Pāda) of Patañjali’s Yoga Sūtras. For some people yogis are considered sorcerers with dangerous abilities who can raise the dead, possess an individual’s body and acquire wealth and power beyond imagination (White 2009).

In a transcultural sense they are often used by parents to discipline misbehaving children in a similar way to the bogeyman or boogie man. Nicholson (2013) pointed out that Vivekananda’s opinion of *hatha yogis* (vernacularised as *jogis*) was that they were only disreputable vagrants who could perform feats of endurance and magic tricks while his ‘*raja-yoga*’ (royal yoga) is really a modernist reconstruction of certain aspects of Patañjali’s system. While the yoga discourse became a normative discourse for legitimising an individual’s or group’s participation in intellectual and cultural domains.

The authors of texts mentioning yoga did not aim to propagate a particular system. Instead their aim was to bolster their own theological position as a counterpoint to the holy violence of animal sacrifice of the Vedic ritualists and the absolute infallibility of the exegetical schools of Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta, while securing symbolic capital and power because yoga had come to be understood as a system of generating superpowers (*siddhis*) based on the notion of non-violence (*ahiṁsa*) (Nicholson 2013: 493). Just like today, to be considered part of an in-group various individuals had to demonstrate, if they wanted to be taken seriously, how their system fitted within the broader popular discourse of yoga. Shanti Mandir’s attitude towards modern postural yoga is quite explicit. Their position is that modern postural yoga is an incomplete or only a partial form. Shanti Mandir explained how:

> The swami asks him, ‘Do you want to learn a partial yoga or do you want to learn the whole thing?’ The āsanas, or postures, you learn in hatha yoga are only one part of āśṭāṅga yoga. […] The first limb people learn about is āsana. In our society today, hatha yoga has been brought into the gym, and many people think that’s all there is to yoga. But hatha yoga is not meant to be a complete yoga unto itself. (*Mandir* 2014b: 1-2)

This statement above shows quite clearly how Nityananda positions himself and his own yoga system in the struggle for power and distinction within the cultural field of the transglobal yoga industry. This conflated representation of yoga and Hinduism has
evolved, in part, through the nationalist lens regarding the attempt to commodify a homogenous Indian (read Hindu) identity asserting India’s place within a global market economy (Nanda 2009). Malinar (2009) described the concept of inclusivism, which refers to the inclusion of other religious systems within the hierarchy of one’s own theological perspective. As Vivekananda is famous for suggesting that while all religions are equal, Hinduism, and particular Advaita Vedānta, just happens to be a better alternative (Vivekananda 2006). Nanda explained that it is the forces of the global market that are turning India, or commodifying India into a Hindu-ised market. Part of this involves the Government of India introducing the Ministry of Ayush to its current independent status in 2014 (Ayush 2015). The mandate of this ministry includes rebranding and promoting yoga in what is seen as a battle to reclaim yoga as something distinctively Indian. It is with the aim of increasing India’s share in a spiritual-health tourism market, which is valued at several billion dollars that:

Indian officials have begun efforts to reclaim yoga for the home team, making plans for a broad expansion of the wellness practice into all facets of civic life — including more than 600,000 schools, and thousands of hospitals and police training centers. They are spearheading efforts to promote and protect India’s most famous export, even quietly weighing a “geographical indication” for yoga, a trade protection normally given to region-specific goods such as Champagne from France or oranges from Florida. (Gowen 2014)

At the pinnacle of the Indian wellness industry is Baba Ramdev. From humble beginnings as a farmer’s son in Haryana he has built a global presence through establishing the Patanjali Yog Peeth and his television company Vedic Broadcasting Limited (Dailybhaskar.com 2011, Sarbacker 2014). Patanjali Yog Peeth was opened with the aim of building the world’s largest centre for yoga and Ayurveda by the then Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat. Ramdev represents the entrepreneurial spirit of 21st century India combined with the ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’ image projected
domestically and internationally as part of the industry’s own marketing strategy (Dailybhaskar.com 2011). Polgreen describes the yoga master as harking:

back to India’s earliest leaders with a message of self-reliance, national pride and traditional Indian values. But with his vast yoga empire and legions of followers on television and the Web, he is also a product and symbol of the New India, a yogic fusion of Richard Simmons, Dr. Oz and Oprah Winfrey, irrepressible and bursting with Vedic wisdom. (Polgreen 2010)

Ramdev’s appeal is linked to India’s neoliberal regime by catering to the rising affluence of the middle classes yet offering ‘traditional’ beliefs and values. While he despises everything about Western culture, Jaffrelot describes Ramdev as a new breed of political animal whose style:

is in line with the expectations of the middle class, which feels uncomfortable with temple rituals, whose mechanisms seem like superstitions brought to life. But while middle class people do not have the time to go to temples anyway, they look for religious support to cope with the hardships of stressful professional, urban lifestyles. Yoga is seen as an excellent antidote to stress — and Ramdev’s exercises are appreciated as relaxing indeed. (Jaffrelot 2011)

Ramdev claims that through the ancient wisdom of his yoga practice several illnesses including the apparent ‘mental disease’ of homosexuality and cancer can be cured. Also, through a particular medicine (divya putrajīvak bīj), claims have been made that it will assist childless couples to beget sons (Chronicle 2013, Crowley 2012, Dailybhaskar.com 2011, 2015). However, recently the Indian Medical Association has called for strict and immediate action against Ramdev under the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisement Act, 1954), which prohibits quackery. There is a growing number of dissatisfied customers who still suffer from various illnesses like diabetes, hypertension and cancer after trying his system (Athiests 2015). Ramdev’s cure for diseases like cancer and AIDS is based on yoga and concentrated breathing (prānāyāma). As a result, the Union Minister of State for Ayush (Health)
has announced that the government agency will clinically check Ramdev’s claims (DNA 2015a).

One of the starkest differences noticed when comparing yoga in the ‘West’ to the ‘Ramdev yoga’ is that it is an Indian-inflected modern yoga scheme that emphasises static postures (as opposed to flowing sequences), short meditative processes and chanting, especially ‘Om’ (as opposed to a minimum or complete absence of both in modern postural yoga). Ramdev promotes his brand of yoga as being the closest re-articulation of Patañjali’s, the alleged compiler of the Yoga Sūtras. In this text, postures are not emphasised in the same way that prāṇāyama is (Limited 2015, Mandir 2015a). Ramdev’s approach has brought disparaging comments from other internationally celebrated yoga gurus such as the famous B.K.S. Iyengar, who believes that over-publicising specific yoga practices is wrong (Dasgupta 2011). However, this flexibility of the yoga sign demonstrates part of how its universality is celebrated, but also contested in the contemporary cosmopolitan world (Sarbacker 2011). Perhaps, also Ramdev’s emphasis on prāṇāyāma is linked to his nationalist teleological agenda of making India more powerful? In 2006, Ramdev predicted that ‘Bharat will become a superpower by the year 2011’ (Jaffrelot 2011). The control of breath is said to be linked to the accumulation of prāṇa (energy). In the PYS Vibhuti Pāda (chapter 3) it is explained that various powers and magical accomplishments (siddhis) can result from different avenues including potions, incantations, penance, and perfection in yoga.29

Tele-evangelical gurus like Ramdev are promoters of Hindu pride and global proselytisers of Hinduism that are trying to restore Indian self-esteem through travelling to the West and meeting followers (Jaffrelot 2011). Ramdev’s involvement with politics further obfuscates our ability to determine more specifically what it

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28 Thanks to Stuart Sarbacker for articulating this in a private conversation.

29 PYS 3.1 Janma auṣadhi mantra tapah samādhijāh siddhayāh.
means to be a globally recognised yogi-renunciant in the current times. While some believe the life of the renunciant ought to lay beyond the supposed sullying realms of politics, others believe that his message of purifying the body and then the nation will bring positive results to not only India but also the world through the reduction of poverty, corruption and illness. This is couched in the neo-Hindu rhetoric of returning India to its position as a global sage able to offer spiritual wisdom to other countries.

Also, consistent with my own experience as a postural yoga teacher it has been claimed at least anecdotally that across the globe eighty-five percent of yoga practitioners are women (Statistics 2003). This leads to interesting speculations regarding the gendered nature of the yoga practitioner’s identity. The popularity of postural yoga amongst women is the result of feminine discourses around health and beauty that started to develop in the late nineteenth century. By the end of the World War Two we see a quantum leap in the popularity of yoga as part of a feminine beauty and health regime, which goes part of the way at least to explaining why postural yoga is overwhelmingly preferred by women today (Madsen 2013, Singleton 2010). One of the fundamental reasons between the yogic identity in western countries compared to India is its embedded location in the dominant patriarchal system of South Asian cultures (Ambedkar and Rege 2013). However, this does not mean to say that women in South Asia are not practicing yoga for similar reasons related to health, beauty and wellbeing.

Further complicating the yoga phenomenon is its position within a unified Hindu identity that has its roots in innovations within South Asian philosophy from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries. The idea of a unified Hindu identity is not as ancient as some Hindus claim and ought to be recognised as the colonial construction it is (Lorenzen 1999, Nicholson 2010). Both Vivekananda and Gandhi shared a similar position that Hindu spirituality and Indian culture had to be defended against modernity and Western materialism. The reformist project of systematising the
disparate traditions making them palatable for domestic and international consumption during the colonial period was to present Hindu spirituality as a superior counterpoint to Western materialism. Vivekananda’s efforts to systematise disparate notions of ascetic practice into an ‘ancient system of yoga’ is now India’s main export product in the spirituality market.

Historically, the move towards interiorisation and abstraction of spiritual practices away from the ritual focus fed, and helped develop, the non-institutionalised forms of spirituality that are so prevalent today and form the contested bedrock of the field. This has its origins in proto-yogic Śramanic, Buddhist and Jain practices from about 600 BCE that are based on liberation (mokṣa) through a practice of internalised ritual suicide (Madsen 2013: 181-2). This included the internal retention of breath (antar-kumbhaka) in order to still the mind and prevent the accrual of more karma. This practice was later appropriated and Brahminicalised through the transformation of the fire sacrifice (agnihotra) from an external ritualised act into an interiorised yogic practice, which involved the control of one’s breath/vital life-force (prāṇāgnihotra) (King 1999, Madsen 2013).

This process of internalising an authentic state continues through to the current era but is linked more with an emotional and moral quest to compensate for the routinisation and predictability of modern life (Bendix 1997: 17). Understanding this we can proceed with exploring what Shanti Mandir projects as its own legitimate identity as a facilitator of internalising authenticity. This is necessary to understand within the later chapters how this translates to the personal level of individuals trying to gain access into and ascension within the various hierarchies of Shanti Mandir’s social network.
2.3 — Marketing the Sanātana Dharma and Neo-Hinduism

Often, as a way to gain legitimacy the particular image and message propagated by divine enterprises is either naturalised, eternalised or sacralised. Terms such as ‘Hindu’, ‘Hinduism’ and ‘Sanātana Dharma’ are problematic in a reductive way (Basham 1989, Basham, Buitenen et al. 2014, Jones and Ryan 2007, King 1999, Lorenzen 1999, Michaels 2004, Pennington 2005, Thapar 1985, von Stietencron 1989). They have come to represent and homogenise (but also differentiate through subsequent contests of identity) the various religious experiences of large sectors of society under the late colonial Neo-Hinduistic reform movements that placed a strong-emphasis on Vedic and Vedāntic heritage as the normative expression of Hinduism and by extension the modern Indian state (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012, Nicholson 2010, Pirbhai 2008, Van der Veer 1994).30

During the late colonial period the positivist, realist and empiricist philosophies of early 19th century Europe were at odds with the idealist propensities of Advaita Vedānta that asserted that everything apart from Brahman is not real (mithyā). Classical Advaita Vedānta was in a sense, ‘weaponised’, and reformulated to deal with the epistemological assault coming from the predominant Bradleyan version of Hegelian Idealism that asserted a comprehensibility of being through an all-inclusive whole where an ‘ideal morality’ focused on the attainment of the ‘best self’ (Encyclopedia 2015). As a result Neo-Vedānta is considered to be a reformulation of classical Advaita Vedānta in relation to Kant’s Transcendental Idealism, Hegel’s

30 Larios (forthcoming) refers to an email he received from Patrick Olivelle. Olivelle asserts that the earliest use of sanātana dharma is located in Dhammapāda 1: 5. ‘Hate can never be overcome by hate. Only by love can hate be overcome. This is an eternal dharma’. Na hi verena verāṇi sammantidha kudācanām, averena ca sammanti, esa dhammo sanantano. See section 5.6.3.
Absolute Idealism and British neo-Hegelianism (Deshpande 2015a: 120). Paul Hacker is said to have borrowed the term ‘Neo-Hinduism’ from the Jesuit scholar Robert Antoine (1914-1981), who in turn may have adopted it from Brajendranath Seal (1864-1938) (Hacker and Halbfass 1995: 9).

Shanti Mandir, is itself ‘neo’. As a relatively young organisation it continues the ‘Meditation Revolution’ started by Nityananda’s Guru, Baba Muktananda. The teachings of the Siddha lineage are promoted within the context of sanātana dharma. Shanti Mandir translates this neo-Hindu term as ‘universal law’ (Mandir 2015t: 1). Throughout the past century or so, this phrase has been championed by neo-Vedantins such as Swami Vivekananda as part of a perennialist agenda that all religions espouse the same truth, it’s just that apparently Advaita Vedānta espouses it better (King 1999, Pirbhai 2008). The transposability of this term has assisted organisations such as Shanti Mandir to spread its universal message across different cultural and religious markets assisting it to accumulate capital. Larios’ work amongst the Brāhmaṇa communities of Maharashtra sheds light on these ongoing processes of negotiating legitimacy, authenticity and identity; their relation to broader themes of modernity versus tradition; and the flows of people and capital within the transglobal yoga industry. As a similar institution to the ones Larios has worked amongst, Shanti Mandir also relies upon its image as a ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’ centre of Brahminical Sanskritic Hinduism to bolster its credentials as a site of the cultural transmission of a particular yoga lifestyle. Larios explained how:

The loss of prestige for the traditional brāhmaṇa among the urban youth and an increasing view of the orthodox brāhmaṇa as ‘backward’, ‘narrow-minded’ and ‘provincial’ has pushed conservative oriented brāhmaṇas to find new venues to justify and ‘market’ their activities among a variety of ‘clients’. Besides the above-mentioned funds, new sources of income have emerged among the wealthy Hindu diaspora and increasingly among Western ‘yoga’-enthusiasts seeking the ‘authentic spiritual heritage of India’. This has of

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31 Seal (1915) was the author of The Positive Sciences of the Ancient Hindus, which was an attempt to situate ‘Hindu scientific ideas and methodology’ within a comparative philosophical context.
course not been without internal frictions among brāhmaṇas who need to constantly renegotiate the borders of their orthodoxy and the power relations among each other. (Larios forthcoming)

Central to Shanti Mandir’s claims to legitimacy is its position as a transmitter of dharma. This term is often wrongly translated simply as religion. However, the meaning is better encapsulated by terms such as morality, natural order, or virtue. To provide a historical glimpse we return to Larios who explained how the term dharma has been:

… reinterpreted and reconstructed again and again across generations. Innovation and change has clearly existed in India. This has been the case in the Brāhmaṇical tradition for millennia, but it was successfully masqueraded under the ideology of continuity and the eternal principles of the Vedas. The concept of dharma, as Olivelle (2005c) has shown, was not originally intrinsic to the Vedic tradition; it was rather incorporated as a reaction to social and cultural changes between the third and fifth centuries CE. It is the ideology of a static perfection developed in the Vedāntic traditions that covered innovations of any sort as coming from the only valid and unchanging source: the Vedas.32 (Larios forthcoming)

Larios explained the processes involved in the blending of Vedic and post-Vedic deities into a syncretic neo-Hinduism that includes idol worship. Historically speaking idol worship is not ‘Vedic’. This syncretism has caused internal dispute amongst the Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy for many centuries (von Stietencron 2005). Furthermore, the processes of essentialisation and eternalisation are ensconced in the rhetoric that all eternal truths are contained within the Vedas, which require a knowledgeable guru to explain them. The claim made in support of the ‘scientific’ and ‘rational’ religion of Advaita Vedānta has developed out of the nineteenth century Neo-Hindu movement which, it was claimed by Vivekananda at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, to be the paragon of religious development (Nanda 2005: 226). Jaffrelot refers to this mechanism used by Hindu nationalist groups to justify their existence through

reinterpreting their own traditions in the light of the ‘other’ as ‘strategic mimetism’ (Jaffrelot 1994a). This can be seen within the context the angst experienced by the Brahminical community as a ‘sense of the community under siege’ (Bairy 2010: 171-172). It is important to appreciate the relationship between piety and prestige and the historical development of the relationship between Brahmin priests and their economic sponsors. The mode by which prestige is conferred on Patrons occurs through the ritual deployment of mantras by the Scholars because it is believed it will ‘invoke divine aid and other benefits’ (Lubin 2005: 81).

People are attracted to Shanti Mandir as it provides a particular moral template and set of practices for existing in a world believed to have become morally ambiguous due to the overwhelming pursuit of profit and over-routinisation of life. This is explained as having come at the expense of meaning, tradition, community, and happiness. The attraction to Shanti Mandir stems from the desire to seek relief from the perceived perils of a secular, modern, scientifically sterile world that is thought to only breed disenchchantment. The promotion of the concept of jīvanmukta is one reason for Advaita Vedānta’s philosophical prestige as it promotes the possibility of attaining liberation in this very life, however, there are very few people that have apparently achieved this state (Sharma 1999). The neo-Hindu concept of jīvanmukta differs from Śaṅkara’s interpretation due to the emphasis of an ideal identity that includes visible elements of social activism (Srivastava 1990).  

33 Jīvanmukti is the opposite of videhamukti or deliverence through release from the body. In other words, jīvanmukti is a state of liberation achieved while living. This concept is central to Shanti Mandir’s promotional strategy. Videhamukti refers to attaining liberation, or at least, release from the body upon death. See Goodding (2002) for detailed discussion of this term.

34 See section 3.2 for more information about Shanti Mandir’s social activism.
Discussed more in section 5.4 is the yoga provider Shanti Mandir outsources their yoga teacher training courses to. Here I demonstrate part of the marketing strategy used by this organisation to generate its own prestige through separating themselves from the modern postural focus and linking themselves to a living ‘Vedic’ tradition. While firmly embedded in the transglobal yoga industry the founders go to great lengths to build a wall of authenticity based on a constructed impression of tradition by contrasting it to a Western ‘scientific’ paradigm. Previously, the ‘Shantarasa Yoga Institute’, which now calls itself ‘Shantarasa Traditional Yoga’ explained how:

In many ways contemporary yoga forms do not comprehend the vast independent science that underpins traditional forms of yoga practice and insight. The medical paradigm, alternative health orientations and the fitness industry are changing the face and implementation of the way yoga’s practices are taught and understood. With this contemporary shift in governing paradigms so much that is the real knowledge and purpose of yogic practices is being lost - either lost completely, lost in translation or reinvented to meet a market. Contemporary science can be useful mainly in articulating the additional empirical evidence required to inspire the western mind sets [sic]. The parameters of that model however are way too narrow to verify the expansive view of the yogic science. Yogic science is hard for the westerner to access unless they have direct contact with authentic adepts and teachings. (Pezet and Pezet 2015d)

This passage essentialises and trivialises a variety of identities and practices by suggesting that ‘western mind sets’ are too narrow to find contentment without ‘yogic science’. Shantarasa Traditional Yoga continue explaining how they are uniquely placed within the context of a very fast growing contemporary yoga scene. The roots and intentions of yogic practices are becoming obscured through the generalised marketing orientation of the ‘yoga industry’. (Pezet and Pezet 2015d)

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35 I discuss in chapter five how this yoga business markets itself in parallel with Shanti Mandir. I focus my argument based on an analysis of its marketing strategy related to the legitimate disposition of Shanti Mandir.
However, their ‘Global Yoga Teacher Training 2015’ promotional video shows how they interweave notions of globalisation, transcultural exchanges, capitalism and assertions of authentic yogic practices based on ‘The India Experience’ and operate exclusively within the very ‘yoga industry’ they seem to despise for obfuscating a ‘true’ yoga (Pezet and Pezet 2015a). They continue asserting that:

Teaching in India, we found the same trends of the western “yoga industry” imported back into the birthplace of “Yoga” itself. Western forms of asana practice now prevail in Indian city gyms and people are becoming injured by their practice and the injuries are not just physical. We meet people in this yogic homeland searching for a traditional form of the practice that is their cultural inheritance. (Pezet and Pezet 2015d)

However, it is challenging to understand what a ‘traditional form’ of yoga means. The following elucidates how yoga apparently has a ‘singular vision’. Not only does this statement expose Shantarasa Traditional Yoga’s claims to represent a narrow orthodoxy, it is also at odds with the general appreciation that yoga, even in a limited traditionalist sense is far from singular.

At Shantarasa, yoga instruction is skillfully conducted to enable profound release of deeply held tensions and limiting mindsets that inhibit the joyful opening and expansive feeling of total well-being. This foundational approach, drawing upon yoga’s singular vision, is consistently cultivated and implemented whether in asana classes, teacher training intensives or the other programs on offer. (Pezet and Pezet 2015c)

Furthering their claim to authenticity ‘The founders of Shantarasa have been fortunate in that they met with and were trained by traditional yogi adepts or “Siddhas” and continue to evolve through that very well rounded and transformational approach’ (Pezet and Pezet 2015d). As self-proclaimed champions and protectors of India’s cultural heritage, they present Shantarasa as part of the frontline preventing the ‘rapid fusion of western values into Indian contemporary culture’ that is in ‘so much danger of being completely lost’ (Pezet and Pezet 2015d). Finally, we see how Shantarasa uses the ‘Vedic’ sign and how it is superimposed onto the practice of yoga to create an ‘authentic’, ‘essential’ and ‘genuine practice’.
We spend many months each year living in the environment of a Vedic school, where the focus is teaching young ones Sanskrit grammar and the study of the Vedas for 12 years. In this environment and through this study all the elements of Vedic wisdom are practiced and the underpinning knowledge and practice of the yoga path exposed as an integral element of this immense living library of teaching and perennial wisdom. (Pezet and Pezet 2015d)

From the above we can appreciate how Shanti Mandir offers respite from ‘profane’ Western ideologies and practices through a remysticification of the world. Drawing upon Weber to clarify disenchantment, he stated that:

The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization, and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world.’ Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations. (Weber 1919: 554)

One could argue that Shanti Mandir provides both a ‘transcendental realm’ through the spiritual practices and liminal domain of the ashram where direct and personal human relations amongst like-minded individuals can be fostered and experienced thus creating a ‘re-enchanted world’. Shanti Mandir promotes itself as stronghold of an orthodox tradition. Jain (2014: xvi) contended that yoga is context specific and that there has never been a ‘true’, ‘legitimate’, ‘authentic’ or ‘original’ yoga. Instead there are ideas and practices contextualised around the term ‘yoga’. Shanti Mandir’s website states ‘Each ashram provides an ideal environment for seekers to immerse themselves in a traditional way of spiritual life, as passed down from the ancient sages’ (Mandir 2015b). However, behind this façade of mysticism and the experience of magic and mystical ritual is one of the driving forces of the perceived ‘disenchantment of the world’ they seek to mitigate: capitalism (Shull 2005, Weber [1930] 1992). According to Shull and Weber logic, secularism and bureaucracy have replaced God, magic and myth. The commodification of the sacred is the confluence of economic and cultural

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36 This concept of liminal domains is discussed below in section 2.8.
forms where culture is now an industry and ritual a commodity. The rationalisation and routinisation of life is entrenched in our existence. In the eyes of many Shanti Mandir devotees capitalism (and its products) is seen as antithetical to the pursuit of spirituality. Yet, today the perceived profanity of consumption has become a sacred act that threatens to dissolve the sacred/profane dichotomy (cf. Featherstone 2007: 119). This has significant implications for organisations like Shanti Mandir that builds its legitimacy on the back of a perceived orthodoxy and a sense of the sacred. Even though the rise in popularity of yoga is a direct response of market capitalism and consumer culture, issues of cultural dilution and authenticity arise. This is particularly the case when considering the building and maintenance of a moral consensus that occurs in the Shanti Mandir community (cf. Durkheim 1964), which uses ‘sacred’ symbols to generate emotional responses and break down social distance (cf. Featherstone 2007: 130), while also making clear distinctions built upon various standpoint theories.

Regardless, people find solace in the production of a contingent and arbitrary moral order that provides certainty, religious or otherwise (Kramer and Alstad 1993). For the majority of people involved there is a certainty that comes through ‘knowing’. This knowledge is derived from their subjective experiences of being in the guru’s presence and adhering to the prescribed practices. The ‘truth’ that they come to know is a direct result of the pleasant feelings and emotions produced through collective religious practice and pervading sense of communitas and shared identity, which I demonstrate is the affective glue that holds the social bonds together (Turner 1969, van Gennep 2004). For example, Durga, a housewife from Surat explained one day while we were cutting vegetables together how, ‘I don’t come here to think and worry about things. When I am with Gurudev and his devotees I feel calmer than I do in Surat. I know this because of the feelings I have in satsaṅga that this place is worth coming to.
2.4 — Materialism, Spirituality and Commodifying an Authentic Identity

Across time, yoga continues to represent a variety of identities and practices to a multitude of different groups (Madsen 2013). ‘Identity, in other words, is a kind of nexus at which different constructions of self coincide, and sometimes also collide’ (Van Meijl 2008: 174). Carrette and King suggested that:

It is clear that the metaphysical, institutional and societal dimensions of ancient yoga traditions are largely lost in the translation and popularisation of yoga in the West. Ancient techniques of introspection and self-control designed to transform one’s orientation away from a false identification with the individual self and leading to a deep confrontation with one’s existential condition, become instead optional methods for relieving daily stress and allowing individuals to cope better with the stresses and strains of the modern capitalist world. (Carrette and King 2005: 119-20)

Spirituality enters the market not necessarily as a counterpoint to the world of business but as a product to be appropriated and commodified. The exploration of how modern gurus represent their own versions of the ‘authentic’ ancient Vedic tradition as an alternative to the crises of modernity is necessary to better understand what motivates both the consumers and producers of these salvific goods (Lucia 2014a: 223). As Weber offered, ‘The most elementary forms of behaviour motivated by religious or magical factors are oriented to this world’ (Weber 1993 [1922]: 1). This is seen quite clearly in the explosion over recent years in spiritual tourism to India and other countries such as Indonesia, which has become a popular spiritual tourism option for the consumer of a yoga lifestyle. There is a seemingly endless choice of yoga retreats and meditation workshops offered that might include packages incorporating surfing, diving, raw food, and detoxification as a holistic and symbiotic balance and re-connection to nature. Book Yoga Retreats facilitates the booking of 2713 yoga retreats and courses from 1704 organisers in over 950 destinations across seventy countries in twenty different styles of yoga (Book-YogaRetreats 2015). To find the most suitable
yoga holiday one starts by choosing a category like ‘Yoga Spiritual Retreat’. Then the consumer chooses a particular style, followed by the preferred destination and arrival date. Neither Shanti Mandir nor Shantarasa Traditional Yoga are found on this website. Neither are they mentioned on the Government of Gujarat's own tourism website.

Gujarat have [sic] world class Yoga centers across the State. This ancient art of Hindu philosophy which prescribe, physical and mental fitness for mind, body and soul as well as spiritual well being, attracts foreign tourists from all over the world who experience the state of the at well being. (Gujarat 2015)

Shanti Mandir is ensconced in this context. On the homepage is a link to ‘Retreats’ where meditation intensives, meditation and group retreats, and retreats in specific idyllic locations can be found (Mandir 2015u). Shanti Mandir has also recently added a ‘Satsang [sic] Tours in India’ where it is possible to travel in the company of the Renunciants and experience the ‘confluence of truth’ in various locations (Mandir 2015v).

The popular ‘holistic’ reception of yoga, both in the West and in India, is too often reduced to an emphasis of either the mind or the body as a sanitised spirituality repackaged for body conscious consumers. Shanti Mandir stipulates that it wants ‘genuine seekers’ of yoga instead of individuals focused on identifying with an embodied individual self that are focused on furthering one’s own narcissistic interests (Carrette and King 2005: 118-121). As the following excerpt from Shanti Mandir’s promotional material explained.

Shanti Darshanam is an education initiative to foster authentic training for genuine seekers on the path of yoga. The courses instruct participants in a broad range of yoga practices and philosophies that enable direct experience as well as the understanding to develop and sustain a meaningful and satisfying relationship with the yoga tradition. […]

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37 The different styles of yoga include: Anusara, Ashtanga, Ayurveda, Bikram/Hot, Hatha, Iyengar, Kundalini, Tantra, Vinyasa, Yin, Dynamic, General, Integral, Jivanmukti, Kripalu, Kriya, Power, Restorative, Sivananda, Vipassana.
One of the central outcomes from participation in this course is an ongoing and expanding connection with the *full experience of yoga*. [Emphasis added] (Mandir 2015w: 1)

Our understanding of the ‘genuine seeker’s identity’ is nuanced by referring to Nichter’s typology of various yoga identities (Nichter 2013: 244-246). This spectrum includes:

1) Yoga professionals
2) ‘Come to the source’
3) Yoga travellers
4) Yoga lites

While Shanti Mandir welcomes anyone interested in their community, tradition and practices, Shanti Mandir explained via email that the abovementioned quote suggests that the ‘genuine seeker’ is likely to be a yoga professional, ‘come to the source’ or a ‘yoga traveler’. The difference separating the first and second identities from the third and fourth is the emphasis, or focus on the individual embarking on a type of pilgrimage in search of a spiritual experience; and the accumulation of cultural capital that can be recognised and admired upon the individual’s return home (Burger 2006, Nichter 2013).

In the email response from Shanti Mandir regarding my question as to what they consider the identity of a ‘genuine seeker’ to be; I was informed that this individual would seek to go beyond ‘fashionable and trendy career based’ options and would instead want to ‘dive to the depths of yoga and themselves’ (McCartney 2015). The Shanti Mandir yoga approach:

*can be a complete life overhaul. And for those who feel that pull inside themselves to ask the big questions, and the courage and perseverance to dedicate their lives to finding the answers, this course places them right in the middle of that. I believe this is what is meant by genuinely seeking. There must be some initial way people can differentiate course objectives. And in a way that is not promotional spammy language but conveys some of the essence of what has been gifted to us. There is the sincere hope that one does not in
fact create any yogic identity but loses many identities in the fire of yoga. (McCartney 2015)

From the response above we can appreciate at least that a ‘genuine seeker’ has dedicated themselves to finding answers to big questions and understands that haṭha yoga is only a preparatory practice and component of a more encompassing sādhanā (practice). The most telling excerpt is the final sentence that suggests that ‘one does not in fact create any yogic identity but loses many identities in the fire of yoga’. Central to the aṣṭāṅga-yoga system is the concept of tapas (heat). It is the burning caused by religious austerity that is said to be one of the ways to achieve purity and perfection. However poetic and wantonly disinterested, Shanti Mandir cannot escape creating for itself a particular brand and identity. The commodification and marketing of Shanti Mandir’s yoga brand and particular lifestyle is tightly bound with the projection of modern postural yoga that dominates the general perception of what a legitimate ‘yoga’ practice is (Singleton 2010). This is central to my argument that Shanti Mandir has reluctantly incorporated modern postural yoga into its identity to gain legitimacy and capital in new markets where postural yoga is preferred. This is further complicated by the fact that previous interpretations of what yoga has signified have virtually no mention of a physical practice focused on postures and breathing (Singleton 2010, Jain 2014, White 2011, Madsen 2013).

Discussed in more detail in chapter three is the philosophical traditions that guide the practices and identity of Shanti Mandir. Built upon the recommendations by the spiritual lineage Shanti Mandir is affiliated with the following list shows at least the emergent properties of the Shanti Mandir disposition. My aim is to go beyond a mere description of the external practices and provide a deeper description of the internal structure of the legitimate disposition. The Smarta tradition advocates that an

38 PYS 2.1, 2.32, 4.1.
39 PYS 4.1.
individual ought to imbibe the good habits of the guru and not just worship them or listen to their advice. Therefore, the following traits advocated by the gurus form the cornerstone of the legitimate disposition:

1. Sattvic (pure) habits, which include vegetarianism, cleanliness, discipline, etc.
2. Regular worship of god and development of bhakti (devotion).
3. Giving importance to learning and knowledge.
4. Good conduct, honesty, generosity, and adherence to scriptures.
5. Austerity and simplicity.
6. Love, respect, and responsibility towards one's family or community.
7. Destruction of pride and ego.

(Mutt 2015)

In trying to differentiate itself from its competitors, the path to attracting global participants to its residential yoga courses requires an engagement with the physical component (āsana). However, this corporeal dimension is backgrounded by the intention of the guru, Nityananda ‘to contribute to the efforts underway to preserve the ancient and authentic gnosis that has guided and inspired countless generations of genuine seekers for millennia’ (Mandir 2015p: 5). Taken as the benchmark for nearly all contemporary approaches to yoga, whether postural or soteriological, the Shanti Mandir yogic approach also finds inspiration in the eight limbs of Patañjali’s (ca. 400 BCE) ‘classic’ treatise on āṣṭhāṅga-yoga (Mandir 2014e: 1-3, Sarbacker 2011, Wujastyk 2015). What can be interpreted here is that a non-genuine seeker has an experience and perception of yoga as limited to the physical aspects that also focuses on using this knowledge to support a career (unlike Shantarasa Traditional Yoga). Shanti Mandir’s yoga ‘lifestyle’ is offered as a counterpoint to this general attitude and yet operates to support a community through accumulating capital. Surely, even the
supposedly disinterested ‘divine’ and ‘spiritual’ pursuits of promoting a Vedic lifestyle
do not preclude an individual or organisation from being contextualised within the
career paradigm? Even still Shanti Mandir must engage with what can it considers an
‘in-authentic’ or rather ‘incomplete’ yoga to attract participants while also developing
a brand name for itself. Perhaps this is best explained through the following
testimonial regarding a previous participant’s experience in one of the courses.

There are few experiences in our life that we can truly pin-point as life changing. I chose
to seek out a yoga instructors [sic] course in the hope of getting some direction in my life
but what I received from the Shantarasa Instructor Course held at Shanti Mandir in India
is truly impossible to put into words. I am so grateful to have been involved in such a
traditional and holistic training program full of integrity and authenticity. It is saddening
to see the way Western society has appropriated yoga from the East, so much of the
philosophy and meaning behind this ancient tradition has been left behind. Participation
in this course in either Australia or India will open your body, mind and soul to the
intended experience of yoga in its entirety and completeness and help you to become not
only the best teacher you can be but also the best person. The experience of the course at
the ashram in India is unparalleled to anything I have experienced before, an experience
that would be impossible to regret! (Bevan 2015) [Emphasis added]

The materialism of the West is often quoted as the reason for the erosion of
‘traditional’ or ‘core’ Indian values. A more nuanced understanding of materialism
allows us to appreciate that a true materialist society would have much greater respect
(i.e., ideas of sustainability and symbiosis with the earth that is treated with reverence)
for the material world through making it sacred (Seabrook 1997). Beginning with
exploring the etymology of the term ‘dharma’ and how this noun is derived from the
Sanskrit root √dhṛ, which means to sustain, support, or hold (Holdrege 2004), Jain
(2011) provides an interesting discussion contextualising it as a religious and
environmental ethos with ecological implications. Shanti Mandir focuses on promoting
these qualities, and while we might be tempted to label this community as a group of
transcendental idealists, with the above definition of materialism, our understanding is
forced to compensate somewhat. However, more broadly across Indian society is
evidence of the contested alternative vision of what constitutes a ‘good Indian society’.

The national incorporation of yoga plays a prominent role within domestic and
international arenas. Part of this negotiation is formulated through an appetite for
pseudo-scientism informed by the metaphysical assumptions of neo-Hindu
philosophers and modern gurus who promote a kind of Vedic/Hindu scientism
amongst the educated and modern (Nanda 2009: 69-70). Supported by a host of
publications asserting the origins of modern science in the Vedas, a recent example is
the statement by Narendra Modi at India’s most prestigious science congress in
Mumbai. As a testament to the vast knowledge located within the Vedas, Modi
claimed that the elephant headed god Gaṇeśa is the world’s first example of a
successful plastic surgery operation (Rahman 2014).

The legitimating experience is built around a ‘search for truths about the world
that start out from an enchanted, animated, divinized view of nature’, which is
considered ‘as legitimately scientific as the search for truths in modern science. This is
the edifice on which the defense of Vedic science rests’ (Nanda 2003: 139). It is also
the edifice upon which the epistemological position of the Shanti Mandir community
rests. Nanda qualifies her statement arguing that, following on from post-modernist
claims made by theologians and feminists, regarding the privileged assumptions and
legitimacy of modern science:

That the naturalistic assumptions of modern science reflect only the historically
contingent experience of disenchantment of Protestant Christian societies, opens the door
for claims of mystical experiences of the unity of nature and the Divine for producing

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40 See Deshpande (2007 — *Modern Science in Vedas*); Panda (2000 — *The Vibrating Universe*) and
India’s Scientific Heritage*) as examples.

41 It ought to be noted that this story is a Purānic myth. AT least 1000 years separates the Purānic and
Vedic literary traditions.
alternative science which has valid descriptions of nature. If modern science is seen as a product of dualist metaphysics of Christianity, then other societies are free to develop their own sciences based upon their own religious experiences and their own metaphysical assumptions. (Nanda 2003: 139)

The problem for people in this modern age who feel compelled to return to something of a glorious golden age is that ‘in the face of the disenchantment of nature brought about by the scientific revolution, we experience a gap between knowledge and wisdom that has the consequence of divesting our lives of meaning’ (Critchley 2001: 8). Embedded within ancient traditions that are presented as competent alternatives to modern secularism is the nostalgia for a return to a pre-modern era that produces hope. However, this reenchanting discourse is still bound within an ironic self-validating context related to ‘sciences’ or ‘technologies’ of the ‘self’ or ‘spirit’ as witnessed above in Shantarasa Traditional Yoga’s usage (McMahan 2008: 13).

In trying to understand where Shanti Mandir is located within the transglobal yoga and spiritual tourism industries, it becomes clear, very early on that this unregulated and heterogenous market allows for a seemingly infinite variety of yoga species to evolve and either prosper or wither on the capitalist vines of the free market. In this section Shanti Mandir has been identified as promoting itself as a provider of a particular authentic identity while encompassing the general understanding of modern postural yoga as only a part of into its broader yogic identity. It does so to build a conceptual and practical bridge that appeals to potential customers of its own Vedic way of life–style (Prasad 2004).

The ongoing recruitment process normally includes work of some kind of goodwill (i.e., community work). Individuals find the enticing pull of the group a palpable source of energy, excitement and purpose. The community is able to feel vital and prosperous through assisting the guru with his proselytising tours and charitable works that demonstrate the accumulation of public attention as newcomers flock to the
group. Cults need a continuous stream of recruits ‘to reinforce the belief that they’re “where it's at” — the vanguard of spirituality on the planet’ (Kramer and Alstad 1993: 78).

An ‘authentic’ Vedic tradition is held in up in contrast to and a solution to the ‘crises’ of modernity (Lucia 2014a). This nostalgia for a premodern revitalisation of ancient traditions that McMahan (2008) discussed is synonymous with the use by religious groups of producing a particular message, product, philosophy, method and idea of sanctity through a ‘transposable message’ and ‘portable practice’ that can be commodified and recontextualised across the globe in different spiritual marketplaces (Csordas 2009b: 4). This is evidenced in the organisation’s promotional material when referring, essentially, to Nityananda’s epistemic capital.

His humility, devotion, patience, and acceptance are palpable, his ability to speak English and his knowledge of the Western culture, allows audiences to grasp the traditional Vedic teachings with ease. While carrying the traditional teachings, he makes spirituality a practical part of modern daily reality, guided by the prayer ‘May all beings be content’. (Mandir 2015d)

As has been demonstrated Shanti Mandir promotes a return to an imagined ‘Vedic golden age’ that is considered the antidote to the onslaught of modernity, capitalism and globalisation. It is worth contextualising this reconstruction within a broader global context that sees other religious and political groups trying to assert and impose their idea of what the past, present and future ought to be and how it is based on various forms of moral chauvinism (Ingersoll 2015). Within the Hindu context it is important to understand how the belief in the fundamental concept of the recurring cycle of Ages of the World (yugas) influences various discussions, particularly if we take into account Nanda’s comment on freedom of others to make their own scientific claims based on various metaphysical assumptions (González-Reimann 2014).

The yugas are a quaternary system where each stage represents increased moral degradation until the cycle resets. Currently we are said to live in the last era where the
capacities of people are diminished and unrighteousness is at its peak. This Kali Yuga is used to explain a multitude of things including the perceived moral degradation of society, the arrival of Islamic rule, British colonial dominance, and the pernicious effects of capitalism (González-Reimann 2014). As far as this metaphysical concept is stretched, it is interesting to know that its humble origins occurred around the beginning of the common era based on a dice game (González-Reimann 1986).

The question is ‘how does Shanti Mandir distinguish itself in this industry?’ Alongside Hindu spirituality, yoga as a ‘discipline to control the mind’ became a repackaged asceticism, devotion and worship worked into a nationalist idiom. It was assumed that this operationalised ‘ancient wisdom’ could help in national self-determination, social reform and spiritual awakening. Moreover, this discussion has shone light on the existing culture war within the industry between so-called traditionalists with conservative values and so-called progressives with liberal values. In the next section we explore the exchanges of capital that support the organisation and their implications for the individual when trying to trade in a disinterested manner within this particular symbolic system.

2.5 — Exchanges of Capital

The following ‘textbook’ examples of the ideal normative representation of the guru-disciple relationship demonstrate how self-interested exchanges of capital exist predicated by the existence of symbolic debt and how they can be remunerated while demonstrating the nature and logic of the debt-relationship one might have with a spiritual master. The first explained how the exchange of knowledge for remuneration is considered the ultimate reward, ‘Dakṣinā jñāna-sandeśaḥ prāṇāyāmaḥ paraṁ balam; the highest religious remuneration (dakṣinā) is the offering of knowledge’. In

42 BhP 11.19.36-39.
the next verse Krishna tells his guru, Sandipani Muni, about the best way to repay the debt he owes: ‘Iyad eva hi sacchisyaiḥ, kartavyam gurunīśkrtaṃ, yad vai viśuddhabhavena, sarvārthātmāpnaṁ gurau; the sincere student should repay the debt to the guru with a virtuous attitude offering even one’s own self’. While the prescribed practice of giving is mentioned in the Hari-bhakti-Vilasa, ‘gurum ca bhagavad-drstyā, parikramya pranamya ca, dattvoktam daśinam tasmai, sva-sārīram samarpayet; Having seen the guru as god himself while circumambulating and bowing to him, one should donate according to the scriptures and offer one’s own body’. While its possible to understand this donation of the self in a corporeal sense of embodied labour, we can appreciate how this expression of post-industrial labour in the ashram is more about handling people and symbols as opposed to manipulating things (Mills 1951: 239). Weeks (2007: 239) explained Mills’ idea of a ‘personality market’, in which ‘personal or even intimate traits of the employee are drawn into the sphere of exchange’ (1951: 182). This idea was further developed by Hochschild into the concept of emotional labour, which ‘requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others’ (1983: 7).

This type of labour is carried out by everyone in the ashram, especially the guru, who is required, in the spirit of exchange, to maintain a peaceful disposition regardless of whether he might be tired or agitated. The same goes for the devotees who are trying diligently to emulate his disposition as well. According to Weeks, the strength of Hochschild’s feminist perspective is in showing how the ‘strategic management of emotions for social effect as an everyday practice […] is not generally recognized or valued as labour’ (2007: 240). Viewing the ashram economy in this way opens up valuable ways of understanding the interpersonal exchanges and how they

43 BhP 10.80.41; HBV 2.112.
44 HBV 2.111.
shape the social network as opposed to a limited view through the lens of rational choice theory (Boudon 2003).

The rhetoric of the Shanti Mandir community generally favours framing the donations the devotees make as disinterested ‘gifts’ that are given free of any expectation of an immediate or later exchange or reward. This is because they ought to be given in the spirit of selflessness. The following example highlights the way in which the disinterested discourse socialises individuals, and how it involves the construction of secondary rationalisations to support disguising the truth regarding the interested motivations of individuals (Huberman 2010, Levi-Strauss 1974).

Anandi is a retired allied health professional from Australia who has been involved with Shanti Mandir for several years and, long before that she was involved with Siddha Yoga. When asked why she gives to this organisation she replied, ‘I give to Shanti Mandir so that our guru’s ashram can grow. I don’t expect anything in return. I am happy helping. It is enough for me’. However, is there more to her intention? Is she reproducing for the sake of appearances and acceptance the standard ‘disinterested response’ expected by the community? Anandi has made her intentions public by announcing she wants to become a renunciant (swāminī) in the monastic order Shanti Mandir is affiliated with. Renunciation is still a strategy for gaining prestige in society and suggests Anandi has at least some level of self-interest in securing status for herself by demonstrating her fidelity through transubstantiating economic and social capital for the religious capital of renunciation.

In sociological theory the level of reciprocity involved in the giving of a gift is contested. Mauss asserted that in any gift lies an obligation to reciprocate (1990 [1950]). This is an assumption that Testart denied through the example of giving money to a homeless person on the street. When such an act is made there is no expectation or obligation upon the receiver to reciprocate (Testart 1998). Building upon Parry (1986), Copeman (2011) explained the various forms of Hindu and non-
Hindu gift exchanges that exist in India such as dāna, bhik, daksinā, and saṅgitā. Focusing on dāna, which is generally an unreciprocated gift or donation that provides a mechanism for ranking through ‘impurity’ (Quigley 1993), leads Huberman to assert that only unreciprocated gifts of dāna transmit inauspiciousness or moral impurity (pāpa) to those who receive it (Huberman 2010). The act of giving is riddled with discourses of power and purity that quite often reveal hierarchical social orders that speak of support for particular utopias or the highest ideals of civilisation, i.e., graciousness and not savagery (Groebner 2002, Heim 2015).

However, what is it that Nityananda or his organisation needs to give back in order not to accumulate the pāpa of their donors? The answer lays in the transference of grace, knowledge and the opportunity to imbibe the teachings of the tradition. This includes appreciating how giving to Shanti Mandir also creates value, whether it is helping to build a sense of community, an act of religious devotion or even to find the zeitgeist within a particular metaphysical system (cf. Graeber 2013), or spiritual movement such that the yoga lifestyle affords. Cultures are first imagined as a type of value that is used to shape those humans drawn to it. It is necessary to appreciate how giving towards the development of a culture in this sense is an investment in value-adding to not only one’s own personal life but of the community we choose to identify with. Graeber clarified Marx’s ‘labor theory of value’ by asking the following question:

assuming that we do collectively make our world, that we collectively make it daily, then
why is it that we somehow end up creating a world that few of us particularly like, most
find unjust, and over which no one feels they have any ultimate control?
(Graeber 2013: 222)

In this context it is possible to understand and appreciate the social world that the Shanti Mandir global community is trying to create. One that seeks to give a sense of wholeness built upon the principles of love and compassion. By giving the individual
feels empowered and that a change, albeit, however incremental, is visible through the growth in the community, particularly the evolution of the students in the Sanskrit college who have a prominent place in the promotion of Shanti Mandir’s activities and identity.

In this way we can appreciate the ritualised exchanges of capital between guru and devotee through his organisation that relies, albeit as a non-profit, on commercial transactions where capital is exchanged for the symbolic rewards of learning to become an authentic knower of this tradition, being accepted as a member of this community, the intangible grace of the guru, and the soteriological promise it encapsulates.

The generous donations of the devotees go through the website or through country representatives (Mandir 2015i). They bypass any direct monetary exchange that the guru may personally have with the dāna. This would suggest, theoretically at least, that he is thereby not inculcated in these electronic investments, which precludes his personal accumulation of the devotees’ pāpa. But, this raises an interesting question, who is? Figure 3.1 shows how an individual is able to invest in various projects, such as the Sanskrit school (mahāvidyālaya), which is central to the identity and purpose of the organisation. It is worth noting that once the individual proceeds to the checkout page the system Shanti Mandir uses for its online transactions refers to the donor as a ‘customer’ (Mandir 2015h). While this might just be a feature of this transactional system, that for transparency and tax purposes of both customer and Shanti Mandir involves this familiar procedural idiom ensuring smooth transactions; Shanti Mandir would ideally like to operate outside of the capitalist paradigm and was reticent to discuss the sources of its economic capital. Regardless, this figure demonstrates part of the necessary bounded nature of the relationship between consumers and producer within the ashram economy.
Regardless of this bypass, the guru is still obligated to reciprocate. Śaktipāta is a fundamental practice in the Siddha tradition and is central to the teleological pursuits of the Shanti Mandir community (Jain 2014). In order to retain and develop his own prestige the guru is under a social obligation to reciprocate by transferring his śakti (energy) and jñāna (knowledge) to his devotees.

The power of symbolic capital is its ability to recast the appearance of self-interested motives into disinterested ones (Swartz 1997: 90). Symbolic capital is ‘denied capital’ as it disguises the attachment individuals or groups have to it. The appearance of disinterested pursuits negates the significance of explicit market exchanges (i.e., money for goods) in preference for a ‘good faith economy’ where the exchange of both material and symbolic gifts dominates (Bourdieu 1990: 114). Such logic exists in the ashram alongside what Marx thought an ideal pre-capitalist world operated by, where ‘material wealth only exists to further that task of shaping one another into the sort of beings we feel ought to exist, and we wish to have around us’ (Graeber 2013: 223).

An example of this involves one occasion when a devotee’s husband died unexpectedly from a heart attack. This woman also worked in the ashram performing various tasks for perhaps USD1-2 per day. In support, almost half the ashram’s residents went to her nearby home. This included a majority of the students who lead a
recitation of the Viṣṇu Sahasranāma. It is commonly believed that recitation of this text releases the individual from all causes of bondage. It is popular across India and quite often recited by families of deceased relatives.

In a satsaṅga that I attended Nityananda explained how the ashram serves as an important space for people to come together, celebrate or mourn. Amita, a young woman from Mumbai who married an expatriate Indian located in Dubai used the ashram for their ring swapping ceremony as part of the wedding activities. On the day of the wedding, which took place in Delhi, Amita organised the distribution of chocolate and cashew nut sweets at lunch. This allowed all of her friends who were not able to join her at the ceremony to remember her and celebrate with her in a distributed way.

Apart from the direct investments of economic capital discussed above, individuals also invest capital as embodied labour. This occurs in the form of volunteering in exchange for the intangible or ‘transcendental’ product of learning to embody and emulate the disposition of the ideal knower, to learn a moral and epistemological template, and to generate an affective sense of community. These donations are given in the spirit of self-less service to the guru and his mission, as suggested by the Bhāgavād Gītā (3.9), to divinise all actions through cultivating a self-less attitude devoid of expectation of rewards.45

On one occasion a friend from Australia visited me. Jack works in IT and has very little idea or interest in ashrams, yoga or gurus. While walking around the ashram Jack explained how he felt that as a short-term visitor and non-devotee who was, like almost everyone else, paying for the opportunity to stay, he considered himself more of a tourist or paying guest who was not obligated to do any sevā. In preparation for

45 BG 3.9 yajñārthāt karmaṇo'nyatra loko'yam karma-bandhaneḥ tad-arthaṁ karma kaunteya mukta-saṅgah samācara.
lunch, I invited him to join us to cut some vegetables after breakfast, however, he declined, explaining ‘why should I work if I am paying for board and lodging’.

At the reception is a sign that said, ‘you are not a guest, but a devotee’. I guess Jack did not see the sign. This raises interesting questions about how, why and when individuals get involved in sevā. Arguably, Jack’s motivation was to come and see what his friend was doing and because he had no interest in joining the community or returning he felt there was little incentive or pressure to participate in the way anticipated by the community. Doctor Rakhee is a pediatrician who has lived in the ashram for more than a decade. Based on her observations she explained to me late one Sunday afternoon how she felt the Western devotees who visit seemed like they had a lot more to prove, and, that is why they generally engage in more sevā than the Indian visitors. Regardless, the students refer to all the visitors as bāhar-vāle (outsiders).

From a feminist perspective, viewing the role of the devotee involved in supporting or promoting the status of the household (i.e., the guru — gurukula) through the lens of emotional labour is revealing. Economic theories related to market analysis often overlook this non-market form of labour. However, emotional labour is central to the exchanges of capital in the Shanti Mandir system as it produces solidarity, bonds of affection, moral support, friendship, love, a sense of community and belonging, empowerment, and ontological strength (Delphy and Leonard 1992: 21). As a site of social reproduction the community and Nityananda often describe the students attending the Sanskrit college as ‘his children’. This brings into light an interesting juncture between the people that help care for and support the students’ development, the labour of affective caring and a ‘feminist epistemology that integrates the knowledges gleaned from labors of the hand, brain, and heart’ (Weeks 2007: 237). As representatives of the guru, the students hold a special in potentia place within the symbolic system. There is a lot of pressure placed on the students to live up
to the expectations and behavioural standards of becoming and being vedamūrtis. The specific performativity of this immaterial emotional labour and its transformative role in the broader socialisation of the community is discussed more in chapters five and six.

In the next section I explore the symbolic capital of Sanskrit and its role in shaping an ideal –scape that instrumentalises the symbolic capital of Sanskrit to revive saṃskṛti (culture).

2.6 — The Symbolic Capital of Sanskrit

One more medium of imbibi

ng virtues like [a] sense of duty, integrity, devotion, faith, etc. is [the] Sanskrit language. By speaking consistently in [the] devvani [sic] (God’s language) the so-called downtrodden or the depressed class of the society also feels elevated. They not only feel confident but also develop samskars [sic], which is the very base of any developmental activity. (Deopujari 2009)

It is through the symbolic capital of Sanskrit that Shanti Mandir gains its credibility as a producer of ‘authentic’ knowers of the Siddha and Vedic traditions. Sanskrit is a highly prestigious language, and, in some ways it can be considered a living and singing fossil that inspires millions of believers and spiritual seekers towards moral rectitude and salvation. For other groups, who have been marginalised by this hegemonic monolith, it represents something different, namely the hegemony of a prestigious and powerful religious elite. Its corpus is said to contain millions of manuscripts. The oldest Sanskrit is said to be the Ṛg Veda, which is dated to approximately 1300 BCE (Parpola 2012, Witzel 2001). Verses 10.71 and 10.125 of this text are the first mention of the sacred power of sound and word within this corpus (Doniger 2009: 108). Due to the unbroken intergenerational oral transmission of this knowledge, in 2008 UNESCO added the tradition of Vedic chanting to its Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity List. UNESCO explained that ‘the value of this
tradition lies not only in the rich content of its oral literature but also in the ingenious techniques employed by the Brahmin priests in preserving the texts intact over thousands of years’ (*UNESCO* 2015b).

As an obvious source of pride the Vedic canon and Sanskrit literature are interpolated into the patriotic discourse in various ways, which Shanti Mandir is also involved in promoting. It is involved as a propagator of a post-vernacular Sanskrit language nest within an imagined community (Anderson 2006, Reershemius 2009, Shandler 2008). The production of divine space using the ‘language of the gods’ is inherent in the aims of several organisations interested in promoting Sanskrit as not only a possible lingua franca but also the instrumental cause in the moral upliftment and development of India. As Shanti Mandir also runs several charitable works to assist the local rural peoples in its vicinity with employment, education, and medical assistance, it is this development-patriotic discourse that serves as a link between the various objectives of Shanti Mandir and the broader activities of the patriots (*deśabhakta*-s).

2.7 — Imagining Sanskrit Land: Sanskrit Language Nests

‘Sanskrit Land’ as I like to call this imagined utopia, is a possibility based on a glorious return of the imagined golden Vedic age discussed above. Various groups such as Sanskrit enthusiasts, yoga proselytes, spiritual seekers and patriots are

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46 A post-vernacular language serves the purpose of identity building within a community even after it is no longer used as a vernacular for daily communication.

47 Anderson’s concept of an imagined community relates to the socially constructed community that people imagine themselves to be a part of. The concept of the nation is defined by Anderson as ‘an imagined political community’ (2006: 7).

48 The Śrīneri Śaṅkarācārya, Bharata Tirtha, explained ‘yaṁ saṁskṛta bhāṣā devabhāṣā iti kathyate; It is said that the Sanskrit language is the divine language (or language of the gods)’ (*Samskritabharaticbe* 2012).

49 Compare Deopujari’s quote at beginning of this section.
interested in realising the potential fruits of revivifying ‘India’s own Jurassic Park’ (Ghosh 2008). The promotion of spoken Sanskrit communities is part of a belief that it is the surest antidote to the alleged moral decay of our times.

As a sign, the ‘Sanskrit-speaking village’ signifies an ideological example of the potential moral benefits a community, and ultimately a nation, can accrue through choosing to speak Sanskrit over another language. Across South Asia, this has led to entire communities ‘correcting’ their lifestyles through their contact with Sanskrit by renouncing alcohol, the consumption of meat, other vices, and various moral dangers (Ghosh 2008, *Hindutvainus* 2011). Some, it is alleged, have even rejected their first language in favour of Sanskrit. This is said to be due to the power of Sanskrit to transform the lives of those who speak the ‘language of the gods’. The co-founder of Samskrita Bharati, the national organisation devoted to propagation of spoken Sanskrit and Indian culture (*Bhārata saṃśkriti*), Chamu Krshna Shastry, believes that ‘through the work of Sanksrit lives are reformed’ (*Samskrit101 2009*).

Across India there are several Sanskrit language nests (such as *Vedapāṭhaśāla*-s). It is also alleged that there are several villages where entire populations of non-scholarly non-Brahminical communities speak only Sanskrit. Both of these types of communities have a particular place in the Hindu nationalist imaginary and, for the naive supporter of the Sanskritic tradition who is not concerned with the politico-religious environment of South Asia, the appropriation of Sanskrit as a nationalist tool is often quite shocking. The patriots’ aim is to replace all the vernacular languages of India with Sanskrit through a forced Sanskritisation (Charsley 1998, Jaffrelot 2000, 50: ‘Saṃskṛtān karaṇeṇa jīvanam parivartanam’).

50 Conversations in the ashram with international devotees were quite revealing. The general lack of interest and knowledge of India and the attitudes towards Sanskrit and Brahminical were highlighted by certain individuals reticence to discuss contemporary social issues. Instead, the overwhelming response focused on not wanting to even consider broader issues preferring to focus on their yoga practice and ashram experience, see section 2.10.
Srinivas 1956, 1989). This will lead to Sanskrit becoming the nation’s principal lingua franca and is seen as an opportunity to right the historical wrongs of the Mughal and British colonial periods through the sanitising power of Sanskrit (McCartney 2014c).

At a Cabinet meeting the Union Culture Minister, Mahesh Sharma recently articulated this point regarding ‘cultural pollution’ (*sanskṛtik praduṣāṇa*) of the West by explaining how:

> We will cleanse every area of public discourse that has been westernised and where Indian culture and civilisation need to be restored - be it the history we read or our cultural heritage or our institutes that have been polluted over years. (Sukanya 2015).

As a post-vernacular language, Sanskrit is spoken to varying degrees of fluency by the teachers and students who work and study at the Sanskrit boarding school located within Shanti Mandir’s ashram. The cultural capital of the twice-born (*dvīja*) *Brāhmaṇa* students\(^{52}\) learning the ritual and linguistic grammars of (technical mastery), provides the organisation with the legitimacy and ‘purifying’ aural component it needs to demonstrate to potential investors (devotee-patrons) that its charitable works have an immanently ‘divine’ purpose. As a form of *prayaŚcitta* (atonement), the individual can give *dāna* to help the guru’s *saikalpa* (intention) to eventually have one thousand students. This group of Scholars (the teachers and students), which is explored in depth in chapter four, also makes up the majority of residents in the ashram, and for this reason, I consider the ashram to be on par with other Sanskrit speaking village. Even though Hindi is currently the main language within the ashram, the aim of Shanti Mandir is, one day, to have a critical mass of Sanskrit speakers so that it will replace Hindi as the dominant mode of communication. The Shanti Mandir ashram is an example of a type of language nest

\(^{52}\) The overwhelming majority of the students are Brahmaṇas. At the time of writing there are only one or two Kṣatriya students studying at the college.
involved in the broader Hindu nationalist project to promote the Sanskrit language. While it is argued that the promotion of spoken Sanskrit is a bigger project, I have yet to meet anyone involved in the spoken Sanskrit movement who does not at least have an emotional connection, if not a political affiliation to the Sangh Parivar. The existence of these villages is used to suggest a possible alternate national reality where the problems associated with the ‘Westernisation’ of India will not be found in Bhārata (the Sanskritised name for India). An example of this is found in a statement by the RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat in which he explained that:

> Crimes against women happening in urban India are shameful. It is a dangerous trend. But such crimes won't happen in 'Bharat' or the rural areas of the country. You go to villages and forests of the country and there will be no such incidents of gang-rape or sex crimes. (Ghosh 2013)

A popular idea among the Sanskrit enthusiasts is that, by bringing development and enlightenment to the rural areas of India, Sanskrit will assist in revitalising a homogenised ‘traditional’ value system and concurrent set of practices while also sanitising Bhārata of its Mughal and British colonial legacies.

> Due to the Sanskrit language caste discrimination between the so-called lower and upper castes has reduced. Those who speak the language can hold his head high in the society. The oneness of the society leads to the development of the village. Jayatu Sanskritam [Victory to Sanskrit]. (Deopujari 2009)

The official philosophy of the BJP is a combination of Integral Humanism and Hindutva. Integral Humanism is an indigenous economic model that affords primacy to humans (Hansen 1999). Hindutva is described as a pathological response to the failures of the modernist state that articulates strong racialist tones and a strident culturalism, which is often described as fascist and a quintessential form of ‘hate politics’ (Reddy 2011, Upadhyaya 1965, Visvesvaran, Witzel et al. 2009). Each new member of the BJP is required to swear an oath of allegiance to these philosophies (Nanda 2009: 27).
Alongside Hindu spirituality, yoga as a ‘discipline to control the mind’ was a new doctrine that repackaged asceticism, devotion and worship into a nationalist idiom. It was assumed that this operationalised ‘ancient wisdom’ could help in national self-determination, social reform and spiritual awakening. The Hindu-spiritual imaginary, which shares undercurrents with the Hindu-nationalist imaginary is underwritten by the belief that the ‘sacred’ language of Sanskrit has a purifying and pacifying effect on individuals, communities and nations alike. The Shanti Mandir ashram represents a multiple array of possibilities or alternate realities to various groups and individuals. By contextualising the ashram as a Sanskrit language nest, or at least a type of village or community where ‘Sanskrit is spoken’, there is the possibility of broadening our understanding of the multiple ways in which this organisation operates as a divine enterprise (McKean 1996). As a divine enterprise Shanti Mandir is engaged in the cultural reproduction and intergenerational transmission of the Brahminical-Sanskritic tradition. The spiritual capital of Sanskrit facilitates the exchange of other types of capital, which ultimately leads to individuals and groups accumulating legitimacy, prestige, authenticity, power and the possibility of ‘peace’.

2.8 — Visiting Sanskrit Land: Ashrams, Sacred Space and Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage places, like Shanti Mandir’s ashram, are associated with sacred narratives about ascetics, gurus and saints who have performed ascetic exercises (tapas) endowing such places with salvational power. While the broad scale of possibilities for belief and practice within the context of Hindu spirituality sometimes obscures the ritual and clerical aspects, it is the anti-ritual and anti-clerical appeal of the spiritual message of Hinduism that assists in the propagation of a universal meaning embedded in the Advaita Vedāntic narrative. This has helped in the growth of a multi-billion
dollar spiritual tourism and transglobal yoga industry (Copeman and Ikegame 2012a, Ikegame 2012, Singleton 2010, Singleton and Byrne 2008).

An ashram is a cloistered religious community where people come to take a break from their regular lives while focusing on their spiritual practice. They come because it is where ascetics, renunciants and students of religion live. Like a caravanserai that provides a place of refuge, rest and recovery for the weary traveler, an ashram is often marketed as affording the same for the spiritual seeker. Individuals come from across the globe seeking the company of wise people who live in such peaceful hermitages. Shanti Mandir describe their ashrams as:

A place of refuge, usually removed from urban life, where spiritual, yogic disciplines are pursued. An integral part of the ancient spiritual tradition of India, its atmosphere can give even the casual visitor a deep sense of peace and renewal. The regular daily activities at the ashram include sacred rituals, chanting, and meditation at sunrise, noon, and sunset. The schedule also includes karma yoga (selfless service), helpful in maintaining the ashram; scriptural study; hatha yoga; physical exercise; and personal tasks. The balance of activities is intended to promote contemplation and rejuvenation of body, mind, and spirit. (Mandir 2015e)

As a sacred space, the ashram marks a distinction between the atmosphere created within its walls and the profanity of the secular and modern world outside. Once inside the ashram, a new set of rules regulates behaviour, dress, and the way different groups interact and share space. This marks the beginning of the process for the novice to learn what the rules of the ashram ‘game’ are and how one might attain legitimacy and prestige within this competitive symbolic arena. This occurs not only in a social sense, but I argue that learning to emulate the legitimate disposition has a secondary function of also demonstrating an individual’s spiritual achievements. The embodiment of the legitimate disposition is also an expression of the experience of ‘divinity’, which is realised as an expression of śānta. This is discussed in detail in chapter five.
The spiritual journey of the pilgrim to liminal domains like ashrams and *satsaṅga* (as a type of extra-liminal space within the ashram),\(^{53}\) are types of sacred places, where it is believed within the Bhakti tradition that the highest salvific goal of religion, *mokṣa*, can be attained by coming in direct contact with a living master. Regardless of gender, caste, morality, ignorance or lack of restraint, this wisdom, or grace of the guru is made accessible to all who attend (Jacobsen 2013). Through the institution of pilgrimage individuals come to pay their respects and receive the grace of people they consider to be wise.

After land was donated by a devotee, and developed from just being a mango farm in 1999, the Shanti Mandir ashram has become an established pilgrimage place. Pilgrims might come by bus as part of an organised tour of several ashrams across various states. Generally they will stay one to two nights on their way between other places of pilgrimage. As pilgrims who are not necessarily associated with the Shanti Mandir community and its culture, the particularities and specificities of Shanti Mandir’s praxis becomes more obvious when such groups visit. General faux pas regularly occur highlighting the fact that Shanti Mandir has institutionalised the way devotees ought to approach the guru.

On one occasion I witnessed a group of pilgrims from Uttar Pradesh who passed through the ashram staying for a couple of nights. One morning, the group waited sitting in front of the guru unsure how and when to approach him to give the gifts of fruit they had brought. As this seemed to be taking much longer than it should and, noticing that none of the pilgrims seemed to know what to do, Nityananda became visibly agitated and asked his attendants, ‘Has no one told them how we do things here?’\(^{54}\) Which in turn lead to him address the group of about twenty pilgrims directly ‘Hurry up, all of you come now!’\(^{55}\)

\(^{53}\) *Satsanga* is a public event discussed in chapter five.

\(^{54}\) *Koi nahi hai ki ham yahān bātē karte hai ki jaise unhē batāyā gayā hai?*
This was an interesting moment that allows us an insight into the guru’s emotional toll. Displays of agitation and anger do have their place in the emotional repertoire. They are often rationalised by the community as a necessary didactic tool for educating a devotee who may have transgressed some boundary. Speaking to some of the guru’s attendents after this mini-drama unfolded it became clear that there had been no explanation given to the pilgrims as they anticipated the group would fall in line and follow the rest of the group in taking darśana. Even though they attended satsaṅga and watched the entire community take darśana, they sat there timidly waiting to be called even after the last devotee had already left the temple several minutes before. I could not but help wonder whether Nityananda’s reaction might have been different had these humble folk had more to offer than their admiration and a big box of bananas, which instead of giving as one box collectively, they distributed amongst themselves a few bananas each and approached Nityananda individually. At the sight of this further extension I recall my own agitation towards these bāhar-vāle who were keeping us from getting to breakfast.

2.9 — Why do People Come?

Individuals are motivated by various desires when they come to religious centres like Shanti Mandir. In the following passages it becomes clear why a few different people choose to come to Shanti Mandir. The following quote from Sneha, a retired Austrian devotee who worked in print media, provides insight into her reasons for going to the ashram and how she gets involved in the community.

On my last trip I sought to learn how to make incense and immersed myself in that working with the Hastkala women. I also wrote suggestions for infrastructure planning. On previous trips I’ve edited ashram literature or website words and conducted interviews

Jaldi ao, sab log abhi idher ao’
as requested. I buy gifts and clothing from the Hastkala shop with a focus on books and music. I like to engage with fellow devotees and permanent ashramites, many of whom I only encounter at the ashram every few years. It's interesting to see how the practices affect us. I like to wander the grounds and watch what's going on. I always have questions I believe are profound and they are usually answered without having to be formally put. I'm beginning to thing it's preferable to have a goal - something to achieve/do at the ashram - rather than just land and see what happens although I've done that, too. Above all I'm there to seek clarity and by having a specific task it provides a stable background to do the spiritual work. (Firth 2012)

James, a psychiatric nurse from Singapore explained how he comes to the ashram to ‘recharge his batteries’ in order to deal with the ‘energy debt’ he experiences due to his stressful occupation working with mental illness. He also enjoys the opportunity to catch up with his friends from all around the world that he might only get to see in the ashram as people converge to celebrate certain events in the community’s calender of worship. Nalini, an Indian woman and second generation devotee, explained that her motivation for coming to the ashram focused on trying to alleviate the symptoms of her schizophrenia. Nalini, told me of her dizzying experience of constantly hearing not one but several voices in her head. Through her singular devotion towards Nityananda and the spiritual practices the voices eventually merged into one voice, that of Nityananda’s. Finally, after some time this final voice would also fade into the background. However, unfortunately for Nalini, outside of the ashram the voices return and she requires medication to help her deal with her ailment. But that does not stop her from returning or believing in the power of the guru’s grace and the practices to help her find a sense of peace.

‘Schizophrenic’ is a category of person constructed through psychiatric practice that creates a liminal persona that is generally considered by the wider society to be an anomaly (Barrett 1998). As Douglas points out, schizophrenics are just as likely to be considered polluting and contagious as well as dangerous because of the transitional state they enter (Douglas 2003 [1966], Sass 1992). While a certain level of eccentricity
is tolerated, the level of credit an individual gets is based around how much of a
distraction or disturbance they become.

Another devotee I also met claimed to be hearing the voice of Nityananda
instructing him not to try and return home to America because the plane he would be
flying on was going to crash. Eric came to the ashram nursing a broken heart after a
long-term relationship had ended. While Eric eventually left with a mending heart, he
had found what Stephanie, a casual tourist from France described as, ‘a safe place
where people can explore themselves, their spirituality, old age or whatever they need
to’. While Eric returned home to continue the healing process, he had found in the
ashram a compassionate group of people who were sincerely interested in helping him
through this difficult period in his life. However, even though Eric found support and a
space to heal, the intrapsychic disorganisation of not having been able to ‘rise above
his emotions’ was seen by some in the ashram as a sort of character defect (Lutz
1996). Another critique invalidates such emotional displays as a form of attention
seeking. Such transgressions of chronic pain (whether corporeal or mental) confound
moral codes regarding sickness, health and enlightenment. It is interesting to consider
how chronic pain sufferers are seen by other members of their social world as not only
disturbing but also invested with threatening powers (Jackson 2005: 332).

Just like Eric, Steven, an Englishman who works as a legal professional
explained how he also ‘felt empty’ after he broke up with his fiancé. He came to the
ashram wanting to work through his issues and create a space for himself to reflect in
the safety of his ‘ashram family’ and the bonds of like-minded and supportive people.
Stephen’s healing and road to recovery emerged through the process of sharing his
burden in long and meaningful conversations, particularly with myself. We spoke over
a few weeks for several hours and Stephen explained how he could never have
discussed some of the things we talked about with his family or friends back home.
The ashram’s emotional economy allows people the safety net to explore their feelings and psycho-emotional impasses. This opportunity might not be accessible in their normal life due to the perceived dangers and constrictive binds that cause individuals to self-censor expressions or discussions of emotionality with a rhetoric of control (Lutz 1996). Not that control of emotions does not occur in the ashram; however, it is through interactions with others that individuals come to know themselves, and their emotions (Stein 2001). Not everyone that comes to the ashram does so to mend a broken heart or because they have a mental illness. Dr Rakhee explained to me how she thinks that:

Most Indians know very little about what an ashram does and is and base their ideas on what they have seen on the television from shows like Rāmayāṇa etc or Baba Ramdev. Most Indians are suspicious of ashrams and gurus, especially city folk, like my brother and cousins who have not visited me in the ashram since I first moved here ten years ago. They think I have made a terrible decision and do not support me. Only my mother has supported my decision. But I was going mad in Delhi working too hard and feeling the pressure of marriage. I was not satisfied with my life nor was I particularly happy. But one time when Gurudev came to Delhi he asked me if I would come and run the health clinic, which I immediately said yes to. (Private conversation 14/03/2014)

People also come because they want the grace of the guru. This concept of grace is one of the principal intangible gifts that the guru offers in return for the dāna that is given by the devotees. It is worth quoting in full Nityananda’s discussion of grace and its role in an individual’s life.

All of these practices prepare us to tap into grace. Grace is like the sunlight. It is always there. But right now it looks like there is no sun. It’s dark. But that is simply a dark cloud over the sun. In a few moments, the cloud will be gone and the sun will shine again. In the same way, our mind is like a dark cloud. All our doubts, all our negativities, are like clouds that cover the sun. Yoga, all the practices, everything we do here, is to make sure the clouds always go quickly. You may feel grace is not there. But I feel grace is always there. All we have to do is connect with it. This recorder is fifty percent charged. By the end of the day, it will be zero percent charged. At ten percent, it will remind me that I have to charge it. If I’m smart, I will plug it in at that point and recharge it. Then it will be ready to use again in two hours. In the same way, every day we use our internal battery. By the end of the day, it is discharged. One way we recharge it is by sleeping. The second
way is to get up and do some chanting and meditation. Every day that you don’t do your spiritual practices, your battery discharges. And you wonder why. But you just have to plug in. You have to make sure you plug in every day. Then you remain connected, you remain charged. This is why we talk about the Guru’s grace. When we stay connected to grace, we feel the Guru is always with us. (Mandir 2013d: 9)

Śaktipāya is one of the four upāyas (means way by which śakti is distributed) and refers to the aspirant realising their ‘true’ nature through the hearing the guru’s discourse (Singh 2006a: xxx). The grace of the Siddha guru is encapsulated in the concept of śaktipāta (the descent of energy). Muktananda became famous for his public dispensing of this historically unavailable spiritual good. The marketing genius of Muktananda is often overlooked (Muller-Ortega 1997: 410). He would walk amongst the attendees at his choreographed meditation intensives pressing peoples’ eyebrow centres with his thumb while waving a bunch of peacock feathers around their bodies (Prince 2015). Compared to Muktananda, Nityananda’s style of dispensing śaktipāta is more subdued; however, just like Siddha Yoga, Shanti Mandir continues to use the proseltyising strategy of personal testimony by devotees at public gatherings (satsaṅga) it organises around the world. The discourse often focuses on the initiatory ritual and experience of receiving the guru’s śakti/kṛpā. It demonstrates the power of the tradition while providing the subjective (non-arbitrary) proof of attendees that potential proselytes want to hear (Jain 2014: 53).

When in the presence of the guru the devotees are expected to develop the attitude of a karma yogin (volunteer) who offers the fruits of their efforts towards something greater without any thought of reward. Yet it is precisely through engaging in selfless service that they anticipate pleasing the guru and in so doing receive the grace they desire. The dominant reasons generally blend together into the following:

1. A desire to find a relaxing place where one can focus on their ‘spiritual practice’ away from the distractions of their everyday life.
2. To meaning in one’s life through adopting an agreeable moral template.
3. To learn a ‘living yogic tradition’ from a contemporary guru or ‘living master’.
4. To find a sense of community that has a global reach.
5. To be involved in helping underprivileged members of society.
6. The possibility of soteriological rewards, such as enlightenment (prabodhana) and liberation (mokṣa).
7. To explore the exotic ‘Other’ through a holiday to India.

I have met and spoken with a broad range of Nityananda’s devotees over almost two decades of being loosely involved with the community. The overwhelming response by the devotees is that they seek to ‘be more like Gurudev’ because it is believed it will help them share in his ‘divine vision’. The devotees believe that emulation of his disposition will provide them the ontological security they desire, which, in other terms, means attaining a sense of ‘peace’ or contentment. In this community people are told that to experience śānti, one must surrender to the guru, the teachings and the tradition. Nityananda summarises the process of surrendering by referring to verse 28\(^\text{56}\) from the community’s principal text of recitation and worship, the Śrī Guru Gītā.

This verse teaches us surrender. It teaches us to allow ourselves to let go and become aware of our actions, speech, and thoughts. So as you go about your daily activities, think about this. Think about what thoughts are coming constantly into your mind. Ask yourself how you can make those thoughts uplifting to yourself, and thus uplifting to others.

\[(Mandir 2011g: 9)\]

A common response to why someone goes to the ashram is found in the words of Abhishek, an IT professional from Mumbai, ‘I come here to learn how to be a better person. By being in the presence of my guru I am learning how to be more compassionate and patient with others and myself’. Chandi, a housewife from Delhi

\(^{56}\) GG 28 karmaṇa manasā vācā, nityam-ārādhayed gurum / dirgha-daṇḍaiṇ namsaṅkṛtya, nirlaijo gurusannidhau // (Shanti Mandir 2011d: 10).
said, ‘I just hope that one day I too can be like Gurudev because he is perfect. He is so loving and kind’. In response to my question ‘How does one become more like Gurudev?’ Chandi replied, ‘By coming to the ashram and taking darśan and listening to what the guru says. By observing how he interacts with his devotees we can learn to also become patient and loving’. Lalita, an teacher from Hobart explained how she thinks that the combination of the orchard, agricultural setting and the Sanskrit chanting help make the ashram a ‘bubble of peace’, where people have an opportunity to imbibe something and adopt a ‘new way of seeing the world that might help deal with stress’.

Through surrendering to the guru, the tradition and the practices, combined with spending time in the presence of the guru, and by making consistent efforts toward the perfection of a prescribed yogic ideal, the desired result is a complete overhaul of one’s own ‘unsophisticated’ disposition. This new ‘enlightened’ disposition is attained through learning to emulate or adopt the guru’s disposition, behaviour and vision. This cultivation of the individual is a result of the particular field of knowledge and practices which are considered legitimate and lead people towards gaining status and prestige through learning what the characteristics are of the ‘ashram habitus’ (cf. Bourdieu 1997a, 2011, Maton 2012, 2013). I contend that this ‘spiritual’ disposition, based on the idea of śānti is the principal soteriological product Shanti Mandir offers to potential adherents. It is enscribed onto the bodies of aspirants through their participation in community building. Through subscribing to this particular set of moral parameters and related practices, individuals find a liminal domain and ideological communitas in which they are able to explore through collective ritualised performance, what they consider their ‘true’ and ‘higher’ selves to be by becoming involved in something greater than the limited solipsistic alternative modernity is believed to offer (cf. Coman 2008, Durkheim 1964, Lindhom 1992, Turner 1974). Lindholm offered a cogent summary.
As many social theorists have argued, the disoriented and anxious state caused by lack of boundaries and absence of rules is commonplace today, and is a consequence of the rupture with the past associated with the triumph of capitalism. The authoritative worldviews that existed previously were the products of a process of sacralization that provided human beings with the legitimization of their daily orientation to action. This sacralization of a meaning system was, as Weber says, first aroused by a creative act of charismatic connection which stimulated an immediate, magical sense of transcendence and participation; primary charisma was then rationalized and channeled into sacred objects. (Lindholm 2002: 331)

The yoga specialist — ‘the guru’, ‘the mystic’ or the ‘the sage’ signifies a disinterestedness towards worldly concerns, which is a source of Nityananda’s own referent power and charisma. Nityananda’s authority comes through his specialisation, claims to higher skills (normally articulated by his devotees), and membership within a closed subgroup (i.e. his vows of renunciation and elevation through the title of ‘Mahāmaṇḍalesvāra’) (cf. Bacon and Borthwick 2012). Weber defined ‘charisma’ as the exceptional individual qualities that set one apart from ordinary people (Weber 1947: 329). Referent power induces in a leader’s followers a high level of admiration and identification that urges them to adopt similar attitudes and behaviours (Kudisch and Poteet 1995, Salem and Reischl 2000). The urge to imitate the guru’s behaviour and adopt his disposition is induced in his congregation through his referent power that appeals to the emotions of the followers and not necessarily because the leader’s commands are perceived as correct or rational. The charismatic leader inspires others that willingly subject themselves to their authority based on habit or rational calculation, which in turn produces legitimacy (cf. Bacon and Borthwick 2012). The leader’s authority is idiosyncratic and must be persistantly demonstrated, which allows for mimetic adaptations to occur amongst the followers. While the leader is the ruler of legitimacy, in the sense that they are the ruler, but also the benchmark by which everyone else measures their own and others’ spiritual achievements. Weber (1968) argued that charisma cannot be taught but it can be awakened or tested. These ideas of
constant ‘awakening’ and ‘testing’ are evident in the Shanti Mandir pedagogy where the onus is on the devotee to habituate themselves to the investments and processes of learning to belong (Bourdieu, Altglas et al. 2010). They form the focus of chapters five, six and seven. Giddens (1971) argued that charismatic authority must extend beyond a personal force and be transformed into a routine so that a process of education can unfold. It is this very process of routinisation through the prescribed, daily set of practices that I focus on in the following chapters.

In this pedagogical system, emotions, intuitions and mystical insights take precedence as legitimate knowledge over rational or logical conclusions. These qualities are generally associated with the rise of the capitalist economic system that seeks to deligitimise the subjective non-arbitrary dimension of knowledge through a positivist emphasis. This qualitative focus combined with the use of techniques to stimulate emotions disengages critical thinking capabilities. Just like any type of faith community, the Shanti Mandir organisation is built upon the following three traits — devotion (to the guru), charismatic leadership (of the guru), and separation from the broader community (by living in the cloistered ashram) (Arnott 1999).

Many devotees responded to my questions like Catherine, an ESL teacher, who told me, ‘I do not come to the ashram to think, I come here to feel all the positive energy of the Sanskrit mantras and of this beautiful place’. This dominant emotional focus finds its pinnacle with the emotional connection that is forged between the guru and disciple. This is the fundamental driver of their participation combined with a desire to belong to a group that shares similar aspirations and values. It is the process of ‘divinising’ the modern and secular spaces that are considered threatening to the individual through the manipulation of emotion based on ‘otherworldly’ truth claims that draws them in (Madsen 2013: 18). Salvation, then, relies on the non-cognitive or non-intellectual act of perception that transcends rational thought to experience a higher and expanded state of consciousness. This is taken to be a testament to the
existence of God and one's true or direct experience of the self (Mangalwadi and Enroth 2005). Expression and testimony of spiritual experiences act as a type of non-arbitrary proof of authenticity enables the aspirant to assert their credentials of spiritual advancement.

2.10 — Conclusion

Central to Shanti Mandir’s legitimising strategy within the transglobal yoga industry is the assertion that their brand of yoga is more authentic. This is based on the assumption that there is one true, static, and monolithic authentic yogic identity that they represent. However, what yoga signifies continues to evolve. Perhaps even in this century there has been more heterogenous development than in the previous millennia. The authentic identity at least of Shanti Mandir’s episteme–community is, as is demonstrated throughout the thesis, to focus on the embodiment of the ideal knower’s disposition, the reference point of which is the guru, Nityananda. Shanti Mandir markets this as a something possible for the ‘genuine seeker’ to obtain through a direct experience of divinity that he facilitates and dispenses. However, the maturity of this industry sees modern postural yoga as an increasingly legitimate form that Shanti Mandir has needed to embrace to remain competitive in a thoroughly saturated marketplace.

Within the global yoga marketplace the competing claims for authenticity are dizzying. So too are the numbers generated through the spiritual-health tourism industries. But however big an organisation becomes, organisations such as Shanti Mandir will continue to be reticent regarding the financial relationship and symbolic exchange it has with its supporters, preferring instead to project a disinterested and otherworldly attitude to this fundamental exchange. While organisations compete for legitimacy we also see that a culture war exists between different markets trying to
assert their hereditary claims to yoga. In short, the term and the practice of yoga have come to mean different things to different individuals and groups. While some might lament the relativisation of yoga and fret at the possible dilution of its ‘timeless’ and ‘eternal’ message, with time attesting to its durability and flexibility, the confines of a monolithic orthodoxy or conservative government seem as if they will be unable to control how the yoga sign and subsequent identities evolve.

In the next chapter a broad overview of the Shanti Mandir organisation is presented. Combining ethnographic data, this chapter discussed the aims, history, location, and religious practice.
Chapter 3 — Settling in to the Temple of Peace
3.1 — Introduction

In the preceding chapter I broadly explored the contested and heterogenous nature of the transglobal yoga industry and other related phenomena such as neo-Hinduism and Hindu nationalism. As the chosen case study to explore legitimacy and symbolic power I also placed Shanti Mandir within this context. The aim of this chapter is to provide a historical overview of the Shanti Mandir community. This chapter begins with outlining the general aims of the organisation, which is followed by explaining the underlying philosophies that guide the ideology and spiritual practices.

Next, the spiritual lineage that the organisation is aligned with is introduced. Tracing back the monastic affiliation to its earliest origins and introducing the more recent individuals, present and past, who are worshipped as part of the guru lineage (paramparā) within this community. The next section touches briefly on the controversial ‘split’ of Siddha Yoga. This caused the abdication of Nityananda from his position as co-guru with his older sister, Chidvilasananda. These events were the catalyst for Nityananda starting Shanti Mandir. They also serve as a potent marker of identity for the devotees. The following section moves into a description of the ashrams location, the surrounding area, and description of the ashram property. The next section discusses the daily schedule and religious practice. This moves into a discussion introducing the devotees.

3.2 — Aims of Shanti Mandir

Shanti Mandir describes itself on its Facebook page as ‘a worldwide community of people that was established in 1987 by Mahamandaleshwar Swami Nityananda. The organization continues the spiritual work of his uru, Baba Muktananda, whom he succeeded in 1982’ (Mandir 2015b). This spiritual work incorporates social work and
the ecumenical goal of promoting peace, compassion, love, knowledge of the self, and selfless service to humanity. The prayer ‘May all beings be content’57 and the statement ‘the world is one family’ guide Shanti Mandir.58 It is a private non-profit organisation established as ‘a worldwide community of people from all walks of life who have the common aspiration of experiencing divinity, knowing the Self and recognising the sacred in all’ (Mandir 2015~: 2). Shanti Mandir’s aims are to:

Provide access to the teachings and practices of the great sages of India, in particular those of the lineage represented by Swami Nityananda; Baba Muktananda; and his Guru, Bhagavan Nityananda. Guide seekers to the direct experience of divinity through Sanskrit chanting, silent meditation, study of sacred texts, the offering of service, and participation in sacred Rituals. Continue the Vedic tradition through teaching the Vedic way of life and the philosophy of Vedanta, performing the ancient sacred rituals of the tradition, and receiving other saints of the tradition. (Mandir 2015b)

The Hindu reformer Swami Vivekananda is a renowned national figure whose life and teachings are often celebrated in the ashram. Vivekananda provides insight into how the ‘Vedic way of life’ is conceptualised: ‘The Hindu thinks religiously, talks religiously, eats religiously, walks religiously, worships religiously, marries religiously, learns religiously, and even procreates religiously’ (Vishwanathan 2004: 506). This is elaborated by the concept of living one’s life in balance (sattva), with purpose (dharma), with knowledge of the self (ātmā), with a higher connection to god (paramātmā), and with love (bhakti) (Swami 2014). The majority of devotees share in the belief that an idealised, romanticised and re-imagined representation of a glorified Vedic past is a necessary counterpoint to modernity. According to the website:

Shanti Mandir regularly carries out activities and events to serve needy communities, especially those near its ashrams in India. These activities include feeding large numbers of people; preventive and curative health; literacy and scriptural education; and teaching

57 Lokāḥ samastāḥ sukhino bhavantu.
58 Compare MU 6.72 — ayaṁ bandhurayaṁ neti gaṇanā laghucetasāṁ udāracaritānāṁ tu vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam.
and fostering income-generating activities, such as handicraft work, to break the endemic unemployment and underemployment that exist in rural India. \textit{(Mandir 2015g)}

This social work and community development is achieved through the three charitable organisations established by Shanti Mandir on their website:

- Shri Muktananda Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya — a free Sanskrit school that provides a rounded and authentic exposure to Vedic teachings.
- Shanti Hastkala — a woman-empowerment program that helps the rural poor learn handicraft skills and provides them with work opportunities.
- Shanti Arogya Mandir — a mobile clinic that services the medical needs of the villages around the ashram in Magod free of charge. This includes camps that provide implants for (intra-ocular lenses). \textit{(Mandir 2015g)}

Feeding is a culturally specific act of philanthropy in Hinduism that is part of the religious giving estimated domestically at USD92 million per year (Bornstein 2012). As Bornstein shows, due to the colonial practice of ‘noninterference’, donations to religious charitable organisations by donors are generally not calculated nor taxed, as this may ‘constitute a strategic political stance defying intervention from the state’ that is part of India’s colonial legacy (2012: 141). Building upon the previous discussion of how donating \textit{dāna} is meant to help accrue \textit{punya} (spiritual benefit), we can appreciate how the donations given today are an extension of earlier late colonial Sanatani reformative efforts to ‘revitalise religion and society to meet the challenges of a furiously changing world’ and, how socio-religious charitable gifting has informed and helped to define a ‘new, modern, but orthodox pan-Indian Hinduism’ (Kasturi 2010: 108-10). This neo-Hindu concern that emphasises social equality, particularly the empowerment of rural populations through ‘income generating activities’ is, according to (Creel 1975), in sharp contrast to a traditional dharmic understanding of the structure of the social world, where the ‘traditional connotation of dharma is being supplanted by a view of ethics based on the presence of Brahman in everybody, repudiating the theory as well as the details of dharma’ (Jain 2011: 111-12). Jain
continues explaining how the traditional caste system based on an orthodox idea of dharma is in opposition to the spiritual equality inherent in the monist Vedānta philosophy. This raises interesting questions about Shanti Mandir’s identity as a socially active yet Brahminically orthodox Vedāntic community.

3.3 — Philosophies of Shanti Mandir

Nityananda aims to make spirituality a practical part of an individual’s daily life through offering a systematic approach based on two schools of philosophy. These are Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta and the Siddha tradition that has evolved out of Kashmir Shaivism. According to Nityananda, Vedānta allows the practitioner to understand what causes pain in an individual. By identifying the cause of suffering the seeker is able to move towards an experience of ‘Truth and divinity within oneself’ (Mandir 2013h). Nityananda explained that the seeker comes to recognise (pratyabhījnā) this direct and unmediated experience for him or herself without anyone else telling them how it ought to be experienced. Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta expresses the thought that the phenomenal world is a projected illusion (māyā) and that the only reality is the inactive (niṣkriya) principle known as Brahman (Shankarananda 2003).

Shaivism approaches the world noting that everything is a manifestation of an underlying consciousness and is represented as Śiva. According to Shaivism, everything in the phenomenal world is considered real due to it being an expression of Consciousness (cit) (Dyczkowski 2000). Founded upon Tantric principles, Shaivism promotes the expansion of the ‘small mind’ to an enlarged state of consciousness. ‘Salvation lies in transcending personal consciousness and merging into the infinite impersonal consciousness, thereby escaping the cycle of birth and death’ (Mangalwadi and Enroth 2005: 45). The following quote elaborates on the cosmological structure of this worldview.
The tantric universe is a pulsating, vibratory universe, in which matter, souls, and sound are the stuff of the outpourings of godhead into manifestation, with godhead generally identified with Siva and his self-manifestation or self-reflection taking the form of the Goddess. [...] And, ultimately, the tantric universe is an emancipating universe, a universe that is primordially and virtually free: born of the boundless playing out of divine consciousness, its every constituent part, including the human body and spirit, as well as brute matter are intrinsically free. Tantrism therefore places a high premium on experience — bodily, practical, concrete experience — which, in conjunction with knowledge, is liberating. (White 1996: 143-144)

The Siddha Yoga tradition has developed out of Kashmir Shaivism. A Siddha is a ‘perfected one’ who has ‘transcended the illusion of duality and achieved permanent direct knowledge of his identification with God’ (Jain 2013: 204).

The basis of the Siddha tradition is found in the Tantric principle of kṛpā (grace) and the dispensing of ūkṣipta (Jain 2013: 201, Muller-Ortega 1997: 426-428).

3.4 — The Origins of the Tradition

Today in India, a renunciant (saṁnyāsin) is affiliated with a particular group based on a system related to the Hindu spiritual compass and sacred geography of the subcontinent. Various monastic orders became affiliated with one of four mathas (cardinal institutions). These centres are located in the traditional seats of religious practice associated with Hinduism. Shanti Mandir identifies with and honours the famous 8-9th century CE saint Ādi Śaṅkarācārya who championed the philosophy of

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59. The main texts of the Siddha Yoga tradition are listed as the Śiva Sūtras, Pratyabhīṣṭāḥṛdayam, Śpanda Kārikās, Vijñāna Bhairava, and the Kulārṇava Tāntra (Siddha Yoga 2015).

60. The SvU (2.12) presupposes a Siddha body that is free of disease, aging and death. Prthivyaptejo’ anilakhe samutthite, paṅcāmake yogagune pravritte, na tasya rogo na jarā na mṛtyuh, prāptasya yogāgnimayaṁ śarīram (Tyagisananda 1949: 51-52). SvU 1.3 explained that a Siddha possesses supernatural powers — te dyānayogāṅgutā āpaśyan, devāṁśaṅkīṁ svagunāirnīguḥ̵āṁ, yaḥ kāraṇāṁ nikhilāṁ tāṁ, kālāṁmayuktāṁadyadhitīṣṭhaṁyatekhaṁ (Tyagisananda 1949: 17).
non-dualistic Advaita Vedanta. Śaṅkarācārya is credited with unifying the disparate orders of renunciates under the Dasnāmi sampradāya (group of ten sects).⁶¹

Built from the verbal root √smṛ — to remember — the adjective smarta refers to the sect’s adherence to Smṛti texts. These texts are of human authorship as compared to the Vedic literature that is believed to be of divine origin (Encyclopædia-Britannica 2014). The Smarta sect restricts access to the initiated ‘twice-born’ upper castes; however, the Siddha tradition of Muktananda’s heritage is free of such restrictions as it aims to move beyond the limitations of orthodoxy. This demonstrates an underlying tension between conservative traditional values and the more liberal values that Muktananda promoted. However, from various standpoints, in the Shanti Mandir community today questions of legitimacy and authenticity are often raised based on someone’s gender, lower caste status or complete lack of caste affiliation.

Shanti Mandir is affiliated with the Śringeri Maṭha and identifies with the non-sectarian Smarta tradition. The syncretic tradition that Shanti Mandir has evolved out of generally prefers to worship Śiva. However, it promotes a philosophical and meditative path that emphasises the oneness of humanity through a unifying principle. Other gods such as Viṣṇu, Śakti, Ganeśa and Sūrya are worshipped with various deities being honoured on their respective days of the week through the main recitation of the specific text to each deity.

Due to the affiliation with the Śringeri Maṭha Shanti Mandir shares the responsibility of the cultural reproduction and intergenerational transmission of the Yajurveda. This body of knowledge contains the governing rules for the successful performance of Vedic rituals and is dated to ca. 1200-1000 BCE (Visvesvaran, Witzel et al. 2009, Witzel 2001, 2003, 2010, 2015). Discussed below, one of the charitable

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⁶¹ Van der Veer (1994) asserts that Vadayarana established the cār dhām (four abodes) and not Śaṅkarācārya in the 14th century.
acts Shanti Mandir is involved with that is central to its Vedic identity is the Sanskrit college that operates from within the ashram.

3.5 — The Spiritual Lineage

The spiritual lineage from which Shanti Mandir draws its inspiration and legitimacy begins with Bhagavan Nityananda (1897 - 1961). Bhagavan Nityananda (Figure 3.1) is considered by many to have been an extraordinary individual who was known as an *avadhūta*, one who is free of worldly desire and obligation (Sabharathnam, Brooks et al. 1997). After years of wandering across India, attracted by the area’s thermal springs and seclusion, Bhagavan Nityananda eventually settled in the village of Ganeshpuri. The village of Ganeshpuri is located 80 kilometres north of Mumbai. It is approximately halfway between Shanti Mandir’s ashram (near the city of Valsad, Gujarat), and Mumbai, the capital of Maharashtra. Several hagiographies exist, perhaps obfuscating a fuller telling of this interesting individual’s story. However, the village of Ganeshpuri expanded around this man who showed little interest even in dressing himself, such was the apparent level of his spiritual magnitude. As word of his fame spread even government ministers came to visit him in the hope of receiving his grace (Muktananda 1972, 1996, Verma 2009).

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62 Sanskrit - *Gāneśa* – the elephant god + *puri* – city.
Baba Muktananda (1908 - 1982) also became quite a famous guru in his own right (Figure 3.2). In the 1970s, the charismatic and controversial yogi was sent by Bhagavan Nityananda to America to conduct a ‘meditation revolution’ in the West. His message, which is adopted by Shanti Mandir today, is ‘Meditate on Yourself. Worship Yourself. God Dwells Within You as You’ (Jain 2013: 200). After Bhagavan Nityananda gave him some land to develop into an ashram in Ganeshpuri, Muktananda built the first of many ashrams later creating the Siddha Yoga empire (Healy 2010a, b, Madsen 2013, Mahoney 1997, Michaels 2004, Sabharathnam, Brooks et al. 1997).
For the devotees of Shanti Mandir, Muktananda is a potent and palpable source of inspiration, guidance and refuge. The anniversaries of his birth, death, and various aspects related to his spiritual attainments are celebrated with great devotion. The following excerpt is an example of a typical invitation distributed by Shanti Mandir to attend, remind and celebrate the occasion of Muktananda’s birth at the Walden ashram in upper state New York. This occasion shows how central Muktananda continues to be to the community, influencing the religious practice and soteriological pursuits of thousands of people across the world.

Happy Birthday, Baba! The sacred texts declare that the earth feels blessed when a great being walks on her surface. Such a great being was our beloved Baba Muktananda, whose grace continues to initiate and guide thousands around the world. We invite you to come and join us at Shanti Mandir, Walden, as we celebrate Baba’s birthday by chanting to invoke the Guru’s eternal presence. (Mandir 2014c)

The ritual calendar of Shanti Mandir celebrates several auspicious days throughout the year associated with the lives of the saints in the tradition. Figure 3.3 shows the relationship between a young Muktananda and his guru Bhagavan Nityananda. This picture, and others like it, is used to celebrate the broader guru-disciple tradition while also instilling the attitudes of respect and devotion that are both central to the legitimate disposition of Shanti Mandir. In the picture Muktananda stands by the side of Bhagavan Nityananda’s bed seeking the grace of his guru.
This poster is a typical example of an invitation distributed to Shanti Mandir’s global network of devotees via its mailing list.\textsuperscript{63} This particular occasion celebrates the ‘significant and auspicious day’ when Muktananda received saktipāta from Nityananda. Saktipāta is said to involve the transference of energy (realised as the guru’s grace) from the guru to the disciple and is said to be accomplished by a look or touch (Antonella 2009, Saraswati 1984a).\textsuperscript{64} However, in the personal account of Muktananda, Bhagavan Nityananda forced his hand down Muktananda’s throat (Jain 2013: 205). This story is recycled amongst the devotees in a way that helps to establish Muktananda’s firm position as the favourite (or even only) descendent of Bhagavan Nityananda. Muktananda established Siddha Yoga as a global movement that espoused an egalitarian, democratic and non-sectarian approach that was in opposition

\textsuperscript{63} Approximately five thousand people are registered on the mailing list.

\textsuperscript{64} Antonella (2009: 07 min 28 secs) a devotee explained how saktipāta works.
to traditional or ‘orthodox’ yoga systems that restricted access to knowledge based on
gender or caste (Jain 2013: 208).

Ganeshpuri has a special place in the sacred geography of Shanti Mandir
because this is where Bhagavan Nityananda settled; Muktananda built his Siddha Yoga empire; where both Bhagavan Nityananda and Muktananda are buried; and
where Swami Nityananda abdicated from his leadership position at Siddha Yoga
before starting Shanti Mandir. When devotees travel to the Shanti Mandir ashram they
will quite often also pay a visit or stay for a couple of days at Ganeshpuri. Some may
even return to Ganeshpuri to say goodbye to their deceased gurus before leaving India
from Mumbai. For devotees in this tradition, it is an important step to visit these
resting places. Ganeshpuri, in some ways, is at the very epicentre of the Shanti Mandir
cosmology. Bhagavan Nityananda has several spiritual successors, but one in
particular is central to the Shanti Mandir tradition.

Swami Nityananda (1962-) is the founder and spiritual head of Shanti Mandir.
In 1981, at the age of eighteen, Nityananda (Figure 3.4) was ordained as a śāstradhāri
(scripture holder) saṅnyāsin in the Sarasvatī order of renunciates. Shanti Mandir assert
that around the same time:

In July 1981, as Baba was concluding a celebration at the Shree Nityananda Ashram (later
Shree Muktananda Ashram) in South Fallsburg, New York, he called the then newly
appointed Swami Nityananda forward. He placed a garland around his neck and
announced to the hundreds of people present, ‘This man will be my successor’. Some
time later, he announced that Swami Nityananda’s sister, Swami Chidvilasananda, would
be a co-successor. In May 1982, Baba formally established Swami Nityananda and
Swami Chidvilasananda so they could carry on his work. (Mandir 2015c)

This reason for the siblings becoming co-successors was based on the premise that the
size of this international organisation warranted having two gurus (Harris 1994, Healy
2010a). In 1982, Siddha Yoga reportedly had 300 centres in 52 countries and 300,000
disciples (Altglas 2007). However, not long after the installation of the siblings the relations between them became strained. Shanti Mandir explained how after:

Baba’s passing in October 1982 precipitated a period of progressive upheaval and evolution. It led three years later to the creation by Swami Nityananda of a new organization, Shanti Mandir, through which he pursues the legacy of Baba’s teachings, while Swami Chidvilasananda continues her work with the SYDA Foundation. (Mandir 2015c)

It is interesting to note that Shanti Mandir’s knowledge of its own history is flawed. In the quote above we are informed that Shanti Mandir was established three years after Muktananda’s death. However, Shanti Mandir was established five years later in 1987. Following this tumultuous period, in 1995 Nityananda became the youngest person to receive the prestigious title of Mahāmanḍalesvara (Great Chief of a Province) within the Mahānirvāṇi Akhaḍa.65 Shanti Mandir explained that, ‘at the age of 32, at a traditional ceremony in India, the saints installed him as a Mahamandaleshwar in recognition of his spiritual attainments’ (Shanti-Mandir 2015c). In discussing this with Siddha Yoga devotees they express a certain level of skepticism regarding this title bestowed on Nityananda. Diego, a longterm devotee from Argentina explained how this ‘could have simply been a strategy for Nityananda to get back some of his credibility after being kicked out of Siddha Yoga’ (private conversation).

65 The Akhaḍas are part of the religious institution that Śaṅkarācārya established. The Mahānirvāṇi akhaḍa is one of the biggest. In terms of hierarchy, the highest position of authority within an akhaḍa, which is a broad community of different groups sharing a similar ideology, is the Ācārya Mahāmanḍalesvara followed by the Mahāmanḍalesvaras, Maṇḍalesvaras, and Mahants. Each of these positions allows for the bearer of the title to be a guru in their own right and have their own congregation of devotees.
Figure 3.4: Swami Nityananda
(Source: Shanti Mandir 2015c)

Nityananda espouses an ecumenical ‘spiritual’ message that foregrounds love, compassion, and selfless service in a similar way to other gurus like Mata Amrtanandamayi (Lucia 2014c). We can understand that the qualities described above are part of the ensemble of emergent characteristics of the legitimate disposition.

3.6 — The ‘Split’

Without this fractious event Shanti Mandir would not exist. For this reason, the split is central to the community’s identity. It is recycled in various ways forming part of particular strategies by devotees to claim prestige. The historical reasons for the breakup of Siddha Yoga are not the concern of this thesis; however, a brief discussion is warranted in order to understand the form that Shanti Mandir has taken and how this event is woven into the fabric of so many individual narratives. For a more detailed discussion see Jain (2013). This section presents a broader discussion of the legitimation process Shanti Mandir has gone through since it formed.

The events that followed Muktananda’s mahāsamādhi (great union), as the death of a saint is called in the tradition, are contentious and serve as powerful emotive sources for people who were involved directly in those events or who have come to embody this history through hearing the stories. Whenever a charismatic leader dies
leaving behind the opportunity to contest the vacant throne, the quest for legitimacy
and authority amongst the next generation can result in trouble for not just the leaders
competing for the top position but also the followers. This abdication or ousting of
Nityananda, as Williamson (2011) describes it, left Chidvilasananda to continue as the
sole spiritual head of Siddha Yoga, which is a position she continues to hold to this
day (Sabharathnam, Brooks et al. 1997).

Nityananda rarely talks about these challenging moments publicly, although
from time to time, either in his ashrams or while on tour, he is known to mention in a
public address how these events have shaped him as an individual and his
organisation. These rare expressions seem to take on a particular currency. Through
only rarely talking about such an emotive topic a particular atmosphere is created that
elicits in devotees present a feeling of even closer affection for their guru. This topic is
quite visibly still a source of emotion for several individuals. The silence, just as much
as the rhetoric, in similar ways, fuels the speculation about what really happened
during the split.

For many of his long-term devotees this was a very traumatic time, not only for
themselves but also their gurus. People were forced to choose sides and ultimately
gurus. Evidence of the pain, confusion, and betrayal that many felt and continue to feel
surrounding this issue is found across the internet (Shaw 2014).

Claims of eyewitness accounts of abductions, house arrests, beatings, rapes and
gun-carrying devotees on both sides of the sibling feud in the Siddha Yoga ashram at
Ganeshpuri are familiar narratives heard while talking with both Shanti Mandir and
Siddha Yoga devotees (Harris 1994). Healy (2010 a,b) was present in a Siddha Yoga
ashram in Australia during this tumultuous period and remembers orders coming from
senior devotees for the removal of any photo or trinket that could identify or be
associated with Nityananda. Similarly, when talking to Siddha Yoga devotees there is
a palpable level of confusion, contempt or distrust shown towards Nityananda and his
organisation. The dominant tropes generally circulate around his illegitimacy to be a guru (or at least their guru) as he renounced his claim, not only to the Siddha Yoga empire, but also to be a guru.

On several occasions I have been asked by Siddha Yoga devotees to verify whether Nityananda is secretly married to one of his disciples or whether he has a particular sexual fetish related to violent BDSM practices. This shows at least the suspicion that continues to circulate.

At this abdication ceremony, for which there was no historical precedent, Nityananda took on the new lay name of Venkateshwar Rao, giving up his rights as co-successor and publicly announcing that he considered his older sister to be his guru. While some Siddha yogis find the subsequent actions of Nityananda to recoup his symbolic capital as a guru and his protracted legal pursuit of his forfeited inheritance contemptible, the Shanti Mandir community takes the opposite opinion that since he was ‘forced to abdicate’ and ‘agreed under duress’, that his public announcement was not legally or morally binding. While I only heard the ongoing legal proceedings mentioned a few times by senior devotees, it seemed that this was not common knowledge amongst the devotees. While those that were aware of these proceedings were adamant of Nityananda’s legal rights, having a guru involved (or at least his lawyers and board members’ advocate on his behalf) is distracting to the projected image of detachment. Regardless, an individual ought to be able to visit their guru’s samadhi shrine. This is something Nityananda has been prevented from doing since the day he left Siddha Yoga.

During the socialisation process at Shanti Mandir established devotees will often refer newer recruits to a particular article published in The New Yorker magazine. This article is an overview of the seismic rupture that occurred which led to the schism (Harris 1994). There were other high profile articles published by both sides to justify and explain what happened (Kottary 1986a, b, Riposo 1987). Several

I was involved in several conversations in the ashram which serve to edify the devotees belief that they chose the right sibling to follow towards their salvation. The mistrust felt by Shanti Mandir devotees towards Siddha Yoga is as real and palpable today as it was three decades ago. These events are regularly recycled in group discussions wherever devotees meet. This seems to work mostly as a way to continue the process of healing that these events seem to require. However, they can also be understood as a vital element involved in the process of ranking individuals within the social hierarchy. Within the Siddha Yoga community the individuals who actually met Baba Muktananda are referred to as the ‘great timers’. While I never heard of a similar expression in Shanti Mandir, there is little doubt that individuals use this social capital of having personally met Muktananda during negotiations for prestige and legitimacy.

When Siddha Yoga devotees ‘defect’ or simply out of curiosity visit the Shanti Mandir ashram, retreats, ceremonies or meditation centres, they are for some time at least, met with a certain amount of distrust and suspicion. Even though the events that caused the seismic rift thirty years ago are in the past, many people are still coming to terms with them and the ongoing consequences that continue to occur. For new devotees who eventually come to know about the foundations of Shanti Mandir, either through their own investigations or through conversations with older devotees, the stories repeat and take on new meanings. For this reason the ‘split’ is an important part of Shanti Mandir’s history because if it had not occurred Shanti Mandir would not exist today.
3.7 — The Village of Magod

The village of Magod is a quiet and peaceful place that has approximately five thousand inhabitants spread throughout little hamlets. These hamlets are interspersed between mango and chikku sapote orchards and fields cultivating rice. Travelling along the roads sometimes requires patience as there are frequent herds of water buffalo and goats moving between their owner’s properties and available sources of water and food. The network of hamlets is distinguished by jāṭī (caste). Some of the hamlets consist of specific castes while others are mixed. Seventeen castes live in the area. Four of them are landowning castes. This means if an individual is not from a land owning caste then they are not allowed to own land.

Village Magod is situated within a matrix of other villages sharing similar occupations that focus on agricultural production, animal husbandry, or fishing. Several people from the surrounding villages are employed in the ashram serving different functions from maintenance, grounds keeping, housekeeping, manufacturing of garments, and food production. Most of these employees are women, some of whom might be the sole ‘breadwinner’ for their families. For some of the local families, their husbands and fathers may travel to the gulf states like Qatar, Bahrain, and the Arab Emirates to find work as unskilled labourers or drivers only returning home after two or three years abroad. As unemployment is high, financial provisions often fall upon the responsibility of the women. Shanti Mandir employs twenty to thirty women through house keeping and maintenance, and indirectly through one of

66 These castes include Nāyakā, Harijan, Koṅ Paṭel, Ghodya Paṭel, Taṃḍel, Rajput, Vāṇiyā (Jain), Ḥalpāṭi, Deśāṭi, Maṅgelāḷa, Kuṇāḷa, Musālmān, Sōḷāṅkti, Kaḷaṇba, Brāhman, Pārśś, and Āḥīr.
67 People from the following castes work in the ashram — Nāyakā, Harijan, Koṅ Paṭel, Ghodya Paṭel, Taṃḍel, Rajput, and Vāṇiyā (Jain).
their charitable works approximately 250 women in the wider area. Construction and maintenance require trades people like plumbers and electricians to make regular visits. Figure 3.5 shows the location of Shanti Mandir’s ashram within the boundary of Magod Village and its proximity to the Arabian Sea.

![Figure 3.5: Village Magod and Ashram](Source: Google Maps 2015a)

When an individual’s provisions are running low it may be necessary to restock on those ‘essential goods’ not available in the ashram or local store in the village. The majority of residents and visitors try to avoid making the trip into Valsad as, compared to the serene atmosphere of the ashram, the city can be quite overwhelming. One may occasionally hear the passing of a rickshaw as it putters up the small hill past the main gate, or the beep of a motorcycle horn, as it warns the students from the nearby high school and other pedestrians walking up to the local corner shop in the village of their imminent passing. If the wind is blowing from the west it becomes possible to smell the ocean and the drying of fish at the nearby beach. So too, if the fisherman’s wives
are taking their unrefrigerated catch into town the smell can take what seems an eternity to disperse as they travel past the ashram en route to the market in Valsad.

As the residents of the ashram and the majority of its visitors are avowed vegetarians the durgandh (foul smell) of the fish can be overpowering, particularly during times of worship, as the main temple and regular site of religious practice is next to the western border of the property and the main road into Valsad. The waft of unrefrigerated seafood over the wall serves as a stark reminder of the distinction between the profane realm beyond the walls and, as the former manager of the ashram explained, ‘the sweetness of the ashram that is purified by the sacred mantras of the students’. One must also choose rickshaws wisely as jumping into one full of baskets of fish can lead to a rather unpleasant trip into town. Some of the residents of Surwada, the closest village to the Arabian Sea explain how they have never been to the ashram even though it is only about one kilometre from their village. There is a caste distinction here and also this village has there own set of ocean related deities they worship that has much less to do with the variant of Hinduism expressed in the ashram.

Within the grounds of the ashram are a variety of buildings. Initially there was only the guru’s hut and another temporary structure nearby where the congregation would meet for satsaṅga. This simple structure without walls later became a storage area and car park, which during my last visit has been demolished and in its place, a solid edifice with lockable storage and also accommodation has been erected. As these rooms are now the closest to the guru’s own hut, no doubt, the individuals who purchase a ‘lifetime lease’ on one of the rooms will acquire a certain level of prestige if not purity as well compared to the people who are not sleeping as close to the guru.

When capital works are planned and revenue is required to fund projects devotees are invited to ‘purchase’ a room through a leasehold arrangement that gives them naming rights and the possibility of furnishing it to suit their needs and tastes.
This could include adding extra shelving, a lockable fridge or a cabinet. Today, as the community continues to grow, ongoing construction, renovation, and demolition continue to make way for improved and enlarged living and operating conditions required for residents and guests. New buildings are regularly required for accommodation, storage, administration, education, religious practice, and manufacturing. All of these capital works are funded entirely by the generous donations from the devotees. Upon completion each new building is divinised with a Sanskrit name (Hastings 2004, 2008).

Figure 3.6: Ashram Boundary
(Source: Google Maps 2015a)

Figure 3.6 shows the physical capital and boundary of the ashram. Notice how densely populated the property is with mango trees. Located just to the left of the mess hall, Figure 3.7 provides a view north towards the centre of the ashram. On the right, the open-air mess hall is visible. Most of the mango trees are decades old providing an abundance of fruit around May and June. Of the twelve varieties of mangos grown,
sold locally or interstate to generate revenue for the organisation. The colouring on the base of the trees is used throughout South Asia to prevent infection and bugs affecting the health of the trees. The students perform this annual task of preparing and applying this protective coat to approximately two hundred trees during their \textit{sevā} periods on alternate days after school. \textit{Sevā} forms one of the principal ways in which devotees and students engage in a symbolic exchange of capital with the organisation and guru. The economics of \textit{sevā} are discussed in chapter four.

The surrounding area is famous for its fertile land that produces some of the most succulent mangoes and chikku sapotes in India. For decades prior to becoming an ashram the land was already an active mango orchard producing an average five tonnes per year. It also has approximately forty cows that provide dairy and other products for traditional use in the ashram like making cow dung patties (\textit{upalā}) mixed with straw that are used as a source of in Vedic fire ceremonies (\textit{havana}), and edible products like milk and clarified butter (\textit{ghee}) which are used for cooking and as a source of ignition in the ceremonies. These products provide extra revenue streams for the organisation (\textit{Mandir} 2015r).

Several snakes inhabit the property and are treated with awe and respect as manifestations of \textit{Kuṇḍalinī Śakti} (a form of Durgā). Green tree snakes can be seen twirling their way along branches of mature trees while smaller black and white banded snakes slither through the grass searching for frogs and bugs to consume. Occasionally, mealtimes are interrupted by the presence of a snake as it hunts and consumes its prey within the vicinity of the mess hall. Overall, the natural setting and relative isolation from the city make the ashram environment peaceful.

In the foreground of Figure 3.7 is a blackboard. Blackboards are often used to inform residents and guests of particular changes to the schedule, or to announce who has sponsored the day’s meal. Devotees will often donate funds to pay for a lavish banquet (\textit{bhaṅḍāra}). This is often done as part of the rites involved in marking the
memory of a deceased relative’s passing (śraddha or sapindaṇkarana). Other opportunities involve celebrating birthdays and other auspicious events like weddings. This recognition of an individual’s or group’s generosity is one of the strategies used to gain legitimacy and status that is discussed in chapter four.

If there is a critical mass of foreigners in the ashram the information presented on the blackboard will be duplicated into English on a second blackboard borrowed from one of the classrooms. Sometimes a big group of devotees from Argentina and/or Mexico may also visit. When this happens a third board may also be used providing information in Spanish. The message on this particular board is written in Hindi.

Figure 3.7: Mess Hall, Blackboard and Mango Trees
(Source: McCartney 2014)

The pink wall seen through the trees to the left of the blackboard is a separate food preparation area known as Navarasa (The nine flavours).\(^{68}\) This space is generally only used when an overwhelming influx of foreign devotees with enough independence, vision, and enthusiasm come together to cater for the other foreign devotees who may

\(^{68}\) The concept of rasas is examined in detail in chapter six.
find the regular meals difficult to digest. The space takes on an alfresco café style atmosphere while devotees with a culinary flair and possible commercial cooking experience have the confidence to donate their time to make alternative meals for whoever feels inclined to consume them. These meals and drinks come at an extra cost to the daily ‘donation’ that the ashram charges for accommodation and food. The funds generated go towards sustaining the pop-up kitchen until such time as the numbers and enthusiasm dwindle. If any profit remains at the end of each incarnation the funds are donated towards one of Shanti Mandir’s charities. The cultural capital of knowing how to prepare delicious food combined with a willingness to serve is one way in which individuals may choose to negotiate their own acceptance into the community.

After dinner, while some students are rostered to make sure the temple is clean and ready for the next day, other students are rostered to wash the evening dishes with the assistance of some energetic devotees. In Navarasa, however, an older student supervises making sure that the candlewicks, oil, clothing for the mūrtis, and anything else is ready for the following morning in the temple.

In the food hall at meal times some tables and chairs are available for mostly elderly and foreign devotees who are not comfortable with sitting on the floor. The majority of people do, however, sit on the floor in lines distinguished by three things — gender, scholarship, and the amount of spice in the food. During the midday and evening meals, students are rostered to distribute food to the rest of the community. During lunch, some other students are assigned to recite chapters from particular Vedic texts such as the Śukla Yajūrveda or Rudrāṣṭādhyāyī, which forms a component of the previous text. The Śukla Yajurveda contains the rules that govern the correct performance of Vedic rituals such as a fire ceremony (yajña). It forms a significant part of the students’ education as they are principally being trained to become proficient sacrificial priests. The Rudram, as the second text is colloquially referred to,
aims to appease the Vedic god Rudra, whose epithets include the ‘ruddy-eyed one’, ‘the howler’, ‘crier’, and ‘terrifying one’. This chant is meant to pacify Rudra turning him into Śiva. This is achieved through worshipping the various attributes of the benign and auspicious god of contemporary Hinduism. Referring to the documentary film ‘A Day in our Ashram’, beginning at 24 minutes the following footage shows people arriving for lunch, the distribution of food and the chanting that occurs (McCartney 2014a).

Jain (2014: 208) cites Muktananda (1985: 189) as saying, ‘it is obvious that the orthodox restrictions are not applied in Siddha Yoga Dham; everyone chants the Rudram, which is a portion of the Rig Veda. Everyone should read and understand the scriptures’. One interesting thing about Muktananda’s comment is that the Rudram is located in the Śuklayajűrveda and not the Ṛgveda. I cannot say whether Muktananda’s comment is just a slip of the tongue that also was not detected by the editors at Siddha Yoga.

While everyone is invited to recite the Rudram each morning at Shanti Mandir, most of the devotees attend passively sitting in silence. The Rudram is read in the Vedic script at quite a fast tempo. Even native speakers of Modern Indian Languages who are not trained in Sanskrit find it difficult to keep up. While some international devotees might bring an incomplete transliterated version with the hope of chanting along with the students, the specific and complicated way in which this text is recited as part of the daily abhiṣeka (religious bathing) of the mūrtis makes this impossible.69 The ability to chant this Vedic text, as opposed to a Purānic text like the Śiva Mahimna Stotram is a defining marker between the Scholars and the rest of the community due to its difficulty, antiquity and apparent purity.

69 The opening five minutes of the A Day in our Ashram show the normal procedure of the daily abhiṣeka of the mūrtis, the spatial relations in the temple and the chanting of the Rudram.
3.8 — Religious Practice and the Daily Schedule

The ashram routine is demanding, especially for people who have not visited an ashram before and do not understand the culture and practices that are promoted and why. For the non-Indian visitor who has little experience with the general culture of ashrams, the settling in phase can produce issues. The main issue comes from the socialisation that ensues to adhere to the routine, discipline and normative standards of behaviour and dress. For those ensconced in this lifestyle, the inertia experienced at the beginning of each stay quickly subsides as one accepts the routine and surrenders to the practices. The alternative is that people leave citing difficulties with fitting in with the culture, discipline, or personalities of other devotees. With early starts and full days of chanting, study and guru-sevā, one generally yearns for slumber by the end of each day.

Regarding the legitimate disposition, the individuals who are able to submit to long days of selfless service and demonstrate their commitment to the guru’s project generally find themselves being praised, at least unofficially. However, it may take several months if not years of service to achieve such recognition. As the ideal sevā yogin, the devotees use Nityananda as the measuring stick for determining their own (and others’) advancement or lack of. Chris, an American devotee explained his respect for the work ethic and adherence to the schedule by Nityananda describing how he seeks to emulate it himself and be ‘more like the guru’. Dipendra, also an Indian NRI-American citizen, is not alone in this thought and regards the focus and commitment of Nityananda to be an ideal everyone should aim to follow:

He is generally the first one up and the last to go to bed. His commitment is so great that he does not think of himself and is busy working into the night, every night, either planning what is to happen next or studying. If only I could have a fraction of the energy he has I would get so much more done. (Private conversation 03/01/2014)
Due to the routine, each day is almost an exact repetition of the one before it. Generally, the daily schedule only changes to accommodate larger festivals spread throughout the ritual calendar. It is easy for days and weeks to feel as if they seamlessly merge into months, broken only by the arrival or departure of devotees and the guru as he is constantly travelling around India and the world sharing his message, visiting devotees and working to recruiting new ones.

A long-term resident of the last decade, Dr Rakhee is a paediatrician from New Delhi. Rakhee first moved to the ashram because Nityananda had invited her to provide medical assistance to his devotees, students, and the residents of the surrounding villages. Rakhee left her medical career and has devoted herself to serving the guru through running the charitable wing known as Shanti Arogya Mandir. Rakhee did explain, however, that she prefers the ashram during its quieter periods when less people visit. When the guru is not in residence the ashram becomes a different place: fewer people visit allowing the peaceful atmosphere to become more palatable and amenable to her personal spiritual pursuit. However, this comes at a cost as these quieter times coincide with the absence of her guru, and having direct visual contact with him is central to her religious practice.

Most of the long-term residents share a similar experience. They prefer the quieter times but lament the absence of their guru because in their tradition daily vision of the guru is also a central part of their religious practice. When the guru is present in the ashram, the entire community is less relaxed as they are, what I would describe as, ‘on point’. This is a performative attempt to display a particular level of discipline, attention and devotion. When the guru is absent it is a chance to unwind a little, and perhaps not sit with such a straight back. Attendance at temple reduces, as does the atmosphere. On some occasions the skeleton crew of students who have been rostered to ensure the facilitation of the evening program and a couple of devoted residents will attend the evening session. The level of chattering during meal times
also increases as silence is generally expected. The change in the residents’ discipline and general reduction of attendance in the temple, combined with the absence of their guru, provides enough reasons for most devotees, particularly international, to not visit during times when the is guru is absent. International devotees generally plan their trip to the ashram to coincide with the guru’s travel plans and presence in the ashram. To come all the way to India and not see the guru would be a major disappointment. It is for this reason that Shanti Mandir regularly posts updates to Nityananda’s schedule (Mandir 2015s).

With each day that passes one’s resistance to the daily program subsides. The vacancy left by having to temporarily renounce the distracting or intoxicating attachments that, initially might seem necessary, like television, alcohol or friends and family, becomes less shocking. But people experience the ashram differently, and for some, the adjustment to the ashram lifestyle is harder to make than it is for others. To become ‘enlightened’ like the guru one must also behave in what is considered an enlightened way, which includes abstaining from consuming meat. According to certain theories pertaining to diet that circulate amongst the devotees, the consumption of flesh serves to create in the individual lethargy (tamas) and passion (rajas). It is believed that these two qualities are hindrances to any spiritual advancement, which instead requires an abundance of equanimity (sattva).

It is assumed that consuming animal flesh will only make one’s mind more agitated and less receptive to a meditative state. Gretchen, a widow from America who was contemplating hip surgery explained how she would not want to ‘turn her stomach into a graveyard’ by consuming meat. This belief is based on the local medical system of Ayurveda, which asserts that every substance can stupify, energise or create a state of equanimity. The problem that arises occurs when current practitioners and apologists essentialise Ayurveda into an orthodoxy to suit their own ideological interests. This includes the assumption that Ayurveda is vegetarian. Instead, it is
prudent to view Ayurveda as a blanket term that covers several medical traditions over a broad geographic area and time line. It was not until the 11th century CE that Cakrapāṇi Datta wrestled with the issue between the use of meat and its implications for righteousness. Prior to this Caraka prescribed the consumption of various formulations of meat and other animal products including the blood of various animals and even the semen of crocodiles (Wujastyk 2004: 833). Being a vegetarian is considered by the Shanti Mandir community to be an essential characteristic. An individual who admits to eating meat will be considered less legitimate and looked down upon. Another common narrative heard not just in the ashram but in other places across India is that in order to learn Sanskrit one must be vegetarian.

The highest peak of attainment in the Yoga-Ayurveda system is voluntary control of the autonomic nervous system. Ayurveda recognises, or at least considers the psychophysiological effects of emotions on automatic responses like the production of adrenaline and glucocorticoids (Manyam 2004). Driving the urge to identify as a vegetarian is the belief that ‘true goodness manifests in terms of compassion and love for all living beings’ and the aspirant ought to adhere to the tenet of nonaggression (ahiṃsa) (Rosen 2011: viii). Rosen continues reminding us of how the perfection of the yoga system is based on a dualistic principle and not ontological oneness in a monistic sense with the Supreme. Pure devotion is said to require two beings shared between one and another. The mature recognition instead not only sees but enjoys the simultaneous oneness and difference. This is the end game of a three-tiered hierarchy of spiritual realisation where vegetarianism has become a central component (Rosen 2011: vii).

Over time, the routinisation and institutionalisation of the daily program has occurred to make the schedule less opaque and more formal. As more people spend time in the ashram there is a need to ensure that essential chores like preparation of food and daily maintenance of the ashram are carried out. This might include the
temporary deputisation of ‘Sevā Captains’. A Sevā Captain is normally a senior devotee who is able to use their social capital to influence and motivate less established devotees into performing certain tasks. While officially, there is very little spare time for leisure or indolence, because attendance and punctuality at all programs is considered mandatory, it is still possible to avoid doing work. Although this does not reflect well on an individual’s standing in the community as the point of the program is to fill the day with ‘divine service’ (divya sevā). The shared sense of commitment and effort towards supporting the guru’s vision allows the devotees to experience a collective sense of shared identity, meaning and purpose (Durkheim 1964, Kramer and Alstad 1993). Through the clear-cut rules and gendered divisions of labour the participants are afforded a relaxing and comforting state of peace through giving and creating an experience of certitude through servitude.

The program changes throughout the year to compensate for certain events that demand adjustments. New events during the daily schedule are added and old ones removed depending on the desires of the guru and his devotees who may lobby for certain amendments to be made like the inclusion of haṭha yoga, English lessons, or jogging. The daily schedule is found in each room in both Hindi and English on the back of the door. It is also found across other prominent locations such as at the notice board at the mess hall.

At the time of writing the daily schedule commences at 04:00 am four days a week with a modern postural yoga class. The temple opens at 05:00 am with the more eager devotees joining the students who are rostered to facilitate the religious practice of reciting the Rudram and performing the ritualised bathing of the mūrtis. Most residents and visitors arrive just before the Śiva Āratī commences at 06:20 am. This is followed by the daily text (pāṭha) and darśana of the deities and guru if he is present in the ashram. In his absence a picture is placed on his chair and people will take darśana as if it were the real guru sitting there. After the morning session breakfast
follows. Breakfast varies each day, however, it is never served without tea and could include either a fried or steamed dish such as *pohā, muthia, dhoklā* with fried green chillies, chickpea curry, or *idli*. While the students hurry off to school people will engage in some *sevā* for a couple of hours. This might include chopping vegetables for lunch, washing dishes, working in the orchards, or on some administrative task. Prestige is attributed to certain *sevās* over others. Instant prestige is accumulated if one has a closer or more frequent interaction with the guru, while chopping vegetables is an essential task, it carries less prestige than other tasks.

Prior to lunch there is another brief midday session of worship in the temple that includes a brief recital of the midday devotional song (*ārtī*). Between lunch and afternoon tea (which is served about 04:00 pm) most of the ashram will have a brief rest and then perhaps return to their studies or chores. For the less established devotees who have not taken on a specific task that has a deadline, or temporary visitors, the afternoon might be a chance to take care of personal chores, some reading, a trip to Valsad, a music lesson, attend to laundry, or to sit and build rapport with other devotees. Depending on the day of the week, after the tea break, on alternate days the students either have free time to play or they are expected to also perform various tasks such assisting in housekeeping with the moving of beds and desks, the construction of paths, installing new water tanks, or collecting fruit from the orchards.

Play time normally consists of at least two games of cricket for the older and younger students alike, table tennis, karrom, bike riding, and volleyball.

The evening session in the temple begins around dusk. The main texts recited are the *Śiva Mahiṁna Stotram* and the *Śiva Manas Pūjā* plus some devotional call and response singing known as *kīrtana* (praising). The format for dinner is similar to lunch, however, instead of the recitation of Vedic texts during the meal, the only singing that occurs is while the meal is served. I learnt this one day while sitting waiting for dinner. Wondering why we weren’t yet singing this simple *Śrī Rām Jai*
Rām tune I took it upon myself to instigate the evenings singing. However, I was quickly silenced by several students sitting next to me and told that I was not to begin until the food service began. For the students especially, this brief moment before dinner is one of the rare opportunities they get to relax.

On some evenings after all the dishes have been done and put away a religiously focused movie on Baba Muktananda’s life or some other saint from the tradition might be played. On previous trips to the ashram episodes of the famous Kṛṣṇa or Mahābhārata television series were played (McCartney 2014a: 1 hr 01 min – 1 hr 5 min).

3.9 — The Devotees

The people involved with Shanti Mandir who stay in the ashrams, it can be said, come from a mostly middle to upper-middle class background and are also predominantly upper-caste, if not Brahmin. There is a general tendency among international devotees for more women then men to visit. For the international devotees, who also include NRIs (Non Resident Indians) who live abroad, the cost of travelling to India or around the world to follow the guru on tour is restrictive for anyone who does not at least earn a significant salary to cover the expenses, especially if this involves dependent family members.

Within the network of devotees, people are predominantly from the middle-class like lawyers, doctors and other health practitioners, entrepreneurs, finance professionals, teachers, house wives, school children, engineers, architects, etc. There is a broad scope of people who all come together to share in and celebrate the connection they have with this particular spiritual lineage. It is quite common, particularly amongst the Indians who live between Mumbai and Delhi, and who have been associated for generations with this lineage, to describe this community as a ‘big
type of extended family’. Over time the international devotees also view their experience as being family-like. Extending these connections through social media sites the global Shanti Mandir community produces a ‘community of sentiment’ that is notionally connecting people through the internet (Appadurai 1996, Werrier 2014).

People are also attracted to Shanti Mandir because of its intimate and peaceful environment produced by the smaller crowds compared to the size of other organisations where their access to a guru could be more restricted like: Sathya Sai Baba, Asaram Bapu, Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, Mata Amritananda Mayi, or Baba Ramdev. For older devotees Nityananda’s simpler form of the guru-disciple yoga practice is reminiscent of the earlier days in Siddha Yoga (Healy 2010b). One could argue that the conscious effort to retain a smaller format and following is part of the charm and legitimising strategy to gain authenticity by Shanti Mandir.

For several families of both Indian and international origins the connections to this lineage started perhaps with their grand parents. Each successive generation has grown up coming to the ashram on the weekend or for longer periods during holidays, religious festivals or otherwise. The sense of community and sharing of common interests, faith and identity intensifies the relationships that people experience. For some, the ashram has provided the place where they met their future life partner. Marie, an Australian met Kush, an engineer from Mumbai in the ashram. After some time and several emails the two eventually married in a traditional Hindu ceremony that took place in the ashram bringing relatives from all across the globe together to celebrate. It is not only life partners that are found but also sometimes potential business partners meet and organise to explore opportunities once they are back in Mumbai, Sydney or somewhere else.

When following the guru on tour, assuming people have the time and money, they might extend their trip from its original duration of one month out to three or four months, while crossing several continents and time zones along the way to stay in the
presence of their guru for as long as possible. This is because the thought of returning home to one’s normal routine and leaving the carnival-like atmosphere (in the sense that life is celebrated every day) of the group causes many individuals to rearrange their schedules to keep the affective feelings experienced in the community from ceasing. The fun of travelling with life-long friends in the company of the guru is a highlight of several individuals’ calendar. As Wendy, a long-term devotee from Sydney said during part of the Australian tour, ‘I have to go home in a few days, but I want to stay on and keep travelling all the way down to Melbourne’. When the guru leaves the country the devotees wish they could continue travelling with him to the next satsaṅga.

For some international devotees there is very little interest in what South Asia has to offer, culturally, linguistically or in any secular kind of way beyond the parameters they construct for themselves through their experience in the ashram with their guru. Jerry, an American who has been coming to India for decades presents a common response shared by other devotees. He explained in a conversation one day how he has:

hardly seen anything of India because for decades because all I’ve done is land in Mumbai and have either gone straight to Ganeshpuri or now to Magod. I don’t come to India to travel around. I come here to be with my guru and to do sādhanā. There is very little that interests me beyond the ashram. Everything else is a distraction.

One glaring difference between the Indian and non-Indian conceptions regarding the external characteristics of the legitimate disposition regards an interest in politics. An expression of a particular religious identity compounds with the political sphere because in India, politics and religion are quite often inseparable. Rajendra, a retired professional from Delhi explained how ‘I vote for the BJP and Modi because the Congress Party is for the Muslims’. While there is a broad spectrum of political views present amongst the individuals in the community, this type of statement was quite
common amongst the Indian devotees I asked. However, in glaring opposition to the more politically passionate Indian is the general response of the non-Indian devotees who present an apathetic disconnection with the political process, not only in India, but in their home countries as well. Similar to most international devotees, Amelie, a French-Australian dual citizen explained how she is ‘not interested in politics here in India, France or Australia. I am a yogi and yogis have no need to worry about such things’.

The stark disparity between the Indian and non-Indian attitudes to politics is fascinating. For the former the relationship between religion and politics is so close that often the distinction is difficult to determine. One day during afternoon tea, a senior Indian devotee told me that:

After Gurudev left Siddha Yoga and he tried to start Shanti Mandir there were some problems. So, he went to the BJP for protection. Now, in return Gurudev instructs the devotees to vote for the BJP. I don’t know if Gurudev votes himself, but BJP politicians regularly come to the ashram for satsaṅga’. (private conversation)

How is it that for the average Indian devotee a political identity is inherent whereas the overwhelming response of the non-Indian devotee is one of apathy? This highlights an interesting dichotomy between two variants of the legitimate yogic identity within the Shanti Mandir community. The Indian devotees generally had no problem talking about politics, whereas quite often when trying to discuss politics with the non-Indian devotees my questions were regarded as annoying or antithetical to the ashram experience.

For many devotees there is a significant lack of interest or ambivalence about becoming involved in any secular affairs, as any distraction from one’s sādhanaḥ is considered to be detrimental. Some people who have been coming to India for decades have made a conscious decision to learn as little as possible about the socio-political-economic landscapes of South Asia. While many international devotees have been
coming to the Magod ashram for several years, and before that to India for decades, there was little enthusiasm about exploring the local area or other parts of India. Linda, a lawyer from Connecticut, expressed this sentiment. She explained how ‘I come to India to be with my guru. I will only leave the ashram if it is with my guru when he goes on a trip to some religious place, like when we went up to the holy glaciers in the Himalayas. I have no need to do anything else in India’. This myopically focused tendency seems essential to presenting a committed persona to the community. If the individual confesses to having the desire to participate in too many secular or tourist endeavours then their commitment and fidelity are called into question. This substantially affects how the community perceives the individual.

Just what is a ‘sense of community’? This concept was defined by McMillan and Chavis (1986: 128) as ‘a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together’. Ohmer (2007) asserted it is generally volunteers involved in an organisation’s daily needs that received the most benefits. Individuals who gain increased responsibility, knowledge and skills, and leadership roles are seen as being more committed, and hence, more legitimate. Possibly the most important ‘reward’ is the sense of community one gains, which includes the potential buffering of feelings of isolation, and the possible increases in self-esteem (cf. Wandersman and Florin 2000).

It is through sharing in the sense of mastery over one’s surroundings and future by demonstrating their willingness to put the organisation before the individual that recognition, and ultimately legitimacy is achieved (cf. Itzhaky and York 2002). This point is elaborated upon in chapter four, however, it ought to be expressed now that each distinct hierarchy within the social network has its own determinants and determiners of legitimacy. In other words there are both emic and etic perspectives regarding whether someone is performing the normative standards of each hierarchy.
This willingness to perform sevā is a form of ‘practical spirituality’ (Srinivas 2008: 258), which has communitarian notions of social citizenship that goes beyond simple instilling or extolling of virtues demonstrating that they are vanguards of fulfilling social obligations (Pandya 2014: 33). The collective effervescence of being personally involved in creating a utopic world enervates the individual towards participation in institution and community building, which is ultimately a performance of service to the guru that is justified and glorified as a sacrificial act and duty of the disciple. However, not everyone who came to the ashram felt inclined to participate in the ways or intensity that was anticipated by the community. If an individual was a casual visitor looking more for the opportunity to relax and unwind then their inclination towards participating in volunteer work might not meet the expectations set for them. This in many ways is an obvious determinant of legitimacy in the eyes of the community. Calvin, a long-term devotee from America explained to me his view on service one night after dinner. ‘Gurudev is the first devotee here. He is awake before everyone and the last to bed. He spends his entire life in the service of his guru’s mission and the development of this ashram. We could all take a page from his book. He is truly selfless’.

The overwhelming response regarding why people went to the Shanti Mandir ashram was 1) to have the opportunity to interact and learn from the guru; and 2) to be amongst like-minded people. Sampson and Raudenbush (1999) explained how collective efficacy supports mutual trust and social cohesion. Wendy and Christine were two women from Melbourne whom I met in the ashram. They had long-term partners who were deeply embedded in the Shanti Mandir community. However, both Wendy and Christine had come to the ashram for the first time, even though their partners had been coming for years. Both women practiced yoga but stopped short of feeling the need to commit to a particular group or find a guru. Even though both women have not deepened their relationship with Shanti Mandir they both commented
on how the ashram was a safe place for like-minded people to share a common identity, which could be exported back home and create little mini-communities that allow people to still feel connected.

This sense of community can have a sinister flip side. The Gujarat 2002 pogrom is an incident that a lot of people would like to forget ever happened. For Indians the economic promises of Modi’s vision outflank any of the detrimental acts of the past he may or may not have been associated with. However, it seems quite implausible to consider that anyone of Indian origin above a certain age could not have heard about the violence that claimed in excess of 1000 Muslim lives (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012). This incident went on for several days and gained international attention that resulted in Narendra Modi’s government (he was Chief Minister of Gujarat at the time) being boycotted by several countries for close to a decade. I was surprised by the number of students in the ashram and international devotees who had not heard of this incident, which human rights advocate Meenakshi Ganguly describes as a:

dark blot on India’s reputation for religious equality. Instead of prosecuting senior state and police officials implicated in the atrocities, the Gujarat authorities have engaged in denial and obstruction of justice. (Ganguly 2012)

I was equally shocked to hear devotees who had heard of this atrocity explain the deaths of individuals as something of no real consequence. Had it been Hindu lives that were lost I wonder if the responses might have been different, or at least more engaging? A long-term and senior Indian devotee explained to me over afternoon tea that ‘those riots weren’t as bad as what people think they were’. This playing down of some of the worst communal violence since Partition could be seen as an attempt to deflect any possible criticism towards Shanti Mandir. While not suggesting that Shanti Mandir supports violence towards minorities there was an overwhelming sense of apathy and disinterest in broader discussions of religious nationalism, fundamentalism,
and terrorism, particularly with regard to the idea of ‘saffron terrorism’ (Van der Veer 1994).

The fact that I tried to raise this critical international and domestic issue within the ashram caused several devotees to essentially conspire against me by constructing a narrative that I was in reality a Mossad agent sent from Israel. The irony of the situation is that Peter, an Australian devotee, who has been involved for decades with Siddha Yoga and Shanti Mandir had befriended me and, through the guise of becoming interested in my research and wanting to learn Sanskrit from me, had begun collecting a dossier in preparation for the ‘guru’s eyes only’. I only came to know about his data collection and analysis because he accidently sent his findings to my email address instead of the guru’s, which I mistakenly read, not realising his email started with ‘Dear Gurudev’ and not the normal in-group salutation of ‘Jai Gurudev’. I could not understand why I was constantly referred to in the third person. After three attempts at reading the email I understood that it was about me and not addressed to me. The reason for this slanderous campaign is based on an inadvertent question I asked Peter about saffron terrorism, which mentioned an unsavoury incident that a Bangladeshi friend experienced in the ashram when she came to visit me with her husband. Upon finding out he had sent the email to me instead of the guru directly, Peter replied:

As my working career included five years in Canberra, part of which was with the then central coordinating agency of the APS, I am not unaware of the games that can be played. In that regard, I don’t know if you are a spy, mate, but if I was one of your supervisors and, unknown to my academic peers, students, etc, was supplying intelligence to an external agency, it would be a relatively simple matter to have a Sanskrit student whose thesis I was supervising to unwittingly gather information for me, using the rationale that "some context" would add to his PhD paper. You might want to contemplate that objectively. The intellect can be a massively powerful delusional machine, particularly when directed outwards and not to the search for inner truth.
It seemed my naïve question had pricklier consequences than I thought it would. By asking people if they had heard of the term ‘saffron terrorism’ I was in no way insinuating that Nityananda or Shanti Mandir support communal violence towards vulnerable minorities, regardless of the fact that Akshay, an NRI retiree who has lived in New York City for forty years and identifies as apolitical explained how ‘we must kill all the Muslims before they kill all the Hindus’. Broadly speaking, however, the rationale in the general apathetic attitude and myopic focus of people in the ashram was generally couched in the rhetoric of the yogic discourse that such things are considered a distraction to one’s purpose of being in the ashram. This ambivalence towards the plight of others is representative of the detached attitude of vairāgya (detachment) promoted by the yogic philosophy. This is one of the fundamental pillars upon which the entire yogic epistemological system rests. Interestingly, however, the Yoga Journal explained that detachment towards external objects and social relations can lead to an impoverished inner life (Kempton 2007).

3.10 — Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide detail about the origins, aims, philosophies, spiritual lineage, location, religious practice and daily schedule of the Shanti Mandir ashram. Shanti Mandir is a community of like-minded individuals who share a connection to the Siddha lineage. Through the philosophies of Kashmir Shaivism and Advaita Vedānta, combined with the affiliation to the non-sectarian Smarta Brahmins, a clearer picture emerges of the context in which Shanti Mandir situates itself. Having established broadly what Shanti Mandir is and where they conduct themselves, the

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70 PYS 1.15 - drṣṭa anuṣravika viṣaya vīrtṣnasya vaśikāra samīṇa vairāgyam. When the mind loses desire even for objects seen or described in a tradition or in scriptures, it acquires a state of desirelessness (vaśikāra) that is called non-attachment (vairāgya).
following chapters explore in more detail specific characteristics of the community. Chapter four specifically looks at the social network and exchanges of capital.
Chapter 4 — The Social Network and Exchanges of Capital
4.1 — Introduction

In Figure 4.1 we see various lines of people eating lunch. Just like in the temple, individuals are not able to sit wherever they please. There is a symbolic system that determines where each individual is allowed to sit. Based on this distinction, beginning with chapter four, various aspects of the legitimate disposition will now be discussed and elaborated upon. By using the comments from the devotees and the organisation a clearer understanding of the emergent properties, internal structure and organising principles of the ashram habitus emerges. The aim of this chapter is to provide a typology of the various groups within the ashram community, so that it becomes clearer what the symbolic exchanges of capital between the groups are, how the internal nature of the competition for status and recognition determines legitimate participation, and how the distinct hierarchies operate based on observations of the spatial and gendered relations between the groups.

Figure 4.1: Lunch in the Ashram
(Source: McCartney 2014)
The typology presented below has developed out of a heuristic exercise to make the sometimes blurry and overlapping boundaries that separate the groups within the network clearer. This chapter seeks to answer the question ‘What is it that makes the groups different?’ While everyone in the community can be considered a devotee of the guru, for the sake of conceptual clarity, they are divided into Patrons, Renunciants and Scholars.\textsuperscript{71} I distinguish these groups based on their functions within the community and the principal species of capital they are able to invest in negotiations for legitimacy within this symbolic economy. These blends of capital determine how each group, and, therefore, each individual is able to legitimately operate within the social network. Moreover, this chapter demonstrates the interdependent relationship between the groups as they each perform a vital function so that the community can continue to sustain itself.

One main point that has evolved during the analysis is that the competition for status and prestige remains internal within each group. For instance, a Patron cannot realistically (i.e., symbolically) compete against a Scholar or Renunciant as these groups rely on a different portfolio of symbolic capital to gain legitimacy. This line of enquiry developed from the distinct spatial relations that operate within the temple and food hall. This typology does not essentialise complex phenomena because these groups already exist within the ashram community. Instead, based on several years of observation of the spatial, gendered, symbolic, and capital relations within the social network, this chapter highlights more precisely the intimate nature of the relationships among the groups and why they are different.

\textsuperscript{71} One might include a fourth category in this list, which I refer to as the employees/contractors. There are several people who come on a daily basis from the surrounding villages to work in the ashram in roles related to housekeeping, maintenance, construction, etc. Because they do not live in the ashram, attend the religious practice in the temple, or consider themselves devotees of the guru, their inclusion in the overall Devotees group as a fourth category is problematic. However, this group of people will be discussed below.
As is explained in more detail below, initially, I theorised that the community consisted of only one hierarchical structure with the guru ultimately on top, while a homogenous group of devotees are located underneath competing against each another for the guru’s grace. However, it became clearer with time, that there are separate and distinct hierarchies within which an individual is placed. The crux of my observation is this. An individual cannot belong in two groups at the same time. One way to visualise the arrangement is in the form of a three-sided triangle. Each side represents one of the different groups. The guru still sits atop the hierarchical network while individuals compete internally within their assigned group independent of the other groups to which they do not belong. However, each group still aims to embody the legitimate disposition through mimetic adaptations as the dominant modality for gaining legitimacy relies on a social relation (SR) to knowledge.

Section 4.2 explains in more detail the principles of legitimation and the first analytical dimension of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) — Specialisation Codes. This brief foray into theory is essential to understand the symbolic nature of knowledge production and how the different groups are identified, while providing various conceptualisations of the hierarchical network. Section 4.3 introduces the three groups providing information on some individuals from each group to better understand the differences and similarities between the groups and personalities therein. Section 4.3 describes the spatial and gendered relations between these groups located within the food hall. This is done to demonstrate the reality of the social network and the way in which the symbolic capital of each group structures the

72 Compare figure 4.14.
73 Thanks to Kirin Narayan for suggesting this possibility.
74 In theory, there is nothing preventing a Scholar or Patron from becoming a Renunciant, except time and their willingness to adopt the necessary disposition.
75 Compare figure 4.15.
76 This is explained in section 5.2.
relations within the social field of ashram space. Section 4.4 synthesises the theory with the data demonstrating various ways in which we can understand the hierarchical relationships among the groups. Section 4.5 is the conclusion.

4.2 — Legitimation Codes

LCT operationalises Bourdieu by conceptualising what the organising principles of dispositions, practices and fields are through its legitimation codes. These codes act as a type of currency that is used to structure the field and determine relations between individuals and groups. These codes represent an abstract interpretation of an exchange rate mechanism between these currencies or what comes to be considered as legitimate knowledge and behaviour (Maton 2013: 37). Social fields of practice are then shaped by the dominant or legitimate codes. The analysis of social fields using legitimation codes enables the exploration of what is possible for whom, where, when and how and also who is able to determine these possibilities.

The basis of distinctiveness, authority, and status is determined by whether a knowledge structure, knower structure, neither or both represents the dominant form of achievement (Maton 2013: 109). Knowledge structures conceptualise the arrangement of knowledge within fields, whereas, knower structures conceptualise the arrangement of knowers (Maton and Moore 2010: 161). In hierarchical knower structures, similar to the Shanti Mandir ashram, the ascendance of ideas or practices is motivated by their capacity to reflect the gazes of legitimate knowers (Maton 2013: 212-13). This reflection of the legitimate knower’s gaze refers to the ability of the knower to emulate the legitimate disposition and reproduce a consonant discourse or behaviour. An individual’s ability to reproduce this knowledge increases their status within the

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77 This is discussed in chapter seven.
community. This results in ascension through the hierarchy of knowers. Developed above, within the ashram there are three independent hierarchical knower structures that correspond to the three distinct groups mentioned above.

The analytical toolkit of LCT consists of five dimensions. The flexibility of LCT allows the researcher to apply one, two or all of the dimensions to their field of analysis. Each dimension has its own code modality (Maton 2013: 37). In this chapter I have only employed the first dimension known as Specialisation. This is discussed next.

Specialisation is the first dimension and the most theoretically developed LCT analytical tool. The specialisation codes enable the identification of the different groups within the ashram reflecting the process of legitimisation for each group. Specialisation uses codes that are distinguished by the epistemic relations (ER) between knowledge and its object, and the social relations (SR) between knowledge and its subjects, actors or authors. Maton explains that:

> these relations refer to two empirically co-existing but analytically distinguishable dimensions of knowledge and practice, namely that knowledge claims are by somebody and about something: the epistemic relation (ER) is between knowledge and its proclaimed object of study; the social relation (SR) is between knowledge and its author, the subject making the claim to knowledge. (Maton 2005: 53)

Another way of explaining it is that epistemic relations refer to ‘what’ is known and social relations refer to the type of knower the individual is required to be(come) in order to be seen by any community as authentic. Maton explains how specialisation ‘establishes the ways agents and discourses within a field are constructed as special,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Code Modality</th>
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<tr>
<td>Specialisation</td>
<td>(ER+/-, SR+/-)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>(PA+/-, RA+/-)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>(MaD+/-, MoD+/-)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Temporality</td>
<td>(TP+/-, TO+/-)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semantics</td>
<td>(SG+/-, SD+/-)</td>
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different or unique and thus deserving of distinction and status’ (Maton 2005a: 90). The four specialisation codes (ER+/-, SR+/-) are further elaborated by strong (‘+’) or weak (‘-’) classifications. These variations in strengths reflect either an emphasis on explicit knowledge, skills and procedures (Epistemic Relation — ‘ER+’) or an emphasis on a particular disposition of knowers relevant to the specific field (Social Relation — ‘SR+’) (Vorster and Quinn 2012: 72). Figure 4.2 is a graphic representation of the legitimation codes in relation to the knowledge-knower structures (Maton 2013: 53). For the purpose of this explanation, the focus is on the upper and lower quadrants on the right side of the diagram, which represent the two modalities prevalent in the Shanti Mandir field.

![Figure 4.2: The Specialisation Plane](Source: Maton 2013: 30)

The symbolic capital that each group competes for has a social relation and an epistemic relation to the knowledge produced within this field. While all of the devotees who are present in the field have access to the social relation through coming into daily contact with the guru and each other, the only group that has access to the restricted epistemic relation is the Scholars. Through their traditional education they

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79 This is not to say that the Renunciants and Patrons do not also have a certain epistemic relation, instead it refers to the emphasis laid on it as a ruler of achievement or measurement of access into this
become ritual and linguistic specialists who officiate and perform at all the daily religious events as they have accumulated the cultural capital of becoming knowers of the Brahminical Orthodox Sanskritic tradition of Hinduism (cf. Anonymous 1951, Gerow 2002, Michaels 2001, 2004, Scharfe 2002).

This combination of both relations to knowledge (ER+, SR+) represents an Élite Code as they have learnt to embody the legitimate disposition, while also gaining both knowledgeable and practical mastery of the tradition. In comparison, the dominant specialisation code for both the Renunciants and Patrons is a non-specialist relation to knowledge (practical mastery) that requires learning to embody the legitimate disposition with less emphasis on knowledgeable mastery. This Knower Code is represented by the code modality (ER-, SR+), which demonstrates that the emphasis within this social field is on the social relation, i.e., the disposition, over any technical knowledge/mastery of linguistic and ritual procedures.

A hierarchical knowledge structure epitomises the hard sciences where principles are rarefied into higher orders of abstraction.\(^{80}\) (ER-) is indicative of a horizontal knowledge structure where knowledge is segmented relying less on cumulative progression of learning and knowledge building. The horizontal knowledge structure lends itself more towards relativism and the non-arbitrary or subjective idealist nature of the spiritual experience and learning process. This is typical of the subjectivist emphasis of the pedagogical system within Shanti Mandir that suggests people base their assessment of their relation to the phenomenal world on their group. This is a reflection of distinction that results from the Scholars technical mastery as opposed to practical mastery.

\(^{80}\) (ER+, SR-) is the Knowledge Code, which suggests specific knowledge is more important over a particular disposition. For instance, in a laboratory, a scientist could have any disposition and identify with any sub-culture. As long as their technical skills are good it should not matter. (ER-, SR-) is a Relativist Code which suggest that neither a disposition or a set of skills is necessary to gain access into a particular community.
personal experience. However, while each individual may experience the world differently, gaining legitimacy still requires that a particular disposition be embodied.

An email response from Gareth, a retired Australian who has been involved with Siddha Yoga and Shanti Mandir for several decades wrote:

As you would appreciate, in the intellectual realm (as in other realms), things are seen and interpreted through a particular window. However much we Westerners may think we are open-minded, there remains our own unique, prevailing (culturally/socially formed) paradigm through which everything is filtered. Perhaps that is why some may conclude that the dispositions/beliefs/values/ways of others can only be the result of a form of "indoctrination" (I feel a more accurate word is "enculturation"). However, if one is blessed to have a genuine, direct experience of the divine, it is SOOOOO powerful that a lot of the prior conditioning gets blown away — leaving only the truly pure and untainted together with whatever tendencies remain as a result of residual karmas.

Gareth appears to have a problem with Western intellectualism and considers it an inferior epistemology compared to a ‘genuine, direct experience of the divine’ that enables for a ‘truly pure and untainted’ and unmediated experience. There was a common disdain toward my intellectual pursuit shown by the majority of devotees who overwhelmingly considered my perceived desire to ‘chase a degree’ as a clear sign of my advanced ego and lack of spiritual development. This shows how different types of knowledge have varying symbolic values and which currency is favoured more in symbolic exchanges for prestige.

Before dividing the various groups we are able to regard the devotees of the guru as a homogenous collection. With this in mind, we can determine that the dominant modality within the Shanti Mandir network is a Knower Code (ER-, SR+) that emphasises a practical mastery. A few examples of this include learning how and where to sit in the temple, what clothes are tolerated, how to approach the guru, and what are the tolerable limits of group discussions. Individuals up to a certain extent can wear whatever they want, however, they run the risk of being chastised for not wearing appropriate clothing. I observed the efforts of more established devotees to
socialise *videśin* women who did not understand the more conservative dress code that a woman should not wear revealing or tight fitting clothing. This includes using a scarf (*dupattā*) to cover the outline of one’s breasts. Priya, a first time visitor to India and the ashram told me how:

> Some of the western devotees were so concerned about my breasts, they kept telling me I had to cover them with a scarf. But I didn’t have one. This policing of the body was such a preoccupation for some people. These people didn’t know me yet they kept telling me how I ought to be.

Apart from the Scholars and Renunciants, the Patrons are able to wear casual clothing including jeans and shorts. However, if one wants to be accepted more readily then they will adopt traditional Indian clothing such as a *sārī*, *šalwar kamīz*, *kurtā pāyjāmā*, or *lungī*. Even in the temple male Patrons might wear jeans and even shorts if they are a young boy. However, some devotees have special ‘temple clothes’ that they only wear after showering and remove before eating or engaging in any other activity. These are normally white. This demonstrates that even within the ashram certain domains are considered to require extra levels of purification before entering. The belief held by most devotees regarding the influence of clothing is articulated by the The Spiritual Science Research Foundation, which explains that ‘spiritual clothing’ can receive and transmit ‘positive and divine frequencies’ while protecting against negative energies. ‘Spiritual clothing’ is determined by the following categories: type of material, amount of stitching, colour of the cloth, design and print on the cloth, condition of the clothes, length of hemline, style, and borrowing clothes from someone else (SSRF 2015).

The reasons the legitimate disposition does not require the acquisition of specialist knowledge will become clearer in chapters five and six: however, the principal reason is that anyone, regardless of various standpoint theories is able to

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31 *Vi* (out) + *deśin* (belonging to a country), i.e., a foreigner.
spend time in the ashram and learn from the guru and his devotees how to adopt what they consider to be an authentic yogic disposition. Unlike the technical linguistic and ritual knowledge that the Scholars train specifically to accumulate, access is theoretically open to everyone to become a devotee due to the prevalent knower code modality.

The specialisation codes demonstrate along with an analysis of capital how individuals are restricted to internal competitions for status within their own group as different ‘rulers’, based on symbolic capital of legitimacy apply to the measurement of success of one’s enculturation. This negates the possibility of trying to compete for status with individuals from the other groups. Even though the organising principles and internal structure of the legitimate disposition are universal across the three groups, the emergent properties such as external appearances, spatial relations and practices vary. The guru’s grace and attention is something all of the devotees are consciously aspiring to accumulate, however, the fact that this is some type of game or competition seems less obvious to some.82

There is very little profit for a Patron trying to compete with or compare him or herself to a Renunciant or Scholar, much less, trying to pretend to be one through an external appearance. With this in mind, then, what we have are three distinct hierarchies where the possibility of migration into another group is quite limited. The ideal knower sits atop all three groups as everyone is trying to become like the guru. At the time of writing, there has not been one Scholar who has become a Renunciant. It is virtually impossible for either Renunciants or Patrons to become Scholars because generally they are too old to begin studying and stick to the rigorous discipline required. However, three Patrons have become Renunciants and there are more who seek to attain this rank. There is another male Renunciant who lives in the ashram. He

82 Game theory is the study of strategic decision making.
is quite elderly and was not initiated by Nityananda. He has no official role in the organisation.

4.3 — The Scholars, Renunciants and Patrons

One of the distinguishing features of the Shanti Mandir ashram is the Śrī Muktānanda Saṁskṛta Mahāvidyālaya. This Sanskrit college opened soon after the ashram was established in 2000 with two students. The college is physically located in the centre of the ashram. It forms a central part of the ashram experience and the organisation’s identity as an authentic provider of a ‘Vedic’ experience through the training of vedamārtis (individuals who have embodied the Veda).

The college, the teachers and the students hold an esteemed position in the community for their dedication to ensuring that the Sanskrit language and Brahminical tradition continues. Compared to other ashrams that do not have similar educational institutions or Sanskrit specialists who embody the Veda present in the ashram there is a significantly different atmosphere (Larios 2014b). The members of this community have a firm conviction that the pleasant and peaceful atmosphere found within their ashram is a direct result of the Vedic mantras that the ritual specialists recite. Jasmine, a devotee from Melbourne, explained that ‘I have been to several ashrams across India and the thing I love about this one (Shanti Mandir) is all the students learning and sharing their Sanskrit mantras with us. Other ashrams feel stale and dead compared to this one’. This trope is quite a common response among the visitors and residents. When talking to first time visitors, the established devotees often refer to the ‘potency’ of the Vedic mantras as being responsible for the atmosphere in the ashram. Individuals believe that the salvific power of the Sanskrit mantras will afford them an aesthetically beneficial experience and possibly soteriological reward. A recent attendee of the Shanti Mandir’s annual yoga course explains how:
Shanti Mandir is a beautiful place of peace and transformation. Words cannot describe the depth of love and tradition that is part of every day life here. To come to such a place for studying authentic yoga is a real gift and you feel it as soon as you step through the gates. (Mandir 2015)

The energy and enthusiasm that I witnessed within the Shanti Mandir ashram is largely a result of the focused religious practice and cultivated sense of community. This is combined with the majority of the residents being the students at the college who are under the age of twenty. Every day the temple and college is full of the boisterous energy of young men perfecting their ritual and linguistic skills and religious identity as they manage the temple facilitating the religious practice, leading the devotional chanting, and performing the Vedic mantras that are not known by the general audience. Such a situation and aesthetic experience is not necessarily available in other ashrams, therefore, in this way Shanti Mandir offers a unique environment for what they consider to be the ‘genuine seeker’. Some visitors prefer a quieter environment in which to meditate, however, for the majority of the devotees one of the highlights of their ashram experience is watching these young examples of the guru’s saṅkalpa mature as they learn to embody the Veda and become vedamūrtis (Larios 2014b).

In Brāhmaṇical circles, traditional Sanskrit education in India is consciously distinguished between the śāstrika (scholastic) and the vaidika (recitational) (Wujastyk 1981: 30). Sanskrit colleges and universities have largely supplanted traditional Sanskrit schools in India (Deshpande 2001a). The Shanti Mandir website explains

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83 This represents one of the ongoing competitions between various groups-individuals within the ashram. Some people are anxious about the eventual growth in the number of the students the guru wants enrolled at the college, as it will mean more boys and ultimately more noise. As the numbers swell, there will also be more competition for the guru’s attention. The devotees regularly raise these two issues amongst each other when discussing the future of their ashram. However, as the ashram grows in size and stature this reaffirms to the devotees that their guru is powerful and that they have made the correct decision to follow him.

how the education within their Sanskrit college aims at providing both types of education mixed with necessary skills to navigate through modernity.

Young students develop proficiency in Sanskrit as a prelude to classroom study of the Vedic teachings through subjects relevant to modern-day life. Their learning is enhanced through regular participation in such Vedic practices as chanting, worship, and meditation. Free education, board, and lodging are provided by the school. Students also receive a stipend to take care of other needs, so they can be financially independent of their families. Because the curriculum demands great discipline and rigour, students applying to the school must demonstrate a high level of determination and interest to qualify for admission. Following 10 years of study, students earn a degree from Sampooranand University, Varanasi, an ancient seat of Vedic learning. (Mandir 2015y)

Larios’ typology of Vedic schools provides an interesting comparative tool to explore Shanti Mandir’s Sanskrit college (from here referred to as the ‘college’) (Larios 2014a: 83-84). Larios argues that along with other aspects this may directly or indirectly affect, at least, the perception of the ‘traditional’ transmission of knowledge. The typology is based on the number of students and proceeds from small to bigger: 1) Gurukula, 2) Vedapāṭhaśālā, and 3) Vedavidyālaya.

The *gurukula* type refers to a small school and literally means in the ‘house of the guru’ where only a handful of students live and study with their teacher. A *pāṭhaśālā* (hall of study) implies a larger scale operation, while a *vidyālaya* (abode of knowledge) refers to an institution such as a college (*mahāvidyālaya*) or a university (*viśvavidyālaya*). Shanti Mandir’s Sanskrit college fits into the third type.

Building upon Larios’ typology we could enrich the third category by separating the college and university into two distinct categories. This is important, particularly when analysing the claims to legitimacy and authenticity that such educational providers make. Through my own visits to similar institutions across India I agree with Larios regarding the general attitudes towards institutional growth and its subsequent effect on perception of authenticity. The argument cuts both ways. Growth is a sign of success, however, the overall quality of education may be called into
question compared to the smaller schools that are perceived as being more authentic and traditional.

One of the main public performances the students are involved in to demonstrate the knowledge they have acquired is a twelve-hour recital of the complete Śukla Yajurveda (Mandir 2009). This is the primary text the students learn as a result of Shanti Mandir’s alignment with the Smarta tradition and Sringeri Math in South India. From the horizontal hand movements the students make during the Vedic recitation it is clear that the college teaches the Vedas according to the Mādyandina Śākhā. This branch (śākhā) is quite prevalent across North India. It focuses on recitation of the Madhyandina Saṁhitā, Śatapathabrāhmaṇa, Īśāvāsyā Upāniṣad and the Brhadāranyaka Upāniṣad (Pratishtan 2015).

The guru’s intention is to have one thousand students and approximately thirty teachers.85 In calculating the overheads for such a project, the current annual cost per student is given by Shanti Mandir as approximately AUD2000. With approximately seventy students currently enrolled Shanti Mandir’s student budget is close to AUD150,000. Extrapolating this out to 1000 students means the average annual budget would be AUD2 million. There are several logistical concerns that need addressing before such growth can occur, which are related to physical and economic capital. The current size of the ashram property and the revenue provided by the Patrons’ donations restrict the ultimate growth that can occur. Several Patrons annually invest thousands of dollars into the college and other charitable works of the ashram as they truly believe and support their guru’s aim. There are some wealthy individuals who make significant annual investments above USD50,000 and have done so since the ashram opened. In this promotional video, Nityananda explains that his intention is:

85 In early 2014 Nityananda tole me that he wants one thousand students.
to create a group of young men who will be able to foster and take forth the teachings of sanātana dharma. To share with people around the world the teachings that sages here in India have given to us over the ages. So it is not forgotten and lost, these students are trained not only in the ancient traditions of the Sanskrit scriptures, but computer, English, mathematics and all of the various modern subjects that we can teach them. So that they can have a well-rounded understanding and perception of life and share that with people. Because as time has gone on people have forgotten why we do all of this, so we wish to remind them that there is a purpose and significance. These students are being trained and prepared for this intention. I feel that in the twelve years that the school has been in operation we have achieved a great amount of success in being able to prepare these students. We look forward to continuing this work with the support from many people from all around the world, and wish these boys a great future in their life. (Mandir 2012e)

At present, the college is registered as an affiliated education provider with the Somnath Sanskrit University in Junagadh District, Gujarat (University 2015). Through this arrangement it also has affiliation with Sarīṇpūrṇāṇanda Sarīṅkṛta Viśvavidyālaya in Varanasi (Vishwavidyalaya 2015). Shanti Mandir aims to one day attain university status for its own college. There are three reasons, which focus upon attaining legitimacy and prestige for Shanti Mandir. This will assist the organisation in continuing with its charitable works. One of the main factors is that a mahāvidyālaya is only allowed to award students an Ācārya Dīkṣā, which is the equivalent of a master’s degree (MA). In comparison, a viśvavidyālaya is able to award students a Vaidya Dīkṣā, which is equivalent to a doctoral degree (PhD).

In India graduate awards are regulated by the University Grants Commission (UGC). The UGC is the national body that oversees the legitimation process educational providers go through to become registered institutions (Commission 2015). The process of gaining recognition is quite competitive. Recognition as a deemed or full university is regulated under Section — 2 (F) of the UGC Act, 1956.

86 On the UGC website there is a list of ‘fake universities’.
With this increase in status the educational provider becomes more attractive not only to potential students but also investors. The college also might become eligible for direct funding from the Indian government. With direct government funding Shanti Mandir would be able to channel its donations to developing and improving its other charitable works, which, in turn would enable it to increase its own symbolic capital. Once the UGC grants university status, thereby, opening up the potential for external funding, this will further demonstrate to the devotees and broader community that their support and investments of economic capital have been worth it. Figure 4.3 shows the teachers, students and other people involved with the school sitting in the temple where satsaṅga is held, while Figure 4.4 shows some of the students in a typical classroom. These photos are used on Shanti Mandir’s website to promote the charitable activity and encourage people to donate to support this endeavour.

Combined with the UGC, the Government of India introduced the Right to Education (RTE) Act in 2009 (India 2015a). According to this Act, an educational provider is not legally allowed to exclude an individual entry to a school based on gender, ethnicity or caste. Larios (forthcoming) comments on how this Act caused problems for traditional Vedic schools in Maharashtra that were opposed to opening up their schools.

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87 Once an institution gains university status they will not be automatically eligible to receive any assistance from the UGC and any other source funded by the Government of India until the university is declared fit to receive central assistance under Section 12 (B) of UGC Act, 1956.

88 Satsaṅga is the focus of chapter five.
The teachers at Shanti Mandir’s Sanskrit college told me that they briefly had a young girl studying at the school but her parents soon removed her so she could marry. The college is not opposed to having more females and lower caste students; however, I was informed that the school does not currently have the infrastructure to safely accommodate females in a boarding style arrangement, neither does it have any non twice-born or lower caste students. Most of the current students are Brahmin, however, at the time of fieldwork there were only two Kṣatriya boys studying at the college. The principal also told me that they will accept any student to study as long as they demonstrate a sincere commitment to the discipline and studies, however, if they are not from the Brahmin caste then they will be prevented from learning the karma kāṇḍa (ritual actions) and will instead have extra classes in grammar and literature depending on their vocational interest.

During my fieldwork I was also invited to formally enroll and study at the school under the provision that upon graduation I would not work as a priest in a temple and derive an income from ritual activity. However, as someone who is
essentially casteless (ajātī) there was doubt, even from Nityananda himself, as to whether I could be considered a dvījā or not. He told me I would have to ask the principal of the college who agreed I would need to take the traditional upanaya (thread) sanskāra (rite of passage) before I could be admitted to the college. This is interesting because it shows that the final say on matters of the college does not belong to the guru, who prior to becoming a Renunciant was from the Kṣatriya caste.

The production of Sanskrit knowers is heavily enconsed in a Brahminical paradigm, which is held up by members of the community as the ideal lifestyle and subsequent disposition that the aspirant ought to strive towards imbibing. In order to understand castes, we need to appreciate that it is a complex system entrenched in a political economy and inflected with religious strands by dividing labourers into certain professions within an externally and internally managed hierarchy (Singh 2015). This has manifested with a push by certain groups to allow the employment of lower caste people, including women, to work as priests in temples. Everyone I asked in the ashram did not consider this to be a good idea (IANS 2014, Magnier 2012). While perhaps a quarter were ambivalent and did not really have an initial opinion, some considered the project completely abhorrent, and the majority considered it more of a political move by certain groups, including Narendra Modi whose inspirational rags to riches story as the son of a lower caste tea seller to the nation’s Prime Minister is evident (Fradkin 2015). One of the junior teachers, Hemraj, told me that he believed the Siddha Path of Nityananda allows non-Brahmins to study at the college, that even though he doesn’t know what my caste status is, he feels that I am like them and should be able to study at the college but not be allowed to earn money from performing rituals.

One evening I was sitting in the room Hemraj used to live with the other unmarried junior teachers. All of them completed their Ācārya Dikṣā at the college. We chatted about life as we ate snacks and some blessed food (prasāda) that had been
brought back from a temple in Haridwar. Some of them went and taught in other schools for a year or two after graduating and have since returned, while the others have simply stayed at Shanti Mandir. There room consisted of four single beds lined up in a row without any gaps in between, which essentially made one really long bed. Each individual had their own lockable cupboard opposite their bed and space above on a shelf for toiletries. The spartanesque nature of the room did little to affect the generally affable mood of its inhabitants. Having to share with only three other people compared to the dormitories for the younger students that might have ten or twelve students packed into a similar space seems like luxury.

During the conversation, which occurred mostly in Sanskrit and Hindi, I was asked if I consider myself to be a Hindu. In the time it took to formulate a response, which I never ultimately had an opportunity to give, a discussion took place that concluded with the opinion that I was indeed a Hindu, an Indian, and that I should certainly marry a Kumouni girl, because most of the guys are from the Kumoun region in east Uttarakhand.

I would often attend the afternoon private study session that took place in the college’s hall. I would sit with the students and help them with their English homework, or we might practice chanting Sanskrit texts together or, instead sit and read from one of their school textbooks. Sometimes Ācārya Jha would run a philosophy class for some of the adult residents and older students. We would sit together and discuss various texts and their implications. Of all my memories from my fieldwork I hold these moments with Ācārya Jha to be among the fondest.

On one occasion I was asked by a group of students and the teacher supervising this session what my gotra (lineage) was. This exogamous unit is used most frequently to determine marriage suitability, as people from the same gotra are not meant to marry. This question left me initially without an answer as it has deeper implications than simply identifying one’s family name. I began by explaining the
etymology of my own family name but this failed to satisfy. These experiences caused me to consider how my own identity within the community was being constantly negotiated external to my own perceptions or control. I was not able to simply assert who I thought I was, as the community was also involved in determining my status and ultimately my legitimacy. In a globalised world the perceived threat of cultural homogenisation is at the heart of India’s resurgent nationalist movement to preserve its cultural and social identity, this situation also invites us to consider what we are willing to change or retain in our own personal identities due to the influence of migration and globalisation (Jayaraman 2005).

The number of students at the college fluctuates but has been around sixty to seventy students for the last few years. The age range is ten to twenty-five years. The students and teachers predominantly come from North India. There are several students from Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, while other students also come from Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Nepal. The teachers come from similar states to the students. Some of the students enrol at the college because they already know one of the teachers, a sibling, or another student from their village who has reported favourably about the college and ashram life. The rising number of awards the students receive in the various national scholarly competitions and statewide examinations they attend demonstrates to the community the efficacy and authenticity of the education.

There are a variety of languages spoken amongst the students and teachers. The predominant language used in conversation is Hindi. The teachers encourage the use of spoken Sanskrit, particularly in the classroom (McCartney 2011). The Shanti Mandir community looks forward to the day when Sanskrit replaces Hindi as the dominant language across the entire ashram. This is due to the symbolic capital that

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89 McCartney comes from Artain. It is a diminutive of the Old Celtic byname Art, which means ‘bear’ or ‘hero’. ‘Mc’ is a patronymic affix that means ‘son of’. Therefore, I am the ‘son of a hero or bear’.

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Sanskrit has as it is believed to be the ‘language of the gods’ (*devabhāṣā*). The supposed power of Sanskrit to morally uplift individuals, communities and the nations is apparent in the discourse propagated not only by Shanti Mandir but also the international organisation known as Samskrita Bharati that was discussed briefly in chapter two (McCartney 2014c). Doctor Rakhee, the resident physician, who treats the sick and injured in the ashram and the wider community, told me that ‘we once had a spoken Sanskrit camp here in the ashram; however, it is difficult to organise because everyone is so busy. Some of the students go to Delhi to Samskrita Bharati’s two-week camp to improve their Sanskrit language skills’.

Rakhee went on to explain that ‘I really like speaking Sanskrit and hope that one day everyone in the ashram will be able to speak it’. This was a common attitude made by most residents and visitors to the ashram. All of them believed in the salvific potency of Sanskrit. It is one of the main reasons people go to Shanti Mandir’s ashram. They also feel that through supporting this organisation a certain amount of prestige (in terms of Sanskritisation) becomes available to them. By being in the vicinity of Sanskrit speakers they will accrue the moral and soteriological benefits attributed to Sanskrit. A German woman, Katherine told me that ‘anyone who can speak Sanskrit is already enlightened’. Other people also hold this view. It is indicative of the general attitude of the community and how the symbolic capital of Sanskrit is used like a currency to determine legitimacy and authenticity. The senior teacher Shyam Sunder Jha started the college in 2001 (Figure 4.5). Ācārya Jha is from Uttar Pradesh. He teaches Sanskrit grammar, philosophy and literature. He is also an accomplished poet. He teaches Sanskrit grammar, literature and Philosophy and has many Sanskrit poetry compositions to his credit.
At the age of 86 he continues to devote his time to teaching Sanskrit. He has a son who lives in America as a computer scientist. We would often sit in the afternoon and talk in Sanskrit and read various texts. This included an nineteenth-century translation of the Bible into Sanskrit. One student wanted to know more about other religions. We started reading this because he was confused by the ‘cannibalism’ found within Christian theology related to ‘eating the body and blood of Christ’. I was always amazed at Ācārya Jha’s fluency and ability to quickly read a passage in Sanskrit and translate it into Hindi. Shyamji expressed a common wish amongst the community. He explained how he hopes that Sanskrit will become the dominant language in the ashram and that this will naturally occur as the student number grows. Similar to the other teachers, the principal Sharadji explained how there is no real urgency to this project, nor is there much of a desire to have spoken Sanskrit camps, because the students’ immersion in the rigorous pedagogical system allows them to become quite proficient in speaking Sanskrit by the time they graduate. However, each Saturday before lunch there is a session where three students are chosen to speak Sanskrit in front of the school. While the students are free to talk about anything they want as long as it is in Sanskrit, the main theme generally riffs on the particular trope of how lucky they feel to be in the ashram, the benefit of what they are learning for themselves and
their country, their fidelity with the other community members and their gratitude towards Nityananda for his guidance and compassion.

Broadly speaking the symbolic capital of Sanskrit is intimately linked to this community’s prestige through its potential salvific power as a ‘divine language’. This strong undercurrent of support for the cultivation of the Sanskrit episteme is central to the reason why people participate in this community as they assert that an association with an authentic producer of Sanskrit will be effective in assisting their own quest for liberation. This is perhaps different from the students’ initial reason for attending the college and living in the ashram. For quite a few, if not all of the students, they have come from poor homes, while some are orphans. Initially prospects of a warm bed, regular food, and compassionate guardians are quite appealing. The following response from Devayani, the Vice President of Shanti Mandir echoes this popular albeit ahistorical linguistic sentiment regarding the divinity of the language.

Sanskrit is known as the language of gods and is the mother of all languages. The sounds of Sanskrit letters are divine vibrations, and the sages ‘heard’ the teachings in this language. My relationship to Sanskrit is that all the text chanting we do here at Shanti Mandir is in that language. (Cable 2013)

This trope is very common within the broader yoga and patriotic communities. Sanskrit is too often misrepresented. It is neither the ‘mother of all languages’ nor the ‘oldest language in the world’. The essentialised eternalisation of Sanskrit is part of

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90 It is interesting to consider where someone like Devayani might fit within the typology I have developed. Devayani is not a Scholar neither is she a Renunciant. She also does not fit exactly into the Patron category because Devayani is what we can describe more precisely as ‘Staff’. As the organisation’s administrator, one of Devayani’s main roles is facilitating the accumulation of economic capital through the promotion of various fundraising initiatives. We could consider her to be the principal Patron, even though she is perhaps not donating any funds herself.

91 For a time Sanskrit was thought to be the original Indo-European language. Historical linguistics has definitively proven this archaic view incorrect by demonstrating Sanskrit’s location in the Indo-European family through the common ancestor of Proto-Indo-European. Regardless, this opinion that Sanskrit is the oldest language of all the worlds 7000 languages persists in India today. Even within
the legitimising strategy used by several organisations to assert a claim to represent divinity and to remystify the world.

The school has open-air rooms with low walls as in Figure 4.4. The students sit on the floor in front of their lockable desks where they store their learning materials. During the cooler months the classes may move outside so that the students can sit directly in the sunlight (McCartney 2014a). During the warmer months the classes begin much earlier in the day before breakfast so that the heat of the afternoon can be avoided. As the college is a boarding school, the students sleep together in tight spaces. Some rooms have only single beds lined up next to each other without any gap, while other rooms may have double or even triple bunks making more use of the vertical space. Each student has a small locker to store his personal possessions such as his clothes, books, and other accoutrements.

The primary function of the Scholars is to facilitate the daily religious practice in the temple. The species of capital that the Scholars use to gain prestige is based on the cultural capital of their knowledge of Sanskrit as vedamūrtis. As vedamūrtis their functions include, but are not limited to, ensuring the daily preparation of all the pūjā sāmagrī (materials for worship), the temple is cleaned, the PA equipment is working properly, and that the chanting books are distributed and collected. The division of labour is interesting. It is always the youngest and newest students who are charged with distributing and collecting the chanting books.

The most important task the Scholars have in the temple is their performative role in leading and facilitating the religious practice by chanting Sanskrit mantras, particularly the vaidika mantras which are generally not known by the general Devotees. It is the students who are charged with ensuring that the various periods of

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India there are four other language families (Dravidian, Munda, Sino-Tibetan, Austro-Asiatic), which Sanskrit has little or no links to whatever. See Mallory and Adams (2013) and Beekes (2011).

92 McCartney (2014a: 19 mins 30 secs) the students can be seen sitting outside enjoying the winter sun.
worship that occur throughout the day happen according to the scheduled time. However, on occasion a devotee might feel obligated to ‘inspire’ the students who may not be running on time by asking them to start chanting.

The weekly roster and group responsibility ensures that all of the students, particularly the younger ones, are given the opportunity to lead the singing. During the more devotional parts like kirtana, an older more proficient student will lead the drumming accompanied by one or two younger students whose instruments are not amplified. This gives them the opportunity to learn how to play along to the regular devotional music. Another student or established ashram resident leads the singing while playing the harmonium.

One morning in the temple I had joined the students sitting with them to recite the Rudram. Due to the required level of concentration I had not realised a microphone had been placed in front of me and I was essentially leading the chanting. Once I realised I became embarrassed but I was then urged to continue all the way through until I also led the concluding mantras to signify the end of the morning worship. The students and other devotees also have access to music lessons from a music teacher who visits the ashram on a weekly basis. Some of the students are quite talented and have represented their community at state and national level competitions.

The Scholars possess a legitimacy unlike the other groups because they have, or are in the process of learning to acquire, a social relation and an epistemic relation to this ‘divine’ knowledge. Not only are they learning to embody the legitimate disposition (social relation), the Scholars are trained into a restricted system of

93 In the opening five minutes of McCartney (2014a) the students are involved in facilitating the religious practice in the various temples located throughout the ashram. Near to the main temple is a smaller Hanuman temple. On the day of filming three of the younger students get confused with the particular steps they were required to perform. Out of view stood an older student who was there to supervise them. He offers advice only when the students really get stuck.

94 Some devotees who have a musical background are invited to lead or participate in the chanting.
technical knowledge. Bouglé was interested in the study of egalitarian ideas. He showed how the caste system is able to teach us about hierarchy based on hereditary groups that are separated by detailed rules of mutual repulsion, which influence the interdependence of labour divisions (Bouglé 1971). This influenced Dumont who focused at least in part his analysis of values via notions of purity (1980). Purity as a moral-natural construct is not disambiguated in South Asia like it is in the Western mind (Marriott and Inden 1977). This has influenced the relationship between priest and king, or in the Shanti Mandir context between priest and guru. Both are considered the traditional arbiters of what is thought to be ‘natural’ or ‘moral’. This exemplifies a developed path from an undifferentiated ‘traditional’ world where religion, politics, and economics were inseparable, to the modern world where they exist in conceptually autonomous realms differentiating the temporal power of the king from the spiritual power of the priest (Parry 1998: 155).

This urges us to ask what is the actual role of Nityananda and where does his power come from? Parry suggests that when a transcendent order is proposed that includes the notion of salvation, it is likely to cause dependency of temporal rulers ‘for the legitimation of their power on those with transcendent authority’ (1998: 167). However, Nityananda rests somewhere between the transcendent and temporal worlds seemingly equally committed to both. I suggest that this is the possible source of his power. By standing on the threshold urging his congregation towards experiencing an immanent transcendence (cf. Haynes 2012). Even though Nityananda is not formally trained in Sanskrit and cannot speak it conversationally beyond a basic level, his position of authority is also legitimated through his life-long commitment to propagating this knowledge system.

The symbolic nature of the social and the epistemic relations to knowledge generates a specialist or elite identity compared to the Patrons and Renunciants who can be considered non-specialists of Sanskrit and the subsequent ritual practices. This
relegates them to generally passive observers of ritual. Regardless, the Patrons, particularly the women are often invited to perform ārīti. Patrons can become active participants generally through paying for the opportunity to be the yājamāna (sponsor of the ritual). Patrons are able to participate in the abhiṣeka of the various deities in the ashram (Mandir 2013a). A Mexican woman, Nalini, explained how it is an honour to pay the USD15 to help consecrate the deities. Anadi, an Australian women said ‘it is a great way to worship the internal divinity. It focuses me’. However, Lakshmi, an Indian woman from Delhi said she has never done it because she has never felt compelled to do something just because others are doing it.

Senior devotees and their spouses are sometimes invited to participate actively in a ceremony. Due to this symbolic reward for sustained service to the organisation, this is one way in which their prestige within the community increases, particularly during the ten-day Nāvarātrī ceremony, which is dedicated to the female deity Śakti. This group often consists of women and girls who are the wives and daughters of the Scholars. The women and young girls are often chosen due to the perception that they represent legitimate embodiments of this divinised cultural artefact, defined as essentially feminine, chaste, virtuous, dutiful and, therefore, a real Hindu woman (cf. Lama 2001, Mandir 2013e). Lama explains how the ‘invocation of the Goddess translates a political endeavour into a religious mission. The ongoing struggle is then endowed with a sacred dimension, simplifying the fight as one of good against evil’ (2001: 8).

Two distinct ideal markers of the student identity are unfailing and unquestioning devotion to the guru and limitless enthusiasm. The ability and desire to put one’s personal desires aside and focus on the guru’s will (guru icchā) is valorised

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95 This is a Hindi word derived from the Sanskrit word ārātrika — the light waved before an idol.
as a key marker of the legitimate disposition as these values are ingrained in the concept of the guru-śisya-sambandha (guru-disciple relationship).

Figure 4.6 puts a human face to the new generation of Scholars. Naveen is from the Kumaon region in Uttarakhand. He was one of the first students to enrol and graduate from the Sanskrit college located in the ashram. Having earned the title of Ācārya after ten years of disciplined study of Sanskrit, combined with the Bachelor of Education he has also completed, Naveen is now a teacher at the college. Naveen is considered by the community to be a shining example of one who has successfully embodied the legitimate disposition. He has learnt the linguistic and ritual grammars of his profession, as well as having developed competency in speaking Sanskrit. Most importantly, Naveen has shown his unflinching commitment and devotion to Nityananda by choosing to stay and continue working for his guru and adapt his own disposition to mimic Nityananda’s.

During Naveen’s first trip outside of India in 2007, when he came to Australia to facilitate Nāvarātri, he told me how he wanted to become a samnyāsin like his guru. However, since graduating from the college he has now married and lives in the ashram with his wife who is also from the same region as himself.96 Now he has the elevated position of supporting the guru on his world tours as an accompanying or sometimes solo priest. Prior to his graduation, Naveen began travelling with Nityananda on his domestic and international travels fulfilling several roles including that of the guru’s personal attendant, a musician, a trainee priest, and ultimately as a

96 As is quite common across large sections of Indian society today, the students generally follow the traditional varṇaśrama system (class and stages of life). This is an important part of legitimising the Scholars disposition. As Brahmaṇas, the repaying of the moral debt they inherited at birth requires the individual to marry and produce sons. While most of the students will likely marry some have chosen instead to remain celibate but not become Renunciants. The conscious attempt to mirror the traditional life cycle of moving from a student to a householder finds its inspiration in chapter three of the Manusmṛti, which deals with marriage. See Online (2015) and Sacred-Texts (2015).
living endorsement for Shanti Mandir and the college. After more than a decade, one of Naveen’s roles is as an embodied testament and demonstration of what the community see as the effectiveness and authenticity of the school, organisation and tradition that the Devotees all around the world invest in.

The case of Naveen is interesting, because prior to the announcement of his intention to marry, several devotees speculated that he would become Nityananda’s successor as the next guru, as he seemed to be the first ideal emulation of the guru to come out of the school. This was due mostly to his unflinching devotion and his legitimacy as a knower of the tradition. However, he explained to me that the pull of becoming a householder was too strong and that he wants to have a family.

![Figure 4.6: Ṛcārya Naveen](Source: Shanti 2015z)

Dinesh was also one of the earliest graduates from the college (Figure 4.7). He is from the Garhwal region in Uttarakhand. Upon graduating he took up a teaching position for approximately one year in a Sanskrit college in Kerala. He has since returned to Shanti Mandir where he teaches various subjects, however, his main role is described on the website as the Warden.

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97 In this guru-disciple tradition the transference of leadership is contentious issue. This is particularly the case based on the controversial history of Shanti Mandir and its formation after Nityananda left Siddha Yoga.
As something of a ‘sergeant at arms’ Dinesh is responsible for maintaining the discipline of the students as well as their finances. Each student gets a monthly stipend, which it is his responsibility to distribute. Dinesh prefers to speak Sanskrit. Like all of the residents Dinesh is a proud Hindu and Indian who believes in the controversial historicity of the Babri Masjid having allegedly been built on top of an older temple dedicated to the supposed birth place of the Hindu god Rāma in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. He provided a similar response to that of several members of the community that this is historical and not mythical.98

Like a majority of residents in the ashram, Dinesh supports the work of the Bhāratiya Janata Party (BJP)99 and the Rāṣṭrīya Svayamsevak Saṅgh (RSS), and identifies as a pracārak (RSS 2015). In this context a pracārak is a celibate male devoted to furthering the aims of the RSS, which is to strengthen India through unification of a Hindu identity. From my conversations with Dinesh I understand that he is not officially a RSS pracārak; however, he models his own behaviour on this

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98 ‘Rām janmbhūmi itiḥās hai, vah to satya hai, mithyā nahī’. It is interesting how this discourse is internalised by the international devotees, many of whom come to believe that the accounts given in the Rāmyaṇa and Mahābhārata are literal and factual accounts of India’s history.

99 I conducted a survey of the ashram residents and visitors and found less than ten percent who supported the Congress party compared to the BJP.
identity. Unlike Naveen, Dinesh has no desire to get married and have a family. He told me that he also does not want to become a *sannyāsin*, which is quite often suggested to celibate or at least unmarried males as the legitimate alternative.\(^{100}\)

The future aspirations of some of the younger students reveals that they have little or no idea as to what lays ahead in their future (McCartney 2014a: 12:20 min). Some of the students explain that they do want to become teachers of Sanskrit or to work as priests in a temple. Om, a student from Rajkot in Gujarat explained to me that his plan is to graduate and move to America to work in the temple that his family runs in New York. Other students would like to join the armed services, while a small percentage would like to work as engineers, computer scientists or even become a Renunciant like their guru. The overwhelming majority of the students said they would like to get married and have a family, and nearly all of them dream of playing cricket for India.

The Patrons experience the students’ development vicariously. It is something that seems more important for the adults within the community who feel that by supporting the intergenerational transmission of what UNESCO described in 2003 as ‘intangible cultural heritage’, they will accrue spiritual merit (*UNESCO* 2015a). This relationship between the symbolic capital of Sanskrit and those that support the organisation’s aims cannot be overstated. It is central to the mission of Shanti Mandir and by extension its network of devotees that the expression of a Sanskrit episteme, which informs their yoga brand continues to flourish, as it is a differentiating marker it uses to distinguish itself from other divine enterprises.

In contrast to the Scholars, the species of capital the Renunciants possess is a result of decades of ‘selfless’ service in support of the guru. We can describe this as

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\(^{100}\) I myself have been asked on countless occasions whether I want to marry and have a family. If I answer no, then the general response was that I should take *sannyāsa* and become a swami, as these two options are considered the only legitimate options available, marriage or institutionalised celibacy.
social capital as it comes after years of building up a reputation within the community without necessarily gaining knowledge in the form of institutionalised cultural capital like a degree in Sanskrit. This has allowed them to demonstrate their social relation to knowledge of the legitimate disposition through learning to make mimetic adaptations to their own behaviour and personality based on their daily observations of and interactions with the guru over several years. The prestige that the Renunciants in the Shanti Mandir ashram have has come from attaining the rank of samnyāsa (profession of ascetism). At the time of writing Nityananda has only initiated three Indian women into the ranks of Renunciants. Prior to this, the three samnyāsinīs (women renunciants) were part of the Patron group as regular devotees, having also worked as staff members for several years. The general lack of women in positions of power and authority, particularly in monastic orders, is based on the dominant sexual division of labour (Lama 2001). It is interesting that Nityananda has only initiated women. Now, as Renunciants they continue their roles as staff members (Mandir 2015).

While Renunciants in other traditions and ashrams may also be ritual specialists, Sanskrit experts, philosophers, or in some way have accumulated other forms of cultural capital, the Renunciants that Nityananda has personally bestowed this prestigious rank upon are not Sanskrit specialists. As women, they have been denied access to the restricted linguistic and ritual knowledge that is available to the Scholars. The three Renunciants have all lived in the ashram serving Nityananda for decades, thus proving their fidelity and commitment as sincere and hardworking devotees. It is because of this that they have been rewarded with the symbolic capital of samnyāsa. They have reached an age in their life, which according to the traditional varṇa-āśrama system allows them to enter the fourth and final stage of samnyāsa. This demonstrates to the other Patrons who also wish to become samnyāsins that it is possible to attain this prestigious rank. Amongst the non-Indian Patrons there is an unofficial competition to see whom Nityananda will make the first ‘western Swami’.
Figure 4.8 introduces the newest individual to become a Renunciant at Shanti Mandir. Prior to becoming a saṁnyāsinī, Sundarananda lived in the ashram for over a decade. Sundarananda explained how she came to help her daughter (Doctor Rahkee) settle in to her new job as the ashram doctor who runs the health clinic. However, Sundarananda told me how she enjoyed it so much that she has since stayed. During this time she has mostly been in charge of housekeeping ensuring that the rooms are ready for the devotees upon their arrival and cleaned after they leave. During peaks in the ritual calendar the ashram’s capacity to accommodate all the devotees is pushed to maximum.

![Swami Sundarananda](figure4.8.png)

**Figure 4.8: Swami Sundarananda**
(Source: Shanti Mandir 2015z)

While Sundarananda has tried meditating, she told me she finds it difficult, and instead has more interest in being sincere to herself and her guru, while working on refining this relationship. Initially, Sundarananda never intended to stay as long as she has. She admitted that at some point in her life she wanted to retire to an ashram. Sundarananda recalled how once she had a dream that Nityananda had asked her why she should wait till later in her life to come and live in the ashram. She explained that because of her children she decided to stay in Delhi. Complicating this, her husband didn't like gurus and ashrams. This made it difficult for her to even attend satsaṅga on Sundays in Delhi.
Sundarananda is a tireless worker who believes that helping people and working hard everyday for the guru, while consciously trying to become more like the guru is how an individual gains respect. In contrast to this, she explained to me that she believes sitting around meditating while acting pious and being inwardly focused does not help the individual in the ashram to gain respect. Neither does it help the community, especially when there are so many things that require constant attention. This highlights one of the tensions within the community regarding how legitimacy is acquired. For some devotees, they believe that hard work and devotion to the guru is the path. This is the path of *karma yoga* (devoted action). Whereas, there are others who prefer to meditate, practice postural yoga, and are more interested in philosophy. This is the path of *jñāna yoga* (knowledge). While others dive into the devotional aspects of the religious practice of *bhakti yoga* (devotion)\(^{101}\), most, regardless of their primary aim also see the ashram as a place to relax and reset. Doctor Rakhee (Figure 4.9) explained to me once that she felt the western devotees are:

> better yogis because they have more discipline when it comes to the yoga practices. Unlike the Indians who are generally more lazy, they just expect they can come and see the guru, stay in the ashram, without doing the hard work of yoga like regular meditation. (Private conversation 04/02/2013)

\(^{101}\) Chapter three of the Bhagavadgītā provides an interesting summary on karma yoga, chapter twelve focuses on bhakti yoga, and chapter six focuses on dhyāna yoga.
This comment shows some of the tensions that appear between the different groups. As most of the Indian devotees are at least twice-born, if not Brahmins, there is an assumed superiority that comes with this particular standpoint. The non-Indian devotees use their cultural capital of modern postural yoga practitioners and meditators to gain purchase in the social network. Shanti Mandir promotes an approach that blends the three yoga-mārgas (paths of yoga) together, however, a particular emphasis is placed on devotion and service,\(^\text{102}\) which ultimately leads to the revelation of what the tradition describes as ‘true knowledge’.

The Siddha guru plays a central role in this perfected (siddha) and spontaneous (sahaja) yoga through providing the opportunity to meditate, chant, and conduct devotional service (Coney 2013: 220, Shanti Mandir 2015a). There is no doubt that people who work tirelessly, with humility, to help the community are seen as more devoted than those that do not engage in such pursuits. The individual who constantly puts the needs of the community first gains more respect. It could be argued that as an individual who had little interest in meditation and postural yoga combined with limited access to the restricted knowledge of the Scholars, that Sundarananda’s strategic options to gain legitimacy were limited to showing her devotion through service to the guru. However, having known Sundarananda for several years, it is her humility and work ethic that immediately and consistently shine through. Sundarananda did not arrive at the ashram, role up her sleeves, and say to herself ‘now it’s time to get some symbolic capital’. This type of rational choice ought not to be assumed as the default of anyone who comes to the ashram; however, these micro-choices occur at a subconscious level when individuals critique the behaviour of other devotees. This is a strategy that essentially says ‘this person is not legitimate but I am’.

\(^{102}\) This becomes evident in chapter seven.
In Figure 4.10 Swami Karunananda also represents the Renunciants. She earned her position after nearly four decades of service to the lineage beginning her spiritual journey with Baba Muktananda and now with Swami Nityananda, who initiated her in 2012. It was while Karunananda was a graduate student in psychology that she went to the Ganeshpuri ashram of Muktananda for a short visit and as she explained, ‘I never left’. She stayed in the ashram finally moving to the Shanti Mandir ashram once it opened, having been involved in performing various tasks for the organisation from administration to teaching. Swami Karunananda is also not a specialist knower of Sanskrit but has been recognised with this prestigious title due to her sacrifice and unwavering commitment to the guru’s community, her practical mastery of the tradition, and the accumulation of social capital has allowed her to exchange it for the religious capital of śaṁnyāsa.

![Swami Karunananda](Source: Shanti Mandir 2015z)

Like several devotees, Anandi, a retired alternative health practitioner regularly questioned my intentions claiming that I was ‘always dwelling on the negative aspects of life in the ashram’. Also, Eduardo, a professional translator from Mexico was astonished that Nityananda had given his permission for this research to be conducted because he also thought it was too negative. He kept alluding to a mystical realm that
science was not able to reach or measure and that my endeavour was too clinical or rational. However, it is all too common to hear or become involved in a conversation where critiquing the behaviour or appearance of others as not conforming to their interpretation of the community’s normative standards occurs. This seemed to form an unofficial ranking system where individuals were placed determining their legitimacy. However, when I posed a question regarding ‘competitions for, or discourses of legitimacy’ or tried to highlight the relative negativity of people’s comments when I heard them, I was generally considered to be asking inappropriate questions.

I was often labeled as being too negative or focusing on negative aspects which most of the residents and visitors to the ashram preferred not to dwell on or discuss. Emma, a devotee from Melbourne asked me once why I was so focused on these ‘negative things’ when they occur everywhere and not just in the ashram. My reply was that it is interesting because most people within religious communities deny the existence of competitions for symbolic capital, or they are reticent to discuss the particular strategies they consciously or unwittingly engage with personally, while, sometimes in the same sentence unwittingly critiquing the strategies of others. To this day I struggle to understand what exactly was so negative about my questions. I asked people why they came, what they did, what they believed in and what their attitudes were to several things. I guess I just wasn’t asking legitimate questions as I was more interested in the sociological reality that is influenced by metaphysical possibilities.

Jitendra, a retired railway worker from Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh asked me once, ‘Patrick, why are you here exactly? What is it that you want? Why don’t you forget all these things and focus on the practices and the singing in the temple? This academic stuff will only clog your mind with useless information. Forget about it’. This shows a strong characteristic of the legitimate identity and what the overall attitude to academic scholarship is at the ashram. Harry, an entrepreneur from Australia, challenged my research ending an email with the following:
In all my time around Gurudev, I have never heard anyone asking about such things, probably for the very simple reason that they are so far removed from our interests in the pursuit of yoga and from what actually happens in the Shanti Mandir ashrams. The intellect can be a massively powerful delusional machine, particularly when directed outwards and not to the search for inner truth. (Email 03/11/2012)

Anandi has made her intentions clear to the community that she wants to become a Renunciant. This public announcement is a gamble on her behalf. As her announcement is seen by some of the other members of the Patron group as a threat to their own position and status within the community. I noticed an increased level of scrutiny directed at her once she made her announcement to ‘run for renunciation’. While there is essentially no pressure on the guru to eventually say ‘yes’, if she were to eventually be denied this honour this could possibly result in embarrassment and shame for her. This is interesting because on one occasion she told me that ‘it is good when people get humiliated because it helps them burn off karma’.

Upon asking Nityananda for permission she was instructed to undertake a three-year philosophy course on Vedānta by correspondence. This is an interesting strategy on the guru’s behalf. I noticed how a pattern has emerged through discussions with several devotees who have also asked for Nityananda’s permission to become a Renunciant or for some other purpose. Nityananda never outright refuses an individual’s request for saṁnyāsa, but instead subtlety defers the decision to a later date. Perhaps, with an explicit refusal, the devotee would leave the community and find another guru who would be more inclined to say ‘yes’. But by saying something like what he said to Anandi, the devotee (and their capital) is retained within the community, while the devotee must put in extra effort to demonstrate their willingness and aptitude for such a rank.

Primarily, it is investments of economic capital that distinguishes the Patrons from the other two groups. Through their patronage made visible by their financial
support they demonstrate their fidelity and commitment, which in turn provides them
with access to the knowledge they believe can satisfy their soteriological aims.
Without the generous donations of the Patrons the community could not exist, let alone
continue to grow. There is nothing new about this as ashrams, or land at least has been
donated to Brahminical and Buddhist communities for centuries (Bayly 1999, Fleming
2013).

The Patrons are restricted (but not prohibited) from obtaining the religious
capital of the Renunciants, although from the evidence gathered within the
community, this requires at least a decade of intense commitment and continued
residence in the ashram. The Patrons are, however, prohibited from acquiring the
cultural capital of the Scholars’ knowledgeable mastery of Sanskrit and the various
ritual elements based on various standpoint theories related to age, gender and
ethnicity. This is due, mostly, to the Patron’s inability as adults to study at the Sanskrit
college. This form of education requires the student to begin their studies at a young
age. 103

Priya’s experience of visiting the ashram for a couple of weeks is indicative of
the aims of this thesis to understand how the individual gains access to and ascension
within the social network. As an outsider, how does one gain entry into the
community? The organisation asserted that everyone is welcome, however, the reality
is far more nuanced than simply welcoming every stranger in with open arms. While
Priya, a professional philosopher has some Indian ancestry; she was born in Malaysia
and grew up in Melbourne, Australia. Priya admitted to having a limited knowledge
and interest of Indian traditions. Interested in yoga, and on the advice of a friend who

103 It is interesting to consider my own position within the network. As a Sanskrit scholar and academic
my own cultural capital generally lead members of the community to perceive me either as a threat to
the organisation or to their own position within the network. The alternative was that due to my ability
to speak Sanskrit, some individuals considered that I was quite a devout individual.
recommened the organisation as a potential retreat, Priya decided to spend a couple of weeks at the Shanti Mandir ashram after attending a friend’s wedding in Delhi. She explains how during her first trip to India that:

I know very little about the world of ashrams, gurus and of Indian cultures in general. My concept of yoga is quite different to the Shanti Mandir brand. It was something I did perhaps once a week at the gym. When I came to the ashram I quickly realised that there was a distinct way of being that was completely foreign to me. There was also an entire vocabulary that I did not understand. I became cognisant to the fact that if I wanted to be accepted I would have to learn how to be like and talk like everyone else. The most interesting thing about my time in the ashram is that the people most concerned with my innocent transgressions of the normative standards were the other westerners. Either the Indians did not care, or they did not think it was their job to socialise me. In the temple I struggled with the concept of lining up and prostrating in front of the statues and gurus. As a non-believing outsider I felt that I was welcome up to a point. If I wanted to stay longer, which I didn’t, then I would have to get with their program. (Priya 2014)

From this statement several things become clearer. The most prominent point is that a restricted code operates within the ashram field and is used to distinguish between the in and out groups (Levine and Moreland 2008). This highlights how a particular knowledge system is in place and if the individual seeks to gain acceptance then this episteme must be mastered.

The Patron group is probably the most complicated to define when compared to the Scholars and Renunciants. While it is clear that each group has a different function and relation to knowledge than the other groups, due to the multigenerational and heterogenous mix of people from all across the world it becomes difficult to conceptualise this group as the permutations are seemingly endless. This is why I decided to treat this group as a homogenous unit that engages primarily as economic benefactors who sponsor the continued scholastic and religious activities of the Scholars and Renunciants. While this group is heterogeneously constituted the overriding similarity is that they neither have the cultural capital of the Scholars nor the Renunciant’s religious capital. Instead they have the economic vitality and
potential practical mastery of the tradition while, most importantly investing capital, particularly economic, into the community.

This does not stop small sub-groups or ‘tribes’ from forming in the ashram. While the community does like to see itself as egalitarian and free of the distinctions that quite often mark the profanity of the world outside the ashram, sometimes it seems that these distinctions are heightened within the ashram itself. Cliques inevitably form between individuals generally distinguished by gender, ethnicity, economic vitality, and the duration and intensity of one’s association with the community. This last category sometimes trumps all the others and forms one of the major markers of legitimacy. While any of these categories could be used to form an analytical framework, the desire was to understand the naturally implicit social order of the darśana ranking system. Something separates the three distinct groups from all going up to darśana of the guru at the same time. The question is what is it? The answer lies in defining the often fuzzy boundaries of the symbolic system within this social network.

Figure 4.11: Vivek Desai — A Patron-staff
(Source: Shanti Mandir 2015z)

Vivek (Figure 4.11) is an interesting example for a few reasons. Vivek enjoys legitimacy because he is male and was born into a Brahmin family. Vivek also lives in
the Shanti Mandir ashram in America and as a staff member he works as an ‘instructor and events coordinator’. Vivek has become a valued speaker at meditation retreats facilitated by Shanti Mandir. The following excerpt is used in promotional material to bolster his credentials by highlighting the cultural capital he possesses as a legitimate knower of the tradition.

Vivek grew up in a family of Baba Muktananda’s devotees. He holds several degrees, including [a] B.A. in Philosophy and a minor in Religious Studies, and is currently a student of [the] Sanskrit language. He has been teaching yoga philosophy for more than six years, and is known for his ability to interpret and teach the essence of scriptures in a very precise manner. (Mandir 2014g)

This paragraph is revealing. While it mentions that Vivek has several degrees, neither the focus of his doctoral degree (Molecular Biology) nor the degree itself is mentioned. Instead the undergraduate minor in religious studies and his current study of Sanskrit are foregrounded. This demonstrates the community’s preference for the Sanskritic knowledge system that is inflected with a sense of modernity including learning English, science and computing. While I consider Vivek to be a Patron-staff, we might consider the assertions made about his credentials that the community, or at least the organisation trying to recognise him as a type of Scholar. However, because he has not studied Sanskrit in the traditional pedagogical gurukula system, he will not attain the symbolic status of a true Scholar.

This opens up an interesting situation for analysis. Is there now the possibility of their being more than two types of Scholars? I assert it does not, because we can distinguish the difference by referring to the technical and practical mastery dichotomy, which the Scholars possess both. Vivek, however, has come to know the practical mastery and can be considered as a subtype of Patron-scholar. If it weren’t for the time and word restraints on this project it would be interesting to develop the Patron typology more. This could be done by refining the types of categories based on
a more focused analysis of capital and strategy. This is visible when comparing the
differences between Vivek and the next Patron, Leo (Figure 4.12).

Other options exist to increase one’s prestige in the community as a Patron. Leo
uses his own cultural capital of being a professional musician and videographer to
promote the practices of Shanti Mandir through his website. Every day he broadcasts a
live performance of himself chanting the primary text of this organisation (Dale
2015b), the Śrī Guru Gītā, while also producing several of the videos that Shanti
Mandir releases via its YouTube channel (Mandir 2015x). Over the past few years this
project has gained enough online support that Shanti Mandir now publicly promotes
Leo’s endeavour through their mailing list. It has, after several years, been officially
recognised. Certainly this will have symbolic benefit for Leo.

Figure 4.12: Leo — A Patron
(Source: Dale 2015c)

While offered as a disinterested and virtuous act, Leo explained in an email that his
daily online chanting of the Guru Gītā ‘brings isolated people who share a similar
connection through this text together’. His donation of time, skill and labour is
exchanged or transubstantiated into social capital through the prestige this affords him.
As people become aware of this daily public ritualised performance his position
amongst the Patrons increases because an ability to sustain such a daily practice is
valued as an emerging property of the habitus or legitimate disposition. In a satsaṅga I
attended Nityananda talked about the power of mantra and how he wants people to chant Vedic Sanskrit, Stotrams, and kīrtana 15-24 hours per day. His rationale is that the power of mantra’s effect on the mind and heart of people are profound and that people ought to engage him or herself in a pursuit that will honour both God and nature.

Leo also donates profits from some of his music he sells through iTunes to Shanti Mandir to help fund the organisation (Dale 2015a). Shanti Mandir also has its own iTunes page where it sells some of its own productions (Mandir 2015q). This demonstrates how his cultural capital assists in accumulating economic capital, which is then turned into social capital as respect and acceptance, and ultimately into the spiritual capital of being taken for perhaps an enlightened individual or the Hindi term used in the ashram to denote a big devotee (baḍā bhakt). Leo explained how his focus is on chanting, his modern postural yoga practice (Iyengar style) and cultivating his understanding of the guru principle. He stressed the importance of being able to do this in one’s home, explaining how central the practice of chanting has become in his ability to cultivate what he considers to be a reproduction of the ashram experience.

One common strategy used by the Patrons to gain prestige and merit in the ashram involves sponsoring a feast (bhandāra) that aims primarily to feed the Brahmins and also the rest of the community. This is associated with the cultural practice that focuses on sustaining the Brahmin caste so that they were freed from labour and could pursue law making and scholarship.\(^{104}\) In order to achieve this it became customary to feed Brahmins based on the belief this would return merit to the donor (Biernacki 2007, Pruthi 2004). Normally the people that do this couch their responses in a disinterested context of doing something good ‘for the boys’ (i.e., students) and the greater ashram community. A feast certainly is something to look

\(^{104}\) This type of charity is classified as nitya dāna.
forward to, as special dishes are prepared that are not regularly available. There is little
doubt that such a strategy is also employed to assist the individual or group sponsoring
the feast with accumulating merit. The name of the donor(s), the donation and its
intention are made public by being written on a public notice board located next to the
food hall.

Several feasts are organised to mark the anniversary of the passing of a
deceased relative. Another common reason is to celebrate someone’s birthday. Several
individuals will do this even if they are not present in the ashram. They will make an
online donation and ask the organisation to arrange it on their behalf. However, this
can sometimes backfire, as one devotee who requested anonymity explained:

I paid USD1000.00 to do something nice for my fiftieth birthday. I wanted to pay for a
bhaṇḍāra (feast) for the boys but I got short changed in the food that was served up. I
wanted something much more grander and fun for the boys out of season, but I don’t feel
like all the money I gave to the person who arranged the lunch used all of the money I
gave for the food. I felt there should have been more dishes. What was served was not
what I had in mind. Now, maybe, people probably think that I am stingy because the feast
wasn’t that good. (Private conversation 23/11/2012)

This individual went on to explain how he felt that due to the perceived tension
between himself and the person in charge of organising it, that a less than lavish feast
was deliberately organised. It also clearly demonstrates that this individual used this
strategy to gain social capital within the community as he was concerned about how
the community might scrutinise his ambitions since his name was on the board as the
donor of the lunch. However, this was certainly not his primary aim.

Parry (1986) and Raheja (1988) wrote about gift giving within the Indian
context. Building on this Copeman (2011: 1060) explains how based on scriptural
injunctions supporting the practice of giving, various charitable and philanthropic
organisations, such as Shanti Mandir, employ dāna as an instrument used to ‘foster a
public giving culture’. Lucia (2014c) adds that the philanthropy and charitable works
of transnational gurus is a strategy to gain legitimacy within the broader community. As the organisation grows it requires more economic capital, but to justify the investments it seeks, the organisation branches out into charitable works. Within the Indian context, the gift, however, is conceptualised as not just an economic transference. It is also said to involve the transference of the giver’s moral impurity (Pinkney 2013).

In this age of internet fire walls, is it possible that through direct online donations, the metaphysical burden of receiving someone’s impurity is negated (Mandir 2015)? If the investor’s impurity does travel with the donation to the recipient, then perhaps the electronic medium of making donations helps to prevent this transference? This situation begs the questions, where might the pāpa go and how is the punya returned? The distribution of non-material prasāda (blessed objects) according to classical Sanskrit sources can be understood as an affective emotion; an efficacious energy or liberative tool; or a powerful speech act that can verbalise a new reality (Pinkney 2013: 752). Based on her analysis of the metaphysical speculations regarding the logic of the exchange in primary Sanskrit texts, Pinkney asserted that punya returns to the donor regardless of the distance between the guru and his or her disciple. This is said to be due to the non-local intentionality (saṅkalpa) of the guru who can also be considered as a source of prasāda (Pinkney 2008).

Regardless of the validity of this non-arbitrary metaphysical assumption, such a logic does indeed influence the practice of this community. An Australian devotee, James, was a lucky winner in the nationally syndicated lottery. He received an unspecified amount of money. Too old to continue running his rural property approximately one hour outside of Melbourne, he contacted Shanti Mandir offering them the land if they wanted to convert it into an ashram because as he said, ‘all the money came from Shiva so it should all go back to Shiva’.
While some individuals prefer to make specific and anonymous donations, however, on occasion an individual may be singled out for their large contribution. It does not happen that often; however, on one occasion in an e-newsletter distributed through Shanti Mandir’s mailing list an individual was singled out for their financial contributions. While investments of economic capital may not directly translate into spiritual capital, they do enable the individual to gain a certain amount of social capital through displaying their enthusiasm and commitment to support the organisation. For example, A. M. Naik is a successful businessman who has been singled-out for his contribution of necessary ‘funds required for the construction of three buildings in the ashram’ (Devayani 2014). The following excerpt reveals the extent of his generosity:

Shanti Mandir global community wishes to deeply acknowledge Mr. Anil M. Naik, Group Executive Chairman of Larsen & Toubro, for his generous offering. He is single-handedly donating the amount required for three buildings at Shanti Mandir Magod:

• Shri Muktananda Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya (school).
• Permanent accommodations (a hostel) for the growing number of students (194+ beds).
• Residence for Acharyas and their families

(Devayani 2014)

Another excerpt from the same email reveals how grace is conceptualised as bidirectional. While Shanti Mandir acknowledge they personally sight each donation, this implies that the guru is cognisant of each transaction and, therefore, knows where to direct his grace. This reveals an implicit acknowledgement of the social contract that is fundamentally not disinterested for both parties.

Please consider directing your grace towards Shanti Mandir Walden in your giving plans for the year and ensuring a sustainable future for the activities that improve people’s lives in countless ways. You can donate by mailing a check or clicking http://www.shantimandir.com/donate/. Your donations made online are individually seen by us, and they will be used as specified in your communication via the website.

(Devayani 2014)
The Patrons not only invest economic capital into the organisation. They also donate their embodied labour through the institutionalisation of sevā. This part of the daily routine ensures residents and visitors are constantly engaged in various aspects of spiritual practice. The act of gurusevā bonds the individual to the community and overall ‘mission’. It also allows for the development of yogic qualities such as detachment that the tradition says can lead to reducing one’s ego (Durgananda 1997: 136). Sometimes, it can also be contextualised as the antidote to crises of modernity, which are characterised by the lack of a spiritual practice, greed, violence, or environmental degradation (Lucia 2014c: location 337). Another view explains the ‘spiritual paradox’ of the necessary self-centredness involved in attaining one’s spiritual goals and the dilemma this causes through sublimating this personal desire to the altruism of participating in something larger than oneself (Kramer and Alstad 1993: 365).

For instance, individuals with professional skills that the organisation can make use of are quite often recruited to help where they can, as the example of Leo above with his multi-media skills demonstrates. Someone with web design skills may help upgrade the website, a lawyer may provide legal advice, an architect may be involved in designing and managing the building projects, a person with business and organisational acumen may get involved in managing the organisation and helping with the necessary logistical manoeuvres of the guru’s world tours. Anil, an architect from Mumbai, has overseen the construction of almost every building in the ashram. He once told me that ‘Gurudev gives us everything, his grace is everything. I can only do this little thing to help, so I do what I can’.

Sometimes a devotee may have a valuable skill that Shanti Mandir is willing to pay for or at least subsidise the costs of the individual’s travel expenses. I personally experienced this by being ‘on staff’ when, due to my previous commercial cooking experience, I was invited to join Nityananda’s entourage as one of the cooks for the
three months he travelled around Australia in 2007. While I had backstage access I was so busy with being part of a small team cooking hundreds of meals a day, quite often in a different kitchen in a different town in the morning and night, that it was difficult to attend satsaṅgas with the guru. On one occasion an incident had developed between myself and another devotee who was hosting the group. As a form of retribution this person lied to the guru about my activities in the kitchen. On the final morning I was asked specifically by the tour manager to come to the final satsaṅga before we left for the next location on our journey across the continent.

I honestly thought I was going to be praised for working, sometimes on my own, for close to twenty hours per day to prepare hundreds of meals. Instead I walked into a public shaming. I was unable to speak due to shock, but when I tried to explain myself the closest devotees silenced me. After this incident I was treated by most present as a pariah. Tainted by the brush of shame, most people who would have ordinarily spoken to me began to avoid even moving through the space around me. I felt humiliated and kept wondering how and why the guru had apparently got it all so wrong.

Unbeknownst to me the truth eventually came out a couple of days later. Another devotee decided to intervene and tell my story. It turned out I was going to be sent home for my alleged transgression even without having the opportunity to defend myself. It was assumed to be true. As I was a volunteer what was my word against the guru’s host?

Shame is the premier social emotion that arises from the monitoring of one’s own actions by viewing one’s self from the standpoint of others (Scheff 2002). Shame causes passivity and feelings of being small, helpless and childish to be experienced (Stein 2001), which is exactly how I felt that day. It is used to highlight a perceived threat to a group and act as an antidote to the social bond (Ashford and LeCroy 2010). This incident affected not only my own sense of self but also my status and power.
within the group. Status is an assessment of an individual’s value to the group; while power refers to the level of control an individual has over others, the ability to keep or let others get what they want or need, the ability to carry out one’s plans, or the authority to enforce decisions (Rogalin, Soboroff et al. 2007).

An example of an individual’s usefulness includes Jackie who is an ESL teacher. Jackie was provided with a return international flight and was not required to pay for her accommodation in the ashram. She told me how she declined the modest salary they offered for her to teach the students English for several months. What is interesting is that a lot of people come and work just as many hours per day but are required to make a ‘donation’. While there is a sliding scale depending on whether one is deśī or videsī, or they have invested considerably in the ashram, other arrangements can be made that allow sincere and hardworking devotees to stay for longer periods of time through the exchange of their labour.

Michael and Angelika are sincere devotees from Latin America. They enjoyed their time in the ashram in 2012 so much that they wanted to extend it. Due to the restrictions Argentina places on international cash withdrawals by its citizens while abroad, the couple made a deal with the ashram manager that allowed them to stay and, instead of paying, they were required to work several hours a day. At first I thought they were just really motivated to work while other devotees were free to do what they wanted. Normally, an individual is expected to do two to three hours of volunteer work each day.

However, not all the devotees that come are as ‘sincere’, ‘devout’, or ‘hardworking’ as other individuals they might meet in the ashram. Visitors and residents alike are in a continuous process of comparison between themselves and the other devotees and also with the guru. These normative elements are crucial in the
construction of both authenticity and legitimacy. For example, Savitri is an NRI who lives in New York and comes to the ashram not from a personal desire but because as she described:

My family are all mad bhaktas, so I come to appease my family and get them off my back. I’m not so into this as they are, but they don’t leave me alone and tell me I have to come to the ashram. (Savitri 2013)

Savitri told me that even though her husband had donated a significant amount of the money towards the ashram, she also explained that her daughter believed that people are inherently bad and that by coming to an ashram one can focus their energy on becoming a better person. Savitri does not understand Sanskrit and prefers to recite the Hindi texts (bhajans) like the Hanumān Cālīsā. It is interesting that a lot of the international devotees do not realise that the Hanumān Cālīsā is a Hindi text. Savitri was not alone in her preference for Hindi texts, mostly because they are more familiar, accessible, and in some ways perhaps also more personable.

The Vedic mantras are all but unintelligible even to the Scholars reciting them, whereas the texts in Hindi and Marathi are able to generate heightened levels of devotion that the ‘purity’ of the Sanskrit mantras is perhaps not. This opens up the possibility for understanding another knowledge hierarchy based on vernacular devotional texts and the traditions they represent. Hindi certainly does not have the prestige that is afforded to Sanskrit, yet as the national language it is able to be better understood and bring people together. However, there is no possibility that Shanti Mandir would renounce their association to Sanskrit due to the perception of it being the language of the gods while Hindi is viewed as a corrupt and modern relative.

In this section the various groups within the ashram were discussed providing an overview of the some of the individuals and personalities who make up these

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105 Non-Resident Indian.
groups. The heterogeneous combination of the individuals shows that there are various interpretations and reasons for becoming involved with this community. While some people call the ashram home and others would like to, some devotees enjoy their time in the ashram but consider themselves only temporary visitors. Still, some come just to appease their families. The complicated ways in which donations can be classified shows that the act of charity has many different aims as well as functions related primarily to sustaining the community. In the next section the spatial relations between these groups is discussed.

4.4 — Spatial Relations Based on Symbolic Capital

In this section the spatial and gendered relations in the food hall are discussed.\textsuperscript{106} In the food hall each group explained above has their own location during meal times. Normally, at meal times Nityananda eats alone in his cottage after he has supervised the distribution of food. Sometimes Nityananda sits and eats with his devotees, particularly if there are VIPs attending lunch. The Renunciants, Senior Scholars (i.e. teachers) and qualified special guests sit on a more comfortable rug compared to the rest of the community. This demarcates their prestigious and elevated position within the community. To sit on this rug one must have either become a \textit{sāmnyāsin} or an \textit{ācārya}. Generally, individuals not associated with the college or who do not have a traditional degree in Sanskrit are not permitted to sit amongst this symbolically elite group.

There are some exceptions to this rule. If a long-term devotee who regularly stays in the ashram is male and of a similar age to the boys attending the college, regardless of him not being a student of Sanskrit, then he may be invited to sit amongst

\textsuperscript{106} For a discussion of seating arrangements in the temple, see section 5.6.
the students while eating. This is the case with a few of the young men who come regularly from Mumbai or Delhi and are considered friends of some of the students. They may not be studying Sanskrit, but because of the age and gender, they are able to blend in more easily and be accepted by the students. Due to my humble knowledge of Sanskrit, gender, and inculcation into the ashram habitus I am permitted to sit amongst the students only if I wear the traditional attire, which means wearing a lūṅgī (sarong). However, I am not able to sit amongst the teachers and saṃnyāsins on the more comfortable rug. On the occasion I did try to sit amongst the students in normal ‘western’ clothing (i.e., wearing denim jeans), I was vocally dismissed and ushered to the general rug for male devotees by several of the students.

Men and women are also separated and sit in distinct lines as in the temple. If there is an abundance of men, they sometimes sit in the same row as the women but there will be a visible gap of two to three metres between them. However, where this distinction breaks down is in the line and at the table and chairs used mostly by the elderly and the videśī devotees who find sitting on the ground to eat challenging. The reason that the genders are mixed in the non-spicy section is that it makes it easier for the food dispensers. Anyone is able to sit in the normal sections and still receive either spicy or non-spicy. Most people eat in the ‘Indian style’ with the right hand only. However, I did observe that even some Indians who are left-handed would also eat with their left hand. This did not seem to cause any problem for them. In an effort to make the guests as comfortable as possible they might also be offered cutlery. However, for those that choose not to use cutlery and eat with their hands, the common reason given for this preference was explained through the popular belief that food eaten with hands is digested easier. The second most popular response was that individuals wanted to fit in and eat how the same way to the majority. This demonstrates one way in which individuals choose to observe and emulate what they consider to be the legitimate disposition.
Figure 4.13 shows the layout of the food hall. Typically, the Renunciants and Scholars sit on western side of the hall, while the male Patrons sit in the middle of the hall, and the female Patrons sit along the northern and eastern boundaries. At the southern end of the seated area is the non-spicy line.

In the middle of the food hall is a low table where the steel buckets (bālīs) filled with food that arrive from the kitchen are stored prior to service. During the invocatory prayer at lunch, which is normally the seventh chapter of the Bhagavād Gītā, the students distribute the necessary items such as a stitched banana leaf plate and perhaps one or two similarly constructed bowls, and a stainless steel cup. Generally, by the time the prayer has concluded each person has received his or her food and water.
There are generally two settings both at lunch and dinner as not everyone is able to eat at the same time because some students are rostered to set places, serve food, and chant the lunchtime text. Sometimes, when the numbers swell due to peaks in the ritual calendar there may be insufficient space for everyone to be seated in one or two sittings. When this happens extra chairs and tables or rugs are assembled adjacent to the mess hall. When the meal is completed one is expected to wait until a student has announced that the service has concluded. This can cause embarrassment for new arrivals that do not know the routine. They may try and leave before they are supposed to because they assume that since they have finished eating they can leave. This generally causes all present to wonder what the individual transgressing the often unspoken rule is doing. On one occasion I was sent after a new international arrival by the students to stop him leaving and escort him back to his seat. As the new arrival was from overseas like myself and seated next to me during dinner, all the students who ushered me after him seemed to think it was my responsibility to socialise him.

Meal service, like most activities in the ashram is normally concluded with the Hindi utterance ‘Sat-guru-nāth mahārāj kī jay’. This is a common utterance within the community that can be translated as ‘Victory to the lord, great king, and true guru’. Sometimes announcements concerning alterations to the daily schedule or ritual calendar may also be made at the end or beginning of the meal. Like in the temple, as a display of respect for the Renunciants and Scholars they are allowed to leave first, followed by the students and the devotees.

This section described the spatial distribution of the various groups in the mess hall. The next section explores how these hierarchies can be theorised.

There are various ways to understand the hierarchical system in the ashram. As mentioned above, based on observations made in the temple and mess hall, I initially thought there was only one linear hierarchy with the guru at the top, followed by the Renunciants, Scholars, and Patrons. Figure 4.14 is a hierarchical ordering of the
various groups within the social network based on this earlier assumption, which is valid if we consider the ranking system for darśana.

It is the Patrons who have the least amount of spiritual or religious capital due to their worldly attachments and lack of ritual expertise. This opens up a discussion regarding the construction of personhood that we know occurs through various mediums of exchange. The ethnosociological model of India’s caste system by Marriott and Inden were initial attempts to formally conceptualise through local concepts the dynamic fluidity of the person/self (1989, 1977). Sax (2002) describes the inherent challenges in this project result from a lack of any ontological primacy, as the ‘self’ in South Asia is considered an unstable and temporary object. Fowler (2005: 122) nuances this by explaining how permeable selves constituting ‘different social groups pursue different exchange strategies in the attainment of personhood’, which are based on caste identities and ‘modified according to gender, age/life-stages, cult affiliation and other factors’. Essentially, the Patrons do as best they can with the varied levels of cultural experience to replicate the disposition of the symbolic élites. The strategy afforded is the opportunity to invest their economic or cultural capital towards the further development of the community.

The purpose of representing the different groups in this way is to demonstrate their discreteness and independence of each other, but to also show the proximal relationships that each group has in terms of status, prestige and purity. The Patrons cannot become Scholars but, very rarely, they can become Renunciants. This, however, takes decades of commitment and sacrifice.
The analysis of the symbolic dimensions has allowed for the nuancing of this initial hierarchy to expand this concept based on the symbolic dimensions and specialisation codes. Figure 4.15 represents several components of this dynamic community. First, each distinct hierarchy is independent of the other groups, yet it also relies on the others for meaning and support through bridging capital that brings different groups together. At the apex of the three-sided pyramid sits the guru as the ideal knower whose cultivated gaze brings together all the habituses. The base of the pyramid represents the cultivated gaze that he uses to inculcate his devotees into the legitimate disposition. At the same time each base point represents the social gaze that is keeping the groups apart as discrete entities. As individuals ascend vertically through their hierarchy their proximal and symbolic relationship to the guru intensifies as does their prestige, authority and legitimacy.

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107 The concept of the social and cultivated gaze is discussed in chapter six.
Figure 4.15: Hierarchies in the Ashram

Figure 4.16 provides a topographic representation of the relationship of purity between the different groups in the ashram presenting the relations in a central-peripheral configuration rather than a hierarchical ordering (Raheja 1988). The guru is the source of purity, followed by his group of renunciants. Due to their shared symbolic capital, sourced from their renunciation of worldly affairs, the impurity attributed to attachments belongs to those who have not already taken such a vow. Roberts (2015) overview of Guha (2013) shows how Dumont’s religious explanation of caste based on purity is limited. He argues this is because symbolic markers like ‘purity’ are only useful or available as a resource if they are rigorously policed, while purity ought to be interpreted as an expression of status and not its essence.

If we look at the Shanti Mandir community as a village with its own caste system, we can appreciate how the videsi Patrons can be viewed as a lower caste trying to emulate the superior group’s cultural forms. Rather than seeing these groups as essential or substantial identities, Mosse (2012) aligns with Latour (2003) to explain how caste ought to be viewed as networks of attachments that bring about action in the sense of ‘actor networks’. Roberts (2015) builds upon Srinivas (1956, 1959) explaining how success is not necessarily only achieved through emulation but is also determined by accumulation of economic (and political) power. ‘Loyalty to norms,
generosity, and allegiance are some of the forms of symbolized social capital’ that are used to disguise economic exchanges as merely social (Matiaske 2012: 192-3). Certainly, with economic power it is possible to gain, through an administrative position on the board of trustees or as a country manager, this form of political power that can translate to success; as commitment to the community through becoming embedded in the organisational hierarchy certainly demonstrates success and possibly closer and more frequent interactions with the guru and, therefore, closer access to the perceived source of purity. Or, as Guha suggests, perhaps purity is only one of several possibilities for creating distinction? Perhaps honour is a more prominent pathway through which social precedence is negotiated and expressed?

The ideal citizen of the Shanti Mandir community can be viewed through institutional model proposed by Moskos (1986), where values like ‘duty’, ‘honour’, ‘country’ and ‘self-sacrifice’ are pivotal. However, honour is commonly seen as an internal quality that often overlooks the external component that relies on sharing an agreed standard (Olsthoorn 2005). This standard is an external acknowledgement of the claim made by the individual as an estimation of his own worth (Pitt-Rivers 1974).

In a casual conversation with an older student, Abhinav explained how he wants to work as a travelling storyteller (kathanika) who specialises in the didactic performance of the Bhagavad Kathā (Taylor 2015). One afternoon I came across Abhinav talking to an engaged and soon to be married Australian woman along with a few other international devotees. There seemed to be an element of coquettish flirtation to this conversation that occurred in English between Casey and Abhinav. Moving to the restricted code of Hindi I asked Abhinav what the word for ‘flirting’ is in Hindi. His tone changed immediately and, as he came and slumped down in the chair opposite me, a forlorned expression appeared on his face.

We spoke in Hindi for the next hour about the concepts of honour, perception and integrity. A prominent point in the conversation came when he explained to me
that ‘it doesn’t matter what my intentions are with a girl, it ultimately depends on how others see it’. My naïve and somewhat flippant comment exposed a great source of tension for Abhinav, and by extension all the other students, to constantly conform to the ideal disposition. The constant emotional and behavioural policing are indicative of Surface Acting (SA); which is a concept proposed by Hochschild (1983). SA includes vigilant management of observable expressions and is contrasted by Deep Acting (DA), which is the ‘intrapsychic process of attempting to experience or alter feelings so that expected emotional displays may naturally follow’ (Kiely 2008). This move from SA towards DA is one way of conceptualising the embodiment of the legitimate disposition, which should be expressed naturally and spontaneously. In verse 15 of BhRAS, the Sanskrit treatise on emotion, the concealment of emotions is referred to as avahithā (Gosvamin 2003, Klostermaier 1974).

The conversation evolved into a retelling by Abhinav of an apparent story from the Rāmayāṇa about the time when Lakṣmaṇa let Sītā, his half-brother’s wife, rest her head in his lap because she had a headache. This story was used by Abhinav as an allegory towards right conduct in the presence of (married) women. During this passionate and entertaining storytelling it was clear that Abhinav has a bright future ahead of him as a kathanika. However, it is difficult to know whether he was using this story as a way to demonstrate that people will form their own perceptions, or rather, to shift the potential blame from himself onto the woman he was talking to.

The traditional ideology of Brahminical Sanskritic Hinduism provides a framework of debt for Brahmin males who must work towards paying off the debts of their ancestors through becoming fully versed in the Vedic knowledge, performing their religious duties, and producing sons (Olivelle 1992, 1993). It is the Scholars that act as intermediaries between the sacred and profane realms through the ‘purifying’ effects of their vocal utterances and ritual performances. They play an integral part in the community and are rewarded with a particular status not available to the other
groups. However, as discussed, this status comes at a cost, because their does seem to be more flexibility for the Patrons who do not have to be constantly vigilant regarding one’s emulatory performance of the legitimate disposition as the Scholars or Renunciants.

![Figure 4.16: Central-peripheral Levels of Purity](image)

Figure 4.17 demonstrates an overall understanding of the Shanti Mandir field of knowledge. Without trying to make any deterministic or essentialist claims, it is possible to analyse this field in a variety of ways; however, using the specialisation codes of LCT and based on the symbolic markers separating the groups, three distinct hierarchies have been recognised. Moving beyond distinctions based on code modalities we can conceptualise them as a knowledge hierarchy (ER+, SR+); a purity-knower hierarchy (ER-, SR+); and an economic hierarchy (EV+/−). It needs to be mentioned that the (EV+/−) code is a heuristic development to help me understand theoretical implications. It is not currently a feature of LCT Specialisation codes.
While the Scholars share the Elite code modality with the guru, in terms of status, the Renunciants still have more prestige. This is demonstrated by the Renunciants being at the head of the queue when it comes to darśana in the temple and at meal times followed by the Scholars and then the Patrons. However, the Patrons sit atop the economic hierarchy because they are the economic providers who invest directly in the community. The moral impurity connected to the Patrons’ attachment to the mundane world sees them at the bottom of the symbolic hierarchies related to purity and knowledge.

4.5 — Conclusion

This overview of the relationships between the various groups and their symbolic or pragmatic functions shows the legitimate species of capital that each group relies upon and uses in its transactions with the other groups. The use of Legitimation Code Theory also shows how the Elite Code (ER+, SR+) and the Knower Code (ER-, SR+) operate in the network to highlight the social and epistemic relations to knowledge and
how this impacts on an individual’s access to prestige, authority, and legitimacy. One possible way of advancing LCT is by developing a code modality that makes room for economic capital. As has been demonstrated in this chapter, economic capital plays an important part in distinguishing the different groups within the community. Economic capital could be coded as Economic Vitality (EV+/−). This would at least allow the application of a code modality to the economic hierarchy I propose and would result in the following code modalities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Code Modality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Renunciants</td>
<td>(ER-, SR+, EV-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholars</td>
<td>(ER+, SR+, EV-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrons</td>
<td>(ER-, SR+, EV+)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Combined with the addition of the Economic Vitality Code (EV+/−), an even clearer picture of the symbolic dimension and role of capital is presented. While the Renunciants have an esteemed position due to their religious capital, they do not have the prestige afforded to the Scholars whose specialist-technical knowledge of Sanskrit is unavailable to them and also the Patrons. Regardless, if it were not for the cultural and religious capital of the Scholars and Renunciants, it is unlikely that there would be as much interest or investment by the Patrons. This suggests that the transubstantiation of capital is quite complicated and constantly renegotiated by various actors in the network. While economic capital is fundamental to the growth of the community it is the exchange that occurs within the symbolic dimension of gaining legitimacy and authenticity that allows and entices the groups to do just that.

The Patrons principally use their investments of economic capital, but are also able to negotiate with cultural capital such as their professional skills that can be used by the organisation to achieve certain ends. However, their ability to exchange economic capital into spiritual or religious capital is restricted, regardless of the size of
the donations given. Even though this is a fundamental part of the operation, the embodiment of a social relation to knowledge is valorised over an epistemic relation or an abundance of economic capital. A Patron might be able to donate unlimited amounts of money, but if they are not able to become or at least outwardly display a more compassionate, tolerant and peaceful embodiment of the characteristics associated with a sattvika disposition, then within the eyes of the community, they will not be considered a legitimate practitioner, yogi or knower. Even though the discrete groups work synergistically to create and sustain a viable community there is limited opportunity for individuals to migrate to another group. This, in part, explains why internal competitions for prestige and legitimacy, as well as recognition as ideal knowers occur within each group and not between.

As discussed above, recognition of being an ideal knower is partly based on an individual’s ability to explain the social world. This is the concept of epistemic capital, which is something that everyone needs to accumulate and not just the guru. The acquisition of epistemic capital is essential in their learning of the normativising rules of the field and to adopt and express the legitimate disposition.

Fundamental to all exchanges is economic capital. Regardless of whether an individual is able to cover the costs themselves or they are subsidised by someone else (as in the case of the Scholars and Renunciants being sponsored by the Patrons), this allows the individual to develop the social and cultural capital of learning how to behave with regard to the expectations (or cultivating gaze) of the community in order to negotiate attainment of an agreed standard of conduct. Through gaining some awareness of the essential components, the individual is able to then develop their epistemic capital, which I argue is a higher order species of capital that consists of both an epistemic and social relation to knowledge, because to accumulate spiritual or religious capital, the individual must be able to articulate verbally and demonstrate
corporally their relationship to, and understanding of, the social and metaphysical worlds. This hierarchy of capital is conceptualised in Figure 4.18.

Figure 4.18: Hierarchy of Capital and Flows

This figure highlights how the tangible species of capital are catalysed into the intangible species through the instrumentality of epistemic capital and the embodiment of cultural capital. The exchanges of capital that underpin the existence of Shanti Mandir are intimately linked to the legitimate ways in which individuals can negotiate access into and ascension within the discrete but interdependent hierarchies present within the social network. Through using a combination of LCT and an emphasis on an analysis of the field in terms of the symbolic exchanges of capital, we gain clarity in understanding the processes involved for the various actors within the Shanti Mandir ashram.

In chapter five the discussion focuses on the cultivation of the aesthetic mood referred to as quietude or peace (śāntarasa) within the particular formal pedagogical domain of satsaṅga. This chapter demonstrates how śāntarasa is central to the identity of Shanti Mandir by tracing the development of an aesthetically religious devotionalism and the synonymous relationship of related terms. To better understand
the pedagogical system used by Shanti Mandir to enculturate members of its community, chapter five also locates *satsaṅga* within a literary and performative tradition and explores concepts related to audience perception and performance. This is done to clarify the transference of affect, the cultivation of collective effervescence and the opportunity to learn to imbibe through mimetic adaptations the ideal knower’s disposition.
Chapter 5 — Suggesting Śāntarasa: The Aesthetic Mood of Satsaṅga
5.1 — Introduction

When we come to satsaṅg, and hear what we hear in satsaṅg, all we really face is ourselves. Because satsaṅg is not about anyone else, but us. (Mandir 2011g: 9)

Oral transmission of knowledge is a defining characteristic of South Asian religious traditions. The importance of learning directly from the guru is located in the Tantric doctrines written between the fifth and sixth centuries CE. It is said that the highest wisdom — liberating truth — can only be issued from the mouth of a master (gurumukhād eva). Verse 12.56 of the Kulārṇava Tantra explains that austerities are not required if the individual is in the presence of the guru, while verse 13.110 asserted that one can experience supreme bliss and gain liberation by the mere sight of the guru (Padoux 2000: 41, 49).

This chapter focuses on satsaṅga (literally sat-truth + saṅga-confluence), which is often translated as ‘being in the company of the Truth’. This chapter is more theoretical in its approach. It complements the ethnographic material presented in chapter six. Broadly defined, satsaṅga is a public event that can be held in any location and involves an interaction between the guru and his or her devotees. Satsaṅga is a performative arena within which certain emotions (bhāvas) and aesthetic moods (rasas) are cultivated as a way to attract potential recruits, inspire current devotees and accumulate capital. This chapter is inspired by Pollock’s ideas related to the historicity of the South Asian literary and performative traditions (Pollock 2003: 43) and Marriot’s ethnosociological model that uses local concepts and theories (1989). Also drawing from Pinkney (2013), I employ a mixed methodology that combines ethnography and philology.

This chapter locates satsaṅga historically, linking the development of the rasa concept from the through to the bhakti (aesthetic devotionalism) movement. It situates
the use of particular key terms that are central to the construction of Shanti Mandir’s identity. In this way, *satsaṅga* can be seen as a performative cultural artefact that can be understood as a type of literature (*kāvya*). It also situates *satsaṅga* within a broader discussion that builds upon previous typologies developed from within the *kāvya* tradition itself. Building upon primary and secondary sources the aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how the cultivation of śāntarasā (the calmed mood) is central to the Shanti Mandir identity, and, therefore, central to the legitimate disposition.

My thesis is that epistemological access\(^{108}\) relies on the collective production of a heightened emotional experience produced in the ritualised event of *satsaṅga* through singing and other performative acts, thus producing the necessary receptive state required for the embodiment of the legitimate disposition. The subjectivity of the seeker is reoriented as the goal for attaining an authentic inner connection with an individual’s deeper self, which is considered to be the source of ultimate truth (Lindholm 2002: 9).

Shanti Mandir’s pedagogical system also emphasises a devotional aestheticism where emotions, intuitions, and subjective mystical insights take precedence as legitimate forms of knowledge over rational or logical conclusions towards the production of thoughtless affects (Brennan 2004: 116). This chapter benefits from the analytical tinkering that allows for a discussion between different analytical-theoretical frameworks to take place. By reading across disciplinary boundaries this chapter allows us to better understand how individuals gain discipline specific epistemological access. One aim of this chapter at least is to understand this particular pedagogical domain by exploring how the performativity inherent within the ritualised performance of *satsaṅga* facilitates the transmission of knowledge through the cultivation of emotion (cf. Bruhn 2011).

\(^{108}\) Being inducted into a particular disposition — see section 2.2.
The performativity inherent within the ritualised performance of *satsaṅga* is discussed in more detail in section 5.6; however, I ought to clarify that I incorporate different meanings of these terms into my analysis. I follow the Austin-Butler sense regarding how communicative acts are involved in the construction and defining of identities due to the (perlocutionary) effect the speaker has on the listener (Austin 1962, Butler 1990); while also appreciating that ‘performance’ covers a broad range of cultural events from theatre through to the political, religious and social rituals to the mundane reality of a localised speech event.

Singer (1972) suggests that religious and cultural performances form the ultimate units of observation and this is why the performance approach has been developed over the past decades and recruited into this analytical framework. Building upon Rostas (2003: 90), Steiner explains how performativity deploys consciously formulated strategies implying creative resourcefulness, ‘Performativity is a measure of the effort (or energy) put into action… on the whole, it is the performativity that gives an enactment its zest, that makes ritual and/or performance interesting to watch’ (2007: 91). While Balzani (2007: 27) refers to the affective quality of religious performances and their role in cultivating particular emotions, Bailey explains that this particular model of cultural performance:

>...contemplates conduct that is profoundly disintellectual. As modelled, the performance is not, even when it purports to be, an invitation to be rational, to doubt, to ask questions even-handedly. It is an enticement directly to feeling, to unquestioning belief; an implantation of values and in that respect a form of ‘diseducation’ it is designed to make people not think, not question, not calculate, only to feel and ultimately to act on the ‘truth’ that is presented to them is that. (Bailey 1996: 5)

The potentially liberating consequence of knowledge, then, is mediated by an individual’s ability to access and embody the legitimate yogic disposition from within the Shanti Mandir episteme. This access is formalised through the *satsaṅga* arena (Dubois 2013: 104, Singh 2006b: 94, Thrasher 1993: 4, Timalsina 2009: 370). Within
the Shanti Mandir ashram, *satsaṅga* is a twice-daily routinised event and highlight of the community’s spiritual practice. It is where direct contact (*sākṣāddṛṣṭa*) between the guru and the audience allows for the transmission of knowledge and transference of affect. We can appreciate that *satsaṅga* is a domain where the ideal or legitimate disposition is consciously cultivated and relies upon these three sources of authority — the scriptures, the guru, and direct experience to achieve the aim of making the timeless ‘truth’ of scripture and tradition accessible and applicable (Brooks 1997: 317-19). The multilayered ‘Truth’ elaborated upon in the Siddha tradition consists of three levels: ordinary (*aparā*), mixed (*parāparā*), and beyond (*parā*) (Brooks 1997: 320-1, 340-45). Truth is also viewed in synchronic and diachronic ways that allow for the merging of immanence and transcendence (cf. Csordas 2009b, Haynes 2012).

As the guru is considered to be the ideal knower, it is through attending *satsaṅga* that the individual learns to become like the guru, thereby gaining legitimacy as an ‘authentic’ member of this yogically inspired epistemic community. Most of the community’s interaction with the guru occurs in the formal setting of *satsaṅga*. Unless someone is a senior member that has a particular function that requires interacting with the guru there is not too many opportunities to mingle. The guru is the final arbiter of a person’s attainments in the spiritual knowledge, however, being considered a ‘knower’ within this field comes through consensus. Individuals are judged by the community to be sincere in their spiritual pursuits through backgrounding any ‘worldly incentives’. They are also considered to be more legitimate if they are able to mimic the normative behavioural standards of the community and basically ‘fit in’ with the in-group. However, there is no formal process of initiation or a checklist. Also, different groups within the community have various standards they set for themselves and others. Essentially, however, the best way to gain legitimacy is to put one’s own pursuits to the side and focus on the serving the guru and supporting his mission. People who are able to sustain this ‘performance’ over several years are rewarded in different ways.
The most obvious way is through admission into the elite spiritual group of renunciants that was discussed in chapter four.

The guru becomes a ‘text’ that the disciples study learning through observation, and embodying through mimesis, how to ultimately become the guru through discovering within themselves the guru-tattva (the true state of the guru) (Shivananda 1999). Theoretically, this allows the individual to attain the ideal experience and inner state of the guru’s self-perfection (Brooks 1997: 325-6, 336). Contextualising satsaṅga as a ‘community of texts’ that incorporates specific yogic and devotional narrative traditions, the present day performative practices and textual interpretation of Shanti Mandir’s devotional corpus helps to construct a collective imaginaire attesting to the continued reliance on an audience's aesthetic qualifications as rasikas (people of taste, relishers, connoisseurs), or at least their predisposition toward the bhakti spirit (Gupta and Valpey 2013: 8-13).

Brooks provides a typology of texts that determine their relationship to the sacred: 1) texts the guru treats as sacred either by declaring them to be or by explicitly endorsing their use; 2) texts, written or oral, that are taught, recited, or used by the guru to impart a given teaching; 3) texts the guru uses to teach or make a particular point. Texts in this latter group may or may not achieve a canonical status, depending upon whether they fall into one of the other two categories (1997: 278-9).

Developing the argument that satsaṅga can be theorised as a type of performance-based literature, I rely upon the correct definition of kāvyya that revolves around the concept of sahrdayatva (literary sensitivity) (Hudson 2013: 54). This concept is central to the cultivation of the refined aesthetic sensibility of the sensitive

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109 This term is synonymous with sahrdaya.
audience member (sahārdaya), allowing for identification with the heart of the poet (kavi), which, I argue in this context is the guru (Gnoli 1962: 20,39, Ingalls, Masson et al. 1990: 58, 72, McCrea 2009: 112, 114).

In the general sense of the sensitive listener, before Abhinava started using sahārdaya it was used by Vāmana in Kāvyalaṃkārasūtraṇātra and by Udbhata (Gnoli 1962: 20,39, McCrea 2008: 114). Expressed in another way, this idea of literary sensitivity is related to the concept of epistemological access, which refers to how the ‘rules of the game’ are established, transmitted, and received.

Morrow (2007) asserted that the teacher’s ultimate aim is to enable epistemological access to knowledge. Lotz-Sisitka (2009) built upon this to explain the teachers’ responsibility is to enable learners to gain access to particular forms of knowledge that are either context dependent or context independent (Daniels 2001, Gamble 2006). Becher (1989) and Arbee (2012) agree that epistemological access consists of acquiring two dimensions: the knowledge and the social. This is directly related to the epistemic and social relations (ER, SR) to knowledge discussed in chapter four. This involves learning the legitimate type of knowledge, the required ways of learning this knowledge, and the subsequent ways of embodying this knowledge; which include social norms, values and behaviours. Within the Shanti Mandir context the principal knowledge relies on an emotionally focused epistemology.

Section 5.2 begins by providing more detail about satsaṅga. It begins with the guru’s own definition and aims for the event. Section 5.3 provides a brief overview of the historical development and confluence of the synonymous concepts of rasa and

\[110\] Dhv 1.1 prasiddha-prasthāna-vyatirekinah kāvyaprakārasya kāvyatva-hāneḥ sahṛdayaḥrdayāhārāḥ-sabdārtham-mayatvam eva kāvyalakṣāṇam. na cokta-prasthānātyayaṇo mārgasyat tat sambhavatī.

\[111\] Kaviḥrdayatādātmyāpatītyogyatā.
ānanda (bliss) within various schools of philosophy that Shanti Mandir draws inspiration from. This is done primarily to support my argument by showing the semantic consonance between the historical development of these ideas and their role in shaping the discourse and identity of the legitimate disposition. Section 5.4 situates the contemporary use of satsaṅga and the cultivation of quietude by Shanti Mandir within its historical context, and as a continuation of a religious performative tradition used by organisations to recruit new members and capital. This is important as it validates several aspects of my argument that satsaṅga is where śāntarasa is cultivated and is based on the historical precedents it is modeled on. Section 5.5 builds upon these ideas moving towards discussing the performative aspects by justifying the analytical approach of classifying satsaṅga as a type of literature, while also providing a typology based on local concepts of literature. Section 5.6 provides a deeper description and analysis of satsaṅga, exploring it in relation to concepts of performativity and ritualisation. This section also includes discussions related to audience reception, embodiment, musical performances, and gendered and spatial relations. This is important to validate my assertion that it is the formal performative ritualisation of satsaṅga that cultivates the necessary aesthetic mood, emotions, literary sensitivity, and epistemological access required for the embodiment of the legitimate disposition. Section 5.7 is the conclusion.

5.2 — An Overview of Satsaṅga

Nityananda explains that his aim in satsaṅga is ‘to share uplifting thoughts, to share uplifting things’ (Mandir 2015o). According to Nityananda ‘satsaṅga means the company of truth. We come together and chant and meditate. We allow the mind to become still so that we can understand our true nature, so we can experience the divinity of our true Self’ (Mandir 2011f: 1). Equating liberation with resting in a state
of equanimity, Nityananda refers to Uddālaka’s thoughts that to obtain liberation requires the cessation of mental agitations caused by desire and cravings (Mandir 2010a: 3). Nityananda reminds his followers that ‘we have come to satsaṅga thinking about living blissfully. How do I live blissfully? How do I live in bliss most of the time, or all of the time? How can I keep my mind from going in another direction or getting caught up in some other situation?’ (Mandir 2011c: 4). Nityananda continues stating that:

If we think about it, often the important ingredient missing in our lives is love. We say, ‘Listen to the Truth within, know the Truth within, the Truth dwells within you’. Yet often the first thing we do as humans is cut ourselves off from this inner connection. Then we come to satsaṅga, to the temple, to the ashram to find out how we can reconnect ourselves. (Mandir 2011h: 4)

In a seminal text on yoga, which Nityananda occasionally refers to in satsaṅga, the sage explained to Rāma, that satsaṅga is the best path for obtaining the supreme reward (Mandir 2010a: 1).112 This highest goal, according to the devotional aesthetic tradition exemplified by another central text in Shanti Mandir’s scriptural canon (Bhagavata Purāṇa)113 explains that ‘from a desire to continue hearing the glory of god and an inability to stop enjoying the company of good people (satsaṅgāt), the wise person gains release from bad inclinations’.114

In the guru-centred mystical tradition, satsaṅga represents both continuity of tradition and change. It represents an ideal that can refer to more than just scriptural references, texts and teachings, while including ‘oral and written selections specially

112 YogVās 2.16.19 saṁtoṣaḥ paramo lābhāḥ satsaṁgāḥ paramā gatiḥ.
113 The BhP refers to itself as the rasa-śāstra (treatise on emotion), explaining that it is written for aesthetes and people with taste. BhP 01.01.003 nigamākalpatarorgādītaṁ phalāṁ śukamukhādāmṛtadravasanyatam pibata bhāgavaṁ rasam ālayaṁ muhuraho rasika bhūvani bhāvukāḥ.
114 BhP 1.10.11 satsaṁgān muktaduḥsāngo hātun notsahate budhaṁ kīrtyamānāṁ yaśo yasya sakṛdākarnya rocanam.
infused with the guru’s intentionality and, more particularly, their own words, teachings, and interpretations’ (SYDA 2015a).

The Kashmir Shaivite philosophy that runs deep in the Shanti Mandir tradition defines the flavour of peace by the contentment that comes from terminating the thirst for pleasure (trṣṇā-kṣaya-sukha) (Tubb 1985: 158). As a cultural and literary artefact, satsaṅga facilitates suggestions of an alternate reality, which assist in cultivating the necessary disposition required to share in the guru’s ‘divine’ vision.

_Satsaṅga_ is filled with music that includes the chanting of Sanskrit texts from Shanti Mandir’s corpus and devotional style call and response _kīrtana_. This could include both slow meditative or faster _kīrtana_ tempos. Archival footage of Baba Muktaṇanda shows him leading a slow version of the _Om Namah Śivāya_ chant similar to the way it is conducted in Shanti Mandir (Antonella 2009). The same _kīrtana_ continues to be sung in _satsaṅga_ every Monday morning in Shanti Mandir ashrams and is considered a favourite by a majority of the devotees because of the tempo and accessibility. This is because there are only three words to learn compared to the longer and more challenging texts. This chant can also be sung at a faster tempo (Videowalla108 2008). Other emotionally climatic chants include the _Mahā Mantra_ (Hare Rāma…) and _Śrī Rāma Jaya Rāma_ (Mandir 2011d). As a result of the collective experience, seekers of knowledge find transitory assurance through attending _satsaṅga_ where they can revel in the company of ‘truth’ as espoused by the guru. As Nityananda

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115 The BhP emphasises two essential practices of _bhaktimārga_ (path of devotion) that are also inherent to the practice and aims of satsaṅga — hearing and speaking about god and cultivating knowledge for advancing on the path towards liberation. The BhP 7.5.23 suggests there are nine limbs of bhakti — hearing about Viṣṇu, repeating his names and activities, remembering him, serving his feet, becoming his friend, and offering one’s very self. BhP 3.25 _satāṁ prasaṅgān mama vīrya-sanvīdō bhavanti hṛt-karna-rasāyanāḥ kathāḥ taj-jośaṅād āśvapavarga-vartmani śraddhā ratir bhaktir anukramisyati._

116 Dhv 3.26 _śāntaś ca trṣṇā-kṣaya-sukhasya yaḥ paripoṣas tal-lakṣaṇo rasah pratiyata eva._
reminds his audience ‘we come together to experience the divinity, the Truth, that
dwells within us’ (Mandir 2014f: 1).

*Satsaṅga* is a ritualised liminal space where the sacred and profane realms are
conflated. This provides participants with a threshold and fertile arena for the
cultivation of an alternate reality and identity based on Nityananda’s ‘yogic’ vision of
an ideal community (Turner 1982). Turner built his concept of liminality upon the
concept of rites of passage that was initially developed by van Gennep (2004).
*Satsaṅga* is not a rite of passage in the sense originally meant by van Gennep. For
example, unlike some sort of initiation ceremony in which the individual participates
only once, say, as a marker of entry into adulthood or the initiation ceremony to
become a Renunciant, the experience of attending *satsaṅga* is repeated many times
throughout one’s life. Regardless, there is a liminality inherent in *satsaṅga* as it can be
seen as a vehicle or type of pilgrimage that allows for the revelation of sacred
knowledge, which occurs in sacred time (Carson 2003: 61).

Liminal beings, stages and spaces can be seen positively, even as sacred
representations of hope, only when they are assigned special status by the society
(Jackson 2005: 333). Shanti Mandir holds that *satsaṅga* is a divine space that offers
protection from profanation through sacred rules (Douglas 2003 [1966]: 8). Liminal
arenas are thresholds or thin places occurring between spaces that have both spatial
and temporal aspects. While the spatial dimension is discussed below in section 5.6,
the temporality extends from a moment, through a period of time to an epoch that
results in life-long change. I assert that *satsaṅga* has the possibility of encompassing
all three temporal scales. For the first-timer or uninitiated, the joyful mood
experienced in *satsaṅga* is an exotic moment that can extend through to a period of
time that includes repeated attendance and longer stays in the ashram. This may result
in the individual seeking to join the community on a permanent basis. In order to do
this on must learn through mimetic adaptations how to behave and respond to
situations. This includes adopting the community’s preference for attending *satsaṅga* as often as possible. Having attended *satsaṅga* and experienced divinity directly, now charged with the mission of moral betterment and liberation, individuals run the risk of becoming a permanent ‘liminal persona’ or ‘matter out of place’ that is betwixt and between worlds as they transition from an illegitimate to a legitimate disposition (Turner 1964).

As the level of disenchantment over secular life grows in concert with the yearning for faster adoption of the yogic disposition, this sometimes results in a life-changing decision for the individual who decides to make a Shanti Mandir ashram their permanent home. Also, some might become a Renunciant through taking vows of *saṁnyāsa*, or by demonstrating other external displays, such as changing one’s clothing to match the style of other devotees,\(^\text{117}\) or less obvious signs such as altering one’s diet to become vegetarian, possibly becoming celibate, or taking a spiritual name.

*Satsaṅga* has a strong potential for fostering creativity and social change, or at least operating as a location for redefining the normative standards of this ideological communitas. It can be seen as an anti-structure, or antidote that is offered as an alternative social model to the more progressive social standards of modern, or perhaps even, ‘Digital India’ (Barlow 2015, Shukla 2015, Technology 2015). Instrumentally, *satsaṅga* is an arena for the calming of febrile minds that have been overwhelmed by the perceived dilution of essentialised core Indian values due to modernity’s attack on tradition (Besnier and Brownell 2012: 445, Turner 1969). Alternatively, *satsaṅga* can be seen as the structure in which specific values and norms are established and reinforced. Ultimately, *satsaṅga* is a pedagogical tool and formal

\(^{117}\) I was subjected to persistent attempts by several individuals during my fieldwork to change my clothing and other things like drink bottles from black to white as this tone is considered more auspicious.
arena for the socialisation of individuals into the Shanti Mandir community that relies on a spirituality focused cultivation of a moral imperative. By referring to a sense of obligation and perception of divinely imposed standards, the guru gains the right to tell people how to live all aspects of their lives (Csordas 2009a, Mangalwadi and Enroth 2005, Weber 1968).

As Nityananda has described above, the aim of satsaṅga is to understand how to live in bliss most, if not, all of the time. In order to understand what this concept of bliss refers to, the next section demonstrates, through creating a semantic genealogy, the overlap between terms such as ānanda (bliss), śānta (quietude), and rasa (emotion). This section demonstrates how these terms are synonymous to the ultimate monist principle of Brahman by describing the development of the aesthetic concept and tradition.

5.3 — The Development of the Aesthetic Tradition

In this section, the development of the mutuality between the overlapping concepts of rasa (emotion) and ānanda (bliss) are explored to demonstrate its centrality to Shanti Mandir’s yogic path and the construction of the legitimate identity. Rasa is a multivalent term that has various contextualised and nuanced meanings including essence, seminal fluid, taste, and pleasure/desire. Over time five major dimensions or distinctions related to the rasa concept developed. The mention of rasa is found in

118 1) The philosophical dimension as originally found in the Upāṇiṣads, which speaks of rasa as identical with Brahman; 2) Rasa is one of the qualities (gunaś) of taste found in the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system; 3) Rasa is also mentioned in Āyurveda where it relates to taste, elixirs for prolonging life (rasāyana) or the use of mercury (rasavidyā); and 4) Concerns the aesthetic implications found in poetics. This later developed into 5) Religious/devotional implications of rasa found in the bhakti movement mentioned in the BhP (10.29-33) and BhRAS. Both these texts mention the requirement of developing good tastes through discrimination (rasavid or knowledge of rasa) (see Hedge 2009: 149).
the Ṛgveda between verses 1.187.1-11 where food is praised as synonymous with thought. The passage in question explains the possibility of multiple locations and effects upon the consumer of food (thoughts) (Griffith 2005 [1973]: 100, Soni 2008: 113). The TU uses rasa to describe the various degrees of happiness that can be enjoyed by different individuals depending on their inclinations (Angot 2007, Sharma 1968: 175, Sharvananda 1921: 83, Yogi 1969). It is said that when one obtains rasa they obtain ānanda (bliss), which according to the Nyāyakoṣa is translated as sukha (happiness) and dukhābhāva (the absence of suffering) (Olivelle 1997: 166, 179). Just as Vātsyāyana does not object to renaming the absence of pain as ‘bliss’ (Potter 1977: 29), so too, Nityananda explained that:

we have to become clear: I am not tortured by anyone. My own mind tortures me. I don’t suffer because of anyone else. My mind is the cause of my suffering. When are you content? When are you at peace? When your mind is at peace. (Mandir 2012b: 5)

This quote demonstrates the cognitive and epistemological foundations and emphasis of Nityananda’s teachings regarding the legitimate disposition and its soteriological and ontological goals based on identifying the sources of suffering. This aesthetic concept of rasa provides deep psychological insights into various mental states and emotions. It was first incorporated into the treatise on performance and stagecraft attributed to Bharata’s Nātya Śāstra around the second century CE. Bharata’s concept of rasa, the well known Rasasūtra, aims to evoke pleasure in an audience through the representation of emotions as ingredients that make up the various flavours of a dish.

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119 RV 1.187.4 tava taye pito rasā rajāṁsyam viṣṭhitāḥ divi vātāiva śrītāḥ. Witzel (2003) dates the earliest Vedic period after 1600 BCE.

120 Tentatively dated between the fifth and sixth centuries BCE, the TU 2.7.6-7 says that ‘having obtained (labdhvā) joy (rasaḥ) he (sah) indeed (hi) becomes (bhavati) this (ayaṁ) blessed one (ānandī). The opening verse of the first anuvāka (section) is ‘Oṁ śaṁ no mitraḥ śaṁ varuṇah śaṁ no bhatavaryamā śaṁ na indro brihaspatiḥ śaṁ no viśnururukramaḥ’ (Sharvananda 1921: 5). The Scholars regularly recite this section during satsaṅga.
The act of relishing rasa is explained as occurring ‘when we are able to transcend the “ego-centric predicament” of the mind, that state of detachment based on a suspension of the routine life yields ānanda’ (Singh 2006b: 94).

Satsaṅga is an arena that provides this suspension of routine life allowing for positive feelings to be experienced and, in a psychoanalytic sense, unconscious feelings are transferred by the devotees onto the guru (Etchegoyen 2005). When this level of aesthetic experience is reached, the basic mental state is said to sink into the sub-consciousness and there, the ānanda aspect of the self, alone, is said to shine in its full splendour. This is considered the highest level of aesthetic experience, and, according to Abhinavagupta is nothing but Brahmānanda (Mukherji 1998: 39).

Ānanda, according to Olivelle (1997: 153), denotes an intense feeling of joy one can experience through devotion, service to divine objects, beings or principles, or in meditative trance (samādhi) as a result of yogic practice. Ānanda, as Nityananda has explained above when he refers to bliss, can be experienced through attending satsaṅga. Sarbacker (2008) explains how it is through the instrumentality of the body engaged in the yogic practice of contemplation (samādhi), that the seer (dṛṣṭṛ), or detached witness (sākṣin) is able to restrain the mental modifications (vṛttis) of phenomenal reality allowing for peace to be experienced. Related to this is the synonymous and multivalent term ‘bhāva’ (Crovetto 2011: 75). Depending on the context, it is translated as spiritual or religious ideation and identification; a feeling

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121 NŚ 6.34 tatra vibhāva-anubhāva(sya)-vyabhicāri-saṁyogād rasanispatīḥ. The NŚ explained that the consummation of rasa is a result of the conjunction of the dramatic situation (vibhāva - medium of production of emotion, e.g. satsaṅga), and the transitory feelings (vyabhicāri-bhāva) of the external signs or (anubhāva) effects’ produced during a performance. The section on rasa-nispati (ecstatic state of rasa) in Abhinava-bhārati does not mention sānta (see Gerow and Aklujkar 1972: 81 note 3.2).

122 Abhinavagupta’s Shaivite philosophy and treatise on śāntarasa is central to Shanti Mandir (see Shankarananda 2003).

123 PYS 1.2 yogaś-citta-vṛttī-nirodhaḥ.
(often of ecstasy); an emotion or attitude; a spontaneous form of possession; or an ‘ecstatic state that comes with direct experience of the divine’ (McDaniel 1989: 6). It is through the identification with the ecstatic feelings produced in *satsaṅga* that the congregation learns to embody this particular ‘peaceful’ or ‘joyful’ aspect of the legitimate disposition.

In the subjective idealist Advaita Vedāntic tradition, which Shanti Mandir subscribes to and promotes, ānanda represents the principal and essential ‘attribute’ of the unchanging reality within and beyond the world, which is known as Brahman (Puligandla 1997). As demonstrated throughout this chapter, Shanti Mandir subscribes to the pursuit of a blissful state that can be experienced in this lifetime through repeated attendance at *satsaṅga*. Through repeated fleeting experiences of this bhāva, it is suggested that the individual is able to move towards a permanent embodiment (*sthāyibhāva*) of ānanda and, therefore, an experience of Brahman. Once this permanent state is achieved one is considered a siddha and a jīvanmukta. However, it involves attachment to the pursuit of this state of eternal pleasure, the *nāma-rūpa* (name and form) of the guru and his tradition, and aversion to objects that will impede this experience from arising.

Olivelle (1997) identifies the link between ānanda and the Brahman/Ātman principle citing the Brahmaśūtras (1.1.5-11), which define Brahman as ānanda. Vātsyāyana in his commentary on the Nyāyasūtra 1.1.22,\(^{124}\) provides a lengthy discussion focused on the question of whether liberation (*mokṣa*) is a blissful state or not. He defines *apavarga* as a condition involving attainment of bliss and calls it ‘Brahman’ linking his concept to that located in the *upaniṣads*. However, Vātsyāyana disagrees with people who describe self-experiences of pleasure when liberated because pleasure is a positive feeling that may lead to developing passions of

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\(^{124}\) Nyāyadarśanabhāṣya.
attachment or aversion. If the path of liberation involves attaching oneself to the gaining of eternal pleasure, then, according to Vātsyāyana, liberation can never be achieved, since any path to liberation necessarily involves non-attachment.\textsuperscript{125} The cultivation of the feeling of śānti relies on attaining the permanent mood of śama (quietism).\textsuperscript{126}

In order to attain the permanent mood the seeker of knowledge must repeatedly attend satsaṅga. The following quote from Nityananda expresses the connection between the use of satsaṅga as a vehicle for experiencing ānanda:\textsuperscript{127}

Baba Muktānanda would say, ‘God dwells within you as you.’ Words alone cannot adequately describe, explain, or take us to that deep place. We have to allow ourselves to be taken there. We have to become immersed within, where ānanda, bliss, continually arises, rather than remain in the shallow realms of mind and emotion.

\textit{(Mandir 2011f: I)}

\textsuperscript{125} Situating himself against the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikans like Uddyotakara and Praśastapāda who assert that the self loses all its qualities in the highest state of freedom, Bhāsarvajña asserts that liberation is a state not only consisting of pleasure but also of consciousness. This is inline with non-dual Śaivism that conceptualises the self as acquiring the qualities of Śiva (eternal knowledge and pleasure) upon liberation, which allows for the possibility of jīvanmukti (liberation while living) (Framarin 2009: 142-54; Potter 1997: 77-79).

\textsuperscript{126} Gerow and Akluja (1972: 83) explain that Ānandavardhana’s treatment of śānta is different from his student’s Abhinava. Ānanda accepted śānta as the ninth rasa with its sthāvīrhabhāva. Whereas Abhinava reluctantly accepted this position on śānta. Not being able to dispense with śānta he boldly homologised śānta and rasatva.

\textsuperscript{127} Śaṅkara introduced the compound term sat-cit-ānanda (being-consciousness-bliss) to represent the essential link and defining characteristic of and between the supreme being (paramātman) and the individual (jīvātman) as bliss (ānanda). As a verbal noun the ā prefixing nanda implies a locus where it is possible to find bliss. Ānanda is not considered to be just a free-floating unfocused bliss, category or a state of transcendent beatitude. Instead it has an implied object that has the individual on the path of knowledge (who attends satsaṅga) as its locus (see Olivelle 1997: 174, van Buitenen 1979: 327). According to Vatsyayan (1996: 151), Abhinavagupta describes the enlightened, liberated, undifferentiated self-luminous aesthetic experience as rasa or ānanda (Schwartz 2008: 17, Vatsyayan 1996: 153-55). Abhinavagupta describes in Locana 2.4 that the enjoyment of rasa is the bliss that comes from reposing in the true nature of one’s self, which is different from memory or direct experience (Ingalls, Masson & Patwardhan 1990: 222).
Based on TU 2.1, this cultivation does not rely on an idea of deficiency nor does it occur in a substantive or even a literal sense. Instead, it is a figurative attainment that depends on changing one’s perception of Brahman to ‘see’ what one already is (Dubois 2013: 183). Before Brahma-insight (brahma-vid) can be realised the removal of avidyā (ignorance) is required. To achieve this it is the role of the guru or adhyāpaka (teacher) to cultivate two affective qualities of disenchantment and yearning alongside discrimination. I assert that this is achieved through producing śāntarasa and the use of imaginative edifying stories to cultivate the right disposition in a seeker. Through the production of the collective effervescent experience of śāntarasa, the congregants become sensitive and receptive to the guru’s discourse. TUbh 2.1 implies that aesthetic attunement to the power of the teacher’s words strengthens discrimination and nurtures disenchantment. Through the integration of aesthetics and analysis the mind is challenged to imagine, logically comprehend, and experience the nature of Brahman, which is explained as supreme bliss (paramānanda) and is associated with the ‘tasting of brahman or ultimate bliss’ (brahmāsvāda) (Gerow 1977: 267-8, Sathaye 2010: 362). Rasa is understood as the process of perception itself (pratiyamāṇa eva hi rasaḥ) while rasanā (aesthetic experience) is a particular kind of perception and aestheticised emotion concomitant with paramānanda (Masson and Patwardhan 1969: 73).

The links between religion, literature and performance occurred in the medieval period as the new mentality that focused on the conscious production (bhāvanā) of emotions became the model for a new kind of religious experience (Pollock 2001: 198, Sathaye 2010: 362). Abhinavagupta’s conceptions of the relation between aesthetic and religious experience throughout South Asian history is considered paradigmatic and is linked to the broader non-dual Śaiva religious practice found in his Tantrāloka and Tantrasāra. In the Mālinīvijayottaratantra he discussed various types of mystical
submersion (*samāveśa*). It is here that we find mention of the highest level of practice or ‘non-means’ (*anupāya*) referring to the direct and unmediated experience of ultimate reality with little or no effort (Lawrence 2012). Abhinava explained that the highest guru is absolutely perfect (*sāmdiddhika*), illumined by the light of intuitive knowledge (*prātibham jñānam*), able to destroy ignorance and spread bliss by his mere presence (Padoux 2000: 45). Referring to verse 81 from the Guru Gītā, Nityananda commented that without a direct experience (*vijñānam*) ‘we’re just like a puppet in whose mouth you put a hand to make it move and talk’ (Mandir 2011h: 4). It is through the direct experience cultivated in *satsaṅga* that consciousness is raised through uplifting thoughts, as Nityananda asked:

> But what greater meaning can there be other than to always have auspicious thoughts, uplifting thoughts, noble thoughts, and for the mind to always be humble and always offer salutations? (Mandir 2015t)

For Abhinavgupta (Tenth century CE) and Rūpa Gosvāmī (Sixteenth century CE), the term *rasa* is central to understanding religious experience (Wullf 1986: 374). The Acintyabhedābhedāvādin Sampradāya of Śrī Caitanya considered *rasa* as more than just an aesthetic concept. They believed that the modification of emotions is key to spiritual growth. The basis for focusing on aesthetic realisation (*vītarighnā pratīta*) is that it is considered equal to *paramānanda* and, therefore, a mode to realisation of Brahman or, as Nityananda described it, ‘the divinity that dwells within’ (Mukherji 1998: 14; Phogat 2012: 777; Rossella 2010: 12).

The class structure of gurudom (i.e., the institution of gurus) is worth mentioning here. Sharma explains how this ‘institution of the intermediary’ developed a class of gurus during the medieval period that was based on the all-pervading

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128 GG 81 ‘jñānam (knowledge) vijñānā (direct experience) sahitaṁ (together with), labhyate (is obtained) gurūbhakti (devotion to the guru) taḥ (from) gurōḥ (from the guru) parataraṁ (higher) nāsti (is not) dhyeyah (should be meditated upon) asau (‘that’ i.e. the guru) gurumārgibhiḥ (by those on the path of guru’s path).
authority of the guru that acted as an intermediary essentially replacing god. This is thought to have been based on the influence of Tantrism upon all sects, which believed that it was impossible to become a siddha and attain liberation without the blessings of a guru, whose function was to instruct the disciple in spiritual knowledge while the priests assisted the guru in the performance of religious ceremonies (Sharma 2003: 274). This relationship between guru and priests is precisely what occurs in the Shanti Mandir ashram today, temporally linking the earlier and contemporary aesthetic traditions.

The pedagogical system later developed into a devotional aestheticism focusing on the cultivation of emotion. This evolved during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the monastic orders of north India began to focus more on aesthetic, devotional, and literary accomplishments compared to the worldly martial pursuits of the akhādās (places of training). Within the Vaiṣṇava context of devotional aestheticism that focuses on worshipping Rāma and Kṛṣṇā, a greater emphasis was laid upon rasika-oriented bhakti that emphasises heightened emotions and the careful perception of sensory experience (Pinch 1996). These structures, identities, practices and aims are central to the pedagogy of Shanti Mandir and the role of satsaṅga.

The discussion now turns to a closer examination of the development of šāntarasa and satsaṅga by locating the historical context of the present day performance of satsaṅga. It also expands the discussion of exchanges of capital from chapters two and four to locate the historical precedence that Shanti Mandir and other similar divine enterprises rely upon to remain financially viable and generate legitimacy. With this, we can appreciate the historical context of the commodification of spirituality, which has for centuries included the cultivation of a particular aesthetic (rasa) that aims to produce the feelings of quietude or peace (śānti) and devotion (bhakti).
As a literary artefact, śánta was finally accepted by the literati in the ninth century after three centuries of debate, however, it is uncertain who first introduced the concept (Carrette and King 2005, Schwartz 2008: 5). The śāntarasa ‘taste’ or aesthetic was probably developed by ‘some Buddhist writers on aesthetics who first maintained, following their great poet Aśvaghōsa, that the calmed was a distinct rasa’ (Warder 1972: 40). However, other scholars suggest that the progenitors of an aesthetic concept that later evolved into the doctrine of Śāntarasavāda was first floated by Udbatṭa and later commercialised by the Theragatha Buddhists as a strategy to accumulate capital (Deshpande 2009, McCrea 2009: 46, Rossella 2010: 12, Singh 2006b, Warder 1972). We can say at least that as a literary or performative artefact śāntarasa seems to have evolved out of the confluence of interactions between Buddhist and Śaivite scholars in Kashmir. These scholars were interested in aesthetics and literature as a means to liberation, and that it was probably the Buddhists who first made conscious use of linguistic, rhetorical and performative technologies to prompt the audience with implicit messages fundamentally based on emotions.

Between the sixth and tenth centuries CE,129 the concept of śānta developed and was debated amongst the literati. This idea was officially ratified in the work of Abhinavagupta who was the first scholar to successfully argue for the inclusion of śānta-rasa as the new, ninth, and principal rasa in the original list of eight (Muller-Ortega 1989, Sharma 2007).130

It is here that I locate the historical source of Shanti Mandir’s tradition that relies on the performative and literary artefact of śāntarasa. While I am drawing upon the literary tradition to understand the historical context and contemporary performative and aesthetic elements in satsaṅga in general, I should state that the

129 Raghavan (1940) mentions an early citation of navarasa in the Sthānāṅgasūtra.
130 The original eight are śṛṅgāra (love), hāṣya (laughter), raudram (fury), kāruṇya (compassion), bībhatsa (disgust), bhayānaka (terror), vīra (heriosm), and adbhuta (wonder).
performativity within Shanti Mandir’s *satsaṅga* does not directly rely upon this literary tradition alone. Instead, I argue that the current style of the *satsaṅga* event is modeled directly from the format learnt from Muktananda, and that Nityananda was socialised into this particular socio-cultural milieu in which the experience of ‘peace’ and ‘love’ are central. While there are many overlaps between the Shaiva traditions, Maharashtrian Sant tradition and *rasa* theory, the syncretic nature of Shanti Mandir’s religious practice, which is Siddha Yoga’s own religious practice, crystallised through Muktananda’s interpretation of the various traditions he was in contact with. Regardless, the concepts of *śānta* and *rasa* play a central role in the development of Shanti Mandir’s identity and ought to be discussed in more detail.

The Buddhist monks employed this calmed mood for two purposes. The first was to produce the ‘ineffable experience of quietude and, on the other hand, to attract future proselytes by making them taste (by means of both the allusion and the charm of poetry) the highest goal of supreme peace’ (Rossella 2010: 12). These two goals are what Shanti Mandir strives to achieve through *satsaṅga*, albeit, it is presented in a disinterested way that serves to promote the ‘sanctity’ and ‘divine’ aspect of this endeavour. This is achieved through making the rarified knowledge more appealing, comprehensible and palpable through a corporeal experience that focuses on a direct experience of ‘peace’, which we understand is a synonym with supreme bliss and ultimately the monist principle of Brahman.

By the sixteenth century CE Rūpa Gosvāmin had made the link between aesthetic and religious experiences explicit. Shanti Mandir employs both *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* (worship with and without form) methods to approach and experience divinity. The *saguṇa* approach, which surely uses *śāntarasa*, reached its peak with the triumph of the erotic mysticism of Rūpa Gosvāmin in the BhRAS, where all the *rasas* become nuances of the only ‘taste’ considered worthy of consuming; that being the devotional sentiment of *bhakti-rasa* (Ṭhakura 2006). Viśvanātha Cakravartin’s
commentary on BhRAS frames bhakti-rasa under the category of ‘ritualistic devotion’ (vaidhīḥ bhaktīḥ), elaborating on the psychological implications that India’s literary critics had developed by focusing on the constituent parts and various stages a seeker of Kṛṣṇa goes through during their ‘passionate devotion’ (rāgānugā bhaktīḥ) (Klostermaier 1974).

From this we are able to appreciate the development of the aesthetic tradition and its centrality in producing an affective emotional state during religious worship that promotes the feelings of quietude and devotion, and how this tradition continues through to the current modality used by divine enterprises today.

The discussion now moves towards elaborating upon Shanti Mandir’s appropriation of śāntarasa as an identity marker. This is achieved through an analysis of its online marketing strategy that uses the aesthetic concept of śāntarasa to suggest authenticity and legitimacy as a global yogic service provider.

5.4 — Suggesting Śāntarasa

The idea of exploring śāntarasa as a way to build a possible analytical framework is two fold. As the ‘Temple of Peace’ Shanti Mandir promotes the cultivation of a peaceful disposition as the ‘remedy for distress and sorrow’ and living a life of ‘blissful abundance’. The official yoga wing of the Shanti Mandir is called Shanti Darshanam, which means ‘to see or know peace’. Shantarasa Traditional Yoga is the company that is outsourced to facilitate Shanti Darshanam’s yoga teacher training courses in their ashrams in India and America. In order to avoid confusion Shantarasa Traditional Yoga will be referred to as STY. STY teaches private classes to corporate level workshops. It positions itself as a global provider facilitating yoga and philosophy courses, as well as yoga teacher training across three continents including North America, India and Australia through its ‘Global Yoga Teacher Training’ (Yoga
2015a). It uses the symbolic capital of its association with Shanti Mandir as a way to bolster its own authentic and legitimate image as a service provider. It focuses on the production of a peaceful disposition stating that their courses are ‘an engrossing area of study that reveals the deeper life maps required for expanding conscious living’ (Pezet and Pezet 2015f).

The following quote demonstrates the intricate exchange of capital that occur between STY, Shanti Mandir and the aspiring yogins who pay to attend their courses, while also explaining how the courses they facilitate on behalf of Shanti Mandir are done in a volunteer capacity.

Shanti Darshanam is a school of complete yoga studies including Yoga Teacher Training Courses that are internationally recognised and accredited. These trainings help to support the funding of the above charitable works, and it is through the donation of time and instruction of the Shanti Darshanam Teacher Training Courses that Shantarasa Yoga practices Karma Yoga. (Pezet and Pezet 2015e)

STY markets itself to the potential spiritual-yoga tourist to India suggesting that what awaits them within the Shanti Mandir ashram is a ‘rare and authentic living Vedic yoga experience’.

People come together here from all over the world and find what is rare anywhere else. This beautiful ashram is a sanctuary where the traditions that infuse ‘Yoga’ with its essence are alive. Amidst hundreds of mango trees and in the shared environment of a Vedic school the study of yoga is a living experience. (Pezet and Pezet 2015e)

This discourse rests at the centre of the transglobal yoga marketplace as various schools try to position themselves within the seemingly endless yogic sub-cultures as an ‘authentic’ representation of yoga. However, yoga signifies a multitude of things to various groups and individuals and is often used in concert with the floating signifier ‘Vedic’ as a strategy to gain legitimacy (cf. Alter 2004, 2006, Altglas 2007, Esala 2006, Healy 2010, Jain 2014, Larios 2014, Madsen 2013, Sarbacker 2008, 2011, Singleton 2010, Singleton and Goldberg 2014, Smith 2007, Strauss 2005, Wilson
The concept or at least conflation towards a ‘Vedic yoga’ is problematic as the practice of yoga promoted by STY and Shanti Mandir is not in any way similar to what yoga signified in the Vedic period. Nonetheless, this idea finds its way into publications that claim a 5,000 year old unbroken tradition (Feuerstein 2003, Frawley 2014).

The problem and irony is that the reliance on a Vedic-yoga identity and history, which I believe can be argued is a result of the market forces shaping the transglobal yoga industry and a resurgent nationalism to push back its antiquity to deeper temporal strata, is the unwitting alignment with the more extreme elements in modern India, the Hindu nationalists (Bjønnes 2010). This shows at least the politics of nonomenclature (Deshpande 2015b), and is evidenced by the VHP leader Praveen Togadia asserting that yoga was never secular, is more ‘Vedic and sanatan’, and that yoga is incomplete without chanting ‘om’ and necessarily includes sūrya namaskāra (sun salutations) (DNA 2015b).

However, STY differentiates itself from other yoga businesses stating that ‘while yoga classes abound everywhere, it is rare to find a facility that is a dedicated yoga school that offers a broad range of yoga-intrinsic services’ (Pezet and Pezet 2015b). The following is a quote from a past graduate of the teacher training course who explains that:

halfway through this course, I knew I needed to go to India, there was no question, it simply had to happen. But where to go in India? There are so many ashrams, and short teacher training courses, it was quite overwhelming. Somehow I was guided to travel to Shanti Mandir. I think it was actually wonderful that I didn’t quite grasp how deep I would go in my time there, as it meant there were no expectations, and I could soak it all up! (Yoga 2015b).

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131 The VHP (Viśva Hindu Pariṣad) is the World Hindu Council. It is the religious arm of the Saṅgh Parivār, while the BJP is the political wing and the RSS is the paramilitary group.
The founders of STY explain that their vision and aim is to ‘infuse all of the yoga school’s services with a respect and appreciation of the inherent essence of peace or “shantarasa” within everyone, and that is one of the hallmarks of the authentic yoga experience’ (Pezet and Pezet 2015b). The philosophy of the institute is an extension of their alliance with Shanti Mandir, which asserts a symbolic and philosophical influence on STY.

Prior to being known as STY it was previously known as the Shantarasa Yoga Institute and before that it was called the Shantarasa Yoga School. This shows how its own identity has evolved and is continuously negotiated within the transglobal yoga industry. The founders have had a long engagement with yoga. This started with their first teacher and guru, Baba Muktananda, and has continued through an association with Nityananda and Shanti Mandir. After demonstrating its viability and success STY has become the official facilitator of Shanti Mandir’s brand of yoga mentioned above as Shanti Darshanam. Explicitly stated on their website, the fundamental aspect and goal of the STY’s yoga practice is the experience of deep peace, which they suggest is more readily available within their system compared to other yoga schools that restrict themselves to a postural emphasis. This essentialised marketing strategy is used to suggest that STY represents a more authentic yogic experience compared to other schools:

Shantarasa means the ‘quintessential peace’ residing equally in everyone at all times, and yoga demonstrates how to fully access this potential. Skilful yoga practice enables us to uplift ourselves in every moment and every situation. ‘Shantarasa’ is a word from the Sanskrit language describing the experience of foundational or deep peace always contained within yet rarely accessed, that is the goal of yoga practice. While yoga is often associated with specific systems of movement to enhance physical and mental well-being, the true measure of its benefits are realized through cultivation of those bodily, mental and spiritual capacities that are innately present but under developed. (Pezet and Pezet 2015b)
The STY view of their pedagogy is that it is of a different (read ‘higher’) order to other yoga schools. What follows is another quote from a past graduate:

After many years of smashing my body in the pursuit of ‘fitness’ I have now discovered the tool my body has been craving for — Hatha Yoga. This non-forceful, ancient practise [sic] leaves my body feeling long and strong and I now understand the difference between ‘fitness’ and ‘well-ness’. [Emphasis added] (Yoga 2015b)

Notice that Hatha Yoga is defined as ‘non-forceful’. This is the complete opposite of the terms original meaning. Mallison (2012) explains ‘the word hatha (lit. force) denotes a system of physical techniques supplementary to yoga more broadly conceived; Haṭha Yoga is yoga that uses the techniques of haṭha’. In other words haṭha yoga is a system that uses a particular type of force directly on the physical body to achieve specific results.

In the description below is a glimpse of what I argue constitutes the internal structure of Shanti Mandir’s legitimate yogic disposition. This relies on the ‘cultivation of an open heart and clear un-agitated mind’.

Shantarasa is a term derived from the Sanskrit language that describes the foundational ‘rasa’ or relishment. Shantarasa awakens a state of ecstatic recognition and non-dual awareness that conveys the ultimate contentment. It is the very source, the centre point, and the upsurge of intense delight that expresses itself through the various sense experiences we pursue. **Shantarasa is most directly accessed not by chasing sensory stimuli,**¹³² which is a hit and miss approach that is usually frustratingly unreliable, but by the cultivation of an open heart and clear un-agitated mind. The practice of yoga, inclusive of meditation, is the most direct, successful and elegant means by which the foundational blissful awareness of being is revealed and stabilized. [Emphasis added] (Pezet and Pezet 2015b)

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¹³² It needs to be clarified, however, through aesthetic devotionalism, ‘sensory stimulation’ is the primary method of cultivating rasas, particularly Śānta and bhakti.
From the above quotes it is obvious that the aim of Shanti Mandir’s yoga praxis is the cultivation and embodiment of śāntarasa, which is described as the development of an open heart and clear un-agitated mind (sahṛdaya and sākṣīn), and that this experience of peace is central to the authentic and legitimate yogic disposition (śāntamūrti). I argue that this disposition is also the main salvific good and promise marketed by both organisations in an attempt to create distinction between themselves from the other schools within the yogic episteme. At the same time this salvific promise of peace is offered as an antidote to epistemological doubt and ontological anxiety. The embodiment and subsequent expression of this serene and ‘saintly’ disposition is fundamental to the individual gaining the respect of his or her peers within this epistemic community as an authentic and legitimate knower of this tradition. STY relies upon its orbit around the symbolically superior Shanti Mandir. This is evidenced by the founders of the STY performing ārati of Nityananda (Yoga 2010).

It is through the cultivation of śāntarasa in satsaṅga and the practice of modern postural and soteriological yoga that leads individuals toward devotion of the charismatic authority figure and the subsequent exchanges of capital that underpin the existence of this organisation. The guru and his organisation are marketed as signifying a particular path to peace. I argue that the guru uses the affective qualities of śāntarasa to build trust, suspend doubt and cultivate what he considers a direct experience of divinity as being essential for cultivating devotion towards the guru and the tradition (Mandir 2011h: 4). The cultivation of both these sentiments (śānta and bhakti) by Shanti Mandir is crucial to:

a) the individual process and soteriological goals of learning to embody the legitimate disposition as a way to relieve anxiety, experience bliss and gain legitimacy within the community; and
b) for the organisation to gain prestige as an authentic producer of ‘peace’ establishing itself as distinct from its competitors in the transglobal yoga industry so that it can accumulate legitimacy, capital and new recruits.

Now the discussion moves towards demonstrating the location of rasa within satsaṅga. Having defined satsaṅga and demonstrated the historical and philosophical links between the concepts of rasa, ānanda, śānti and Brahman, and the commercialisation of these concepts to accumulate capital, this section assists in demonstrating how satsaṅga is the primary location and formal domain where rasa is cultivated.

The following advertisement was distributed via Shanti Mandir’s email subscription list. It demonstrates Shanti Mandir’s conscious use of satsaṅga as a marketing strategy and an arena to evoke and enjoy rasa. The Rasa Utsav (Festival of Rasa) was an invitation to celebrate the ‘nectarean essence of joy’ through a meditation intensive that included talks, discussions, centering techniques, quiet contemplation, and singing (Mandir 2014h).

From Upāṇiṣadic times the use of stories praising the acquisition of knowledge has been employed to encourage students to seek it (Dubois 2013: 110, 187, Hirst 2005: 81). The same occurs today in the Shanti Mandir ashram within the institutionalised domain of satsaṅga. As a professional ‘god man’, Nityananda uses satsaṅga to define the necessary qualifications and dispositions required for legitimate participation within his community. If individuals want to experience peace-bliss, as suggested by Shanti Mandir, then they must be socialised into the various normativised and gendered roles it suggests are necessary if individuals want to be

133 TUbh 3.1.1; BUbh 2.1.
accepted (Stark and Finke 2000: 164); as finding a community that is accepting is fundamental to relieving one’s anxiety and doubt.

Central to Shanti Mandir’s corpus of devotional texts is the Bhagavad Gītā. The entire text is recited in full every Sunday morning in satsaṅga. This recitation takes approximately three hours to complete; whereas the entire satsaṅga lasts for several hours from early morning until mid afternoon with only a short pause for breakfast. Verse 6.15 describes the disposition of a yogin as śānta (Olivelle 1997: 166).134

How does Shanti Mandir purify hearts and make minds more receptive? This question is central to the thesis as I believe it is fundamental to the individual’s epistemological access and, therefore, how they gain legitimacy. Combined with a totality of positive attitudes (āstikya-buddhi), as Śaṅkara calls it, and committing to the practices that may provide a ‘vision of god’ (brahma-sākṣātkāra), I believe the answer is found with Shanti Mandir’s assertion that it is through regular attendance at satsaṅga, combined with certain fundamental practices of Advaita Vedānta, which are 1) hearing the teachings (Īśvaraṇa); 2) thinking about the teachings (manana); and 3) meditating upon the teachings (dhīyaṇa, nididhyāsana) that this the goal of clarifying the mind and purifying the heart is achieved.135

It is important to keep in mind that various debates and differences of opinion exist even within the Advaita Vedāntic traditions. It was/is not a fixed or static monolith as it is often represented. Various debates within the Vedāntic schools, particularly in the late colonial period, have influenced the position Vedānta has today in the construction of a yogic identity (Deshpande 2015a). There are two differing

134 BG 6.15 Yuñjann evam sadāṁnām yogī niyata-mānasāḥ. Śāntim nirvāṇa-paramām mat-saṁsthām adhigacchati.
135 BSSBh 3.4.26 catasraḥ pratipattayo brahmani. prathamā tāvad upaniṣad-vākya-śravaṇa-ātrād bhavati yāṁ kila ācakṣate śravaṇam iti. Dvitīyā māṁsā-sahitā tasmād eva upaniṣad-vākyād yāṁ ācakṣate mananam iti. trītyā citta-saṁtati-maẏi, yāṁ ācakṣate nididhyāsanaṁ iti. caturthi sākṣātkāraṁ vṛttī-rūpā, nāntaryayāṁ hi tasyaḥ kaivalyam iti.
opinions on how the individual can realise Brahman. The major difference between
two followers of the Vivaraṇa school of Śaṅkara’s Vedānta, which Shanti Mandir
follows, is whether direct realisation of Brahman is caused by a particular operation of
mind following the above three steps; or, realisation is caused by the hearing of
Upaniṣadic sentences (the mahāvākyas – great sayings) perfected by spiritual
cultivation and meditation (Acharya 2008: 423). Shanti Mandir seems to have adopted
a complementary approach that favours both options equally.

The KUp is the source of the famous invocatory ‘peace mantra’\(^1\) that Shanti
Mandir recites everyday. Shanti Mandir also draws upon the KUp for advice as it
suggests the process of transitioning to a peaceful state requires that ‘prajñāḥ vāc
yacchet manasi; tat yacchet jñāna; jñānam niyacchet ātmani mahati; tat yacchet śānta
ātmani’.\(^2\) This means ‘the learned one ought to let the speech move into the mind, the
mind ought to move into the intellect, the intellect ought to move into the great soul,
the great soul ought to move into the peaceful soul’.

Discussed in more detail in chapter six I base the internal structure of this
legitimate disposition on the idea of cultivating receptivity and epistemological access
in the audience. Based on the principle of sahrdayatva (aesthetic capacity), I assert
that, similar to changing the prescription of one’s glasses, an increase in receptivity or
aesthetic capacity is required before the individual can change their epistemological
setting (Goodwin 1998:39, Hudson 2013, McCrea 2009). As Abhnivagupta explains, it
is only the sahrdaya that can experience rasa (Ingalls, Masson et al. 1990: 73).
However, before this happens the individual must first become sensitive to the guru’s
message. In order for that to happen the heart needs to become more sensitive to the

\(^1\) oṁ saha nāva vatu, saha nau bhunaktu saha vīryaṁ karavāhahai tejasvināvadhitamastu mā
vidvīva vahai oṁ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ.

\(^2\) KUp 1.3.13 Yatchedvāṁmanasī prajñāustadyacchējījāna ātmani jñānamātmani mahati
niyacchettadyacchēchānta ātmani.
aesthetic-emotive propensities of satsaṅga. This is achieved through attending satsaṅga where the affective power of collective recitation, enjoyment of music and other aesthetic qualities enable the individual to cultivate the ontological and epistemological requirements.

Tubb (1985: 154) discussed the subtle problem raised by Gerow and Aklujkar (1972) regarding the peculiar nature of śāntarasa. Theoretically, it is assumed that in order to experience the aesthetic mood of śānta the individual must become free of all attachments to worldly things. Interestingly, however, this includes fetishised cult worship of a guru, which is a central part of Shanti Mandir’s religious practice.

The experience of śānta is temporary and requires repeated attendance at satsaṅga to achieve lasting embodiment of the authentic and legitimate disposition. The theoretical trap for divine enterprises and charismatic individuals is that by demonstrating how to experience śānta the source of proselytes needs to be renewed as some individuals will no longer need to rely upon the guru as the only source. Instead, they might just do as Nityananda urges, which is to find the source of bliss he suggests is already within them.

Drawing upon Bourdieu this experience of ‘divinity’ or ‘truth’ relies on the obfuscation of the categories of distinction through the imposition of an invisible template that works in concert with the durable disposition specific to the field that produces consent (Burawoy 2008: 25-26). The audience perceive this state or experience of śāntarasa as unobtainable without the grace of the guru, which is fundamental to retaining individuals who are required to appreciate the guru as the ultimate source of śānta and, in fact, every validating experience in their lives. Because of the transitory nature of the experience, individuals come to understand that repeated attendance is required, as the experience of śānta is intensified through the collective effervescent nature of communal religious practice, which the guru is considered to the source of.
This section demonstrated the historical development of *satsaṅga* and its incorporation of šāntarasa as an aesthetic strategy, which has continued into the present day operationalised by organisations like Shanti Mandir and STY to support their proselytising aims and accumulation of capital. More importantly, however, is how the cultivation and transference of these particular emotions and how they act as the glue that holds this community together. Through the social exchange that occurs around the religious practice a collective identity is forged through the concept of embodying quietude to become a šāntamūrti. Aspects of this are explained below in the rest of chapter five as well as in chapters six and seven. However, it is through the cultivation of positive emotions that many devotees report of the temporary reduction in their uncertainty (in the company of the guru, or perhaps uncertainty is heightened in the presence of the guru) and social order is maintained due to the creation of affective bonds. Building upon Emerson (1972), Lawler, Thye *et al.* (2000) explain how the productive exchange is oriented towards group outcomes. Individuals invest in group cohesion for the indivisible profit of a shared reward, which in this case is the sense of quietude. Ravi, a retired manager from Delhi explained how, ‘Sitting with Gurudev in the temple allows us to see bigger picture stuff. We know there is a sense of belonging and community. That we are brothers and sisters and that Gurudev is our father. We feel this love and positivity in his presence. That is why we come here, to get a sense of peace. Out there beyond the ashram it is mad. Everyone is mad. That is why I come and give, so that I may get some sense of peace in my life’.

The following section elaborates how satsaṅga is located, or at least can be conceptualised as operating within the performative literary tradition.

**5.5 — Locating Satsaṅga within the Literary Tradition**
As satsāṅga and kāvyā share the aim which is to ‘evoke a rasa, literally “juice”, “taste”, i.e. the universal, impersonal and non-empirical aesthetic experience’ (Rossella 2004: 16), this section demonstrates how and why satsāṅga can and ought to be considered as a literary artefact which is part of the literary performative tradition. While Shanti Mandir may not consciously draw from the literary performative tradition in the production of satsāṅga the overlaps are obvious and worth exploring. This is because the ultimate goal of both kāvyā and satsāṅga is to evoke, perhaps only glimpses of nirvāṇa (liberation), by providing an alaukika (supernatural) experience (Rossella 2010: 9). Indian art is ‘not religious in the ordinary sense, nor is there a theology of aesthetics, but the two fields interpenetrate because they share the basic world-view in general and the specific goal of mokṣa (liberation) in particular’ (Vatsyayan 1996: 160). In a footnote Rossella (2010: 9) cites Boccali, who provides the following opinion on the purpose of literature, which:

is not to convey a religious message, as the texts (āgamas or tantras) of the different religions […] do; nor to tell the ancient myths (that is, in the Indian view, the history), as the traditional epic poems (itihāsas) do; nor to provide the theoretical and practical tools of a discipline, as the numberless treatises (śāstras) […] do; but to evoke in the audience […] the aesthetic experience’. (Boccali 2000: 387)

I base my argument on how the aesthetic dimension of approaching or gaining epistemological access to divinity ought not to be overlooked when trying to understand the pedagogical system involved in revealing Brahman to seekers of knowledge (Dubois 2013: 100). How the penny comes to drop for the audience is a result of logic combined with a distinctively artful imaginative use of language that nurtures disenchantment and yearning (Hirst 2005: 77, 160). It is due to the charming performative aspects based on principles of literature that allows the audience to become receptive to the guru’s religiously ecumenical or universal spiritual message. As the following example shows, Nityananda often refers to the ‘great poet-saints’, drawing inspiration directly from this tradition himself.
Many of the great poet-saints, such as Rumi and Kabīr, shared their experience of love. We try to read and understand their poetry from a logical perspective, because that’s how we relate to things in general. See if you can allow yourself for a moment to get out of your logical mind and go to the place where there is simply the awareness of Consciousness, and read from that place. I bet every poem you read will be difficult to finish in one sitting. You’ll read a line or two lines, and then you will find yourself in a place where you can do nothing but feel what Rumi is sharing. The poet is allowing you to have darśan [sic] through his words. (Mandir 2014i: 4)

Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta include the linguistic function (śabdavyāpāra) of suggestiveness (vyanjanā). They believe that aesthetic delight can only be suggested and that it does not rely on anumāna (logical processes) (Masson & Patwardhan 1969: 7). The imaginative use of language and the beauty of the poetic act of expression affords apprehension of the meaning, aesthetic appreciation and experience that points to a mode of being in the world while remaining grounded in transcendence (Rossella 2009: 33, Tubb 1985: 141-2, Visuvalingam 2006).

Inspired by Pollock I seek to understand how the literary artefact of rasa and the performativity employed in satsaṅga affects and encourages embodiment of the legitimate disposition (Pollock 2001: 198). I focus my analysis around questions of reception and how the audience actually experiences this aestheticised emotion of śānta as a way of learning to emulate the guru’s disposition and thus gain legitimacy. I apply the definition that a text is ‘either spoken or written discourse, for example the words used in a conversation (or their written transcription) constitute a text’ (Fairclough 1995: 4). Pollock suggests that a text has three features that can be projected in this process of a literary implication (2001: 199):

1. A Figure of sense (arthālankāra),
2. An aesthetic emotional state (rasa),
Using this list I assert that the figure of sense in *satsaṅga* is an overall religious setting that aims to produce rasas that aid in the eventual embodiment of a blissful disposition. The aesthetic-emotional state produced within Shanti Mandir *satsaṅgas* is a combination of two rasas — the calmed and the devotional (*śāntarasa* and *bhaktirasa*).

The bare narrative matter has two components. The first of the narratives is established in the Sanskrit texts that are chanted collectively by the congregation, or specifically, the Vedic texts by the Scholars, while the Patrons and Renunciants sit quietly as neither group is comprised of ritual or linguistic specialists. The texts accessible to everyone include but are not limited to the Guru *Gītā*, Śiva *Mahimna Stotram*, Śiva *Manas Pūja*, Viṣṇu *Sāhasranāma Stotram*, Rudrāṣṭhadhyāyī, Bhagavad *Gītā*, Devi *Mahātmyām*, Lalita *Sāhasranāma*. The second is the morally edifying discourse of the guru or anyone else who is given the opportunity to speak on some spiritual matter to the audience (Singh 2006b). From the Shanti Mandir website we can understand that it is Nityananda’s:

ability to speak English and his knowledge of the Western culture, [that] allows audiences to grasp the traditional Vedic teachings with ease. While carrying the traditional teachings, he makes spirituality a practical part of modern daily reality, guided by the prayer ‘May all beings be content’ (*Mandir* 2015d).

It is worth highlighting the conscious use by Shanti Mandir of the floating signifier ‘Vedic’ as, more often than not; it is the Śaiva-Tāntric philosophy and syncretic world view of the Siddha tradition that is emphasised. Due to Nityananda’s discourse that involves a practical application of traditional teachings to contemporary concerns, combined with his focus and poetical reinterpretation of ancient Vedic wisdom; according to Nanda’s typology, this makes Nityananda a Type 2 guru (Copeman and Ikegame 2012a, b, Nanda 2009). Type 1 gurus are the hyper-gurus such as the ‘hugging saint’ Amma and Sathya Sai Baba who, together, have millions of devotees
and billions of dollars as a result of their alleged abilities to perform miracles (Chamberlain 2011, Lucia 2014 a,b,c, Tredwell 2013). Type 3 gurus, such as Baba Ramdev, focus on and are primarily known for teaching yoga and meditation. Nanda asserted these typologies can and do overlap. With this in mind Nityananda’s traits belong to both Type 2 and 3 categories as part of Nityananda’s focus is also on teaching yoga and meditation. Quite often, his devotees criticise the hyper gurus for their ostentatious performances and reliance on alleged ‘miracles’. They cite Nityananda’s aversion to magic (jādū) as proof of his authenticity and humility.

In attempting to locate satsaṅga within a literary tradition I rely on Nepali’s reminder regarding the definition given in Viśvanāthakavirāja’s Sāhityadarpana (SD) for a clarification of the two main types of kāvya (2000: 1). Kāvya is distinguished by two sub-genres, an audible (śravyakāvya) and a visual (drśyakāvya). Therefore, a more precise location of satsaṅga is within the audible kāvya genre. Within śravyakāvya there is a further level known as camphūkāvya. Campūkāvya is a mischief (mixed) type that incorporates the other two styles from within the subgenre of audible poetry, namely prose (gadya) and poetry (padya). The early 20th century commentator of the SD, Haridāsa Siddhāntavāgīśa explains how the use of this type of kāvya is said to gladden the connoisseurs of poetry by way of arousing amazement in them by breaking the monotony that prose and poetry alone are liable to create (Nepali 2000: 1-7).

In developing my argument I assert that it is due to the special operation (vyāpāra) through which the words of the guru’s discourse and the utterance of Sanskrit texts that the congregants’ attention is held. We can further classify satsaṅga

138 SD 6.1 drśyaśravyatvabhedena punah kāvyaṁ dvidhānatam.
139 SD 6.299 gadyapadyamayaṁ kāvyaṁ campūrityabhidhīyate.
140 campū camat-kṛtya punāti sahrdayāṁ vismitikṛtya prasādayati iti campuḥ.
according to Udbhaṭṭa’s typology of kāvya as the Rasavat type. Rasavat literature is used to evoke a specific sentiment. In this case, I argue that the primary sentiment is śāntarasa and the secondary sentiment is bhakti (Bhaduri 1988, Deshpande 2009: 140).

From Ānandavardhana onwards rasavat equates with rasābhāsa. The element responsible for rasābhāsa is impropriety (anaucitya). Rasābhāsa refers to an experience that is close to, but not quite, a complete experience of rasa. It implies that various factors are present that prevent the total development of the emotional experience. This impropriety could be on behalf of the audience member or the location and does not imply a failure on behalf of the performer [cf. Aklujkar (1977: 274-75)].

This impropriety has a semantic consonance with the concept of epistemological access. The local environment in which individuals are embedded is said to directly influence cognitive processes and the success of suggestions (Gallagher 2008). Gallagher gives the example of an operating theatre that is already set up prior to surgery. This helps the surgeon and his or her team to prepare cognitively for the task at hand due to already being immersed in the pragmatic meaning of the constellation of objects. In the same way, the aesthetic situation within satsaṅga relies on similar cognitive suggestions to clarify the unmediated arena for cognition and experience of Brahman.

In an effort to generate intersubjectivity, satsaṅga relies on a fundamental poetic principle which is employed to make the audience more receptive to the suggestions of the guru (Sathaye 2010: 362). Discussed by Abhinavagupta in

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141 Rasavat literally means ‘like the rasa’ or ‘similar to the rasa’, however, it can also mean ‘graceful’, ‘witty’, or ‘charming’. A synonym is rasābhāsa ‘nearly or approximately rasa’.

142 KAlsam UKss 4.3 rasavaddarśitaspaśṭaśṛṅgādirasādayam svasābdaśṭhāyīṣaṃcārivibhābhīshīnāyāspadam.

143 The psychological relationship between individuals.
Dhvanyāloka 1.7, Kāvyārthatattvajña is — the aim (artha) of kāvyā is to know the true nature (tattvājña) of Brahman. Building upon this idea of suggestion Copeman and Ikegame argue that the guru ‘is a social form of peculiar suggestibility’ and a vector between sacred and profane domains where a liminal space is constructed by aesthetic and verbal implications (Carsten 2011: 2, Copeman and Ikegame 2012b: 289-291).

Satsaṅga generally involves spending time with the guru learning directly by observing his behaviour and listening to his lectures. This is interspersed with collective singing of Sanskrit texts, musical (and sometimes also dance) performances, meditation, and rituals involving fire ceremonies. When the guru is on his world tours visiting devotees in various cities, it is the mobile and makeshift satsaṅga arena set up in rented church halls, community centres, yoga schools and devotees’ living rooms that provide the seekers of knowledge an opportunity for interacting with their spiritual guide.

Pollock (2001) asserted that Anandavardhana’s application of suggestion (vyañjanā) is the cornerstone of his aesthetic theory. This concept of dhvani focuses on the creative use of language and its role in generating meaning within an epistemic community that shares, and learns through repeated attendance, how to understand the linguistic and cultural nuances particular to its field. This occurs through generating an epistemic relation to knowledge (Mohanty 2000: 133). This concept of dhvani allows the meaning of texts (i.e., the guru’s discourse and the narratives within the recited

144 Footage of satsaṅga is available in A Day in our Ashram — the temple is visible in the first and last ten to fifteen minutes. From the 42nd to 50th minutes footage of two separate fire ceremonies are also available.

145 The theory of aesthetic suggestion or implication is also known as vyañjanā.
texts) to reside in the emotional content (rasa) that is communicated by suggestion; as rasa (aesthetic appreciation) manifests through suggestive manipulation (vyanjanā).146

Implying an early development in the field of audience reception, Ānandavardhana’s principal successors Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka and Abhinavagupta took the focus of this theory from a textual locus towards the audience’s response (Pollock 2003: 44). The distinctive integration of aesthetics and analysis is employed for the overall purpose of reinforcing affective qualities of disenchantment and yearning so that discrimination develops and the sources of suffering can be identified, which leads to the experience of śānti and also legitimacy as a knower within this epistemic community.

The affective and cognitive impacts available in satsaṅga highlight the nature of the blindness (acaksuṣṭva) and ignorance (avidyā) that Vedānta asserts leads to misperceiving Brahman and experiencing pain and suffering; and, therefore, not experiencing ‘peace’. This construction of a collective identity through shared practices, experiences, epistemological training and moral edification is achieved through building an affective sense of trust, suspending disbelief and removing doubt.

The possibilities of an alternate ideal society can be realised through the subjunctive mood147 and suggestions of the guru’s message that resides in the implied meaning made explicit through his discourse and behaviour (Grenoble, Rice et al. 2009, Rossella 2004: 16).

The aim of the guru’s ritualised performance as a master of ceremonies is to point, guide, direct, and suggest symbolically how his audience can become

\[\text{ Footnotes }\]

146 Chapters six and seven expand the analysis of what exactly the guru is suggesting through his discourse.

147 A verb is in the subjunctive mood when it expresses doubt, a wish, regret, request, demand, or proposal.
established (siddha) in a potentially permanent state that is free of the overpowering attachment to suffering.

As mentioned above, this is the priority of Advaita Vedânta philosophy (Mandir 2013h). The aesthetic dimension demonstrates that imagination also plays a key role in cultivating disenchantment with limited forms of enjoyment (Dubois 2013: 113). By providing a description of how to experience the world as the guru does, the individual learns how to embody his disposition, which is both the ultimate symbolic reward in terms of accumulating social capital within the community and the soteriological goal/reward of the seeker. To be like the guru is to become the guru, and with this change in disposition, it is suggested by Nityananda that they will see a world of abundance and be at peace in the world and within themselves. As this suggestion from Nityananda explains:

Go within yourself. Become established there. And when you become established within, view this world from there. Then whatever experiences you encounter, this very world will become filled with joy. This very world will become filled with peace. Because your outlook will have changed. Your perception will be different.

(Mandir 2012a: 3)

The ambiguity often present in the discourses provides for a deeper questioning of what is really being alluded to (Narayan 1989).\(^{148}\) It is the use of ambiguity as a literary device that allows suggestion and contemplation to occur. Nityananda is trying through suggestions to cultivate aesthetic moods in order to persuade his audience to adopt his yogically inspired peaceful disposition (i.e, the Knower Code ER-, SR+) so that they can share in his lifestyle that focuses on perceiving and living a life full of peace, bliss and purpose.

\(^{148}\) Quite often the ambiguity of the guru’s discourse will serve as a heated topic of debate amongst the devotees. Due to the ambiguity each individual is able to take a slightly different message as is relevant to them.
Each utterance can be classified as comprising of three components. *Abhidhā* is the literal meaning, *lakṣaṇā* are the external characteristics of an expression that are indicative of something deeper, and the *vyāñjanā* is what is alluded to (Tharakan 2010).

I follow Lincoln’s suggestion regarding analysis of any project of persuasion that the same questions asked of any speech act should be applied to religious discourse, namely: Who is speaking? Who is the audience? What are the means? And of what is the speaker trying to persuade the audience? (Lincoln 2000). We know that Nityananda is the speaker, who explains to his devotees (the audience) using various allegorical stories, imbued with enough ambiguity to make the message more general and accessible to more people (the means), to persuade his audience to adopt his lifestyle and disposition. In the first *satsaṅga* of each year Nityananda provides a new year’s message setting a direction for his devotees to follow. Distributed by the online mailing list, his message for 2015 is to:

think about living a life of purpose, a life of joy, a life of passion. Let us become more dedicated to making solid achievements than in running after swift and synthetic happiness. A quote from Baba Muktananda, from his book Reflections of the Self, where he shares, ‘Be as deep as the ocean, with an intellect as steady as a mountain, be centred in supreme compassion, never lose courage and become a coward, never forget the indestructible treasure, always meditate on that, you will be filled with bliss.’ May we all in this upcoming year of 2015 think about this, our life, what each and everyone of us can achieve and do to fill the world with peace and bliss. (*Mandir* 2015n)

Now I discuss some of the ways in which suggestions can be used in a political context through a broader discussion of epistemic and symbolic capital. The *kāvya* theory of suggestion (*dhvāni-vyañjana*) was not necessarily used to manipulate people in a socio-political sense and the next section does not necessarily imply this. Instead the art of suggestion in a poetic sense works after an utterance’s primary meaning to cultivate the highest experience of empathy, which only the *sahṛdaya* can appreciate.
Satsaṅga, however, can be a site for the implicit or explicit suggestions of a political nature.

While the progressive aesthetic idea rejects the aim of trying to understand how works become meaningful through their aesthetic, the traditionalists seek to know what the root of a special aesthetic sense is (White 2013: 11). My own analytical approach is in line with Bourdieu who suggests that concepts of art and aesthetics belong to cultural class structures that are ultimately employed to preserve the privileged position. I also fall in with Ranciere (2009b) who asserted that any aesthetic is one in a series of regimes used to govern. Here then, we must be cautious regarding the claims by Shanti Mandir to a disinterested position that involves only assisting others in their soteriological endeavours and expand the discussion to include satsaṅga. According to Bourdieu symbolic capital is ‘the most valuable form of accumulation’ because it can be converted into political and economic benefit (Balzani 2007: 37, Bourdieu 1977: 179). As Figure 5.1 demonstrates satsaṅga is a domain that can facilitate politically and economically oriented goals through different strategies by consciously manipulating the guru’s persona based on traditional values and respect. My aim is to demonstrate how this aesthetic and the arena of satsaṅga are used by Shanti Mandir to create a transcendent yet immanent reality. I agree with Ranciere (2009b) who suggested that any aesthetic is one in a series of regimes used to govern. Considering this it would be naïve to suggest that satsaṅga is an apolitical arena concerned simply with salvation in a philosophical or ontological sense. There is another type of salvation and this is a political one that is used to cultivate support for a Hindu nation.

Based on the guru’s symbolic capital as an esteemed renunciant and his epistemic capital at being able to seductively explain the social world, within this context I see satsaṅga not only as an arena where liberation is discussed but also as an opportunity for controlling people through suggestive story-telling (Maton 2003,
White 2013: 11). As a mode of cultural practice satsaṅga includes a complex set of practices, discourses, and representations through which tactical improvisation of learning to embody the legitimate disposition is historically and contextually negotiated (Jenkins 1992: 51, Zarilli 2007: 239).

It is important to understand that satsaṅga is a pedagogical arena where knowledge is transmitted through this ritualised performance that involves the construction of identities. It also includes a poetical reinterpretation that produces the collective experience of śānta. We can then appreciate the production of a dominant aesthetic that ultimately serves the interests of the privileged upper-caste male, who due to their symbolic capital as living vessels of the Veda, operate within the context of Orthodox Sanskrit Brahminical (neo) Hinduism, which requires a passive (complying and vulnerable) audience (Peterson 2014, Rancière 2009b, Schröder 2000).

Satsaṅga is considered by those who participate in it as a domain that allows for the revelation of sacred knowledge (Grenfell 2011). However, this expression of ‘Truth’ is also an expression of hegemony. Satsaṅga is a culturally contingent arena where transcendence or truth can be experienced. However, these claims are actually political and ideological representations produced by self-interested parties in the pursuit of symbolic domination (Lindholm 2002: 334).

Demonstrating how political discourses and nationalist ideology find their way into satsaṅga I return briefly to the famous yogin Baba Ramdev. He is involved in a broad social movement, which includes amongst its participants, elected representatives from the BJP. This movement, led by the successors of Transcendental Meditation (TM) aims to ‘Make India a Lighthouse of Peace for the World’ through developing a ‘master plan for re-establishing Vedic India’ (Foundation 2015).

Here one must bear in mind that the Vedic era ended around 500 BCE and predates the inception of the nation state of India by roughly 2500 years. One should
also consider that the aim of this movement is to create Rāma’s kingdom (Rām Rājya), which is essentially a Hindu theocratic state that requires dismantling the world’s largest secular democracy.

The following quote from the foundation’s website demonstrates their aim of making ‘India to be the greatest power in the world, radiating ideal life and invincibility, Ram Raj dukh kahu na vyapa’ (In Rama’s kingdom there is no suffering’) (Foundation 2015). We can locate Shanti Mandir within this movement due to the following assertions made on their website regarding:

- Continuing the Vedic tradition through teaching the Vedic way of life and the philosophy of Vedanta, performing the ancient sacred rituals of the tradition, and receiving other saints of the tradition.
- Shri Muktananda Sanskrit Mahavidyalaya – a free Sanskrit school that provides a rounded and authentic exposure to Vedic teachings.

(Mandir 2015b)

During one satsaṅga in the Shanti Mandir ashram an alamanac was distributed amongst the attendees (HinduJagruti 2015a). Figure 5.1 shows the front cover. This almanac is produced by the Hindu nationalist organisation Hindu Janajagruti Samiti (HinduJagruti 2015b). This organisation’s main goal is the establishment of a Hindu nation. The following is a statement from their website and explains the mission statement.

O Hindu Brothers! The Holy land of Bharat is a self-materialised ‘Hindu Nation’. However, the unrighteous rulers have maligned the Hindu Nation by declaring it a secular Nation. Since the present Democracy does not have the support of Hindu Dharma, the Hindu society and the Nation are facing a grave decline. To arrest the decline and to bring back the past glory to the Holy land of Bharat, it is imperative to reinstate Dharma in Bharat. To reinstate Dharma, that is, to establish the Hindu Nation, ‘Hindu Janajagruti Samiti’ (HJS) was established on 7th October 2002. In the last 12 years, HJS has successfully launched five activities – Education on Dharma, Awakening of Dharma,

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149 This is quite similar to 7.20.1 of the RāCMaṇ rāma rāja nahīṃ kāhuḥi byāpā.
During fieldwork I asked people in the ashram who had received the almanac two simple questions related to the sentence located at the bottom. ‘In this picture, what do you think are the calamities that need to be overcome? Why is establishing a Hindu nation the only solution?’ Whether Indian or international, devotees generally found it difficult to answer. Yet the following articulate response from an anonymous devotee perhaps suggests otherwise.

This is a very vague statement and every person may have a different interpretation of this. I do not know what Sanatan Almanac mean by this statement. In a Hindu nation, the philosophy of the Vedas and other ancient Hindu scriptures will flourish and may influence the global thinking in a positive manner. For example, Hindus believe in the concept of a global family150 and in their daily prayer they wish for the welfare of all

150 ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ (vasudhā-earth/creation + eva-verily, Kutumbakam-family). Vasudhā refers to the earth or the entire creation. Eva means ‘certainly’ or ‘verily’. Kutumbam means a family or blood relations, and kutumbakam technically means a little family. So here the Vedic sages are saying
mankind and not just that of the Hindus. 'Sarve Bhavantu Sukhina...' i.e., May all beings live comfortably, without any misery etc... Here the wish is for the whole world and is not limited for the welfare of a particular community (Hindu). So, I think, in this way, a Hindu nation may contribute towards world peace. As of the barriers, I think these may include the selfish attitude of the so called secular forces in India which play the vote-bank politics in the name of secularism and denounce true Hindus and act as barriers in the establishment of a Hindu nation. This is my interpretation and as I said in the beginning I don't know what Sanatan Almanac intend to say. (McCartney 2014b)

According to one of the original Hindutva ideologues, M.S. Golwalkar, the three internal enemies of the Hindu nation are the Muslims, Christians and the Communists (Yechury 2001). Patnaik (1993) believes the Sangh Parivar’s Hindutva ideology is fascist because they ultimately seek to homogenise Indian cultural and linguistic diversity into a type of semiticised monotheistic religion and Hindu nation (rāṣṭhra) or Rama’s Kingdom (Rām rājya). Van der Veer discussed the concept of the development of a ‘chosen people’ as a way to understand the ‘semiticisation’ of Hinduism through the lens of nationalism (1999: 419); while Cheetham asserted that groups such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) have influenced the ‘semiticisation’ of Hinduism in order to make it more dogmatic, ‘national’, creedal and missionary (2006: 508). This is based on a focus of past injustice, a sense of cultural superiority, a reimagined ahistorical interpretation of history blending grievance and superiority, rejection of rational arguments that counter this interpretation, and majoritarian appeals premised on race and hyper-masculinity.

This section provided an overview of satsaṅga locating it within the literary tradition of kāvya by demonstrating the similar aims of satsaṅga and kāvya. Through

that the entire world is truly just one family. Mahā Upaniṣad 6.72 ayaṁ bandhurayaṁ neti ganana laghucetasam-udaracharitānāṁ tu vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam: Only small men discriminate saying: One is a relative; the other is a stranger. For those who live magnanimously the entire world constitutes but a family.
the use of specific rhetorical strategies like suggestion and the literary artefact, *satsaṅga* was identified as a hybrid *rasavat-campū* type of *kāvya* according to Udbatṭa’s and Viśvakarmakavirāja’s own typologies. From this the relationship between the guru’s discourse and the cultivation of aesthetic moods and emotions also showed how the audience’s epistemological access is historically situated encouraging socialisation through symbolic control, and how political ideologies are able to be weaved into the narrative. The next section discusses the efficacy of *satsaṅga* creating a synthesis between modern and medieval concepts to demonstrate the centrality of the performative project in the socialisation of individuals.

### 5.6 — Performativity of Satsaṅga

Csordas (1990) argues that Durkheim (1964) was too reductionist in suggesting that the sacred’s moral authority is due to it being a mystery and a massively radical ‘other’ that exists outside the individual. In contrast Geertz (1973) provides a definition of religion that incorporates a symbolic system that is expressed through social relationships and that religion acts upon long-standing moods and motivations that are a generic capacity of human nature (Csordas 1990: 33).

Referring to Lévi-Strauss (1966), Brückner and Schömbucher (2007: 11) suggest that the outside observer or non-believer cannot see an event the same way as a believer does. This touches on the difference between emic (internal) and etic (external) perspectives and how as researchers, prior to entering the field, we ought to first acknowledge the influence of our own subjective experience and the possibility of generating a less biased perspective through interaction and observation (Laughlin, McManus et al. 1990: 21-32, Throop and Murphy 2002: 201). Meaning is not just transported through sound but also relies on a blend of sensory channels. This is why Kersenboom (2007) invites us to consider what gives authority and empowerment to a
performance through highlighting the methodological demand that focuses on becoming a full participant and not just observing; as the lack of a common perspective between participants and observers renders the cultural translation of performances as a possible process of desacralisation. The potential threat of the paternalistic academic gaze is never more potent then when it is trained on the production of ‘sacred’ space and identity. It should be noted that I personally came under intense scrutiny by the Shanti Mandir community for trying to suggest that *satsaṅga* is a type of performance. Most devotees whom I spoke with were offended even by the suggestion that a certain amount or particular type of performativity was present. The offence and indignation arose from a perception that I was trying to attack Shanti Mandir, its community and its cultural practices. No amount of explanation seemed to justify in the eyes of the devotees my position as someone sincerely interested in understanding this fascinating phenomena in the way I chose to. This has unfortunately resulted in being ostracised by certain members. Reflexively this demonstrates interesting patterns or boundaries as to what is considered legitimate behaviour and how my research, for a majority of the community, is not considered a legitimate pursuit due to its perceived emphasis on objectivity over subjectivity.

An objective description is not possible, as meaning is negotiated between participants, giving a variety of different perspectives. This suggests that by focusing on an agent-centred view of performance the observer can show how participants collectively construct the world around them (Bauman and Biggs 1990: 69, Brückner and Schömbucher 2007: 8).

As a *pravācaka* (expounder),¹⁵¹ the guru uses his epistemic and symbolic capital during *satsaṅga* to explain the social world and one’s relation to it by

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¹⁵¹ In the Hindi version of Shanti Mandir’s e-magazine Siddha Marg, one article is titled ‘Śrīgurudev kā Pravacan’ (The guru’s discourse), which demonstrates Nityananda’s identity as a pravācaka (Shanti Mandir 2013d: 1).
employing characteristics of kāvyā and the dramaturgical tradition to produce bhāvas (emotional states) and rasas (aesthetic moods) that assist in conveying his message to the audience (McCrea 2009: 46). For most of the devotees, participation as passive or active members in fire ceremonies (yajñas) and other rituals such as daily pūjā (worship) are described in a multitude of ways as ‘beautiful’, ‘magical’, ‘timeless’, ‘wonderful’, ‘special’, and ‘sacred’. The reason for this is the element of performativity that captivates their attention.

In general, performances aim to evoke an imagined reality through cultivating an intense and heightened emotive experience among the spectators. This results in an altered awareness of their situation and, quite possibly, a sense of emotional relief as they are reassured that the alternate world they seek is immanently possible because they can feel it. Through the shared experience of evoking an imagined reality and altered state of awareness, both the spectators and protagonists of the performance share in the construction of a collective identity. This is applicable to any ritual and, as I argue, performance and performativity are essential to the satsaṅga experience (Steiner 2007: 91).

The performativity of satsaṅga requires dramatic equipment (viśiṣṭa-samāgrī), some of which was prescribed in the NŚ. We can compare this to Gallagher’s suggestion above regarding the influence of the local environment on cognition. This equipment, i.e. a receptive audience, master of ceremonies (guru), music, poetic vision, a particular aesthetic mood, creative use of language, stage and PA equipment, mūrtis and other religious paraphernalia are used so as to engage the latent mental impressions (vṛttis) of the spectator that underlie the mental state forming the stable emotion (sthāyībhāva), which are produced by the vibhāva and brought into view by the anubhāva. The vibhāva is any condition that excites or develops a particular state in the body or mind. In this way, we can understand the arena of satsaṅga as a vibhāva. The ‘vi’ affix is an intensifier, so vi+bhāva refers to something that cultivates
an intense or heightened emotion. The *anubhāva* is an experience (*anuvṛtthā*) of a heightened emotion caused by the *vibhāva*. In this case, the *anubhāva* is the synonymous feelings of *ānanda* (bliss) or *śānta* (quietude), which ultimately rely upon or aim to stabilise the durable feeling or state of mind (*sthāyibhāva*) of *śama* (quietism) (Ingalls, Masson et al. 1990: 223).\(^{152}\)

The only thing that *satsaṅga* does not normally include is an actual dramatic performance, although sometimes the students from the Sanskrit college will perform a play in Sanskrit for the enjoyment and moral edification of the congregation. However, dramas and dialogues do occur in some of the devotional texts which are recited as part of the daily religious practice. For instance, the Śiva Mahimna Stotram features celestial beings, in particular one who offended the king by taking his flowers that he would ordinarily use for his worship of Śiva. Displeased by the act of Puṣpadanta a trap was laid out that resulted in him offending Śiva and having his power of invisibility retracted. Puṣpadanta sought forgiveness by composing the Śiva Mahimna Stotram thus absolving him and returning his divine powers (Gonda 1977: 259).

On other occasions professional dancers are invited to entertain the audience (*Mandir* 2008). Regardless of the normal absence of ‘actors’ in the normal sense of a dramatic play, what is undeniably present is a type of stagecraft that includes presenters, singers and musicians engaging in well-tempered and choreographed performances that serve as a focal point for the members of the audience to be exposed to a particular aesthetic mood where certain emotions are cultivated. Such an aesthetically pleasing space climaxes with the guru’s discourse and *darśana*, which is explored below in chapters six and seven.

An example of this choreographed stagecraft involves the return of Nityananda to his ashram from his travels. Before he arrives, everyone is instructed to be present

\(^{152}\) See Locana 2.4.29.
in the temple to welcome him. As the temple fills with expectant devotees, updates of his imminent arrival make their way to the musicians leading the chant to either increase or decrease the tempo depending on his estimated time of arrival, which is contingent on unexpected traffic delays. The excitement and anticipation of being able to once again see and interact with the guru is intoxicating for the devotees. Most will change into their best clothing and ensure they are immaculately groomed. Before entering the temple Nityananda will stand waiting just out of sight until the emotional charge of the collective singing has reached a climax. It is at this moment he will enter to the rapturous applause and cheers as the music continues to create a palpable affect on the participants’ emotions. There is nothing random about the timing of these events. It is orchestrated precisely to stimulate the emotions of the congregation and reinforce the ‘divine’ qualities of the guru. Such a regular and repeated event clearly incorporates orchestrated performative elements and any assertion that it is not is a deliberate attempt to obfuscate reality.

The South Asian theory of aesthetics (Rasālaṅkāraśāstra) describes the universalising principle or feeling of mutual communion as sādhāranikāraṇa (making commonly shared) (Virtanen 2006). This seductively heightened feeling equates with the concept of collective effervescence (Durkheim 1964), and is contrasted to the normal state the individual experiences when alone. Sādhāranikāraṇa can be understood as the communal experience of euphoria that is generated by group participation and leads to the reaffirmation of shared identity and moral unity through a process of deindividuation and involvement in a communitas (Turner 1986). This occurs through identifying with the group mentality, which ultimately leads to the feeling of collective effervescence (Law 2011). Weber argued that unthinking emersion in a group was a response of lethargy, whereas Durkheim argued that
participation and the sense of self-loss in the community is validated by the immediate sense of transcendence and ecstasy it offers (Lindholm 2002: 294).\textsuperscript{153}

Merleau-Ponty (2005: vii) said that the basis of phenomenology is the study of essences, which is one of the meanings given for the term rasa (Greenberg 1991). Building upon Merleau-Ponty, Csordas’ theory on somatic modes of attention and embodiment form a paradigm regarding the ‘sense of somatic contingency and transcendence associated with meditation and mystic states’ (Csordas 1990: 138-9). It is, however, possible that ‘the character of particular human experiences shaped by yoga are products of human consciousness and not the realisation of a Universal Truth’ (Alter 2006: 764). It is also possible that the production of a supernatural atmosphere where both the calmed and devotional sentiments become signifiers for divinely inspired altered states of consciousness signifying sacred and mystical yogic experiences. These mystical experiences, however, can be interpreted not as facts but, instead, as religious opinions assigned to facts (Madsen 2013: 34). This is due to the non-arbitrary\textsuperscript{154} subjective nature of the mystical experience.

\textsuperscript{153} From interviewing several devotees the overwhelming response of the Shanti Mandir community is that this experience of collective effervescence results from the potency and sanctity of the mantras (prayers) uttered on a daily basis. The sociological aspect is not really considered.

\textsuperscript{154} According to LCT the principles of legitimation are the relations between the arbitrary and non-arbitrary dimensions of knowledge. The arbitrary dimension relates to how knowledge is historically situated within social relations of power such as positivism, while the non-arbitrary dimension of knowledge is irreducible to such social relations of power like idealism and relativism (Maton 2006, Maton and Moore 2010). Essentially it is more difficult, if not impossible to critique, qualify or quantify the non-arbitrary dimension and this is why providers of goods of salvation often use it in their legitimation process. For example, discussions of metaphysics and theology related to various aspects of the energetic (cakra) system of Tantra-Yoga or the hierarchical evolution of the tanmātras (subtle elements), involve the non-arbitrary dimension as it is impossible, from an empirical position at least, to ascertain the validity of these concepts. The modes of legitimation are formed by the different settings of the relations between the arbitrary and non-arbitrary dimensions, which have ramifications for the form taken by knowledge production and its social contexts. The more learning within a social field relies on the non-arbitrary dimension the more opaque are the rules for access and ascension. As the philosophies informing the social world of Shanti Mandir are based on romantic idealism, there is an emphasis on the
While the experience might be ‘true’ for the experiencer it is difficult to say definitively whether divinity is or is not involved. Hence, while the experience is a fact, qualifying it as a ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ experience is really only an opinion regarding the fact. This can be explained as a result of the heightened affectivity groups have, which has an irrational component where people in groups lose their individuality in favour of a common mind. To explain these existential experiences various signifiers are assigned to help construct a web of belief and meaning dependent on the cultural context. This phenomenon relies on the power of charisma, suggestion, and a kind of social contagion (i.e., ideas, sentiments, immersions and beliefs).

The transmission of affect relies on mimetic entrainment to share in the dominant emotion suggested by the charismatic leader (Brennan 2004: 53-57). Brennan suggests that hormonal, nervous and auditory entrainment are important factors and should be considered when discussing the transmission of affect; and, whereas chemical entrainment occurs unconsciously, rhythmic entrainment using prosodic elements of pitch, melody and stress, such as singing and chanting mantras in satsaṅga, can be consciously cultivated (2004: 70).

It is possible, then, to locate how particular yogic experiences are culturally contingent and are a result of learnt behaviour that includes learning to discuss, embody, and ultimately display the results of receiving śaktipāta, which is considered an esoteric secret of this salvational path of Śaivite theology (Muller-Ortega 1997: 424-25). As a result of śaktipāta certain kriyās (physical responses) are said to manifest through the awakening of kundalini śakti, including glossalalia. These kriyās

subjective experience of the monist principle of Advaita Vedānta known as Brahman. It is worth keeping this in mind when considering the social and epistemic relations to knowledge and ultimately how legitimacy and prestige are accumulated because knowledge of Brahman would be classified within the non-arbitrary dimension due to the lack of precision in measuring an individual’s subjective experience of Brahman, which in turn renders the navigation more difficult for the spiritual aspirant.

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can also be analysed within the performance paradigm, which is where our attention soon turns to along with discussing relevant approaches to analysing ritual.

But first we ought to stop and appraise the use of Sanskrit verses during the guru’s discourses. This rhetorical technique of sprinkling Sanskrit verses into one’s speech is quite common throughout public speaking and debating traditions of South Asia. Primarily it serves to show the speaker’s knowledge of the tradition, specific subject matter, and as an expression of status that ‘validates the oral discourse by tying it directly back to the authority of the original source text’ (Taylor 2015: 519). Inspired by Csordas’ discussion of glossolalia and its similarity ‘much in the manner of a mantra’ (1990: 30), it is possible to at least consider that the Sanskrit utterances have a similar effect on the audience. While I am not suggesting that the guru is babbling incoherently, what is similar is the fact that generally speaking most of the audience does not understand what these utterances mean and that is why he qualifies them through paraphrasing or translating them directly.

Because these utterances lack ‘referential content’ the ‘performative force’ heightens the sense of the ‘sacred’ (Lambek 1990: 29). Moreover, these verses lack a lineality that semantically prosodic or musical utterances have. This allows them to exist outside of time for a brief moment and host glimpses of eternity like gushes of oxygen feeding the charismatic fire. Also, the use of Sanskrit utterances can be understood as a type of charismatic prophecy and direct message from God that even though they may not foretell future events they ritually establish certain states of affairs and are implicit in the structuring of relevant social relations (Csordas 1990: 28-9).

There are three general approaches to ritual analysis (Hughes-Freeland and Carin 1998: 1-2). The first incorporates a structural or anti-structural event with a social function connecting the personal and the social (Turner 1969). The second involves a processual aspect which constructs meaning through participation (Geertz
1973). The third is as a particular aspect of some action (Bell 1992). Bell's definition of ritualisation as ‘a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities’ privileges the knowledge, practices, and subsequent identity of the legitimate and authentic knower (Bell 1992: 74).

Focusing on ritualisation instead of ritual allows for the investigation of the active dimension of performance and the interplay between constraint and creativity, that has real and imagined, and immanent and future effects on the perceived and projected identities of participants. Schieffelin (1998: 205) explains that ‘the central issue of performativity, whether in ritual performance, theatrical entertainment or the social articulation of ordinary human situations, is the imaginative creation of a human world’. Building upon Bauman (1986), Steiner (2007: 91) characterises performance as a display of expressive competence or virtuosity by one or more performers addressed to an audience. In this case, the relevant performer is the guru and his choir of Sanskrit specialists (the Scholars — teachers and students at the Sanskrit college), as they perform for and on behalf of the guru’s devotees, who generally form the majority of the audience as passive participants.

As satsaṅga extends beyond a local event through print and electronic media the idea of considering satsaṅga as a type of ‘-scape’, or fertile ground for the cultivation becomes possible (Shanti-Mandir 2015m,}). In this context we can investigate this arena as a site where the production of a homogenised and idyllic representation of an imagined nation state or transglobal yogic utopia occurs. This is based on the institutionalisation of Vedic knowledge relying on what Jaffrelot calls a ‘mimetic strategy’ that transports the ideal Vedic ‘golden age’ into the present (Appadurai 1996, Jaffrelot 1994b, 1999, Larios 2014a: 132). The ritualistic performances of yajñas and Sanskritic utterances in satsaṅga aim to evoke an imagined ‘Vedic’ reality in the present moment and an intensification of collective experience
among the spectators that evokes altered states of consciousness, which lead to a sense of emotional relief and shared identity. This political context, essentialised into a religious or patriotic duty, is particularly evident during satsaṅgas that occur on days celebrating India’s independence or perhaps the anniversary of famous patriots such as Swami Vivekananda’s birthday.

Satsaṅga is a ritualised event where identities are constructed through performative actions, gestures and behaviours. A prime example is how Republic Day (Gaṇāntantra Divas) is celebrated. What is interesting is the centrality of the Sanskrit students in leading the choreographed performances in an almost exact format to the way Sundar describes students in RSS schools in other parts of India are coerced into celebrating (Sundar 2004).

On one Sunday morning Dinesh, the college warden, appeared at my door and invited me to satsaṅga. I was in the middle of writing some notes and told him I would come down after I had finished. Skeptical, in Sanskrit Dinesh went on to first question why I would not come and then explained that the benefit of attending satsaṅga was the opportunity to have direct contact and that this was the highest or best thing, or rather ‘mitraṁ āgacchatu, satsaṅgaḥ calati, kimartham tatra na gamisyati mahodayah? sākṣāt darśanaṁ tatra asti, sākṣāt darśanaṁ atyuttamaṁ asti, terhi tatra sarveṣaṁ gamanīyam. tat anantaṁ lekhaṁ karisyate bho’.

Continuing with the theme that satsaṅga is a type of literary-performative artefact, as a cultural enterprise, satsaṅga can also be understood as a type of prakaraṇa (production, discussion, occasion). It is also a means to dissolve social tensions, rearrange power resources while (re)creating identity and integrity through the liminally created arena within this ideological communitas (Turner 1969: 152). Building upon Turner, MacAloon provides four analytical frames for performance genres related to the Olympic games that consists of a multi-layered public event in which different genres of performance lie embedded within one another in a Chinese
box fashion. These are the spectacle, festival, ritual and game (Besnier and Brownell 2012: 446, MacAlloon 1984: 253, Rudie 1998: 116). While Schechner (2013: 297-299) asserted that this analytical roster does not exhaust the possibilities of exploring the ways in which these genres historically, ideologically, structurally and performatively intersect; it is, nonetheless an interesting way to view the performativity of *satsaṅga*. As a spectacle, *satsaṅga* is a socially constructed event mediated through the symbolic domain of images where everything contained within this arena is considered beautiful and alluring while promising to extend beyond the immediate liminal zone (Debord 1994).

As the most inclusive genre containing within its boundary the other genres, a spectacle is an occasion linking performer and audience that involves excitement but not the expected ‘faith’ a ritual is expected to convey. While the implication is that in a spectacle performers and audience are free to ‘read’ messages at will, combine images and construct their own meanings (Rudie 1998: 116), MacAlloon suggested that ‘ritual is a duty, spectacle a choice’ (1984: 243). Debord explained that:

> The spectacle appears at once as society itself, as a part of society and as a means of unification. As a part of society, it is that sector where all attention, all consciousness, converges. Being isolated — and precisely for that reason — this sector is the locus of illusion and false consciousness; the unity it imposes is merely the official language of generalised separation. (Debord 1994: 5)

What I understand from Debord and MacAlloon is that even though *satsaṅga* produces apparent unity for the immediate group, it is the false consciousness of the subordinate group that may not realise how the hegemony of the symbolic system conceals the imposition of the social relations they come to embody through consent (Gramsci 1971). Bourdieu (1997b: 177) shared a similar view regarding the ‘consciousness’ aspect. He explained that consent through symbolic domination is anything but a conscious acceptance, and instead relied on the order of beliefs that operate at the deepest level of the disposition. Through situating *satsaṅga* as ritual and, therefore, a
duty, the obligations of participants in the reproduction of normative standards based on difference becomes clearer.

During satsaṅga there is also lightness and opportunities for spontaneous laughter. It is not a constant ‘serious’ enculturation. Keeping the mood this way allows the audience’s troubles of ordinary life to dissolve becoming temporary memories. Satsaṅga becomes something of a festival that is the ‘true’ arena where the aims and relevant behaviours are standardised, calibrated and enforced. Whereas, if we situate satsaṅga as a ritual, within MacAloon’s schema, it is considered a serious and important culturally mediated expression of commitment to individual improvement and affirmation of collective identity, which may occur in an increasingly contested and expanding arena.

Through the transglobal yoga industry satsaṅga moves from local culture to global politics for resistance, negotiation and the affirmation of identities (cf. Hughes-Freeland and Carin 1998: 1-2). Satsaṅga is a focused nexus where the intermingling of orthodox religion, new age spirituality, the consumption of both, the expression of various identities occurs, and support for different socio-political causes is championed.

As people come from all across the world to the Shanti Mandir ashram to specifically attend satsaṅga with the guru, generally without any desire to travel beyond the boundaries of the ashram, neophytes join the contest to affirm their identities within the ashram community as there are various hierarchies within the social network. Later, individuals export their accumulated stock of symbolic capital back to their homes as an expression of their newly adopted or reaffirmed yogic identity, which may include the cultural capital of having been to India, spent time in an ashram, found a guru, taken a spiritual name, or perhaps even obtained certification as a yoga teacher. This cultural capital of having ‘found a guru’, an ‘authentic yoga ashram’, or a ‘serious yet fun yoga teacher training course’ allows individuals to
transubstantiate this cultural capital into the economic form through having acquired the authority to facilitate yoga classes or manage and their own yoga studio. Perhaps the strength that comes from finding and connecting with a community allows for exploration of particular business possibilities with other devotees. Perhaps the pre-cognitive feelings bottled up inside an individual are given a space to be acknowledged, articulated and explored. Dana first came to the ashram through a chance meeting with a devotee on the plane from Singapore to Mumbai. It was Dana’s first trip to India. Excited and nervous the more she heard about the ashram it sounded like an ideal first stop on her six-month tour of the subcontinent. Dana originally intended to only stay a few days but enjoyed what she described as ‘a lovely, safe and nourishing place’ so much that she ended up staying for two months. During that time Dana attended a month-long yoga teacher-training course held in the ashram. ‘I had a vague idea before I came to India that I wanted to do a yoga course, but I was not interested in becoming a teacher. However, this course has inspired me to take the plunge [and become a teacher]’. Dana has since returned to Canada and has set up her own yoga studio. While she has not returned to India she ‘misses it terribly’.

Steiner (2007: 90) uses Atkinson’s (1989: 15) Liturgy-Performance Centred Ritual (LCR — PCR) distinction to separate two types of performance. LCR is defined by the preordained progression of delineated steps to which ritual practitioners and congregants collectively conform. In contrast, PCR is characterised by a repertoire of ritual actions available to performers acting independently during the performance, e.g. shamanism and initiation ceremonies. Discussed above, Van Gennep’s rite of passage concept that was reformulated by Turner is better suited for PCR and not LCR (Rostas 2003: 90).

Humphrey and Laidlaw assert that ‘the central concern of PCRs is the genuineness or trust of the supernatural quality of the event… they rest on a stimulation, a half-believed fiction that some unseen supernatural event really happens
as they are performed’ (1994: 8). While in LCRs, the correct performance of the preordained steps is emphasised and held to be automatically effective. A general assessment of satsaṅga is that it is a type of PCR that also contains elements of LCRs.

The sacrificial ‘Vedic’ smarta rituals (havanas and yajñas) that focus on procuring well being and fertility in this life and beyond are characterised by the offering of several substances into the sacrificial fire that includes milk, ghee, vegetables and fruit. This is a type of LCR. These cultural performances encapsulate the elementary constituents of the ‘Vedic culture’ that Shanti Mandir asserted is a core component of its identity and practice (cf. Singer 1972: 71, Steiner 2007: 85).

Shanti Mandir said that it aims to ‘guide seekers to the direct experience of divinity through Sanskrit chanting, silent contemplation and rituals’, while continuing ‘the Vedic tradition through teaching the Vedic way of life and the philosophy of Vedanta [sic], performing the ancient sacred rituals of the tradition, and receiving other saints of the Tradition’ (Mandir 2015b). The other performative components of satsaṅga include public discourses, group recitation of non-Vedic (generally Purānic) texts, silent meditation and appreciation of professional musicians and dancers. These are examples of PCR. Having explained why and what sort of performance satsaṅga can be considered as being, the discussion focuses next on the gendered and spatial relations in satsaṅga.

Lingorska (2007) categorised the NŚ and Abhinava’s commentaries as classic theories of audience reception where the desirable qualities, appropriate behaviour and potential benefits are described, supporting the idea that any performance requires qualified spectators (sahṛdaya or rasika). A critical distinction offered is that an audience is not a homogenous body, but consists of different social groups where a distinction is made between experts and the common public. This is realised in satsaṅga by the spatial relationships regarding seating arrangements that occur between the various groups. Due to the various blends of capital in their respective
portfolios, Figure 5.2 demonstrates how the Patrons (male and female devotees) are seated furthest from the guru, with the Scholars (students and teachers) enjoying closer proximity along with the Renunciants.

![Figure 5.2: Overview of Spatial Relations in Temple](image)

Regarding the gendered history of epistemological access to this salvific knowledge, one frequently overlooked component of the Advaita Vedānta philosophy is that Śaṅkara taught that only male Brahmin monastics could access this knowledge, realise its truth, and gain salvation because his ‘metaphysical vision was conservative, elitist and thoroughly stratified’ (Nelson 1989: 61, 63). Śaṅkara’s elite group focuses on social exclusivity, soteriological and symbolic control, and compliance by all disempowered individuals, who are part of the unbalanced power structure of the guru-disciple culture in general (Nelson 1989: 64). However, the Siddha tradition espouses a syncretic and ecumenical approach that is, without contradiction, able to take from various traditions the particular point which helps in emphasising the message the guru wants to transmit regarding the essential unity of everyone and everything (Brooks 1997). Just like Muktananda, Nityananda asserted that freedom and a life of abundance
is accessible by anyone who dares to want it. Nityananda said, ‘May we all experience freedom within ourselves. May we all share that freedom, that wisdom, with everyone’ (Mandir 2011a: 7).

Generally, one comes to know of the position within the social network without much confusion. It is not difficult to ascertain where one should sit in satsaṅga. As is quite common all across India, women and men are seated separately. However, in the main satsaṅga arena, the women sit on the left and the men on the right. This topological overview demonstrates how the guru, seated in the southwest corner in front of a picture of his guru Muktananda, directs the various components of satsaṅga from his raised and cushioned seat. As the guru sits on his throne (āsana) he symbolises the whole cosmos, which he is deemed to transcend while being worshipped ritually through the ritual bathing of abhiṣeka and gurupūja (Mandir 2010d, Padoux 2000: 44).

The young children up to about ten years of age are generally free to roam between their separately seated parents. For adolescents and adults, there is little opportunity for an individual to take a seated position in a group they do not belong to, unless they want to suffer the confused looks or comments from the community that generally circulate around the individual’s possible ‘confused’ gender identity or sexual orientation. This would lead quite quickly to being told, quite possibly by other devotees, who know the protocol and routine that a particular space is reserved for another group.

While there are genuine offers to show a new arrival around, generally, it would seem that such directives are not always given in a disinterested manner to assist the new individual. Instead an accomplished devotee might use such an opportunity to demonstrate that they are familiar with the normative standards of the community, that they are in fact, knowers of the tradition. There is also a distinction made between where the teachers and students sit separated by an invisible line in
front of the male devotees. The Renunciants, whether male or female, generally sit next to the guru, along with other visiting Renunciant guests. If another esteemed guru or saint from within the tradition visits they might be offered a similarly raised and comfortable chair to sit upon to demonstrate their equal or perhaps even higher status than Nityananda’s. If they are a visiting Scholar or Renunciant then they may be seated within their respective groups on the floor. While a Patron could not go and sit with the Scholars or Renunciants, the Renunciants are free to sit where they like, whether that be next to the guru or in the back rows where a chair might be more comfortable. These distinctions are based on standpoint theories of gender, purity, and accumulation of various sub-species of capital, which in turn, demonstrate the particular relationship each group has within the multiple hierarchical ranks.

5.7 — Conclusion

This chapter set out to discuss the ritualisation and performative tradition of satsaṅga to determine how the legitimate disposition is cultivated within this pedagogical arena through the cultivation of particular emotions and aesthetic moods. This chapter has demonstrated the historical and textual links between the performative, devotional and textual traditions and how they are central to the production and efficacy of satsaṅga as a medium of instruction.

The confluence of these traditions and their combined centrality to developing rapport between the audience and protagonists, through a type of religious-educational, are consciously used to cultivate two specific aesthetic emotions of quietude and devotion. These emotions assist in the pedagogical aim of stimulating disenchantment for the ‘swift and synthetic’ pleasures and yearning for the adoption of an enlightened disposition. Both of these aesthetic emotions are essential to the cultivation of the legitimate disposition and are central for the organisation in securing
its accumulation of various species of capital as a global service provider of an authentic yoga practice and identity.

The cultivation of these emotions forms part of the principle goods of salvation produced by Shanti Mandir and consumed by the congregants. These emotions also enable the seeker of knowledge to become receptive to the teachings, without which, the demonstration, mimetic adaptations, and development of an authentic yogic identity would be a difficult project to complete. This chapter also demonstrated that historical precedents exist underwritten by the foundational texts of Shanti Mandir’s own tradition. The historical development of satsaṅga has evolved out of the literary tradition that began with the through the cultivating of an aesthetic sentiment that merges with the devotional and performative traditions as a result of an exchange between Buddhist and Kashmir Śaivite philosophers. That satsaṅga can be considered a literary artefact, and more specifically, a type of hybrid campū-rasavat literature, as it works to cultivate particular emotions using an embellished rhetorical style to do so. Linking this to the use of the devotional narrative tradition we gain a clearer understanding of how literature, performance and audience reception combine to cultivate the collective imaginaire of this ideological communitas based on the oral performance and reception of Shanti Mandir’s textual corpus. While at the same time, satsaṅga serves as a potential site of control and conflict. Contextualised as an arena where transcendence or truth can be experienced, issues related to political and ideological representations regarding hegemonical issues of consent, submission and symbolic domination highlight the interestedness of those involved in using satsaṅga as a place to reaffirm individual and collective identities, but most importantly, use it as the primary location for the production of the social glue that holds the community together.

While explored more in chapter six, this chapter also touched upon issues related to epistemological access, which, I have argued is central to the acquisition of
the legitimate disposition, as the cognitive functions and aesthetic components are reliant on the culturally contingent backgrounds of the audience, the event and its context through the horizon of participation. Beginning with tenth century theories of audience participation we moved beyond simply seeing the audience as a homogenous unit. Instead it is clear that various groups collectively contain different amounts of epistemological access based on their cultural capital and social relations to the knowledge presented as legitimate. This forces the guru to rely on rhetorical strategies such as ambiguity and suggestion to make the message more accessible to different levels of expertise. This accessibility relies upon the epistemic capital of the guru in his effort to interpret the corpus of texts that inspire the community. Fundamentally, the reception of this interpretation relies on the audience’s aesthetic competency (sahṛdayatva).

The contrasting and conflicting message simultaneously promoting devotion and independence emphasised by Shanti Mandir highlights an interesting contradiction that the salvific promise of release and independence is inhibited by the insistence within the tradition of promoting continued fidelity and reliance on the guru. It is through mimetic adaptations learnt by observing the guru’s behaviour and listening to his morally edifying discourse that individuals anticipate their soteriological and social ambitions of achieving enlightenment and gaining legitimacy will be attained.

While chapter five situated satsaṅga firmly within the performative tradition as a type of literature, chapter six explores the role of the guru’s cultivating gaze, and chapter seven focuses more specifically on the contents of the guru’s message and its transmission of the fundamental principles and constitution of the legitimate yogic disposition, while also demonstrating how he legitimises his own position as guru and the institution of gurudom.
Chapter 6 — Darśana, Epistemological Access

and the Cultivated Gaze
6.1 — Introduction

First this chapter explains the notion of *darśana* and the various interpolations that occur within the Shanti Mandir community through its social media platforms to create an affective sense of community. Based on ethnographic observations this includes further description of the physical domain and layout of the temple, which moves into a discussion about the religious practice, gendered space and the proximity that various groups have to the source of spiritual power and the social glue that holds the community together, i.e., the guru.

The next section returns to a discussion of Legitimation Code Theory and an explanation of the socialising effect of guru’s cultivated gaze and the necessity of epistemological access for bringing about the required transformation through the community’s own socialisation process.

6.2 — Darśana — Seeing the Guru

*Darśana* is a concept central to the religious practice of Hinduism that involves the devotee and the deity or guru exchanging glances. *Darśana* events are an opportunity for an active visual exchange between guru and devotee that may involve a dialogic interaction. The expectation central to the *darśana* experience is that a transference of the guru’s power will occur and a transformation will result (Lucia 2014a: location 941). It is believed that through this exchange the descent of grace (*śaktipāta*) and a transmission of spiritual energy (*śakti*) occurs (Eck 1985, Sabharathnam, Brooks et al. 1997, Svoboda 2008).

In discussing *darśana*, it is worthwhile considering the etymology of the English term ‘charisma’, which is located in the Greek term *khárisma* and means ‘favour freely given’ or ‘gift of grace’ (Beekes 2010: 1607). In Sanskrit, the cognate term *ākarṣana*, built from the root *vṛṣ* is translated as ‘pulling, drawing near, and
attracting’. In certain Tantric texts\textsuperscript{155} it means to ‘attract an absent person into one’s presence by magic formulas’ (Monier-Williams 2015). Weber’s definition of charisma is that:

\begin{quote}
Charisma is a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader. (Weber 1947: 328)
\end{quote}

Charisma is validated through those individuals who choose to subject themselves to such an authority and can be conceptualised as only that which the believers recognise it to be (Worsley 1968: vii). Weber also explained that the source of charisma lay in the recognition of the followers and that the leader had to know how to display their extraordinary quality in practice (Zhe 2008). However, charisma can be seen as ‘nothing but an affective relationship between followers and their leader, towards whom sentiments of awe and enthusiasm are directed’ (Zhe 2008: 51).

Current research into leadership has moved towards investigating the dyadic nature of the dynamic charismatic (leader-follower) relationship where perception is influenced by the vision advocated by the leader and not simply a consequence of either the leader’s or the follower’s attributes (Balkundi and Kilduff 2005, Campbell, Ward et al. 2008).

Is the guru’s source of charisma mysterious? Or is it a result of a mobilised collective affection? If it is the latter, then it is important to consider what it is being mobilised for or toward. Several scholars suggest that without a utopian aim complete emotional commitment and voluntary submission is not likely, and that the key to social aggregation (i.e., the social glue) is the affective reward of building an

\textsuperscript{155} Agnikāryapaddhati and Acintyaviśvasādākhyam.
Darśana and the opportunity to spend time with the guru are central to the Shanti Mandir experience. The guru brings and holds people together by facilitating a space for collective religious practice and identity making. If the guru is not present in the ashram the number of visitors during this time plummets. The regulars who normally come up from Mumbai or down from Surat rarely make the trip when the guru is on tour. Dipendra, a retired army officer normally makes the trip down from Delhi once a month by train. He explains how he can:

catch the Shatabdi (intercity train) from Nizamuddin Station at 05:00pm and the next morning around 07:00 am arrive in Valsad. I come down normally once a month and stay for a week each time. I come to see my guru and my friends in the ashram. Now that I am retired and my children are all grown up I have plenty of time to do the things I want. It’s not too far to get to the ashram but I don’t bother coming if Gurudev is not here. Maybe I will come but it’s just not the same without him here. (Personal communication)

This is a common articulation. Priyanka, an NRI from London who works in marketing explained how ‘the ashram just isn’t the same without the guru here. It feels different, like there is less fizz in a bottle of champagne…who wants to drink flat champagne?’ However, if the guru is in residence they would more than likely come each weekend. International arrivals are far less likely to come during times when the guru is absent. This shows at least that coming to the ashram is a secondary concern for most devotees when compared to the opportunity to see and interact with the guru. This is because the locus of affective power is not in the guru himself, neither is it found in the ashram. Instead it is found in the relationship cultivated between the guru and disciple. Central to this is the opportunity to be sākṣāt.

The concept of being sākṣāt indicates placing oneself immediately in front of the object of worship to have a direct line of vision. Dipesh, an accountant who now lives in Singapore but is originally from Delhi, told me how he feels that the community held together by emotions (Feuchtwang and Wang 2001, Hervieu-Léger 1982, Zhe 2008).
experience of *darśana* is energising, focusing and allows for his spiritual practice to come easier. Several devotees attest that while seeing one’s guru forms the cornerstone of their religious and ashram experiences, and usually invokes feelings described as ‘blissful’, ‘healing’ and ‘magical’, it can also produce feelings of deep anxiety, shame and guilt to manifest.

It can be a confusing and overpowering cocktail of emotions. This can be seen as part of an authoritarian strategy to control and manipulate people through increasing collective and individual emotions, so that the guru’s verbal and non-verbal suggestions can be more effective (Brennan 2004: 56). A common response like the following from Amita, a Delhi housewife explains, ‘when the guru gets angry with us it shows he cares and if we are humiliated in front of the rest of the people, like what happened to the swami in the temple today, then what is really happening is that our karma is being burnt up quicker’.

This is part of the group social dynamic that occurs encouraging the devotee to work reflexively upon him or herself as they recalibrate their own sense of subjective identity by using the guru, as the ideal knower, as a reference point. This works because the guru operates by signifying the ideals of compassion, kindness, and patience, in a way quite similar to a caring but authoritarian father figure.

As the aspirant is comparing themselves to the guru we can appreciate the concept of *meconnaisance* (misrecognition) to explore the exchange of glances (Lacan 1978). Meconnaisance refers to the way in which individuals are subjected to the spatially mediated visual or metaphorical operations where the individual catches a glimpse of one’s reflected image. The result is a perceived impression that comes from the ideal other who (in)validates the image causing anxiety for the individual and questions to be asked of oneself (Brennan 2004, Lacan 1978, Merleau-Ponty 2005).

One of the surest ways to gain social capital within the community is to be publicly recognised by the guru. Anil, a long-term devotee and architect from Mumbai
explained that, ‘Babaji (Nityananda) is able to see directly into our souls…there is no hiding, the guru knows and sees everything, that’s why all we can do is surrender to him’. Part of the guru’s charismatic power comes from the belief that he is omniscient, able to know all that is going on in his ashram and in the hearts and minds of his devotees. This alleged panopticon like ability of the guru regulates the habits and behaviour of the devotees. The ability of the guru to ‘know everything’ is a representation of perfection that coerces people into believing they must surrender to his authority in order to gain his grace.

While many people donate significant amounts of economic capital and have done so for decades, it is clear that, even if the guru is aware of the game he is a part of, as he and I have discussed, that in order to secure the fundamental financial benefits required to assist in the future development of his organisation, he must sometimes satisfy the personal desires of his devotees to have private darśana with him, especially those that have economic vitality and a willingness to invest in his organisation. While financial donations may not guarantee an individual’s accumulation of the desired symbolic capital encapsulated in gaining legitimacy within the community as knowers, it does generate a certain amount of social capital through demonstrating a commitment to the guru and his project, regardless of feelings of envy that are often articulated in similar instances. This display of fidelity is important as becoming like the guru, or at least seemingly, requires gaining not just epistemological access but also a closer spatial relationship. One way of gaining this is through online access, to which subject I now turn.

Some organisations use web-based transmissions for live or recorded transglobal e-satsaṅgas and e-darśana (Williamson 2005). This raises interesting questions and concerns amongst devotees as to the validity, ontology and the legitimate logic for engaging in such practices as cyber or e-darśana, which has
become one of the most popular Hindu practices available on the net (Karapanagiotis 2013).

At the click of a mouse button the devotees can find themselves in e-satsaṅga having darśana with their guru who is able to explain key points about the tradition and its practices while providing romantic and idyllic images of the ashrams, fellow devotees and the ritual practices. E-darśana is an interesting marketing strategy that entices individuals who are transported electronically to the emotive well-spring from which they draw their spiritual energy.

Some gurus like Baba Ramdev and Swami Nithyananda (a different swami to Shanti Mandir’s guru) have live broadcasts over the internet of their satsaṅgas and other culturally related events, showing that the seeker’s ability to connect is ever present (Nithyananda 2015, Ramdev 2015). Within the Shanti Mandir e-community devotees are able to have darśana through its own YouTube channel where short clips of the guru giving satsaṅga are regularly uploaded (ShantiMandir1008 2015).

Leo, whom we met in chapter four, responded to an email regarding e-darśana by saying:

I don't know about e-darshan but e-satsang is certainly a winner. Practicing kundalini yoga as a householder in isolation in the 21st century used to make me feel like a real loner. With gurugita.com I've got in touch with a bunch of people around the world who are just like me. (Personal communication)

Through Shanti Mandir’s YouTube channel individuals are able to connect with their guru and the broader community he has developed. Through seeing the guru and also his ashrams it allows for memories of previous experiences to be relived and also to foster or rekindle in individuals the desire to once again return to the ashram. For many devotees, like Peta a law student from Sydney, who comments:

It is the sound of Gurudev’s voice and his kind face that instantly takes me to a place of stillness. If I am feeling frayed at the ends from my hectic life I will watch some clips of Nityananda on YouTube to remind me of the special connection we and I share. (Personal communication)
Eck explains how the Hindu term *darśana* does not only signify ‘seeing the deity’ but it includes the ‘seeing of truth’ (1998: 4). The visual aspect of seeing the divine form is an intimate occasion that places emphasis on a personal encounter. Even though e-*darśana* reduces the exchange to a two-dimensional digital domain, various forms of *darśana* are heightened modes of perception that focus attention; this ‘attention is the closed telescope when the gaze is upon the deity. The returned gaze, being open, is what is desired by the devotee — the view from Brahman’s point of view’ (Sanzaro 2008: 16).

The devotees’ experience in live *satsaṅga* in the ashram can at times be sensorially overwhelming. This might result in a distorted reception of the guru’s message as there are sometimes quite a few things going on distracting the devotee from paying attention to his message. E-*darsána* complements live *darśana* by providing an alternative effective medium for increasing epistemological access because the devotee can focus on the guru’s discourse and repeatedly watch a particular video or rewind a section to gain clarity on certain points. Whereas in the temple, the guru may be speaking mostly in Hindi, which means the non-Hindi speaking devotees receive a single and mono headphone plus a receiver that allows them to listen to one of the bilingual devotees as they translate the guru’s message.

On one occasion while Nityananda was travelling in America some lucky residents were given the opportunity to exchange glances and say a quick hello to their guru via Skype. Due to the increased wifi connectivity in the ashram Swami Komalananda was able to pass her iPhone around for about thirty minutes so that those still enjoying Sunday morning breakfast could say hello. As I watched the young students and elderly residents climb over each other to say ‘Namaste Gurudev’, I was struck at the centrality of Nityananda to people’s lives, the sincerity and earnestness of their approach.
One other way in which this global family joins together is through Shanti Mandir’s Facebook pages. This principal page is facilitated by the Walden ashram in America. Shanti Mandir Australia also has a page (Mandir 2015k). Through Shanti Mandir’s timeline the devotee is afforded another opportunity to stay in touch with the guru’s movements and receive almost live updates on particular functions or ceremonies he is participating in.

Through various social media sites it is possible for the distributed devotees across the globe to stay abreast of the guru’s movements. This practice plays a fundamental part in keeping the bonds of this global community entwined. As there are several individuals who have known each other for decades from all over around the world; due to their association with Siddha Yoga and now with Shanti Mandir these online communities help to make the world a smaller place allowing people the opportunity to connect with their guru, their fellow devotees but, most importantly, themselves. Moving from the cyber world of e-darśana the next section returns to the ashram providing ethnographic information on darśana in Shanti Mandir’s temple.

Building upon the brief description of the temple in the previous chapter we are already aware that in the temple the genders are separated with female devotees seated on the left side while the males sit on the right, and that in order of purity and legitimacy the Renunciants sit closest to the guru followed by the Scholars (Teachers and Students) and then the Patrons. These domains of purity are malleable and during peaks in the ritual calendar the space reserved for officiating priests may be occupied by some of the students to make room for more devotees.

Everyone who is socialised into the habitus of the ashram comes to know their place. Occasionally transgressions of this normative social order occur. One of the most notable occurrences of this happened during my fieldwork. It involved a small infant child of perhaps 18-months age. This child waddled up to the front of the temple to the small statue of Nandī, the animal vehicle (vāhana) of the god Śiva. Like a coin-
operated ride that one might see located out the front of a shop for a child’s entertainment, the child saddled Nandī and began riding it to the delight of everyone in the temple who burst into laughter as she simulated taking a journey on the animal’s back. However, her parents were shocked, embarrassed and seemingly terrified of the potential consequences. She was quickly whisked up from her mount by her mother and taken out of the temple amidst much bellowing and laughter by all present. Everyone seemed to think that it was nothing more than a delightful display of cherubic innocence. At least as conversations ensued after the event it became clear that this was not regarded as an issue for the child or her parents. However, can this incident tell us something about legitimacy? While the child was exempt from the normative standards of behaviour, had she been perhaps older, and therefore, in a better position to have been able to judge for herself if this action was tolerable, a different response from the community might have resulted.

One personal experience of sitting in the temple occurred during a quite busy time in the ritual calendar. The temple was full to the point of overflowing. The western wall of the temple is only about one-metre high. I climbed over it and sat down towards the front of the audience where the students and teachers sit, as there was no space at the rear of the temple where I would have normally sat. I remember the look of shock on the faces of some Western devotees. However, the students I sat amongst did not seem perturbed by my presence, in fact they welcomed it. Afterwards an older American devotee tried to explain the perceived transgression. In his eyes I had seated myself in an area beyond my what my status allowed. However, I received no negative feedback from the students, teachers or the guru. Even if some individuals consider something okay everyone may not look upon it in the same light. While I may have done something ‘wrong’ in the eyes of one devotee, like a majority of the community, their sense of right and wrong or legitimate and illegitimate is based on
the guru’s discourse. The guru spends a significant amount of time inspiring people through anecdotal stories about the rewards of adhering to his ‘good’ way of being.

The formal time for taking darśana of the guru occurs prior to both breakfast and dinner. The students have a different darśana routine, which involves each year group presenting themselves separately in the middle of the temple facing the guru, while the rest of the congregation watches. A common narrative amongst the devotees is how they find observing the guru-student relationship to be one of the most rewarding aspects of their ashram experience and, more importantly, why they make donations. Melanie, a Swiss devotee believes watching the students interact with the guru is one of the highlights of her experience in the ashram. ‘I love watching Gurudev interact with the boys. He cares for them greatly. You can see that they also love him a great deal. This is why I like to come and see the boys growing year after year. This is why I support this place. I want to help preserve Sanskrit’. This exposes an interesting facet of the vicarious nature of rapport. Melanie’s explanation shows the affective relationship between herself and the guru is mediated by the guru’s relationship with the students.

Before the students leave the temple they begin their routinised darśana by reciting one or two short Sanskrit verses (subhāśitas) of their choosing before taking full prostrations. They stretch themselves out face to the floor before their guru. Some even take to touching the ground with each closed eye finishing their routine by kissing the floor several times demonstrating to themselves and onlookers the depth of their sincerity and intensity of their devotion to their guru who feeds, clothes, houses and cares for them as if they were his own children.

This pious performance is an opportunity for the congregation to realise and witness the progress that each year level is making. The crowd takes particular delight in watching the youngest students quickly decide amongst each other who will lead the recitation and which mantra will be uttered. For many, this experience personally
touches them as they have been investing in the ashram, the school, and the students for some time. Also, compared to the other less tangible or directly observable charitable works that the organisation is involved in, the students and their development are centre stage in all facets of life and religious practice within the ashram.

For the Renunciants, teachers, and the Patrons the *darśana* procedure is somewhat different. Figure 6.1 shows how the common pattern of two lines forms based primarily on gender. It was watching this procession one evening in *satsaṅga* that I started to wonder about the hierarchical configurations of the social network. In the temple the hierarchy that exists places the Renunciants at the head of the queue, followed by the teachers (Scholars) and then the Patrons. However, as discussed, in the evening it is the students who lead the darsána procession. This crisscrossed shuffling web of devotion can be become quite challenging to navigate especially when there are hundreds of people and lines seemingly going in every direction.

![Figure 6.1: Movement of Devotees during *Darśana* in the Temple](image)

Figure 6.1 shows the *darśana* starting point is normally on the left (east) and people move towards the right (west) finishing their *darśana* at Muktananda’s picture located
behind the guru’s chair. The penultimate station is at the Nityananda’s feet. Couples sometimes cause a bit of confusion and frustration as they try and negotiate synchronising their arrival in the queue at Nityananda’s feet. Charlie, a long-term American devotee who used to be a Renunciant under Muktānanda but left the institution of saṁnyāsa after Muktānanda’s passing, explained to the congregation one day in satsaṅga that:

*Darśana* is a mystical experience that leads people to a greater connection with themselves. It is through the power of the guru’s grace being transferred to the individual that a subtle process of change begins to take place. This experience is beyond words and the mind. It can only be experienced through surrendering to the guru…by getting rid of the ego.

As people move from one deity to the next in a similar way to Catholics moving between different stations of the cross in a church, they will generally drop to their knees and either complete a full or half prostration by placing their foreheads and chest on the ground in front of the deity, while the more aged will stand, drop their chin to their chest and place the palms of their hands together at the chest in a humble and earnest display of supplication. Most people will then stand up moving closer to the deity and either touch its feet or some other part purportedly drawing in the grace or goodwill to themselves by placing their fingers and palms at their eyes, chest, and at the top of the head.

Some individuals have developed intricate and highly individualised prostration techniques. For most people the standard operating procedure consists of 1) approaching the deity/guru with palms of hands pressed together in front of chest, and 2) dropping knees to floor and possibly chest / forehead extending hands either out in front or under shoulders in a push-up style position. Some also extend the legs out into a full prostration and also add a twist of the torso or perform a complicated routine involving repeated interlocking movements of arms and legs. There seems to be a fine line between showing enough reverence and putting on too much of a show, as people
watch learning from each other different or expected ways to approach the guru, others will critique the displays performed by their fellow devotees to see if they are really embodying the legitimate ways in which to approach divinity (McCartney 2014a: between 08:00 and 10:00 mins).

During darśana people generally do not talk. At least if they do it is done quietly with the people near to them in a muttered way so as not to disturb others, as darśana generally produces a solemn, peaceful and introspective mood. Occasionally, some of the students may lead kīrtana (devotional singing) accompanied by instruments. The most common musical accompaniment is instead prerecorded music played over the sound system. This incorporation of live or prerecorded music helps to cultivate the necessary mood that facilitates the production of subsequent emotions. Sometimes the student in charge of the audio equipment will decide on the music to be played himself, while other times the guru may instruct a particular album to be played. Quite often the music played is a recording of Muktananda singing a particular text like the Guru Gītā.

Over time I have become less inclined towards taking darśana, mostly because I cannot stand queuing in lines. We often think of waiting as frustrating, yet it is fundamental to and a constitutive aspect of the process and aims of darśana (cf. Jeffrey 2010).

My own experience, attested also by that of others, is that during the wait toward the guru I would contemplate the journey home, into myself. I would reflect on the opportunity to create more space for love and compassion in my life and think about the people I care about, those I have issues with, and those I do not know, wishing them well on their own journeys and that there be no ill will between us all. However, not everyone thought this way, including members of my own family when they came to visit. Disinclined to participate they explained how ‘it’s just weird, why would I want to stand in line and bow at his (Nityananda’s) feet?’
When I did take *darśana* I would wait until the very last person had gone up and, then, I would only take *darśana* of the guru. I found a lot of benefit in watching people seeing the different ways in which they made sacred and approached divinity. However, my lack of participation was noticed by several devotees who individually or as a collective came to me on a couple of occasions puzzled by my reticence to participate in this central part of their religious practice.

I once asked Nityananda about the *darśana* procession and he told me that ‘there is no official way to do it. No one is expected to participate like everyone else’. He acknowledged, however, that a routine had developed which people had become accustomed to and then expected others to follow. By citing this conversation I once had with Nityananda, my interlocutors generally left either confused or irritated. This also seemed to create some distance between myself and some of the devotees demonstrating that by not committing to the external practices of the group the individual might hinder their attempt to gain legitimacy or at least acceptance. However, this was also part of my methodology to see how far the bonds of sociality were able to stretch and what the limits of the social glue are. Not participating like everyone else caused me to be viewed by some with suspicion. That I might not be as sincere as those that did join in. The social capital that one accrues through participating in all aspects of daily life but most importantly the religious practice, and especially *darśana*, is paramount to gaining legitimacy and acceptance.

Most people prefer to line up and take *darśana* at all the available points within the temple, whereas some people prefer to only take *darśana* of the guru or not at all. Participating in the full circuit demonstrates how the performance of this spiritual practice is also an important opportunity to accumulate valuable social capital by showing one’s devotion and commitment. Established devotees may take it upon themselves to insist, encourage or guide newer devotees or visitors to approach all the deities as a way to introduce and socialise the new arrival to the practice. Sometimes,
this seems to be less about helping the new arrival then it is about an individual establishing themselves as either more knowledgeable or competent within the eyes of the community.

Taking someone ‘under one’s wing’ is a strategy that can be employed to demonstrate a certain level of advancement. Cheryl, an American retiree, took it upon herself to show the new arrival Natalia, a professional artist from Mexico the ways of doing things in the ashram. It is possible that Cheryl was doing a selfless task, however, Natalia informed me that she felt as if it was more an exercise for Cheryl to demonstrate to her guru her ability to socialise others into the culture by showing she ‘has what it takes’ to become a leader; that her attainment of the ashram habitus was established and evidence of her preparedness to take vows of renunciation.

In general, Natalia believes that the more established devotees had a sense of ownership over the guru and the ashram, and while they welcomed newcomers, they also took on the role of ‘educating’ in a manner more stringent than even the guru might insist. Natalia also mentioned that during one talk given by the guru he mentioned his observation that some devotees become too attached to things, like particular chairs, locations in the temple, or even the guru himself and that the attachment to the nāma-rūpa (form of things) ought to be avoided. These examples raise interesting points regarding the unofficial hierarchies that develop within the ashram network. Length of association is an important factor in determining legitimacy as well as one’s perceived value as a contributor.

Darśana for many is the highlight of their day in the ashram, mostly because for a brief moment they share an intimate space with the guru. On the occasions he is on tour and outside of the ashram, a framed photo of the guru replaces his physical presence on the chair he normally sits on in the temple. The more devoted individuals will still queue to take darśana of the photo whereas the apparently ‘less committed’ or sincere may avoid this step. When he is present, some individuals take this
opportunity to speak personally with him, which, sometimes results in holding up the queue interminably frustrating those left waiting in line eager to have darśana and move onto consuming the waiting meal. This can lead to disparaging comments being made by other devotees about their own guru-bhai (guru-brother) who has made an explicit attempt to usurp or delay the other devotees’ time in front of the guru by their alleged abuse regarding the consumption and tragedy of this commons (Kopelman, Weber et al. 2002). Individuals might be labeled greedy for taking what is perceived to be too much time with the guru. This offence extends to a critique of the individual’s ego, which may be deemed in need of reduction as many devotees consider that only an egotist would take too much time in the darśana line.

Generally, when in front of the guru, most people will smile and not say much preferring the moment to pass as they take in what June, a retired devotee from America explains as the ‘silent loving gaze’ of the guru. The guru may smile and look directly into someone’s eyes or, he may be busy receiving information while talking with an attendant to even notice the seemingly endless line of people dropping to the floor in front of him.

Pallabi, a long-term devotee from Delhi relates, like several other devotees that she sometimes thinks that the guru might be angry with her if he doesn’t look at her or smile when she goes up for darśana. This seed of self-doubt that is sown in individuals forms part of the currency of enlightenment. If devotees were to always receive positive reinforcement through smiles and good wishes then perhaps they might become complacent or egotistical assuming that they have advanced and that is why their guru is pleased with them. Through producing tacit elements of fear and shame the guru is able to retain devotees who remind themselves of their imperfect state and necessary continuation of their yogic practice and allegiance to the guru and his community. This becomes evidence for some aspects of the alleged omniscience of the guru who perhaps, or perhaps not, has come to know the particular and minute...
indiscretions of his devotees. Or perhaps it is just coincidence that the guru doesn’t smile or even acknowledge someone’s presence when they appear for *darśana*. Nonetheless, it is an interesting mechanism of socialisation that several devotees have commented on. Svati, a housewife and mother from Delhi believes that the guru knows everything about her and that there is ‘no hiding anything from him’. Svati believed that the ‘cold shoulder’ she received from the guru at *darśana* the previous evening was a punishment for the argument she was a part of with another devotee. She explained how:

I think the guru knew about what happened between me and the other person yesterday. That is why he snubbed me. Actually he loves me, but he wants to teach me a lesson that he is not happy with me my behaviour. It is not how one should behave in the ashram. That is why he did not look at me.  

(Private conversation 13/01/2013)

Vivek, an engineer from Mumbai, was one of several devotees who responded to my question regarding why he queues by interestingly citing his own version of Pascal’s wager. He explained that: ‘I don’t know, it’s what we do yeah, you line up and bow and hopefully receive the grace of the guru and gods. It’s better to do it than not, isn’t it!’ While Abigail, a visitor from America, who did not consider herself a devotee said, ‘I do it primarily to fit in. I don’t want people to think I’m not sincere. Everyone else does it so maybe I should too?’

In the economy of sympathy, mimesis as performance, plays a significant part in governing social relations and critical exchanges of power and information, which includes tapping into different sentiments in order ‘to display “finer” feelings while also granting worthy objects of sympathy a place in the social order’ (Esse 2010: 6).

After people have taken *darśana*, on their way to breakfast or dinner they will pass through the entrance to the temple and receive some *prasāda* (blessed food). Normally it involves a sprinkling of ‘holy water’ (*brahmāmbhas*), a teaspoon of yoghurt, and perhaps either a small piece of fruit or a boiled sweet. These foodstuffs
are said to be infused with the transcendent energy of the guru and the gods, as they were located during the guru-pūja next to the mūrti of Nityananda.

A lot of the prasāda is first given as a gift from a devotee to the guru who then passes it on to one of his student attendants to ensure it becomes part of the prasāda distributed at the end of satsaṅga. On some occasions a box of sweets might be opened by the guru and distributed to select individuals as they come up for his darśana. This can cause delight in some but disappointment in others as they miss out, or, they are perhaps in between two people who receive this extra piece of prasāda, and are left wondering why they did not receive it as well. Consumption of the blessed foodstuffs is yet another opportunity to imbibe the guru’s grace thereby aiding the karmic detoxification of the individual.

This collective performance of piety requires patience as it can last sometimes as much as one hour until everyone that wants to has taken darśana. A strategy for showing more devotion involves choosing to stay in the temple after most have departed for the following meal. By delaying or foregoing that in order to linger in the temple with the guru they demonstrate that the lure of physical sustenance in the form of food is not as nourishing as being in the presence of the guru for a few more moments, particularly with less people around. The opportunity to walk with him, as part of his entourage over to the mess hall, may make the individual feel even closer to the guru.

Darśana also occurs in less formal, more spontaneous ways, or what I like to describe as ‘pop-up’ style darśana events. They generally happen either after breakfast or lunch. The guru will sit down in a public place within the ashram grounds, normally around the mess hall on a swing (jhūlā), allowing people to again line up to receive more of his grace. Sometimes this type of event could include the distribution of gifts by the guru to the students at the Sanskrit school. They may receive a new sweater or T-shirt. It is also common for a senior devotee who is close to the guru to be involved
in handing out these gifts. Some become involved willingly while others are reluctant to do so. Edward, a devotee from Australia told me that ‘I don’t mind giving to the big guy (Nityananda) to help out his ashram. I just don’t want to be recognised for it or have to stand there and distribute gifts. It’s not an honour for me it is a penance’.

Just like in the temple, as people finish their prostrations, many, particularly the students like to mill about close to the guru watching the procession. It seems that as if by standing in proximity to the dispensing of saktipāta this will allow them to accumulate a little more for themselves. As I sat one day finishing lunch with Matthew, an architect from Sydney, we watched this event unfold and began to discuss what motivates people to take darśana at any and every opportunity. Matthew convinced me to go with him for darśana suggesting that ‘it could be fun’. I reluctantly accepted.

I noticed as I arrived at the front of the line and began to prostrate in front of Nityananda that one of the senior devotees and trustee members, Naresh an engineer from Mumbai, mentioned to the guru that he had seen me during the previous session in the temple chanting the Bhāgavad Gītā in the Gujarati script. This seemed to cause great delight amongst the group and particularly the guru who already knew I could read the Hindi script. As I rose from my prostration I tried to leave the rug, which had been laid out in front of the guru for the purpose of prostrations. I tried to catch up with Matthew but an overwhelming feeling took over my body. As I tried to walk away I felt, in a way, as if I had taken a fast acting sedative. My limbs became heavy and as I sat back down, feeling what I can only articulate as being quite dizzy due to this rising feeling of effervescence, like when a bottle of sparkling water is opened, I entered into a meditative trance cross-legged on the floor with my eyes locked into the third eye (ajñā chakra). It was approximately ninety minutes later that I came back to my senses after having sat silently in what I can only describe as a blissful meditative
state. By the time I opened my eyes everyone had already left and I was sitting there alone.

Maybe it was something that I ate? I had not really experienced something as direct or as overwhelming as this before in my experience of being in Nityananda’s company. Previously, I had experienced flutters of excitement, fear, or an overwhelming mélange of emotions when approaching him, but this experience was so much more intense and unexpected. I had always rationalised these flutters as something similar to an excited teenager swooning in front of their favourite rockstar, overcome by the blend of aesthetics, collective experience and socialisation into expected modes of behaviour. However, I think the added expectation that the guru ‘knows everything about you’ adds to the anxiety. It’s difficult not to be nervous when approaching someone the devotees say ‘knows you better than you know yourself’.

As a skeptic and rationalist I find it hard to understand what happened to me that day. Did I receive my first real dose of śaktipāta? I’m not the type of person who relies upon or goes seeking experiences like this as a self or social validation. Did the guru really know of my conversation with Matthew and think to teach me a lesson? Or was he just happy with my ability to recite the Bhagavād Gītā in the Gujarati script? Still how does that transfer into an explanation? I really do not have an answer to these questions or, more importantly, the answer to what happened to me that day. However, as I returned to the room I shared with Matthew he chuckled, ‘He zapped you good didn’t he?’ With his statement I began to realise the commonality of several devotees’ descriptions regarding their experience of śaktipāta, and why it is common to hear it likened to the flow of electricity.156

This type of experience of receiving the guru’s grace is soteriologically fundamental to Shanti Mandir’s practice. It forms a unique part of devotional testimonies and is common for members of the community who have embodied this discourse to attest to an ability to sense, as a result of their yoga practice, the finer energetic fields or, more specifically, the energy of Baba Muktananda present today in their lives.

Some devotees even profess engaging in daily internal dialogues with their disembodied guru. People who never personally met Muktananda come to appreciate the economy of sentiment and how this can help them gain acceptance through the sympathy of shared experiences. These statements can be seen as a proselytising strategy and an assertion of authority when uttered in the presence of new recruits or visitors. Such public statements are common in the satsaṅgas that occur in or outside of the ashram. It is quite normal for chosen devotees to share their experience of yoga since becoming involved with Shanti Mandir and Baba Muktananda.

Regardless of validating or disproving such claims, some who knew Baba Muktananda say they feel his presence in the ashram today, or that through his grace they are able to see semi-divine beings. Whatever one thinks of the validity of such claims, from a sociological perspective this may be interpreted as a strategy to gain legitimacy in the eyes of other devotees, particularly new recruits, who are seeking confirmation they have chosen the right community to entrust their anticipated salvation with. Stories of this power and its effect on the lives’ of individuals circulate amongst the network of devotees traded like symbolic ‘bit-coins’ in an attempt to show one is more advanced than the other. At the same time these stories are also used to build rapport between people from across the world, as it is their common attraction

to Muktananda or Nityananda, and the commonality of experiences that has brought them together, and more importantly what keeps them together.

An example of how such an experience is used to establish relational positions in the hierarchy occurred at breakfast one morning. Without greeting me, soon after sitting down Christiano, a health practitioner from Argentina said to me, ‘You know Patrick, the guru just told me I will be liberated in this lifetime.’ I wasn’t sure if he had literally just come from a meeting with the guru and I was the first person fortunate enough to share the good news with or not. As I ate my breakfast unsure how to respond to such a statement I let the silence answer for me. Yet later I thought that, if nothing else, it was a strategy by this individual to rank himself higher than myself because the guru had never told me such a thing, although I had not thought to ask. Why else would someone make such an utterance? Was I expected to congratulate him or ask for his advice about how, I too, could gain a similar promise from the guru?

This section explained how central the practice of seeing the guru directly or indirectly is to Shanti Mandir’s culture – or even via non-local scenarios such as through the internet. This discussion moved into an ethnographic overview of the religious practice that occurs in the temple, in satsaṅga and in other ‘pop-up’ style dispensing of the guru’s grace. The next section aims to explore issues related to deconstructing the guru’s gaze in order to understand how this transformation unfolds. It begins by elaborating on the concept of audience reception.

6.3 — Deconstructing The Guru’s Gaze

Both Gnoli (1968) and Masson and Patwardhan (1970) discuss how Abhinavagupta in Abh and DhĀL moved from defining an audience by social parameters to psychologically defined characteristics of cognitive processes and emotional experiences (Lingorska 2007: 154). Sreenath explains how in Bharata’s aesthetic
theory, the symmetric relationship or rapport between audience and actor is central to the rasa experience that is derived from the objects of perception, which include the determinants (vibhāvas), consequences (anubhāvas) and transitory emotions (vyabhicāri-bhāvas) (2013: 18).

This relates to how the ‘Horizon of Participation’ is established primarily by the invitation to participate, and by the relation between the event, its specific context and the cultural background of the audience (White 2013: 60). Satsaṅga is open to everyone and anyone desiring to know or experience these particular culturally constructed concepts of śānta and bhakti rasas and their teleological efficacy in the purported attainment a ‘blissful’ and ‘liberated’ state. However, by moving beyond a homogenous ‘audience’ and defining the various groups that attend satsaṅga based on their roles within the community, including their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, we can appreciate the various levels of understanding and epistemological access different participants or groups might possess. This is related directly to the concept of epistemic capital that is discussed next.

Based on the analysis of Shanti Mandir’s marketing strategies and the ethnographic material provided we know that a significant reason why people go to the Shanti Mandir ashram is to find an affective sense of peace through community. The historical context and aims of satsaṅga that focus on recruiting new proselytes and capital through showcasing the potential benefits of aligning with the organisation have also been demonstrated (Kriegman 1980, Kriegman and Solomon 1985). The success of such a practice relies fundamentally on the guru’s ability as a facilitator of this choreographed production, his referent and charismatic power and also his epistemological capital, which, essentially refers to his ability to explain to his devotees their social relationships to the phenomenal world. Referent power is an

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individual’s ability to make others want to emulate the individual said to possess it. This is fundamental to not only cultivating the legitimate disposition but also the removal of epistemological doubt through the gift of knowledge (vidyā-dāna) (Galewicz 2011).

Knower building, which is what the transformative process is about ‘depends on how the gaze generated by social relations shapes a field’s sociality or capacity to integrate and subsume dispositions of actors’ (Maton 2013: 240-241). While epistemologists have distinguished several species of knowledge, epistemic coherentism is related to a belief system’s maximal explanatory power. The general idea regarding how coherent a belief might be is justified for the individual as long as it either best explains, or, is best explained by a member of the epistemic community in question (Moser 2002: 3-4).

The guru’s epistemological capital is directly connected to and intimately involved with cultivating his congregation’s own epistemological access, or rather, their ability to understand his message and follow his cultivating gaze to this alternately idealised utopia he discussed in his public discourses. This ability to provide epistemological access forms part of his own epistemological capital, which, in turn, is linked to his own referent power. Reference to Nityananda’s epistemological capital and referent power is clearly represented in the following statement found on Shanti Mandir’s own website:

He travels between the ashrams each year, sharing the spiritual practices and teachings in which he has been initiated. His humility, devotion, patience, and acceptance are palpable, his ability to speak English and his knowledge of the Western culture, allows audiences to grasp the traditional Vedic teachings with ease. While carrying the traditional teachings, he makes spirituality a practical part of modern daily reality, guided by the prayer ‘May all beings be content’. (Mandir 2015d)

From the same page the visitor to the website is told by Nityananda himself that ‘we must dive deeper within ourselves, we must become established in the knowledge of
the Truth’ (Mandir 2015d). Schopenhauer was inspired by the South Asian speculative traditions, particularly by the Advaita Vedānta tradition that also inspires Shanti Mandir. In his third book on aesthetics he refers to the concept of genius, which can be construed as a similar term to epistemological capital. This genius enables people to learn how to teach the aesthetic experience to others so they too can revel in the pure subjectivity that is free of interest or desire (Schopenhauer 2008). As established in chapter five, we know that the main aim of transforming the individual is based on cultivating an aesthetic experience. By learning how to see and experience the world in a way that cultivates the attitude of becoming a disinterested spectator, it is believed that the individual is able to overcome the bondage caused by their desires that is lost due to this cognitive distortion (jñāna-sācīkaraṇā). Within Shanti Mandir’s episteme this distortion is said to arise as a result of avidyā (ignorance) caused by māyā (illusion).

The devotees are eager to apply the guru’s moral and epistemological teachings and practices to their lives and find that the guru’s gaze or ‘divine vision’ impels them to continue in their religious practice (anuṣṭhāna). The mimetic logic and non-cognitive currency appeals to the emotional preferences of the followers who repeatedly told me they do not go to the ashram or satsāṅga to think but instead to feel. In contrast to their normal daily lives where they are engaged in distracting thoughts related to the material world they explain that they lose focus or connection with their own internal divinity. According to the tradition it is through the guru’s message conveyed by the rasa and bhavas of satsāṅga that allows the audience to reconnect with themselves. This discourse suggests that objective rational thinking is antithetical to the subjective experience of bliss or quietude. Combined with the guru’s charismatic and referent power it induces in his followers a high level of admiration and identification urging them to adopt similar attitudes and behaviours as a strategy to find peace and also gain legitimacy (Crovetto 2011).
In an effort to promote introspection or reflexivity within this particular community, I argue that *satsaṅga* is the formalised domain within which epistemological access to the ‘rules of the game’ is established, reiterated, projected and received. Willig explained how ‘epistemological reflexivity encourages us to reflect upon the assumptions (about the world and knowledge) that we have made in the course of the research, and it helps us to think about the implications of such assumptions for the research and its findings’ (Willig 2001: 32). While Willig’s focus is on conducting qualitative research as a social scientist, I argue that the reflexive ‘research’ being carried out by each individual who attends Shanti Mandir’s *satsaṅga*’s has a similar intention; which involves the prospect of reflecting upon the assumptions of the world and one’s place in it that might lead to fundamental answers regarding the human condition (Lingorska 2007: 160). In a sense, it is an epistemological template that Shanti Mandir offers to its congregants.

As Söffner (2010: 92-3) suggested, mimesis (*mimetike*) or assimilation, in a Platonic sense, does not necessarily ‘entail re-presentation’ but instead operates through participation (*methexis*). *Satsaṅga* is the ritualised or formalised domain where this shared experience of collective effervescence and psychological unity merges with the opportunity to participate in making and reaffirming sacred identities. This is because *rasa* is a theory of mimetic communication through which a core emotion (*bhāva*) is rediscovered through a series of perceptible sensory moments in a performance (Sreenath 2013: 2). Based on the NŚ this is said to come about as a result of the bodily representations produced by certain deep mental processes that have given rise to the *sahṛdaya* (qualified spectator) (Schechner 2001). It is the *satsaṅga* arena that produces a particular atmosphere, which is experienced collectively allowing for the transmission of affect. This affective transference, while produced socially or psychologically, has real, immediate and sometimes durable results on the neuro-biology and ultimately behaviour of the *sahṛdaya* (cf. Brennan: 2004: 3).
The guru stands between appearance and reality acting primarily as the dynamic and transformative force of the divine rather than as a static, paradigmatic lawgiver. The individual aims to align themself with the guru’s schemas of perception that organise a person’s conception of reality while also motivating and guiding action (D'Andrade 1992: 30). Undergoing this transformation to become (like the) guru is the central task of the disciple. This ought not be taken in the sense of gaining a position or status, an ashram or a following of people. Instead it refers to the attainment of the guru’s state of inner self-perfection (Brooks 1997: 335-6). It is the guru’s gaze that cultivates in the devotees the urge to undergo this transformation. Below in Figure 6.2 we see a typical scene from a Sunday morning satsaṅga. Seated in front of the male Patrons are the Scholars (students and teachers) dressed in white, while the guru sits facing his audience in front of a picture of his guru Baba Muktananda. The student standing next to Nityananda gives a testimony to the audience about his experience of being in the ashram, studying Sanskrit and his pledge of fidelity to Nityananda and the tradition.

Figure 6.2: A Typical Scene from Sunday Morning Satsaṅga

When the cultural capital of knowledge dominates as the favoured rate of exchange, as in the ashram, the field can be conceptualised to identify the hierarchical arrangement
of knowers by their social relation (Maton & Moore 2010: 161). With more experience and subsumption of knowledge, in every field, an individual is able to ascend up the hierarchy of knowers, however, they are limited by the relative strength or weakness of their social relation, which is shaped by the type of gaze operating in the field. LCT conceptualises how four different types of gaze are determined by the social relation to knowledge. It is the strength of knower-grammars that help shape the conditions for entry, position and trajectory within a field’s hierarchies (Maton 2013: 137).

The relatively strongest social relation is one represented by innate natural talent and the genius of the ‘born’ gaze. The ‘social’ gaze has everything to do with standpoint theoretical constructions of group identity based on gender, ethnicity, class or sexuality. Thus the born and social gazes restrict access demonstrating a stronger grammar (SR+). The cultivated gaze represents access through a weaker grammar (SR-), which is open to anyone willing to make the effort to be cultivated into a particular type of knower. Figure 6.3 clarifies this spectrum.

![Figure 6.3: The Gaze Spectrum](Source: Maton 2013: 138)

Breier (2004: 43) explained how the cultivated gaze is the perspective of an expert or transmitter, transmitted tacitly to acquirers, which enables the recognition and realisation of phenomena of legitimate concern to a discipline, field of education, or of practice. This type of ‘cultivated’ gaze requires prolonged immersion under the tutelage of a master so that the knower’s disposition can be appropriately shaped (Maton 2013: 199). This shapes the knower’s dispositions and allows for the
anticipated transformation. These ways of knowing define the appropriate procedures of enquiry, practice and the means of evaluation (Maton 2013: 199). Figure 6.4 represents how the cultivated gaze of the ideal knower is meant to bring different habituses together into a single disposition.

Figure 6.4: Growth of Knower Structure within a Cultivated Field
(Source: Maton 2013: 142)

The underlying rule of the cultivated gaze is that ‘habituses must be brought together’, whereas through the social gaze ‘habituses must be kept apart’ (Maton and Moore 2010: 176). Here we see an interesting phenomenon develop regarding how the cultivated gaze entrains the dispositions of various individuals from within the different groups towards emulating the guru’s disposition to adopt the ashram habitus. However, the social gaze is what is used to then separate the different groups based on the various species of capital they are legitimately able to use. This is represented in Figure 6.5 below.
The omnipresent and omniscient ‘ambient’ gaze is not part of the LCT framework. However, it is interesting to discuss this concept as it is thought to act in a similar way to the panopticon vision of CCTV cameras that unconsciously prime individuals toward prosocial behaviours. Results from experimental economic games demonstrate that the presence of ‘witnesses’, even if simply an image of a robot with large human-like eyes, encouraged more altruistic behaviour and decision making involving the allocation of scarce resources (Bering 2006). The role of the ambient gaze in the transformative socialisation of the individual is further explained by a belief in watchful supernatural agents that militate against the psychological state of deindividuation. While the process of deindividuation does occur during moments of ecstatic singing in the temple, thus creating an environment of collective identification that leads to inculcation of the ashram habitus, the subjective individual self remains. This movement between deindividuation and individuation is central to the transformation required to imbibe the ashram habitus. Speculating, then, on the role of the statues and pictures of gods and gurus spread throughout the ashram...

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158 Deindividuation causes people to unquestioningly follow group norms instead of personal norms.
159 See Michaels (2004) for an interesting discussion of the identificatory habitus.
we can begin to understand a more dynamic role (and relationship) these images (and their gazes) have in transforming the individual’s habitus and behaviour.

Extending this discussion to the broader social system of the ashram community, we can appreciate that regardless of idealist claims to the contrary made by several members within the Shanti Mandir ashram, within the social network are several arenas of conflict in which power, status, and benefits are sought by participants. Building upon Durkheim, Collins (1990) discussed the role of emotions within an organisation. He explains that there are order-takers and order-givers, and that generally the order-givers derive more emotional satisfaction because they are the main beneficiaries of the system.

It is the gaze of the order-givers, loyal to the symbolic system that represents their own prestige and affiliation to the organisation. This ritualises the order-takers through arousing a similar organisational commitment (Kemper 2002: 59). Lucia (2014c: location 3700) also invokes Durkheim (1995: 316-21) to explain how the charisma that comes from the ascetic nature of the religious virtuosos who have mastered or overcome nature, such as the guru and his or her advanced disciples, inspires the laity to perform acts of significant selfless service based on an impetus to belong and demonstrate an intense commitment to the tradition and organisation.

Within the ashram exists a hierarchical structure where more established devotees have positions of power and prestige due to their access and proximity to the guru. As part of the ashram game involves pleasing those in positions of power in order to demonstrate commitment to the organisation this system can sometimes be abused.

A common example is the use of invoking the guru’s name in order to coerce someone into performing some action. For example, ‘the guru said that you should do this work’. As it seems the order has come directly from the guru, and as the devotee knows they do not want to displease the guru, then they will normally submit to the
directive given by the order-giver due to the fear that non-acquiescence might be relayed to the guru, thereby potentially short-circuiting an individual’s claims to be part of the in-group or receive his grace. Within the community such a step generally results in positive responses as it shows a deepening of commitment to the community through submitting to the socialising process. These strategies are employed to demonstrate ones commitment to the in-group (Bauman 1990). Tensions do arise and generally it is left to the individuals to come to some understanding of the situation, ignore the situation, or leave the ashram. When asked about how the guru controls all the egos and personalities in the ashram, Nityananda often quotes Muktananda who said, ‘I don’t have to work on them. I just put them together and they work on each other’ (Muktananda 1994a: 424).

6.4 — Conclusion

As was demonstrated in the earlier portion of this chapter, the concept of charisma and how the dynamic affective relationship between the leader and follower is considered the source of the guru’s charisma. Insight into darśana and how its various interpolations provide the necessary exchange of visual glances with the guru. This chapter also discussed how social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube are used to bring together the various edges of this global community acting as an electronic (social) binding agent.

This discussion moved into a thicker description of the physical domain and layout of the temple that coincided with a description of the religious practice, gendered space and the subsequent proximity that various groups gain to the perceived source of spiritual power, i.e., the guru.

In the final section the discussion returned to Legitimation Code Theory and the socialising effect of the guru’s cultivated gaze. This was linked to the necessary
epistemological access that is crucial for the individual to appreciate the ‘divine’ discourse required for the successful inner transformation through highlighting formal aspects of the community’s own socialisation process. While this chapter explored the visual dimensions of enculturation, the next chapter turns to a more critical and thorough analysis of the guru’s discourse. Several examples are offered demonstrating the various narrative and hortatory elements combined with an analysis of the directive passages used to suggest the legitimate yogic disposition.
Chapter 7 — Divinising the Guru’s Discourse
7.1 — Introduction

Building upon the previous chapter in which I explored concepts related to the socialisation processes involved with the guru’s cultivated gaze and the centrality of the visual exchange between guru and disciple in Shanti Mandir’s religious practice, this chapter provides an analysis of the guru’s discourse and rhetorical strategies highlighting how his utterances also contribute to structuring legitimate participation within this field. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how the guru legitimises himself, his institution of gurudom, and the yogic disposition. I assert that implicit in legitimising himself, the guru legitimises his own organisation and community.

The examples given are excerpts from separate public talks that the guru has given during satsaṅgas across the world over the past decade. These talks were later transcribed and published in the Shanti Mandir’s quarterly e-magazine Siddha Marg and published in English, Spanish and Hindi. This diachronic study elucidates more salient features of the guru’s saṅkalpa to give a clearer understanding of the message he promotes to build a morally edifying discourse and the possibility of a web of belief for his devotees regarding their transformation into embodiments of śānta (cf. Hacking 1986).

Through analysing the guru’s discourse we can understand the alternate reality and legitimate disposition that he suggests is worth emulating. While Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) aims to identify the social dimension of discourse, it is also involved in determining the ideological construction for the transformation of the seeker’s disposition. Not only is finding an identity considered crucial for ontological security, it is also needed for business purposes in making distinction between one’s own enterprise and that of other competitors (Choulaiaraki and Fairclough 1999: 96, McNamara 2007: 55). CDA is also concerned with the ways in which the interests of
particular groups are furthered through the production, reproduction or transformation of social structures, relations and identities (Benwell and Stokoe 2006).

In chapter five we ascertained the performative tradition of *satsaṅga* and its role in suggesting to the audience how to share in the guru’s vision. We also learnt how the devotees must first develop the capacity to appreciate the guru’s message by becoming receptive to it; and that the performer and audience are equal agents in the process of interpreting and giving meaning to utterances, as without an audience the speaker has no influence and, therefore, no power. Continuing with the performative theme and contextualising the guru’s discourse as a cultural artefact embedded within the South Asian literary tradition, I invoke the Sanskrit term *ākāśabaddhalakṣa*\(^\text{160}\). In theatrical language this term refers to fixing one’s gaze on some object out of sight. It is through the guru’s discourse that the object out of sight is made visible, and, once visible through a description in *satsaṅga* it is closer to being obtained.

While chapter five explored the context, and chapter six the visual aspects, this chapter identifies the content of the guru’s perlocutionary acts that can create a new reality. Building upon Austin (1962), Taylor (2015: 519) explained that ‘perlocutionary significance’ refers to the extra-linguistic or other meaning and function that is not conveyed by the words alone. The perlocutionary act (or perlocutionary effect) involves the psychological effect of persuading, convincing, scaring, enlightening, inspiring, or otherwise getting someone to do or realise something (Loos, Anderson et al. 2004). While there are common sources and familiar strategies for understanding and interpreting scriptures, the Siddha tradition is difficult to characterise, as it is not a unified body of ideas and practices. However, one identificatory marker of this tradition is that the Siddha guru ultimately rests in the centre of the canon through his or her own determination of what is true, authoritative,

\(^{160}\)ākāśa — space; baddha — visible; lakṣa — mark to aim at.
and appropriate within the lineage. Due to the guru’s position as the locus of authority, who is able to determine the legitimate terms of reference and the corresponding referents (empirical and metaphysical or arbitrary and non-arbitrary), this represents a stronger grammar because there is basically no way to discount or argue with the guru’s opinion as it is considered absolute (cf Maton and Muller 2007). Disputing the guru’s claims would ultimately result in social ostracism, as a foundational component of the legitimate disposition is trusting in what the guru said is true and real. However, as Taylor explains:

There is a deep sense in the Hindu episteme that if a text or utterance is in Sanskrit, the language of the scriptures and of the gods themselves, then by that very fact alone, it may be regarded as “true.” This idea stems from an ancient and widespread concept in Indic epistemology known as śabda pramāṇa, literally “verbal authority” or “written testimony.” This, along with evidence derived from perception and logic, are according to the tradition the main ways of knowing. (Taylor 2015: 531)

I take inspiration from Keller (2005). This includes analysing the variegated processes involved in the social construction of knowledge (i.e., production, circulation, and transformation). This comprises the analysis of the symbolic order on institutional and organisational levels and arenas as well as the effects of such an ordering in different social fields of practice. My focus also draws upon the Foucauldian paradigm of analysing discourses within arenas of meaning production and practices of power and knowledge (Keller 2005). This perspective also covers the implication of social actors in the performance and ‘reception’ of discourse.

Bourdieu understood discourses as ‘structured and structuring structures’ that work to legitimise certain positions and identities while making others illegitimate (1990: 277). Laclau’s position on discourse theory suggests that a hegemonic relation occurs when a certain particularity comes to represent a totality even if it is incommensurable with it (2014: 6). Keller defined the instrumentality of discourse:

as identifiable ensembles of cognitive and normative devices. These devices are produced, actualised, performed and transformed in social practices (not necessary but often of
language use) at different social, historical and geographical places. They unfold in time as well as they are embedded in historical contexts. Discourses in this sense constitute social realities of phenomena. At least they compete in the everlasting struggle over symbolic order. (Keller 2005)

Inspired by Nietzsche and Wittgenstein, Bourdieu's idea that the role of language is not as a mirror reflecting a pre-given reality, but as a practice that makes the world or at least determines how we understand it. This is central to understanding the way in which the guru’s discourse is involved in the recontextualisation of knowledge. Through the suggestions the guru makes regarding the possibility of an alternate reality based on a ‘Vedic’, ‘ancient’ and ‘eternal’ context, we can begin to understand just what the role of language is in the creation of imagined alternate worlds and sociolinguistic utopias. As Keller suggests these worlds are:

realised by social action, i.e. by social actors’ practices and activities. Actors need motivation to enter a discursive field, but we should neither imagine them as complete masters of a singular discourse nor as transcendental subjects beyond their concrete historical contexts. Social actors are embedded in the historical a priori of established symbolic orders and institutionalised power/knowledge-regimes. (Keller 2005)

Based on Laclau, Larios (forthcoming) employed the concept of the empty signifier to problematise the concept of the deepest strata of Hindu thought, i.e., the Vedas (Laclau 1996). Larios argues that the ‘Veda’ is devoid of distinct meaning. As an empty signifier, Veda or Vedic are terms used in competitions for legitimacy by various actors within the trans-global yoga industry to accumulate symbolic capital related to ‘true’ knowledge and related corporal competency. Larios asserted that during struggles over alternative, multiple and sometimes contradictory representations, the contingent nature of the field’s heterogenous elements are stabilized through the accretion of identity around the two empty signifiers, namely ‘yoga’ and ‘Veda’.

Grenfell and James (2004) discussed how the principles of legitimation establish an orthodoxy or doxa based on what is thinkable and unthinkable, expressible
and inexpressible and valued or not. This builds upon part of the Symbolic Interactionist tradition that describes the ways in which proverbs, moral maxims and wise sayings function to generate legitimacy through symbolic processes that produce a temporal cohesiveness and a value system (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 92-104).

The sociology of knowledge approach of analysing public discourses aims to understand the social construction and representation of collective action or problems. I do this to understand how particular concepts eventually become habituated, reciprocated and institutionalised into Shanti Mandir’s symbolic universe, and how such statements are used to legitimise an institutional structure through a collective and plausible web of belief. In order to do this I adopted the methodology of corpus linguistics.

In section 5.1 we explored the notion of the guru becoming a text himself that the devotees ‘read’ to mimetically adapt their own behaviour (Brooks 1997: 279-280). In addition, he also chooses certain texts to draw inspiration from. This choosing, then, allows these texts to become authoritative through the guru’s teaching (upadeśa) and intention (saṅkalpa). This raises the need to understand how texts are chosen and interpreted through an examination of the role of the guru as both arbiter of scriptural teachings and as the embodiment of spiritual ideals by determining the texts’ contents, meanings, and usages. Supplementing the analytic framework from chapter six I include examples from the principal texts Nityananda has referred to in order to establish the following three things (Brooks 1997: 278-9):

1. Texts the guru treats as sacred either by declaring them to be or by explicitly endorsing their use.
2. Texts, written or oral, that are taught, recited, or used by the guru to impart a given teaching.
3. Texts the guru uses to teach or make a particular point.
Unlike the traditional linguists and philosophers of language who have typically focused their analysis on isolated units of language, discourse analysis concerns itself with the use of language in a running discourse, continued over a sequence of sentences and involving the interaction of speaker or writer and listener or reader in a specific situational context. There is an illocutionary force of an utterance that lacks an explicit indicator of its illocutionary intention. This is possible in part because users of language share a set of implicit expectations called communicative presumptions which helps to make the utterance meaningful and intelligible (Sharma 2007). These collective assumptions are:

1. Writers or speakers and readers or hearers share a large body of non-linguistic knowledge and experience.
2. Writers use language that is intentional, purposive and in accordance with linguistic and cultural convention.
3. There is a shared knowledge of the complex ways in which the meaning of the text varies with the particular situation in which it takes place.

In reference to points 1 and 3, throughout this thesis I have demonstrated the non-linguistic knowledge and experiences that the community shares and the particular context in which meaning is created in chapters six and seven. The aim of this section is to focus on the second point.

‘Divine’ discourses are highly standardised and consist of formulaic elements in which cultural knowledge is presented. In the effort to avoid reifying the ‘context’ by describing everything that surrounds a set of utterances, speech acts should not only be seen in their referential or indexical function, but any use of language should be
interpreted as ‘social action’ in which ‘things are done with words’ (Brückner and Schömbucher 2007: 8).161

In concert with Brückner, Schömbucher (2007) suggests that in order to understand the power of divine discourses, it is essential to evaluate the textual content of an oral performance to identify the particular conditions of listening. Schömbucher provides a framework for the analysis of divine discourses. The three components of divine discourse include:

1) Panegyric passages (in praise of something/one).
2) Narrative elements.
3) Directive passages (suggestions for how to transform one’s disposition).

In the next section I demonstrate how the three elements intertwine throughout the guru’s discourse to legitimise the guru, the institution and the yogic disposition.

7.2 — Legitimising the Guru, Institution and Disposition

Using the AntConc corpus linguistic software a frequency analysis of key lexemes found in the guru’s discourse demonstrates the focus of the panegyric passages used to praise something or someone. This list contains twenty-two magazines spanning the past several years of the publication; however, several of the discourses contained within these publications were recorded as far back as 2001. Each magazine could contain only one longer discourse of several pages or it might consist of a collection of shorter ones. From the list below we can now appreciate more clearly what the focus of Nityananda’s discourse is:

161 Compare Austin (1962).
From this list, it is obvious that the type of yoga promoted by Shanti Mandir is a soteriologically focused subjective approach that emphasises devotion to the Guru (guru-bhakti), particularly Muktananda, as he is the most frequent lexeme used by Nityananda. This is done for panegyric and directive purposes of directing the audience’s attention and devotion towards Muktananda; however, through referencing Muktananda, Nityananda also draws upon the symbolic capital of his memory. The frequency of the guru concept compared to an emphasis on hatha yoga and modern postural yoga is revealing. This list confirms Shanti Mandir’s emphasis as a provider of soteriological yoga. Even though yoga is mentioned in this list, it is found bound, overwhelmingly, in adjectival phrases related to the yoga of devotion (bhakti yoga) instead of postures (āsana). Overall this list reveals the boundaries of Shanti Mandir’s web of belief and also shows the focal points of inspiration and nodes of piety.

In order to generate legitimacy for himself and his institution Nityananda locates himself within a broader literary tradition. While ultimately Nityananda seeks to validate himself through the Vedic tradition, it is through the Purānic literary
tradition that focuses on eulogising various Hindu deities that we find the locus of the
guru’s panegyric passages. This is because the Purāṇas include philosophical and
cosmological concepts within the context of religious devotionalism, which is a central
component of Shanti Mandir’s religious practice. From within the Purāṇas it is the
Skanda Purāṇa that we move to a brief discussion of.

The Skanda Purāṇa focuses on the son of Śiva and Pārvatī who is known as
Skanda or Kartikeya (Ganeśa’s brother). The text also has various stories about Śiva
and holy places connected to him (Tagare 1996). The Skanda Purāṇa is often quoted as
the source of the Guru Gītā, which is a stotra (hymn praising the spiritual master) and
is considered to be the principal text in Shanti Mandir’s devotional canon. There is a
longer and shorter version, however, Shanti Mandir use the 182 verse version, which is
incorporated into the much larger Marāṭhī Guru-caritra162 of Sarasvatī Gaṅgādhar
(Rigopoulous 2005: 237). It is part of the Marāṭhī Sant devotional tradition Baba
Muktananda drew a significant portion of his canon, inspiration and legitimacy from.
The entire text glorifies the position of the guru, the benefits of having a guru and how
to behave around the guru.

Occasionally, devotees are given the chance to talk in satsaṅga. This
opportunity undoubtedly affords the speaker a certain amount of prestige as they are
considered knowers of the tradition. The following quote is from a Shanti Mandir staff
member (instructor and events coordinator). Dana Wilkinson was involved in the study
of the Guru Gītā in the Walden ashram in America in 2011. The title of his discourse is
‘The One Indispensable Text’. Already from the title it is obvious what the
community’s attitude towards this text is or, at least, ought to be. However, what is
important about this example is how the speaker places it within a broader literary

162 Ca. 1550 CE.
tradition explicitly endorsing its use while at the same time defending the opaque origins of this text. Wilkinson said that:

The Guru Gitā comes from a longer scripture, the Skanda Purāṇa. Verse 182 of the Guru Gitā, the last verse, tells us this when it says ‘Iti Śrī Skandapurāṇe’.\(^{163}\) I know some people have looked for the Guru Gitā within the Skanda Purāṇa and did not find it. But you have to consider that these Vedic teachings were a collection of mythological stories that was passed on orally for thousands of years. Over time, some parts were lost. Eventually what we now know as the Skanda Purāṇa was gathered and written down, but it didn’t include the Guru Gitā. However, that isn’t to say the Guru Gitā did not come from it originally. (Wilkinson 2001: 2)

This statement is telling of the way in which the Purānic and Vedic literary traditions are conflated and how the meaning of the ‘Vedic’ signifier is stretched to encompass periods well beyond its historical timeline. It is quite often the case that the term Vedic is used without critical reflection regarding its actual historicity. In short, members of the Shanti Mandir community often refer to anything premodern as Vedic. This is often done because the Vedas are considered to be the source of all knowledge; however, the Vedic and Purānic periods are separated by at least 500-1000 years (Doniger 1993, Madsen 2013).

It is important to understand that it was through the guise of the bhakti movement’s polytheistic devotionalism that the Purānic literature spread across India under the umbrella of Brahminical monotheism. While externally devotional, the Purāṇas represent political and ideological justifications of the religious and political elite’s hegemony. The institution of royalty legitimised the Brahminical Vedic ideology and monotheism in order to maintain, legitimise and sometimes entrain society (Bandyopadhyaya 2008, Madsen 2013). We can view the use of texts like the Guru Gitā by Shanti Mandir in a similar way. While this text is used to inspire religious devotionalism it is also used to justify the position of the guru and legitimise

\(^{163}\) ‘Thus the Guru Gitā is in the Skanda Purāṇa’.
the docile subordination of the devotees within a defined hierarchy based on purity and knowledge. Wilkinson explains that ‘the Guru is the source of our inspiration, and the Guru Gītā is the core scripture of this yoga. By chanting it, we access the source from which everything comes to us in sādhanā, as we do our spiritual practices’ (Wilkinson 2001: 1). Wilkinson continues demonstrating the directive qualities of this text with regard to how the disciple should behave, the benefits of conforming and the transformative purpose of the guru.

The secrets of the Guru-disciple relationship are revealed in the Guru Gītā. It explains who and what the Guru is. It tells us how a disciple should behave, and what we can gain through a relationship with the Guru. It also talks about the nature of Consciousness and the nature of the world, individuality, bondage, and liberation. Ultimately, it talks about recognizing our oneness with the Guru. The purpose of the Guru is to transform us from a mere disciple into one who lives in the same state as the Guru. (Wilkinson 2001: 3)

The guru is a pravācaka, an expounder of ideas. He relies upon an assortment of stories pulling didactic material from wherever is suitable to help explain a certain point. Often, Nityananda will speak in either English or Hindi and sometimes he will sprinkle his talks with Sanskrit verses. This part of the performance demonstrates to the audience his knowledge of the tradition. In the following examples from the guru’s discourse, direct quotes and explanations surrounding various verses from the Guru Gītā are provided demonstrating how they are used to legitimise the guru’s position at the pinnacle of the hierarchy (cf Taylor 2015). Included is the original Sanskrit text with the translation given by Shanti Mandir.

The first example is taken from a discourse titled ‘Who is the Guru?’ where Nityananda explained at a satsaṅga in 2011 in America how the Guru Gītā is the ‘vital scripture’ that emphasises establishing an internal gaze to locate the guru principle (guru-tattva) (Mandir 2011i: 1). In 2009, while also in America Nityananda gave a talk in which he invoked Muktananda’s devotion and focus on his guru as a source of inspiration. Muktananda referred to verse 76 of the Guru Gītā as a guide suggesting
that the ultimate meditation focused on the guru and is the basis for all the other methods of meditation. The verse establishes the guru as central to the religious practice of Shanti Mandir.

\[
dhyānāmūlaṁ guñormūrtiḥ pūjāmūlaṁ guroḥ padam
mantramaṁ guruvākyaiṁ mokṣamūlaṁ guroḥ kṛpā || GG.76
\]

The root of meditation is the Guru’s form. The root of worship is the Guru’s feet.
The root of mantra is the Guru’s word. The root of liberation is the Guru’s grace.
(Mandir 2010c: 7)

This next verse was used during a satsaṅga in Mexico in 2001. Here, we can see how the guru is legitimised as the centre of the religious practice. This verse is also used to affirm gurubhakti as the ultimate passage for the aspirant to attain their soteriological goals. It is directive and panegyric in that it promotes devotion to the guru. It is also narrative as it alludes to the process involved in illuminating what is ‘real’ and how joy can be experienced.

\[
yatsatyena jagatsatyaṁ yatprakāśena bhāti tat |
yadānandenā nandantī tasmai śrīgurave namaḥ || GG. 36
\]

Salutations to Śrī Guru, by whose reality the world is real, by whose light it is illumined, and by whose joy people are joyous.
(Mandir 2010b: 9)

Nityananda mentioned the following verse at another satsaṅga in America during 2011. In verse 34 the guru is identified as the keeper of knowledge who has the ability to impart wisdom and remove ignorance, which we know is already considered to be the cause of suffering. This verse is panegyric in that it uses the common refrain of offering salutations to the guru (tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ), while also containing narrative elements through which it explains how the aspirant’s eyes are filled with ignorance and the collyrium stick of knowledge that is used by the guru.
ajñāna-timirāndhasya jñānānājana-śalākayā |
cakṣur-unmālitāṁ yena tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ || GG. 34

My eyes are filled with ignorance. The Guru with the collyrium stick\textsuperscript{164} of knowledge opens my eyes. Therefore, I offer salutations to the Guru.

(Mandir 2011b: 6)

We ought to contextualise this by focusing on some of Nityananda’s discourse that follows this verse where he explains the infallibility of the guru. By directly commenting on the institution of the guru, Nityananda indirectly accumulates legitimacy for himself when he deftly explains how ‘The Guru himself does not suffer from blindness. He lives in a state of being awakened at all times. He is always present in the mantra, always experiencing God, always experiencing divinity, always experiencing Truth’ (Mandir 2011b: 6). In the same satsaṅga Nityananda explains that the highest state is attainable through serving the guru. This explanation and use of the primary text in the canon justifies the focus of Shanti Mandir’s practice by relying on the testimony of Śiva to his wife Parvatī during their conversation in the Guru Gītā.

In the next example Nityananda’s explanation becomes more directive as he explains through panegyric components of honoring and serving the guru how the highest state is attainable. It also includes a narrative component of explaining the tension between the aspirant’s wants and what the guru is alleged to know the aspirant needs.

The whole process of sādhanaḥ can be seen as a tussle between the disciple saying this is my situation, and the Guru saying, no, you are greater than that. The last line of verse 53 in the Guru Gītā says, ‘Prāptuṁ tat sahasam svabhāvam-anīśaniḥ sevadhvam-ekinaṁ gurum’. Lord Śiva says the highest state ‘is attainable’ Tat sahajam, just naturally. All you have to do, he says, is ‘go to one Guru, do his servā. Serve him’. (Mandir 2011b: 6)

\textsuperscript{164} Collyrium — a medicinal lotion applied to the eye. The stick is what applies the lotion.
The frequency list above clearly demonstrates the centrality of Muktananda and the abstract concept of the guru. Both are often mentioned in a panegyric way for the audience to focus their devotion on. Nityananda often shares narrative elements from stories of his own experience of being with Muktananda or stories of what Muktananda had said. The narrative elements in the next example demonstrate in a directive way where God is and how to arrive at this place ‘within’. Nityananda ended by stating that this understanding must be cultivated. In an abstract way it is also describing an aspect of the legitimate disposition.

Baba Muktānanda would say, “God dwells within you as you.” Words alone cannot adequately describe, explain, or take us to that deep place. We have to allow ourselves to be taken there. We have to become immersed within, where ānanda, bliss, continually arises, rather than remain in the shallow realms of mind and emotion. This is the teaching. This is the understanding we must cultivate in our life. (Mandir 2011i: 1)

Having demonstrated some of the ways in which the guru legitimises himself and his institution, the following passages focus more on the suggestions he makes through directive passages that describe aspects of the legitimate disposition and how it can be achieved. This is by no means an exhaustive list. It serves more as a digestive, complementing the assertions made above in previous chapters regarding the legitimate disposition. During a satsaṅga in 2010 in America, Nityananda explained how central to the legitimate disposition are the qualities of non-attachment and compassion. He refers to the Bhagavad Gīta in this instance as the source of authority explaining in a directive sense what a bhakta (a faithful person) is and how one ought to behave. While not explicitly referring to it, we can replace the term bhakta here with the synonymous term sahrdaya and appreciate how fundamental this quality of being with-heart is.
The Bhagavad Gītā tells us that a bhakta harbors no hatred toward anyone, but is friendly and compassionate to all, without attachment or ego. (Mandir 2010e: 3)

In that state, we naturally feel friendliness, compassion, kindness, and love toward all because we are experiencing all as Consciousness, as our true Self. (Mandir 2010e: 4)

Comparing, now the bhakta with the jñātr (knower) we can appreciate the previous discussion regarding the legitimate disposition regarding the internal structure. Previously I asserted that the internal structure can be conceptualised as a combination of an epistemological component (sākṣin) and an ontological component (sahṛdaya). At a satsaṅga in 2013 in America titled ‘Four Types of Devotees’, Nityananda refers to the jñānī as a watcher. This term is synonymous with sākṣin. Nityananda narrates with a descriptive aim that the knower is a watcher and that through learning to watch, the aspirant, just like the knower, can not only know Truth but also become one with it.

A jñānī simply sits in the experience of his own divine Self. He watches what comes, what goes. He watches who comes, who goes. It doesn’t really matter to him. Therefore, the Lord says, ‘the jñānī, the knower of the Truth, has become one with the Truth.’ (Mandir 2013c: 8)

Consistent with the extraordinarily high frequency of the word ‘within’ in the corpus, an overwhelming symbol is the concept of going within oneself to locate the sense of peace. Not only does Nityananda direct and clarify what the aspirant ought to seek (i.e., peace, joy and tranquility), but he also directs, through the narrative of the sage Uddālaka what and where the goal of yoga is and how to reach it.

Uddālaka reminds himself, ‘What you seek — peace, joy and tranquility — is within. Don’t allow yourself to wander outside. You may go wherever you like but you will never find supreme peace, except in perfect wisdom. To find that peace, to find that stillness, go inside yourself. Go within. (Mandir 2010a: 5)
During a tour of Latin America in 2011 Nityananda reiterated this point while in Argentina. He explicitly stated that the habits of the individual must change and that one needs to not only ‘go within’ but one’s perception must change to that of the observer (sāṣṭin).

Now we have to tell ourselves, ‘I must change my habits. I must train myself not to look outside. Rather I must train myself to look within myself’. Go within yourself. Become established there. And when you become established within, view this world from there. Then whatever experiences you encounter, this very world will become filled with joy. This very world will become filled with peace. Because your outlook will have changed. Your perception will be different. (Mandir 2012a: 2-3)

The next example demonstrates some of the physical characteristics one can expect to display along the devotional path. The way in which Nityananda narrates the type of devotion one ought to strive for is said to ‘melt the heart’. By cultivating through panegyrical passages love for authority figures, Nityananda implicitly reinforces devotion to himself through directing the audience towards aspects of the legitimate disposition that the aspirant ought to attain. This is couched in the context of cultivating an attitude similar to unconditional love a child experiences for their parents, which combined with singing the Lord’s name(s), will allegedly produce various physical responses such as laughing, weeping or dancing as if possessed (Gosvamin 2003, Klostermaier 1974, Ṭhākura 2006).

All I can think of is the childhood experience of the unconditional love of a mother, father, or respected elder. If for a moment we sat on their lap, forgot everything, and simply allowed ourselves to connect to that space within us, to that space within them, in that moment we no longer thought of anything, we simply felt the overwhelming emotion called love. In the same way, says Tukārām, when we find ourselves embraced by the Lord, the heart simply melts. We laugh ecstatically, weep, cry out, or dance like one possessed. There is no way to express what that experience is like. There are no words for it. (Mandir 2010e: 2)
This quote about dancing and singing like the one above regarding effusive emotional displays is interesting for a few reasons. Implicitly it points to being able to properly assess a situation, to see and listen, but to also have compassion for others.

A deaf man looks into a room through its window. Everybody is moving and swinging and swaying. Of course, he can’t hear anything. So he thinks to himself, “These are mad people.” The sage says, “Because he’s deaf and can’t hear the music to which you are dancing, he thinks you are mad.” In the same way, we’re all dancing to a tune. We don’t always need an iPod to listen to a tune. There is a tune playing within at all times. So make that tune enjoyable. (Mandir 2011g: 10)

Using these two examples of a theoretical ideal I turn to an incident that occurred in 2009 while conducting fieldwork. In the Shanti Mandir ashram I met an American woman who came to stay for several weeks. A few days into her stay she started dancing like a whirling dervish spending the days (and nights) spinning round and round across the ashram with her headphones plugged in listening to music and singing to herself. I first noticed this during meal times where she would first take a spoon full of food, stand up and spin three times and sit back down for the next spoonful, and again stand up and spin. Her manic behaviour continued throughout the night, for several nights, disturbing everyone including Nityananda, who at one point told her to ‘stop, this is enough’.

However, she ran off into the night like a screeching banshee. Soon after this interaction Nityananda left for several days leaving the woman, who was ‘dancing as if possessed’ to continue uncensored. During times of religious practice she would come into the temple continuing to spin and scream until a devotee or two would try and restrain or usher her out of the temple.

It is interesting then, how people like this woman, who break all conventions and rules, are held up as theoretical examples but then in reality are sidelined by the normative conventions of the ashram’s conservative standards of behaviour, and instead are regarded as more of a nuisance. Regardless of the frayed ends this woman

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was creating, the ashram manager, at a loss to contain the situation and deal with the increasing number of petitions to send her away, said, ‘Well Patrick, she has come here and is safe, and maybe that is what the she needs, a place to let go of all this energy’.

The final example clearly narrates the directive route to achieving the final destination and some of the expected behavioural signposts the aspirant is likely to pass along the Siddha Marg to becoming filled with joy. In chapter five I demonstrated how the terms joy (ānanda) and peace (śānti) have been used throughout this spiritual milieu to represent the same concept of liberation while living (jīvanmukti), which in chapter two this concept was discussed within the context of neo-Hinduism or neo-Advaita Vedānta as having a different meaning to the original intended by Śaṅkara. In this passage below, Nityananda explained that if tears flow upon closing one’s eyes and one reverberates with joy then the aspirant is performing the legitimate disposition correctly, however, if not, then there is something wrong.

Close your eyes. If some tears flow, you aren’t crying, you’re just filled with joy. If tears don’t flow, then you know you have something wrong. At least that’s my prescription. Because when your whole being is filled with that experience, you reverberate with it. (Mandir 2012c: 7)

These are just a few examples that highlight how the guru’s discourse is structured and how the structured discourse structures legitimate participation within this field of religious practice.

7.3 — Conclusion

This aim of this chapter was to provide an analysis of the guru’s discourse and rhetorical strategies to give a clearer understanding of the message promoted through the guru’s didactic speeches within the context of satsaṅga that legitimise himself, his institution and the disposition. By analysing the guru’s discourse a clearer picture of
the alternate reality and legitimate disposition are made explicit through the suggestions he makes regarding the particular characteristics worth emulating.

The various elements of the discourse were analysed demonstrating which figures are considered legitimate examples; the narrative elements used to inspire and explain rarefied knowledge; and the directive passages used to explain what the path to legitimacy looks like. As the list of key words suggest, particular focus is given to developing an internal awareness and cultivating happiness within through focusing on the guru principle. While, generally, modern life and Western culture is seen as the source of dissipation and distraction, the guru urges a refinement of one’s disposition through finding inspiration in the stories and behaviour of sages and saints to enter into the same state of freedom and bliss as the guru.

While the guru does urge the disciple to consider him or herself to be ‘free’ they are also bound by the tradition’s discourse and normative conventions to supplicate the guru for his grace. By stepping back to understand the textual traditions that inform the construction of Shanti Mandir’s practice, identity and the context in which these texts were themselves created, we are able to appreciate the political and sociological intentions behind the suggestions made by the guru. Just like the religious elite during the preceding centuries, Nityananda represents the aspirations of the same religious group whose aim is to symbolically impose a standardised monotheistic Brahminical worldview on the impressionable minds of individuals seeking salvation. Due to the perceived infallibility of the guru and his central position as the arbiter and dispenser of ‘truth’ his opinion is considered final and unquestionable.

The soteriological yoga of devotion promoted by Shanti Mandir is canonised by the central text of the community the Guru Gītā, which asserts the divine role of the guru in the community’s hierarchy. So too it extols the virtues of the guru-disciple relationship and also explains the normative way that the guru ought to be approached and revered. Finally in this chapter I demonstrated some of the more salient features
related to the internal structure of the legitimate disposition. In order to understand the
guru's discourse and receive the benefits of this association the aspirant is required to
cultivate both epistemological and ontological components related to becoming a
compassionate witness. The next chapter concludes the thesis restating the aims and
subsequent findings from this research.
Chapter 8 — Conclusion
8.1 — Recontextualising Shanti Mandir

In order to understand how people within the Shanti Mandir global community interact and shape one another’s experiences of yoga, and the subsequent identities this generates, the aim of this thesis was to explore the cultivation of authenticity and tradition through a capital focused sociological analysis of its emotional economy. The reason for this focus was to understand what the social glue is that holds this community together and answer the following question, ‘How is legitimacy acquired, negotiated and expressed within the Shanti Mandir yoga ashram?’

The reason for this was based on a simple scenario. Imagine someone is contemplating deepening his or her knowledge and experience of yoga and, perhaps, is considering where, when and how to participate in a yoga teacher training course somewhere in the world. Where ought they go and with whom should they study? More importantly, having chosen Shanti Mandir and travelled all the way to India, how is their experience different to what they had imagined and anticipated? What changes to their behaviour and identity do they need to make in order to fit in and gain acceptance in the ashram? And, what is involved in making a deeper commitment and connection to this community if the yoga aspirant wanted to do so?

While yoga has come to mean many different things to a wide variety of people, what I wanted to clarify is what it means for the Shanti Mandir community as an organisation, community, and for its individual members. I have demonstrated that Shanti Mandir’s Siddha Marg emphasises the devotional aesthetic approach of bhakti yoga while incorporating modern postural yoga into system. In chapter seven I demonstrated the most popular words used by the guru in his public talks showed the emphasis is on devotion, particularly to the guru. While the lexeme ‘yoga’ was found further down the list this result needs qualification. Even though postural yoga was
mentioned mostly in a disparaging way in contradistinction to Shanti Mandir’s modern soteriological yoga; yoga was itself qualified in phrases emphasising gurubhakti yoga or the yoga of devotion to the guru.

Shanti Mandir is a typical example of a divine enterprise that began in India and has spread throughout several continents creating a unique cultural space for itself. Moving between macro and micro levels of analysis, this thesis explored how these concepts are expressed within the Shanti Mandir community and understood within the broader transglobal context between organisational and individual attempts to become authentic knowers of this tradition.

I focused on the construction of ‘authenticity’ of various yogic identities and how access is negotiated within the emotional economy of the ashram’s social field. The novel approach of applying the analytical method of LCT to this religious pedagogical arena has allowed for insights to emerge regarding not only the legitimate yogic disposition, but also the historical context in which transcultural flows of knowledge and capital influence the way in which legitimacy and authenticity are constructed within both the Shanti Mandir community and the transglobal yoga industry.

Through analysing the discourse, marketing strategies and the logic of satsaṅga, in chapters five, six and seven we learnt about how the aesthetic mood of śāntarasa is historically situated and central to Shanti Mandir’s identity. Shanti Mandir emphasises a devotional aestheticism where emotions, intuitions, and subjective mystical insights take precedence as legitimate forms of knowledge over rational or logical conclusions towards the production of thoughtless affects.

Through comparative analysis of primary texts and contemporary aesthetic concepts related to performance and audience reception, combined with ethnographic observations, the logic of the socialisation/legitimisation process became clearer. We are able to appreciate that śāntarasa is synonymous with the concept of ānanda (bliss)
and how this aesthetic mood is consciously employed to produce the affective emotion of quietude; and, how the guru’s cultivated gaze is central to the socialisation process of entraining disparate habituses towards the legitimate one, or at least the variants which are also influenced by the standpoints generated by the social gaze.

Without the cultivation of rapport and the affective tangible experience of the guru’s vision through the cumulative effects of Shanti Mandir’s spiritual practice, the seeker may not be able to appreciate the subtle dispositional adjustments required to become sensitive to the literary artefact of śāntarasa. This is central to the individual’s epistemological access, which potentially increases each time they attend the formal pedagogical domain of satsaṅga with the guru. Through having direct contact the aspirants are able to continue the process of learning to emulate his disposition. By adopting the salient features of the guru’s disposition to become more tolerant, compassionate and peaceful, the seeker essentially becomes the guru and potentially shares in an experience of his ‘enlightened’ state. This is made possible through the dynamic bonds of affect generated between the charismatic leader and his followers.

I have explored the salient surface features of Shanti Mandir’s habitus and provided a model for understanding the processes involved in accumulating the symbolic capital of authenticity within the Shanti Mandir social network. Based on discourse analysis and a grounded theoretical approach, which guided me toward the often-repeated comment by Nityananda regarding cultivating ‘big hearts and minds’. This in turn sparked an exploration of the aesthetic sense of quietude and how it is cultivated within satsaṅga.

This thesis also focused on demonstrating how the requisite affective experience of śānta has evolved out of a particular historical context of aesthetic devotionalism and is incorporated into the ritualised performativity of satsaṅga to cultivate particular emotions. By identifying satsaṅga as part of a performative literary tradition I argued that in order to become sensitive to the guru’s discourse and initiate
the inner transformation of the Siddha path, the seeker must immerse him or herself in
the aesthetic mood of śānta, cultivated formally at satsaṅga, to become sensitive first
to the literary artefact of śāntarasa.

By stating that bigger hearts and minds are necessary Nityananda gave clear
instructions as to what a basic template regarding salvation and legitimacy could look
like. Therefore, based on this assertion I have demonstrated, one way at least, of
summarising the internal structure of Shanti Mandir’s legitimate disposition as a
composition of both an ontological (sahṛdaya) and epistemological (sākṣin)
component. I define the organising principle and overarching legitimate identity as
śāntamūrti, an emboider of peace.

It is believed that through the combination of the practices that the aspirant is
propelled along by the affective feeling of collective effervescence to experience a
feeling of oneness like a connoisseur (sahṛdaya) quaffing the ambrosial nectar
(amṛtarasa) produced during the ritualised performance of satsaṅga. The presiding
emotional logic involves using this expansive feeling to momentarily move beyond the
limited mind to appreciate the guru’s discourse. Through this process of expansion the
seeker is afforded reflexive opportunities to develop the attitude of the passive
conscious spectator (sākṣin).

Without cultivating this fundamental epistemological principle of Advaita
Vedānta, the seeker will fail to acknowledge what Śaṅkara refers to as the natural
confusion between subjectivity and objectivity, which leads to the experience of
suffering. This epistemological break of Advaita Vedānta, which I showed is similar to
what Bourdieu described in his own epistemological approach as a ‘third way’, seeks
to objectify the individual’s own subjective experience by urging the witness of
phenomena to take an abstract step and view one’s own experience as if it was the
experience of another external being.
Through shining light and increasing knowledge of the bounded state of existence we can appreciate how knowledge is liberating and, at the same time legitimising. Ultimately, this thesis reminds us that there is an infinite number of ways to ‘make sacred’ and approach and experience divinity; and, in this late capitalist age, regardless of whether a tradition is young, old or timeless, what really matters is how people come and, more importantly, stay together.

The production of emotion is key to the social glue of affective bonds. I have demonstrated not only the emotional economy of the ashram but also the ways in which people engage with it and invest in themselves and the community they identify with to add value to their lives and the lives of others. These investments are not simply rational strategies to gain acceptance and symbolic capital. They are also globally engaged citizens who channel their embodied labour through different types of capital to support the charitable work of their guru.

In chapter four I demonstrated how the symbolic system in which individuals negotiate their access and ascension within the various hierarchies highlights the internal competitions that arise within the three groups, namely the Renunciants, Scholars and Patrons. These groups work together to support the guru’s saṅkalpa providing necessary species of capital for the organisation to function, grow and gain prestige. While the distinction between these three groups is obviously based on spatial and gendered relations found throughout the community, the confusion for the new recruit is often expressed due to the opaqueness of the social network and the socialisation process itself.

While the strategy of providing a less formal system is appealing for many, as it suggests an egalitarian social network and relativist code modality where no emphasis is placed on either an epistemic or social relation to knowledge (ER-, SR-), it does not preclude other hierarchies from forming. However, in this particular case, the three hierarchies that exist have different ways of being and levels of access, which are
expressed through the code modalities identified for each group. Moreover, mobility between these hierarchies is quite limited due to the privileged nature of the system, the temporal investments required and the level of commitment one must display.

In closing I offer some comments regarding the transglobal yoga industry and Shanti Mandir’s position within it. I began by building upon previous scholarship that acknowledges how a binary has developed between two forms of yoga, namely modern soteriological yoga and modern postural yoga. I have followed with interest the gradual inclusion and increasing prominence of modern postural yoga into Shanti Mandir’s own yoga system.

As the life cycle of this industry has matured modern postural yoga has gained more prominence as a legitimate form in its own right. This has prompted Shanti Mandir to continually negotiate its own relationship to this modern evolution and what it describes as a ‘partial’ expression of the ‘true’ yoga it claims to represent, which I have shown is soteriologically focused. Demonstrating how legitimacy is negotiated I explained in chapters two, three and five the marketing strategies that Shanti Mandir uses to incorporate modern postural yoga within its own system; and, how this is in response to the need to align with the dynamic industry where new identities and fads are constantly created. Shanti Mandir positions itself as a ‘traditional’ provider in a ‘modern’ world as a seemingly static counterpoint to the rampant commercialisation it sees as sullying the beauty and efficacy of the yoga system.

Furthering Shanti Mandir’s claim to legitimacy is the promotion of their ability to act as an authentic conduit to a tangible Vedic culture and an imagined golden age through the performance of Vedic fire ceremonies and the chanting of Vedic mantras. As a new religious movement that undoubtedly promotes and continues the practice of South Asia’s intangible cultural heritage, its relatively recent temporal inception is obfuscated by adopting what it refers to as the ‘Vedic way of life’ and connection to an ancient tradition. This is because of the reinterpretation of the Vedic culture and its
wisdom through the syncretic formulations of Purāṇic and Tantric literature that informs multivalent interpolations of an ever-evolving contemporary Hinduism. At the institutional level it influences how a newly established organisation merges with a long-established tradition to create a unique cultural space for its global network of devotees.

Shanti Mandir’s expression of authenticity begins with the concept that legitimacy requires a fundamental inner transformation through interaction with, and grace directly transmitted from, the guru to the aspirant. In several modern postural schools of yoga there is a distinct lack of the ‘living guru’ tradition. Or at least, it has been repackaged in a particular way to seem less hierarchical than it might still otherwise be, because secular yoga teachers are also able to achieve a guru-like status. The authentic yoga espoused by Shanti Mandir includes a living tradition where the teachings are brought alive through spending time in the presence of a living guru. This is particularly evident in the Siddha Yoga tradition that Baba Muktananda constructed to create distinction for himself within the burgeoning counter-culture movement that was the forerunner for the current transglobal yoga industry. He focused on the direct transmission of the historically opaque and inaccessible concept of the guru’s grace (śaktipāta).

Demonstrated in chapter seven is the way in which the guru negotiates legitimacy for his own essentialised position as a divine representative and conduit of grace, and by extension the institution of gurudom he represents. The perception of legitimacy is primarily achieved through relying on the authority of particular ‘sacred’ texts such as the Guru Gītā and the Bhagavad Gītā. These texts not only define the legitimate way to approach and interact with a guru, they also sanction the institution and superiority of gurubhakti in achieving the individual goal of salvation. Serving the guru is considered the highest expression of devotion and is fundamental in achieving
salvation, which is considered impossible without a guru to impart knowledge and grace.

As the transcultural flows of yogically inspired knowledge continue to stretch across the globe, various heterodox and syncretic yoga practices evolve continuing to test the boundaries of authenticity and, more simply, what the yoga sign is capable of signifying. Even as yoga flourishes, today, the average conception of yoga, and more importantly ideas proposing an ‘authentic self’ are different depending on where that individual finds him or herself placed with regards to yoga as either a fitness regime or a vehicle for salvation.

Regardless of whether an individual’s aim is to be sporty, spiritual or something in between, we can all appreciate the perennial quest for quietude, a connection with others, and a community to feel safe enough to explore that potential.
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