

# SEXUALITY, GENDER, AND MARRIAGE

PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGY OF  
SEXUALITY AND EMPOWERING  
THE GIRL-CHILD IN INDIA

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*Spiritus* 3.1 (2018) 109–126  
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**Key Words** *gender, human sexuality, marriage, Hindu, Pentecostal theology of sexuality, narrative identity*

## **Abstract**

The focus of the article arises from a case study of an Indian woman and her adopted child, Sunita and Komal. There are three key issues that can be abstracted from the story of Sunita and Komal. The abandoned “girl-child” Komal raises the question of sex—what am I? What does it mean to be biologically female? What consequences are there for being born female? Sunita’s and Komal’s rejection from their families has led them to ask the question about their gender—who am I? What does it mean to be a girl or woman in a predominantly Hindu society? How is my female identity constrained and constructed by my society? Finally, Sunita, as a young wife and in light of her miscarriages, recasts the question of marriage itself—how am I supposed to live as a woman in society, particularly in the context of family? What role and functions are expected of me as

a woman? Thus, the three issues raised are sexuality, gender, and marriage of the Hindu girl-child. This article seeks to explore, in response, a Pentecostal theology of human sexuality along these lines.

## Introduction

Five-and-one-half-year-old Komal is one of the children whom we serve at Shiksha Rath. Komal's mother, Sunita, got married at the very young age of fourteen. She faced a lot of problems as she was unable to manage the household chores she had to perform in her husband's house. Furthermore, being very young, she had two miscarriages. The doctor had already warned the family that she would not be able to bear children in the future if pregnancies continued, as her body was not ready to bear children. Meanwhile, the villagers found an abandoned premature girl baby (born in the seventh month) in the forest. The doctor diagnosed that the baby would not survive for long. Sunita's in-laws, thinking that the baby would die soon, forced Sunita to take the baby and look after her. They thought this would be a distraction for Sunita and ease the pain of her two miscarriages. They believed that the baby would surely die soon, so there was no question about adopting it. Unwillingly Sunita took the baby, but soon found herself genuinely taking care of her. By the time the baby, Komal, reached two months of age she got healthier, and Sunita had developed a great attachment to her. Seeing the baby getting healthier and growing, Sunita's husband and family got worried and told her to give away the baby as it was not their own. But Sunita was not willing to abandon Komal again. Sunita was physically abused for not listening to them and was told to leave the house. In addition to her husband's family, all the villagers started taunting her. She left her husband and in-laws and came to her parents' home with Komal. But even her own family was not supportive of her decisions. Sunita brought Komal to Delhi to begin a new life in the Outram Lines slum. She is working as a maid to support both Komal and herself. In addition to her work, Sunita is taking tuition classes to complete the tenth grade so that she can get a better job.

## Shiksha Rath

Shiksha Rath (“chariot of education”) is an after-school holistic educational program for the slum children living in Outram Lines, North Delhi. There are eighty children between the ages of five and fourteen from sixty-eight households who regularly attend our daily classes. Shiksha Rath aims to help the underprivileged children in their studies and give them opportunities to develop their skills and talents and most of all give them an environment of love and acceptance and a place to learn the principles and teachings of Jesus. This is done in a non-conventional way of evangelism. We do not talk or teach about religion directly, but mostly demonstrate it through our lifestyle and deeds. We work very closely with the parents and the community as a whole. Our approach is to be a true light and salt in this community and to allow our good deeds amongst them to speak about the love of Jesus that motivates our work.

Most of the children and the families we serve belong to different kinds of Hindu traditions. They may be Shaivites or Vaishnavites and would worship many gods and goddesses and broadly live out the Hindu life, even if they are not consciously indoctrinated in it. Even as we have served these children for over seven years, we have gotten close to their families and have been able to observe the deeper issues and challenges they face—particularly the girl-children and their mothers. Komal’s and Sunita’s story is an example. It is well documented that the Hindu traditions predominantly have a low view of women and female sexuality, particularly with respect to the girl-child, at least in the practical sense of their role and function in society. Hence, wonderful stories in the tradition that honor women are exceptions; revisionist historians have built the argument that the marginal notion of women has not always been the case. However, in the context of our work, the girl-child and often their mothers are disrespected as they are seen as a dowry curse. Furthermore, the anticipation of their early marriage and going away alienates the girl-child from her own family from a very young age, as she is perceived as belonging to the other. The practice of female child marriage also translates into a lack of present care of the girl-child as well as fuels a disinterest in her welfare through

education or other means. These issues are not only seen as emerging in the Sunita-Komal story but are also generally well documented within the larger Hindu society. In the Indian social world, these oppressive and abusive structures continue to persist, fed by unchallenged social customs that are often termed religious.

There are three key issues that can be abstracted from this story. The abandoned girl-child Komal raises the question of sex—what am I? What does it mean to be biologically female? What consequences are there for being born female? Komal's and Sunita's rejection from their families has led them to ask the question about their gender—who am I? What does it mean to be a girl or woman in a predominantly Hindu society? How is my female identity constrained and constructed by my society? Finally, Sunita, as a young wife and in light of her miscarriages, recasts the question of marriage itself—how am I supposed to live as a woman in society, particularly in the context of family? What role and functions are expected of me as a woman? Thus, the three issues raised by the above vignette are sexuality, gender, and marriage of the Hindu girl-child. This article seeks to explore a Pentecostal theology of human sexuality along these lines.

The methodology followed is the method of correlation with the following structure. First, after an initial description of these issues—sexuality, gender, marriage—problems are identified by the survey research done with the girls and mothers in Shiksha Rath. Second, the issues are explored and engaged from the Hindu point of view within whose horizons the Shiksha Rath women experience their lives. Finally, building on what Shiksha Rath is doing practically, we will offer a theological reflection from a Pentecostal perspective. Through this case study on the work of Shiksha Rath, it will be argued that a Spirit-empowered ministry intervention can go a long way in engaging these issues and reforming the cultural and religious practices, particularly related to the dignity of the Hindu girl-child in India.

However, before we get to the main sections, three preliminary points will be addressed: a) the method of correlation used in this article; b) the status of Pentecostal studies on human sexuality; and c) the three-part conceptual structure of Ricoeur's narrative identity, which will provide the theoretical scaffolding for this work.

## Method of Correlation

In a general sense, this work lies within the theology, and particularly contextual Pentecostal theology, of human sexuality. However, it is not a mere review of theological material that concerns us here: rather this is an attempt to make a contribution to a Pentecostal theology of human sexuality from the ground up, in a sense, from the problems faced in a particular context in which theology is asked to respond and seek for an answer. Paul Tillich called it “dialectic” or “answering” theology, which he developed in his *Systematic Theology Volume 1* as the method of correlation. Tillich states that “the method of correlation explains the contents of the Christian faith through existential questions and theological answers in mutual interdependence.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, the questions are raised in “real life,” as in the case of the project of Shiksha Rath, which depicts the human condition, and an attempt is made to seek theological answers. It is in this correlation that the contents of the Christian faith are revealed. However, for Tillich, the entire process possesses a circularity within which God has a predominant place. He writes,

God answers man's [*sic*] questions, and under the impact of God's answers, man [*sic*] asks them. Theology formulates the questions implied in human existence, and theology formulates the answers implied in divine self-manifestation under the guidance of the questions implied in human existence.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, in a sense, there is a predominance of theology in the method of correlation. Adrian Thatcher provides a helpful insight in his introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*. While this method of correlation has been heavily critiqued, he argues, “Tillich was right on several counts” and that “he was right to insist that for revelation to occur at all, it must first be received in human context.” Thatcher affirms that “Tillich was right to demand ‘answering theology.’” He also claims that the *Handbook*, published in 2015, attempted “to provide ‘answers’ to very modern and pressing questions arising from the experience and study of sexuality and gender, within

and beyond the Christian faith.”<sup>3</sup> This article seeks to follow in the lineage of such an inquiry, attempting to articulate a Christian response to issues of gender, sexual identity, and marriage in a Hindu context, with a view to contribute to a Pentecostal theology of human sexuality.

## **Pentecostal Perspective on Human Sexuality**

It has been acknowledged more than once that there is a paucity of material about the Pentecostal perspective on human sexuality.<sup>4</sup> While Pentecostalism has been open to cultural changes, such as the use of media and its encouragement of a strong work ethic in a capitalist economy, William Kay and Stephen Hunt argue that:

across its “various” streams Pentecostalism has largely remained counter-cultural in respect of preserving conventional moral positions, especially those related to sexuality and thus has taken a stand against adultery, sex before marriage, divorce (except on the grounds of adultery), and homosexuality.<sup>5</sup>

However, it is not Pentecostalism’s conservative counter-cultural stance that draws our attention, but rather that historically these subjects related to human sexuality (for Kay and Hunt it was the subject of homosexuality, but it can also be extended to the other issues listed above) have “largely remained ‘closed,’ not needing discussion, and [have] usually only been dealt with as a matter of pastoral discipline.”<sup>6</sup> This lack of engagement is once again reiterated by Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse, the editors of the eighth volume of the *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion*, which was on the theme of “Pentecostals and the Body” (2017). They wrote in their initial call for papers in 2015 that “to date, there is no sustained examination of Pentecostalism and the themes associated with research on the body.” Therefore, one of the main themes they have listed to be explored in their volume is “the politics of sexuality and gender roles—Pentecostalism as liberating and limiting for bodies, social control and gender roles, sexuality and notions of holiness/purity of body.”<sup>7</sup> I believe the present discussion, as well as the aforementioned edited volume, seeks to remedy this lack of Pentecostal resources, albeit in a

small manner. However, it must also be noted that within contemporary discourse, human sexuality has come to be taken as synonymous with discourses on homosexuality or LGBT rights. While these are legitimate contemporary concerns and issues that need addressing, the classical issues of identity and role of human beings on the basis of sexual differentiation equally need to be addressed from a Pentecostal perspective, which is precisely what this article attempts to do.

## Narrative Identity

We argue that gender, sexuality, and marriage can be adequately treated under the thematic of narrative identity, following closely the model put forward by the French Protestant theologian/philosopher, Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur argues that identity is always a response to “who,” which is mostly in the form of “naming,” although this “who” continually changes over the passage of time. Therefore, on what basis can we be justified in taking a single name of the subject throughout a life filled with changes from birth to death? Ricoeur’s answer is because of its “narrative” structure. In other words, the answer to the question “who” is always “to tell the story of a life.” Therefore the identity of this “who” must be a narrative identity.<sup>8</sup> Thus, identity, understood in narrative terms, can be called “by linguistic convention, the identity of the character”—in other words, a character in a narrative.<sup>9</sup> Ricoeur posits that this identity of a subject has two dimensions: identity as sameness (*idem*) and identity as selfhood (*ipse*) and it is the dialectic between *idem* and *ipse* that contains the identity of the subject.<sup>10</sup> Ricoeur argues that while *idem*-identity as sameness is what is permanent over time in the sense of a numerical identity, *ipse*-identity constitutes the changes over time. We argue that Ricoeur’s narrative identity possesses a third aspect as well—the narrative role played by the character, which fulfills all the functions required by the constraints of the role. Thus, Ricoeur’s narrative identity arguably implicitly possesses a three-part structure that responds to the following three questions respectively: a) *idem*, as what am I, or what about me does not change over time?; b) *ipse*, as who am I even as I grow and change through time?; and c) character, as how am I supposed to live, or what role am I supposed to play in the larger narrative of life? The first question for us can be translated into the

question of sex and sexuality—what am I? The second question refers to gender—who am I even as I change over time and am constructed by society? And the third question can point to marriage, the role played by the person in the larger family narrative. Ricoeur argues that “the identity of a person or a community is made up of these identifications with values, norms, ideals, models, and heroes, in which the person or the community recognizes itself.”<sup>11</sup> Here it should be noted that the Shiksha Rath community belongs predominantly to various Hindu traditions and therefore their identity and roles are primarily informed by Hindu narratives. However, the work of Shiksha Rath introduces new narratives, new characters, values, and models, based on the Christian tradition and this article also seeks to uncover how these new narratives have influenced the community.

With these preliminary points made, we now turn to the main section of the article, which raises questions about the sexuality, gender, and marriage of girl-children in India to which, following Tillich, we will posit an “answering” Pentecostal theology.

## **Sex, Gender, and Marriage of Shiksha Rath Women**

Simon Brodbeck and Brian Black, in the introduction to their edited volume on *Gender and Narrative in the Mahabharata*, claim that “the *Mahabharata* is one of the definitive cultural narratives in the construction of masculine and feminine gender roles in ancient India, and its numerous tellings and retellings have helped shape Indian gender and social norms ever since.”<sup>12</sup> They make a useful distinction between sex and gender that serves our purposes. They understand “sex” to be a biological identity, while employing “gender” to refer to a social identity. If “sex” makes someone male or female, then “gender,” they argue, differentiates masculinity and femininity. Therefore, gender for them is culturally constructed even if sex is a biological universal.<sup>13</sup> Following this distinction, we want to begin with sex and sexuality. However, as said above, the discussion is not in the line of the common pursuit towards homosexuality and LGBT rights. The interesting question we want to pursue, albeit a classical question, is about the theological implications of the biological status of being female. In reverse, we want



to begin by asking if there are implicit problems in being born female and possessing this sexual sameness throughout life. What are the implications and challenges of possessing a female biological identity in the Indian context?

On the other hand, gender seen as culturally constructed refers to the “who” question. Who is a feminine person in Indian society and how is her identity being shaped and constructed on the basis of her gender? While the term “gender,” from the Old French *genre*, now *genre*, derived from the Latin *genus*, originated as a grammatical term referring to “classes of noun designated as masculine, feminine, or neuter,” since the fourteenth century it has also been used to refer to the “state of being male or female,” which after the fall of Christendom has been dictated by medicine and the social sciences.<sup>14</sup> In other words, it is the discourse of medicine and social sciences that has shaped gender identity with its possibilities and constraints in the modern West. However, in the Indian context, it is the broader Hindu discourse that has shaped and constructed gender identity and set out who is a feminine person along with her identity. This goes back to the question of who am I, asked by feminine persons, which entails a deeper question—how do the Hindu traditions shape and construct the feminine gender and what are its implications for my life?

Finally, with regard to the role or function played by the feminine-character in the broader Indian social narrative, the primary role of women in the Indian social narrative is tied to her role in marriage. This connection is so strong that even when the girl is young, she is already seen through the lens of marriage and even betrothed at a very young age.

Of the thirty-one mothers from Shiksha Rath who were interviewed for this study, ninety percent of them (twenty-seven) who were married off below the legal age of eighteen say that being born female mattered a great deal to how life has turned out for them. Being a girl meant that they were to be married off and nothing else could be expected of them. Ramkali, who was married off at the age of thirteen, narrates about her marriage saying, “I was not ready for marriage, but after my mother had died while I was still very young, my older brother found a boy for me and asked me to get married.” Sunita, who was married off at the

age of fourteen, says, "I did not even understand what marriage was when I got married. My parents told me they would come and take me back after a month, but they never came back for me. I just listened to my parents and got married." None of the thirty-one reached university level in education. Over fifty percent of them (seventeen) did not receive any education at all, and another forty percent attended classes below fifth grade, with only three of the thirty-one women studying above sixth grade. Seventeen of them are working as maids, four as cooks, one gives beauty treatment from house to house, and three of them have small shops in the slum. Rekha exclaims, "I am working in eight houses now, and I am so tired of life." Most of them (twenty-six) said that they are not satisfied with the work they are presently doing. They believe that, if they had studied further, they could have gotten better-paying jobs and would have been treated with respect. Vimla best sums up the general feeling of the women: "I am not satisfied with the work that I am doing right now. I feel that had my parents allowed me to study further, today I could have done a better job and earned more."

Being born a girl-child, or having a feminine sexual identity, meant that they were to be married off at an early age, and so the families did not consider any value in educating them since they would be sent away to belong to another family. This also meant menial jobs for them along with much harassment. Their feminine sexuality disempowered them. What undergirds this treatment is not mere social pragmatism of getting the daughters married, but a deep-rooted Hindu low view of the feminine sex.

## **Hindu View on Sexuality, Gender, and Marriage**

Of course, affirming that there is no single Hindu view on anything is obvious, as there are multitudes of Hindu traditions, similar to any other world religion. This is more so the case in Hinduism, each tradition with its gods, sacred texts, practices, and theology, including a theology of gender. However, given this diversity, is it possible to abstract from these traditions a Hindu theology of gender? Vasudha Narayanan, in her article on gender in the *Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, affirms diverse views within Hindu traditions. In her opening line, she

contends, “gender is understood and acted out in different ways in the many Hindu *sampradayas* or traditions.” She further argues, “the Hindu traditions have a wealth of materials which can inform us on how some human beings have understood gender in many ways over four millennia; narratives and arts which can contribute to the current academic discourses on gender.”<sup>15</sup> In this work, she limits discussion to a description of the gender of the devotee within the Tamil *Srivaishnava* tradition of the ninth century and bases her understanding of Hindu gender in light of the life and work of the poet Nammalvar. She particularly looks at his poems that are composed from the standpoint of a woman, which Nammalvar would recite in a woman’s voice. Nammalvar becomes a young woman taking on the roles of different female characters of both the helpless devotee as well as that of a strong leader. From the classical Hindu texts characters such as Sita, Radha or the gopis, and Lord Vishnu are portrayed by the young man. Narayanan asks, “in what ways does this role-playing inform us about gender?” To which she replies,

some may argue that in the laments of the lovesick woman as well as in the ritual with Nammalvar, the portrayal projects a social, “patriarchal” relationship on to and replicates the male-female social power structure in the human-divine relationship. This, indeed, is true in many instances, where the deity is seen as the supreme “Man” (*Purusottama*) and the woman’s “lowliness” is exalted.<sup>16</sup>

But she quickly adds that this is only a partial view, as the voice of the helpless woman is only one of the voices the poet takes, and that he also takes the voice of dominant women such as a woman in love, a world-wise courtesan, as well as that of a mother. With this, Narayanan wants to prove that the voices of women are valued and privileged. However, what she fails to take into account is that it still took a male poet, Nammalva, to give voice to the feminine gender. Were the actual women of eighth- and ninth-century India able to give voice to their own selves or did it necessarily require the masculine gender to give voice to them? Out of the twelve Alvar poets, Andal of the eighth century is the only woman poet. So in spite of Narayanan’s view of the

positive portrayal of “women’s voices,” her perspective actually echoes the exclusion and helplessness faced by the Shiksha Rath mothers.

This is useful because then we can safely assume that the gender of the Shiksha Rath women is constructed in line with the social and cultural realities of their Hindu traditions. The above data on the women’s experiences suggest that however idealistic textual Hinduism may be about feminine gender identity, Hindu women embodying these gender identities have been deprived of their dignity and have been disempowered.

The ideal woman is often portrayed in terms of the *pativrata*, the wife who is religiously devoted to her husband. One of the most well-known *Mahabharata* examples of the *pativrata* is Savitri, who, by means of cunning, perseverance, and eloquence, outwits Death to save her husband. Another example is Gandhari, who makes loyalty to her husband her highest aim (*pativrataparayana*) by willfully blindfolding herself when she marries the blind Dhrtarastra, resolving that “she would not experience more than her husband could.”<sup>17</sup> Another trope used for women is that of the courtesan. And in this role, although she does not play out the marriage ideal, it is still contingent on her sexuality and how she uses her sexual power over a man. “*Sri*, who in some ways resembles the courtesan (*ganika*) as depicted in the *Kamasutra*, chooses the man who pleases her most (this is the difference between victory and defeat), and features as a temporary and fickle consort, not as a childbearer.”<sup>18</sup>

So we find that “the *pativrata* and *Sri* are two of the more prominent paradigms of femininity in the *Mahabharata*. Both paradigms present women as important complements to their husbands’ success. Both are restrictive, only representing women in relation to their menfolk.”<sup>19</sup>

Thus, we find that broadly within Hindu traditions the *idem*-identity of being female restricts the woman primarily to a complementary role as the *pativrata*, or wife, or its powerful counterpart as an aberration in the *Sri* as the courtesan. This restrictive view delimits all other possibilities. The woman is not viewed as a unique creation of God, who is an equal image-bearer, with creative possibilities.

## Exploring a Pentecostal Theology of Human Sexuality

As mentioned above the contemporary discourse on sexuality, even within theology, has largely focused on responding to issues of homosexuality and LGBT rights. However, these are not the issues faced by the women of the Shiksha Rath community. With regard to the church's undivided focus on homosexuality, Elizabeth Stuart writes,

while the church debates have become predictable . . . perhaps because the Holy Spirit has been moving elsewhere, theological reflection upon sexuality . . . produced a rich seam of theological discourse focused not only on homosexuality . . . but on human sexuality in all its diversity and complexity.<sup>20</sup>

So what is Shiksha Rath doing that can bring about a change in the lives of the girl-children so that they do not have to suffer the plight of their mothers? Thirty-two girls from the ages of five to fourteen were interviewed and surveyed for this article. Twenty-six of them said that they are happy to be girls and it was interesting to note that their social identity as being feminine was not seen negatively, yet many felt discriminated against for being a girl. One girl said she was unhappy because “she wants to be with her mother even after marriage but as a girl, she has to go and stay with her in-laws.” Also, they can notice the gender differentiation. One of the girls complained, “granny doesn’t like girls, she says only my brother will continue the family line.” All thirty-two of them want to work, and their dreams are diverse, either to be a doctor, teacher, dancer, artist, or an engineer. Some said that if their parents do not support them, then they will fight for their career dreams and many of them want Shiksha Rath to be involved in negotiating with their families when it comes to these difficult decisions of marriage and career. One Shiksha Rath staff said, “we take groups of girls and spend time with them talking about different issues according to their age. For example, with the older ones we talk about their careers, relationships, and dressings while with the younger girls we do activities and talk about different options for their career as well as about pursuing their hobbies.”

So the question for us regarding these discussions on sexuality and gender is, what theology of gender is operative in Shiksha Rath that drives them to engage robustly with Hindu theology and the practice of gender differentiation faced by their girls?

First, the operative theology is one that affirms the creation of both the masculine and the feminine sex in the image of the triune God. While it does not pander to the call of equality of all genders, it deals with the precise uniqueness of the girl-child. Janet Soskice argues, “The as yet unsung glory of Gen. 1:26-7 is that the fullness of divine life and creativity is reflected by a human race which is male and female, which encompasses if not an ontological then a primal difference.”<sup>21</sup> Beattie argues that “the account of the goodness of creation and of the human male and female made in the image of God requires a delicate balancing act between the affirmation of sexual difference as part of that original goodness.”<sup>22</sup> The *idem*-identity of sexuality, of being a girl-child, explicitly differentiates the kind of life the Shiksha Rath children lead and the future they anticipate. This theology, sensitive to sexual differentiation, has enabled Shiksha Rath to encourage the girls to rethink what it means to be girls, different from boys, and yet wholly in the image of God, and thus full of feminine possibilities. As we saw above, two of the more prominent paradigms of femininity in the *Mahabharata* are *pativrata* and *Sri*, and yet both of these ideals are dependent on the menfolk, be it husband or male. This is precisely because the Hindu imagination does not have the notion of the woman being in the image of God, independent of the male folk. One way forward is to reimagine a Pentecostal Hindu theology of sexuality in which women can be directly connected to the divine, independent of the male.

Second, in Shiksha Rath, we take full advantage of the *ipse*-identity that opens up the girl-children to be reshaped by alternative empowering narratives. If the primary *ipse*-identity (the changing identity) of the girls is shaped broadly by the Hindu narratives and practices, then the teachers and leaders of Shiksha Rath wisely use their opportunity with the girls not only to address their problems but also to offer biblical material in the form of stories and narratives, including as expressed through art, drama, and theatre, as alternative visions of being of feminine gender. Stories of Ruth, Esther, and Hannah from

the Old Testament, as well as the stories of Mary and Martha and Mary Magdalene from the New Testament, serve as powerful narratives of empowered women, which when shared with the girls enable them to be receptive to be reshaped by these narratives. Here the stress is not on imperatives and rules, as identities are seldom developed by such forceful constraints. Rather, it is a unique partnership with the Holy Spirit, in which while we share the narratives, we allow the Holy Spirit to do his work in enabling the girls to get embedded in these new narratives. Here a question can be raised to Pentecostal theology. Would it be open to developing a theology of religion on different themes, including sexuality, which would take an interfaith approach? Such a theology would bring together narratives from both Christian as well as other religions' texts in order to seek an understanding of sexuality directed by the Holy Spirit. Would this provide a genuine platform for the development of a Pentecostal theology of religion on gender from the ground up? This is not a completely new idea within Pentecostal theology. In Amos Yong we have a Pentecostal theologian who claims that emergent churches are already participating in these forms of interfaith engagement in that they "emphasize genuine dialogue, encourage visiting other sacred sites and even participating in their liturgies, and insist on learning about the lives and religious commitments of others."<sup>23</sup> On the basis of Eddie Gibbs' and Ryan Bolger's *Emerging Churches*, Yong argues that "these activities are informed by the conviction that there is much to be learned from other cultures, even to the point of being evangelized by those of other faiths in ways that transform Christian self-understandings."<sup>24</sup>

Finally, about the social role and character played by these girls in the larger social narrative, as shown above, the girls from childhood are steered to a single role and function, as a wife in a marital role. While this ideal does not go against the Pentecostal theological position of the primary role of a woman, we would like to broaden this understanding in light of the girl-child being in the image of God. If the Holy Spirit is actively involved in shaping and reshaping the unique roles of the girl-children so that they fulfill their unique destiny, then a "single standard fit" of "marriage" will not do for all. It is here that we at Shiksha Rath are sensitive to the Spirit's leading for each of these girls so

that we can support them in the directions they are led regarding their futures, in which of course marriage is a central possibility. However, we want to be careful that we do not become the handmaiden of a Hindu theology that advocates women to be treated as Sunita and to suffer without consideration. However, this discovery is not made by the leaders of Shiksha Rath for the child. Rather it follows a Trinitarian model in which the girl, along with the Shiksha Rath leadership and the Holy Spirit, equally working together, are on a journey for the girls to find their dignity and roles in society. In our view, it is here in these moments of practical empowerment that the grounded Pentecostal theology of sexuality, gender, and marriage blossoms. While this is an initial attempt to abstract reflectively a theology from practice, much more must be done to work towards maturing such a theology.

## Conclusion

This exploration of how the Spirit discloses the inherent image of God in female sexuality indeed reveals the godly destiny of the girl-child. The Spirit-given charismata operational in the service of the workers enables the growth and nurture of the godly destiny in the girl-child. We hope that the study of these themes has not only enabled us to begin an attempt at a Pentecostal theology of human sexuality, but also explicitly demonstrates the role of the Holy Spirit in restoring the dignity of the girl-child in Shiksha Rath.

To end this presentation, a recent story in a mainline Indian newspaper continues to reveal the plight of the girl-child in India. “A 12-year-old survivor of rape, who recently gave birth to a child making her possibly Bengal’s youngest mother,” has to transfer out of her school as she was being accused of bringing a “bad name” to the school. The reasons given for her expulsion are: a) she would discuss her “sexual exploitation” with her classmates, and they did not want such a “dirty girl” to study along with their children; b) they were questioning how a girl could even be raped in this manner; c) why was the family not more protective of the child?; and d) male faculty members feared that she might level false allegations of physical assault against them. However, her aunt said, “she was born on July 1, 2005, and isn’t even 12 yet. She



still plays with toys, and it's me who is taking care of her baby. Even now all she is concerned about is having chocolates and cold drinks.”<sup>25</sup>

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## Notes

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- 9 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 141.
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