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Siparia Mai: An Illustration of the Tangibility Factor in Faith by Hindus in Trinidad

Siparia is a town in southern Trinidad, in the island country of Trinidad and Tobago. The town is located south of Penal and southeast of Fyzabad with a population of around 86,000. Siparia is also called “The Sand City.” Siparia is home to a church operated by the Catholic Capuchin Order—La Divina Pastora. The venerable Isidore of the same order brought the worship of the Holy Shepherdess to the South American Mainland, presently known as Venezuela, as early as 1715. In 1759 the order formed a mission in Siparia because they were fleeing persecution by the Amerindians on the South American mainland that began around 1730 (Boodoo 1993:385). Pope Pius VI decreed in 1795 that the saint known as “The Divine Shepherdess” or commonly known as “La Divina Pastora” was to be the patron saint of all the Capuchin missions (A Brief History of Siparia).

Every year on the second Sunday following Easter the Feast of La Divina Pastora is held as a memorial to the lady. The feast begins with a solemn High Mass after which the statue of mother Mary is carried through the streets of the town in a procession. During the procession the Rosary is recited followed by the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. Marian hymns are sung, and as the procession returns to the church there is a solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament (Noel *Short History*:14). Apart from the feast, one more event takes place in the parish during the Passion Week. On Holy Thursday and Good Friday, Hindus from all over the country pay visits to the church to worship the statue of Mary. The worshippers believe that the statue is the Trinidadian incarnation of the Hindu goddess Kali, a phenomenon that is unknown to the majority of Hindus residing in India.

The practice of worshipping the divinity of another faith is not restricted to the Hindus in Trinidad. Our Lady of Vailankanni in Chennai, Tamil

Nadu; The basilica of the Holy-Rosary in Hoogly, West Bengal; Mount Mary Church and St. Michaels Church or the Mahim Church in Mumbai, Maharashtra, are a few examples of worship places visited by many Hindus as pilgrims. Though this article focuses on this aspect of Hinduism in Trinidad and the mission challenge posed by such practices, these examples indicate that there are other examples of this practice in Hinduism.

Hinduism in Trinidad

Hinduism was introduced to the Caribbean region as early as 1845 with the arrival of the indentured laborers from East India. With the abolition of slavery the planters in the Caribbean looked for contract workers for their plantations. After a couple of failed attempts to bring workers from different places, they finally turned to the east and the laborers from India were brought in to work in the sugarcane and coco plantations. The first ship *Fateh Al Razack*, commonly known as Fatal Razack, arrived in Trinidad on May 30, 1845, with 227 immigrants. This import of Indian laborers continued until 1917. "Originally East Indians came (from 1845) on a labor contract, first for three, then for five years. This was extended to ten years with a guaranteed free return passage to India" (Boodoo 1993:386). Although the immigrants are collectively known as East Indians, in reality they came from the north, east, and a small number from south India. These immigrants brought their religion, practices, and cultures with them. The majority of the immigrants were Hindus, with a small minority of them Muslims.

The primary intention of the immigrants was to work and to earn as much as possible so they could return to India to live a comfortable life. At the end of the contract some of them returned but many others made the Caribbean their home. "An estimated 500,000 *girmityas* (indentured agreement-signers) crossed the Indian and Atlantic Oceans to work in the Caribbean. Of this number, 175,000 returned home (*Janma Bhumi*, land of birth) when their contracts expired, while 350,000 stayed in the Caribbean. Of the 175,000 that returned home another 40,000 to 50,000 re-entered the Caribbean for the second and even third time" (Roopnarine 2011:174).

When it became clear that many of the indentured workers had a desire to settle in Trinidad, the then Governor took initiatives to facilitate their settlement.

In 1870, Governor Gordon decided to give a block of crown lands to the East Indians who were desirous of making their home in Trinidad in return for their free passage to India. The response was so good that other East Indians began to apply for lands and as a result East Indian villages began to spring up, mainly in the north-central, central and south-central parts of the island. (Boodoo 1993:386)

It was at that time that the faith and practices of Hinduism were introduced in Trinidad. Hinduism is a faith that is expressed through tangible expressions of faith such as the *Jhandi* (the flag poles) of different colors, small shrines in the houses of Hindus all over Trinidad, and the temples. Apart from these tangible expressions, there is one other prevalent expression of Hinduism in Trinidad and that is the worship of the statue of La Divina Pastora as the goddess Kali.

La Divina Pastora

Little is known about the arrival of the statue of Mary at the church at Siparia. There are several legends associated with the event. Adrian Booodoo suggests that the statue came with the Capuchin monks (1993:385). It is also believed in the same context that “a Spanish priest brought a statue of the Catholic saint to the church in Siparia from Venezuela sometime in the 19th century, declaring that it had saved his life” (A brief History of Siparia). It is further said that the monk had a shipwreck at Quinam. Efforts were made to return the statue to the rightful destination on the mainland by another ship but it failed. Some also suggest that the statue is only a bust, probably from the bow of the wrecked ship (Jaggassar 1992:16). Note the following legends:

In Siparia lived a Carib-panol [A person with Carib and Creole or local Spanish descent] woman who was very prayerful. In that carate house where she lived, was a stone. She noticed the stone getting larger as months went by. The woman prayed for some sort of revelation concerning the phenomenon of the house. After some time in prayer, the stone was formed into a statue, ‘Siparee Mai.’ She described the statue as “a living statue with great power.” It was said that the statue went out and spent a night and returned the next day. The occurrence happened occasionally. Wanting to find out where the statue went, the woman got no answer. With threats she struck the statue with a broom and it returned to a stone and disappeared.

She [La Divina Pastora] appeared to a hunter in the forest and instructed him to place the statue in the chapel. He brought the statue home and delayed in the instruction. The hunter fell seriously ill and remembering the task, told his son to take the statue to the chapel. It is said that, at the same time the son arrived with the statue in the chapel, the hunter was miraculously cured. (Jaggassar 1992:16)

A noted anthropologist of Trinidad, Kumar Mahabir, suggests that “a record in Siparia parish around 1871 states that the image of the Virgin Mary was brought from Venezuela by a Capuchin proselytizing priest who publicly declared that it had saved his life” (Mahabir 2007). He fur-

ther mentioned that “some elderly Hindus have laid claim that it is their fore-parents who had first seen the apparition of a lady in white sitting on a stone under a *karat* [palm] tree where the church now stands. They claim further that the apparition was endowed with healing powers, just as Mother Kali” (Mahabir 2007). The tales and theories about the statue of La Divina Pastora are many, but the Hindus of Trinidad remain unaffected since they have recognized her as their goddess from a very early period that dates back to soon after their arrival in Trinidad.

Hindu Acceptance

The date and history of the Indian population accepting the statue of Mary as their Goddess incarnated is unknown and inaccurate. “By 1890, however, the statue of *La Divina Pastora* was already attracting a large number of East Indians, especially Hindus, but also Muslims” (Boodoo 1993:386). Kumar Mahabir cites an early church record written by a priest, Cornelius O’Hanlon, in 1871.

For the East Indians, the Black Virgin is really “Suparee,” the name of a seed which is used in their religious ceremonies, and also the name of a powerful saint in India. . . . When their ancestors came to Trinidad, the Indians heard of their “Saint” at Siparia and found that she had all the qualities of their Suparee-Mai and were convinced that she was the same one. (Mahabir 2007)

The observation of Cornelius O’Hanlon may not be accurate in terms of interpretation. While it is true that *Suparee*, the beetle nut and the beetle leaf are considered sacred by Hindus, it is never used to christen any god or goddess. The beetle nut is used as an offering to the gods and goddesses in order to welcome and express reverence in the same way that guests were welcomed and treated in many ancient Indian houses. The name “Suparee Mai” is possibly the distorted pronunciation and spelling of “Siparia Mai.” Presently the goddess is known as Siparia Mai and also addressed as Siparee ka Mai, suggesting that the name has originated from her location because in the Hindi language the word “*ka*” refers to “of.” Therefore the name Siparee Ka Mai can be translated as Mother of Siparia.

Most Hindus believe that the statue is the incarnation of the Hindu goddess, Kali. During my visits to the church at Siparia, I interviewed several pilgrims. They were all, except one, of the opinion that Siparee Ka Mai is the incarnation of the goddess Kali. The one exception expressed the opinion that she is the feminine aspect of Hindu divinity and did not give her a specific name. Bavina Sookdeo suggests that “some believe

that Siparee Ka Mai, which means Mother of Siparia, represents the goddesses Durga and Kali. [The] goddess Durga represents the power of the Supreme Being that preserves moral order and righteousness in creation and Kali is a manifestation of the Divine Mother, which represents the female principle" (Sookdeo 2012).

The priest John T. Harricharan describes the statue in a very interesting way when he says, "She is described as short, possessing long black hair, copper coloured skin, small cheeks, kindly eyes, and a tiny nose" (1983:12). This description is very similar to that of Kali, but not a replica, and is what probably led the East Indians to believe that she is an incarnation of the goddess. As an East Indian who lived for many years in India with Hindus who worship Kali as one of their primary deities, I am convinced that the statue could have struck the East Indians as Kali in Western attire.

Another factor that could have led to the present practice was that the planters, who were of the Christian faith, allowed their indentured workers to make the pilgrimage to Siparia to offer prayers to Suparee Mai. Many left on Holy Thursday and walked to Siparia from as far as Port of Spain in the north (Boodan 2007). But some plantation owners became displeased over the fact that their East Indian workers left the plantation and went to Siparia to worship and give thanks at the church.

In response Theresa Noel tells us that "some estate owners in the North of the island got together in an effort to put a stop to the practice. They bought a statue which they installed upon a hill in the city of Port of Spain. They christened the place "Siparia Hills," in the hope that their workers would transfer their zealous devotions there. Their plot failed miserably" (Noel n.d. *Short History*:17).

Regardless of the background or origin, Siparia Mai of Siparia has occupied an important place in the religious life of the Hindus in Trinidad for more than 120 years and has not been diminished or replaced even in recent years.

The Miracles

Several miracles have been attributed to Siparia Mai by Hindu pilgrims, a few of which are noted below.

People from as far as America, Venezuela and England will tell you they have come to pray to La Divina Pastora and had their wishes granted. . . . People come here for many reasons. Mothers come to pray for good husbands for their daughters. . . . One woman came to pray because she wanted her visa so badly and she was turned down quite a number of times. She asked La Divina Pastora to grant her the visa and so she received it. In addition, her name was pulled in some

sort of lottery where she got permanent residence. (Sookdeo 2012)
A blind Spanish girl approached La Divina and asked the divine mother to intercede for her sight to be restored. She promised La Divina a gold chain and her sight came back. One night when she was dressing for a party, the young lady said the only thing to complete her good looks was her chain. The item reappeared around her neck and her sight was gone. (Boodan 2007)

"I believe that she (Siparia Mia) is keeping us good," said one Mrs. Maraj, a pilgrim visiting the church with her young adult children, as I was interacting with her within the church compound. According to her, Siparia Mai was protecting her children and herself. Stories of miracles believed to be performed by Siparia Mai are abundant. Believers claim children who were unable to walk or speak have been miraculously healed by the offerings made to the goddess. (Webb 2011)

The Worship

There is no specific pattern or liturgy of worship followed by the believers of Siparia Mai. The offering of candles, rice, flower petals, olive oil, money, gold, and jewelry are all components of Hindu worship of the goddess. In the past, Hindus would visit the statue inside the church, but since such visits disturbed worship on Good Friday it was decided to move the statue to an adjoining room. On Holy Thursday the statue is placed in the parish hall adjacent to the main church to facilitate the pilgrims' worship. Believers stand in front of the statue with folded hands in reverence and offer their prayers, petitions, and the offerings.

In the early days when Indians were indentured servants, pilgrims walked from all over the island to reach the church in order to offer prayers. With the advent of the railroad in 1912 some used that facility to make their journey more comfortable. Although today motor vehicles have made travel easy, some of the devotees still prefer to come to the church on foot as a sign of their devotion.

Beginning from Holy Thursday afternoon the pilgrims start flocking in and gathering. Most of them carry a bottle of olive oil to offer to their deity. A portion of the oil is poured into a container placed near the statue and the rest remains with the devotee after the bottle is brought in contact with the statue. The oil is considered holy and used for special purposes like healing, blessings, etc. While speaking with some pilgrims, they told me they will preserve the oil as it is considered holy and sacred and apply it to their foreheads when they have special needs. Along with the oil, they also give other offerings. It was interesting that a few pilgrims were seen walking into the church with reverently bowed heads and offering prayers.

On Friday morning the pilgrims who stayed overnight in the adjacent school building recite their holy recitations in devotion and walk into the parish hall where the goddess is displayed. Some things have changed, for “during indentureship, Hindus sacrificed cocks, goats and pigs in the churchyard. [However] the practice was discouraged by Catholic officials” (Mahabir 2007).

It is also a practice among Hindus to offer their hair as an offering to a deity as a sign of reverence and in return they hope to receive a blessing. This is also practiced in connection with Siparia Mai. The ritual is performed especially for children. “Parents use the services of the barbers at hand to cut their children’s hair as a sign of dedication and offering. The practice began as early as 1871 when the parish priest of La Divina Pastora recorded in his diary the offering of hair (Mahabir 2007).

Another ritual performed on the morning of Good Friday is the thanksgiving dance known as *Anchara nach*. The dance is performed by professional dancers who carry children whose hair has been offered along with other offerings. “Many of the mothers of these boys claimed to have been cured of infertility through prayers to Siparee Mai, hence the reason for this elaborate act of thanks giving” (Noel *La Divina*). Most of the pilgrims leave the site by 2:00 p.m. on Good Friday. The statue is then replaced in her designated spot inside the church. While small groups of visitors occasionally visit the church during the rest of the year, the great majority of them visit on Good Friday when the church will be filled with pilgrims wishing to express their gratitude, reverence, worship, and those seeking the blessings of Siparia Mai.

Missionary Challenge

Why did the East Indian contracted laborers in Trinidad rechristen La Divina Pastora as Kali Mai, Durga Mai, or the feminine aspect of their divinity? In my opinion there are two answers to this question which, I believe, need to be considered because they pose serious challenges for the cross-cultural gospel communication to the Hindus of Trinidad. The first answer is that Hinduism is a religion where the faith is experienced in a tangible way, and second, the all-inclusive nature of Hinduism that allows for many syncretistic beliefs in contrast to the exclusive claims of the Bible.

The life of the laborers was not one of comfort and ease on the sugar-cane and coco estates. They were treated no better than slaves and were often plagued by illness. Addictions were another social evil causing a lot of unrest in the community. They were also living in a new world where the location, language, and culture were all confusing and unknown. Discomfort, fear, and a sense of insecurity hung over them like a cloud. It was in this state and because of these factors that the Indian laborers were

driven to search for the divine as is the case when people are in trouble. They also came from a cultural setting where Hinduism had goddesses for cholera and small pox from the time when there was no treatment for such diseases. Recently Hindus have added a new goddess, yet to be accepted nationwide—Aidsamma—the goddess that protects from the incurable HIV virus (Gewertz 2000). Almost all the goddesses of Hinduism are believed to help the devotees during times of trouble.

In East India, Durga is known as *Dugatinashini*, the destroyer of evil, and Kali is called *Bipattarini*, the savior from all troubles or danger. Kali protects her devotees from famine, destruction, plagues, epidemics, illnesses, and other forms of disaster. All these existing beliefs influenced the indentured laborers to accept Suparee Mai as the Trinidadian incarnation and divine expression of their established mythologies and a resemblance of the well-known goddess Kali of East India. They found a local deity they could approach, tell their needs to, connect with in their trials, worship, and feel one with. Carrying a bottle of oil, embracing the statue, and touching it with the bottle, gave them a sense of the presence of the divine. In that way they experienced the tangibility of the divine.

The *Longman Contemporary English Dictionary* describes the word “tangibility” in this way: “If something is tangible you can touch or feel it.” The *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* defines tangibility as “real or not imaginary; able to be shown, touched or experienced.” The first description suggests tangibility to be an experience that is physical and the second one describes it as beyond a physical experience, one that can touch the soul since experiences are not always physical. Therefore, a spiritual experience does not always include a physical experience, but the physical aspect cannot be discounted just because it does not include things like seeing or touching. Many times an experience begins when there is contact with an object and even after the person leaves the physical presence of the object the experience remains and lingers on. Most Hindus claim that their experience with the divine starts in this way—by touching or feeling or experiencing the divine in connection with a tangible experience—and Trinidadian Hindus are no different.

During my visit to La Divina Pastora on Holy Thursday and Good Friday, I had the opportunity of interacting with Hindu believers. They all mentioned one thing—the oil they were carrying back with them. The oil gave them a sense of the divine presence in their homes. Most of them said they would keep the oil at the family shrine.

This raises a very important question, How can the Seventh-day Adventist Church provide tangible experiences of the presence of God in everyday life so that a Hindu would be attracted to the church? I will make

an effort to answer this question after discussing a second question that deals with the all-inclusiveness of Hinduism.

The All-inclusiveness of the Hindu Faith

Mahabir rightly pointed out that “Hinduism has absorbed all sorts of religious faiths, various forms of worship, and diverse kinds of rituals and customs. In La Divina Pastora, Hindus have been able to syncretize their traditional religious beliefs and practices with Catholicism in such a way that they have been able to reincarnate Virgin Mary and yet retain their distinct ethnic identity” (2007). This is one of the unique characteristics of Hinduism. Many Hindus accept blessings from various divine sources because they believe that idols or any kind of expression of the divine are an expression of the eternal reality. Commenting on a speech delivered by President Obama, Aseem Shukla quoted from the Vedas: “Truth is One, the wise know It by many names.” He continues to state that understanding and tolerance should be the “critical point that should be the goal and common denominator for every sincere interfaith effort anywhere” (Shukla 2010).

The same belief is practiced even while worshipping an idol. While summarizing the teachings of Swami Vivekananda, the famous Hindu philosopher, Vishnu Prakash, writes, “We may worship anything by seeing God in it, if we can forget the idol and see God there. We must not project any image upon God. But we may fill any image with that Life which is God. Only forget the image, and you are right enough—for ‘out of Him comes everything’” (2011). It is with this understanding and belief that a Hindu sees the goddess Kali in the statue of the Virgin Mary at Siparia.

The idea of worshipping anything by seeing the divine in it was not just restricted to the indentured laborers, but is an aspect of religion as practiced by most Hindus. The Indian national Raghavan was on his first trip to pay homage to the deity but vowed to return next year. “I am a Hindu and my friends here [in Trinidad and Tobago] told me this [the La Divina Pastora compound] is a notable place to visit. There is indeed vibration and sanctity here and we would return. I am here with my wife and two children and others” (Williams 2012). My interaction with other non-resident Indians, who also visit La Divina Pastora, confirms that they sense that the divine can be experienced in any image or idol since it is the projection of the same, one, and ultimate reality. Thus Hinduism includes any expression of the divine in their pantheon of gods and goddesses.

Many Hindus worship any idol or image because they believe it is a projection of the same, one, and ultimate reality, therefore, they also have no difficulty in accepting Jesus Christ. To them, he is just one of the many

incarnations. I have visited in many Hindu homes and have seen a picture or a statue of Jesus or a cross that is placed with equal reverence as the other deities at their family shrine. Jesus is worshipped and prayed to along with the other Hindu gods. This is where the challenge arises. When the claim of Christianity becomes an exclusive claim that says Christ is the only God and there is no other, this is foreign to the thinking of most Hindus. To present Christ as the only one, omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient God is where the test for Christian mission lies. Some Christian scholars suggest that Christ should be presented in an ecumenical pattern.

People of other faiths are not enemies of Christians, rather fellow travellers. Their religions and cultures are no more for destruction by Christian missions; rather they are treasures for the enrichment of the Gospel of God in Christ. Therefore witnessing Christ hereafter is always in the company of people of other faiths. For this the Hindu faith experiences can take the lead as diverse enrichments have already come from that angle. (Aleaz 2011:110)

It would be easy to share the gospel in such an inclusive way; however the Seventh-day Adventist Church is committed to the Bible where the claim of Christ is an exclusive claim (John 14:6, Phil 2:10). Therefore, Christ cannot be presented as only one of the divines. I believe that one way to solve this issue is to stress the fact that the Christ of Christianity can be experienced in a tangible way. The question that needs to be asked is, How can the Seventh-day Adventist Church provide such a tangible experience of the presence of God in our midst that Hindus are attracted to the church?

Tangibility of Faith

In the first century the church grew in an environment that is almost the same as in Trinidad and in the rest of the Hindu world. The gentile context of the church was an all-inclusive idol worshipping context where the church started to take root. The beginning of the explosion in church growth took place in the multilingual context of Jerusalem during a festival when pilgrims from all over the Roman world were in attendance (Acts 2). After persecution broke out in Jerusalem, the church became more and more dominated by those won from the Gentile world. A careful reading of the Book of Acts exposes us to a few important facts: the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and later upon other converts, the healing ministry of the apostles and others, and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believers. I would like to refer to just two of the many incidents in Acts in order to draw my conclusion.

During the Pentecost experience the audience included “God-fearing

Jews from every nation under heaven” along with the Jews (Acts 2:5, 11 NIV). Proselytes and God fearers were not Jews by birth. They were gentiles who came from idol worshipping backgrounds who had been all-inclusive in their acceptance of many deities, but who had come to acknowledge the living God. On the day of the Pentecost, the Jews in Jerusalem and the Jews from the Diaspora experienced a tangible expression of God when they heard a loud noise and then listened to the disciples speak in multiple languages because they were filled with the Holy Spirit. After Peter’s speech there was one question, “Brothers, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Peter gave an uncompromising answer. “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (v. 38). “And three thousand people were added to the church on that day” (v. 41). The tangible expression of divinity demonstrated through the coming of the Holy Spirit helped the people to accept the exclusive claims of the Bible.

The second incident is in Acts 16 where Paul and Silas were praying and singing in the prison at Philippi when there was an earthquake. The jailor wanted to take his own life, fearing that his prisoners had escaped, but Paul stopped him by informing him that they all were there. The response of the jailor was actually a response of his experience of the divine in a tangible manner. His first question was, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (v. 30). Paul and Silas were ready with their answers and told him, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household” (v. 31). The same night the jailor and his family were baptized (v. 33). The jailor accepted the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ because he had the tangible experience of the intervention of divinity in the midst of an earthquake. When the divine reaches the experience level of an individual, the doubts that often interfere with the exclusive claims of the Bible disappear.

The above mentioned incidents have similarities. In both cases there was a tryst with the power of God which became an experience for those who experienced it. The tryst with the divine and the experience together helped the individuals to make a decision for the Lord in such a way that there was no compromise with the inclusivism of the past. The people involved could respond positively to the exclusive call of the disciples. The expression of faith came from their tangible experience.

These two incidents are spectacular expressions of the tangibility of the divine. However, not every encounter with the presence of the Spirit of God will be an earth-shattering one. Yet the presence of the Spirit of God and the working of the Spirit of God in and through the life of a believer must not be hidden. God’s presence and interaction must become evident and radiate out to others as happened in Antioch where the be-

lievers shared the good news with the people. When Barnabas came to Antioch he “saw the evidence of the grace of God” (Acts 11:23). The text further says, “The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord” (v. 21). There is no detail given of how the hand of the Lord was with the believers or how Barnabas saw the evidence of the grace of God. All that the Bible records is that because of such evidences people turned to the Lord unconditionally.

The disciples of Jesus found the tangible expression of the divine in Jesus himself. Later on John the apostle testified to that truth (1 John 1:1-3). Therefore, when Jesus told them about his departure they were troubled (John 13:31-38). Jesus assured them that he would send another Comforter—the Holy Spirit. He promised, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you for ever—the Spirit of truth” (John 14:16, 17). The disciples experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit at various times and in many different settings—the very thing that transformed their lives and the lives of pagan people living with very inclusive worldviews.

The promise of Jesus to send the Holy Spirit is as valid today as it was for the disciples in the first century, and so are the promises of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Those tangible expressions of God through healings, power to overcome addictions, and setting people free from the evil one are the very types of evidences that will encourage Hindus in Trinidad to accept Jesus as their only Lord and Savior.

Conclusion

The Hindus in Trinidad worship Siparia Mai because of what they have either heard of or encountered through an experience with the goddess. Many times those beliefs are just based on legends and miracle stories, but this faith in the goddess has been passed down from their ancestors who felt the tangible expression of the divine in the form of Siparia Mai. The Bible provides us with the evidence of the tangible presence of the living God. It is through an encounter with the Holy Spirit that leaves an everlasting experience and every minister and member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church should strive for it. A demonstration of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit as a tangible expression of the living God can be an effective way for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to share the gospel message with Hindus. Experiencing God’s presence and power are integral to believing the gospel message. The core challenge is to present a practical Christianity so each individual can experience God in some tangible way. Hindus need to experience God, to have a faith-building encounter with God before they can believe in the exclusive claims of that God.



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