



Received: 05 December 2017
Accepted: 13 December 2018
First Published: 24 December 2018

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Reviewing editor:
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PHILOSOPHY & RELIGION | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Attachment to a charismatic religious figure and development of virtues: Followers of Jalaram Bapa

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Abstract: This article reports on a 10-year longitudinal study across nine cities in five countries of Jalaram Bapa followers. Jalaram Bapa (JB) is a Gujarati Hindu eighteenth-century charismatic God-like figure. The aim was to examine how attachment to JB leads to the development of virtues. Data were collected from 12,069 followers during phase 1 (2002–2003) and 11,034 followers during phase 2 (2012–2013). They were compared to an equal number of Gujarati Hindu non-JB followers. Results showed that faith development, God attachment security and virtues development of JB followers was incremental and higher compared to non-followers. JB followers who performed their devotion through social service, food charity and community kitchens and whose phase 2 faith maturity and God attachment security scores were higher, were more virtuous. Charismatic humans who assume God-like images in the psyche of their followers promote an attachment. These implicit religious experiences could be used for public good.

Subjects: Religion; Hinduism; Religion in Context; Religious Ethics

Keywords: faith development; attachment; God attachment; virtues; charismatic religious figure; Jalaram Bapa; followers

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This article reports on a longitudinal study of Jalaram Bapa followers. Jalaram Bapa (JB) is a Gujarati Hindu eighteenth century saint and followed by several Gujarati Hindus in India and the diaspora. The aim was to examine how attachment to JB leads to the development of virtues. Data were collected from followers in India and the diaspora during phase 1 and 10 years later. They were compared to an equal number of Gujarati Hindu non-JB followers. Results showed that faith development, God attachment security and virtues development of JB followers was incremental and higher compared to non-followers. JB followers who performed their devotion through social service, food charity, and community kitchens and whose phase 2 faith maturity and God attachment security scores were higher, were more virtuous. Charismatic humans who assume God-like images in the psyche of their followers promote an attachment. These implicit religious experiences could be used for public good.

1. Introduction

Much was written about religion's potential to promote values and virtues or morally good behaviour (Kinghorn, 2015). This essentially flows from religion's potential to trigger experiences, shape reactions and endow a sense of security (Vishkin et al., 2015). It comes from the fact that emotions and feelings are a part of religious experience and understanding (Carr, 2005). Religion also affects experiences by shaping the processes of regulation of either intrinsic or extrinsic nature (Vishkin, Bigman, & Tamir, 2014). Extrinsic regulation means providing social support and promoting feelings of social belonging (Diener, Tay, & Myers, 2011). Intrinsic regulation is of internal processes, which originate from inside the individual and endow the ability to disengage attention from an emotion-rousing stimulation through practices such as meditation (Carter, McCullough, & Carver, 2012). This regulation is generally in a manner that is congruent with religion-consistent goals that are essentially virtue driven. This is because religion-inspired regulation involves meaning making—influencing the way people feel, by changing the meaning of events, through strategies such as cognitive reappraisal (Vishkin et al., 2015).

Within religion, God or Higher Power attachment and attachment to God-like figures are considered as critical for shaping experiences. Attachment to God and psychological behaviours were subjected to empirical investigation, either through field testing of attachment models or through understanding how exactly the attachment is processed, e.g., seeing God as the parental figure (Beck & McDonald, 2004). Attachment to God is also seen to promote coping in the wake of stressful events (Belavich & Pargament, 2002).

Cicirelli (2004) has applied Bowlby's classical attachment theory to God as the attachment figure whom believers have the desire to protect by defending or justifying their belief when challenged by outsiders. Further secure attachment to God entails having a healthy view of self and God. Attachment to God can occur in two different ways, namely through compensation and correspondence. The compensation hypothesis states that the relationship to God can compensate for the deficient caregiver and/or adult romantic bonds. The correspondence hypothesis states that the attachment style experienced by an individual would be consistent across different types of bonds (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000). Granqvist (2002) revised the correspondence and compensation hypotheses to what he called socialized correspondence and emotional compensation. Sandage et al.'s (2015) study on adult attachment and divine-human relations, in a sample of graduate students in the US, supported the correspondence hypothesis. Positive correlations between adult attachment and attachment to God were observed, which ranged from spiritual grandiosity to stability and regulation.

Attachment theory, and specifically the compensation and correspondence models, have guided empirical studies that talk of God the attachment figure as loving and the importance of having a relationship with God as more stable and close (Beck & McDonald, 2004). God was described as the ultimate attachment figure (Kirkpatrick, 2005), and there is abundant evidence that believers engage in proximity seeking behavior through various types of spiritual coping when faced with stressful events or circumstances. Researchers have reported that secure (as opposed to avoidant or insecure) attachment to God is associated with higher levels of life satisfaction, and with lower levels of depressed affect, psychological distress, and feelings of loneliness; on the other hand, anxious attachment to God was found to be inversely associated with positive affect, and positively linked with distress and neuroticism. Positive orientation and life satisfaction are in turn seen as promoting positive virtues and virtuous behaviour and vice versa (Ellison, Bradshaw, Kuyel, & Marcum, 2012).

1.1. Attachment to charismatic or God-like figures: Jalaram Bapa and his followers

One interesting phenomenon, specifically in the context of Hindu religion globally, is the existence and proliferation of God-like charismatic figures or gurus, who attract large number followers through their spiritual messages, majority of who remain lifelong devotees and followers (Tollefsen, Alisauskiene, & Lewis, 2016). Followers feel a sense of attachment to this charismatic figure or guru, seeing in him a quasi God-like image (Pessi, 2011). Through the attachment, followers or devotees reinforce a link

between the charisma's authority and morality or values and virtues development, and this accentuates the interpersonal dimension of the therapeutic relationship (Van Hoecke, 2006). The link also echoes the four-factor model of virtues viz. empathy, order, resourcefulness and serenity (Cawley III, Martin, & Johnson, 2000) and thus the connection between attachment to God-like figures and the psychology of virtues (Zubko, 2014).

One such charismatic or God-like figure was Jalaram Bapa (1799–1886), an 18th century saint from a small town named Virpur located in Kathiawad, Rajkot, Gujarat state, India. His hagiographies, particularly Shri Jalaram Vandana (Shah, 2000) and Jalaram Bapa (Soni, 1984) are the key sources of information on his life. His early education was from his mother who was very religious. At the age of 16, he was married to Virbai, who lifelong partnered in his mission. The important trope of his religious work was service to the poor, specifically his food service or what is known as “*sadavrat*” or charitable kitchen. This continues to be a major form of devotion to him in Indian temple centres and the Diaspora.

His fellowship is the vernacular Gujarati tradition-bound coterie, in pursuit of the miraculous. Miracles lie at the heart of the Jalaram Bapa tradition (Wood, 2010). This has prompted the Gujarati Diaspora to build his places of worship or temple centres across the globe. Apart from rituals and worship these temples continue the charitable kitchen tradition.

The hagiographies describe in detail, his charitable work and miraculous healings (Shah, 2000; Soni, 1984). These narratives set the foundations for two Jalaram Bapa traditions that are replicated in the contemporary times globally: the first is the belief that there will always be enough food for those who need it, even if the numbers present are considerably more than anticipated, with food left over. Second, it lays the foundation for the tradition of ensuring that a bowl or basket of sanctified food, half covered by a cloth, will always be available at sites of Jalaram Bapa devotion or temple centres and that the bowl or basket will remain full, without any human intervention (Wood, 2010).

For long, Jalaram Bapa, his miracles and the traditions that had evolved around him were essentially confined to Gujarat generally and Virpur in particular. With the change in social and environmental situation, and the migration of Gujaratis at the beginning of the end of the eighteenth beginning of the nineteenth centuries, the tradition of Jalaram Bapa developed beyond the confines of Gujarat and he began to appeal to the general global Gujarati community based in Africa, UK, USA and Australia (Williams, 2001, p. 207), This led to the development of temple centres in each of the places, which continue the tradition of Jalaram' s *sadavrat*. The food, which is sanctified and given free of charge to any who attend, reflects the ethic of generosity and service to all.

His followers, who frequent the temple centres engage in ritual worship, which includes collective prayer and chanting, private prayer and chanting and most importantly participating in the food service (i.e. the charitable kitchen), which is an integral part of all temple centres. They venerate Jalaram Bapa as the Godhead and are attached to him (Wood, 2008, 2009, 2010).

1.2. The present study

The present work is a longitudinal study based on Diaspora followers of Jalaram Bapa (henceforth JB), whose attachment and devotion to him cause them to engage in acts of altruism and virtuous behaviour for greater common good. Over a period of 10 years, I examine their faith development, attachment to God (since Jalaram Bapa is a quasi God to his followers, owing to his miraculous powers which continue to persist) and development of virtues.

A longitudinal repeated measures design was used. Data were collected at two time periods— from 12,069 followers at phase 1 (2002–2003) and 11,034 Jalaram Bapa or JB followers at phase 2 (2012–2013). An equal number of Gujarati Hindus, but not followers of Jalaram Bapa, comprised

the control group at both the phases. The outcome measures were examined through three scales—Faith Development Scale, Attachment to God Inventory and Virtues Scale.

Based on the literature, the study hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: JB followers experience higher faith development and maturity over a period of time in comparison to non-followers.

Hypothesis 2: As JB is a quasi God-like figure for this devotees or followers, JB devotees are more likely to experience lesser God-attachment anxiety and avoidance and more secure God attachments, which enhances over time, as compared to non-followers.

Hypothesis 3: JB followers are more likely to be virtuous (i.e. have higher scores on the Virtues scale), which increases over time as compared to non-followers.

Hypothesis 4: Socio-demographic variables and JB attachment related variables viz. duration of fellowship, frequency of engagement and nature of devotional activities and engagement undertaken may contribute to the variations in faith development, attachment security and virtues development of JB followers.

Hypothesis 5: Virtues development of JB followers may also be contingent on intermediary influencing variables viz. faith development and God attachment security.

2. Method

2.1. Jalaram Bapa (JB) followers' profile

2.1.1. Phase 1

At phase 1 (2002–2003), of the 12,069 JB followers, 36% (4345) were in the age group 20–30 years, 24% (2896) of them were in the age group 30–40 years, 18% (2172) in the age group 40–50 years and 22% (2655) were in the age group 50 years and above. An estimated 46% (5552) were men and 54% (6517) were women. They were associated with the following temple centres: Virpur—22% (2655), Ahmedabad—11% (1328), Bradford—11% (1328), Leicester—9% (1086), Middlesex—8% (965), Illinois—13% (1569), Oakland Florida—11% (1328), Christchurch—8% (965) and Nairobi—7% (845). Roughly 34% (4103) had up to high school level education, 39% (4707) had college degrees and 27% (3259) had higher professional degrees. An estimated 18% (2172) were students, 36% (4345) were in regular employment, 29% (3500) were self-employed and 17% (2052) were homemakers. Around 64% (7724) were currently married and 36% (4345) were single (including never married, widowed and divorced). All were Gujarati Hindus living in India and the Diaspora and the belonged to the business caste (birth ascribed ethnic status) groups of Patidars—36% (4345), Kanbis—22% (2655), Thakkers—18% (2172) and Lohanas—24% (2896).

2.1.2. Phase 2

At phase 2 (2012–2013), of the 11,034 JB followers, 38% (4193) were in the age group 30–40 years, 22% (2427) of them were in the age group 40–50 years, 15% (1655) in the age group 50–60 years and 25% (2758) were in the age group 60 years and above. An estimated 46% (5076) were men and 54% (5958) were women. They were associated with the following temple centres: Virpur—18% (1986), Ahmedabad—11% (1214), Bradford—11% (1214), Leicester—8% (883), Middlesex—9% (993), Illinois—15% (1655), Oakland Florida—13% (1434), Christchurch—8% (883) and Nairobi—7% (772). Roughly 24% (2648) had up to high school level education, 49% (5407) had college degrees and 27% (2979) had higher professional degrees. An estimated 8% (883) were students, 41% (4524) were in regular employment, 30% (3310) were self-employed and 21% (2317) were homemakers. Around 54% (5958) were currently married and 46% (5076) were single (including never married, widowed and divorced). All were Gujarati Hindus living in India and the Diaspora and the

belonged to the business caste (birth ascribed ethnic status) groups of Patidars—26% (2869), Kanbis—27% (2979), Thakkers—23% (2538) and Lohanas—24% (2648).

2.2. Control group profile

2.2.1. Phase 1

At phase 1 (2002–2003), of the 12,069 Gujarati Hindu non-followers, 32% (3862) of them were in the age group 20–30 years, 28% (3379) of them were in the age group 30–40 years, 15% (1810) in the age group 40–50 years and 25% (3017) were in the age group 50 years and above. An estimated 49% (5914) were men and 51% (6155) were women. They resided in the following towns/cities: Virpur—18% (2172), Ahmedabad—16% (1931), Bradford—8% (966), Leicester—8% (966), Middlesex—11% (1328), Illinois—15% (1810), Oakland, Florida—15% (1810), Christchurch—4% (483) and Nairobi—5% (603). Roughly 24% (2896) had up to high school level education, 49% (5914) had college degrees and 27% (3259) had higher professional degrees. An estimated 22% (2655) were students, 34% (4103) were in regular employment, 20% (2414) were self-employed and 24% (2896) were homemakers. Around 68% (8207) were currently married and 32% (3862) were single (including never married, widowed and divorced). All were Gujarati Hindus living in India and the Diaspora and the belonged to the business caste (birth ascribed ethnic status) groups of Patidars—48% (5793), Kanbis—12% (1448), Thakkers—25% (3017) and Lohanas—15% (1810).

2.2.2. Phase 2

In phase 2 (2012–2013), of the 11,034 Gujarati Hindu non-followers, 38% (4193) were in the age group 30–40 years, 26% (2869) of them were in the age group 40–50 years, 16% (1765) in the age group 50–60 years and 20% (2207) were in the age group 60 years and above. An estimated 46% (5076) were men and 54% (5958) were women. They were residing in the following towns/cities: Virpur—8% (883), Ahmedabad—22% (2427), Bradford—10% (1103), Leicester—10% (1103), Middlesex—10% (1103), Illinois—15% (1655), Oakland Florida—15% (1655), Christchurch—5% (552) and Nairobi—5% (552). Roughly 21% (2317) had up to high school level education, 52% (5738) had college degrees and 27% (2979) had higher professional degrees. An estimated 2% (221) were students, 42% (4634) were in regular employment, 30% (3310) were self-employed and 26% (2869) were homemakers. Around 58% (6400) were currently married and 42% (4634) were single (including never married, widowed and divorced). All were Gujarati Hindus living in India and the Diaspora and the belonged to the business caste (birth ascribed ethnic status) groups of Patidars—49% (5407), Kanbis—14% (1545), Thakkers—22% (2427) and Lohanas—15% (1655).

2.3. Sampling

2.3.1. Jalaram Bapa (JB) followers

The followers of Jalaram Bapa were identified in stages. At the first stage, nine temple centres were selected in cities across the world—Virpur and Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India; Bradford, Leicester and Middlesex, UK; Illinois and Oakland Florida, USA; Christchurch, New Zealand and Nairobi, Kenya. At the second stage, available lists of followers from each of the centres were obtained. The complete list of followers across nine centres was 38,518 of whom every third follower was identified and approached for inclusion in the sample. With a response rate of 73.45%, at phase 1, 12,069 followers comprised the sample. At phase 2 of the study, 11,034 followers agreed to participate in the second round of the email survey. The sample attrition was due to relocation—24% (248) and unavailability due to personal reasons—76% (787); however, none said that they were no longer Jalaram Bapa followers.

2.3.2. Control group

From each of the nine cities from where the follower sample was identified, Gujarati Hindu community groups of non-followers were approached and members were requested to sign up to answer an email survey at both the phases. At phase 1, in each of the nine cities, community

associations and groups were approached and from the 25,098 members across nine cities, 12,069 agreed to respond to the email questionnaire. At phase 2, from the same cohort of the comparison group, it was possible to re-establish contact with 11,643 members, and in keeping with the sample attrition of the follower group, 11,034 members' data (as obtained sequentially) was retained at phase 2 from the comparison group. At both the phases, non-following of any charismatic guru was the pre-requisite for comparison group membership.

Both the cohorts (Jalaram Bapa followers and non-followers) at both the phases, were offered token gift vouchers for participating in the survey.

2.4. Consent and ethics

Informed consent was sought from the followers and the comparison group members. The survey intent and objectives were stated and respondent consent was sought prior to opening access to the survey questionnaire. The study conforms with the norms prescribed by the independent ethics committee of the University of Mumbai, India and in compliance with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2000.

2.5. Measures

An online questionnaire was administered with JB followers and the control groups at both the phases. For both the cohorts, the questionnaire comprised basic background questions: age, temple centre/domicile city, gender, education, occupation, and ethnic group. Additionally, for the follower group, fellowship details were sought: source of initiation (parents/natal families, conjugal families and peers), duration as followers (number of years), frequency of engagement (once a week, twice/thrice a week) and main devotional activity (private prayer, rituals and chanting/collective prayer and chanting; social service and food donations along with assisting in community kitchen).

To measure faith development, God attachment and virtues development, three scales were used. The said scales were selected owing to their cross-cultural validity and reliability. Faith development and God attachment are primary outcome measures. Virtues is a secondary outcome measure.

The Faith Development Scale (FDS) (Leak, Loucks, & Bowlin, 1999) is a brief, global measure of religious maturity derived explicitly from Fowler (1981) influential theory of faith development. It is an eight-item, forced-choice measure of global faith development or faith style. Respondents choose one of two options for each of the eight items. One response option reflects either Stage 4 or 5 faith development (relatively high faith development), and the other is keyed for Stage 2 or 3 faith development (and relatively low faith development). For example, respondents are asked to choose which of the following statements they agree with more [e.g. (1) It is very important for me to critically examine my beliefs and values (higher development); and (2) It is very important for me to accept the beliefs and values of my faith (lower development)]. One point is assigned for each higher development statement chosen, with a possible score of 8, so that higher scores indicated higher faith development [Cronbach α = .76; item-scale intercorrelation = .82; Pearson's r = .84].

The Attachment to God inventory (AGI) developed by Beck and McDonald (2004) is a list of 28 statements [e.g I am totally dependent upon God for everything in my life; My experiences with God are very intimate and] of which seven are reverse coded [e.g. I worry a lot about my relationship with God; I just don't feel a deep need to be close to God], to understand individuals' feelings about their relationship with God or divine figures. The AGI has two subscales: Avoidance of Intimacy (even numbered items of which five are reverse coded) and Anxiety about Abandonment (odd numbered items of which two are reverse coded). Avoidance of intimacy and abandonment anxiety are orthogonal dimensions, which display good factor structure, internal consistency, and construct validity. Combined together, the scores measure attachment anxiety and intimacy avoidance with God. Rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), the combined AGI score ranges from 63 to 105 with higher aggregate scores indicating lower attachment anxiety or avoidance and more secure God attachment. The combined score was used for this study as secure God

attachment is a cumulative outcome of lower intimacy avoidance and abandonment anxiety [Cronbach $\alpha = .83$, item-scale intercorrelation = $.87$; Pearson's $r = .79$].

The Virtues scale (VS) developed by Cawley III et al. (2000) is a 140-item self-report measure of virtues, based on a four-factor model of virtue involving: Empathy, Order, Resourcefulness, and Serenity. For each item, respondents are to indicate a score along a seven-point Likert scale indicating "Least like you really are" (1) to "Most like you really are" (7). The Virtues Scale asks respondents to report their "real virtues", i.e. the "way you really are and not the way you ideally should be." The score ranges from 140 to 980 with higher scores indicating a more virtuous personality [Cronbach $\alpha = .93$; item-scale intercorrelation = $.86$; Pearson's $r = .84$].

All the scales were cross-checked for reliability and validity, and the e-questionnaire was administered to all followers and non-followers in English language. A Gujarati language translation was also developed using the standard method of translation, re-translation and back translation and was retained as a backup.

2.6. Statistical methods

Phase 1 and phase 2 scores of JB followers and non-followers on the two primary and one secondary outcome measures were analysed using analyses of variance and compared using *t*-tests. One structural equation model was developed to analyse the predictors and their mutual covariances of the post-test scores of JB followers on the virtues scale.

3. Results

The primary analyses comprised 12,069 JB followers at phase 1 and 11,034 JB followers at phase 2 of this longitudinal repeated measures design study. At both the phases, an equal number of non-followers comprised the control group. Scores on the three outcome measures viz. faith development, God attachment and virtues for both the groups were compared at both the phases. For the JB followers at phase 2, one structural equation model determining predictors and covariances for the secondary outcome measure of virtues, was developed.

Phase 1 fellowship and devotional details of the followers were as follows: An estimated 78% (9414) were initiated into the devotional fold by their parents/natal families and 22% (2655) were initiated by their conjugal families or peers. An estimated 83% (10,017) had been JB followers since 15 years or more, and 17% (2052) were more recent devotees. An estimated 56% (6759) said that they visited the temple centres for devotional rituals twice or thrice a week and 44% (5310) said that they did so once a week. Phase 1 followers did the following main devotional activities: private prayer and chanting—20% (2414), rituals—12% (1448), collective prayer and chanting—14% (1689), and social service and food donations along with assisting in community kitchen—54% (6517).

Phase 2 devotee status details were as follows: An estimated 76% (8386) were initiated into the devotional fold by their parents/natal families and 24% (2648) were initiated by their conjugal families or peers. An estimated 83% (9158) had been JB followers since 25 years or more, and 17% (1876) were JB followers since 10–15 years. An estimated 58% (6400) JB followers said that they visited the temple centres for devotional rituals twice or thrice a week and 42% (4634) said that they did so once a week. At phase 2, followers said that they did the following main devotional activities: private prayer and chanting—15% (1655), rituals—12% (1324), collective prayer and chanting—12% (1324), and social service and food donations along with assisting in the community kitchen—61% (6731).

3.1. Faith Development Scale scores

3.1.1. Phase 1 FDS scores of non-followers

The average FDS phase 1 score of non-followers was 4.03 ($SD = .87$). The effects of gender and education were significant. Post hoc analyses using Scheffe post hoc criterion for significance indicated that the average phase 1 FDS scores were higher for non-followers women ($M = 4.3$,

$SD = 1.02$) vis-à-vis men ($M = 3.5, SD = .89$), $F(1, 12,068) = 79.03, p = .02$; and, for those with college education and higher professional qualifications ($M = 4.2, SD = .67$) vis-à-vis the high school educated ($M = 3.4, SD = .79$), $F(1, 12,068) = 86.29, p = .03$.

3.1.2. Phase 2 FDS scores of non-followers

The average FDS phase 2 score of non-followers was 4.1 ($SD = .79$). The effects of age and gender were significant. Post hoc analyses using Scheffe post hoc criterion for significance indicated that the average phase 2 FDS scores were higher for non-followers above 40 years of age ($M = 4.3, SD = .87$) vis-à-vis those below 40 years at time 2 ($M = 3.3, SD = .89$), $F(1, 11,033) = 83.67, p = .04$; and, for women ($M = 4.2, SD = .76$) vis-à-vis men ($M = 3.6, SD = .96$), $F(1, 11,033) = 118.87, p = .03$.

3.1.3. Phase 1 FDS scores of JB followers

The average FDS score of JB followers during phase 1 was 4.2 ($SD = 1.2$). One-way analyses of variance showed that the effects of gender and source of initiation were significant. Post hoc analysis using Scheffe post hoc criterion for significance indicated that the average FDS scores were significantly higher for women ($M = 5.1, SD = .97$) than men ($M = 3.3, SD = .88$), $F(1, 12,068) = 78.29, p = .012$; and, for those who were initiated into the following by their parents/natal families ($M = 4.9, SD = .68$) than for those initiated by their peers and conjugal families ($M = 3.7, SD = .87$), $F(1, 12,068) = 69.03, p = .013$.

3.1.4. Phase 2 FDS scores of JB followers

The average FDS score of JB followers during phase 2 was 6.7 ($SD = .96$). One-way analyses of variance showed that the effects of duration of fellowship, regularity of devotion and nature of engagement were significant. Post hoc analysis using Scheffe post hoc criterion for significance indicated that the average FDS scores were significantly higher for those who were JB followers since 25 years or more ($M = 6.9, SD = .98$) vis-à-vis the latter entrants ($M = 6.1, SD = .96$), $F(1, 11,033) = 89.07, p \leq .01$; for those who visited the temple centres twice-thrice a week ($M = 6.8, SD = .98$) vis-à-vis who did so once a week ($M = 6.5, SD = .89$), $F(1, 11,033) = 88.03, p \leq .01$; and, for those whose main devotional engagement was social service and food donations along with assisting in the community kitchens ($M = 6.8, SD = .93$) vis-à-vis those who did private/collective prayer and chanting ($M = 6.5, SD = .89$), $F(3, 11,033) = 89.07, p \leq .01$.

3.1.5. Comparison

FDS scores of JB followers and non-followers were equal at phase 1. There was no significant difference in the average phase 2 FDS scores of non-followers. The average phase 2 FDS scores of the JB followers were significantly higher than their own phase 1 scores as well as the phase 2 scores of non-followers.

3.2. Attachment to God Inventory (AGI) scores

3.2.1. Phase 1 AGI scores of non-followers

The average AGI score of non-followers during phase 1 was 56.78 ($SD = 2.03$). The effects of gender and marital status were significant. Post hoc analysis using Scheffe post hoc criterion for significance indicated that the average AGI scores were higher for non-followers women ($M = 58.92, SD = 1.87$) vis-à-vis men ($M = 52.39, SD = 1.45$), $F(1, 12,068) = 78.21, p \leq .01$; and, for singles ($M = 6.34, SD = 2.78$) vis-à-vis the currently married ($M = 51.89, SD = 3.88$), $F(1, 12,068) = 102.38, p = .03$.

3.2.2. Phase 2 AGI scores of non-followers

The average AGI score of non-followers during phase 2 was 57.89 ($SD = 3.02$). The effects of gender and education were significant. Post hoc analysis using Scheffe post hoc criterion for significance indicated that the average phase 2 AGI scores were higher for non-followers women ($M = 58.92, SD = 2.03$) vis-à-vis men ($M = 53.82, SD = 3.88$), $F(1, 11,033) = 72.32, p = .02$; and, for those with

college degrees and professional qualifications ($M = 59.89$, $SD = 3.44$) vis-à-vis high school qualified ($M = 53.87$, $SD = 3.22$), $F(1, 11,033) = 156.32$, $p = .03$.

3.2.3. Phase 1 AGI scores of JB followers

The average AGI score of JB followers during phase 1 was 68.13 ($SD = 2.39$). The effects of gender, marital status and source of initiation were significant. Post hoc analysis using Scheffe post hoc criterion for significance indicated that the average AGI scores were significantly higher for women followers ($M = 79.23$, $SD = 1.38$) vis-à-vis men ($M = 66.12$, $SD = 1.28$), $F(1, 12,068) = 78.15$, $p \leq .01$; for singles ($M = 76.15$, $SD = 2.18$) vis-à-vis currently married ($M = 63.12$, $SD = 1.56$), $F(1, 12,068) = 89.18$, $p \leq .01$; and for JB followers initiated into the fellowship by their parents/natal families ($M = 76.12$, $SD = 1.29$) vis-à-vis those who were initiated by peers and conjugal families ($M = 59.02$, $SD = 1.15$), $F(1, 12,068) = 98.03$, $p = .04$.

3.2.4. Phase 2 AGI scores of JB followers

The average AGI score of JB followers during phase 2 was 99.04 ($SD = 3.18$). The effects of regularity of devotion, nature of engagement and their own phase 2 FDS scores were significant. Post hoc analysis using Scheffe post hoc criterion for significance indicated that the average AGI scores were significantly higher for those followers who visited the temple centres twice or thrice a week ($M = 102.12$, $SD = 1.38$) than for those who did so once a week ($M = 98.03$, $SD = 1.87$), $F(1, 11,033) = 67.06$, $p = .03$; for those whose main nature of devotional engagement was social service and food donations along with assisting in the community kitchen ($M = 102.67$, $SD = 1.39$) vis-à-vis collective and private ritual prayers and chanting ($M = 97.03$, $SD = 1.15$), $F(3, 11,033) = 89.03$, $p = .014$; and, for JB followers who had higher FDS scores ($M = 101.28$, $SD = 1.28$) than for those who had lower scores ($M = 98.02$, $SD = 1.17$), $F(3, 11,033) = 113.04$, $p = .03$.

3.2.5. Comparison

The average AGI scores of the JB followers at phase 1 were higher than non-followers at phase 1 and also at phase 2. The average AGI scores of JB followers at phase 2 were higher than their own scores at phase 1, thereby indicating an increase in secure God attachment and reduced anxiety and avoidance for JB followers and also vis-à-vis non-followers (Table 1).

3.3. Virtues Scale (VS) scores

3.3.1. Phase 1 VS scores of non-followers

The phase 1 average VS score of non-followers was 562.38 ($SD = 32.56$). The effects of education and marital status were significant. Post hoc analysis using Scheffe post hoc criterion for significance indicated that the average phase 1 VS scores were higher for non-followers with college degrees and professional qualifications ($M = 589.23$, $SD = 38.76$) vis-à-vis the high school qualified ($M = 558.92$, $SD = 29.86$), $F(1, 12,068) = 289.34$, $p = .02$; and, for the singles ($M = 588.32$, $SD = 26.71$) vis-à-vis the currently married ($M = 559.85$, $SD = 22.71$), $F(1, 12,068) = 148.23$, $p = .02$.

3.3.2. Phase 2 VS scores of non-followers

The phase 2 average VS score of non-followers was 567.41 ($SD = 22.87$). The effects of gender and marital status were significant. Post hoc analysis using Scheffe post hoc criterion for significance indicated that the average phase 2 VS scores were higher for women ($M = 572.83$, $SD = 27.93$) vis-à-vis men ($M = 566.23$, $SD = 3.96$), $F(1, 11,033) = 233.09$, $p = .02$; and, for singles ($M = 57.02$, $SD = 3.88$) vis-à-vis the currently married ($M = 562.88$, $SD = 2.85$), $F(1, 11,033) = 212.08$, $p = .02$.

3.3.3. Phase 1 VS scores of JB followers

The phase 1 average VS score of JB followers was 781.25 ($SD = 32.07$). One-way analyses of variance showed that the effects of gender and source of initiation were significant. Post hoc analysis using Scheffe post hoc criterion for significance indicated that the average VS scores were significantly higher for women ($M = 801.23$, $SD = 38.06$) than for men ($M = 762.09$, $SD = 28.17$), $F(1, 12,068) = 115.04$, $p = .013$; and, for those initiated into the JB fold by their parents/natal families (M

Table 1. Phase 1 and 2 scores of non-JB followers and JB followers on Faith Development Scale (FDS), Attachment to God Inventory (AGI) and Virtues Scale (VS)

Outcome measures	Non-JB followers				JB followers				Non-followers phase 1 and 2 (df# = 23,101)		Non-followers and JB followers phase 1 (df# = 12,068)		Non-followers and JB followers phase 2 (df# = 11,033)							
	Phase 1		Phase 2		Phase 1		Phase 2		t	p*	t	p*	t	p**						
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD												
FDS scores	4.03	.87	4.1	.79	4.2	1.2	6.7	.96	162.09	.34	.18	113.23	.01	.48	126.32	.38	.21	102.38	.01	.73
AGI scores	56.78	2.03	57.89	3.02	68.13	2.39	99.04	3.18	117.39	.41	.19	233.89	.01	.56	129.06	.01	.64	118.93	.01	.66
VS scores	562.38	32.56	567.41	22.87	781.25	32.07	819.04	28.03	231.07	.56	.18	211.68	.01	.58	128.53	.01	.66	203.43	.01	.65

#df = degrees of freedom

*p ≤ .05

**p ≤ .01

= 811.06, $SD = 23.16$) vis-à-vis those initiated by their peers and conjugal families ($M = 761.29$, $SD = 22.08$), $F(1, 12,068) = 67.03$, $p = .012$.

3.3.4. Phase 2 VS scores of JB followers

The phase 2 average VS score of the followers was 819.04 ($SD = 28.03$). The effects of nature of engagement, their own phase 2 FDS scores and AGI scores were significant. Post hoc analysis using Scheffe post hoc criterion for significance indicated that the average VS score was significantly higher for JB followers whose main nature of devotional engagement was social service and food donations ($M = 821.16$, $SD = 37.08$), vis-à-vis prayer and rituals ($M = 789.12$, $SD = 23.18$), $F(3, 11,033) = 119.03$, $p = .013$; who had higher phase 2 FDS scores ($M = 816.27$, $SD = 16.28$) vis-à-vis lower ($M = 798.02$, $SD = 24.18$), $F(3, 11,033) = 116.29$, $p = .012$; and, who had higher phase 2 AGI scores ($M = 821.08$, $SD = 23.18$) vis-à-vis lower ($M = 796.15$, $SD = 28.17$), $F(2, 11,033) = 117.63$, $p = .0124$.

3.3.5. Comparison

VS scores of JB followers were higher than non-followers at phase 1. There was no significant difference in phase 2 VS scores of non-followers. Phase 2 VS scores of JB followers were higher than the phase 2 scores of non-followers and their own phase 1 scores (Table 1).

3.3.6. SEM of phase 2 VS scores of JB followers

Table 2 depicts the structural equation model with standardized coefficients of the phase 2 Virtues Scale scores of the JB followers with nature of engagement, their phase 2 FDS and AGI scores as independent variables. The maximum likelihood methods were used with four iterations and log likelihood = -128.28271. All the independent variables of the model influence the phase 2 VS scores of JB followers. The goodness-of-fit measures are also significant, indicating model reliability [$\chi^2(4) = 184.18$, $p \leq .011$; Goodness-of-fit Index (GFI) = .93; Normed Fit Index (NFI) = .84; Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .05]. There is covariance between nature of engagement and phase 2 FDS and AGI scores, respectively, as well as mutually between phase 2 FDS and AGI scores.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Results support the initial hypotheses. JB followers experienced higher faith development and maturity over a period of time in comparison to non-followers. As JB is a quasi God-like figure for these devotees or followers, JB devotees were more likely to experience lesser God-attachment anxiety and avoidance and more secure God attachments, which enhanced over time, as compared to non-followers.

JB followers were more likely to be virtuous (i.e. have higher scores on the Virtues scale), which further consolidated over time as compared to non-followers. Socio-demographic variables and JB attachment related variables viz. duration of fellowship, frequency of engagement and nature of devotional activities and engagement undertaken, contributed to the variations in faith development, attachment security and virtues development of JB followers. Virtues development of JB followers were contingent on intermediary influencing variables viz. faith development and God attachment security.

Faith development of JB followers was incremental and higher compared to non-followers. Among non-followers, women, the highly educated and older adults experienced higher faith maturity over time. For JB followers, at phase 1, women and those initiated by their parents/natal families scored higher on faith development. Faith maturity for JB followers increased for those who were regular in their devotion and engaged mainly in social service and food charity along with assisting in community kitchens as a part of JB fellowship.

God attachment among non-followers was higher among women, singles and those with higher education. However, even at phase 1, JB followers (especially women, singles and those initiated

Table 2. SEM of phase 2 Virtues Scale scores of JB followers (standardized coefficients)

Structural equation Standardized	Coefficient	OIM (Observed Information Matrix) Std. Error	z	P> z 	95% Confidence interval
Phase 2 Virtues Scale scores of JB followers					
Nature of engagement	2.3910	.8172	2.33	.01	1.8172 3.8891
Phase 2 FDS scores	4.1182	.1187	3.10	.01	1.0722 8.7812
Phase 2 AGI scores	8.2918				6.1028 9.3376
Constant	2.3918	.5142	2.98	.03	1.8716 3.7762
Mean (nature of engagement)	3.8654	.6562	3.04	.02	.3387 2.9861
Mean (phase 2 FDS scores)	4.0198	.1136	4.15	.03	.2615 3.4498
Mean (phase 2 AGI scores)	9.7645	.8873	8.63	.02	6.2731 1.2238
Variance (e. Virtues scale scores)	3.8192	.1121			2.3617 4.0192
Variance (nature of engagement)	1.7612	.1321			.6651 2.0923
Variance (phase 2 FDS scores)	3.3184	.1138			.2182 8.8992
Variance (phase 2 AGI scores)	5.7865	.2265			.4328 8.9923
Covariance (nature of engagement, phase 2 FDS scores)	2.7821	.2161	3.92	.01	.5815 4.6745
Covariance (phase 2 FDS scores, phase 2 AGI scores)	3.7162	.7723	7.82	.01	1.1872 4.8823
Covariance (nature of engagement, phase 2 AGI scores)	5.8194	.3827	5.63	.01	2.8874 6.8891

into the fellowship by their parents/natal families) had more secure God attachments and lower avoidance anxieties vis-à-vis non-followers. This attachment security was higher in phase 2 for those JB followers who were regular in their devotion, engaged mainly in social service activities and community kitchens and had higher faith maturity at phase 2. Further, those who were more regular in their devotional activities were more likely to mainly engaged in social service, food charity and community kitchens and the social service does in turn had higher faith maturity.

JB followers scored higher on the virtues scale vis-à-vis non-followers at phase 1. Among non-followers, those with higher qualifications, singles, and women were more virtuous. For JB followers, at phase 1, women followers and those initiated into the families by their parents/natal families scored higher on the virtues scale. Phase 2 virtues scale scores of JB followers were higher for those who mainly engaged in social service, food charity and community kitchens within the fellowship and whose phase 2 faith maturity and God attachment security scores were higher. Social service within the JB fold as a core devotional engagement also seemed the most likely trope for mature faith development and secure God attachment. The combined effects and confluence of JB devotion inspired service/charity/community kitchen work, faith maturity and attachment security to God/JB as a God-like figure, promoted the development of virtues.

Results showed that devotion and attachment were realised by JB followers through social work, serving people considered equivalent to serving God/God-like charismatic figure. Findings have shown that among non-followers and followers, women are more religious and are also able to enhance the religiosity over time. Parental faith inclination is a strong predictor of individual faith maturity and God attachment. Being regular in devotional activities and engaging in a people-centred practical activity such as social service most likely ensured faith maturity and God attachment security, which in turn led to the development of virtues. Performing JB devotion through social service was affected by faith maturity and attachment security, which in turn led to the development of virtues.

4.1. Study limitations

The main limitation of the study is the absence of any qualitative data to understand attachment and how exactly it translates into virtues. The sample attrition at the second phase of the longitudinal study has statistical limitations. Research is needed on contingent factors that promote virtues, which are an outcome of the JB fellowship viz. devotion duration, regularity, nature of engagement and faith development, along with degrees of attachment to the charismatic figure. Further, the comparison group comprised of non-JB followers, but the comparison group inclusion criteria for this study did not specifically distinguish between believers and non-believers. A more focused comparison between believers but non-JB followers and JB followers and non-believers and non-JB followers and JB followers, as well as a comparison between diaspora and original followers, would be another area of research.

4.2. Concluding remarks

Results overall substantiate the aspects of attachment theory specifically God as an attachment figure. The added element here is that even charismatic humans who assume God-like images in the psyche of their followers, promote an attachment or bond. What remains to be studied in-depth, however, is the nuances of this attachment and the way it promotes desirable/undesirable social behaviours. Attachment to Jalaram Bapa as a God-like figure promotes virtuous fellowship. Followers are socialized into performing acts of social service as a part of devotion to Jalaram Bapa, service, in turn, as instrumental in re-enforcing proximity and attachment. This conforms to the conceptual framework provided by Granquist (2002), which promotes the “internal working model” for understanding attachment and religion. Here social service through food charity provides the implicit spiritual experience, a feeling of carrying forward the historical legacy of the charismatic figure: serving “others” promoting one’s relationship with the God-like figure.

The findings have implications as they connect attachment literature to religion, God and more specifically God-like charismatic figures, and pointedly, how this promotes development of virtues. In the context of attachment and religion, findings signify how attachment can further be positively channelized, with reference to ethnic groups across cultures, so that implicit spiritual experiences, manifest for greater common good.

Funding

The author received no direct funding for this research.

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Citation information

Cite this article as: Attachment to a charismatic religious figure and development of virtues: Followers of Jalam Bapa, Samta P. Pandya, *Cogent Arts & Humanities* (2019), 5: 1559965.

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