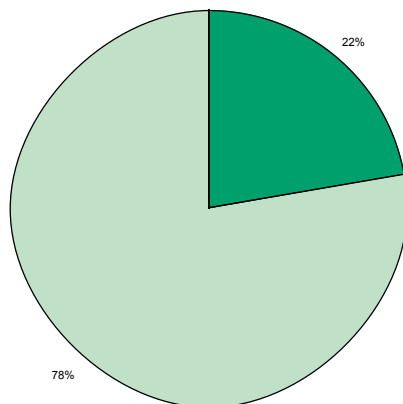


# MFS Report

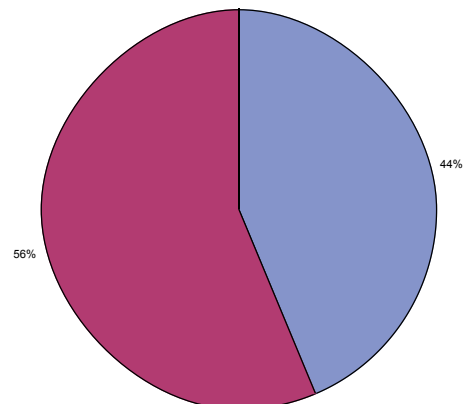
## Country India

Ulrika Sparre 2005  
Department of Fine Arts  
Konstfack

India



Sweden



## Background

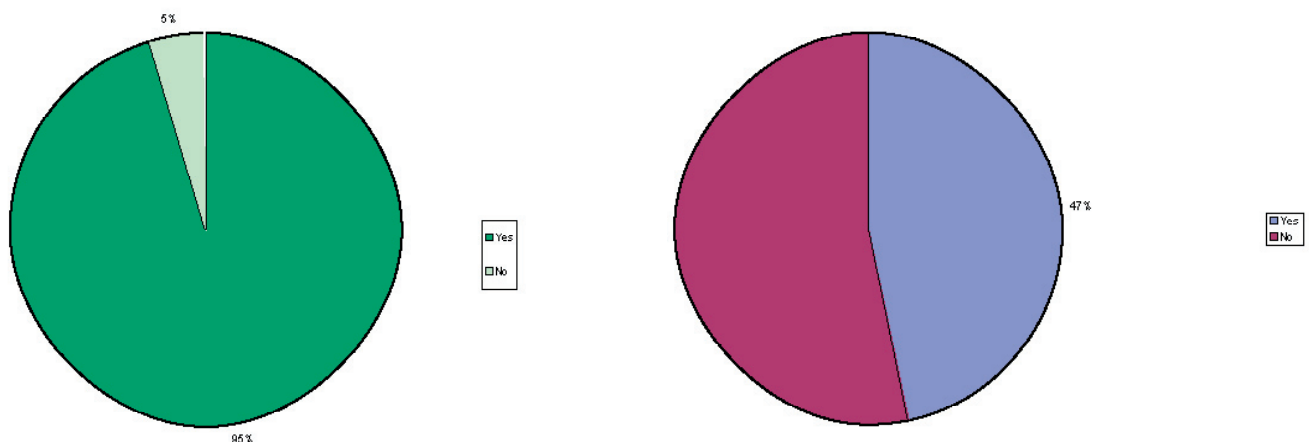
I have concentrated on how people create their beliefs in contemporary society today. How people create answers for themselves to the questions which you don't know the answer to. Questions like who we are and where we come from, how we look upon life and death? The questions which neither religion or science can answer for us, but where we create our own answers.

In 2004 I started the artistic project Att tro är att inte veta (To believe is not to know) – It existed as an email questionnaire/spam. The aim was to force people who participated to answer Yes or No to questions you don't know the answer to, questions around your existence. The aim was to raise a thought around a subject bound with great taboo in Swedish society. I have found how many people in Sweden today have difficulties to discuss their beliefs, using a word like God, and relating to Christianity. Since these issues also has no real value in our society and culture. And the word God has an almost negative sound. In Sweden today everyone can read and take part of a great amount of information. We have a society with a great freedom to think and reason for ourselves, which is one reason to be rational and create our own truths with the backup of science. This has created a new kind of belief, the one in science. Where the scientist takes over the role as the creator by proving evolution and the form of the universe. Even though one belief shouldn't have to exclude the other.

Even though the aim of the research was to raise the question of belief amongst individualists in Sweden, the research also ended up with a summary of conclusions made from the analyses of the answers. The conclusions made from the questionnaire can't be claimed as results of a correct scientific method for research. I anyhow think they give a good idea of a trend and way of thinking of the over 400 people participating. The questionnaire consists of questions where the only choice of answer is Yes or No. The reason for this is to avoid the answer of I don't know, since this answer doesn't really evaluate the question. There is also a contradiction in the option of only Yes or No answers in relation to the questions.

One of the conclusions made from this research was that the questions around our own existence and who we are, are thought about amongst people in Sweden today, but rarely brought up to an open discussion. Read more; [www.ulrikasparre.com](http://www.ulrikasparre.com) – Att tro är att inte veta (Swedish).

Do you see yourself as a person with a belief system?

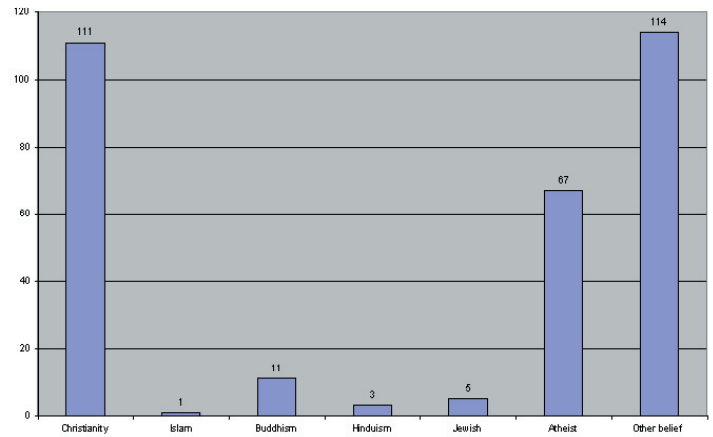
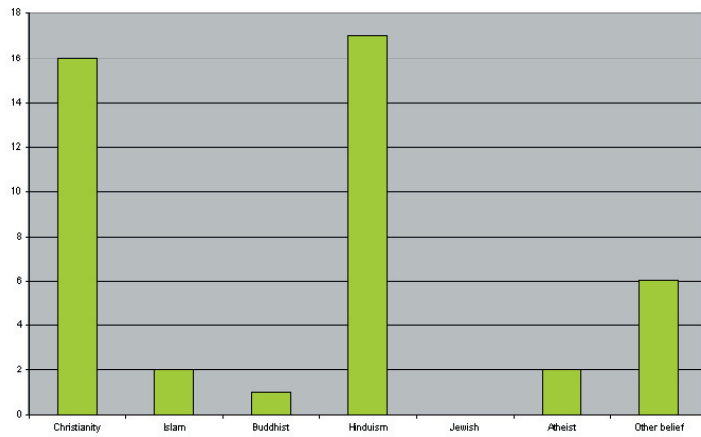


## India

This has influenced me to use the same research to make the comparison between India and Sweden. How are we creating the answers to our existential questions through the influence of our culture. And how will the answers differentiate.

India is considered the most religious country in the world, in opposite to Sweden – the most secular. But the word secular has a totally different meaning in India than in Sweden. The meaning of the word secular according to a western dictionary; “not controlled by a religious body or concerned with religious or spiritual matters”, “not religious or spiritual in nature”.

Which of the following faiths/belief systems do you belong to?



In the constitution of India it says India is a secular country. Secular in the means of that any religion may be practiced. But that you wouldn't be of any religion or part of any belief system seems like a distant thought amongst people in India.

This is shown by the answers to one of the questions in my research; "Do you consider yourself as a person with a belief system?". Where 95% of people answering the questionnaire in India answered Yes in opposite to 47% in Sweden.

This shows that we have a very specific idea of what belief is. In Sweden we are not considering ourselves to be believers but the research is showing that the question of why you exist is more taught about amongst people in Sweden then in India. Maybe because we don't have the backup of our religious believes and traditions, giving us advice and support in these questions.

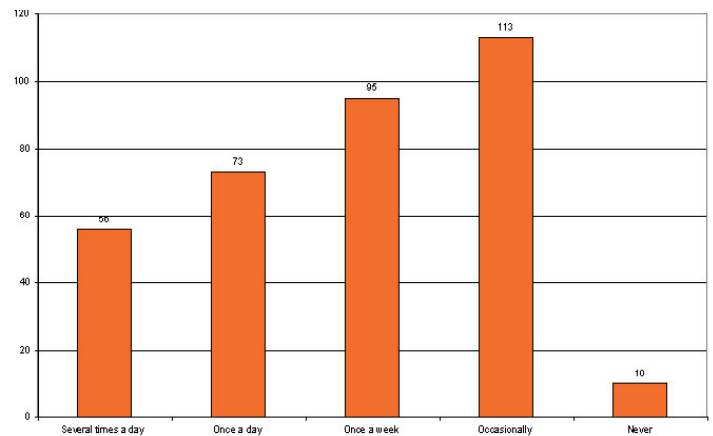
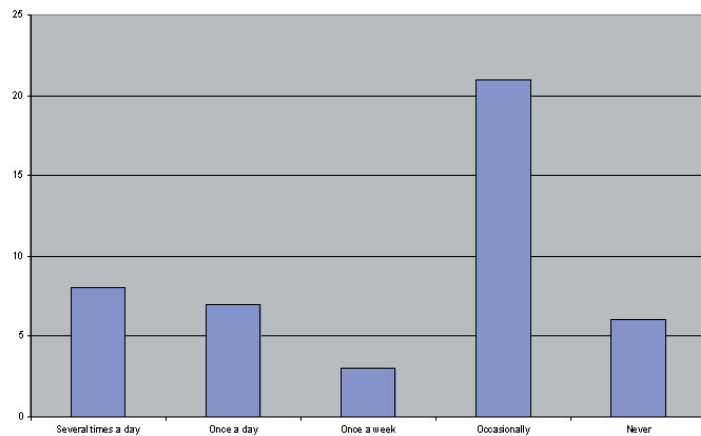
Men and women consider themselves to be believers to the same extend, both in Sweden and India.

In India you often come across the idea that God created the world, therefore he also created science as part of the world. It's said that science claimed the world was flat, but then it was proved (by God) that it was round.

Therefore you can't trust science as a source.

In Sweden you would hear the opposite example where religion was claiming the world as flat but was proven the opposite by science.

Do you think about why you exist?



The idea of the individualist is a western phenomena, where we are thought to take care of ourselves from a young age and where each and every person is responsible for his/her own life and actions. The Indian society works totally the other way and people have great responsibilities towards family where children and young people from a young age have to support both his own family, parents and in-laws.

*India is a highly communal society which is explained to me by Jasmine, a South African woman working in India. And she sees many similarities with S. A. culture:*

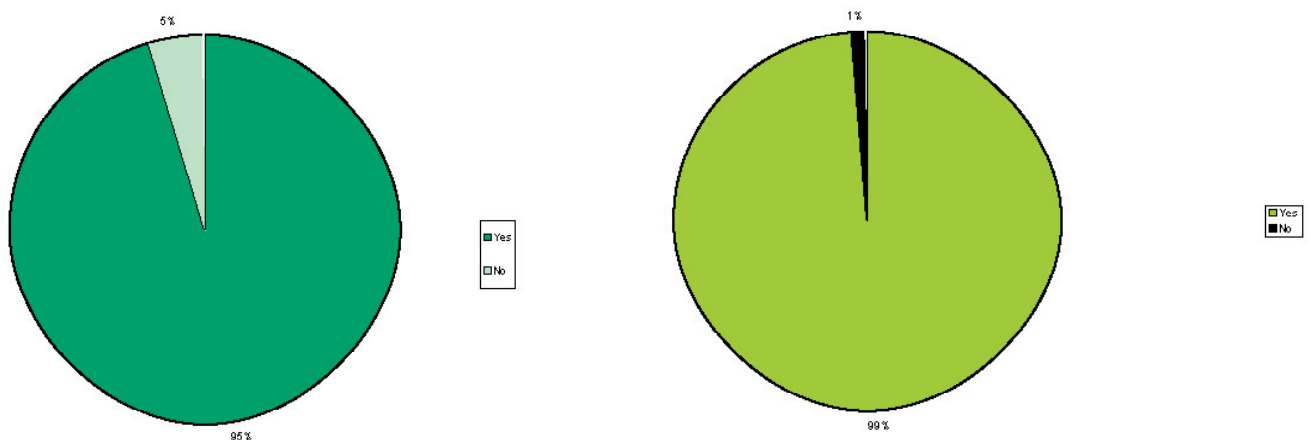
*A communal society like India suppresses the individual right for the communal.*

*In a communal society when the individual is let down by state and also by people in the community, the person tends to put her/his trust in God or other traditional beliefs. This could be one of the reason for a great belief in something bigger than yourself (God) in India. If the communal fails you, the tendency of reunifying by God is relevant. It also creates the possibility of putting the blame for things you can't understand to a higher power. The highly communal societies tends to have a great responsibility towards each other. It creates problems when youths being sent away to study by villages. Ones educated they don't want to come back to support their villages.*

*This is causing a lot of tension since the villages feels they invested in a persons education. The educated people have to make a choice of supporting their families or live alone. If they decide to live alone they are left with the burden of very high costs. Since they have to pay for 2 households. It creates the problem of Praying for two Gods, yourself or your community.*

The belief of Atheism or Other belief are of a great majority in Sweden, even though 35% claims to be Christians according to my research. In India most of the beliefs are within the frames of a religion. The importance of being part of a religion is of a much greater importance in India. Most schools are bound to a certain religion, sometimes the schools are also bound to the fact that you have to be part of the religion of the school in order to study there.

Do you think that the way you act towards others, society and nature influences your personal development?



When making interviews in India I realized that there even is a fear of admitting that you might not be fully committed to your religion since family and society will leave you outside the community.

*Mini is a girl with a Hindu upbringing and comes from the Shutria-cast. She has changed and created her own belief. We are discussing her belief and belief amongst Indians today:*

*– Why is there no doubt in a God amongst people in India?*

*There is a great feeling of being left out if you are not part of a religion.*

*But Mini believes that power is in universe and humanity. If you are human, universe will support you.*

*Mini says she feels secure in any temple or church and is not depending on a certain tradition from Hinduism.*

*Her God is not depending on religion, she explains. God comes through people.*

*When there is insecurity and fear in culture, religion gives identity.*

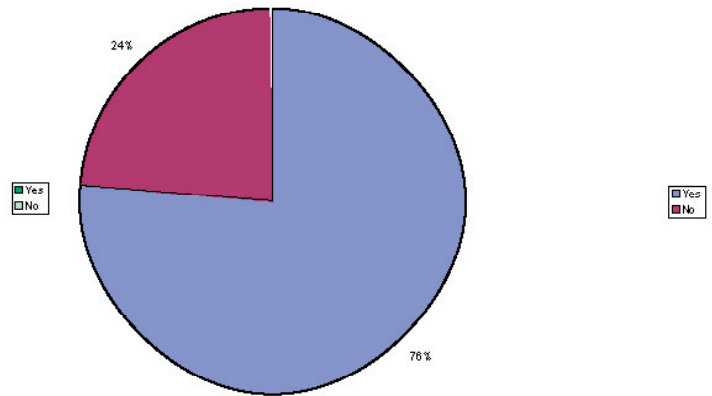
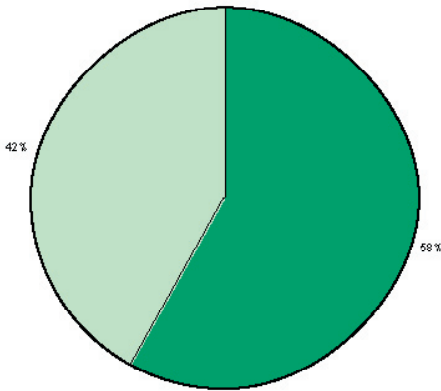
*If you don't have a fundamental belief in India you will feel left out, and if you don't pray and worship you are not part of the religion.*

*There are extremes between religious and non-religious people. Mini feels scared of telling people that she is non-religious. People might be angry when you are questioning fundamental values.*

In both India and Sweden most people think that the way they act towards society, nature and other people influences their personal development. This might show that even though you don't consider yourself to have a belief system, you still believe in some kind of reaction to your acts. In a religious belief this could also add up to your judgement when passing on to your next life.

Most people believe in some kind of humane thinking towards our surrounding. This is deeply rooted in Swedish as well as the Indian culture.

Do you consider that you are in control of what happens in your life?



According to the research 76% of the Swedish participants consider themselves to be in control of what happens in their lives. In India only 58% answered Yes. This might be a result of an individualistic thinking applied in Sweden, where you are responsible for your own acts and the way your life turns out to a greater extent than in India.

The belief in karma and the fact that you put somebody outside of yourself (God) responsible for what happens to you influences this answer in India. Your life is already decided by God, but the belief in that your acts influences your development might show that this can be affected. The meaning of karma is that the way you behaved and acted in your previous lives influences the life you are living now. Therefore you also have to do good, to be able to influence your future and your future lives.

The Muslims have, like Christians, a belief in entering paradise (or hell) after death. Where your acts are valued by God on judgment day.

*The Muslim man Magid explains:*

*Muslims believe life starts after death. We believe in Day of Judgment – Judgment day.*

*During the life you carry an angel on your right and on your left shoulder. These angels are writing down your acts. During the Muslim prayer you look to your right and left shoulder to speak with the both angels evaluating your acts.*

*Once you are a Muslim there is no doubt in your belief. If you are a Muslim you believe that Allah is everything. God is near the vain to your heart in your body.*

*We believe in the concept of the unseen, if we haven't seen it doesn't mean it doesn't exist. Don't question this.*

*You need to believe in life after death – if you doubt it you're not a Muslim.*

*– Why do Muslims tend to speak in the terms of we?*

*We are one – united Muslims. If you say "I" you are proud of yourself, "We" come from we are all one.*

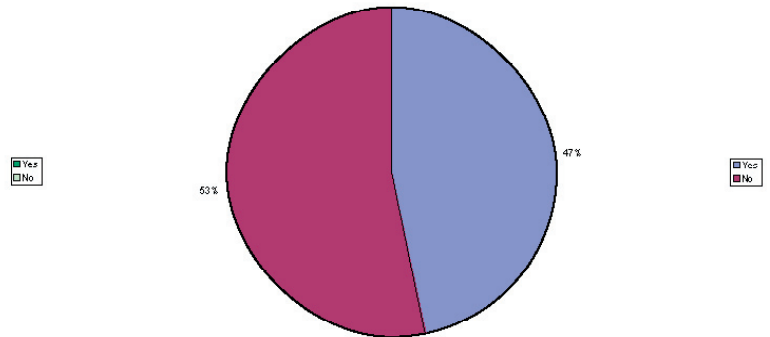
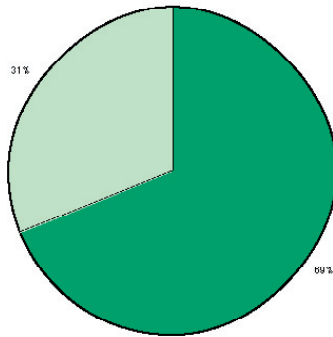
*God is only one but beings are thousands, we are accountable to God.*

*You have to learn the Quran to know how to live. The greatest mean for humanity, peace, unity.*

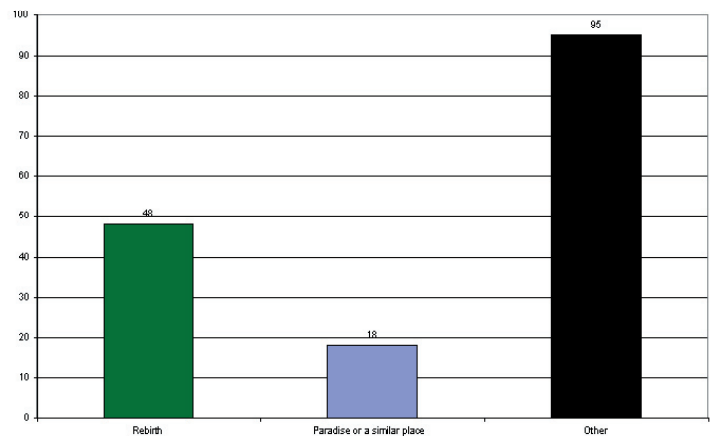
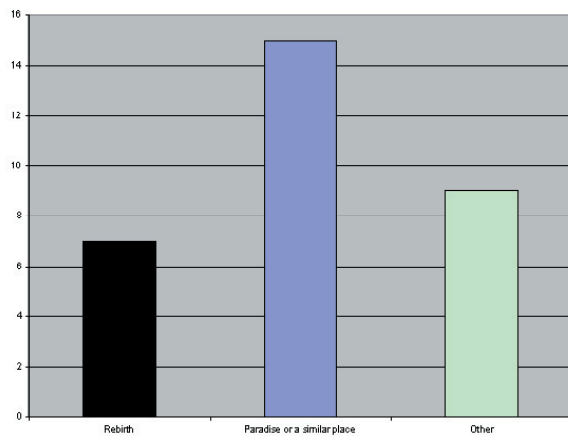
*The one with money has power. Religion is made to use for power.*

*Muslims don't doubt!*

Do you believe in life after death?



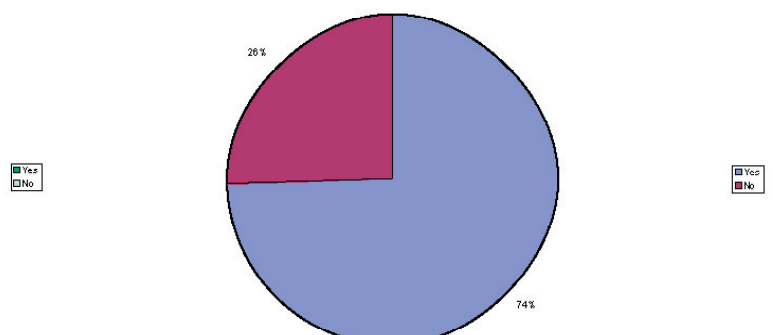
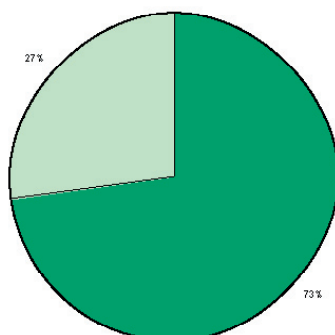
What kind of life is there after death?



In Sweden 47% believe in life after death. In India 69% answered Yes to this question. The connection between answering Yes to being part of a belief system and believing in life after death is strongly connected. The belief in some kind of life after death is connected to all religious belief systems.

In India there is no difference between men and woman in the belief in life after death. The majority of people believe in Paradise or similar place.

Do you believe in life on other planets?



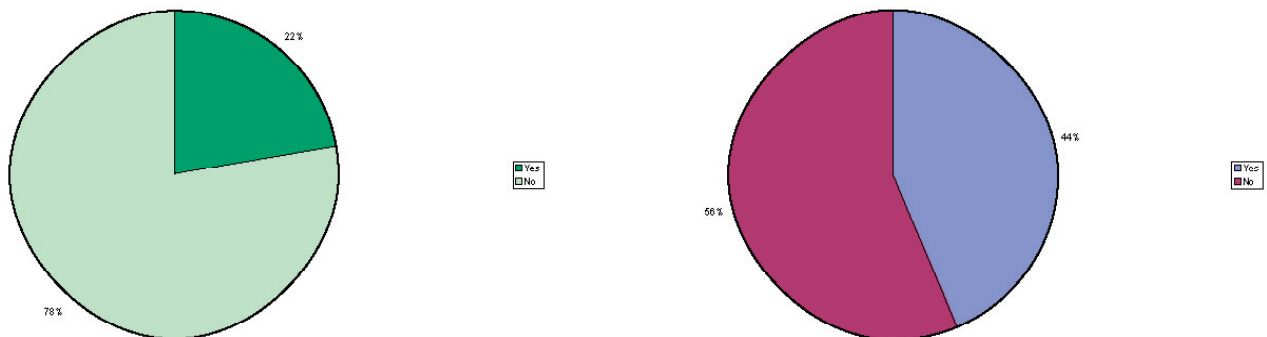
In Sweden the belief in life after death is greater amongst women than men.

There is also an old myth in certain religions saying that women are closer to god – could this insinuate this?

The great belief in science all over the world today influences our trust in finding life on other planets. Both in India and Sweden 3/4 of the people taking part of the questionnaire believe in life on other planets.

In Sweden you could find a difference between men and women in this matter, where a man is more likely to believe in life on other planets than a woman. In India the answer doesn't differentiate between men and women.

Are you afraid of dying?

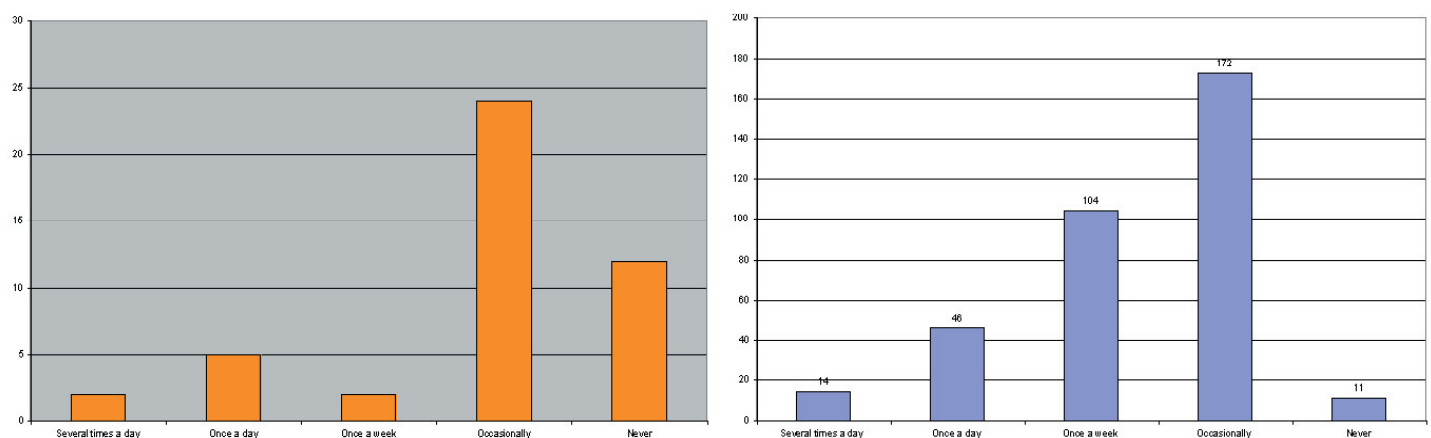


The fear of dying is according to my research much greater in Sweden than in India. Also people in India think less over death than people in Sweden. This might be because in Sweden we actually don't have the answers for what happens after death as part of our culture. We also in Sweden and western societies value "youth" as an ideal, where old people are put away and where signs of aging should be resisted and concealed.

In Sweden and other western countries the dead bodies are placed outside the cities and in places where they are well hidden. This happened in the beginning of the 19th century, when the view upon death changed to be associated with deace. (Foucault – Of other spaces, 1967, Heterotopias).

The tradition of how to handle and look upon death and dead people is very different between the two countries. In India the dead person is often cremated in public and with many people present, whereas in Sweden most people have never been in contact with or seen a dead person.

How often do you think about death?





India is a country with strong traditions and values. This I have also come across during talks with various people of different religions in India.

*During my talk with the Christian Father Paul I ask him whether there are people in India doubting in God he shares a story:*

*He was crossing a river together with a man who was an intellectual and non-believer. Once crossing the river the indians will make namasté (Thank you) and then cross as an offering to the mother who is the river Ganges. When to non-believer crossed he made a namasté and through a coin in the river. Later Father Paul questioned the man why he'd done that, not being a believer anyway. Instead he could have given the rupee to a beggar who could have had a cup of tea. The man answers that he was offering to the river as this was part of culture and he had always done this.*

*This might show how religion is deeply rooted in the culture. The question of God might be there, but the culture is not to be questioned.*

*According to father Paul there is a God – without any doubt.*

A theologian I met explained how many religious groups in India are trying to resist consumerism and influences from the west. To prevent this they are resisting art, architecture and music which has influences from the west. Art is painting and images. The Muslim, Christian and Hindu theologians do not want to show western art since there is a suspicion of what destroys culture.

Also in the Christian tradition of the last supper, wine and bread are sometimes replaced with rice and water to sustain Indian tradition and culture.

But India is changing through globalization, even though it's important to keep you roots. Intellectuals and fundamentalists are scared of western influences.

*Mini explains: For children in India today it is important to be part of western influences like Friends and McDonalds. And the beliefs are changing because of this. Religion is becoming more inclusive of other religions and marriage comes before religion.*

*Children find religion less important, this is much more obvious amongst those who live urban lives.*

*The generation 20 and above goes less to church. Those who are educated focuses on education and marriage comes second. Even in the arranged marriages the families wants a working girl. This doesn't go so much for Muslims who has a different view on women role.*

*From a higher cast in the society it is easier to fight for you will, like love-marriage. (In India still 80% of the marriages are arranged) The first generation who went to university came from conservative backgrounds.*

In India the men and woman have different responsibilities towards family, and many of the educated woman I meet explains to me how a lot of the recourses of the universities are not being used. In India the maintenance of traditions are very strong. A woman might go to study for may years but once she is married she will stay at home and take care of the house and children.

There are great educational gaps between men and woman, especially amongst the Muslims. The strong patriarchal society is causing conflicts between men and women. Marriage is a high priority in India since it is considered a holy constellation and therefore many women follow their husbands will to stay at home, to show her respect.

*Mini is telling about a north Indian hindu tradition called Karavachaoth – Worship of husband:*

*If you are married and your husband is alive you are blessed by God and society. The wives fasts the hole day for her husband. According to tradition you are married 7 times to the same husband. Therefore you pray to get the same husband in next life. The wife dresses up like a bride and fasts, and when the moon comes out you watch the moon and your husband, and he'll give you water. If this is not practiced you might be excluded, not only from religion, but from the way you live in your county. You have to follow the rituals otherwise you will be out-cast.*



*I am discussing Islam, the role of the woman, her responsibilities and the use of burkha, with the Muslim woman Asma 35. Asma had an arranged marriage and has 3 children together with her husband. In Hyderabad, where Asma lives, most Muslim woman are wearing Burkha.*

*Asma explain that marriage gives women more confidence. The woman takes care of his salary, and the husband is normally not hiding the salary from his wife.*

*The woman has status in the home. After marriage you live with your in-laws (the same as in the Hindu tradition).*

*If a friend comes to visit her husband when he's not home, the friend has to come back. Since she can't be alone with another man. The husband has certain rules in the house and for the children, these rules are followed also when he's away.*

*The Muslim woman has to serve her husband, she is the one who takes care of the house.*

*Asmas husband has his own soap when she gives bath to him. When he calls for her she has to help him, but if he doesn't call for her she believes something is wrong. When he calls for her it shows that he loves her.*

*In Islam the man has a responsibility to God to take care of the woman, to protect her. Culture expects this and it is for company as well. The Koran also says man has to provide food and shelter, and to give honour to his wife.*

*Asma prefer to go out with her husband and not alone, to go shopping for example. It is not allowed to go with a male friend. You can meet men through school for example but you can't be friends.*

*Why are Muslim women wearing Burkha?*

*Purda as it's called, is not to make women lower. When women go outside it is better to cover. It is a symbol of a believing woman.*

*It's said in the Koran that woman should wear extra cloth when outside.*

*It's also said that men can't use dirty sight, and men can't think dirty thoughts.*

*The Purda is to purify the thoughts for people, it's not to restrict.*

*Asma mother was her teacher at her school where they would wear a school dress. But from the age of 14 she would wear a Purda (Burkha).*

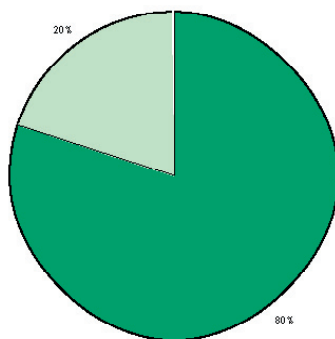
*"I feel much more confident wearing Purda. People of other religions give you more respect."*

*Asma says; "India is changing, but Muslims don't change. Other Muslims groups might look western, but they are not western in mind"*

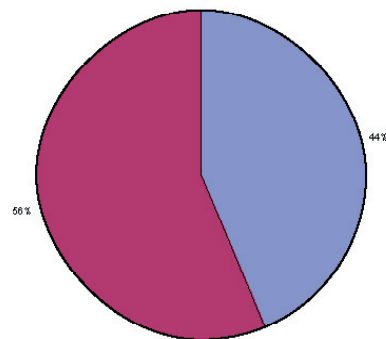
*Asmas brother is a teacher and live a very modern and western life. But his wife will always wear a burkha. The saris she gets she could only wear at home.*

*Asma can't visit the mosque, since it's a place only for men, but she prays 5 times a day for a few minutes.*

Is there a universal truth that explains the existence of mankind?



■ Yes  
■ No



■ Yes  
■ No

In India the question of claiming a truth has a greater meaning, 80% of the Indians answering the questionnaire believes there is a universal truth that explains the existence of mankind. God and religious believes are giving an explanation to many people. Religion is often claiming a certain truth and is limiting peoples belief systems. And the idea of claiming the truth is common amongst religious people.

Almost 4/5 also believed it is possibility to comprehend this truth.

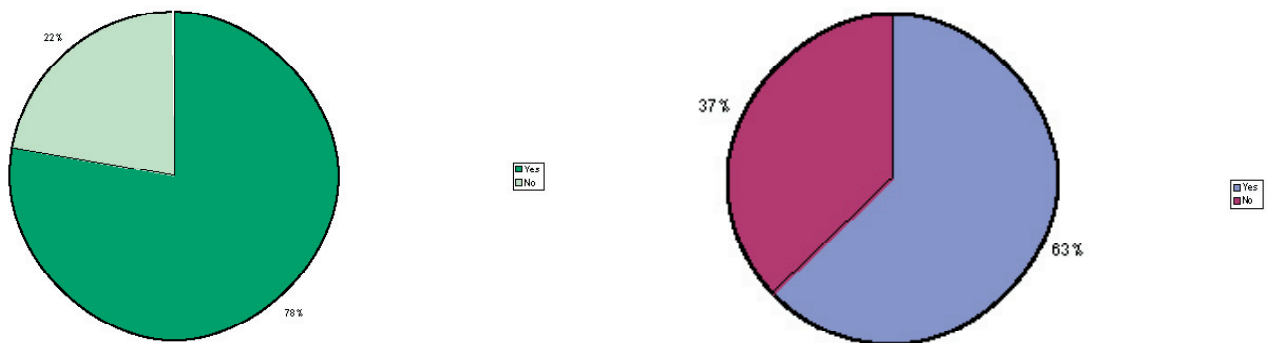
Someone spontaneously said to me when looking at the title of my project – There must be a mistake here, shouldn't it say "To believe is to know?"

Among the Swedish answers only 44% answered that they believed in a universal truth and the amount who believed it can be comprehended was less than in India.

This might be because there is a great belief in science in western society and science haven't given us any 100% true answers to why we exist.

The scientists and researchers Hawkins and Peacocke agrees on the fact that we are limited as humans and it hardly seems probable that we will ever find out the reason why an outermost reality has created the universe. If we will ever understand it? (SvD, Idag, "Min Gud", April 2003).

If yes, is it possible to comprehend this truth?



In India there is a great belief in healing and people are gathering all over the country under various religious circumstance to receive healing together.

*The Christian man Vargese explains to me how the tradition of religion and healing has been told to him from childhood:*

*– Is there any doubt in God amongst people in India?*

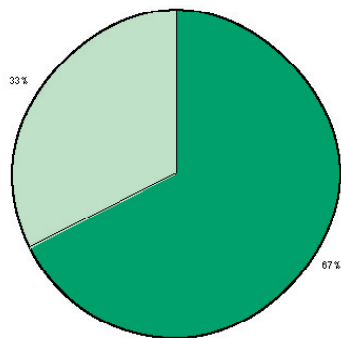
*God is taught by family from childhood. Grandparents tell stories and share their experiences.*

*Vargese grandfather told a story of when his wife was sick in 1912. Somebody who was a doctor told him she would die, there was no hope. The grandfather was standing outside of the house, and Vargese father was just a baby. He was praying for his sick wife dying inside the house. Afterwards the wife and mother said she had received a lot of energy. Science might be able to explain this but the grandfather said he was certain it was God. This strengthened the belief system.*

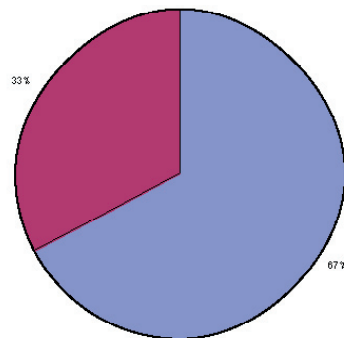
*– Why is belief in God strong in India?*

*Healing is a powerful force in India. When a doctor can't help a person who is sick, the patient is taken to a religious place like a mosque, temple or church.*

Are you secure in the knowledge of who you are?



■ Yes  
■ No



■ Yes  
■ No

Perhaps this strong belief and possibility to explore healing is one of the reasons a lot of westerners are attracted to experience the spiritual India.

During my time in India I visited amongst others the Guru Amma, the hugging mother. Amma is the only female guru in India, who has a lot of followers both in India and in the western world. She has embraced millions of people all over the world. Her power is suppose to give enlightenment and health and this has given her the financial possibility to run various charity projects such as hospitals and schools all over India.

There are thousands of opportunities for westerners to take part in various satsangs and retreats in India. There are also many gurus to be followed, who can help you in finding yourself.

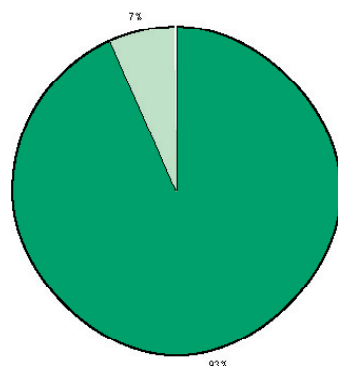
According to my research it shows that the question of “Who am I” (Are you secure in the knowledge of who your are?) is not to be answered easier either in India or Sweden.

But it shows that if you live in India you are more likely to believe that your existence serves a purpose. Something which is of course important for each individual.

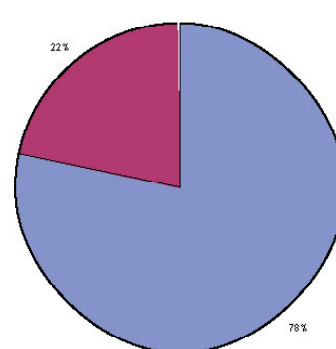
So perhaps it is not such a bad idea to go to India, not to look for yourself, but to find a way to make your life more meaningful. Something which religious believes might help you with.

According to a Swedish research people with religious believes both live longer and are happier.

Does your existence serve a purpose?



■ Yes  
■ No



■ Yes  
■ No

## Conclusion

Some of the questions stated in my initial phase were;

What room does belief have among the people in India?

Why is there no doubt in a God among people in India? Is this true?

Is it possible that a developing country like India is more in need of a belief due to poverty and illnesses etc.?

How does belief support the people in India?

What can we learn from this way of thinking?

The starting point was the research “To believe is not to know”. A research with the aim to force people to answer Yes or No to the questions which you don’t know the answer to. This to avoid the answer of I don’t know, and to force a careful consideration of each question.

This project had as an aim to raise questions and thoughts around our believes. It shows that our belief is strongly connected to our culture. What really stroke me during this research was how limited we are to the influence of our culture. I became obvious that individual thinking is something which really doesn’t exist, neither in Sweden or India, or anywhere else. But perhaps there is a truth and it might be possible to comprehend. And maybe you will reach paradise after death or perhaps you will just be a pile of dirt.

But how we answer these questions which we really don’t know the answers to is of course an individual choice, but can we ever answer them individually.

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Ulrika Sparre

Department of Fine Arts, Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and Design

[www.ulrikasparre.com](http://www.ulrikasparre.com)

[ulrika@sparre.com](mailto:ulrika@sparre.com)