

# PUSHPA” ‘I AM THE PRINCIPAL’!

## A STUDY ON THE NATURE AND SOCIAL FUNCTION OF AUTHORITY & OBEDIENCE

*Excerpts from the book” The Foundry Worker and the Gardener”  
of Fr. P. Ribes, s.j. published by the Gujarat Sashitya Prakash.*

### Intent Of this Exercise

- ✓ To study the ‘purpose’ and ‘social function’ of authority.
- ✓ To clarify what’s the difference between ‘personal’ and ‘formal’ authority.
- ✓ To be able to exercise authority in a way in keeping with human dignity, both of the inferiors and superiors.
- ✓ To find out why so often, ‘good and loving people’, once in a position of authority, become unpopular and inefficient Superiors.
- ✓ To discover some mistaken and exaggerated ideas of authority prevalent even among good and religious minded people.
- ✓ To study the emotional problems Superiors are likely to face.
- ✓ To realize that, unawares, superiors occasionally may try to satisfy their personal needs, rather than those under their authority.
- ✓ To caution ourselves to the dangers of being ‘superior’

### Target Audience:

All audiences. Some time or other, in life everybody is invested with some degree of authority – big or small – for instance:

- |                       |               |                     |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| • Parents             | • Managers    | • Scouts masters    |
| • Priests             | • Head clerks | • Team Captains     |
| • Teachers            | • Housewives  | • Civil authorities |
| • Religious superiors | • Principals  | • Community Leaders |
| • Supervisors         | • Monitors    | • Etc.              |

### Uses of these notes:

- Recollections.
- Workshops on ‘leadership’.
- Talks and Seminars for Religious Superiors.
- Teachers. P.T.A groups (Parents Teachers Association).
- Human Relations Sessions.
- Sessions or evenings for Parents.
- Social awareness sessions. “Use and abuse of Authority’.

- Value clarification. (Values and Motivation).
- Talks, Sermons.
- Discussion Groups.
- Religion and Moral Science Classes.
- Personal reflection on one's attitudes and use of authority.

**Group Size:**

- For talks, electorates and the like, unlimited
- For sessions with discussions and personal sharing maximum 24

**PROCEDURE:**

**Introductory Session.**

- Meeting and greeting the participants
- Coming to know one another
- Singing hymns / bhajans
- Opening prayer

**Presentation of the story of “ PUSHPA “**

Present the story of “PUSHPA” in an impressive way. Several ways of presentation are suggested below.

- Have it acted or dramatized
- Get it taped and play it back as a radio play
- Retell the story or have it re-told by a good story teller.
- Have it read in dialogue form
- Give Xerox copies of it to all the participants.
- Make them read it carefully and reflectively.

**PUSHPA. I AM THE PRINCIPAL!**

(The Parable)

**Narrator:** Think of a most loving and loveable person, full of kindness and charm with smiles for everyone all the while. That was Pushpa, - a young and enthusiastic teacher. She loved to be with the children, to listen to them, to talk with them, and play with them too. The children loved her. The screams of children shouting: “Pushpa”, “Pushpa”, Miss, Miss were sweet music in her ears. A time came when the principal of the school was about to retire. The management met to decide who the next Principal could be. This is what went on at that meeting

**Principal:** I think that our next Principal should be Pushpa. What do you think?

**Advisors:** She is the most loved teacher in the school! The children worship her! With the support of the children, she will do marvels.

**Principal:** Congratulations, Pushpa! You are going to be our next Principal!

**Pushpa:** Me? Principal?

**Principal:** Yes, You! Congratulations, once again, and all the best

**Pushpa:** I, Principal? My, did I ever dream of one day becoming the Principal of the School? It looks like a dream

**Narrator;:** Some days later, Pushpa was sitting on the Principal's Chair

**Pushpa:** Oh! How I love to be Principal. If as an ordinary teacher I could be so close to the kids, how much more now. As Principal, I'll be able to do so much for them. Oh! I love them

**Narrator:** At recess time, all the children rushed to Pushpa's office. They yelled at the top of their voices: "Pushpa! Pushpa! Miss! Miss! Pushpa". All wanted to talk to her, to be with her. The Principal's office looked like a fish market. Some disgruntled staff members disapprovingly were looking and listening from the corridor. They remarked loud enough for Pushpa to hear:

**Teachers:** "What is all that din and turmoil in the Principal's Office? Nonsense! Where is now the respect due for authority? Imagine calling the Principal by her name in her own office!"

**Narrator:** The bell at the end of the recess rang. Pushpa had to forcefully push the children out of her office. Some kids were even late for class. When alone in her office, she had a funny feeling within herself. She did not know how to express it. It was so new! She was happy that the children came to her office and called her by name. At the same time she wasn't quite happy with the teachers' remarks. She stayed for a while with her feelings. Finally she muttered to herself:

**Pushpa:** "Miss! Miss? Pushpa? Pushpa? All it's very nice! But what will the teachers think and say of me? What will they feel of that hullabaloo in the Principal's office? I guess what they will say: This choice of Pushpa as a Principal isn't so good after all. Look at the children coming late to class after the recess. And to think that they were fooling in the Principal's office! Where have we come to? There is no respect any more to authority in this school!"

**Narrator:** After that, an unusual and a strange anger swelled up from her heart. She blurted:

**Pushpa** ; Miss? Miss? What? Am I still a miss here? No! Here, I am the Principal! I'll have to tell the children! **Of course, I love them, but, as Principal, I have to be respected Now, I am holding office. I am not just anyone, any ordinary miss!** No! No! I'll have to put my foot down. First of all, they will call me Principal!

**Narrator**: Kids are kids. The next day, when the recess bell rang the children darted again to the Principal's Office. No one bothered to knock on the door! As they flooded the Principal's office, all were shouting their tops off. "Pushpa" "Pushpa" "Miss" Miss. Then, Pushpa, all of a sudden, turned towards the children and in an unusual fit of temper shouted:

**Pushpa**: "Stop! Stop it! Quiet now! Don't you call me Miss or Pushpa any more! Here, I am your Principal. Do you get that? From now on, you will call me Principal! Got that?"

**Narrator**: Timidly and confused the children replied: "Yes, Miss, Yes Miss, Yes Pushpa!" and left the office. Then, Pushpa started thinking of means and ways to make the children realize that she was the Principal. Oh, yes, she found the way! She would have a desk board made for her on which the inscription "**PRINCIPAL**" would be clearly visible. Then triumphantly she placed it on her desk and muttered to herself:

**Pushpa**: Now at last, the children will see by themselves that here I am the Principal. **I have to have my little self-respect too, of course, like anybody else! I can't afford to be treated like any other miss or teacher.** It is time they know that!

**Narrator**: Next day, when the recess bell rang, the children dashed again to the Principal's office and yelled: "Miss! Pushpa! Miss! Pushpa!"

**Pushpa**: She blurted out:" Shut up! I told you already! I am your Principal. Damn it! Stop calling me Miss. I will not stand it any more. You will call me Principal! Can't you see this board on my desk? I am your Principal!"

**Narrator**: Not one of them had seen the label on her desk. All they saw was their beloved Miss, their friend Pushpa. The children left the office in silence and utterly confused. What had happened to Miss? What had come over to their friend, Pushpa? When she was again alone in her office in a rage she said

**Pushpa**: How the hell can I make these brats see that I am their Principal now?

**Narrator**: Pushpa ordered a new board to be made. So large, that it would go from one side to the other of her desk. So big that no one could ever miss seeing it. She placed it on her desk and confidently sat behind it and said:

**Pushpa:** “Today at last, these dumb kids will discover that I am their Principal here. They will call me principal either they like or not”

**Narrator:** The recess bell rang anew. The children rushed again into Pushpa’s office. Again those forbidden words filled the air! ‘Pushpa’ ! ‘ Pushpa’ ! ‘Miss’ ‘Miss’ ! But, the words got frozen in the children’s throats. Pushpa, their beloved friend, wasn’t there in the office!

The office looked empty, cold, and unfriendly. All the children could see was a big desk board that read ‘PRINCIPAL’, but their beloved “PUSHPA” wasn’t there! They could not see her! In despair, they stood for a while at the door. They looked at each other, and in sadness, they said: “Miss is gone! Too bad! Pushpa is not here! In silence and disappointment, they left the “PRINCIPAL’S office

Again, next day the children ran to Pushpa’s office. Standing in the corridor they peeped in. All they saw was an empty, unwelcoming office and a large signboard on the desk that read “PRINCIPAL’. They went away crest fallen and puzzled.

Faithfully, for many days, they kept coming to the office of their beloved friend, but she wasn’t there any more. Finally, as the days passed by, they stopped coming to Pushpa’s office. Many weeks later, they did not even care to peep inside the office from the corridor. They had already forgotten all about their beloved Miss, all about their best friend Pushpa.

**By now, she, the Principal, friendless and sad, lonely and forgotten remained seated in her office, hidden behind her larger signboard, that read; ‘ PRINCIPAL’. Of course, respected by all, loved by none!.**

### **Questionnaire.**

- Divide the participants into small groups of 6 to 8 members..
- Give to each group a Xerox copy of the questions you wish them to discuss.
- Each small group of 6 to 8 will prepare a short report of the questions discussed.

### **Sample questions from which the moderator may frame his questionair**

**You will find below a list of 23 questions based on the text of the story of PUSHPA. Choose the questions, which are more relevant to your group. If you wish, you can add a few more questions of your own**

1. What sort of person Pushpa was before she was appointed Principal?
2. What happened to her after her appointment as Principal? Describe.
3. Could you tell Pushpa what were the reasons why she failed as Principal? (Read the story and pay special attention to her feelings).
4. What do we mean by ‘authority’?
5. Can the word ‘authority’ be taken in different senses? If so, which? Explain.

6. How is it that some superiors are 'efficient' but not popular, others are popular but not efficient, and still others are both, popular and efficient?
7. What sort of authority does a superior need to be both popular and efficient? Explain.  
To your way of thinking, what are the qualities of a good superior? Why?
8. What's the purpose of authority? Is it necessary that there should be superiors? Why? Could we manage without superiors? Why?
9. What are the duties of a superior? Enumerate
10. Does 'authority' confer 'privileges' or 'duties', or both, on a superior? How? Why?
11. Can and should superiors demand 'respect', 'reverence', 'honor' and 'obedience' from their subordinates? How? Why?
12. Should inferiors give 'respect', honor', and 'obedient to their superiors? Why? How?
13. to what extent?
14. Are 'superiors' in any way 'superior' to their 'inferiors'? In what sense?
15. Is the word 'superior' given to the one holding 'authority' indispensable or justifiable? Why? Could you suggest alternative names or words? List them.
16. Does the story of Pushpa have any relevance for Family Life, for the running of the Church, and for Community life? For our Schools, Apostolic works and other Institutions we manage?
17. Can you think of some emotional blocks and psychological difficulties many superiors may face? Enumerate.
18. Have you ever discovered some 'irrational beliefs' about authority and obedience being preached and acted upon by some people in authority? List them. Discuss them.
19. Is the voice of the superior the voice of God? In what sense? How?
20. Have your ideas about, 'authority' and 'obedience', changed in the course of your life? If so, how? Why? What are your ideas about them now
21. Have you ever been placed in a position of authority, however small, in a school, in a sports team in your place of work, in the office, or even in your own home? Can you recollect: Recount your experiences of being a superior? All in all, are they pleasant or unpleasant?
  - ✓ Did those under you, love you? Why?
  - ✓ Did you consider yourself an efficient superior? Why?
  - ✓ Were you a popular superior or not? Why?
  - ✓ Did you enjoy being a superior? Why?
  - ✓ Were you to be a superior again,, what things would you change in your way of functioning? Why?
22. Narrate: The best superiors you have even known (*You may give their names*) Explain why?
23. Narrate: The worst Superiors you have ever known (*Do not disclose their names.*) Explain why?

## **INPUT: SUGGESTED THOUGHTS**

### **A) Kinds of Authority:**

- There are two kinds of authority: **‘formal’** authority and **‘personal’** authority.
- When Pushpa was a “Miss”, she enjoyed **‘personal authority’**. She was obeyed and respected because she was loved and appreciated as a person by the pupils.
- When she was lawfully appointed “Principal”, she was given **‘formal authority**.
- Later one she lost her “personal” authority by being authoritarian and too conscious of her authority position.
- After losing her ‘personal authority’, though she was the Principal, she was not loved anymore.
- **Both kinds of authority are wanted and necessary** to be an efficient superior. If any of these kinds of authority is lacking, a person cannot be a successful superior.
- **‘Personal’ authority cannot be given by appointment or by law!** It has to be earned by the individual
- Among the rulers of the Jewish nation, **Jesus never had any ‘formal’ authority**. That’s why the Lawyers and the Pharisees asked him; “On whose authority do you do all these things?”
- **Yet, Jesus enjoyed tremendous ‘personal’ authority**. People said: “He speaks as one having ‘authority’ not like the Masters of the Law!”
- **The Pharisees cared only for ‘formal’ authority**. They were legalistic minded. **Jesus cared for ‘personal’ authority**. He was ‘person minded’.
- Respect, love, trust and reverence cannot be demanded by anyone, much less by superiors. It has to be won, deserved, and earned the hard way. **‘Formal’ authority alone makes slaves of the subordinates and tyrants of the superiors**.
- **Personal’ authority makes friends, cooperators, partners of the subordinates and fathers, facilitators, guides, helpers of the superiors**. Formal’ authority makes obedience burdensome, humiliating, hurtful, and distasteful ‘Personal’ authority makes obedience pleasant, joyous, enriching, and freeing!
- **‘Formal’ authority isolates superiors from inferiors**. It makes them feel alone, insular, not wanted. **‘Personal’ authority unites all concerned, makes all feel accepted, loved and wanted**.
- **Personal’ authority builds community and brotherhood ‘Formal’ authority just ‘holds’ together strangers by external and legalistic means**.

### **B) Nature and Function of Authority**

- **The aim of authority is to help**, to guide, to moderate, to facilitate, and to lead the community towards its aims.
- **Authority is never meant to boss over, to ‘rule’, to lord it over**, to impose one’s whims, to crush people, to force others, to suppress individual freedoms
- **Superiors are not there for their personal benefit but for the good of their subordinates**.

- **Superiors exist for their inferiors, not the other way around. Authority in human society, is a means, not an end,**
- **Superiors are there to see to the needs of their subordinates, not to satisfy their own,** a thing that may be done unconsciously
- **A person in ‘authority’ has been given a ‘trust’, a ‘commission’ to serve his subordinates, to guide them, to care for them.**
- **Authority is a ‘necessity’ flowing from the social nature of man. It could be said that ‘authority’ is a ‘necessary evil’, or a ‘minor evil’.** It is necessary in order to prevent greater evils.
- **Strictly speaking, before God, there are no superiors or inferiors. All men are alike, all are equal.** Some have to play the ‘role’ of superiors, although, in fact, they ‘are not’ superiors. It is the common good that demands such ‘role-playing’.
- This role is relative, not absolute. **The only real superior is God himself.**
- Superior-Inferior relationships make sense only at the human level. In the eyes of God such relationships have no value. **In heaven there will not superiors. God will be all in all.**

**C) Proper Exercise of Authority:**

- **Superiors should not be too conscious of their ‘formal’ authority,** much less appeal to it when they command.
- **Honor, fame, money, benefits, privilege, pomp, grandeur, pageantry, protocol, pleasure etc. should not be attached to ‘true authority’.** **If it does, authority loses its credibility;** -- the ‘personal’ value of authority is lost. The only thing left will be ‘formal’ authority with all that it entails:: force, repression, sanctions, punishments, and brutality!
- **Superiors should be loved, not feared.** They have to be loveable, not frightful.
- **Obedience is one thing, subservience, servility, submissiveness quite another.**
- **No one should, nor can he abdicate his ‘fundamental human rights, even to his superiors. No authority can divest a human being of his dignity!**
- In the ‘authority-obedience’ relationship, both parties to the relationship (i.e., superiors and inferiors) should treat each other as equal human beings
- In T.A. language, any transactions in the area of ‘authority-obedience’ among grown ups should always take place at the adult-to-adult level. Parental (critical and nurturing) and child (natural or adopted) transactions should be excluded.
- **Commanding is not bossing, suppressing, repressing, but helping, enabling, facilitating, supporting.**
- **Authority’s dynamism should be ruled by a centrifugal force. Any centripetal force is antithetic to true authority.**
- **Very often, we hear said that “today there is a crisis of obedience”. We should rather speak of a crisis of authority.** More often than not, ‘obedience’ is not what it ought to be, because ‘authority’ is not what it ought to be!

- **Authority and obedience are ‘relational terms’ complementing each other. Often enough, the cause of crisis is neither because of authority nor because of obedience taken singly, but in their relationship.**

**D) Emotional Blocks and Personal Problems possible in people in ‘authority’**

- If a superior feels hurt when not obeyed or when not listened to, he is emotionally unfit to be a superior
- Actually speaking those who disobey do not disrespect the superior, but they disregard a law of human sociability.
- **A superior should never identify himself with the law! If he does, he is in for trouble! He will forever feel rejected, disregarded, unwanted!**
- The superior is there to help and facilitate those under his care to keep the law. If they listen to him, all the better for them! If not, all the worse for them!
- If some subordinates do not keep the law, despite of their superior’s advice, it is their problem, not the superior’s. They will have to face the consequences not the superior.
- **The single greatest cause of emotional problem for a superior is personal insecurity’.** Insecurity it’s bound to breed some of the following problems for the superior:
  - **Lack of self- esteem**
  - Fear of losing control
  - **Fear of disapproval from higher authorities, peers and inferiors.**
  - **Fear of failure and of doing mistakes.**
  - Suspiciousness
  - Fear of rejection
  - Distrust of people
  - Inflated sense of responsibility
  - Perfectionist tendencies
  - **Lack of assertiveness.**
  - Identification of ‘personal’ with ‘objective’ issues.
  - **Mixing up of ‘personal image’ with ‘job performance’.**
  - Inflexibility. Inability to compromise
  - Incapacity to accept peoples’ failures
- Whenever a superior realizes that his orders are not consistently complied with, he has to accept the fact there is a problem somewhere. Let him objectively face the issue without feeling discouraged.

***NOTE: The subject of Authority – Obedience is so important that we added three appendixes with supplementary matter for study ad reflection***

## **APPENDIX ONE: Authority in the Gospels.**

Mk.	10/35-4	The Request of the Sons of Zebedee
Mk.	9/33-37	Who is the Greatest?
Jn.	13/2-17	Washing of the Feet?
Mt.	7/28 & Lk.20/1-8	Formal Vs. Personal Authority
Mt.	6/14-29	<b>Death of John the Baptist –Abuse of authority.</b>
Jn.	19/8-11	Jesus and Pilate (I have authority....)
Mt.	23/1-12	Jesus warns the Scribes & Pharisees

### **Slogans of Jesus on Authority and Power:**

Mt.	20/28‘	‘The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve’
Mt.	20/26	‘If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of all ’
Mt.	20/27	‘If anyone of you wants to be first, he must be your slave’
Lk.	22/26	‘The greatest one among you, must be like the youngest, and the leader must be like the servant’.
Lk.	22/27	‘I am among you as one who serves.’
Lk.	14/11	‘Everyone who makes himself great will be humbled, and Everyone who humbles himself will be made great’
Lk.	6/40	‘No pupil is greater than his master’
Jn.	13/16	‘No messenger is greater than the one who sent him’
Jn..	13/14	‘If I your Lord and Teacher, I have just washed your feet. you should wash each other’s feet’
Mk.	9/35	Whoever wants to be first must place himself last of a servant of all’.
Mt.	18/4	‘The greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven is the one who Humbles himself and becomes like a child’.
Mt.	23/8	‘You must not be called ‘Teacher’, because you all are Brothers of one another and you have only one Teacher’
Mt.	23/9	‘ You must not call anyone here on earth ‘Father’, because you have only one Father in Heaven’.
Mt.	23/10	You should not be called ‘Leader’, because your one and only Leader is the Messiah.”
Mt.	23/11	‘The greatest one among you must be your servant’

## **APPENDIX TWO: Personal Reflection Form.**

### **How do I handle or Exercise Authority?**

1. When in authority, what is more important to me? My needs or my ‘subordinates’ needs? My good name or others’ good name? My happiness or theirs?

2. When in authority, am I touchy? Do I take offence when others do not follow my instructions?
3. Do I get discouraged and disappointed when I cannot get them to do what ask them?
4. Do I feel insecure and threatened when people do not 'respect' me as their superior?
5. Am I bossy? Do I like to make others feel my authority?
6. Do I use 'authority' as a prop to boost my 'self-esteem'?
7. Do I use my 'authority' as a means of giving vent to my anger and frustration?
8. Do I enjoy making others feel small, or foolish, or inferior?
9. Do I make too much of my 'formal' authority? Do I appeal to the fact that 'I am their superior'?
10. While commanding, am I petty, punctilious, sort of 'perfectionist'?
11. Can I make allowances to the shortcomings of others?
12. Have I earned 'personal' authority by my love, service, dedication, generosity, acceptance, unselfishness towards those under my care?
13. Am I sensitive to the needs and feelings of others?
14. Am I courteous, polite and respectful towards others?
15. Do I accept them as persons even if they do not obey me?
16. Am I flexible, ready to dialogue and change my orders if need be?
17. To my way of thinking, what's more important: 'the command' or the 'person' commanded?
18. Do I make a sincere effort to understand the excuses others give me for not complying with my orders?
19. Do I trust people? Can I believe them?
20. Have I patience and endurance?
21. Do I feel answerable to and responsible for my subordinates' mistakes?
22. Can I distinguish between 'me' as a person' and 'me' as the superior?
23. Do I seek the approval of my higher superiors in discharging my role of superior rather than the good of my subordinates?
24. Do I 'help' my subordinates or do I 'rescue' them?
25. Do I 'delegate' power or do I tend to do everything by myself?
26. Do I interfere in the job and duties of my subordinates?
27. Do I ever overstep the limits of my competence and authority?
28. Do I praise and give recognition to my inferiors, for all the good they do?
29. Do I correct them with love, always safeguarding their honor and self-respect?
30. Do I show them the way by example rather than by preaching?
31. Am I scrupulous in keeping confidentiality?
32. Am I assertive, never aggressive nor submissive while dealing with them?
33. Have they any grudges against me? What are they? Do I take cognizance of them?

## **APPENDIX THREE   Activities**

**If time permits, do not skip this step. It is very effective.**

Afternoon hours are the best for the activities.

## **Preparation Time**

In small groups the participants will prepare an activity based on the main ideas of the event.

### **Suggested Activities:**

Role-play	• Puppets	• Creating new parables
Case-study	• Shadow-play	• Mime
Debates	• Radio-play	• Pantomime
Story telling.	• Photo-story	• Symbolic representation

**For subject matter for their activities, the Participants may choose any Conflicting authority situation they have seen or experienced,** for instance, between:

- Parents and children,
- Husbands and wives
- Teachers and pupils
- Management and staff
- Bosses and employees
- Masters and servants
- Priests and parishioners
- Bishops and priests
- Superior and community members
- Monitor and class-mates
- School captain and boys
- Sports or game captain and team
- Public administrators and citizens.

### **or any conflictive Gospel Passage, such as:**

Mk.	10/35-45	The Request of the Sons of Zebedee
Mk.	9/33-37	Who is the Greatest?
Jn.	13/2-17	Washing of the Feet?
Mt.	7/28 & Lk.20/1-8	Formal Vs. Personal Authority
Mt.	6/14-29	Death of John the Baptist -Authority's abuse
Jn.	19/8-11	Jesus and Pilate ( I have authority....)
Mt.	23/1-12	Jesus warns the Scribes & Pharisees

Request the groups to carefully read the passage, to study and discuss it and then prepare an activity based on it. Ideally, the activity can be a 'transposition' of that situation to a modern setting.

## **Presentation Time**

When the groups are ready, the house will assemble

Each group will present its activity

Each presentation will be followed by a short discussion and valuation.