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Volume

Changing Cultures and Religious Practices in Asia

Edited by
Binod C. Agrawal

Changing Cultures and Religious Practices in Asia

Religion and Social Communication

A Book Series of the
Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication
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Edited by

Franz-Josef Eilers, svd
Chainarong Monthienvichienchai
Binod C. Agrawal

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Introducing the Book Series

The Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) at St. John's University in Bangkok (Thailand) has since its foundation in 1999 animated scholars to reflect and research in the field. The results are partly presented in *Religion and Social Communication* the bi-annual journal of the Center and regular roundtables with related themes presented by invited participants. Many of our friends felt that at least some of these considerations should be also published within a book series to make them more accessible and permanent. Through these publications, this desire should be fulfilled and more professional research in the field be promoted.

The series reflects mainly the activities of the Bangkok Center but is not only confined to them. Other upcoming volumes will also reflect academic activities in related studies at the 400-year-old University of Santo Tomas (UST) in Manila with their Graduate School and Faculty of Sacred Theology where a special program in Pastoral Communication for the pastoral ministry of the Catholic Church is offered. The third volume of this series will present some considerations from this program which might be interesting even beyond Christianity in Asia. The series is further open to similar academic studies if they are related in one way or the other to our field.

With the UST Publishing House as the publisher, all books will be available on the general market and thus accessible to many interested partners from all over Asia.

Contents

Preface

Changing Cultures and Religious Practices in Asia emerged out of very hard and persistent effort of Prof. Dr. Franz-Josef Eilers, svd supported by Mr. Anthony Roman and the staff of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication, Bangkok especially Dr. Chainarong Monthienvichienchai. The three persons from TALEEM Research Foundation who worked hard to complete the editing and formatting and who provided all the secretarial help were Ms. Shabya Baroi, Mr. Leslin Bastian, and Ms. Hiral Dave.

It took several rounds of discussions before the book was given a shape. Each author was asked to send his/her revised papers. After receiving all the revised papers, I edited the book. My effort was to harmonize the style of each paper in which I have been partially successful. I take the opportunity to thank the authors for their valuable cooperation and assistance in sending their revised papers.

I sincerely thank Fr. Eilers whose leadership, ceaseless efforts, and great patience yielded the present book. One person who remained source of inspiration and execution of the book is Dr. Chainarong Monthienvichienchai. I thank him for his most valuable help.

Hope the readers will find fresh insights into little explored dimensions of communication related to religion in cross cultural perspective, with special reference to Asia where almost all major religions were born and practiced for over several millennia.

Binod C. Agrawal
Ahmedabad, February 5, 2014

Introduction

Binod C. Agrawal

Changing Cultures and Religious Practices in Asia emerged out of an interesting and ongoing project of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC), at Saint John's University, Bangkok, Thailand under the leadership of Prof. Dr. Franz-Josef Eilers, svd, Pontifical University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines, who also acts as Director of the ARC. The articles included in this volume emerged out of the 6th ARC Roundtable held on October 21-25, 2013 at the Buddhist Mahachulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University in Chaing Mai, Thailand. The host University is also an Institute for Tipitaka Studies and higher education for Buddhist monks, novices and laypeople. The theme of the Roundtable was 'Changing Cultures and Religious Practices in Asia,' with special focus on media and communication including Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

Participants from various religious traditions like Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and others presented their papers in the Roundtable.

The Host University was represented by Ven. P. B. Dr. Saneh Yanamethi, Mahachulalongkorn University; Asst. Prof. Dr. Samran Khunsamrong, Mahachulalongkorn University; Dr. Phaitoon Ruensat, Mahachulalongkorn University; and Ven. Phra Tippanakorn Chayapinanto, Mahachulalongkorn University. Dr. Binod C. Agrawal, TALEEM Research Foundation, Ahmedabad; Dr. Gnana Patrick, University of Madras; Dr. Arbind K. Sinha, Mudra Institute of Communications, Ahmedabad; Prof. Sebastian M. Michael, svd, Institute of Indian Culture, Mumbai; Dr. Keval Kumar, Resource Center for Media Education and Research, Pune; Prof. Chandrabhanu Pattanayak, KCCTE University of Hawaii, India Campus, Delhi participated from India; Prof. Maria Stella Tirol, University of the Philippines-Los Baños; Mr. Anthony G. Roman, Pontifical University of Santo Tomas, Manila; Dr. Kim Min-Soo, Sogang University, Korea; Dr. Sanjeeva Samaranayake from Sri Lanka and Dr. Yoel Cohen participated from Ariel University, Israel; Fr. Anh Vu Ta, represented the Pontifical University of Santo Tomas, Manila. The host country Thailand was represented by Fr. Anucha Chaiyadej, Catholic Social Communications and Mr. Saranyu Pongpraserstin, Professor, Lux Mundi College.

The present volume includes papers that were presented in the 6th Roundtable. The book is divided into four sections: Section I includes an introductory paper by Prof. Dr. Franz-Josef Eilers, svd, in which he examines the concept of Social Communication and Religion in a broader perspective. Eilers distinguishes three dimensions of communication as subsections of the field i.e. *interpersonal and cultural dimension, mass media,* and *social networks.* He also explains that religion as an expression to or from of a higher being is present in all three dimensions representing different modes. It can be 'listening' and 'hearing' on the personal/cultural level or only a passive reception at the media level. The paper also discusses the relationships between religion, culture, and society within a communication perspective of 'Social Communication.' He discusses how cultures and their communications are determined and even maintained by or through religion.

Section II consists of three papers; Prof. Sebastian M. Michael, svd, in his "Religion and Social Communication in Changing Cultures of Asia: An Anthropological Perspective," talks about a dynamic relationship between changing cultures and their ever longing for meaning of human existence present in today's world. Dr. Sanjeeva Samaranayake, in his paper "Bridging Social Distance to Challenge Paternalism in Sri Lanka," emphasizes humility for Information and Communications Technology to be viewed as the *technology of powerless humanity* so that it can strive to achieve true power in human connection by bridging the social distances that have been created. Fr. Anh Vu Ta discusses "Challenges for Religions Communication in New Social Structures and Social Forms of Modern Society in the Vietnamese Context" and talks about the new context of social communication and religious community which is shaped by their belief, values and culture. He asks how the Vietnamese people should understand their language, symbolic expressions, and trends of modern society, whether these are valuable or ephemeral. Broadly, Section II deals with dynamic relationships between changing cultures, social structure, and the ever longing for meaning of human existence present in today's world.

Section III begins with Dr. Kim Min-Soo's "The Rediscovery of Religious Silence in the Social Media Era: A Korean Case," where he points out the problem of Social Networking Services (SNS) in Korean society. He presents religious silence as an alternative method of communication which is the tmost appropriate in Korean society. Prof. Samran Khunsamrong's "Communication Technology Impacts Thai Culture and Buddhist Way of Life," shows how Buddhism existed for almost 2,600 years in the midst of changes in the world until the arrival of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Dr. Gnana Patrick presents "Dimensions of Bonding and Bridging in Religious Communication through Internet." He analyzes how the ways of virtual religious communication through the Internet impacts the experiences of today's communities. "Mythology and Society Continuum: Study of an Indian Television Serial" is a paper based on a primary research done as part of the content analysis of a mega mythological

television serial. Author Dr. Arbind K. Sinha provides an illuminating understanding how these mythological serials have contributed in maintaining continuity of custom and practices. Prof. Chandrabhanu Pattanayak, in his paper "An Act of Faith: From the Spiritual to the Ritual" explores the social space in India that *Gurus, Babas* and *Sadhus* they inhabit, and what the place of the follower is, in this phenomenon. Dr. Keval Kumar raises in his paper "Religion, Culture and the 'New' Social Media in India: Critical Perspectives" some questions about the practices of social media networks such as Facebook, and reflects on the social, cultural, religious, and ethical implications of social media for the Indian middle class. Dr. Yoel Cohen discusses "Judaism in the Computer-Mediated Era" with special reference to Israel. Cohen highlights the influence of religion on mass media and social media, and its impact on society. He examines how Judaism and its religious leaders have responded to the digital revolution.

Dr. Binod C. Agrawal in his paper "Influences of Religious Telecast in a Multi-Religious India: An Analysis of Hindu and Muslim Television Viewers," aims among other things, at the presented influences of religious telecast on the Hindu and Muslim viewers living in the urban multi-religious cultural setting, and the changes in the religious behaviour having common cultural and linguistic tradition.

SECTION I
A Closer Look at the Field

Social Communication and Religion[1]

Franz-Josef Eilers, svd

'Religion and Social Communication' is in the name of our center and some people might question what we mean by "Social Communication." This expression was seemingly used for the first time about 50 years ago as a title for a document of the Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council (1963, *Inter Mirifica*). The expression, however, was only in the title but never further developed and explained. Apparently it was just used as a common name for (Mass) Media. It was the sociologist Giorgio Braga who took up the expression in a book with the same title (1969) where he elaborated the field of social communication as the "study of communicative processes in society." Later psychologists followed in the use of this expression with "Social Psychology of Communication" (Fiedler, 2007). But within the Church or Religion it was never studied in greater detailed and perceived in a broader way which seem to be needed today in a time of "Social Media" and "Social Networks" where the full power and potential of this expression as the "communication *of* and *in* human society" comes to the fore. It means that *all* ways and means of communication of cultures and societies have to be seen under this perspective. It goes from the cave paintings of some 30,000 years ago via printing to the latest technical developments. It also means that the expression is not determined mainly or only by technology and media. It connotes the communication of people and their society in whatever form available and used. This includes in a special way Religion which cannot exist and live without proper communication on different levels and in different ways. Actually, the study and life of Religion is also the study of its communicative ways and expressions beyond the mere 'human.' It finally boils down ot the fact that communication is people, as Pope Francis recently told the members of the Pontifical Council for Social Communication in Rome (*Allocutio*, Sept. 12, 2013).

Over the years and in a common approach, communication is often identified with Media—also in Religion for e.g. in this expression on "Religion, Media and

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[1] Keynote Address delivered during the 6th International Roundtable of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) at the Mahachulalongkornrajvidyalaya Univeristy, Chiang Mai, Thailand, October 21-24, 2013.

Culture." Such an approach and expression, however, refers only to the *means* or instruments of communication and not to the full communicative happening and process of living Religion, which goes far beyond technical means and reflects the human being and society as the environment for living in relation to Religion. It is therefore, important to take a broader and deeper look at this expression of "Social Communication" which seems to get an additional importance through modern communication possibilities and developments.

Looking at Social Communication in this broader perspective and as a field of life and studies, one might distinguish three dimensions of communication as subsections of the field:

1. First comes the *interpersonal* and *cultural dimension* which is not necessarily related to any technical means but rather seen as a happening between persons which can be traced already to the very first human beings in history: Wherever humans lived they communicated with each other with the simple facilities given to them by the creator. This further developed into social groups and cultures with all their different cultural communicative expressions. This is not only to be understood in the historical sense from the birth of humankind, but today it is also an essential element of living and bonding together on a more personal level.

2. In the course of technical developments, speaking developed into writing and this further developed into printing for preservation and distribution up to the modern *Mass Media* which also go beyond text into visual and audio with film, broadcasting (radio and TV). Here the technically determined means of communication are central in their mass production, mass distribution, and mass consumption: Mass Media. At this stage communication is basically consumption only, passive consumption without any real interaction – communication.

3. Interactive communication, however, comes back and goes now beyond space and time in the *third dimension* of Social Communication, at the *Social Networking* level. While the interpersonal and cultural level of social communication is still limited in time and place, this now is removed with the "Death of Distance" into a communication beyond time and space. It also goes now beyond the older and long-time existing "social networks" of family and other groupings in society which are already part of the first dimension.

"Social Communication" comprises all of these three dimensions and therefore place a special challenge and need for research and study in our concern for Religion and Social Communication. What does all this mean for our lives and communities, our study and research and our 'practice' of Religion and its integration into personal and community life? Buddhism in Thailand and our own place of meeting this year might be a concrete example and challenge for all this.

To capture the presentation up until now in a nutshell the following graph might be helpful:
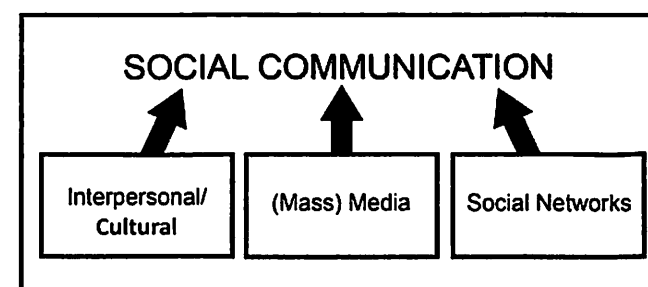
In a certain way these three dimensions might be seen as historically following each other. This, however, is not fully true. Also in mass media, cultural communication can be taken up and multiplied, but here the main emphasis is still on the *technical* transmission of the message which is not the case in the first and 'original' position of the first dimension. There we have a full *interaction* of *all* participants while for e.g. in a television program there is no interaction!

The third dimension refers to *social networks*. Such networks have been in existence since the beginning of humankind in family and social groups though we did not name them that way. What is new, however, and dominant today is the fact that a) social networks are somehow without limits in space and time (Death of Distance). We are no longer confined to people who we see directly and hear; the whole world is open to everybody, b) it also means—in contrast to the mass media—it is the individual or the social group which determines the application of technical means and not powerful corporations. "I" determine, which means I use and for whom and how. Here the personal qualities, likes, and dislikes come in. Also, possibilities of communication which were not accessible to me before are now at my disposal. This also means that it is not any more "media-education" in the narrow sense of critical use of the media which is needed, but rather communication competence has to be developed where I know when and how and where to use technologies for my communicating.

When the expression "Social Communication" was first proposed by Church people in 1963, the German communication scholar O.B. Roegele (1964), commented, "the title is very progressive, but everything which follows is the opposite." In those days communication studies in Germany, communication

was defined as everything which is made public ("Publizistik"), regardless of the means and ways this happens. Thus, already in those days the dimension of *society* was considered and was not a technical process (technology).

The Role of the Recipient

Considering the role of the recipient in the social communication process, it should be clear that he/she is both producer and consumer in the *first dimension*. In the *second dimension* of our presentation of the media process, the recipient is basically passive. S/He receives and "consumes" but cannot easily "talk back" nor even "dialogue" with the big media.

This, however, is again possible today in the *third dimension* where communication takes place directly and immediately in a social network either on the person-to-person level and in cyberspace. Here the participant becomes what a study group of the German Bishops' Conference (2012) called a "Pro-sumer," a combination of the words 'Producer' and 'Consumer.' S/He moves on both levels and thus can come to a creative exchange similar to the early days where communication took place e.g. in the family.

Religion as an expression to or from a higher being is present on all three dimensions, but also here the mode is different: it can be listening and hearing on the personal/cultural level, or only a passive reception at the media level. It can also be a lively personal exchange in a network—here not so much as listening to a higher power but rather as an exchange of experiences and beliefs and expectations between people.

How far does all this help us in our concern about Religion and Religion in Asia? Do all these developments contribute to our experience and change in Asian cultures? How is this done? How does this possibly change values? How does this affect the lives of individuals and communities, and the different age brackets within these groupings?

Communication scholar and editor of the *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Religion, Communication, and Media* Daniel Stout has recently published a textbook on *Media and Religion* (2013), where he distinguishes between (1) organized Religion and (2) elements of Religion like "rituals, deep feeling, belief and community" (p. 2). He quotes Johnston (2001) in defining religion as "a system of beliefs and practices by which a group of people interprets and responds to what they feel is sacred and usually supernatural as well" (p. 4 f.). Thus he states "that religion is multidimensional, comprised of belief, behaviour community, and feeling." Referring to Rudolf Otto's seminal work on the *Idea of the Holy* (German original, 1917) he equals Religion with everything "numinous" and thus goes far beyond Religion in the strict sense. He states that he "uses the term Religion as well as the

term 'numinous' because numinous experiences are similar to religious ones and may occur outside institutions, and such experiences do not necessarily involve the supernatural" (Intro, p. 4). He further refers to the need of an interdisciplinary approach in Religion and Media studies involving Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, Ecology literacy (p. 19 ff), but does not mention Philosophy and Theology.

In our ARC approach I do not think we want to follow this somehow superficial approach but rather are concerned about Religion as essential part of our Asian cultures, societies, and living. Therefore we are concerned about the relation between Religion, Culture and Society under communication perspective in the sense of "Social Communication" as explained above. This includes considerations and studies like:

- How cultures and their communications determined and even maintained by or through Religion?

- How are Religion and Technology (in the broad sense) related to communication? Does e.g. communication technology influence change religious practices?

- How do the ways of communication express, influence or change religious practices or even religious convictions and teachings—from official to 'banal' (popular) religious practices?

- How is Religion present, needed or accepted in communicating societies and practices in a culture/society?

- Modern ways of communicating e.g. Social Network and Religion in Asian Cultures and life: practices, possibilities and needs.

- Religious leaders and their communication competence in modern and traditional society; Which kind of competence do they need to develop in order to be at the level of life, culture, and society of people but at the same time integrating or even promoting Religion—beliefs and practices—in our times?

Or the questions placed already in our call for papers:

1. How are traditional ways of communicating of and in Religino changed through such developments?

2. How do Religions respond to these developments?

3. Is the internal communication *within* Religions, as well as their communication to the *outside* influenced and changed? How?

4. Does such a situation also have an effect on religious practices (e.g. pilgrimages) and rituals (e.g. devotions) of members? How? When? Where?

5. Do developments in IT enter into religious practices? When? Where? How? With what effect?

6. What do these developments mean for intercultural communication within and between Religions (Interreligious Dialogue)?

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SECTION II

Changing Cultures and Emerging Social Structures

Religion and Social Communication in the Changing Cultures of Asia: An Anthropological Perspective

S.M. Michael, svd

Introduction

Life is a dynamic process interacting with nature and other living organisms. Human life, in addition to the above interactions, also seeks meaning to human existence and explores the causes behind the universe and its existence. The history of humanity has built up various cultures and civilizations to understand and organize human life. The universe being an evolving system, the dynamics of human relationship with nature and with one another is also constantly changing. As a result, all human cultures are changing and rearranging themselves to the ever dynamic process of the evolving universe. All the same, the deepest quest of human existence and its meaning is ever present in the human psyche.

This paper deals about this dynamic relationship between changing cultures and their ever longing for meaning of human existence present in today's world. The methodology and approach used is anthropological in nature. The paper is divided into six parts. The first part deals with the dynamic nature of culture and the place of religion in cultures. The second part concentrates on the characteristics of the Asian cultures. The third part analyses the changing nature of cultures through the process of globalization and the emergence of inter-culturality in today's world. The fourth part of the study concentrates on the culture and communication revolution in the present world. Based on the above observations, the fifth part of this paper concentrates on religion and social communication in the changing cultures of Asia. The last part is the conclusion.

Dynamic Nature of Culture

Human existence is a configuration of historical, rational, political, social, relational, and religious layers. Culture offers a site, network, a texture, and continuum of these varied and myriad events and experiences of life-journey.

Culture can be understood broadly in two different ways. One is the universal dimension of culture, i.e. all human beings share in the one common heritage of culture. Here, we distinguish human beings from animals. As a fish cannot live without water, so human beings cannot live without culture. There is an intimate relationship between and being human. Here, culture is understood as a nurtured behaviour addressing the entire human being in contrast to animals who live in nature with their instinct. Here, culture is understood as nurtured in contrast to nature.

The second dimension is the distinctive way one community or society organizes itself from other communities or societies. This implies that there are many cultures in the world. There is a distinctive way a group or a community organizes itself in its economic, social, political, religious and other aspects of life. Thus, we can use the term "culture" in singular to distinguish human behavior from animal behaviour, or "cultures" in plural to distinguish one group's behavior from another. In both cases, culture is understood as a learned behaviour as opposed to the instinctual behaviour of animals. This is the literary meaning of the term "culture." It derives from the Latin verb *colere* meaning "to cultivate" or "to instruct." "Culture in its broadest sense is cultivated behaviour, that is, the totality of man's learned, accumulated experience which is socially transmitted, or more briefly, behaviour acquired through social learning" (Keesing, 1958:18).

From the ancient times, there has been a dynamic relationship and communication between cultures from different parts of the globe. This communication has intensified today in the scenario of a global village. Accordingly, the discourse on culture in the present world is different from the classicist instrumental approach. Today, culture is an ever unfolding scenario in an ethos of dialogue rather than an *idée fixe*. Or rather, culture is a creative narrative in which ideas, ideologies, and traditions interplay and an organic harmony is achieved; this configuration is not a 'constant' but a process-in-*telos* offering ever new meaning and horizon to life in the time-space sequence. Religions in dialogue have a vital role in this process of interpretation and integration in the present pluralistic history.

Culture and Religion are Constituent Elements to the Journey of Life

In the present pluralistic ethos, cultures do not remain in a lazy aloofness, but enter into a dialogical hermeneutic which upholds the inviolability of each culture not in isolation or exclusion but in a network of mutual appreciation and approximations. What is at work is a relational epistemology which is inclusive, existential, and futuristic both in its style and substance. Religions have to partake in this 'cultural' of human existence which is a constant seeking, and is on pilgrimage in the history and even beyond history. That is to say, religion is not outside the journey of life but a constituent or rather the very 'culture' which gives significance to human life.

Characteristics of Asian Cultures

Asia has never been a unified cultural world. For thousands of years the continent and its surrounding islands had been home to a vast number of languages, cultures and religions. Major centers of urban civilization in Mesopotamia, Persia, India, and China have emerged several thousand years ago. By the beginning of the Common Era they were actively trading with one another across the continent. Arab rulers successfully joined Arabia, Mesopotamia, Persia, and much of central Asia under a common Islamic government in the seventh and eighth centuries for the first time, but eventually regional rulers rose to become more important. The Mongol Empire in the fourteenth century had come closest to unifying the entire continent of Asia under a single ruling dynasty, reaching from China to Europe and into northern India. By the fifteenth century it, too, had split into several political and cultural factions. Thus, the diversity of languages, religions, and cultures are marks of Asia.

Even colonialism and the process of globalization have not unified the cultures of Asia into a single civilization. All the same, the communication technology has influenced the people, especially the youth of Asia. The postmodern and relativistic value system has captured the imagination of many Asians. Hence, today, Asia is not in isolation. Asian cultures are changing, and changing very fast.

The Process of Globalization and the Increasing of Inter-culturality

Globalization is a complex process by which the world is becoming a highly interconnected world thorough economic, social, political, and cultural contacts. It refers to the intensification of global interconnectedness, suggesting a world full of movement and mixture, contact and linkages, and persistent cultural interaction and exchange (Inda & Rosaldo, 2002:2). As a result, the world is shrinking in terms of time and space, making the world feel smaller and distance and distances shorter. The intensity and the momentum of this process are further enhanced by the sophisticated instant communications and ever-expanding fast travels. Globalization symbolizes a world in motion providing people with resources to new ways of being human in the fast changing world.

There is another important cultural process is taking place in the world of today. A multivalent or polyvalent culture is on the rise in which 'global' and 'local' contest as well as collaborate generating 'glocal.' The simultaneity of humanization forces of global, and indigenization protests of the local spins out into an inevitable dialogue between them. There is no 'local' untouched by outside forces, and no 'global' not influenced by the 'local.' The 'universal' as well as 'local'

lose their edge in the interface of 'local' and 'global.' Instead, what is in ascendancy is 'intercultural' and multi-cultural.

Culture and Communication Revolution

The world today is consumed in an ambience of technological sophistication. The Social Network, Internet, and Mobile revolutions which are collectively called the 'Triple Revolution' have created a new information and media ecology that is distinct from the past. The New Media have contributed to a great way to the convergence in information, education, entertainment, and career. There has been a great gift from the traditional one-way, mass communication towards more interactive communication between medium and the user. What all these means for people and cultures is unpredictable.

The diffusion and the robust presence of technologies in formal and informal contexts are determining the way we organize our private time and our social presence. The Internet has raised new possibilities of interactivity and participation in virtual social relationships leading to a shift of boundaries between public and private spaces. More than being a tool fasten communication and information transfer, new media has become a very important social device to get in contact with usual friends, to expand relationships and communicate identity, acting a strong social connector. The process of creating, collecting, assessing, and distributing information is increasingly becoming networked. Key technological changes have given rise to new affordances that shape the everyday lives of individuals as well as their decisions and their behaviour. This is especially true when it comes to the interrelation between technology and youth.

For the young people, Internet and social networks are real settings that work together with their physical life. In Facebook, blogs, Messenger, and other social networking sites, young people tend to expand their networks and build up their world. It has made a big influence on their lifestyles, changing their traditional leisure activities. They almost live, relate, feed, grow, and express their needs, and aspirations through these new media. It seems to make more sense to them to relate and communicate through new media than face-to-face encounters.

This climate of digital explosion and New Media technological communication gives rise to new cultural models. However, today, technology is not only a passive instrument at our disposal, but because of its networked character, it has more or less become an active agent that affects and transforms both the scenario and the people involved in it. Nevertheless, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has also given rise to previously unknown ethical problems and concomitant conflicts concerning ecology and nature, humanity and life value, and the morality of ethics of society.

Religion and Social Communication in the Changing Cultures of Asia

In this context, it is pertinent to explore Religion and Social Communication in the changing cultures of Asia. Since religion is the meaning-giving system, it is very important that in the midst of changing worldviews and moral and ethical ambiguities, religion explores the effective social communication to revitalize the deeper meaning of life in the changing cultures of Asia.

a) *Religious Communication has to be in Visual Culture Today*

The concomitant consequence of the communication revolution in this postmodern era is the assertion of 'space' over 'time.' Owing to the globalization process coupled with media, 'space' has become the culture-scape which facilitates the juxtaposition of diverse traditions and ideologies. Michel Foucault (1967) figures out the present history as the 'epoch of space.' Our experience of reality has become existential rather than historical; it should be searched in a network of relationship here-now. Postmodernists will not postulate or postpone 'meaning' to a virtual utopia in the unknown future. The art and skill of postmodernism is to celebrate the polyphony of diverse flows and stands of discourses in a creative and inclusive harmony of life's manifold expressions. Consequently, what we have is a creative ambivalence of plurality in the intricate texture of the Real!

Media and its sequent visual culture, to a large extent, caused the death knell of unilinear, centralized, and normative referent leading to a moral and cultural relativism. A visual gives birth to a creative spectrum, not a rigid center; it symbolizes, harmonizes, and upholds the variety and diversity in an incommensurable logic. It is more experiential, existential; it enhances the concrete rather than abstracts in universals. It paves way to the birth of a culture of multiple sources and fosters a multiple belonging. The universal is a 'lie'; what really exists is the inviolable and vulnerable 'concrete,' the 'individual.' A religion becomes irreligious the moment it stops to appreciate and appropriate the individual. The individual lives in a narrative of life, not in abstraction and absolutes. God is not an abstraction; God is of life. Postmodernist ethos calls for a return to the narrative to construct a new identity of human existence, inclusive, vibrant, creative and innovative right in the reality of everyday life.

b) *Narrative Communication*

In today's pluralistic world of relativity, media virtuality, randomness, and liminality of human experience, what we need is a story that gives perspective and meaning to the fragmented experiences and uprooted identities, and to make sense of the temporality. Story as a figurative language interprets us as we interpret it. By and large, the Scriptural literatures are generally narratives. They are a vast narrative canvas of polyvalent discourses of contrasting themes. The

paradoxicality of Godhead can be revealed and comprehended only on a narrative spectrum. In this context, the theme of the 2006 Asian Mission Congress calls our attention. It advocates the rationale of the return to the art and craft of a story-telling in its efforts to tell about Christ in Asia. This intrinsic approach gives primary importance to the interpretation of Jesus' life. Sadly, the Enlightenment caused the collapse of the very capacity to tell stories and to listen to stories. Today, the increasing communication technologies such as social network, Internet, and mobile revolutions have brought back the narrative communication. Religions must use this method in their communication.

What is implied and entailed in this advocacy is a radical shift from the Western normativity to narrativity. Religions, especially Christianity ahs to proactively 're-conceive' itself as a narrative entity in the present scenario of dialogue of religions, multiculturalism, media, etc., to communicate the truth of their religions. The late Pope, John Paul II in *Ecclesia in Asia* recommends an Asian narrative pedagogy which will introduce people step-by-step to the 'fullness of life' that Jesus has brought about.

c) *Experiential Communication*

In a multicultural world of today, cultural and moral relativism dominates the experiential life of people. Postmodern culture sees doubt as a form of health. It often derives meaning or excitement through experiments with sensation, sex, and drugs. At the same time, people in general and the youth of today in particular experience a great vacuum and emptiness. They search for deeper meaning and understanding of their existential situation of brokenness in family, in relationships, and in marriage. They seek understanding and compassion. In this situation religious social communication has to be existential. The religious personnel must be persons who understand the changed cultures of Asia and show compassion, forgiveness, and inclusiveness. The life of religious witness, firmness, compassion, and understanding will help the wave-ward, un-firm to see religion in a deeper way answering their existential situation created by the present world.

d) *Religious Communication through Feasts and Festivals*

Studies show that in spite of urbanization, industrialization, and modernization the religious practices of feast and festivals do not die out, rather they strengthen group solidarity, by modifying themselves and adjusting to new situations.

Feasts and festivals are related to the experiential dimensions of life. They are cultural celebrations. It is in the celebrations of the feats and festivals that a community re-experiences, re-lives, re-creates, re-tells, re-constructs and re-fashions its culture. Thus, festivals constitute a prime act of reflexivity, whereby a society gets shaped and reshaped. Thus, festivals can be considered as rites of intensification, whereby the values and solidarity of the society are enhanced.

The concept of festival embraces two modes: a) enjoyment and b) enrichment. Enjoyment (carnival) inverts the social order and leans towards breaking barriers between the rich and poor, between high and low in status, between the privileged and underprivileged. Victor Turner (1967) refers to this equalizing process in celebrations as anti-structure, which is more or less subversive of the social order. *Communitas*, that is, universal fellow feeling reigns for those who are willing to participate in the celebrations. Society looks at itself transformed. Enrichment is done by the performance of rituals and ceremonies which celebrates the past memories making it a reality today, giving meaning to human existence in the midst of death and life. It is the tension between these two dimensions of festival that gives it its warmth and power. According to Sutton-Smith (1972), the tensions between enjoyment and enrichment are the seedbeds of cultural creativity of a community. Everyone may participate in a festival because of its enjoyment element.

Studies on feasts and festivals by Milton Singer, Dell Hymes, Richard Bauman, Victor Turner, and others have shown us that feasts and festivals are not only naturally occurring units of *meaning* but are also *periods of heightened activity* when a society's presuppositions are most exposed and the core values are expressed. Through the celebrations of feasts and festivals the people involved give expression to the meanings of life which their religion, culture, and language have crystallized from the past.

The feasts and festivals are usually connected with the periodic changes; the daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly changes which are associated with changes in technology through the alternation of day and night and of the seasons. The celebration of feasts and festivals which come periodically help reinforce the habitual relations within society. E. D. Chappell and C.S. Con (1942) call these rites and ritual as "rites of intensification," since the goal of these celebrations are the strengthening of group unity.

Religious festivals illustrate the importance of the social factor in religious experience. Religious festivals include enormous gatherings. The largest festival in the world, the Maha Kumbha Mela of India, is held every twelve years, time to take place at an auspicious position of the planet Jupiter. The Maha Kumbha Mela draws 15 million participants to the banks of the Ganges River. Ascetic holy men abound, seeking the opportunity to cleanse themselves from sin by bathing at the auspicious moment, thereby obtaining merit. The major world pilgrimages also include massive festival occasions, such as Guadalupe Day (December 12), near Mexico City, where the Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego in 1531; this festival is the most heavily attended Christian pilgrimage in the world, attracting more than

five million pilgrims a year. Other religious festivals take the form of passion plays. Another type of religious festival primarily takes the form of a public procession.

In the postmodern world where there is so much ambiguity, confusion, and moral relativism, feasts and festivals give a cohesion and re-living of a culture in a changing world. Hence, religious communication should take the celebration of feasts and festivals seriously and communicates their religious worldview in a creative way to reinforce the religious convictions of people in the postmodern world.

e) Religious Communication through Rites of Passage

Every individual in a society undergoes different phases of life such as birth, puberty, adulthood, old age, and death. From birth until death human beings take up different positions in life such as childhood, youth, marriage and parenthood. All these changes and positions in life involve different responsibilities and each of these changes disturbs the individual's equilibrium in relationship within his family and society. A person's ability to handle these situations is marked with uncertainties. Hence these disturbances, which involve marked changes in the habitual interaction rates of individuals, are known as crisis (Chappelle & Coon, 1942: 484). Every culture meets those crisis situations through various rituals so that an individual from one state in his relations with other people to another state. Hence, these are marked with celebrations. A careful observation of different cultures would reveal the universality of these celebrations.

The purpose of these rituals and celebrations is to transform an individual from one stage of life to another. These rites and celebrations are seen as both indicators and vehicles of transition from one socio-cultural state and status to another— childhood to maturity, virginity to marriage, childlessness to parenthood, sickness to health, death to ancestry, and so on. These ceremonies and specific rites also play an important role in the ordering and reordering of social relations (Gluckman, 1962:4).

In Asia, still these rites of passage play an important role in the lives of individuals and families. These occasions can be very good occasions to communicate religious beliefs and value in today's world.

f) Religious Communication through Pilgrimages

Pilgrimages are related to cultural celebrations. They are one of the most powerful ways through which a community re-experiences, re-lives, re-creates, re-tells, re-constructs and re-fashions its culture. Thus, pilgrimages constitute a prime act of reflexivity, whereby a society gets shaped and reshaped.

Pilgrimages are of ancient origin in human history. They are related to the reality of human existence. As humans we experience joys and sorrows of life, holiness, and sinfulness in our being. Pilgrimages are intimately related to these dimensions

of life. There is a basic desire to be good but at the same time, the social reality of life is so complex which leads to structures of guilt, anxiety, and stress. That is why there is a longing for renewal in human hearts. Certain types of pilgrimages are related to penitential rites for self-purification.

A pilgrimage is a sacred journey. On such a journey one gets away from the reiterated "occasions of sin" which make up so much of the human experience of social structure. Nagging guilt and the desire to get relieved motivates individuals to undertake pilgrimage with the hope of purification. For many pilgrims the journey itself is something of a penance.

In short, we can say that in human life there is a tension between order (structure) and creativity to go beyond order, which disrupts order (anti-structure). In this process of structure and anti-structure, individual society, and culture get renewed. Victor Turner (1978) refers to pilgrimage as a kind of anti-structure, which is more or less subversive of the social order. **Communitas,** that is, universal fellow feeling, reigns for those who are willing to participate in the pilgrimage celebrations. It is in the tension between these two dimensions of structure and anti-structure that pilgrimage gives it its warmth and power. According to Sutton-Smith (1972), the tensions between structure and anti-structure are the seedbeds of cultural creativity of a community. Pilgrimage is an important process of this renewal and rejuvenation. They are the celebrations of life and death. A pilgrimage is an initiand, entering into a new, deeper level of existence than he has known in his accustomed milieu. The essential aspect of pilgrimage is the inward movement of the heart. The moral dimension of the pilgrimage is salvation or release from the sins and evils of the structural world. Pilgrimage, then, offers liberation from profane social structures. This paradigm will give a measure of coherence, direction, and meaning to their action in proportion to their identification with the true meaning and sincerity of the pilgrimage. Since life is a process, the need for pilgrimage is a continuous one seeking renewal and transformation until the end of one's life.

We concretely see how pilgrimages are on increase in today's world. The fast communication system also enhances the increase of pilgrimages. Hence, in this postmodern world, religions must make use of this channel to deepen the moral and ethical values of their religions.

g) Presence and Witness of Religions in the New Media

Today, there are over two billion people who use the Internet now and more than 650 million websites are in existence. In a day nearly 10,000 web pages are created, and as per the latest statistics of the British Broadcasting Company (BBC), a blog is created every second (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/4737671.stm). On an average, there are 31 billion searches on Google every month.

These technologies are integral to an emerging global culture that offers not just an effective means of communication, but immense possibilities to transcend the limits imposed by geography and national borders, and address millions of people without meeting them face-to-face.

Today, the way to connect with the emerging generations cannot be only through traditional print media, television, or radio, but online—through blogs, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter accessed on smartphones, tablets and e-readers. In his message for the 44th World Communication Day, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI highlighted how New Media could be at the service of the Word and how the Church and her members could discover new possibilities to carry out the ministry. The world of digital communication has almost limitless expressive capacity and the increasing availability of the new technologies should be made use to witness the religious values in the cyberspace. Religious presence in and through the New Media is not an option but a necessity. Religions need to be present in the world of digital communications as a faithful witness to the Gospel. For example, Fr. Robert Barron's blog, www.wordonfire.org, has hundreds of homilies, teachings, and reflections that have brought a new face to the understanding of Christianity online and provides a platform for interaction and sharing. The challenge is to be present as a leaven in this new culture of communication, using media wisely and carefully yet at the same time not substituting direct encounters and dialogues with mere virtual contacts.

h) *Dialogical Communication*

Today, in order to understand one's own religion, one should also know other religions. Surrounded by people of other faiths as we are in Asia, we must consider it an opportunity to interact closely with people of other faiths in order to deepen the knowledge of our own. Any attempt to shield ourselves from the experiences of people of various religions, or to show no interest in understanding the world views of others around us, thinking that these are good ways of insulating and protecting our own faith, is a misguided course of action. When one grows in critical thinking and observes the diversity of faiths, the inability to understand one's roots in relation to others will ultimately lead the person to complete faithlessness. One can explore other faiths only when one is rooted in one's own; and one deepens one's roots in one's own religion only when efforts are made to understand one's faith in the light of other faiths.

In the context of increasing violence, deteriorating economic situation, and ecological concerns, religions need to pool their resources to build a "new civilization of love, founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice, and liberty" (*Tertio Millenio Adveniente* 2000, No. 5). This requires inter-religious cooperation. A cooperative venture among religions in Asia to engage themselves in the liberative struggles of people is essential for social justice, human rights, gender justice, eco-equity, etc. Only by being part of people's movements and struggles for a just society can religions be envisaged in new paths and paradigms to uphold the integrity of their religions in the Asian context. Living in an information age and "speed," what is needed is to be in the process. That is possible only when we are dialogical and receptive.

Conclusion

Human beings are gifted with creativity to survive and live a meaningful life through their cultures. Discovery and inventions in human history will affect the lives of people. All the same, the deeper questions of life, like birth and death and meaning of human existence will always remain in spite of the continuous changes in the world. Communication is the essence of this human life. The modes and methods may be changing always but the deeper questions of life still remains. This is an anthropological problem and paradox. As culture creativity is a continuous process, so is religious communication. Religion which deals with the ultimate questions of life must both use the traditional communication channels like the celebration of feasts and festivals, rites of passage, pilgrimages and story-telling methods, as well as the modern means of social communication to revitalize the human spirit in the changing culture of Asia.

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Bridging Social Distance to Challenge Paternalism in Sri Lanka

Sajeeva Samaranayake

Part I

Social distance, Paternal Governance and Violence

From sovereignty to dependence

Sri Lanka is an island nation with a recorded history that stretches back to 500 BC. It possessed an advanced irrigation culture and was among the earliest repositories of the Buddha's teaching fromt the 3rd century BC. The monuments at the two ancient capitals at Anuradhapura (4th century BC-10th century AD) and Polonnaruva (1055-1215 AD) in the dry North Central Plains (Rajarata) of the country bear rich testimony to an authentic and organic culture.

After a long span of 1500 years this way of life collapsed in the 13th century. The fatal blows were delivered by a South Indian invasion led by Kalinga Magha in 1215 AD. The Lankans abandoned their *Rajarata* and began a 'drift to the South West' to find relative safety and stability in a succession of capitals from Dambadeniya in the North West to Kandy in the central highlands.

With the capital finally stabilized in Kandy from 1594, the Lankans survived against the Portuguese (1505-1656) and Dutch (1656-1796) for three centuries. These Europeans established their rule in the coastal areas but were repulsed time and again in their attempts to conquer the whole island. When the British arrived in 1796 the Kandyans lacked unity and resources to safeguard their ancient sovereignty. Thus the island became a British colony in 1815. After 133 years of foreign rule, Sri Lankans negotiated dominion status in 1948 and completed full separation from the British crown as an independent country in 1972.

Re-configuration of Buddhism

The influence of Buddhism on state and society has waned with time. In the ancient period the philosophy was well integrated as a way of life. However, with the gradual erosion of the island's political and economic sovereignty, Buddhism has made the historical transition from a *matter of values* to a *matter of identity*; from *reality* to *name*. Religiousness in the island was a *shared ethic* inspired by tolerant attitudes until exposure to Western colonialism at the turn of the 16th century. Chronic political instability since then (bar the period under the British) has reduced religion to a *badge of communal loyalty*. Thus what unified then, divides the people today.

Great departures from ancient and medieval society

This paradigm shift can also be traced directly to the social impact of two momentous events in 1215 and 1833. Mendis[1] refers to them as two great dividing lines in the history of the island. They are both points of no return coupled with uncertain directions for the future.

First, the collapse of the ancient polity in 1215 and the ensuing displacement from the heart of Sinhalese irrigation severed the people from a unique way of life organized around a special relationship with water, its storage and distribution. Political unity was lost as regionalism gained ground and only one king in the 15th century ruled the whole island for 600 years, from 1215 to 1815. The prosperity of *Rajarata* was replaced with agrarian stagnation while European colonizers spearheaded the scientific, technological, and industrial revolutions in a new age of exploration, colonization, and plunder. Spiritually, socially, and culturally, the period of creativity and innovation was over, giving birth to an epoch of internal alienation and external imitation. As Wickramasinghe elaborates:

> At the beginning of the 11th century, Ceylon became a colony of the Chola Empire. Vijayabahu I destroyed the Chola power. But from about the 12th century our rulers and the educated urban minority lost their cultural independence and became imitators of Sanskrit culture.[2] They treated their own peasants as rustics and their real Sinhala language as a vulgar tongue.[3] The borrowers and imitators of Sanskrit culture of the 13th century differed in certain respects from the borrowers and imitators of English culture only because the Sanskrit culture was not completely alien.[4]

Secondly, 18 years after the British conquest the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms of 1833 dismantled the social system itself.

The Colebrooke Reforms were historically important as they mark the transition in Ceylon from the medieval to the modern. The abolition of *rajakariya* corresponds to the break up of feudalism, and the abolition of monopolies made possible the development of commerce. The establishment of a unified form of government is similar to the developments that created nation-states in Europe. The establishment of the rule of law and the use of the printing press introduced by the Dutch became effective only as a result of other changes from medieval to modern was a *natural process* resulting from a series of events which covered more than three centuries. The Colebrooke Reforms were a series of administrative reforms, each inter connected with the others that produced similar results. The normal process is for economic changes to lead to social changes and social changes to lead to institutional changes. *In this case the process is almost reversed. Institutional changes led to economic and social changes more far reaching than any that had been experienced in Ceylon before.* The Colebrooke Reforms are thus a dividing line in Ceylon history. From them we can look back to the past, to the ancient Sinhalese and Tamil System. From them we can also look forward to the development of modern Ceylon.[5] [Emphasis added.]

Social separation and social distance

Ancient society was hierarchical and caste based. But in its time it was functional, cohesive, and constructive. It was a society that could agree upon and achieve common objectives, respond the crises and mount a defense against foreign aggression. Wickramasinghe has referred to the loss of cultural independence in the Polonnaruva period and a new social distance between the elite and the common people. This distance increased with time and was coupled with increasing rigidity in the caste structure. With the loss of irrigation culture the people also lost their highly organized cooperative work ethic needed to support the system of tanks and canals. Regional kingdoms and Western rule in the Maritime Provinces also reinforced this internal separation and alienation. British colonial policy removed the people from their natural environment and social system and subjected them to an alien institutionalized order. Thus reduced to non-beings they scrambled to become 'some bodies' within this new order; a shift from the old *unity of being* to a new *unity of becoming*. This was to establish an enduring relationship of dependency where state dominated society and government dominated the people.[6]

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[1] Medis, Garret Champness (1957) *Ceylon Today and Yesterday: The Main Currents of Ceylon History,* Colombo: Lake House.

[2] Wickramasinghe, Martin (1975) *Sinhala Language and Culture,* Tissara Press p. 34.

[3] Id p. 39, 50

[4] Id p. 35

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[5] *Op cit supra* n 1 p. 70

[6] While social distance is formalized and entrenched through a dominant language and culture, the root cause behind separation is spiritual. This in turn indicates societal imbalance and unequal integration of all component elements of a human society.

Paternal governance

The British assumption was that they could re-order Lankan society. There was also the assumption of a virtual clean slate on which the imperial power could write—almost at will.

The post-1833 challenge of re-ordering involved three key elements identified by Barry Buzan:

1. Organizing ideology of the state
2. Institutional expressions
3. The physical base of the country—population and territory[7]

The colonial government relied upon a top down process for achieving structural consistency and harmony between the state, its institutions and the people. 'Education' became the means for indoctrination in the organizing ideology of the state.

Mendis refers to a key recommendation of Colebrooke:

> He suggested the adoption of the English language for government purposes as he found Sinhalese and Tamil inadequate to satisfy modern requirements. He even went against the avowed policy of religious neutrality, and recommended that the education of the island should be entrusted to missionaries as he believed they helped the intellectual and moral advancement of the people.[8]

It is interesting to note how little this basic attitude of paternalism has changed despite 65 years of governance by the local elite which succeeded the colonials after 1948. As Keerawella points out, using a broad definition of education synonymous with social communication:

> Education is the key mechanism of production and transmission of knowledge. In that sense, education in any context is a historically conditioned political exercise. It is through this process of reproduction of culture, i.e. education that necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills are imparted and also the rules, norms and procedures related to the construction of social reality are determined.[9]

Thus, paternalism and authority (which affirmed social separation and distance)

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[7] Buzan, Barry (1991) *People, States and Fears—Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post Cold War Era*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers p. 63

[8] *Op cit supra* n 1 pp. 118/119

[9] Keerawella, Gamini (2012) 'Education, Reconciliation and Post-Colonial State Building: Need for a New Perspective' In *Dialogue* Special Issue on Crisis in Education—Focus on a Sri Lankan Experience, Ecumenical institute for Study and Dialogue p. 2

defined the new infrastructure of social and religious communication. It was influenced by the perception of a pliable society that could be fashioned and molded to fit the organizing state ideology or any other competing ideology. The gross inadequacy of this view of society and the model of communication it produced was demonstrated in a succession of youth revolts that paved the way to a new paradigm of violence.

Anti-state violence, youth alienation and triumph of ethnic nationalism

Sri Lanka has enjoyed universal adult franchise for 82 years now. The first 40 years from 1931-1971 was the liberal democratic phase. This ended with the first southern JVP insurgency in 1971. In the next 40 years the state would be locked within a cycle of violence with its own people as successive generations of Sinhalese (the second JVP insurgency took place between 1987-89) and Tamil youth (the Eelam war from 1983-2009) paid with their lives to overthrow an essentially top-down system of government.

The Presidential Commission on Youth 1990 adverted to two factors that led to a loss of youth confidence in the existing institutions of society:

a) The existing institutions have been so eroded and reduced to atrophy either by politicization or institutional paralysis that the youth do not perceive them as performing any necessary or significant function in society. Consequently ideologies which capture their interest and imagination often have a predominant element of anti-institutional bias.

b) Youth grievances and representations are not accorded any substantial place in these institutions which have not effectively developed systems ensuring some degree of sensitivity to the changing nuances and priorities of youthful aspirations.[10]

After the final suppression of anti-state rebellion in 2009 the state has tightened its control over the media as a whole. Thus the following observation is more real today than when first made 20 years ago:

> A media system that functions closely under State control cannot credibly promote freedom of expression, nor can it facilitate public access to information at the level of choice. It is not only a problem of ownership or control but also an ethical issue because, if the very modality which seeks to protect and promote a particular freedom imperils or constrains it, there is no moral basis for its existence.[11]

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[10] Report on Presidential Commission on Youth, Seasonal Paper No. 1 of 1990 p. 8

[11] Gumawardena, Victor (1993) 'A regional perspective on current developments in broadcasting: some political, ethical, and technological issues' in D. Wesumperuma and C.S. Ranasnghe (Eds.) *Mass Communication in Sri Lanka: some salient aspects—Seminar Report*, Friedrich-Erbert-Stiftung: Sri Lanka Foundation Institute p. 10

The final result of chronic conflict and violence since 1971 has been the emergence of an all-powerful, authoritarian state. It is currently engaged in the political task of reconstructing an organizing ideology based on ethnic nationalism; shaping institutional expressions in an effort to re-make society *once more*. What is remarkable is that the social distance between the powerful and powerless in society has now reached an all-time high.

Part II

Stalemate between parochialism and secularization

Secular challenge to religion

The British period marked a shift of emphasis from religion to scientific technology as the dominant influence on society. Buddhist priests and clergy from other religions who had been the sole professionals, teachers and cultural specialists were now facing the exponential growth of secular professions with equal or greater prestige with the emergence of and English educated middle class.

English became the vehicle for secularizing thought—a powerful edifice that supported the new scientific forces of modernization in communication and transport that Lankans were beginning to experience in the 19th century.

Secularism was a long drawn out historical process that flowered with the Age of Reason or Enlightenment in Europe in the 18th century. It 'consisted of a serious attempt to construct a rational explanation of the universe on the basis of scientific or experimental knowledge and to control it through technology.'[12]

It was a sophisticated intellectual movement that sought on the one hand to liberate all fields of knowledge and learning comprised under arts, sciences and morality from the historic domination of religious thought and symbolism. On the other hand, it was a profoundly religious or moral enterprise that pursued the 'perfectibility of man, not by scientific progress alone, but also by social action.'[13]

Madan quotes the works of Kant[14]

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without

[12] Madan, T.N. (1997) *Modern Myths, Locked Minds: Secularism and Fundamentalism in India,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 10

[13] Id

[14] Id p. 11

the guidance of another...The motto of the enlightenment is therefore: *Sapere aude*! Have the courage to use your own understanding!

In this confident quest 'the emphasis no longer was on the sacred things beyond, but on *saecularis*, or lasing worldly things judged as values, and on *saeculum*, or our age, here and now.'[15]

Confronted with these intellectual and moral claims coupled with the organizational might of the British Empire, the Lankans faced an unprecedented ideological challenge. Hitherto they had relied upon the oral medium for transmission of culture through stories, poems, proverbs and religious chants. Writing and reading were the perverse of nobles, both secular and spiritual. The oral medium was supplemented by pilgrimages to sacred sites and periodic religious festivals that included spectacular pageants and merit making ceremonies. Another feature of this cultural world was its insulation—given the marginality of Lanka as an island on the edge of the Indian sub-continent.

According to Martin Wickramasinghe (1890-1976):

The Sinhalese have a very liberal religion.. But they had a very poor literature in their own language and a spiritual culture at its lowest ebb when they came in contact with the European nations.[16]

Significantly, it was English that catalysed the revitalization and secularization of both Sinhalese and Tamil languages—influencing them as deeply as Sanskrit had done in the past.[17]

Brotherhood postponed

The Lankans were coming to grips with a *new human relational paradigm* as a subjugated people. Secular thinking required a detached, scientific and empirical approach shorn of parochial sentiment. Indians, guided by figures like Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Tagore and Gandhi rose to the challenge to mould a freedom movement that integrated these new lines of thought. Lankans, meanwhile, were stuck with issues of class, religion and caste *inter se*.

The printing press, public debate and promotion of denominational education were the cornerstones of religious revivals staged—separately by the Lankan Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims in the 19th century. Cultural independence was not restored. Instead dependency was affirmed in two respects. One was the old dependence on exclusive religious symbols, ceremonies, rituals, places of worship and pilgrimage; the other was a new dependence on the conveniences of material technology coupled

[15] Id

[16] Wickramasinghe, Martin (1952) *Aspects of Sinhalese Culture,* Martin Wickramasinghe Trust p. 88

[17] De Silva, K.M. (1981) *A History of Sri Lanka,* Oxford University Press, New Delhi p. 479

with a lack of attention to *internal change, grown and self-cultivation.* Authentic externals coupled with the power of new technology became the path of religious revivalism ignoring the centrality of internal authenticity and liberation.

Internal reform on a foundation of egalitarianism thus took a back seat to resisting the Christian missionaries. The result was religious stratification of the masses who were encouraged to remain parochial while acquiring some secular credentials like literacy.

This would establish an abstract mode of education and a structure of awareness that would alienate the lettered from the unlettered. The fortunate few would relate to and understand the deprived masses, less through direct contact and dialogue and more through 'news' created by newspapers and government broadcasting. As Mendis observed,

> ...the river of life as a whole stirred little. The current moved mainly on the surface and did not penetrate very much deeper than the English-educated middle class with its new ideas, new economic interests and new forms of life.[18]

This explains how Wickramasinghe was able to make the following, rather idealistic observation about Sinhalese villagers in 1952:

> Sinhalese culture in the villages, in spite of all variations and mutations under Western influence still survives as an integrated whole. It is Apollonian in its pattern; all extreme forms of behaviour are excluded, ceremonies are very few and simple and free from ritual and extravagance. Their funeral rites are the most simple. They have no customs to encourage the individual or the family to excess and violence in grief, and elaborate rituals for the dead. The middle path is their way of life. Seeking vision by self-torture or by means of drugs, alcohol, sex, mysticism and witch hunting and other forms of excesses have been shunned by the Sinhalese villagers as the lowest forms of vices. Most of these, however, are integrated elements of Hindu culture, because Hindu religion embraces the highest and noblest forms of mysticism with the extreme forms of self-torture, blood sacrifice and sensual indulgence by which the individual is encouraged to seek the vision of reality.[19]

The shadow of this positive rendering is of course the *separation and alienation* between English and vernacular educated people that the colonial policy produced, religious revivalism reinforced and post-colonial governments maintained. This was to lead in the 1970s to a paradigm of violence where the observations of Wickramasinghe have been turned on their head by a new culture of extreme competition, hatred and

[18] *Op cit supra* n. 1 pp. 118/119
[19] *Op cit supra* n. 16 p. 25

self-destruction.

Pseudo-modernization

The full benefit of free education was withdrawn from underprivileged children consigned to mono-lingual schools while a quality bi-lingual education was limited to the privileged few. This maintained social inequality in society. It also ensured that modern mass media like radio, film and newspapers would be separated along the same lines reinforcing ethnic separation.

The enlightened nationalist dream of creating a bilingual, patriotic national intelligentsia rooted in the local milieu and at the same time capable of transcending parochial and national boundaries was shattered by the emergence of an ideologically dominant monolingual rural intelligentsia. The introduction of free education in the early 1940s and its rapid expansion after independence did not expand bilingual education as policy makers adopted the most expedient strategy of extending monolingual education throughout the country. This in effect confirmed the overwhelming majority of rural youths to entho-linguistically segregated monolingual schools, while a tiny majority of youth from privileged social strata acquired a bilingual education from urban schools.[20] Hettige concludes:

> Modernization theorists assumed that traditional societies once exposed to modernising forces like modern education, mass media, political participation and new technologies through extension services, would rapidly move towards modernity. It was also assumed that, on their way to modernity, these societies would gradually evolve into modern nation states based on principles of modern social organization such as universalism, functional specialization and affective neutrality. However, in spite of the introduction of mass education and mass media, widespread political participation and the emergence of modern forms of divisions of labor, many of these societies have not emerged as modern nation states. At least part of the explanation for this failure can be found in the fact that the potential modernizing forces have been "used" in these countries to reinforce rather than to soften traditional identities and primordial loyalties.[21]

Religious communication has followed this pattern in general commencing with the revivals in the British period. Consequently social distance within communities and cultural distance between religious communities has been maintained. The use of new communication technology has been confined to ensuring the survival and maintenance

[20] Hettige, S.T. (1998) 'Pseudo-modernization and formation of youth identities in Sri Lanka' In Hettige, S.T. (ed. *Globalization, Social Change and Youth* German Cultural Institute Colombo and Center for Anthropological and Sociological Studies, University of Colombo p. 15.
[21] Id p. 13

of religious forms. Their spiritual growth and the development of a broader inter-faith dialogue with appropriate use of ICT awaits fundamental changes at individual and social levels.

The Household Survey on Computer Literacy (E-readiness of households) 2006/07[22] reported that computer literacy has risen to 16.1% up from 9.7% in 2004. The digital divide is following established patterns of non-participation in non-urban settings and among the less-educated. Computer literacy was 25.1% in urban sector, and 15.1% and 4.3% respectively for rural and estate sectors.

The study shows that 8.2% of all households in Sri Lanka now possess a personal computer—a figure up from 3.8% in 2004. In the Western Province, 16.4% of households have computers. Among households that have computers. Among households that have computers, 27.3% have the e-mail facility which implies that only 2.3% of all households have e-mail access from home. However, this is an increase from 0.9% in 2004. The government has taken steps to reduce this divide by setting up computer resource centers around the country. For example, the *Nenasala* Project of the ICT Authority established 600 centers in all districts covering both urban and rural areas. One-fourth of households covered in the e-readiness survey indicated that at least one member of their households was aware of such facilities in their localities.[23]

This data is mildly encouraging, albeit unremarkable. However, much depends on the front runners who are working to challenge the moral-intellectual vacuum that reigns in the heart of Sri Lankan society guarding the stalemate between the old and the new. The past is dead and the future is yet to be. However, our protagonists are locked in battle within these two mind-made domains. It is not by taking positions on 'what ought to be' but by engaging with 'who we are' and 'what is' that we can move forward. That means being present—a country where there is no social distance.

Part III

How ICTs can help us bridge our social distance

The lengthy shadows of Black July

The anti-Tamil riots of July 1983 provoked by the ambush and killing of 13 Sinhala soldiers by the LTTE was a watershed in the relationship between the two communities in Sri Lanka. It also heralded three decades of blood shed that claimed many thousands

of lives. In August 2013, *Groundviews*, the local citizen journalism website, organized a wide ranging reflection on the theme "30 Years Ago: How ICTs are changing Sri Lanka."[24] Quoting Rajan Hoole they added one more question to a long list of unanswered (even unanswerable) questions in contemporary Sri Lanka.

> …[Bradman] Weerakoon himself pointed to the violence engulfing Colombo on Monday, Kandy on Tuesday, Badulla on Wednesday and Passara on Thursday, the delay roughly corresponding with distance from Colombo, and offered his own explanation. He associated it with news passed on by travellers, say someone going from Kandy to Badulla and instigating others, "See what the Sinhalese in Kandy did to the Tamils, where is our patriotism, are we not going to do our bit for our race?

Today, ethno-political violence spreads at the speed of Twitter and SMS, but so can more conciliatory, peaceful messaging and content. The same tools used by the BBS, Sinhala Ravaya and many sections of the government for hate, harm and hurt are those already used, or can be used to strengthen democracy by bearing witness, create and increase community resilience, communicate counter-narratives and dispel rumours.

Thirty years on, does Sri Lanka's coast-to-coast connectivity help or hinder that which gave rise to Black July?

Search for identity

Meanwhile the search for identity *through violence* continues. The conclusion of the war in 2009 only hardened the paradigm of violence. Those in positions of power—secular and spiritual—remain committed to top-down communication and view people as power bases and vote banks. They have not sought to share any of their power with the people. Communication without sharing, without a spirit of giving, is simply self-assertion and a form of aggression. Wittgenstein said that conversation is the essence of humanity. Sri Lankans have the challenge of measuring up to their standard now.

Balancing technologies

In Sinhalese culture there is a statement that refers to a balance and harmony of technologies achieved with the old irrigation culture: "wewai daagebai" "gamai pansalai." This refers to the tank and stupa—the village and temple. The idea is that material technology must always be balanced with spiritual technology.

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[22] Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, http://www.statistics.gov.lk/CLS/computer%20literacy%20english.pdf
[23] Id

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[24] Groundviews, http://groundviews.org/2013/08/18/30-years-ago-how-icts-are-changing-sri-lanka/

From the very beginnings of mankind our capacity for communication was pressed into service for two objectives. The first related to the challenges of living: food, shelter, clothing, and even love and companionship. The second related to the challenge of *life itself*; understanding its purpose and meaning. The first quest began with the fashioning of tools and weapons, the discovery of fire, etc., and developed into a science of matter. The second developed into a religious and philosophical quest. Both approaches developed procedures and methods that were tried, tested and refined and then made a part of ordinary work and life. This integration turned nascent science and spirituality into *technologies* which served our common cause.

However, the effective transmission of technology across generations takes place with greater ease in the case of knowledge pertaining to *control of matter* than with regard to *control of consciousness*. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi explains:

> ...the kind of knowledge—or wisdom—one needs for emancipating consciousness is not cumulative. It cannot be condensed into a formula; it cannot be memorized and then routinely applied. Like other complex forms of expertise, such as a mature political judgment or a refined aesthetic sense, it must be earned through trial-and-error experience by each individual, generation after generation. Control over consciousness is not simply a cognitive skill. At least as much as intelligence, it requires the commitment of emotions and will. It is not enough to *know* how to do it; one must *do* it, consistently in the same way as athletes or musicians who must keep practicing what they know in theory. And this is never easy. Progress is relatively fast in fields that apply knowledge to the material world, such as physics or genetics. But it is painfully slow when knowledge is to be applied to modify our own habits and desires.

Secondly, the knowledge of how to control consciousness must be reformulated every time the cultural context changes.[25]

Thus every generation has a critical role to play in the review and redeployment of human values. When this capacity has atrophied and the spirit is absent, spiritual and social dynamism remains in abeyance adding to the accumulation of toxic negativity within the collective psyche of the people.

In the words of Paul Tillich, "It is obvious that the spirit, that is, the creative, dynamic power of the soul, is not a matter of construction. If spirit is lacking, no construction can possibly produce it. It either is or is not active in individuals or in groups. But if it is active, it creates a body for itself through which it can be manifested and act. Words, forms of life and social institutions, works of culture and religious symbols,

are the embodiments of the spirit. And these are subject to conscious cultivation and reconstruction. We refer to them when we speak of 'spiritual reconstruction after the war.'"[26]

He identifies the key errors perpetuated by the traditionalists and modernists in Sri Lanka—during and after the colonization:

> Spiritual tendencies should not be accepted simply because they belong to a given historical structure (here positivism is wrong). Neither should general principles be imposed on a spiritual situation which has no organ of receiving them (here idealism is wrong). Much wisdom is needed to avoid these two mistakes, which threaten every reconstruction. The second task, equally important, is the protection of the creative trends of the spirit against distortion and corruption. With respect to the spirit of the Asiatic nations and largely with respect to Russia, this protective task is practically the only one which is demanded of us... Nothing spiritual can be given to the human spirit for which it is not prepared.[27] (Emphasis added)

All communicate—few connect

"Social communication" and "religious communication" with their connotations of detachment, openness and freedom are luxuries for people struggling for political emancipation. It can also be a luxury for those who possess great power.

In his book on Gandhi and Churchill, Arthur Herman notes a revealing admission by Churchill: "When I was subaltern, the Indian did not seem to me equal to the white man," Churchill recalled in 1952. It was an attitude that, he belatedly come to realize, had hurt the Raj.

Then he said something unlike anything he had ever said about India: "if we had made friends with them and taken them into our lives instead of restricting our intercourse to the political field, things might have been very different." That regretful musing was a final landmark on a long journey. The opening that Gandhi had wanted had finally appeared—but too late for either of them.[28]

This separation was precisely the violence that Gandhi identified and resisted all his life; the internal separations and distinctions between our spiritual, social and political aspects and the resultant failure to engage as wholesome human beings. While Gandhi implemented a seamless connectivity between these aspects

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[25] Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (1991) *Flow*, Harper Perennial p. 21

[26] Religion Online http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=380&C=105

[27] Id

[28] Herman, Arthur (2008) *Gandhi and Churchill: The Epic Rivalry that Destroyed an Empire and forged our Age*. London: Arrow Books, p. 97-99.

of his life, his Westernized counterparts and colleagues would hide themselves behind a cold professional façade.

In Sri Lanka communication technology is perceived as yet another tool of the powerful to be directed against the powerless. On the contrary, it is in truth a common resource for both the *apparently* powerful and the *apparently* powerless so that they can both cast aside their delusions in simple friendship. Such humility is essential for information and communication technology to be viewed as the *technology of powerless humanity* so that it can strive to achieve true power in human connection by bridging the social distances we have created. Until then what we refer to as 'social and religious communication' will lack soul and essence.

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Challenges for Religious Communication in New Social Structures and Cultural Forms of Modern Society in the Vietnamese Context

Anh Vu Ta

Background

Vietnam is a socialist one-party system state ruled by the Communist Party of Vietnam. In the last 25 years, the country has made an impressive economic development. In fact, the government launched in 1986 a political and economic renewal program called ĐỔI MỚI (renovation or reform) which changes from a centralized economy to a so-called socialist-oriented market economy. This step brings Vietnam out of isolation from the outside world and leads it to join the world economy. In 2010, Vietnam reached the status of a lower middle income country. In the course of national development, Vietnam ambitiously strives for becoming a modern industrial country by 2020. The progress is continuing.

This modernization process, however, causes significant changes in societal perspective and inevitably in cultural perspective. As the country opens itself to the outside world, mainly for the sake of economic development, it comes to experience international encounters. The process of globalization in many respects affects the Vietnamese society as well as its cultural life. Moreover, modern forms of social communication definitely contribute to cultural and societal changes in Vietnam. This has repercussion in preserving and communicating traditional values. In this context, the paper will reflect on new social structures and cultural forms created by modern development in Vietnam and facilitated by modern social communications. It will consider the dynamics of this changing process and the consequences for communicating religious values whereby the reflection is limited to the situation of the Christian community as an example in the entity of religious communities living in Vietnamese society.

Changes in Social Structures and Cultural Forms

In the course of industrialization in the last 25 years in Vietnam, industrial parks have been built up in the periphery of the two metropolitans Hanoi and Saigon, and other big cities of Vietnam. The government tries to build up these so called "Industrial Centers" as many as possible. ,This step of modernization has brought about great change in the basic structure of the Vietnamese society. The basic structure of the Vietnamese society is the village community which is determined and influenced by agricultural mentality: the pace of life, the circumstances of life, the perception, the work, symbolic expressions etc., are mostly influenced by this mentality. In village society the culture, or symbolic repertoire, was reasonably homogeneous and the boundaries of culture and community were largely coterminous. However, people now flock to the newly built industrial parks in order to look for a new chance of life with better job and opportunities in education and other life aspirations. Among them, most are young people. This leads to a new situation for the community as well as for the people who settle themselves to a new place.

Firstly, many village communities experience a change in their social setting. Young people and persons of middle age are missing because they have gone looking for jobs in modern cities. Only few of them can do the work in the land which is left behind by their family members. The social and cultural ecology gets imbalanced. In social and cultural point view, there is a lack of a smooth communicating process between generations. In other words, there is a lack of 'potential bearers' of traditional goods and values. One will see that only old people and children remain in those communities. In addition, people in these provinces somehow come in contact with modern society through modern communications. This mostly happens in young generation. Their family members or community members who are working in modern areas bring back new cultural elements. In this way the community learns new lifestyles, new thoughts, new world with different values, norms, patterns, etc. They still live in their old cultural and social context, but somehow affected by new modern cultural elements. All these aspects make communicating of traditional goods and values difficult.

Secondly, people who left their hometown in order to look for a new job come to new places where the life and the work conditions, and the social environment are totally different. In a modern society affected by globalization, people live in multicultural situations, and cultural repertoires are used in different ways in different institutional contexts. Further, the situation is different in the network of relationships. In this new context they are no longer who they were, but are also not the original people there. They are "in between."[1] The ways of life, the

symbolic languages, the view, the life patterns, norms, etc., which they have been accustomed to at home are different to the new situation. A transforming progress of uprooting and acculturation begins. James Lull's words may be used to describe the situation:

> The challenge for people today is to navigate and combine an unprecedented range of cultural territories and resources ranging from relatively unfamiliar terrain imported to the self through technological mediations and human migrations of various types, to territory that is far more familiar and stable, such as that offered by religion, nation, and family, in order to invent combinations that satisfy individual's changing needs and preferences.[2]

In this context, it is essentially about the matter of caring for, of shaping or transforming the identity of individuals, of a communal unity, and certainly of a religious community. The consequences are profound. In a multi-cultural, multi-religious modern society, traditional institutions like religions, existing social organizations, governmental organizations, to mention a few face an unprecedented challenge in communicating their values and orders which are hitherto prevalent to their societies. Modern technologies contribute to the complexity of the problems and challenges most especially. Cultural information, symbolic forms and ideas. can easily be reproduced, edited, and presented through modern communications. This leads to different ways of interpretation and perception of the individual which challenge traditional patterns of thought, perception, belief and values. Within this context, religion provides an interpretation of human life. It proffers values through which people may come up with issues happening in their lives, and those values determine social interaction among them. However, the new situation requires high sensitivity and patient attentiveness to explain the meaning of life in a multicultural and multi-religious context, because there are other layers of meaning in the conception of culture and religious belief and values of the people today.

Changes in the Perspective of Social Communication

New social structures and new cultural forms bring along new ways of communicating in society. Before the stage of modernization, Vietnamese people have mostly lived in an ordered relation, determined by the large family, neighborhood, village community, and community of the adherents of a religion. Within this order they acquired communicative forms, such as interpersonal communication, face-to-

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[1] Cf. Franz-Josef Eilers, *Communicating between Cultures: An Introduction to Intercultural Communication*, 4th ed. (Manila: Divine Logos Publications Inc., 2012), 132-133. Based on Victor Turner, Eilers describes the people "in between" as those "who may be initiands or novices in passage from one social cultural stage and status to another, or even whole populations undergoing transition… are 'neither here nor there.'"

[2] James Lull, ed., *Culture in the Communication Age*, (London and New York: Routledge 2001), 138.

face communication, group communication, communication through ritual forms developed by the village community, or existing in religious communities. Values and cultural goods have been communicated by oral communication or traditional ways. The religious community is the most important place where different ways are used to convey religious values, e.g. in liturgical celebrations through performing dances, storytelling, performing dramas, music, through entertainment plays which have traditional characters of Vietnamese culture. In these communicative activities, cultural elements are also used to transmit faith content, and in this way cultural goods are handed down.

These kinds of social communication become less when many people abandon their home place in order to seek for better life conditions. There is a lack of young people and people of middle age in almost village communities who mediate between the old generation and children in the cultural perspective as 'potential bearers' in communicating cultural and religious values as it was in the past. This disparate social setting leads to cultural impoverishment. In addition, the adolescents who still live at home come into contact with other worlds through modern means of social communication such as TV, magazines, and the Internet. They gather information, different values, and new concepts. This creates a big cultural gap between the old and the young generation. In a cultural perspective, the meanings, symbolic forms, and the ways they communicate are much different.

People who work far away come home and bring new life styles, new perspective, values and norms from their workplace and new life circumstance. It is interesting to follow the way my nephews organize their work as they come home. They have foreign colleagues, specifically French. They have learned the way how those people organize their work and time, the way they think, and how they behave. My nephews have given up the sense of time they have acquired in their local setting. Time has been more "flexible" and oriented on events of life. They have adjusted to new cuisine, ways of expression, and habits of daily life in the modern city. Sometimes they somehow feel nostalgic of certain things in the past, but they will not come back to the old life context.

In modern society, where international cooperation, collaboration, and encounters happen, people can clearly see the traits of globalization. There is no longer a pure Vietnamese culture. There are experiences of multi-ethnic and multi-national culture as well as multi-religious experiences. Many young people told me of their feelings of confusion, of helplessness, sometimes of fear. It is hard to distinguish various elements from the other. All things seem to be right and just in a certain context. Because of this, it is not easy for them to make a choice. They look for fellow men who come from the same locale and organize themselves to a group in order to support each other. They establish a website for regular connecting. They develop a way of dealing with modes, codes, and processes in the new context.

From their social and cultural background, they individually combine the values and social practices from the local culture with elements and forms they have acquired in the new circumstance, which they consider as meaningful, and create for themselves a resource in living with the new social context. Just whatever makes sense to them in that situation they choose. In the group (of the same local) they share this experience of developing ways to come up with life. James Lull calls the 'product' in this communicative cultural process as *superculture*. "Supercultures are customized clusters, grids, and networks of personal relevance—intricate cultural multiplexes that promote self-understanding, belonging, and identity while they grant opportunities for personal growth, pleasure, and social influence."[3]

In this complex situation of social communication, religion faces many problems, too. Religious values, patterns, perceptions, and norms are no more received as all-embracing reality. What religion proffers for guiding a life is now considered only as one of the many ways of life which people experience. Many traditional religious symbolic forms and expressions seem to lose their power. People of modern time undergo other lifestyles, encounter other symbolic forms, look for other ritualistic events, and have other rhythms of life and world views. But there is also a chance when religious communities consider that one of their fundamental tasks is to accompany human persons in their lives, and to help them discover the meaning of life. Even if there are many layers of meaning in conception of life today, religion assists them to find the meaning of "meanings," and in this way to see the life in full coherency. In other words, religion proffers 'another version' of life from which people can see their true identity. To be able to perform this task, a religious community has to grasp the relation between religion and communication: the context in which religion and social communication interrelate to each other, precisely "in which context of social communication is religion situated?" and "what consequences does this situation create for religious communication?" the way religion uses to approach human beings in the context of human social communication, and the goal of religious communication.

Challenge in Correlation of Connectivity and Community

One should be aware of an important factor that in the course of modernization and globalization national culture doesn't exist anymore. In the same condition, local cultures no longer exist in the perspective of cultural life and activities of different communities in the Vietnamese society. Even in remote areas, people are connected with the 'distant' world. The young generation who is computer-mediated comes in touch with other values, norms, and expectations. The common frame work of customs, ways of communicating, tools, and lifestyle is no longer shared by the whole community. People still live together in the same place, but they are divided into different groups according to their social relationships as well as cultural connectivity.

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[3] James Lull, ed., *Culture in the Communication Age*, 132.

Among the young people, virtual online communities emerge through Internet-facilitated social networks. People living far from each other are now connected online, exchanging information, sharing interests and hobbies, studying together, etc. In this situation religious communities are challenged on how to maintain the community in which different groups of people can live harmoniously together. In order to give people a sense of belonging to the community, many aspects should be considered: how to celebrate religious rituals, how to integrate experiences of people into religious celebration, how to filter out negative influences on social life and cultural life of the people, and how to integrate new values, norms, forms, etc. into the existing system so that it can become an enrichment. Religious values, for example those speak for "commonness," "human dignity," "harmony," "solidarity," "authenticity," "respect," and "tolerance," may be used as catalysts in this changing process. This is also a question of the goal of religious communication at what it wants to aim and especially how it considers the human person in the process of social communication.

Challenge in Forms of Communicating

Religion as the source of interpretation of life delivers a set of ideas, images, symbols, stories, and theories. By doing this, religion aims at explaining and illustrating what life is about, what the meaning of life is, and in this way provides guidance on how to live life. However, in contemporary multi-cultural and multi-religious society, many beliefs and visions are disseminated. Modern means of social communication, in particular, accelerate the spreading of those beliefs and values. Communications of religious values happen in the former time through traditional means such as oral culture, text-culture, and religious celebrations and activities mostly on the interpersonal level. In Christian perspective, it is important to note that communicating religious values is often a one-way communication. Franz-Josef Eilers illustrates the situation in the following graphic:[4]


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                    SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

              ↑              ↑              ↑

        ┌──────────────┬──────────────┬──────────────┐
        │ Interpersonal/│              │   Social     │
        │  Cultural    │ (Mass) Media │  Networks    │
        ├──────────────┼──────────────┼──────────────┤
        │ Producer &   │   Consumer   │  Pro-sumer   │
Receiver as →│ Consumer  │              │              │
        └──────────────┴──────────────┴──────────────┘
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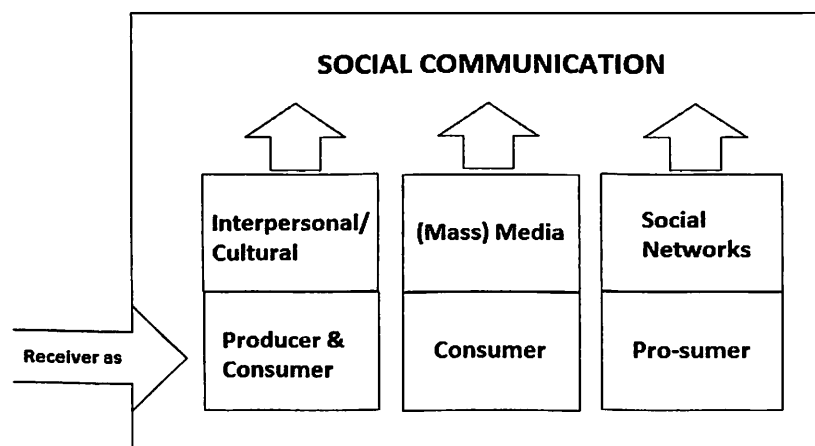
[4] Franz-Josef Eilers, "Inter Mirifica: Vatican II Decree on Social Communication 50 Years, Origin – Reception – Challenges," in: *Religion and Social Communication*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2013, 71.

Through modern means of social communication, a variety of styles and variants in symbolic exchange is brought about. In mass communications like books, magazines, newspapers, radio, television, etc., people now are somehow 'passive.' They receive pictures, images for examples, from television as transmitted to them and often have identified all these as 'reality' itself. "Television images, unlike high art, are public, shared symbols. For many people they answer the questions 'Who am I?' and 'Who are we?' Moreover, under this giant canopy of images all denominations and religious traditions are exposed to the same framing of reality."[5] It is also important to note that because of this bewildered situation people tend to individually choose what is more easily fitting to them in order to create an individual concept of life.

The situation in modern social networks is different. People now actively participate in a new form of social exchange enabled by the Internet. From their cultural and social setting of the past, people now face new forms, orders, customs, norms and values which they have gained in encounter with other different individuals and groups. In this interaction they come to know new forms of communicating and symbolic exchange. From different cultural spheres[6] such as universal values, religions, international sources, civilizations, nations, regions, and everyday life, they create new symbols and concepts, and at the same time new culture among themselves. According to Eilers, the persons who are involved in modern social networks are now prosumers.[7] They use cultural elements of modern communications, affected by them and create from there "new culture."

Challenge in the Choice of People in Different View Points

People in modern societies are confronted with problems like short-term jobs, changing partners and families, mobility, anonymous neighborhood and throwaway material goods. In addition, societies feature distraction, sensations, promises of pleasures, happiness, or successfulness, etc. In this context different lifestyles are offered, different trends are shown. All these aspects challenge modern human beings in their search for an integral life; they even make themselves confused in seeking for a real meaning of their life. Because of that individual persons feel it difficult to make a right choice. Reality is complex, the perception is fragmented and therefore the approach is pragmatic and individually selective.

One major task that religion has to do in contemporary society is to provide ways through which individuals may regain a sense of self in order to return to their center and experience the core of their personhood. In this way religion assists individuals in interpreting the meaning of their lives, giving criteria for reflecting life experiences

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[5] James McDonnell and Frances Trampiets, eds., *Communication Faith in a Technological Age*, (Middlegreen, England: St Paul Publications, 1989), 58.

[6] James Lull, ed., *Culture in the Communication Age*, 139.

[7] Franz-Josef Eilers, "Inter Mirifica: Vatican II Decree on Social Communication 50 Years, Origin – Reception – Challenges," in: *Religion and Social Communication*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2013, 72.

and events in the wholeness of the human person. In this perspective religious community is now faced with a multi-dimensional task:

1. Religion or religious community still has to prove itself as a resource which provides guidelines and directions for people in conducting their individual life based on their values.

2. For this reason, religion has to deepen those values regarding new social communication in order to re-formulate them in the new context. This needs proper perception and analysis of new forms of social structures and communications.

3. From there, religious community accompanies people in their life with the variety of their experiences. It has to be there in their problems, experiences, and aspirations. It helps them to see the reality beyond realities. In this way, it aims at strengthening them in their seeking for the meaning of life and at empowering in their attempt of resolving important life issues.

4. Finally, religion when authentically and prudently assisting people in finding the meaning of life, also contributes to develop meaningful ways of social communication that promote human life, human person and the whole of society. It could offer other ways of communicating and of interaction among human beings.

Some Considerations

All efforts made in Vietnam now are concentrated on the economic growth; also the foreign countries consider their support programs for Vietnam under economic perspective, although they call such support as contributions to social development in Vietnam. Their programs mainly aim at training and educating people in order to provide them the skills fitting to new technological demands. In the context of the Vietnamese society, it is urgent to look at the imbalance of social and cultural ecology caused by industrialization and urbanization. Religious communities find themselves in the task of how to keep the community alive as well as possible. In this perspective, the question is how to re-structure, re-organize the communities in order to preserve the cultural and religious goods. Perhaps a fusion of different groups to a new unity is necessary so that organization of community life and activities may be possible and easier. However, there is a need to study seriously the cultural, social, and religious tradition of those locals in order to gain an entire picture of the locality. For example, one has to look for the 'resource persons' of those locals, who still live there, in order to collect elements of their heritage to analyze and re-evaluate in order preserve that cultural heritage. People concerned should be made aware of their situation and be invited to dialogue on how to build a possible way to cope with the situation. Further, various religious activities like before may not be performed anymore because of the lack of personnel and participants, but one can pointedly organize some activities locally, and other joint programs for the whole region. There can be a chance of mutual learning and enriching.

In the new context of social communication, religious community needs people who are aware of their identity shaped by their belief, values, and way of life of that community. At the same time these people should be able to understand the language, symbolic expressions, trends of modern society whether they are valuable or ephemeral. In this way, they understand how people think, express themselves, and act. On this level they can approach them in order to share their view, values, their interpretation of the events, and their experience how they deal with the things.

There is one experience I would like to share here. We accompany groups of young people who have gone to modern cities for work or for education. There we see a chance coming out from initiatives of those young people. They organize themselves to a group in order to strengthen themselves and to preserve their identity. They establish a website through which they share with each other how they understand their 'culture' and new experience of how they see themselves in relation to their cultural perspective, and how they now try to come up with this situation. In this way, they introduce other people to their 'culture' and also bring new perspective. We help them filter out positive and negative aspects. In their encounter with young people in the new place, they sometimes celebrate festivities and perform some dances, dramas, and the like which they have learned at home. When they come home to visit in holidays, they combine social activities like helping the poor, cutting hair for poor children, giving school materials to them with performance of dances, mime and play. Some of the elements reflex the life situation of their new place, but conceals communications of religious values. Such activities and groups are still in small numbers because the government restricts those activities. However, there is in my point of view a need to establish and promote those people and their works. Based on that, we may develop some programs and concepts that can promote communications in cultural and religious perspective. It is necessary to note here that each group of persons needs another care and way of accompanying according to the social, cultural and psychological setting of the group. In our complex situation of social communication, we need different small groups of different people who are involved in different life situations. These groups, provided with proper formation and accompaniment, will particularly contribute to communicating religious values in the midst of multi-cultural and multi-religious modern society.

From my observation, there is another important aspect: the choice of the language for a communication in its context. The language used in digital communication is often short, precise, and somehow reflexes daily life experiences of people. I read many stories which are shared among people in Facebook.

These stories are very short, telling events in daily life which happen in families, in the school, at workplace, in nursing home, and so forth that give experience of humaneness, loyalty, trustworthiness, friendship and love. People "like" these stories much. Maybe, I think, these stories are a kind of modern parable. I tried to write some stories in the similar way and shared them to my Facebook friends. I have realized that these people are very much touched by these stories. They have given many positive feedback. In communicating religious values, I believe that we need to do research in this area: the language in the net, the perception of the people, the symbols used, and the like. In this way we can come to know their expressions, their way of thinking, their language, in order to be able to interpret their message and to understand its meaning. After this we can share our interpretation of that message in the light of religious values. Maybe, on this avenue we come to the joint meaning that leads to the understanding of the full meaning of what religion aims at giving. In other words, authenticity, openness, and sensibility are key terms in religious communications: being authentic to one's belief, being open to people, and being sensible to them (both involve humbleness and respect) will help us in communicating our values to other people. This calls for building an inner disposition we need in communications. At the same time, religious communicators should develop communication competence in dealing with all the requirements for communicative exchange in modern social communication. For this reason, there is a need to build a new concept in formation of religious communicators since they will be involved in a multifaceted task.

I traveled to Vietnam and spent two days only to visit several bookstores in SaiGon and to look for books on sociological or social studies or studies on culture in Vietnam. These were great bookstores that offer different kinds of book. However, it was hard for me to find some books of my interest. There seems to be no particular literature about sociological or social studies in the present time of Vietnam. I only found one or two books dealing with the fundamentals of sociology for new students in universities. Admittedly, there are some books on cultures in the Vietnamese society, but they mainly deal with the introduction to fairs or folk festivals in several locations. These books are rather descriptive opuses than analytical and critical studies. I found some articles in newspapers and magazines. These items are similarly descriptive in character. In recent times, it seems that there are few research studies that deal particularly with cultures and society in the Vietnamese context.

My presentation comes therefore not from any statistical or research-based resources, but from my own observation of the situation of the places I have been to and from conversations with people I have met. However, the issues in this reflection are compared with some aspects taken from official reports from Vietnam as well as from the reports of some countries that cooperate with Vietnam in terms of economic and social development. The main issues of these reports are about how to build technological and organizational infrastructures,[8] or how to improve educational systems in order to cope with the problems and challenges in the development process.[9] However, one can observe the connection between economic development and social and cultural change in Vietnamese society.

This indicates that it is urgent to initiate implementing serious studies on social and cultural situation in a Vietnamese context. This cannot be an effort of individual persons, but rather an undertaking of a group that apprehend the problems and facts, analyze and consider them in an interdisciplinary perspective in order to develop a clear vision.

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[8] Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Unit for Development Communication, *Country Strategy for Development Cooperation with Vietnam 2013-2016*, 7-9.

[9] Nguyen, Loc, "*International and National Skills Development Approaches in Vietnam*," presentation paper at NORRAG's conference on June 25-26, 2009. (NORRAG = Network for international policies and cooperation in education and training), retrieved from: http://www.norrag.org/en/publications/other-publications.html

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SECTION III
Religion in Mass Mediated Societies

The Rediscovery of Religious Silence in the Social Media Era: A Korean Case

Ignatius Kim Min-soo

Introduction

We are used to live in a noisy world full of artificial things, accepting noise or constant sound as a price worth paying for contemporary convenience.[1] Various kinds of chaotic noise and sound from construction sites, congested streets, loud voices, spectacles of ads, or mobile phones give us so much trouble frequently as to bring about the deterioration of human relationships or even human death. Recent neighbor disputes over noise traveling between floors left two people dead and several others injured. Similar cases have been increasing over years in Korean society.

Noises of the emerging smart age[2] are more delicate and complicated, different from analogue noises. In particular, the darker side of the smart age is characteristic of mentality and invisibility. The use of mobile phones or iTunes in the public space results in 'a kind of invisible violence' as the suffering and stress of the others. The bigger problem in the smart age, however, is ceaseless connection with different SNSs (Social Network Services) that causes a kind of addiction in which one is deprived of reflection and contemplation. In other words, those who are highly dependent on SNSs including Internet tend to become 'shallow and unthinkable.'[3]

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is (a) to point out few very serious problems of SNS in Korean society and (b) to stress and rediscover religious silence as an alternative to them. The Korean society is so competitive and outcome-oriented

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[1] Kenny, Colum (2011). *The Power of Silence: Silent Communication in Daily Life.* London: Karnac, p. ix.

[2] The smart age means that distribution channels of contents have a kind of an information highway with the advent of smartphones and SNSs.

[3] Carr, Nicolas (2011).*The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains.* New York: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc.

that many Koreans are harassed with self-exploitation and suffer depression. It is reportedly asserted that this phenomenon is caused by SNS in part. In spite of the definite advantage of SNS, it frequently keeps many from contemplation and reflection, eventually making them unable to think. In recent Korean society, there are various movements, including secular and religious measures, which are aware of the need of silence in some forms such as healing, spirituality and therapy.

Assumptions

This paper assumes that silence is a vital way that facilitates intra- and inter-personal communications, leading into contemplation and reflection deprived by SNS. First, it deals with the strength and weakness of SNS in Korean society, in particular paying more attention to its negative aspect. Secondly, it illustrates an important role of silence to overcome the negative effects of SNS, including the various problems that the current Korean society faces, and then introduces a communication model concerning silence. Thirdly, paper compares Catholic ways (example, silence retreat, Eucharistic adoration, Holy Hour or 'digital fast'[4]) with Buddhist ways (e.g. Temple Stay) on the basis of the communication model suggested earlier. Consequently, the paper emphasizes the necessity of religious silence in the SNS era, the silence whose effect makes humans able to think and recover their humanity.

The Strength and Weakness of SNS

In the recent years, SNS (Social Network Service) has been a very important means of communication. It is reported that 82% of world-wide online population uses SNS.[5] According to Market Research Agency (eMarketers), the number of SNS users once a month has reached to 1.2 billion in December 2011 and this trend is expected to continue until 2014. This means that, 2.2 billion people who correspond to 31.4% of the world-wide population use Internet, and that 12 million or, 54.5% of them, use SNS.[6]

The 2012 survey of Korea Internet and Security Agency shows that 47.5% of Korean smartphone users are those who experience SNSs such as Twitter, Facebook and Kakao Talk. Among them, 78.5% use SNS more than once with an average 0.99 hour per a day.[7] The Korean SNS users have primarily engaged

SNS for the purpose of social networking or for personal relation management. According to DMC Report of the 'SNS user awareness,' the purpose of SNS use is: social networking management (76.1%); exchange of information (59.8%); management of personal history (29.5%); fun (42.6%); business (11.4%); and personal promotion (5.6%).[8] In spite of the multiple uses of SNS, it has both weak and negative as well as strong and positive aspects.

(1) The Strength of SNS

SNS has had positive impact on both the individual and the society. Twitter, one of most popular SNSs, is under the limelight due to the following seven reasons: involvement in social issues through the exchange of information, follower group formation based on the interaction, convenient function of communication, easy communication, relaxation and entertainment, the space for private writing, and the availability of 140-character posts.[9] In case of Facebook, the reasons for its popular usage are as follows: the expression of identity, social interaction, usability, interaction with friends, searching for friend information, the good use of leisure, human relation management, escapism, participation, and breaking from loneliness, and so on.[10] In addition, many use cyberspace to gain the same experience as if they are there[11] and SNS enforces a weak network since it can be easily maintained at the cheap cost of the network.[12] Eventually, SNS offers positive dimensions such as the formation and maintenance of relationship, trust-based social searching, and formation of public opinion and so on.

(2) The Weakness of SNS

SNS provides the good way of maintaining and enhancing the formation of relationships and of sharing and spreading of information. However, it generates fatigue—'SNS fatigue'—as a result of overusing the social network.[13] According to the study of Kim and Oh, Joo-hyun, the SNS fatigue is derived from the burden of SNS management, information overload, and control loss in relationship.[14] Lee and Jung show that the motivation factors of SNS fatigue are the burden of SNS

[4] Digital fast means to unplug from digital devices such as the Internet and smartphones at stated periods, like the traditional Catholic Lenten fast.

[5] comScore (2011). Top 10 need-to-knows about social networking and where it's headed. *comScore Report.* 1-69.

[6] eMarketer (2012).29, February.

[7] Korea Communications Commission and Korea Internet & Security Agency (Jan. 2013). *The Survey of Smart Phone Use in the second half of 2012.* p.16.

[8] Statistics Agency of South Korea (2012).

[9] Shim, Hong-Jin and Hwang, You-Sun (2010). The Study of Micro-blogging use motivation: from the perspective of Twitter. *The Journal of Korean Broadcasting,* 24(2), 192-234.

[10] Kim, You-Jung (2011).The Use and Gratification Study of SNS. *Media, Gender, and Culture.*20, 71-105.

[11] Zhao, D., & Rosson, M. B. (Aug. 2010). *How and why people twitter: The role that micro-blogging plays in informal communication at work.* Paper presented at the ACM 2009 International Conference on Supporting group work. Retrieved from ACM.

[12] Donath, J., & Boyd, D. (2004). Public displays of connection. *BT Technology Journal,*22(4), 71-82.

[13] Kim, Hye-Youn and Oh, Joo-hyun.(2012). The Current Domestic and overseas SNS Reality and Social Meaning. *A Study of Information and Telecommunication.* 24(12), 19-42.

[14] Ibid.

management, reputation care, and acknowledged risk of information privacy.[15] They point out SNS' discontinuance intention in terms of SNS fatigue and negative attitude toward SNS. Another study indicates that people who have resistance of the social media such as Twitter and Facebook tends to use SNS as innovation.[16]

From the perspective of SNS fatigue, the overloaded use of SNS brings significant damages to users themselves. The ubiquitous environment by smart phones equipped with the PC in hand can connect to the Internet anywhere, anytime with SNS like Twitter and Facebook. But the excessive use of smart phone and SNS results to the colonization of private and public time. A recent survey shows that more than 60 percent of smart phone users tap on their handsets an average 30 times a day. Such a trend causes not only the danger of digital addiction but also brain fatigue . Therefore, the use of SNS may be time-wasting, making users uneasy (in particular unless they do not have their smart phone right now) and affect their concentration, and so being at risk of addiction.

The representative symptoms of serious SNS addiction[17]: users feeling severely anxious and nervous when not in possession of a smart phone; they think they should reduce their use of smart phones, but do not succeed; they are deprived of sleep hours by using smart phones until late night; and they continue to use smart phone without any reason or pay more fees than they expected. This addictive attitude toward the smartphone and SNS not only causes fatigue and mental and physical exhaustion, but also puts the users under a lot of stress.

The Status of Korean Society Related to SNS Fatigue

It is said that today Korean society is dominated by limitless competition making everyone dedicate themselves to being a winner. While such a limitless competition tends to bring about corruption by hook or crook, it drives many people to be exhausted physically and mentally and susceptible to potential illnesses such as depression and characteristic disorders. Professor Han criticizes the abnormality of a Korea-based on strict discipline and ruthless competition in his book, *Fatigue Society*.[18]

According to an interpretation of his discourse on fatigue society,

> Korea is a 'society of undue meritocracy,' which forces each member
> to endure a never-ending race of productivity and efficiency, like a
> salesperson who must continue to rise to a higher rung by selling as much
> product as he or she can. The consequent competition for survival results

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[15] Lee, Hyun-Jee and Jung, Dong-Hun. (2013). A Study of Discontinuance Intention of Twitter and Facebook. *Korean Journal of Journalism & Communication Studies*. 56(4).

[16] Kim, Hyong-Jee et al. (2012). A Study of Innovation Resistance among Social Media Non-Users. *Korean Journal of Journalism & Communication Studies*. 56(4), 439-464.

[17] Lee, Gyun-Ho and etc. (2013). *Communication and Society*, Seoul: Ewha Press, p. 413.

[18] Han, Byung-Cheol. (2012). *Fatigue Society*. Seoul: Literature and Intelligence Press.

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in extreme fatigue and indifference. Those who do not reach the goal regard themselves as the underdogs of society. Such an inferiority complex in turn drives people into a state of mental and physical exhaustion.[19]

Korean society definitely can be defined as a result-oriented society to work to death and get tired without any coercion or pressure.[20] The obsessive outcome principle and the culture of competition are factors that make Koreans tired and exhausted. Thanks to becoming more fatigued society because of the limitless competition culture, long working hours and result-oriented systems, Korean society faces various problems with higher levels of divorce rate, suicide rate, unemployment, and lower birth rate, compared to those of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Furthermore, the problematic Korean society is intensified as it encounters SNS fatigue syndrome.

Nicolas Carr's book, *The Shallows*, accounts for how the exhausted Korean society can take a closer look at its problems in light of SNS fatigue as follows:

> We want to be interrupted, because each interruption brings us a
> valuable piece of information... And so we ask the Internet to keep
> interrupting us, in ever more and different ways. We willingly accept
> the loss of concentration and focus, the division of our attention and the
> fragmentation of our thoughts, in return for the wealth of compelling or at
> least diverting information we receive. Tuning out is not an option many
> of us would consider.[21]

The Internet and SNS encourage the rapid, distracted sampling of small bits of information from many sources, but what we are losing is our capacity for concentration, contemplation, and reflection. This phenomenon is confirmed by Shin, Dong-Won, Korean medical scientist. According to Dong-Won[22] the brain reacts continuously to outside stimulations particularly by the frequent usage of the digital devices. Thus the brain needs rest to enhance its function, which is achieved by the default mode network. If people quiet the brain through practices like meditation in default mode, it will improve its function. However, recently people can't afford to give time to their brains, which later blurs judgment because of a malfunction in perceiving information. It leads to spiritual energy exhaustion.

There is growing apprehension that Koreans have a trend toward 'an unthinkable man', like 'one dimensional man'[23] who conforms to the established order without any criticism and resistance in terms of false consciousness. They are at a risk to be

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[19] Oh, Jung-hun. Fatigue School. *Koreatimes*. (22 Mar. 2013).

[20] Ibid., Han, Byung-Cheol. (2012 23~29).

[21] Carr, Nicolas. (2011). *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. 133-134.

[22] Shin, Dong-Won, *Brain Healing & Digital Detox*, Century One, 2013, p. 280.

[23] Marcuse, Herbert. (1991). *One-Dimensional Man*. 2nd Edition, Boston: Beacon Press.

dehumanized, and who are interpellated by different social systems, lack independent thinking, and then lose their self. While the feelings of alienation, indifference, anger, and depression are rampant in Korean society, recent healing craze has spread with the pattern of spirituality in both the secular and sacred measures. These measures share a meditation method based on silence.

It is indeed believed that the only way to heal the sick and tired Korean society is that everybody should recover inner communication through concentration, contemplation, and reflection within silence. Professor Han asserts that Hannah Arendt, a German political theorist, figured out human being as speculative rather than active.[24] In other words, it is no exaggeration to say that the tragedy of this time results from the loss of contemplation ability. The keyword for rediscovering concentration, contemplation, and reflection is 'silence' that relates to both intra-personal and inter-personal communications. It helps unthinkable men to lead to self-examination and self-reflection as an inner communication.

Silence as a Communication Process

The rapid development and evolution of communication technology doesn't allow any room for silence in the modern world. Silence can be seen as inefficient and unproductive to modern people who are caught by perpetual access and data smog.[25] However, the more silence is rapidly deported or lost, the more the meaning and value of life disappear. To lose silence is to lose human nature.

Pope Benedict XVI recommends through his 46th World Communications Day message of 2012 that those who live in the digital age rely on search engines or SNSs too much, but should equip silence as a larger virtue. "Silence is a precious commodity that enables us to exercise proper discernment in the face of the surcharge of stimuli and data that we receive."[26] Mother Teresa also has stressed the importance of silence as follows: silence of eyes, ears, the tongue, the mind, and the heart.[27] She points out that we can hear the words of comfort given by God through silence and offer comfort to Jesus suffering within the poor with all our heart.

President Obama's latest "51 seconds' silence" has been highly appreciated as a masterful speech. He gave a silent speech at the memorial service that held in honor of victims dead wrongfully by 2011 shootings in Arizona. He kept silent without any words during 51 seconds, instead of expressing his feelings of anger and sadness. Such an action

turned out to be more effective and formed a deep bond of sympathy. The moment of his silence seemed to be the time of healing and consolation for all Americans.

As mentioned already, silence is a kind of communication leading to contemplation through reflection, and then allows those who are tired to recover their humanity. The important role of silence companies an inner communication process called intra-personal communication or self-communication. According to Pope Benedict XVI, "we observe the most authentic communication taking place between people who are in love: gestures, facial expressions and body language are signs by which they reveal themselves to each other. Joy, anxiety, and suffering can all be communicated in silence."[28] It is necessary to understand how such an inner communication occurs in the mind and spirit.

The Analysis of Silence Communication

All dimensions of communication are initiated from one's own self. Self-communication or intra-personal communication is fundamental in all forms of human communication as a process of thinking inside human beings, that is, the self, relationships with others, reflection on their environment, their interior monologue, and so on. When the fundamental communication operated from inside the self is in good condition, the communication of different dimensions such as inter-personal communication, group communication, mass communication, and global communication is well done properly. Eventually the inner communication is a key element of communication, at the same time, the root to regulate all dimensions of communication.[29]

Especially, it is necessary to understand how silence plays an important role in the process of the inner communication. Above all, the following diagram suggested by Professor Choi helps to figure out a basic principle on self-communication.

Figure 1[30]

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[24] Ibid., Han, Byung-Cheol. (2012). p. 46.

[25] Data smug is defined as overwhelming amount of information that would make it more difficult for the average individual to sift through and separate fact from fiction.

[26] Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the 46th World Communications Day. (20 May 2012). *Silence and Word: Path of Evangelization.*

[27] Mother Teresa. (1997). *In the Heart of the World: Thoughts, Stories, and Prayers.* California: The Mother Teresa Reader.

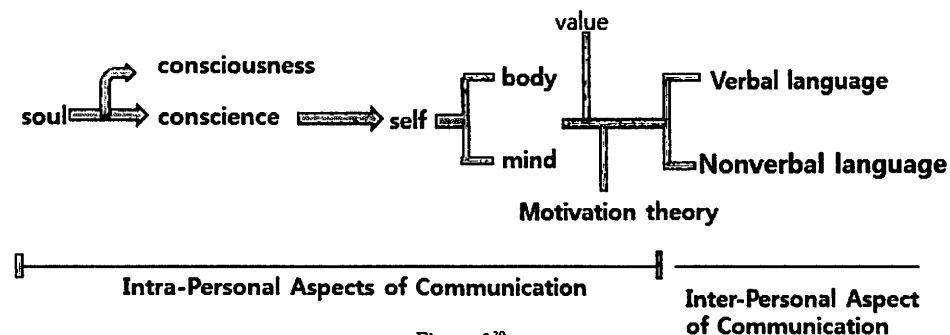[28] Ibid., Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the 46th World Communications Day.

[29] Choi, Chang-Seop.(1994). *Self-Communication.* Seoul: Bumwoosa, 308-309.

[30] Referred and revised on the basis of p. 376.

Based on the diagram, inter-personal communication presupposes intra-personal one. These two communications are not separate, but a process. A soul is the most basic element and works as a standard interactive among all kinds of elements. It prompts human instinct urges that make true through conscience beyond experiences. There are conscience and consciousness to connect between a soul and the self. While conscience is related to religion and ethics, consciousness is to psychology. The self is always developed by a process of motivation with different values and is composed of the body and the mind. Therefore, the self-communication or intra-personal communication forms inter-personal communication (verbal and non-verbal), passing the above interaction through the body.

However, it is silence that is necessary to operate the above communication model for intra- and inter-personal communication. It is difficult for the model to be carried out as long as noise, exhaustion, and speediness affect the self. On the contrary, Calmness, serenity, solitude, and silence induce reflection of the self, helping to facilitate intra-personal communication.

The Comparison of Catholicism and Buddhism Regarding Silence

All religions put emphasis on silence. As Pope Benedict XVI mentioned, "different religious traditions consider solitude and silence as privileged states which help people to rediscover themselves and that Truth which gives meaning to all things."[31] Christianity has preserved the importance of silence from Desert Fathers to modern spiritual practitioners. The reason that it needs silence is to be on with God in a severe solitude. To put it concretely, "silence is an apparatus that triggers and transforms the human heart from within to attain integration, liberation, inner transformation, and perfection in Christian life."[32]

In Buddhism, silence is a means of practicing asceticism in order for a person to listen to his/her inner voice. It is always accompanied by Zen meditation and contemplation. Eventually, silence brings people to attain emptiness, and absolute silence is for attaining enlightenment.

Recently, those who are tired and suffer from stress tend to pursue secular or sacred spiritual healing programs for recovering the body and the mind. In particular, many of them follow the spiritual programs that the existing religions like Catholicism and Buddhism have practiced as a long-standing tradition. There have been retreats, Holy Hour, Eucharistic adoration, and pilgrimages to practice by participating in silent hours in the Catholic Church. In Buddhism, numerous people have attended at "Temple stay"[33]

programs to perform silence. This phenomenon explains how much the Koreans want to be healed.

Both Catholic and Buddhist programs mentioned above use silence for meditation in common. First of all, both are merged in inner and outer serenity to have an insight into the self, leading self-examination and self-reflection. In a Catholic way, there are two kinds of silence; meditative and contemplative ones. The meditative silence is an active and intentional communication which leads to self-reflection as a process of encountering God. On the other hand, the contemplative silence brings about a passive concentration in which God invites into his love, communicates and unites with us. In a Buddhist way, silence is a kind of instrument for concentration to escape from outer world. Another dimension of it is to enter into interior silence to discover the innermost center of the soul and to empty the mind. However, there is a considerable difference between Catholicism and Buddhism in the process of the intra- and inter-communication model.

In case of Catholicism, "Christian meditation is a term for form of prayer in which a structured attempt is made to get in touch with and deliberately reflect upon the revelations of God."[34] It is sometimes taken to mean the middle level in a broad three stage characterization of prayer: it then involves more reflection than first level vocal prayer, but is more structured than the multiple layers of contemplation in Christianity.[35] As an example of Christian meditation, Eucharistic meditations are always under silence, one by which some one can take a close look at his/her self and leads through his/her soul to God. Therefore, the communication model offered already can be revised to explain the process of Catholic meditation, as follows:
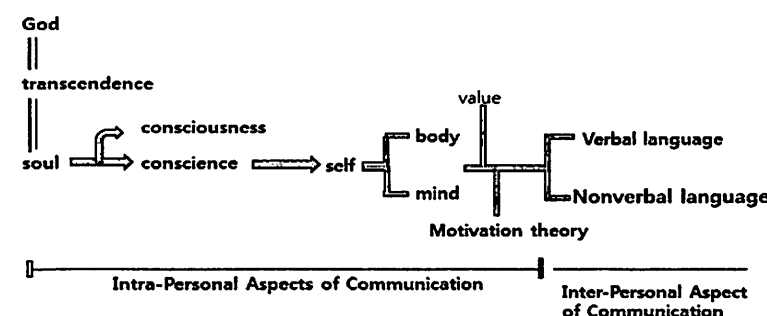
Figure 2[36]

Temple stay programs which have begun in 2002 usually include monastic formal meals with healthy, vegetarian dishes; tea ceremonies; morning and evening chant services; and "Seon" or Zen meditation. The communal Buddhist meal service or "Balwoogongyang" is a unique way of eating in Korean temples, where food is consumed in total silence and not a single grain of rice is wasted.

[31] Ibid., Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the 46th World Communications Day.

[32] Seso, Paulinus. (2013). *The Role of Silence and Consequences for Pastoral Ministry*. University of Santo Tomas Graduate School, Manila.

[33] Temple Stay is a unique cultural program which lets you experience the life of Buddhist practitioners at traditional temples which preserve the 1700 year old history of Korean Buddhism.

[34] Zanzig, Thomas. (2000). *Christian Meditation for Beginners*. Marilyn Kielbasa: Saint Mary's Press, p. 7.

[35] Griffin, Emilie. (2005). *Simple Ways to Pray: Spiritual Life in the Catholic Tradition*.NY: Sheed& Ward,p. 134.

[36] Ibid.,Choi, Chang-Seop, p. 376.

A soul can meet and unite with God through His revelation and transcendence as depicted in Figure 2. However, the encounter with God is followed by an attitude of conversion and purification, a flight from "self" to the "You" of God and His illumination, based on silent contemplation.

In contrast with Catholic meditation, Buddhist meditation refers to the meditative practices associated with the religion and philosophy of Buddhism. It lacks of the concepts of God, salvation, and grace. Buddhists pursue meditation as part of the path toward Enlightenment or *Nirvana*. As seen by Temple stay programs, most of them offer some time for Zen meditation *(Ch'amSŏn)*. Buddhist religious contents such as chanting, bowing, meditating, to mention a few are presented as part of monastic life in the temple stay program. All temple stay programs include the morning and evening ceremonial services *(yebul)*, which consist of chanting and bowing in the main *dharma* hall. They also normally include sitting and walking meditation. Such Zen meditation with silent contemplation makes all of participants in the program self-reflective. If they take a close look at their soul through conscience and consciousness, they may attain "Euphoric states" or *Nirvana*.

Figure 3 presents a communication model for *Nirvana* that Buddhist meditation pursues.
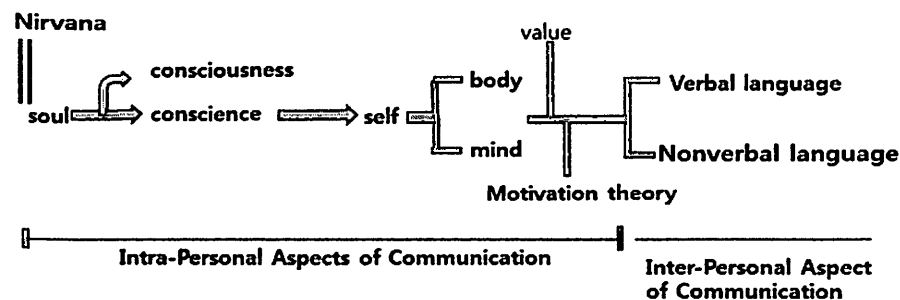
Figure 3

Nirvana obtained through Buddhist meditation should not be confused with prayer or assumed to be signs of the presence of God, a state that should always result in loving service to others.

Consequently, both Catholic and Buddhist meditations reach a soul through the self with assistance of silence, but show quite differences each other. There is no concept of God, salvation, and grace in Buddhism in principle. Moreover, while Buddhist meditation may suggest approaches to disengage the mind, Christian meditation aims to fill the mind with thoughts related to Biblical passages or Christian devotions.

Conclusion

The SNS era we live in drives us to be tired and stressful due to various kinds of noise. Such a fatigue society has brought about alienation, depression, and apathy, with severe social problems like high rate of suicide and divorce and social injustice. One of the most problematic thing is to make us unthinkable as a result of overusing SNSs in part. Those who don't think of themselves anymore lose their self, including their conscience and consciousness. Furthermore, their soul cannot experience any transcendence by which Catholics meet God and Buddhists achieve *Nirvana*.

Recently, everyone hears the word "healing" being mentioned all around. There are things such as healing camp, healing leadership, healing land, healing concert, healing industry, healing food, healing marketing, healing therapy, healing journey, healing forest, healing meditation and so on. "Healing" seems to be the key concept of Korean society on these days. Why do we emphasize and talk about healing so passionately?

Above all, the healing process transcends merely listening to the inner voice. Though there are various healing methods, religious meditation through silence helps to cure and recover the self. However, there is a big difference between Catholicism and Buddhism in the communication model of meditation as intra-personal communication. In one word, it relies upon salvation in terms of God or his/her own efforts.

This paper has tried to stress the importance of religious silence rediscovery for overcoming the fatigue society of Korea. It may have some limits in explaining the analysis of the meditation process through silence in intra-personal communication. However, it expects its follow-up study to supplement.

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Communication Technology Impacts Thai Culture and Buddhist Way of Life

Samran Khunsamrong

Introduction

In the past two decades, the development of communication technology has tremendously changed human lifestyles all over the world. A totally new environment has been created[1] through satellites and information superhighways.[2] Rapid changes in the information society are affecting cultural identity and creating a massified society.[3] Moreover, technology and popular culture as cultural elements spread through the media fuel both cultural integration and change. Both elements are integrated more quickly than the values associated with them, creating cultural lag.[4] Technological advances such as the automobile, the television, and more recently, the computer and the cellular phone have brought about striking changes in our cultures, our patterns of socialization, our social institutions, and our day-to-day social interaction.[5] Many people are simply connecting to each other through online sites such as e-mails, websites, forums, chat programs, and social networks. The Internet has become an essential elevator to change the standard and lifestyle of message senders and receivers.

Thailand being a developing country, plays a recipient role in mass media transfer from the US and Western European countries. News, films, TV

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[1] McLuhan, Marshall. (2064). *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man,* New York: McGraw Hill, pp. 7-16.

[2] Canter, A. Laurence et al. (195). *How to Make a Fortune on the Information Superhighways,* Glasgow: Harper Collins Publishers.

[3] Toffer, Alvin. (1980). The Third Wave, Pan Books.

[4] Lindsey, Linda L. & Beach, Stephen. (2003) *Essentials of Sociology.* New Jersey: Pearson Education. p. 48.

[5] Schaefer, Richard T. (2004). *Sociology.* New York. McGraw-Hill. p. 411.

programs, magazines, and music are examples.[6] The main reason the foreign mass media are growing so rapidly is the open, absorptive, and adaptive nature of Thai society.[7] These mass media have an impact on Thai society in several ways: new lifestyle, new fashion, and new leisure activities[8], or as expressed by another study, the imported media affect Thai society in terms of social structure, traditional values, and lifestyle changes.[9] Mass media from foreign nations act as cultural representatives capable of creating change in the social structure of Thai. Generally, the impact of foreign mass media may have both negative and positive influence on social change. Viewed positively, mass media provide Thais with entertainment and knowledge which is necessary for national development. Foreign media can also reinforce cultural identities and reconcile diverse values in society. However, the negative consequences are also tremendous: social problems, conflict, and unnecessary political, economic and social dependency. The negative impact of foreign mass media stem from their unsuitable content for many recipients.[10]

Buddhism in Thailand

For centuries Buddhism has established itself in Thailand and has enriched the lives of the Thais in all aspects of their lives. Indeed, without Buddhism, Thailand would not be what it is today.[11] Looking back on Thai history, we can clearly see the close relationship between Buddhism and the Thai nation. The history of the Thai nation is also the history of Buddhism. The Thai nation originated over 2000 years ago. Also in that same period Buddhism came and has played an important part in Thai history ever since.[12]

The roots of the traditions and cultures of Thailand lie firmly within the family structure and Buddhism. Once Buddhism spread throughout Thailand the *Wat* or the temple became the center of the village. It was the place where people received education, attended ceremonies, and held feasts and festivals. For many Thais, Buddhism is closely associated with traditional values and cultural activities. But the cultural scene itself is fast changing in urban Thai society. Though Buddhism still plays a very important role in the day-to-day life of the vast majority of

Thais today, with the rapid increase of modern communications, it is inevitably impacted by the communication technology.

Communication Technology

In Thai society, we use technology and receive more often from the outside world without realizing that it makes a change little by little to our traditional way of life. Changes are happening at a rapid pace due to many factors, among them the increasing dominant commercial mode we now operate in and the spread of communication tools (TV, mobile phones, computers, Internet, cars, and airplanes). We like to see things move very fast, and speed is usually regarded as power and progress. Culture has changed with the new IT revolution. We value immediacy. We have a high regard for simultaneity.[13] We will feel upset if our electronic machines work slower than our mind. We have less patience. This seems different from a Buddhist way of life that the mindfulness of reflection should be always practiced. The word "Chuk-Kid" that can approximately be expressed by the English term "to stop and think" is almost neglected. Many Thais, especially in the city, tend to absorb the Western concept "time is money." Thailand, which is known as the "land of smiles" is continuously overshadowed by that concept. The scene of the family going to the temple, making merit and listening to the Dhamma talks in the past is replaced by the scene of children playing games, chatting on the Internet, watching movies or TV programs, etc., while their aging people are making some meritorious activities. The progress of communication can make people who differed both in language and culture communicate conveniently.

Mobile phones become one of the major requisites for the Thais everywhere, even for children in primary school. About ten years ago, the scene of a reluctant old woman dressed in rags, led by a girl who was supposed to be her daughter, directing to a mobile phone shop, is still in my mind. According to the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) data in 2011, the number of mobile phone subscribers in Thailand is 74.59 million, which is more than a 100 percent penetration.[14] The "smartphone boom" has strongly encouraged Thai mobile phone consumers to purchase new smartphone models. All Thai major mobile operators have various special data packages for iPhone, iPad, Android, and Blackberry so as to increase non-voice revenue. In the past, Thai people used to walk or ride a bicycle to chat and share some kinds of food and opinion with their relatives or friends who lived one kilometer or farther from their home. It was as good as exercising for them as well as for establishing a close relationship with people. In the present time, they use the telephone to communicate with people who live even 100 meters or less. Face-to-face contact

[6] Boonchan, T. and L. Brooks Hill. (1996). US Mass Media and Thai Society Intercultural Communication Studies VI: 1.

[7] Indorg, H.H. (Ed.). (1982). *Thai-American Relations in Contemporary Affairs*. Singapore: Executive Publications, PTE. Ltd.

[8] National Identity Office, Office of the Prime Minister. (1984). *Thailand in the 80's*. Bangkok: Ruang Ruang Ratana Printing.

[9] Virasi, B. (1981). *Thai Society in Transition*. Asian Culture Quarterly. 9(2), 28-32.

[10] Mowlana, H. (1986). *Global Information and World Communication: New New Frontiers in International Relations*. New York: Longman.

[11] Access to Insight. Readings in Threavada Buddhism. http://accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/kusalasaya/wheel085.html. Accessed 2 October 2013.

[12] Phra Dhammapitaka (P.A. Payutto). (2001). *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World*. Buddhadhamma Foundation, Bangkok, p. 14.

[13] Prince of Songkla University. http://fs.libarts.psu.ac.th/research/journal/journal-52-1/1-Language%20and%20cultural%20change.pdf. Accessed 2 October 2013.

[14] National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission, Telecom Market Report Q2/2011, p. 2.

has been replaced by telephone conversation, as it saves time, and most people do not think there is any difference between an actual conversation and mediated conversation.

Facebook is one of the most popular social media in the present time. In Thailand, Thai Facebook users with ages between 18-24 (38.5%) years old have hit the highest rate of Facebook profile registration with the amount of 237,960 profiles, while ages between 25-34 (36.6%) years old are in the second rank with the amount of 26,460 profiles, whereas the ages between 35-44 (10.1%) years old are in the third rank with the amount of 62,180 profiles, and the ages between 14-17 years old (8.9%) are the least rate of Facebook registration with the amount of 54,940 profiles.[15] In 2012, there were about 14.2 million Facebook users who have selected their location as "Thailand" (16th in the world).[16] Bangkok is even the top city in the world in terms of Facebook user numbers (8.68 millions).[17] By the time of the writing of this paper, Facebook users are still increasing in number. Some parents use Facebook or Line when calling their children from their own rooms for a meal together even though they live in the same house. Many times, Facebook is used as a tool to violate the Buddhist basic principles of the lay people, the five precepts: to abstain from killing, stealing, committing adultery, telling lies and taking intoxicants. The word Face can be Fact or Fake, if only one alphabet is replaced. Once, a popular Thai newspaper headline reported that a young Thai girl was lured and killed by an old guard man who tried to rape her. The girl had a relationship with him after learning that he was not the person he had shown he was on Facebook. If such an event happened, the question is always on why this kind of incident happens in a Buddhist country like Thailand. There is no doubt that if more people earnestly practice the Dhamma (the Buddha teaching), many of the problems Thailand now faces could be satisfactorily solved or ameliorated. For example, if people really observed the five precepts, there would be less violence, fraud, and corruption. Even if only one precept of the five ways is adhered to, it would surely contribute tremendously to society. Indeed, it is not Buddhism that is the problem to society, but of not following it in the proper way. Communication technology, like Facebook and other social media is a two-edged sword; we can use them with our loving kindness to other people as harming them through it.

Cable and Satellite TV & Community Radio

Satellite TV as well as community radio influence the way of thinking of Thai people. Since the revolution of the Council of National Security (CNS) took place in Thailand on September 19, 2006, the national conflict has spread all over the country. Although there are many groups involved in the conflict from that time up to the present, the main ones are the Yellow Shirt group and the Red Shirt group. The conflict between these two main groups has continued to become more and more deeply rooted. Satellite TV is used for political mobilization. To avoid government censorship, its ASTV sends broadcasting data to Hong Kong via fiber optics and airs programs from a Hong Kong satellite instead of Shin Corporation's ThaiCom satellites. The Red Shirt movement later started their own satellite channels including D Channel, which changed its name to PTV and then to Asia Update. The Democrat Party started their own channel BlueSky after a defeat in the 2011 general elections. Since 2005 these political channels have played a crucial role during Thailand's political turmoil. The political turmoil since 2008 and the anti-competitive behavior of the broadcasting industry accelerated the number of political related radio stations, mainly created by the Red Shirts. The Yellow Shirts also have community radios in the Bangkok areas and other provinces.[18] Satellite TV and Community Radio are not used for the reconciliation of the people in the country, but largely for putting the blame and spread the hatred on the opposite sides. This is against the Buddhist teaching that we should radiate loving kindness out to all beings.

English borrowed in Thai

Language, as a part of culture, is an important tool for social interaction. It allows much more than communication; it is the key to cultural transmission, the process by which one generation passes culture to the next.[19] All cultures are represented through language. Language exerts such a strong influence on culture that it is often as a key marker for determining the number of world cultures.[20] Advances in technology have also brought about changes in language. Meanwhile, the rapid progress in technology and education inevitably leads to linguistic globalization. Many linguists today would regard language change as a natural process, which is neither good nor bad. But in fact, people do pass value judgment on language and do speak about the degeneration of a language. They often go further in finding a correlation between socio-cultural decadence and language. A change of Thai language is also influenced by mass media communication, especially English. Moreover, a style of using spoken and written Thai language itself also changes in accordance with cyber media. The influence and effects of English on Thai language have thus been accelerated and more widespread than ever. Despite the completely different roots of the Thai and English languages, there are some words and phrases which have been relatively recently borrowed from English. Many loan words from English have entered the Thai language, and some grammatical changes in Thai have been fostered by English. *Hello* has been adopted as the common way to answer the telephone, although the Thai

[15] Human Resource Management Academic Resource Society. http://www.hrmars.com/admin/pics/59.pdf. Accessed 5 August 2013.

[16] Facebook, Facebook Advertising Tools, https://www.facebook.com/ads/manage.adscreator. Accessed 2 February 2013. Using location: Thailand filter with all ages and genders.

[17] Socialbakers,http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/cities, accessed 3 March 2013.

[18] Manager Radio, http://radio.manager.co.th, Accessed June 2013.

[19] Macionis, John J. (2009). *Society*. Pearson Education, p. 56.

[20] Lindsey, Linda L. & Beach, Stephen (2003). *Essentials of Sociology*. New Jersey: Pearson Education.

version of this is more commonly a "Hallo," with the second syllable extended and given a rising intonation. In a restaurant it is quite common to hear the phrase "Cheque Bin" to ask for the bill.[21] The Thai language is like other languages such as Japanese, Indian, and Singaporean, which have borrowed words so extensively from English language long time ago. English loan words have an influence in Thai language of both written and spoken language. We usually use English loan words to describe new concepts, which may not have been in existence earlier, for example, casino, wreath, necktie, office, free, care, game, etc. Some English words have been adopted and adapted until they sound like Thai words. For example, the English word "number" has become "ber" in Thai. The Thais just do away with its first syllable. Similarly, the verb "tutor," has become "tu" and "racing" has become "sing." Many information and technology terms have been adopted and used in Thai. Nowadays, the volume of English loan words in Thai language has increased. Yuphahann used the term "E-Thai" to bring out in the search of Thai Language in the new millenium. "E-Thai" is used to refer to both novel variety of Thai—the Thai "Netspeak" used in "electronically-mediated communication" and the English influenced Thai in contemporary Thai society. According to Yuphahann's study, the characteristics of Thai net speaking include abbreviation and condensation of words and phrases; pronunciation spelling; international deviant spelling to avoid censorship; international deviant spelling to get attention; and orthographic strategies to show paralinguistic features and gestures or emotions. Yuphahann also pointed out that, for Thai, the noticeable impact on the language is that some deviant spellings and pronunciation spelling of some words used to be the in-group jargon of chat room.[22]

Advantages of ICTs according to Buddhist views

After the Buddha attained enlightenment, he spent the rest of his life teaching people all over Central India. The Buddha spent forty-nine years on his bare feet wandering from place to place in India to spread his doctrine to other people. The dissemination of Buddha's teachings were slow due to the limitations of ancient transportation and communications. It took the Buddha's teachings (Dharma) several centuries to reach other countries.

Furthermore, it took the Dharma five hundred years from India to reach the East Asian countries. But time was not the only issue. In the target country, the teachings should also have been able to adjust itself to the new society and its culture to become a form of 'localized Buddhism.' In the process of adapting itself to the culture, the Dharma would be transformed and become slightly different from the original. The practice of Dharma was divided into different sects to adjust to the particular culture and tradition of the local people. For example, Theravada follows

the original method of practice based on the Buddha's time and the Mahayana tradition a reform of the original. Some of the countries that follow Theravada are Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Burma. Mahayana is more popular in countries like China, Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan, Korea, and Mongolia. Today, the Dharma has found new ways to re-transmit itself to the Sangha, the Buddhists communities and the world. The acceptance of Buddha's teaching does not depend on whether it can accommodate new cultures or societies, but in the way it presents the core teachings. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan stated that, "the 'content' of any medium is always another medium, the content of writing is speech, and the content of speech is the actual thoughts or itself nonverbal. The content of written word is print and the print is the content of the telegraph."[23]

Buddhism has now existed amongst the changes in the world for almost 2,600 years to the era of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). This technology has been linked to global unity. Humanitarian access and obtaining information can be done quickly. It is a matter of fact that ICT has both positive and negative impacts on Buddhism. For example, the positive impacts include using ICT for Worldwide Buddhist dissemination via the Internet, which is very quick. People can access Buddha's teachings through ICT with ease anytime, anywhere. The use of the Internet and the World Wide Web is an important form of religious dissemination. Websites can be used to further the mission of spreading religion to serve their members and the communities in various ways. For example, monasteries and Buddhist institutions are important institutions in maintaining the Buddhist cultures and traditions. They use websites to display the Buddha's scriptures, images, audio, and sometimes spiritual rituals so that they can show the presence of Buddhism or the virtual Buddha to promote their faith. According to Stevenson, "whether we live our lives permanently in the village where we were born or restlessly travel the globe, media cultures are almost certainly present." Thus, Buddhist institutions cannot escape the use of new media especially the Internet because of its convenience. Secondly, the use of websites in Buddhist institutions is also creating new bonds and communication networks between the Sangha, Buddhist communities and the world. Before the Internet was introduced to the public, Buddhist monasteries or institutions were mostly known by local people.[24] Now they can also be well known overseas via the web. The use of the Internet to post the temple's scenery, services, and activities attracts visitors within the country and overseas who may want to visit the temple when they have a chance. More and more high school students now visit temples on school excursions instead of other places. The Internet has expanded internationally and globally for the benefit and convenience of those seeking spiritual places and tourism destinations.

[21] Macmillan Dictionaries. http://www.macmillandictionaries.com/MED-Magazine/April2006/37-Thai-English-false-friends-print.htm, Accessed 7 August 2013.

[22] Yuphaphann, H. (2005). *Thai Language in the New Millenium*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Manoa Press.

[23] McLuhan, Marshall. (1964). *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*, New York: McGraw Hill, pp. 7-16.

[24] Chua Quang Minh. Vietnamese Buddhist Temple. http://www.quangminh.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=articles&id=182:the-use-of-the-internet-in-buddhist-institutions&catid=1:latest-news, Accessed 13 August 2013.

Bhikky P.A. Payutto states in his book *Advanced ICT, But the Need to Develop Wisdom and Discipline of the People:*

> In the current era of globalization, let us examine the effects the globalization has on religious beliefs. What is the future of our beliefs? How can religious beliefs be integrated into the ever changing process? It has long been focused solely on the religion. In this discussion, I would like to discuss 'Religion in the Era of Globalization.' Let us set religious beliefs on one side and globalization era on the other. Each side has effect on the other. How does globalization affect the religious beliefs and how can religious beliefs aid humans in this era?...

> The importance of technologies is not only seen as a tool that helps us save time and energy. It should also be viewed as a miraculous discovery. Technologies represent human every-growing visions. They enable us into achieving something that our previous generation has not even dreamt of...

> For example, our scripture, Tripitaka, has been downloaded onto CR-ROM. We are now able to search the lengthy Tripitaka containing 22,000 pages approximately. To find the word 'Sabha' manually previously took weeks or even months to obtain, but now can be achieved at an unheard of speed. With just one click of a keyboard, all information of that keyword will appear within seconds on the computer screen. Technology provides easy and convenient access in the study of Buddhism. I consider this a miracle. It expands human visions...

> Thais should try to fully understand the capabilities of Information Technology. We must utilize its capacities. We must realize the pros and cons of this new tool. We then must select the beneficial outcome of technology. We should not focus solely on the commercial benefits. We must also focus on the effects of its output to society as a whole. The output should be identified as favorable or harmful. Least of all, we should be able to identify which outcome of the new technology we can adapt into our society and which to avoid...[25]

The Buddha says, "[n]o piece of technology will be intrinsically good or bad. What will matter is how we use it. It is up to use." Technology itself does not harm and value anyone, but we, as the users, do it. For the young children, they have to be guided or educated by the adults who understand its advantage and disadvantage.

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[25] http://www.facebook.com/notes/noratus-thossaphol/ict-and-budhism/552209701472611, Accessed on 25 August 2013.

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Dimensions of Bonding and Bridging in Religious Communication through the Internet

A Study Based on the Responses of College Students in Chennai

Gnana Patrick

Religious communication through cyberspace grows steadily and greatly changes the nature, functions, and dynamics of religious beliefs and practices. Every religious tradition, classical or popular, communicates through the different features of Internet today. The impressive varieties of websites created and maintained by religious personnel or institutions speak volumes for the reception they get from the public. People visit these websites for the purposes of getting information (knowledge) about religions as well as for practicing their devotions or piety. Among the varied types of impacts of these 'religion-online' and 'online-religion' activities, that which is relevant for building up a healthy civil society is the one made upon our understanding and organization of communities.

Aim

The present study attempts to enquire into the way the virtual religious communication through the Internet impact upon our experience of communities today. It endeavors to analyze the responses of a group of college students in Chennai to questions related to the role of religious communication in creating 'bonding' and 'bridging' dimensions of communities in the civil society today.

Dimensions of Bonding and Bridging

Since Robert Putnam spoke about dimensions of 'bonding' in the year 2000, 'bridging' have been explored further through empirical studies and theoretical analysis in different regions of the world. The interest in studying them goes with the general interest in contributing to enhancing social capital for the sake of creating a vibrant civil society and democracy in a given society.

Since the early nineteenth century when Alexis de Tocqueville opined that vibrant civil society is a desideratum for a mature democracy, political theorists and activists have been exploring into the strength and weaknesses of civil society. However, the interest in civil society went into dormancy during the subsequent period until the late-twentieth century, when religion, an important component of civil society, began to contribute significantly to political changes as they occurred in Poland, Latin American countries, Iran and so on. Inspired by these experiences, there is a revival of interest in the transformatory role of the components of civil society for political changes today.

A salient theme explored in the civil society discourse today is that of 'social capital,' which means 'experience of social trust based on relatively stable networks of interactions.' A particular society is said to have high social capital, when there are high levels of networks of interactions. Moreover, the quality of democracy in a given society is said to be in direct proportion to the quantum of social capital.

Social capital, the networks of social trust, grows upon dimensions of networks which are known as 'bonding' and 'bridging' networks. Bonding network is one which creates an in-growing core-tie among the participants based on any homogenous identity, and continues to deepen the relationship through repeated participation. On the other hand, bridging network is an out-growing relationship among participants based on heterogeneous identities. Researchers have different findings on the role of bonding and bridging networks. The view that it is bridging networks which are congenial for healthy democracy seems to be privileged by researchers. However, those who privilege the bonding networks are also not few.

It may be surmised that a vibrant civil society, contributing to a healthy democracy, needs a dialectics of bonding and bridging networks. While the bonding networks deepen our understanding and commitment to values and visions, the bridging networks make the people participate fully in the grassroots social and political processes. While the former gives an orientation towards the future, the latter involves us in the present. It is a dialectics between the two which will ensure the growth of civil society and democracy. The salience of the one over the other may endanger the very democratic process.

The Study

It is in this context that the researcher has taken a study on the web-based religious communication's role in the emergence of bonding and bridging networks of relationship. The study, as stated above, is among a section of the college students in Chennai. It is an empirical study, undertaken with a questionnaire with close-ended questions on the various aspects of bonding and bridging relationships. The study will come out with insights into the dynamics operative among college

students who take to web-based religious communication, which has become a dominant role of experiencing religion today.

The traditional 'secular' society would start with an *a priori* suspicion on the role of religion for democracy. But the contemporary era, which is a post-secular one, goes with an open mind with regard to the role of religion for a healthy public sphere and civil society. It provides a congenial ambience to this study. The findings of the study will contribute to the understanding of the nature of web-based religious communication in relation to its role for creating a healthy civil society and participatory democracy.

During the months of August-September 2013, the researcher took this miniscule study as a forerunner to an elaborate study to be undertaken later. The miniscule study was done with a close-ended questionnaire among 65 college and university students in the vicinity of the University of Madras, Chennai. The questionnaire contained 17 questions on different aspects of 'bonding and bridging' resulting from religious communication through the Internet. Soft copies of questionnaire were sent to 100 prospective respondents with a request to fill out the questionnaire and send back. The researcher received replies from 65 respondents, most of whom were either undergraduate or graduate students, 72.3% (47) of whom were below 25 years of age. In terms of religious belonging, 60% (39) are Christians, 36.9% (24) are Hindus, and 3.1% (2) are Muslims. This study would be an indicator of attitudes the young students of higher education in Chennai are forming towards religious bonding and bridging through online religious activities. The following are some important and interesting findings:

Visits to Religious Websites

To a question, 'whether you like to visit websites of your own religion only,' 18.5% strongly disagreed, 24.6% disagreed, 24.6% were neutral, 18.5%, agreed and 13.8% strongly agreed. Cumulatively, those who disagreed (18.5 + 24.6) were 43.1%, and those who agreed (18.5 + 13.8) were 32.3%. If we take those who disagreed to be tending towards bridging, and those who agreed to be for bonding, we can conclude that the capacity for bridging (43.1%) stands out over against bonding (32.3%) among the college students. However, it needs to be noted that the difference is only 10.7% which is a narrow margin only.

To an alternative question, 'whether you like to visit the websites of other religions as well,' 12.3% (8) strongly disagreed, 12.3% (8) disagreed, 15 were neutral, 29.2% (19) agreed, and 23.1% (15) strongly agreed. Cumulatively, those who disagreed were 24.6% (16) and those who agreed were 52.2% (34). If we take those who disagreed to be tending towards 'bonding,' and those who agreed towards 'bridging,' then again, we can state that a majority of 52.2% were tending bridging over against

the 24.6% bonding. The answers to the above two questions point to the fact that the college students in Chennai tend more towards religious bridging than towards religious bonding in terms of their online religious communicative activities.

Motivation to Visit Religious Websites

When it comes to the motivation for visiting the religious websites, a clear majority of the respondents (76%) do it for gathering information about their own religions as well as about other religions, though higher majorities do it only to visit websites of their own religions. When it comes to praying and worshipping through Internet, 43.1% do them through their own religious websites, and very interestingly 18.4% do them through other religious websites as well.

The above findings show that the college students in Chennai visit religious websites more for gathering information; however, a significant section undertakes online practice of religion, too. It is very interesting to note that there are students who pray and worship by visiting websites of other religions as well. This again shows an abiding element of a capacity for bridging prevalent among the student community.

Religious Bonding and Removal of Prejudice

With regard to religious bonding behavior, questions on 'whether visiting websites of their own religion helped them to make friends with people of their own religion' and 'network with people of their own religion for social causes' were posed. The answers point out that 49.3% agreed that visiting websites of their own religions helped them to make friends with their own religions, and 75.4% agreed that it helped them to network with people of their own religions for good social causes. This points to the fact that college students take to religious websites for networking with people of their religions for good social causes. Common good seems to be an important factor in religious bonding among the college students in Chennai.

To the question 'whether visiting websites of other religions helps them make friends with other religious people' 43.1% agreed and 35.4% disagreed; and to another related question, 'whether visiting websites of other religions helps them to remove prejudice against other religions,' 45.8% agreed and 29.2% disagreed. The responses point towards a moderate impact, however appreciable though, of religious websites on making friends with people of other religions and removing prejudices against other religions.

Religious Discussion and Dialogue

When asked whether they seek to argue against other religions by visiting the websites of other religions, 41.5% of students agreed and 36.9% disagreed. This

could be read as indication of the presence of religious debates as well as the will to argue on religious matters. This answer gets a qualitatively different emphasis when 75.4% of the students opined that they visit the websites of their own religion to get to know more facts so as to prove the truth of their own religion. However, majority of the students wisely distinguished between 'proving the truth of their own religion' and 'proving the superiority of their own religion,' because only 40% agreed to the statement that they visit websites of other religions to prove the superiority of their own religions as against the above-mentioned 75.4% who spoke about proving the truth of their religion.

To the question whether visiting websites of other religions helps them appreciate other religions, 50.8% responded affirmatively. To another question whether visiting websites of other religions helped them to dialogue with other religionists, 36.9% agreed, and of the same percentage disagreed. This shows the relative absence of the practice of dialogue among the college students, though this is also an indication that the students are more open for such efforts. To a question whether visiting websites of other religions urge to compare them with theirs, 35.4% disagreed, while 29.2 % agreed and a good percentage of 35.4 remained neutral. With regards to the wish to look for similarities of their religions with other religions, 44.6% agreed, 32.3% disagreed, and 23.1% remained neutral.

Discussion

With the statistical analysis presented so far, it can be concluded that the college students in Chennai, aging below 25, doing undergraduate and post-graduate studies, do take to religious communicative practices through Internet; while majority of them take to the Internet for gathering information, practicing what is pointed out as 'religion-online,' a significant section takes to Internet to pray and worship as well. In so doing, the college students generally exhibit considerable capacity for bridging with other religions, a fact which is evidenced in not restricting their visits to websites of their religions only, but on the other hand, visiting the websites of others and appreciating the similarities of other religions with theirs, while remaining circumspect about comparing and arguing against other religions. However, it can also be seen that this bridging is not one-sided, but goes with an appreciable level of bonding found in making friends with and networking for social causes with people of their own religions, praying and worshiping through websites of their own religions, and showing a proclivity to prove the truth rather than the superiority of their own religion. Going by these findings, it may safely be concluded that the college students are generally positively oriented in terms of religious bonding and bridging through online religious communication.

Implications of the Study

1. Religious communication through Internet should tap the positive orientation of the college students and provide opportunities for them to build bridging relationships with people of other religions. For example, since the students look for similarities between religions without unduly comparing, religious websites of particular religions can also provide links for similar teachings or religious practices in other religious websites. Online religious communicative practices can concentrate on promoting the involvements of students for social causes of common good. Religious communication through websites needs to promote more and more of dialogue, which is found at a relatively low ebb in the study.

2. Exclusive concentration upon either bonding or bridging through online religious communication is inadequate, and it does not meet the aspirations of a generation which seeks both to be bonded in a religious community, without losing the capacity for bridging with other religious communities. Therefore what we need to aim at is a more positive relationship between bonding and bridging rather than being negative and exclusive.

3. A number of researches highlight the fact that a positive relationship between bonding and bridging is more tenable and fruitful, than a negative relationship which decries one over the other. The study on Gulen movement in Turkey is a good example for how a religious bonding can also nurture social values and make the followers good citizens of a democratic polity. On the other hand, a study undertaken by upon Australian evangelical church bonding comes out with the finding that such bonding securities provide fertile grounds for crime, while bridging attitudes found in traditional Catholic and mainline Protestant Churches deter the emergence of crimes within their fold.

4. The study brings to our awareness the importance of religious communication through Internet along with its nature, characteristic features, and functions. One of the singular features that characterize religious beliefs and practices in the era of advancement of Information and Communication technology is virtuality. People, especially the young generation, increasingly takes to practice of religion not merely with the aid of information or data available in the virtual world, but also together with the very experience of virtuality, which becomes part and parcel of the religious experience. Virtual pilgrimages are a case in point. In the Indian context, *yatra* - pilgrimage is said to be an important religious practice a person is supposed to undertake in her / his lifetime. It is a *yatra* intimately associated with the religious vision of the *asramas* of life—the stages of

life. During the stage of *vanaprastha*, a man (because only a man can pass through the religious stages of life according to this tradition), is supposed to undertake this *yatra*, visiting different temples situated across the country and offering pujas for getting purified from *avidya* so as to realize the atman. This *yatra* today has come to be performed virtually. There are websites wherein you can 'undertake' this *yatra*. One visits different temples virtually, offers pujas by paying money through the credit card, and complete the *yatra* virtually. This virtual performance certainly is not as complete as the real *yatra*, but it does offer an experience of fulfillment of religious duties, especially for those who, for various reasons, are not able to undertake real *yatra*. It gives a sense of religious satisfaction, wherein physicality dissolves into virtuality. Oftentimes, it is not possible to draw a line between physicality and virtuality when it comes to religious beliefs and practices. It must be noted that such religious practices are increasing in every religious traditions today. Catholics are increasingly being drawn to participating in celebration of the Eucharist virtually; Pentecostals are very much in the practice of preaching and praying virtually, etc.

Needless to say that such virtual religious practices impact upon the way people experience religious communities, which in turn leaves its trace upon the way they experience communities in the wider public. Actual religious communities acquire a certain virtuality, thereby opening themselves to possibilities and challenges. Possibilities are like extending their influence beyond the physical space, and being present to their followers wherever they go; the followers can be instructed on religion regardless of their physical presence, and can be brought into a wider network of religious affiliation. Thus we see how the diaspora communities are increasingly being sustained religiously by virtual religious practices. There is a bonding among them, in and through virtual religious practices, and they are enabled to exist as distinct religious communities even amidst different religious others.

Virtuality and Bonding

Virtuality contributes to bonding in different ways. The most obvious way is to introduce and strengthen a sense of community among those who share the same religious tradition, whose knowledge is presented in its multiple dimensions in the Internet. Knowledge regarding holy books or writings, religious leaders, events like festivals, and interpretations of various facets of religious beliefs and practices given out in the cyberspace brings an awareness or strengthens the existing consciousness of a religious community with which the visitor to the websites shares her / his identity, sympathy, concern, etc. This virtual knowledge spreads its wings across space and brings together participants from across the globe. It makes a virtual bonding, whose power emerges as and when its identity

is hurt or challenged in the actual public sphere. It is then a virtual bonding whose impact upon actual community is sporadic and timely.

While this is the tangible way in which virtuality contributes to religious community, the other way, which is not less important, is the way an adherent of a religion 'practices' her/his religion through the Internet. The study brings to our awareness the fact that even the college going students, 43.1% of them, take to the Internet to practice their religion. It is an indication that the growing generation will take to this virtual practice of religion more and more as communication facilities increase. This certainly is a more substantive way of participating in a virtual religious community, which has its tangible impact upon the actual religious community. This creates a virtual bonding, whose impact is not just sporadic, but more sustained and enduring.

Virtuality and Bridging

The study throws up data which evidence the fact that bridging religious communication through Internet takes place in a significant way. The way majority of the college students disagreed to the statement 'I like to visit the websites of my religion only,' the way a more emphatic majority agreed to the statement 'I like to visit the websites of other religions as well,' the fact that majority (50.8%) of the respondents perceive that religious websites help them to appreciate other religions, and the fact that majority of the respondents (40%) do not want to prove the 'superiority' of their religion, but wish to argue for the truth (75.%) of their religion point to the presence of a significant space for religious bridging among those who visit religious websites. This space could be read as spiritual, cultural, and social, because this space draws resource from all these spheres, while simultaneously impacting upon them.

Bonding and Bridging Relationships in Terms of Virtual Experiences

Sustained impact of virtual religious communication upon actual religious bond on the one hand, and a simultaneous presence of a significant space that provides for religious bridging on the other reflect the not simple straightforward reality that exists today. Reality of virtual religious communication as well as its impact upon actual reality is more complex, and provides prospects and challenges. The contemporary society is called upon to live up to these prospects and challenges, and there is not a simple way to ignore and bypass this reality. As Information and Communications Technology is growing in a fast mode, its impact is also growing; in the realm of religious communication through the Internet, it contributes to accentuating the awareness of bonding and identity on the one hand, and bridging and relationship on the other. Besides cultivating the ability to draw strength from one's community, dynamics of bonding has much

to do with humanity's search for truth, values, ultimate meaning, goal, future orientation, etc. The dynamics of bridging, on the other hand, has much to do with virtues of relationship, solidarity, mutuality, inter-subjectivity, etc. It is in the ever-unfolding dialectics between this bonding and bridging that human society will draw strength and vitality, and grow in its civil virtues. Civil society, a space for creative transformative praxis rather than passive calm, will stand to gain much from this dialectics, and enhance the depth and width of democratic experience.[1] Much more significantly in terms of religious communication, it is in this dialectical mutuality between religious bonding and bridging that human beings will continue to experience the mystery of the Divine; and religious communication through the Internet will continue its mite unfailingly.

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[1] The researcher is aware that there are studies which opine that use of the Internet supports democratic experience only through bridging ties, and not bonding ties. Keith Hampton, for example, comes out with the finding that 'Internet use largely supports democratic engagement through interaction with bridging but not bonding ties.' But this study throws up the insight that the use of Internet supports bonding and bridging, without however, losing the space for bridging relationships to support a democratic polity.

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Frequency Table

Demographic Profile

Table 1: Distribution of Students by Sex

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	31	47.7	47.7	47.7
	Female	34	52.3	52.3	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Distribution of the Student by Educational Qualification

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Undergraduate	26	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Post Graduate	27	41.5	41.5	81.5
	Research Scholar	11	16.9	16.9	98.5
	Diploma	1	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Distribution of Students by Age Group

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below 25	47	72.3	72.3	72.3
	Between 25 to 35	13	20.0	20.0	92.3
	Above 35	5	7.7	7.7	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: Distribution of Students by Religion

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Christian	39	60.0	60.0	60.0
	Hindu	24	36.9	36.9	96.9
	Muslim	2	3.1	3.1	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 5: Distribution of Students

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	12	18.5	18.5	18.5
	Disagree	16	24.6	24.6	43.1
	Neutral	16	24.6	24.6	67.7
	Agree	12	18.5	18.5	86.2
	Strongly Agree	9	13.8	13.8	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 6: I like to visit the websites of other religions as well

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	8	12.3	12.3	12.3
	Disagree	8	12.3	12.3	24.6
	Neutral	15	23.1	23.1	47.7
	Agree	19	29.2	29.2	76.9
	Strongly Agree	15	23.1	23.1	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 7: I visit the websites of my religion to gather more information

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
	Neutral	6	9.2	9.2	10.8
	Agree	27	41.5	41.5	52.3
	Strongly Agree	31	47.7	47.7	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 8: I visit the websites of other religions to gather more information

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	6	9.2	9.2	9.2
	Disagree	11	16.9	16.9	26.2
	Neutral	6	9.2	9.2	35.4
	Agree	25	38.5	38.5	73.8
	Strongly Agree	17	26.2	26.2	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 9: I visit the websites of my religion to pray and worship

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	11	16.9	16.9	16.9
	Disagree	11	16.9	16.9	33.8
	Neutral	15	23.1	23.1	56.9
	Agree	13	20.0	20.0	76.9
	Strongly Agree	15	23.1	23.1	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 10: I visit the websites of other religions to pray and worship

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	24	36.9	36.9	36.9
	Disagree	16	24.6	24.6	61.5
	Neutral	13	20.0	20.0	81.5
	Agree	9	13.8	13.8	95.4
	Strongly Agree	3	4.6	4.6	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 11: Visiting my religious sites helps to make friends of with people of my religions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	6.2	6.2	6.2
	Disagree	10	15.4	15.4	21.5
	Neutral	19	29.2	29.2	50.8
	Agree	15	23.1	23.1	73.8
	Strongly Agree	17	26.2	26.2	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 12: Visiting my religious sites helps to work with people of my religion for good cause

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	6.2	6.2	6.2
	Disagree	1	1.5	1.5	7.7
	Neutral	11	16.9	16.9	24.6
	Agree	38	58.5	58.5	83.1
	Strongly Agree	11	16.9	16.9	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 13: Visiting Other Religious Sites helps to make friends of other religions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	10	15.4	15.4	15.4
	Disagree	13	20.0	20.0	35.4
	Neutral	14	21.5	21.5	56.9
	Agree	20	30.8	30.8	87.7
	Strongly Agree	8	12.3	12.3	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 14: Visiting other religious sites helps to remove prejudices against other religions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	11	16.9	16.9	16.9
	Disagree	8	12.3	12.3	29.2
	Neutral	16	24.6	24.6	53.8
	Agree	23	35.4	35.4	89.2
	Strongly Agree	7	10.8	10.8	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 15: Visiting other religious sites helps to argue against their claims

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	8	12.3	12.3	12.3
	Disagree	16	24.6	24.6	36.9
	Neutral	14	21.5	21.5	58.5
	Agree	24	36.9	36.9	95.4
	Strongly Agree	3	4.6	4.6	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 16: Visiting other religious sites helps to converse with other religionists

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	8	12.3	12.3	12.3
	Disagree	16	24.6	24.6	36.9
	Neutral	17	26.2	26.2	63.1
	Agree	19	29.2	29.2	92.3
	Strongly Agree	5	7.7	7.7	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 17: Visiting other religious sites urges to compare them with my religion

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	10	15.4	15.4	15.4
	Disagree	13	20.0	20.0	35.4
	Neutral	23	35.4	35.4	70.8
	Agree	12	18.5	18.5	89.2
	Strongly Agree	7	10.8	10.8	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 18: Looking for similarities with my religion when I visit other religious sites

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	9	13.8	13.8	13.8
	Disagree	12	18.5	18.5	32.3
	Neutral	15	23.1	23.1	55.4
	Agree	18	27.7	27.7	83.1
	Strongly Agree	11	16.9	16.9	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 19: Visiting other religious sites helps to appreciate other religions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	5	7.7	7.7	7.7
	Disagree	14	21.5	21.5	29.2
	Neutral	13	20.0	20.0	49.2
	Agree	21	32.3	32.3	81.5
	Strongly Agree	12	18.5	18.5	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 20: Visiting my religious sites helps to find facts and truths

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	2	3.1	3.1	3.1
	Disagree	5	7.7	7.7	10.8
	Neutral	9	13.8	13.8	24.6
	Agree	18	27.7	27.7	52.3
	Strongly Agree	31	47.7	47.7	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Table 21: Visiting other religious sites helps to prove the superiority of my religion

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	10	15.4	15.4	15.4
	Disagree	16	24.6	24.6	40.0
	Neutral	13	20.0	20.0	60.0
	Agree	12	18.5	18.5	78.5
	Strongly Agree	14	21.5	21.5	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Mythology and Society Continuum: Study of an Indian Television Serial

Arbind K. Sinha

Introduction

Asia, seat of multiple civilizations, has maintained its cultural identities over time through family, family norms, faith, and values that have been passed on from one generation to another repeatedly through textual narrations, myth and mythology, folk tales, folk songs, poetry, riddles, wall paintings, statues and monuments to the extent that it has been deeply imprinted in our memory. The impact of these thousand years of ancient civilizations and antique cultures that existed in form of myth and mythologies forever—during the past, on our lives today, and on modern society as a whole. It has also been part of our upbringing as every society follows one religion or the other and most of the religions—dominant or not so dominant have their own mythology, followed and believed by a large group, which moves around this magnetic force.

Cognitive psychology, while talking about memories teaches us on our ability to create memories by experiencing new phenomena through all our sensory organs, specially—observation, interaction, communication, explanation, and narration. Sociologists term it as social communication that helps the culture to survive through all odds. These memories are retained, sometimes replaced with a new memory, and are retrieved when needed to make a meaning out of it. On the same line, the mythology—an integral part of most of the civilizations of the world has been created as long-term memories. While examining the validity of memories created through different means of communication, we find that the psychologists also talk about replacing the memories with different objects and experience. Often we use this assumption and replace memories of unpleasant events. This is equally valid in the case of myth and mythology. There is evidence that in the process of replacing the memories, the belief and the practices of old mythology have been replaced by new thoughts of contemporary society.

India, with more than 5000 years of history and civilization having multiple cultures, has been the fertile ground for nurturing multiple religions and associated myth and mythology. Lately, media has played its pivotal role in perpetuating the myths and mythology. The media has also been used for propagating various myths and mythologies by different presenters who have projected a few dissimilar realities at different time and space. The question is whether projection of these religious as well as social communications in more than one way makes the base of memory and believes that keep changing?

In present-day context, we find ourselves at the crossroad where at one side we listen to the debate of the fast changing culture across the globe where mass media is blamed for cultural distortion, and on the other side there is a strong argument that with the advent of technology, the mass media has facilitated accelerating process of dissemination of myth and mythological beliefs and has helped the reinforcement of mythological thinking more visible than ever. In this background, when there has been debate on changing culture, it is imperative to discuss the pace of change and the way the change has been brought about.

There are many studies highlighting how the social communication as a vehicle loaded with the acts and practices of mythological Gods and Goddesses have affected elements of everyday life in most cultures. This study examines, through a primary research, how the contemporary social practices that the projection of mythology in newer form have been incorporated as mythological practices that will stand a chance to be taken as the practice of the mythological period. I present here a line of reasoning on how the memories are replaced and how they may stand to be counted as mythological facts over a period of time, especially when nobody knows the origin of the facts.

New Images Replace the Old Memories

Nobody knows how Lord Mahadev or Ram looked like in his original form. We have been introduced to them through various paintings and photographs created by different artists. Perhaps they were also taking the clue from earlier narrations in the texts. But we always knew of the mythical characters through the images that we were exposed to.

When I was a child, I used to sit with my mother for a short evening to a framed poster of Lord Shiva. I distinctly remember the face and the facial expression of Lord Shiva, as portrayed in the poster, and that image is still imprinted in my mind. For this paper, I started watching the tele-serial 'Devon Ke Dev Mahadev', and I had a different image of Mahadev (another nomenclature of Lord Shiva). The face of Mr. Mohit Raina, who played the role of Mahadev in "Devon Ke Dev Mahadev" serial, flashes in my memory—his face, his costumes, the way he stands,

Mr. Mohit Raina
Images from India-Forums.com

the way he sits, and the way he meditates. The new image often gets superimposed on the old image that I still carry for Lord Shiva; apart from the costumes, everything is new.

Similarly, in 1987, a mega television serial aired in India and across other continents. The serial was based on the Indian epic *Ramayan*. Even today when I think of Ram—the mythical heroic character of *Ramayan*, I only visualize the face of Mr. Arun Govil who personified the mythical character of Ram.

In the context of recent political events, Desai (2013) remarks that "[t]here is startling absence of past memory, visual or otherwise. Had Richard Attenborough not made "Gandhi" (film on the life of Gandhi) we would have virtually no visual reference of the person we refer to as the 'Father of the Nation.' Even now, when we see the real Gandhi in pictures he looks like a shriveled version of how he ought to be, thanks to the somewhat sturdier bearing of Ben Kingsley."

Thus, if the saying "repeated information helps in registering in the mind of the receivers" is correct, I strongly believe that not only myth and mythology, but the acts and social orders, with some contemporary or non-mythological elements that come as information blitz through different media will be taken by the new generation as reality of the mythological era.

Mr. Arun Govil
Images from India-Forums.com

What Others Say

Esther Lombardi (2003) defines myth as "a traditional story, which may describe the origins of the world and/or of a people. A myth is an attempt to explain mysteries, supernatural events, and cultural traditions. Sometimes sacred in nature, a myth can involve gods or other creatures. And, a myth represents reality in dramatic ways." She also says that many cultures have their own versions of common myths, which contain archetypal images and themes. It is explained that mythology is "a traditional or legendary story, usually concerning some being or hero or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation,

especially one that is concerned with deities or demigods and explains some practice, rite, or phenomenon of nature." Mythology is made up for many tales, which hold important messages—societal ideals, morality of life, intrinsic concepts such as luck and fate, fundamental rules of society, to the people and it has survived through the ages primarily on its ability to enchant and inspire people to continue in the art. The subject attracted many scholars and there is an enormous deposit of knowledge gather on mythology and society.

Dundes (1984) wrote about the degree of flexibility that is expected in a myth. Dundes is of the view that "if myths represent the traditional values of the society, including the moral norms, one would expect them to maintain a firm shape, to show very little from one generation to another. However the scholars like Ford and Firth have different explanation to offer. Ford (2000) holds the view that myths often evolve as a result of cultural diffusion and contact. To him, myths are constantly adapted to new cultural contexts and worldly realities. Raymond Firth (1960) also talks of 'plasticity of myth' and has given it a scope of change. Van Baaren (1984) talks about the flexibility of myth and says that the occurrences of changes in a myth occur as a rule to prevent loss of function or disappearance by changing it in such a way that it can be maintained. By changing it, a myth is adapted to a new situation, armed to withstand a new challenge.

Celena Smith is of the opinion that although myth is timeless, there are views which say that myths were changed to adapt to different societies and times, causing some myths to have different variations that may contradict each other.

In his foreword to the book *Changing the Mythology: Thoughts on Sonia Arrison's 100 Plus*, Peter Thiel writes that "every myth on this planet is an untrue story that tells people that the purpose of life is death. The crisis of the modern world is the crisis of mythology. We no longer believe in the old stories, but we also cannot go back to a time when we were not there and challenge it" (2011).

The volume *Dramatic Revisions of Myths, Fairy Tales and Legends: Essays on Recent Plays*, edited by Verna A. Foster, Stephe Harrop (2013) pointed out that there are examples of various kinds of retellings of myth, fairy tale, and legend. The statement by Foster is based on the wide-ranging survey of the ways in which contemporary dramatic literature appropriates, contests, and transforms pre-existing mythic and fantastical narratives. Harrop further writes that "old stories have been traversed for new cultural purposes in modern playwrights and there has been "dramatic revisions" of myth, fairy tale, or legend (12).

In the same essay, Elizabeth W. Scharffenberger has been quoted exploring the ways in which contemporary playwriting and performance can radically "unmake" myth (52), However, it is also said that Kritzer argues that Caryl Churchill's use of mythic

figures and themes in 'The Skriker' deliberately pushes the play beyond the personal and the everyday in order to make visible "the psychological, social, and economic burden carried by young people" and address the wider issues of "social breakdown" and "natural catastrophe" (122) and how Sharon Friedman contributed a fascinating survey of multiple revisions of the "dybbuk" in modern theater and the ways in which this Jewish folkloric figure has been used to engage contentious issues of gender, identity, and sexual desire (140). The essay talks about the fairy tale's potential to dramatize and contest contemporary social mores that are central to Sheila Rabillard's account of Grasses of a Thousand Colors, its appropriation of tropes and themes from "The White Cat," and Wallace Shawn's knowing redeployment of "the transformations which fairy tales undergo" (162) in the creation of a dislocating, dystophic fantasy of sexual predation and ecological disaster...."

Kristin Callis, mythology is taken differently in the USA as Greek mythology has its roots in physical perfection and many of the Americans look to mythology that depicts and celebrates physical perfection. Callis also connects it to the contemporary business world and says that Greek mythology has its visible impact on business and products— naming the brand, and picking up the fashion—dresses, jewelry, and goddess hairstyles. She also states that "Mythology has benefitted the spheres of entertainment, where much inspiration is drawn from the ancient tales of mythology and where many ideas are reused in different forms of entertainment—radio programs, films, television, and now Internet."

The Study

In order to understand the mythology vis-à-vis social practices, the author tried to study the religion and mythology in the cultural context of India. The paper is based on his primary research carried out in the form of content study of an ongoing mega mythological television serial to understanding how the mythology has contributed in continuity of custom and practices, and also of how much the society has taken part in changing the construction of the mythology to reflect today's reality and connect it with audience and society. Perceptibly it became imperative to understand the interrelation between the religion, myth, and society.

The present paper examines how the mythological practices have been taken by the society, how some of the mythological practices as shown on television serial exist today, and if there is a possibility that the depiction of mythological characters and practices might have been twisted to match the contemporary practices in the society. The author wonders that if it is true, the future generation will take it as Godly act and will keep the new practice alive for the next few generations until someone play with it again.

Content Study

Since content study of a long lasting serial of 400+ episodes that started airing from mid-December 2011 was a near impossible task, the author selected a time slot between March 2013 to August 2013, a timeframe of six months. Though the author wanted to see all the telecast but missed many of them because of travel and other commitments. Out of more than 120 episodes telecast during this period, the author watched at least two-third of the total episodes. The paper does not claim that it is based on a fully scientific study following all the steps of content study; it has been able to pick up a number of significant events from the serial that helped to connect it to some of the cultural practices which were shown on television and strikingly being practiced even today by different communities. The author hopes that the elucidations will help in the understanding of how mythology has contributed in the continuity of custom and practices, and how much the society has participated in changing the construction of the mythology to reflect today's reality and connects it with society.

"Devon Ke Dev Mahadev" – the TV Serial

The Hindu culture, like many other civilizations in the world, believes more in Divine power, and the gods and goddess are the ones who are supernatural entities. Mahadev, also known as Shiva or Mahesh or Mahadev (the Lord of Lords) is one of the three most powerful mythical characters. They are **Brahma** (the creator of universe), **Vishnu** who maintains the universe and holds the responsibility of running the show by taking different *Avatar* (incarnation) at different time and space, depending on the need of the time, and **Mahesh** or **Mahadev**, considered as the demolisher of the world who destroys the ego and punishes the evil characters. Shiva is also taken as the art of meditation.

The mega serial "Devon Ke Mahadev," depicting the life and different phases of Mahadev started its telecast on the evening of December 18, 2011. The serial in Hindi language is slotted between 8:00–8:30 pm on Life OK channel. The serial, dubbed in different regional languages of India, is telecast at different time in different language zones of India.

The Findings

Some of the incidents of the mythology, as depicted in the serial, reflects today's reality. The characters of the mythological drama have at times maintained themselves like any normal human being in our society. Does it reflect the psychic unity of humankind as propounded by Edward Tylor? Did the people of mythological era behaved the same way as today, or it has been incorporated by those who wrote the script?

There is an instance in episode 356 when a wife gets jittery with her husband over a petty issue, nothing different than day-to-day experience in today's world. Parvati wanted Mahadev to get a *Gajara* (a traditional flower hair band meant to decorate a hairstyle). She says that if she does not get *Gajara*, her beatification will not be complete and she will take a vow to forget everything, and she did it. It took hell of a time for Mahadev and all others to bring her memory back.

The mythological drama also showed that the gods behaved like the men of today who are often blamed to get changed after their marriage. There is an instance when the saints invited Mahadev for a *Gyan Sabha* (knowledge discourse), but he did not devote much time in it because he wanted to spend some time with his wife. The saints did not appreciate this change in behaviour of Mahadev, and Rishi Bhringi said, "When he was not married he was always ready to participate in such discourse within no time. Today he excused participation and took time off to spend with his wife."

Like the lineage politics ruling a democratic country like India, the mythology also shows how the universe is ruled by family members. Most of the characters in key positions are related to each other; Ganga is Mahadev's sister-in-law and Vishnu is his brother-in-law. Lord Brahma's wife is Goddess Saraswati, the goddess of learning. The dynasty political plan is clearly reflected when Mahadev chooses his son Kartikeya over others to be the chieftain of his territory. Lord Vishnu announces Nahush (Mahadev's son-in-law) the *Devraj* (king of the deities) in place of Indra Dev, of course for the wrongdoings of Indra. On the other hand, to save his party men from losing their battle, Lord Vishnu cheated Jalandhar's wife Vrinda, and Jalandhar had to lose the battle.

One episode proves the saying, "blood is thicker than water." Mahadev favoured his own son in the battle between Ganesh and Jalandhar, who was also born out of his anger. The fault of Jalandhar was that he did not forget the wrong doings of God Indra who killed his mother from behind for no fault of her. Jalandhar, through his meditations and blessings from Lord Brahma, became very powerful and for his own reasons was not following the norms set by the Gods. He wanted justice for his slain mother. When Jalandhar was killed by Mahadev in episode 414, his last words were, "Now I know for sure that one does not have liberty to live with independent views. Everyone has to follow your (Mahadev's) norms and instruction without even thinking what is wrong and what is right." When the author matches up this statement to the present day situation, it is exactly the same thing that the kings and emperors had followed.

Most management principles applied for any corporate or government working are the same. Another instance is when Mahadev chopped off Ganesh's (that time known as Vinayak) head because he did not obey his order to allow him to enter into the house

when his mother was taking bath (episode 285). Will we allow any outsider (Ganesh did not know that Mahadev is his mother's husband) in that situation even today?

Kuber, the king of wealth, was keeping everything with him and did not share or give to others, even to his brother Dasanand (Ravan). Episode 324 shows that on this act of Kuber, Mahadev thought about teaching him a lesson. Mahadev punished him using Ganesh, and when Kuber realized his mistake, Mahadev told him to understand that he was made a custodian of the wealth and he started acting as owner of the wealth. This shows the present crisis in the society where most of us do not understand the difference between 'coordination' and 'control,' and go for lust for power. Mahadev gives example of nature has everything with but it does not keep anything with her and offers these to everyone equally. Kuber realised that the desire of accumulating wealth never dies, and requested Mahadev to give him one more chance to repent.

The serial also mentioned a superstition that Ravan talks about. In episode 466, when Ravan was going to Mithila for participating in the marriage competition (*Swayambar*) of Sita, his wife Mandodari called him from behind. Ravan scolded her and told that "I was going for an auspicious work and your calling me from behind was not justified." This superstition is very much prevalent in many Indian societies, and to ask a person who is going for some work is not considered auspicious. It is believed that if it happens, the mission will not be completed.

Episode 432 showed that once the construction of Ravan's castle was over, he

Image from Wikimedia Commons

instructed his lieutenants to kill the artisans who built the castle for him so that they cannot build another equally beautiful house for anyone else. It was only at the eleventh hour the Lord Mahadev arrived at the scene and saved the artisans against the wishes of Ravan.

In recent history there also has been record of this type of cruelty. Taj Mahal, one of the Seven Wonders of the World was built by Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his wife Mumtaj. Work on the mausoleum began in 1633 and 20,000 workers laboured for 17 years to build it. It is alleged that upon its completion, Shah Jahan ordered the right hands of the chief mason and other workers to be cut off so that the marvelous monument could never be recreated.

One can debate whether people have imbibed many of their acts from mythology or mythology has incorporated many things from today's social practices to suit to the test of those who view/listen to them. In support of the second hypothesis, the paper presents a few illustrations shown as part of the marriage ritual in the mythological serial "Devon Ke Dev Mahadev." These are: (1) Educating the groom before marriage, and (2) Fish the ring.

Episode 437 shows that the groom Ganesh ran out of the venue and his maternal uncle Vishnu chased him to bring him back to the marriage venue. Perhaps he wanted to know more about the responsibility of a married life before he gets into it. Lord Vishnu ultimately gave him sermons and brought Ganesh to the venue and the marriage was solemnized. Same ritual is today practiced during the sacred thread ceremony among the Maharastrian culture.

In today's context, this ritual is very much in practice in some communities in India as a part of the sacred thread ceremony (also known as *Upnayan* or *Yagnopavit* or *Janeu*). Sacred thread ceremony guides the child into taking a pledge of undertaking an eternal pursuit of knowledge secular and spiritual. Wikipedia says that traditionally the boys were sent to residential school (*aashram*) for education. At this point, a boy who wants to renounce family life and get to the teachers (*gurus*) by running is averted by the maternal uncle (*mama*) who lures him by expensive gifts and money to bring back to the material world. This practice is also mentioned by Desai (nd) who has written about this practice in his article on sacred thread ceremony where he termed the local name as "Badvo."

Image from Wikimedia Commons

Today it is a common ritual that when the bride comes to the groom's place after the marriage, the women of the family drop a ring in the bowl filled with milk and other ingredients. Both bride and the groom are asked to put their hand in the liquid and search for the ring. The first one who finds the ring is applauded. The game is a post-wedding game—'Fish the Ring,' and is a very popular Indian marriage custom observed in almost all communities. Once the bride and the groom reach the latter's home after the wedding ceremony, they play this game arranged by the women in groom's family. The bride and the groom are asked to put their engagement rings with other small metallic objects in order to confuse the players in a large bowl of milk and flower petals.

Then, they search for their rings in that bowl using one hand only. The myth says that the person who finds it first is deemed to have an upper hand in their future life. If both find one ring each, it is believed that there will be a sense of balance in understanding and decision making between the married couple.

All the matrimonial sites write extensively on it to add value to their sites as well as popularizing the game.

Same ritual was performed in the serial "Devon Ke Dev Mahadev" where Ganesh and his brides Ridhhi and Siddhi were shown performing the same ritual immediately after their marriage (episode 439).

Conclusion

Through the analysis of the observations, and as reflected in the serial "Devon Ke Dev Mahadev," the author concludes that the serial does not only reflect the practices in the mythical era, which is very much followed, believed, and practiced by many communities across the country, but the producer of the serial has also put contemporary social practices that do not seem to the practice of the mythical era. The new twists were given to dramatize the mythology so that it connects well with the audience and their present practices, which in turn increases the chance of viewership of the serial. It seems like human psychology in the absence of a concrete evidence of the past and its datedness, we either erase the memories or create new ones that somehow give a mirror reflection of ourselves projected back in time in order to render it of contemporary interest. It is said that whenever any new attempt is made to reconstruct the mythology, maybe in order to fit into the format required by a particular medium, it goes through some modification of facts and the process continues. It has happened in the past and will happen, probably in the future, too.

The presentations in the mythological serial under study or any such attempt of mediated mythological framework for popular use, can be termed as "cinematic mythology," may be for business motif or may be as Harrop and Celene mentioned— for making it more afresh.

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An Act of Faith:
From the Spiritual to the Ritual

Chandrabhanu Pattanayak

Introduction

A characteristic trait of the social and, to a certain extent, political life of India over the last ten to twenty five years has been the appearance and rapid growth of the influence of various types of new forms of religious worship, as well as of individual saints, incarnate gods, gurus and swamis (religious teachers), *yogis* and *tantrics,* astrologers and soothsayers who have a vast and growing number of followers. "These cults are called neo-religious because, although their leaders usually use some of the postulates, symbols, and practices of traditional Hinduism, they develop their own rituals, system of views, and cult practices that differ widely and are often contrary to those of Hindu orthodoxy. Leaders of the latter group and more frequently now, the media, often voice sharp criticism of the new preachers, calling them *jet gurus, false gurus,* and even tricksters who undermine the foundation of the true faith" (Kliuev, 1986). Whether one calls them charlatans or wise men, they have millions of followers' worldwide. This new-age religion and "spirituality" has been one of India's biggest exports since the '60s.

What I propose to do here is to try and locate the social space that is afforded to this new age guru within which he/she survives and operates. What I also am trying to see is whether these gurus are operating essentially within a religious frame or that of a ritualistic one. I shall venture to go a step further and try to explore whether in fact, if ritual is what they are engaged in, then it is extended to "play" rather than religious ritual.

Kumaré: The Time I Became A Guru

Posted: 07/06/2012 12:04 pm

Six years ago, I filmed a gang of sadhus (spiritual ascetics) smoking weed on the banks of the Holy Ganga in Northern India. Their guru stepped away from a young

European woman meditating under a banyan tree, and approached me, machete in hand. "You want to know about gurus?" He popped a squat, and lit up a bidi. "All those big gurus you see, they are not spiritual people. All they want is money. It's not that easy man... Living a spiritual life is very difficult." That night, they swapped the pot for heroin.

Back home in New York City, I filmed the world around me embracing the "spiritual life," or at least one packaged into a healthful 90-minute alternative to aerobics class. The modern definition of yoga is convoluted as the postures yogis aspire to. Symbols, smells, words, icons, and religions of the East became an easy aesthetic for branding and marketing. Was the culture I grew up in becoming just a marketing scheme for a flourishing industry? In yoga class, was I the only one who wasn't feeling the vibe of getting enlightened? And why were people all of a sudden bowing down to people in robes with expensive philosophies and the promises of happiness? I became skeptical of anyone who sold a spiritual product, anyone who claimed to be holier than anyone else, anyone who said they had the answer.

Since those days as one-man crew, my answers and strong opinions have turned more into questions. As a documentarian on the edge of a subculture for years, the lives of the characters I met have come full circle -- almost repeating the same plot lines as the teachers that fell decades before them. I've tried Iyengar, Ashtanga, Jivamukti, Kundalini, Anusara, and met the founders, inventors, entrepreneurs, and gurus in many traditions. I've also chanted (reluctantly and enthusiastically), set intentions, retained breath, hugged a saint -- or rather got hugged by one, received blessings, blessed, fasted, veg'd out, finished a first series, kriya-ed, flossed my nose, taken pilgrimages, avoided dysentery, bathed in the royal baths, found moments of deep tranquility, gave in to temptation, restrained it, fluctuated mentally, and even saw a most surreal event called an International Yoga Competition. I've said 'No, it's Vikram with a V' more than any other phrase these past few years. I learned from this, that practice never makes anyone perfect. We are all the same -- flawed, yet capable of greatness.

Trailer:

I'd always wanted to make a movie about 'us' -- about our inner, "spiritual" lives. I've watched so many movies about 'them' -- the backwards people of the others and even, the fundamentalist right-wingers. What about us? Why don't we turn our gaze back on ourselves? I figured: If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. So, I impersonated a wise guru from the East named Kumaré and started a following of real people in the West.

The character Kumaré was the center of a social experiment testing what we coined "The Spiritual Placebo Effect." Can a fake religion and religious leader have the same effect as a real one? If the facts are not real, does it make the experience any less real? Some people were appalled, offended at the idea. It's easy not to question what feels right -- people think you're being a downer, a bummer, or a cynic. But to me, asking questions, breaking down icons and idols, and destroying the illusions our society is built on are highly 'spiritual' acts. And aren't the saviors of history the ones that decided to speak up and say something?

This film was my humble attempt to bring the spiritual heroes I learned about as a child to the real world. I studied Buddha, Shiva, Krishna, Jesus -- all the big ones

but it took the form a bearded barefoot man who carried a trident and spoke like my grandmother.

It was not a matter of fooling people -- everyone from the footsteps of the Himalayas to the Mexican Border believed in Kumaré. I suspect this is not because I am a great actor, but because Kumaré is a dream worth believing in. Being a fictional spiritual leader has a lot more rules than being a real a guru. No money can be earned. No temptation can be acted upon. My character only saw the highest in people, his 'motivation' was to make them happy -- to trick people to be happy.

At Q&As, people ask me if I'm still as critical of spiritual leaders as I was when I started. I can say now that I understand why we have spiritual leaders, and how slippery the slope is from hero to villain, when one takes on that role. I may be more sympathetic now, but I still always think back to something Kumaré once said: "It is you real gurus that make us fake gurus so necessary."

There are several questions that are raised here. Are people free to choose? Are the devotees being duped by the clever ad-guru (literally)? Is this *guru*, in creating these rituals creating some process of healing for devotees who are hurting in some inner psycho-spiritual realm? Is religion itself something we need to question? Starting with the background of the recent media focus on several gurus engaged in rape, murder, financial embezzlement, cheating political impropriety and various other abominations in India, it would be interesting to look at how, building on the legacy of the mystical and spiritual authority of the East, and having had the way paved by Vivekananda, today's New Age Indian gurus, even those who rarely leave India, negotiate their charismatic spiritual authority through global networks. Scholarly literature on Indian gurus has engaged discourses across the academic disciplines to address theoretical topics such as cosmopolitanism, diaspora, globalization, religious pluralism, and gender, and this literature has contributed to our understandings of social realities of Hindu Nationalism and the Indian middle class. As Angela Rudert points out, "These scholarly conversations are by no means complete, and more attention to Indian gurus, especially multi-sited studies of guru-led movements at various stages of development, will benefit its continuation. However, new conversations need to begin as well, and this essay suggests that new enquiries on contemporary Indian gurus should begin to address the term 'New Age' and what this means in various contexts as it applies to guru-led movements. Particularly, we should be asking what 'New Age' means for Indian gurus themselves and for their constituencies in India and around the globe. The already messy modifier, 'New Age' undergoes its own transformations as it traverses transnational terrain, religious sensibilities, histories and worldviews around the figure of the New Age guru."[1]

Asaram Bapu, the latest in a list of miscreant Gurus, when he was arrested for allegedly raping a sixteen year-old girl, saw in the Indian media, an O. J. Simpson

kind chase drama being played out. For days on end people watched transfixed, this "drama" unfolds through myriad intrigues of now seen and now gone. Perhaps George Orwell was on to something when he said that "saints should always be judged guilty until they are proved innocent", for no all-too-human godman can ever live up to the qualities of godliness. Perhaps the wise course to take is to reflect upon the tragedy of overweening human ambition of these fallen gurus and move on.

Yet, if one pauses to think about it, Asaram's arrest is not just a matter of one more godman's personal failings. Rather, this episode dramatises the thin line between faith and blind faith, and the near complete merger of faith, politics and money in contemporary Indian society. Hundreds of thousands of his followers still stand by him steadfastly for he has touched them in some way in the past.

A few months ago another Baba,who calls himself "Nirmal Baba" (untainted, virtuous, pure) was arrested and put into prison for having cheated his flock. Sai Baba, one of the most popular of the gurus in the last three decades left behind a messy inheritance, when it was found, on his death that his personal wealth amounted to 16 billion dollars. Ramdev Baba one of the most popular of them all in the recent past has been the target of several inquiries for misappropriation of finances and several other charges. Whether any of these charges are true or false is not my concern here. What intrigues me is that in spite of such public outrage, charges, counter-charges and humiliation, millions of people still steadfastly follow them. After all they are their gurus. What is the social space that they inhabit? Who gives them this space and why is this kind of supposed blind faith allowed in a modern 21st-century nation/world? In fact, a large number of their followers are from different parts of the world and not Indians.

So then what or who is a Guru? According to the *Hindu Primer* written by *Shukavaka N. Dasa*,"The word *guru* means "heavy" or "deep," thus a guru is a person "heavy" or "deep" in knowledge. In this sense a school-teacher is a guru, a coach or athletic instructor is a guru, a fine-arts or even a dance teacher is a guru. One's parents are also gurus."[2] According to the *Brahmanda Puran a guru is*

"Guru is Shiva sans his three eyes,

Vishnu sans his four arms

Brahma sans his four heads.

He is *parama* Shiva himself in human form"

Guru is the God, say the scriptures. Indeed, the 'guru' in Vedic tradition is looked upon as one no less than a God. 'Guru' is a honorific designation of a preceptor as defined and explained variously in the scriptures and ancient literary works including epics. The English word 'guru' has its etymological origin in the Sanskrit term. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*

defines it as "Hindu spiritual teacher or head of religious sect; influential teacher; revered mentor."

In this sense, the guru is more real than the gods. Basically the guru is a spiritual teacher leading the disciple on the path of "god-realization." In essence, the guru is considered a respected person with saintly qualities who enlightens the mind of his disciple, an educator from whom one receives the initiatory mantra, and one who instructs in rituals and religious ceremonies. The *Vishnu Smriti* and *Manu Smriti* regard the *Acharya* (teacher), along with the mother and the father as the most venerable gurus of an individual. According to *Deval Smriti* there can be eleven kinds of gurus and according to *Nama Chintamani* ten. According to his functions he is categorized as *rishi, acharyam, upadhya, kulapati* or *mantravetta.*

Thus to have a guru who acts as the master is an essential part of spiritual growth and so to feel respect for and to want to honor one's guru is natural and healthy. However, there is a tendency nowadays for the development of guru "cults" where the worship of guru supersedes the worship of God. This generally takes place when the original idea of guru as teacher becomes diminished and is replaced by the idea of guru as "blesser." To be blessed by a guru is considered the greatest thing, but people forget that the real blessing of a guru comes in the form of study, discipline, and hard work that leads to knowledge and wisdom and not just with the touch of a hand. The idea of guru as blesser is a debasement of the true role of a guru."[3] So if the role of the Guru has been somehow debased, then what reallyis going on? Why are there so many gurus today and why are there so many people following these numerous gurus?

Sudhir Kakar, in his excellent study, *Shamans, Mystics and Doctors – A Psychological Enquiry into India and its Healing Traditions,*[4] seems to suggest that aprt from the various practitioners of different healing traditions such as *hakims, vaids,* there are also palmists, horoscope specialists, herbalists, deviners, sorcerers and a variety of shamans whose therapeutic efforts combine classical Indian astrology, medicine, alchemy and magic with beliefs and practices from folk and popular traditions. Apart from these, "we have the ubiquitous *sadhus, swamis, maharajas, babas, matas and bhagwans* who trace their lineage in some fashion to the mystical spiritual traditions of Indian antiquity and claim to specialize in 'soul health,' the restoration of moral and spiritual well being."[5]

Unlike Western psychotherapy, where introspection has significant bearing on the concept of "true self," the meditative procedures of Indian psycho-philosophical schools of 'self-realization' are of a different nature and follow radically different goals. The Indian injunction, 'know thy-self,' is related to a self other than the one referred to by Socrates. "It is a self uncontaminated by time and space

and thus without the life-historical dimension which is the focus of psychoanalysis and Western romantic literature. This inherent belief in the supra-historical self is shared by almost all traditional as well as modern religious cults in India."[6]

Sudhir Kakar also draws interesting contrasts between the Indian and the Western views of the 'person' with regard to the problematic of human freedom. This difference in the interpretation of the meaning of human freedom in Western and Indian religio-mystic traditions as well as conceptualization of this term in post-independence cults of modern Godmen in India is also of vital importance in understanding the divergent approach of these traditions in tackling the various ailments and the problem of human happiness. This would mean that one is able to, through some ritual practices or exercises be able to experience various inner states of consciousness by associating with different Gods and Godesses at the same time having the external constant or unchanging.

This method of inducing a dissociated state—rhythmic music, dance, over-breathing and stimulation of the semi-circular canals by rotation of the head may vary. How dissociation actually works in healing, as Sudhir Kakar points out is still a mystery though there are a few speculations as suggested these dissociation techniques are not solely the prerogative of shamans and other healers. They have in fact, been very effectively used by modern Gurus. Almost all Gurus today use some form of the dissociation techniques in the ritual initiation into the cult, where dance, rhythmic music and variation in lighting is masterfully combined to create the desired effect.

Thus human freedom in the traditional Indian context seems to imply an increase in the potential to experience different inner states while limiting action in the outer world to stereotypes and unquestioned adaptation. The Indian emphasis has been on the pursuit of an inner differentiation while keeping the outer world constant. In contrast the notion of freedom in the West is related to an increase in the potential for acting in the outer world and enlarging the sphere of choices, while keeping the inner state constant to that of a rational, waking consciousness from which other modes of inner experience have been excluded as deviations.

In the Indian culture, where the fear of separation and loss is considered as the most legitimate of human anxieties, and where the ideal model of learning and personal transformation stressed identification—the student being proud to be even a poor copy of the preceptor—it is precisely these aspects that are seen as limitations of the *guru–shishya parampara* or model that are seen as its virtues. It is therefore not surprising that some Indian psychiatrists consider the *guru–shishya parampara* as the most acceptable model of psychotherapy in the Indian setting.

The prolific growth of the religio-mystical cults like ISKCON, Maharshi Mahesh Yogi, Rajneesh, Sai Baba, Asharam Bapu, Baba Ramdev, Sri Sri Ravishankar and

many more should be viewed in the context of the emergence of a homogenized world and the middle and upper classes. A homogenized set of aspirations are being created and sold to all across boundaries. As Bertram Gross put it, "In today's first world, oppression takes many different forms. It is rooted in the frustration of rising aspirations, in the anguish of old crises in new forms, in the new environmental crisis and in the erosion of authority. Above all the impact of tendencies towards extended professionalism accentuates fragmentation, anxiety and alienation. The bi-products of accelerated consumption are boredom apathy and tension. The slow growth of concentrated elite power builds up repressed aggressiveness and despair at all levels."[7] This situation according to Gross, generates a huge and desperate demand for something to belong to and believe in.

Now to take a different tracks altogether, that of ritual. To both ethnologists and neurologists, ritual is central to behavior and brain structure /function. While Kakar locates the ritual form in the dislocation of the external and the internal, Victor Turner locates ritual "betwixt-and-between," in cultural creases and margins, making it more like "play" than anything else. The ritual process is liminal-liminoid, unauthorized, antistructural subjective ("if"), and subversive. The contradiction also expresses the difference between Turner's social perspective and the ethnologist's-neurologist's biological one. The difference is a version of an old, insoluble argument between determinists and those who assert that humans are free to make their own destinies.

Turner saw the ritual process as analogous to the training-workshop-rehearsal process where accepted or readymade texts and accepted ways of of using the body, and feelings are deconstructed in broken down into small usable bits of behavior, feeling, thought and text and then reconstructed in new ways, sometimes to be offered as public performances. In traditional genres such as Kathakali, Kallaripaittu, ballet or Noh theatre, people start their training early in life. This training involves new ways of speaking gesturing moving. Maybe, even new ways of thinking and feeling. New for the trainee but well known in the tradition of the respective forms of performance. Just as in initiation rites, the mind and body of each performer are returned towards a state of *tabula rasa,* ready to be written on in the language of the form being learned. When finished with training, the performer can speak 'kathakali', 'kalaripaittu,' 'noh,' 'kumara' or 'Baba Ramdev': he/she is truly "incorporated" into the tradition. The violence of scarring or circumcision is absent —but deep permanent psychological changes are wrought.

It is precisely when the creative and/or subversive function of ritual dominates, spills over its usually well defined boundaries that art separates from—and sometimes opposes—religion. The makers of carnival, Hopi mudhead clowns, are also anti structural, but always in the service of ultimately of reinforcing traditional ways of doing

and thinking. A period of license is permitted, even required. Things are done "backwards," excesses are celebrated, promiscuous sexuality and drunkenness flourish. But then Ash Wednesday terminates carnival and the subversive shenanigans of Mardi Gras are put away for another year.[8]

This is exactly what happens in the Ramlila and the Dushehra/Durga puja, Holi and Diwali in India. The demon is destroyed and all is brought back to peace. People know exactly what to expect and what the actions represent. However, in art, things are different. The subversion is continuous. As Schechner so eloquently put it, "The avante garde is art's permanent revolution."

The violence acted out in performance is no longer "symbol," sapped of its ability to wound, frighten or astonish. Even if there is no apparent violence, there is a real danger and risk involved in it. This danger is a "mortgaged actuality indefinitely postponing catastrophe."[9] Ritual violence is not a remembrance of things past. The present moment is always a negotiation between a wished-for future and rehearsable, and therefore, changeable past. History is always in flux; that is what makes it so like a performance. The mortgaged future is always death; the past is always life as-remembered or restaged. Individuals, all of who will die are assimilated into families, groups, religions and ideologies which are putatively immortal. The stories these groups tell, their ritual enactments concern temporary and uneasy triumphs over death.

Thus all devotees of all babas/gurus are in a perpetual play where their lives are mortgaged to a restaged past. And this is why in some sense, the devotees are not able to see the disjuncture in the reality when their babas or gurus are arrested or go to jail or commit larceny or rape or fraud. This is also why; political parties with extreme ideologies are able to use these babas and their congregations for their own benefit. This is theatre. We are evolved into a complex network of games, contingencies and scenarios played out in various "theatres."

At a certain deep level of dreaming—a level that is as much cultural as it is individual—strong links connect tragedy, violence sexuality and farce. Milan Kundera nicely invokes this progression from laughter to arousal to violence:

> There the stood in front of the mirror (they always stood in front of the mirror while she undressed), watching themselves. She stripped to her underwear but still had the (bowler) hat on her head. And all at once she realized they were both excited by what they saw in the mirror. What could have excited them so? A moment before, the hat on her head had seemed nothing but a joke. Was excitement really a mere step away from laughter? Yes, when they looked at each other in

the mirror that time, all she saw for the first few seconds was a comic situation. But suddenly the comic became veiled by excitement, the bowler hat no longer signified a joke, it signified violence.[10]

After all what is a human being if not a dreaming organism? When dreams were first performed—not only dreamed and remembered, but spoken danced sung and acted out—a definite threshold was crossed. Performing a dream actualizes what can never be shown. A dream is experienced firsthand only by the dreamer; like the violence of Greek tragedy, it is forever offstage, shared only in so far as it can be represented. Babas or Gurus of the new age are "dream-trained." They can focus their dreams, retain and retell them. This retelling can be in any medium, words, actions, pictures, sounds. These dream-trained people can also freely combine their dreams with what they get from the outside world, from ordinary life, from tradition or any other source. Is this what Sudhir Kakar talked about when he talked about dissociation of the external and the internal? Is this what Kumaré has ultimately achieved—the most effective play most exhaustively rehearsed?

Appendix 1

Kumaré Review

Vikram Gandhi was a disillusioned religion student who went seeking spiritual leaders and discovered that most of them are unnecessary con men bilking needy people out of a need to assuage their own egos or to score desperate tail. He wanted to prove to people that they did not need some guru to open up their better selves—that religion and sensibility are within everyone. So he got together a yoga instructor and a publicist and transformed himself into the spiritual guru kumaré, a faux yogi who was there to take in people easily lured by the billion dollar spiritual guidance industry and show them that they didn't need anyone else to be amazing. The social experiment seems cruel, and as he lures in followers and finds people with genuine problems opening up to him in the process, Gandhi himself changes as a person. What starts as a *Borat*-style parody that demonstrates the foolishness and gullibility of the devotees of various self-help and spiritualist movements, like Law of Attraction and yoga enthusiasts, quickly develops into a fascinating study on what it means to have faith. Belief is an incredibly strong emotion, something that will drive people to lengths and breadths that they never thought themselves capable. *Kumaré* could easily have been a cruel movie, making fun of these clingy suckers who'll absorb any sap you splash on them, but instead takes the difficult high road and becomes incredibly poignant. Even as you wince and chuckle at the characters, you find yourself caring about them as much as Gandhi eventually does. And that's what elevates the documentary beyond mere mockery.

Vikram Gandhi, a native of New Jersey who narrates the documentary in a clear as a bell voiceover, grows out his hair and beard and adopts the more traditional mutter of his grandmother to become Kumaré. Kumaré is a likable fellow, a continuously happy guru, clutching what's essentially a trident with a testicle shaped character at the top, and with a silent open-mouthed laugh. Gandhi dons the orange robes and loincloths that we expect from a Central Casting swami. He learns yoga, and then develops a routine of various yoga-like moves that are meant to be ridiculous to see what he could get people to fall for. Because he looks and sounds the part, he's able to convince a yoga class to do a motion that resembles people doing power strums on air guitar or to grunt and strain like panting dogs. He gets them to chant nonsensical sounds or to say "Be All That You Can Be" in Hindi. With the help of two willing assistants, a publicist and a yoga instructor, he's able to quickly permeate the yoga community of Arizona.

While hilariously exposing how people will pretty much buy anything if they think it comes from an authentic source, the film begins to take a turn as we dip into the lives of the core group of Kumaré devotees. These are people with genuine problems and concerns who are clinging to Kumaré to save them. It would have been a very different and less effective film if Gandhi were playing everything for laughs. It would be *Borat*, which was just as instrumental at exposing the hypocrisy of the average citizen. Gandhi's thesis from the very start was to start a religious movement that helped people to learn that they didn't need religious movements. He's constantly telling people that he's fake, that he's not what they think he is, and they so want to believe him that it becomes painful. You can see throughout the film how uncomfortable and pained Gandhi is beneath his playful Kumaré exterior. He realizes that he might completely destroy these people who only wanted help and that he is genuinely trying to help. The film actually opens with scenes just before he's about to initiate the "Great Unveiling." Gandhi stares at himself in a mirror, with a mortified look on his face, shaking and about to dry heave. He never intends to hurt anyone, and that's kind of what permits us to laugh along and prevents the film from dipping into cruelty and callousness, which elevates it to such a moving experience.

Of course, this all might be bullshit. The very film *Kumaré* is about a con man, and Gandhi might just be manufacturing his own sentimentality. POSSIBLE SPOILER ALERT: When he does reveal himself to be a regular person, there are plenty of folks who simply walk away or are grievously pained by his deception. Those that forgive him end up bettering themselves. We don't hear from those who were disillusioned. So by nature of the documentarian, he's probably spinning everything to look less the dickhole. But I'm fine with that. ENDETH SPOILERS.

Kumaré is a daring social experiment in what it means to have faith. Gandhi's not preaching the gospel of the fallacy of organized religion. He's merely stating that most people are capable of achieving that without paying money to some evangelist, whether he sports a fake tan and a shiny diamond crucifix tie tack or a scraggly beard and bare feet. I found the film to be incredibly moving—I got a little teary-eyed towards the end—because I wanted these people to find what they were looking for. And that's the heart of *Kumaré*, there seems to be a genuine and heartwarming effort to help people find the help they need and to turn their faith in on themselves.

Kumaré is screening in the documentary competition at the SXSW 2011 Film Festival.

Appendix 2

The holy men of India
(images from Wikimedia Commons)
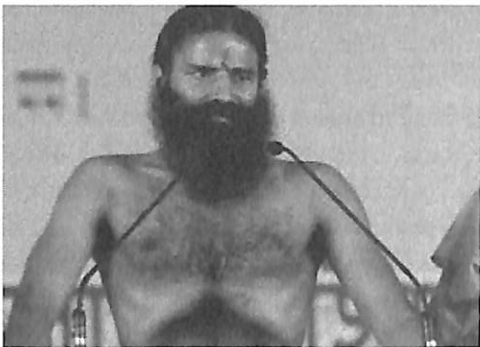
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Religion, Culture and the 'New' Social Media in India: Critical Perspectives

Keval J. Kumar

Introduction

Kirthega Reddy, the Head of Facebook India, claimed in a recent interview to *Business Standard* that 'we're the richest, most accurate database of people, their likes and their interests'. She went on to say that 'no other platform has real user and real identity'. Out of the 120 million 'users' of the Internet in India, 71 million are Facebook users (Kohli-Khandekar 2013). Other social networks that have a sizable following in India include LinkedIn, MySpace, Google Plus, and Twitter.

What Reddy did not talk about in the interview was how this 'most accurate database' was exploited by Facebook without the knowledge of the millions who share their 'likes,' 'interests' and other personal intimate details of their lives with families, relations, friends, acquaintances, colleagues and peers, and even strangers within India and across the globe. Most Facebook users, especially children, and to the people they interact with Facebook Inc. sells this rich personal data to marketers and advertisers, without permission or any legal sanction. This is termed 'monetization' of personal data. In reality, this is 'free digital labour' (in the form of 'user-generated content' or UGC) provided by social media users but which is exploited for profit by the social network sites (SNSs).

Prior to sale, of course, the data is 'mined', 'aggregated' and 'segmented' in terms of demographics, psychographics and geographics so that marketers can precisely target consumers of different products and services. Such extremely personal and intimate data is thus commodotized, purely for marketing purposes with little or no concern for the nature and type of self-disclosures they are, or for the privacy of individual users and their real-life social networks. The legality and ethics of such manipulative use of personal data freely shared in confidence and sometimes in all innocence, is of little concern either. Children are the most vulnerable to this large scale and global manipulation and unabashed deception.

Indeed, even as young people look upon social media as a 'confessional' where intimate self-disclosures are expected to be kept confidential, others treat the social media as a 'performance of the self' for public adulation (hence the tall claims made regarding the number of 'friends', 'followers' and 'likes' garnered). How 'real' then are the identities (profiles) presented by 'real' friends and followers in the social media where 'faking' is quite widespread? This is both a religious and cultural question as much as it is a question of identities.

It is widely assumed that the new digital social media like Facebook impact the religious and cultural life of India. The hype about these new digital media (in the traditional mass media and among the urban educated elite) does not come anywhere near the reality. Certainly they have assisted in more efficient administration and governance, mobilized the educated urban middle classes against the national and state governments in raising issues like corruption in public life, safety of women in public, and acted as catalysts for speeding up economic development. Yet, less than ten per cent of the population has access to computers and the Internet; much fewer has access to the social media, though it's true that this situation is rapidly changing with mobile phones turning 'smart' thereby giving every mobile user access to social media and a host of other applications. With over 900 million mobile phones in India, it appears that almost every adult Indian now has access to a mobile phone. (Among those with access, personal computers, tablets and mobile phones are the primary devices employed). Globally, according to a recent UTI and Georgia Institute of Technology survey, only 30% of the world's youth are digital natives (cf. Report in *The Times of India*, 8 October 2013, p. 1).

Much of the Indian research on social media carried out so far is dedicated to serving the market; social science research on the religious or cultural impact of these new technologies is in its nascent stage. The few studies conducted relate to the 'uses and gratifications' (Krishnatray et al. 2012) or to the political economy (Thomas 2012) of the social media. Derne (2008) looks at the globalization of Indian culture and the role played by the new media in this transformation, while Osuri (2012) throws light on the 'anti-conversion' debate in India in the context of religious freedom and the growing religious fundamentalism among both majority Hindu groups and minority Muslim and Christian communities (Thomas 2008 and James 2011).

Aim

This paper will raise critical questions about the practices of social media networks such as Facebook, and reflect on the social, cultural, religious, and ethical implications of these activities for the Indian middle class. More specifically, the paper will analyse social media evangelism as reflected in websites, blogs, Twitter and Facebook activities of two religious communities of India, namely, the Hindu majority and the Christian minority. Thus, how the new social media empower (and often provoke and inflame) the urban educated class and help mobilize public opinion (mostly along religious lines) against various social/political causes, even as they divide religious communities through hate-speeches, will be the main thrust of this paper. The challenge for India is how to balance freedom of expression and freedom of religion enshrined in the Constitution with the unfettered freedom that an unregulated social media stands for and propagates. The paper concludes with an analysis of how far these developments are changing Indian religious culture, with particular reference to religious practices and expressions, and inter-religious relations.

Religion Related News Reports

Prior discussion of social media, culture and religion in India, I'd like to share some news stories that caught my attention in early October 2013; they are directly related to the theme of this paper:

> 'Dalits embrace Buddhism at meet' (Headline in *The Times of India*, 14 October, p. 5). At a rally in Rajkot, 60,000 dalits converted to Buddhism 'leaving behind the age-old caste discrimination and untouchability' which they were victims of as Hindus. Besides dalits, people of the Koli community and other castes too embraced Buddhism. This was reminiscent of earlier mass conversions of the 'untouchables' to Buddhism, particularly the one in October 14, 1956 when more than 600,000, led by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, turned their backs on Hinduism and embraced Budhism. (Dalits comprise 17% of India's population; 37% of Dalits live below the poverty line).

News about Catholic/Christian bishops rarely makes headlines in the daily newspapers of India, except of course if they happen to be involved in scandals or corruption. But October 3, 2013, the day following the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, was an exception. Two news stories on the retired and current Catholic bishops of Pune made it to the city page of *The Times of India*. The first was headlined: 'At 80, Bishop connects with youth on Facebook'; the second: 'Religious leaders should look beyond places of worship'. The first story described how Bishop Valerian D'Souza, now retired, claims he has 2500 friends on Facebook, with a third of them under the age of 25. These young 'friends' of his asked him questions about religion. The second story reported on an inter-religious programme on 'Religion and Faith' organized to mark Gandhi Jayanthi. The headline was a direct quotation from the speech of Bishop Thomas Dabre of Pune. He had observed at the programme that 'with the society riddled with communal problems, religious leaders should look beyond rituals and places

of worship and take lead in educating their community to live in peace... All religious leaders should come out and be promoters of justice, peace and reconciliation in the society... the credibility of a religion or faith depends on the conduct of its followers.' Muslim, Zoroastrian and Buddhist scholars also spoke at the programme.

> 'Now, RSS takes the social media route to reach out' (Headline in *www.rss.org*, 15 October 2013). We are told that the 'join RSS' link on the site, got 12.115 requests in 2012 and as many as 19,312 requests till July 2013 (ibid.).

These news stories provide us just a glimpse of the contemporary religious scenario in India. None of these stories were on the front pages of daily newspapers but they told real-life experiences of people of different faiths of the country. The same events were reported in the digital versions of newspapers, and were possibly discussed in the social media.

The Indian Religious Landscape

The religious landscape of India is marked by infinite diversity, eclecticism and syncretism. While Hinduism clearly rules the roost with an overwhelming majority of 80.5% (or one billion) of adherents of the population, Islam has a sizeable 13.4% (135 million) and Christianity a mere 2.3% (24 million), while Sikhs comprise 1.9% (19 million) (Census 2011). Buddhists make up a mere 0.8% (or 8 million) but rank as the fifth largest religious group. Then there are 'multifarious little traditions of popular Hinduism and indigenous tribal faith expressions' (Thomas 2008, 193). Besides these, there are the Jewish, Zoroastrian, Orthodox and the Sufi traditions. And not to be overlooked are the neo-Buddhists, largely made up of dalit and low-caste converts to Buddhism under the leadership of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. In 1956, over a hundred thousand Indians of the lowest caste converted to Buddhism.

However, the major religious traditions are not monoliths; each has its many divisions and sects. Hinduism, though not a religion in the Semitic sense but rather a 'dharma' or dutiful way of life, has diverse traditions and practices, primarily the Vaishnavite and the Saivites. The Sunni-Shia divide thrives in India as much as in West Asia. Among Christians, the Catholic-Protestant-Orthodox divide persists. While the Catholic Church is split by rites (Latin, Syrian, Syro-Malabar), the Protestant Christian community is dominated by Anglicans, Baptists and Lutherans but has several minor sects like the Pentecostal/Neo-Pentecostal churches as well as Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's witnesses. Several of them have come together and formed two large groups, the Church of South India (CSI) and the Church of North India (CNI). The Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, largely under the influence of American churches, form

the 'fundamentalist' far-right congregations, preaching what has come to be known as Prosperity Theology (Thomas 2008).

Religion in the 'New' Social Media

Religious TV channels reflect this religious divide. Out of the 35-odd channels, the majority are Hindu-affiliated (e.g. Astha, Sanskar, Zee Jagran, Disha, Bhakti) while Islam and Christianity run a small clutch of indigenous channels. QTV, Peace and Islam are the most prominent Islamic channels and God, Miraclenet, CBN and Shalom are the best known Christian channels. The social media space has been taken over by the same religious groups. They have inundated the Internet with their history and literature in the form of text, graphics, audio and video. While most of the 'pages' of religious sites attempt to inspire and to elevate the human spirit, a small number disseminate suspicion and hate about other religions. Such are the sites of the fundamentalist groups (Kumar 2003, 36).

More than 650 websites, 7 million blogs, 15 million videos on YouTube, and 20,000 'Internet Hindus' tweet 300 times a day, besides making their presence felt on Facebook and other social networks (*Sunday Midday*, April 25, 2010). A significant proportion of these are sites are actively promoting the Hindutva ideology; they lose no opportunity to attack and mock Islam, Christian, and Buddhist beliefs and practices. Some of these sites which foment hatred and threaten communal violence have been banned (e.g. hinduunity.org) by the national and state-governments. Under an image dripping blood, the banned site hinduunity.org names a variety of people for committing crimes against the Hindu nation. 'This page exposes the evil forces that are against the Hindu people... Know your enemies! Know who will be responsible for the downfall of Bharat... and prepare yourselves for the duty towards your religion and nation' (qtd. in Thomas 2008, 142).

Other websites such as christianaggression.com targeted at Indian Christian churches, continue to operate freely. The website *christianaggression.com* is designed as a news site, replete with reports, features and articles, with the focus though on news related to Christian pastors who sexually abuse and murder minor girls. One telling headline reads: 'Militant Christianity – Evangelical Christianity: Devils in high places.' However, nowhere on the site is it stated clearly who owns and runs the site; the 'About' Page merely lists three links: What Aggression?, Why India? and Contact Information. While the answers to the first two questions were spelt out elaborately in the linked pages, the Contact Information page just gave an unusual email address: *iaca_master@yahoo.com*. This is the kind of anonymity that social media sites thrive on. The site appears to be extremely popular with advertisers. Flipkart.com is a major advertiser, so is Islam (islammatrimony.com) which carried a banner ad on the day I accessed

the site. The day I browsed the site (October 15, 2013), pride of place was given to a recent book on the *Life of Pope Francis*, advertised by flipkart.com, India's foremost retail shopping site.

Among the indigenous Indian Christian websites are: indianchristian.org, nicministries.org (North Indian Christian ministries), indianchristianity.com, indianchristianmission.com. These sites are targeted at practicing Christians of different denominations; their primary objective being to provide factual news and prayers that inspire love and peace. 'Rival' churches or religions do not usually find mention on such sites.

The majority of Christian and Hindu social network sites (SNSs) are targeted at loyal followers of the respective religious communities; however, each religious group manages specific sites which are unabashedly aggressive and hostile in address and tone when reporting or discussing 'rival' religions that are imagined to be competing in the same space.

The use of the social media by India's many religious communities is on the rise. They were already active on print, radio and television platforms; now they have extended their 'propaganda' on to social media platforms.

Social Media and Changing Indian Culture

Social media not only extend the power and influence of the traditional mass media but put power in the hands of groups and individuals whose views are not given voice to in the mainstream media. Thus, for instance, religious minorities and the backward classes, though it needs to be acknowledged they have limited access to the new social media or the wherewithal to invest resources and time in them. Yet, these same media have the potential to be exploited to counter dominant and official views on political, economic and cultural issues, and even to mobilize public opinion and even participate in social movements against the hegemony of the dominant classes. Further, as Campbell (2013, 12) observes, "rather than being an alternate social space for a few, digital technology becomes an important platform extending and altering religious practice for many." The social media have had a role to play in India's changing culture, especially youth culture, over the last two decades. The aspects of Indian culture that have been affected relate to family relationships and values, personal relationships and privacy, and relationships among majority and minority religious communities.

Social media play only a peripheral role in bringing about changes in personal or community religious practices and religious expression. Religious discourses can be freely shared and downloaded via youtube, Facebook, Twitter and other social network sites. 'Petitions for prayers' can be sent to various shrines via

websites. Information about religious feasts, pilgrimages, and timings of church services are disseminated through these same networks. In some cases, worship and rituals may be offered via these sites and applications. The application for the Catholic practice of 'confession' has been launched in some countries, but for 'absolution,' church members are asked to approach their church pastors. These practices exemplify what has come to be termed 'digital religion.' However, "digital religion does not simply refer to religion as it is performed and articulated online, but points to how digital spaces are shaping and being shaped by religious practice" (Campbell 2013, 12, see also McAnany 2013).

Conclusion

Religious culture in India has not experienced any dramatic changes. The forms of expression might have been affected in some ways, particularly among young people, but traditional religious expression through rituals, congregations and pilgrimages, for example, continue unabated. The social media perhaps facilitate religious expression and traditional practices. However, the most disturbing change has come about in the fomenting of communal tension between different religious groups, particularly through propaganda that is filled with hate-speech. Several such sites have had to be banned by the Indian government, to promote national integration, inter-religious understanding and communal harmony. What is however imperative is the coming together of Indian many religious communities, using social media for inter-religious dialogue and the immediate scotching of rumours to put a halt to panic situations and communal flare-ups as occurred recently in two Indian cities of Mumbai and Muzaffarnagar in the wake of the dissemination of 'fake' videos of violence. Consequently, some regulation of 'hate-speech' on the Internet, particularly in communally sensitive countries like India, may go against the spirit of the largest ungoverned virtual space on earth, but is certainly called for if national unity and inter-religious peace and order are to be sustained.

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Asian Religions and Social Media: Challenges and Opportunities A Reflection

Chainarong Monthienvichienchai

According to an overview report on global digital trends published by *We Are Social*, a London-based social media agency with offices worldwide, out of the world's estimated population of some 7 billion people, there are 6.5 billion with mobile subscriptions in one form or another.[1]

Furthermore, in a United Nations study published last year, more people on earth have access to mobile phones than sanitary toilets. Out of the world's estimated 7 billion people, more than 6 billion have access to mobile phones.[2] Far fewer—only 4.5 billion people—have access to clean, working toilets.

There was also a tipping point last year that has major implications for businesses and religion. This point will impact publishing and marketing and religious strategies and tactics in the future.

On December 13, 2013, Beyoncé, one of the world's biggest music stars ignored the traditional mass media product launching process. She bypassed the "normal" mass media release of a radio campaign, multiple TV appearances, and retail and consumer brand promotions that is the usual requirement for successful album sales.

Instead she announced her new album on Instagram with just a picture, captioned 'Surprise!' Amazingly, this one picture sent the music world into an instantaneous meltdown. What she did was releasing her new album on iTunes with zero warning. An Instagram post was all she needed. Twitter reported a whopping 1.2 million tweets about the album in just 12 hours and the new album sold 828,773 copies in just three days, making it iTunes' fastest-selling album worldwide.

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[1] Simon Kemp in News on 9 January 2014, Social, Digital & Mobile in APAC in 2014 http://wearesocial.sg/blog/2014/01/social-digital-mobile-apac-2014/

[2] UN News Service, Deputy UN chief calls for urgent action to tackle global sanitation crisis, 21 March 2013 http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=44452

These "new forms of behavior" are posing an immense challenge and are also providing great opportunities for religions and their messages. Our religions have not changed, even not our traditions. But our people especially our young are living in a new world.

In the history of Christianity, people of the past made use of all forms of media to spread their convictions and faith—whether it be parchments and scrolls, art, stained glass, illuminated manuscripts, printing, television or radio. We must therefore welcome the use of so-called 'social media'. Many communities have websites. There are 'sacred spaces' on line, priests and gurus on TV programs, 'soul-waves' radio and many more. But all of this is no longer enough.

There are different ways of looking at the use of social media in religion—one is to see the new media as yet another tool to reach people with a religious message. By means of the various forms of social media, we can reach out to the peripheries and draw people, so that they live and practice their religion better. But despite all this we must remember that the best form of communication is still interpersonal.

Another way is to see the digital, online, or virtual world itself as a new space, is also for personal use and growth.

The former was called as "Religion online" (Drawson), the latter, however, is "online Religion."

The Acts of the Apostles (Acts 17:16-26) of the New Testament speaks about Paul going into Athens, the bustling capital of the ancient world. Paul is amazed to see that the city was full of idols. Yet Verse 21 comments: *All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas*. Pope John Paul II saw also the internet as the 'new Athens,' a new marketplace or *Areopagus* (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 37c), a 'global village' where people exchange ideas and talk to each other—but with "new languages, new Psychology and new ways of communicating." Like Paul, our challenge is to become aware of such a situation and see the need for dialogue with this digital culture.

Nowadays, people are spending huge and increasing proportions of their time in this virtual world. I believe many of us, if not all, keep our mobiles with us all the time. Many keep social networks open throughout the day in a distinct browser tab or app, so much that for them it is becoming increasingly the place where they live their lives. When they go to bed at night, most of them check their phones one last time before placing it on their bed stand. What we call the real world of face-to-face seems often dull and uneventful to them and their secondary existence.

Thus social media have become the nervous system of our new culture, in which more and more people are expressing and exploring their identity, picking up

and discarding their values and attitudes, expressing their feelings and prejudices, befriending and unfriending each other, measuring each other's status and importance, relevance and appearance. If our young people and people of all ages are living in this gigantic network, how is religion there, interacting with the inhabitants of this world, with the men and women who dwell in the social media.

When we speak about the role and impact of religion in social communication, we more often than not think of the so called 'real world,' but in reality billions of people now live in the social networks. These have been called as among the biggest countries in the world—and they are countries with no barriers. For example, more than 1.2 billion inhabit the world of Facebook. The majority of these people may never practice religion or even become aware of it as essential part of life and society. Our challenge as communicators concerned about religion and social communication has always been to reach out and encounter people wherever they are—and increasingly, that means going online.

We might have been used to ask ourselves, "What do we need to tell people?" Now we also have to ask ourselves, "What do people want and how do they want to hear from us?" They no longer wait for the evening newscast, or the morning paper, or even the Sunday homily. They develop their own program and know where to find it! When people today need *information*, they will seek it and find it. When they need *guidance*, they look for it and consult their social networks. When they need *community*, they will connect to it.

The Catholic Church's Pope Francis, in his message for the 48th World Communications Day, speaks about 'Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter.' The Internet, in particular, he says, 'offers immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity. This is something truly good, a gift from God."

He is saying that, "today the social networks are one way to experience this call to discover the beauty of faith, the beauty of encountering Christ." We should encourage this encounter through technology and social media. Social media require technology, but they are not the same thing.

Our problem is that in general religious authorities do not distinguish between technology and the social media. We are still distinguishing between the tools and the cultures they create, while disregarding the latter. Long gone are the days when to connect to the Internet you had to fire up a modem and wait for the connection. Now we are always on. We are the Internet.

Yes you heard that right. We ARE the Internet. We are no longer living in a world where you had a producer of content on a website and a number of consumers. Through social media we are the Internet. Each one of us is a consumer and a producer on the web. Our lives, real lives if you will, are creating content for the

social networks to consume. Actions on these networks are extending our lives. Pope Francis states that "the digital world can be an environment rich in humanity; a network not of wires but of people."

The challenges facing religion in the digital culture and in order to effectively communicate our message and concerns in today's generation are that we need to learn the language of social media, which is conversational and interactive —to speak in a style that is accessible to a generation accustomed to 15 second commercials and 140 character texts or "tweets"—who prefer content that allows them to respond, comment, and feel that they are interacting with someone that genuinely cares.

The Pope urges in his message "to dialogue with the men and women of today, to understand their expectations, doubts and hopes…." We should go out of our churches to dialogue with people in their own environment, in their own life. It really means: reaching out to people in their own environment and to the modern day peripheries.

At the same time, however, also the problems and drawbacks with authentic communication in the virtual world should not be neglected, for example—problems with achieving balance, fighting stereotypes, be aware of the ease with which people can isolate or 'barricade themselves' online 'behind sources of information which only confirm their own wishes and ideas, or political and economic interests'.

We need to "walk the streets of the digital highways, to encounter, like the Good Samaritan, those who are lying on the side of the road and witness to them in tenderness and love." Thanks to the social media, Pope Francis says, "Christian witness can reach the peripheries of human existence." "The digital highway is … a street teeming with people who are often hurting, men and women looking for salvation or hope. By means of the Internet, the Christian message can reach 'to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8)."

There is a temptation to see social media simply as a possibility for bombarding people with religious messages. We have to go beyond this: "Can we be available to them, hear their issues and problems, engage with their questions and doubts and their search for truth?"

From a Christian perspective, Pope Francis concludes: "May the image of the Good Samaritan who tended to the wounds of the injured man by pouring oil and wine over them be our inspiration. Let our communication be a balm which relieves pain and a fine wine, which gladdens hearts." He urges us: "Let us boldly become citizens of the digital world… in order to dialogue with people today and to help them… We need to be religions and people at the side of others, capable of accompanying everyone along the way."

I would like to conclude with the communication messages that Archbishop Eamon Martin of Ireland has uploaded on his Twitter (on May 19, 2014) some useful suggestions for us to keep in mind a number of principles which might guide us in our presence in social media:

- Be positive and joyful. Remember that it is the 'Joy of the Gospel' that we are communicating. No 'funeral faces'.

- Remember 'Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est'. Fill the Internet with charity and love, always giving rather than taking. Continually seek to broaden and reframe discussions and seek to include a sense of charity and solidarity with the suffering in the world.

- Have a broad back when criticisms and insults are made—when possible, gently correct misunderstandings and errors.

- Pray in the digital world. Establish sacred spaces, opportunities for stillness, reflection and meditation online.

- Establish on-line connections, relationships and communities. Religions have always been about 'gathering' together—but it was never said where we should do this. . .

- Educate our young to keep themselves safe and to use the Internet responsibly.

- Witness to human dignity at all times online. We are well-aware of the pervasive prevalence of pornography on the Internet, which can 'pollute the spirit', destroy and degrade human sexuality and relationships, reduce persons to objects for gratification, draw millions into the commodification and commercialization of sex, and feed the monster that is human trafficking.

- Last but not the least be aware that with the help of the Internet, social media messages have the potential to reach to the ends of the earth in seconds. In this regard, let us foster and call forth charisms in younger committed people who understand the power and potential of the social media to bear witness.

SECTION IV
Mediated Religious Influences Across Religions

Judaism and the Computer-Mediated Era

Yoel Cohen

Introduction

Rabbis have a difficult encounter with the mass media. They perceive mass media as threatening the Jewish value system. With the Western commercial media not generally encouraging religious ideology, but rather inclined to cater to popular taste in search for the ratings, rabbis see in the media threats to their value system (Cohen 2006a). The publication of political and social gossip and the portrayal of sex and permissiveness are among areas of conflict between rabbis and the media. Notwithstanding this, religious and spiritual issues are today increasingly mediated through print and electronic technologies, with mass media in effect a sub-agent itself of contemporary religious identity. If over the centuries the Jewish tradition has been based upon rabbinical authority vested in religious bodies, there is today increased emphasis upon personal choice in moral and religious matters. Mass media help to popularize Judaism at the grassroots level where institutionalized religious forms have become weak. This is no less true with the current digital revolution today. The plethora of messages challenge rabbinical authority as people find alternative—perhaps more deeply spiritually meaningful—means to give religious expression.

Aim

This article examines how Judaism and their religious leaders respond to the digital revolution, which is characterized by computers and the Internet. Questions to be examined include the impact of the digital era upon Jewish identity; secondly, the question of online prayer; thirdly, the use of educational websites; and fourthly, the phenomenon of online rabbinic counseling. The article focuses on the Jewish community in Israel, numbering some eight million persons. Situated in Asia, Israel has strong Asian roots, including being home to

amongst other immigrants many thousands of Jews from Asian countries who immigrated to Israel in the Fifties and Sixties.

Jewish Population in Israel

In order to understand contemporary Judaism's perception, attitudes and usage of new digital technology it is necessary to break down the Jewish population in Israel between the different religious streams or traditions. The *Dati Leumi* or modern orthodox and *Haredi* or ultra-orthodox are the two dominant religious streams in Israel. Fifteen percent of the Israeli Jewish population are *Dati Leumi* and 8% are *Haredi*. The remainder comprise some 40% traditional (not strictly religious), and 40% secular; the traditional population are inclined to identify with the modern orthodox. There are also small non-orthodox religious streams, the Conservative and Reform movements—which are the dominant streams in the United States making up 80% of the US Jewry. It is instructive to also examine these, given both their positive approach to the wider culture and because of the streams growing presence in Israel, albeit unrecognized by state organs.

Religion and Mass Media has received little less academic treatment in Israel, and Religion and Digital Media even less. The question of Jewish theological attitudes concerning the social role of traditional media forms prior to the Internet was discussed by Korngott (1993) Chawat (1995) and Cohen (2006a, 2014). Cohen (2006b, 2012a, 2005) examined religious content in Israeli newspapers, radio and television, religious and secular in a broader study of the interaction of media and religion in contemporary Israel. And, while the *Haredi* press has been described by Baumel (2002), Levi (1990), and Micolson (1990), their writing preceded the Internet. Horowitz (2000) describes early *Haredi* rabbinical attitudes to the Internet. Cohen (2001), and Barzilai-Nahon and Barzilai (2005) examine how the Internet has been to adapted to *Haredi* community needs. It is nevertheless instructive to quote one rabbi, Alfred Cohen (2005), editor of the *Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society* who remarked:

> Since use of the Internet is such a new practice, there has scarcely been time for a body of broadly accepted *halakhic* literature (Jewish religious law-YC) or rabbinic comment to develop. Consequently, much of our study will involve trying to find cognate situations discussed in earlier generations, to identify the appropriate categories of activities discussed in rabbinic literature which could guide us in the current situation.

Religious Identity

The *Haredin* (Hebrew for fearful ones) community, or ultra-orthodox Jews are characterized by social withdrawal from what they see as the dangers of modern society. One of the major challenges to *Haredi* self-isolation has come from mass media. Reflecting its philosophy of withdrawal from modernity and seeking to maintain religious values in a cultural ghetto framework, the *Haredi* rabbis have over the years issued religious decrees (*pesuk din*) against mass media as being a threat to Torah family values. From the appearance of newspapers in the nineteenth century, through to the development of radio and television, and latterly video, computers, Internet and portable phones, *Haredi* rabbis have enacted decrees against media.

But rabbinical attempt to place a wall between *Haredim* and the Internet have not entirely achieved their rabbi's goal. The Internet not only exposes some *Haredim* to undesirable matter but threatens the very essence of the *Haredi* lifestyle as a cultural ghetto. It widens the marketplace of religious ideas, weakens rabbinical hierarchies and threatens religious loyalties (Cohen, 2013). So, religious leaders raise concerns that the Internet provides access to undesirable sites such as pornography—not dissimilar from the dire concern in the fifteenth century of the Catholic Church to the danger with the development of printing (Einstein, 1983).

In 1998, *Haredi* rabbis imposed a ban on computers. Following the development of the Internet, a special *bet din* (religious law court) of *Haredi* rabbis was established, which issued a complete ban on its use. The rabbis regarded the Internet as a far worse moral threat than television whereas television was supervised, the Internet enabled access to pornographic sites. The Internet also enabled the *Haredi* surfer to get information beyond his religious stream or indeed his Jewish faith.

Haredim have lower exposure to computer and to the Internet than the rest of the Israeli Jewish population. In 2007, 55% of *Haredi* households possessed a computer. Some 57% of these households were linked to the Internet. This was higher than a 2005 official survey by the Central Bureau of Statistics (2005) which found that only 10% of *Haredi* families were linked to the Internet (in contrast to 61% of the total Israeli Jewish population). Surveying those without computer or Internet, *Haredim* were the largest grouping. Forty-two percent of *Haredim* had no computer at home in contrast to 29% of the general Israeli population. *Haredim* were also less inclined to be heavy Internet users. Broken down according to 'light users' of Internet (less than once a day), 1-3 times a day, and 'heavy users' at least 4 times a day, 58% of light users in 2005 were *Hardin*.

A distinction within the *Haredi* world may be delineated between the so-called European Lithuanian school and the European *Hassidic* and *Sephardi* or oriental branches of Haredim. The Lithuanian school placed a ban not only upon the Internet but also upon computers as a whole, calling upon its members to get rid

of them from their houses. The Sephardim generally are more tolerant, and the European *Hassidim* are more inclined to go to work in contrast to the Lithuanians who study in *yeshivot* (talmudical colleges), surviving economically on stipends.

Nevertheless an estimated 55% of *Haredi* houses in Israel had personal computers at home already in 2007 *Haredi* rabbis have been faced with the realization that the ban on computers and the Internet has not been entirely accepted. And, given the recognition that computers and the Internet are integral features of twenty-first century life, some *Haredi* rabbis have relented and allowed Internet access at businesses and places of work, if a filter is used on the computer.

In 2008, one *Hassidic Haredi* community, the *Belze*, reached what would be a short-lived agreement with a religious Internet server, Rimon, to create a special package of 150 sites—comprising both sites of general interest, including some quality Israeli newspapers, as well as business-related websites. There was an immeasurably longer list of forbidden or 'black' sites. However, seemingly 'okay' sites led to other sites which were problematic, such as through links, or sites themselves carried problematic advertising, or originally deemed okay but which were subsequently updated with problematic material. A *Haredi* body, the so-called rabbinical committee for communication affairs, recommended an alternative system of 'white' sites. Access would be allowed to only sites relevant to a specific profession. The weakness with this scheme was that there was inbuilt a contradiction in which some *Haredi* customers would be prohibited access to websites which were allowed to other *Haredi* customers whose businesses needed those sites.

Parallel to the rabbinical bans upon computers were a number of attempts by *Haredi* entrepreneurs to create compute filtering programs. One early attempt, "Torahnet," undertook to process requests for clearance to websites within 24 hours. Another 'Nativ,' comprised software blocking everything but e-mail or access to a limited number websites operate by business-related and official institutions.

By 2009, a handful of *Haredi* news websites operated independently from rabbinic supervision. These include *B'Hadrei Haredim*, and *Kikiar Shabbat*. The site owners were aware of the acceptable social limits within the *Haredi* religio-cultural ghetto. For example, there were no pictures of women. Some *Haredi* rabbis, nevertheless, refused to be interviewed by the sites, and the names of those sponsoring and editing the sites were hidden from public light. Moreover, fore like *B' Hadrei Haredim* became a platform for the *Haredim* to speak out against their rabbis and religious institutions.

Haredi leaders faced a new Internet challenge with the creation with the creation of social networking sites like Facebook. To be true, the *Haredim* have always emphasized the importance of interpersonal relations both in terms of family and

community. Furthermore, Facebook did not pose the direct threat from Internet sites with sexual-content. But social networking did not breach the *Haredi* rule of conduct notably by building relationships between men and women. It also resulted in the free passage of information and gossip in a society in which gossip *"loshon hara"* is frowned upon by Jewish religious law. In one sense, the matter lay with grassroots Facebook users themselves to develop their own *Haredi* Facebook code of networking—not dissimilar from the codes which the unofficial *Haredi* Internet news websites did. By contrast, the rabbis of the *Dati Leum* (modern orthodox) stream have not issued legal ruling regarding media exposure. In attempting to reach a synthesis between the Torah world and modernity, they use techniques like media literacy to the Internet. Exposure of children to the mass media ought to be handled by inculcating the child towards self-censorship rather than withdrawing to a *Haredi* ghetto-like insistence. The number of modern religious using the Internet is today no less than the general publication. The Central Bureau of Statistics found that the modern religious population—divided between the academic and non-academic communities—has the highest number of computer users: 97% in contrast to 89% of 'academic' secular Israeli Jews, 85% of 'academic' traditional Israeli Jews and 77% of academic *Haredim*. When the two groups 'academic' and 'non-academic' are combined there was also a higher percentage of *Date Leumi* Internet users 95%; it was the same as secular 98% 'academic' and 93% traditional 'non-academic', but much higher than *Haredim*: 55% of *Haredim* using computers (77% of *Haredi* academics and 40% non-academics) have Internet (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Yet even some of the *Dati Leumi* rabbis, notably those identified with the 'hardal' (*Haredi Leumi*) substream, encourage controlling exposure particularly of children to the general media, particularly the Internet. The 'hardal' or 'Haredi Leumi' are characterized by a combination of a *Haredi* separatist view towards modern culture but a nationalist or 'leumi' view towards nationalism in the Zion state. While the mainstream modern orthodox community are less restrictive in their exposure to media and in the main watch television as well, the 'hardal' have constructed 'cultural walls' to distance themselves from perceived dangerous influences. These range from fewer secular studies in their schools to avoiding exposure to television and the Internet.

The non-orthodox religious streams, the Conservative and Reform streams, are also critical of the Internet and believe it damages religious values. While they are not inclined not to censor children's exposure to traditional media forms like the press and television, some of their leaders saw a need to censor the Internet.

Rabbinical views on the Internet have little or no impact on the non-strictly religious population 75% of which comprise both secular and traditional non-strictly religious sectors. But to the extent that educators and parents in the secular and traditional communities are concerned about the influence and dangers of

the Internet, there are shared interests. In 2007, a *Haredi* political party sought to legislate nationwide controls on Internet access to pornography Itzhak Cohen, a member of the Shas, a Sephardi Haredi political party, placed a private members bill in the Knesset, the Israel Parliament, which would have required Internet services not to supply pornographic material to any children or to adults with the exception of those adults specifically requesting to receive pornographic matter. Drawing upon Jewish social responsibility as an ideal and viewing the secular world from a perspective of superiority, hostility and self-correction, the *Haredi* outlook includes a felt responsibility to build a model society. The bill passed its first reading—with 46 members of the Knesset voting for and 20 against—after Shas mustered the votes of other religious political parties, both *Haredi* and modern orthodox, as well as feminist members of the Knesset and Arab political parties. But the bill floundered after a government committee that examines upcoming parliamentary legislation decided that more pedagogic methods such as self-censorship should be used to educate the young about the dangers of the Internet. Given the overall antipathy towards the Haredim, the bill might have had better chances had it been initiated by a non-*Haredi* party.

Online Jewish Education

The discussion within the Haredim and Dati Leumi rabbinical leaderships about the threat from the Internet have, therefore, occurred at the same time as a parallel proliferation of Jewish-related websites. There is an increasing recognition among rabbis of all religious streams that the computer is a useful tool for religious study. Torah databases comprise online comprehensive collections of traditional texts from the Bible, biblical commentaries, Mishnah, the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, and the later Jewish codes, spanning 3300 years of Jewish written scholarship. In addition to these sites, the Internet also has other sites of broader Jewish interest, including community news like listings of synagogues, Jewish schools, kosher restaurants and Jewish cultural events, Israel news, Jewish daing and genealogy. In terms of computer savviness, younger rabbis are leaps and bounds ahead of their older colleagues, as reflected in the wider use by these Torah databases. The value of the Internet for Jewish learning and cultural life made it more difficult for rabbis imposing their anti-Internet line. Even Haredi rabbis are beginning to recognize the revolutionary value of databases for their single-minded objective of Torah study.

Online Religious Practice

Whatever the social impact of new digital technology upon Jewish identity, a separate question is how the digital revolution has affected Judaism itself as a religious form (Cohen, 2012b). The pinnacle of the Jewish faith, like that of other Abrahamic faiths, is worship. During worship, the believer prays in dialogue—

indeed is 'in communication'—with God. Some aspects of Jewish religious ritual have already taken on digital forms. Prayers at the Western Wall, Jerusalem done via e-mail with prayers subsequently printed out and placed in accord with local tradition within the walls of the 'Kotel.' Funeral eulogies at some cemeteries in Israel are streamed online enabling relatives living afar, such as relatives living abroad, to 'attend' the funeral—particularly helpful given the Jewish custom of burial on the same day of death. Another religious practice also performed online is the custom of selling chametz (leavened food) in a Jew's possession prior to the seven-day Passover festival (when possession, as well as consumption, of leavened products is forbidden). Rabbis have also addressed the question of whether the tradition of *mechila*—or the obligation to apologize to one to whom one has sinned—at the Jewish new year—when a person is judged by God for his other deeds over the previous year. Some rabbis think that the act of apologizing over the Internet is inappropriate given the impersonal nature of the e-mail and that an apology should be given in the person's presence.

But the key question which rabbis face in online religious practice is whether communal religious services—the *minyan*—may be held online. Two forms of the virtual *minyan* have evolved. In the ideal type, no physical synagogue exists; instead Jews link up to a synagogue online. In the "Second Life" online virtual *minyan* has been meeting on Friday eves and on each Saturday morning for prayers. A lesser type is a dual model comprising offline and online *minyan* service. Some communities in Reformed Judaism have arrangements to enable people who cannot reach the synagogue or temple to link up electronically or 'virtually' to the prayer service. This, for example, is invaluable for the infirm and sick or, to say, for a Jew serving in the United States Armed Forces or in the foreign service posts in a location far from an existing Jewish community.

According to the medieval Jewish law, *Shulkhan Arukh: Orah Hayim 55* the divine presence (*Shekkinah*) is present when ten men pray together—the *minyan*—in the same physical space. The question may be raised in the age of the Internet of whether a virtual *minyan* or Jewish prayer service may be held in which ten men are not physically together but link up electronically through the Internet for such a service. After all, the relationship between God and humanity is universal and transverses physical barriers.

Both orthodox and conservative rabbis have rejected the first model of a completely virtual synagogue service as well as the dual model of an offline communal service also streaming an online version electronically. In 2001 the Conservative Movement's Jewish Law and Standards Committee held a detailed discussion of the subject (Reisner, 2001). The space referred to in the *Shulkhan Arukh* is a physical space. If orthodox and conservative rabbis could reconcile the virtual *minyan* with the structures of Jewish religious law (*halakhah*) it would enable many who are

physically distant from the synagogue community or even those while not wanting to be publicly seen at the synagogue but wish to participate in the prayer experience privately and anonymously through a virtual *minyan*.

While even the dual model of an offline service also streaming the service in an online version is rejected rabbis in both the orthodox and conservative streams leave open the possibility that a Jew could link up to an existing offline or physical *minyan* of ten in order to participate in some but not all sections the prayers. A distinction has been drawn by some orthodox rabbis between more 'passive' sections of a religious service such as listening to the reading of the scrolls of the Bible or the recitation of the Books of the Prophets like the Book of Esther on the Purim holiday and the more 'active' sections of the communal prayer service where the individual himself participates in the prayer including, for example, the mourning prayer, the *kaddish*, which is recited albeit only in the synagogue by immediate relatives following death of a kin for a period of 11 months.

Another obstacle in Jewish religious law concerns hearing the cantor's prayers via an electronic transmission like a radio or computer rather than directly and uninterruptedly from the mouth of the cantor. Listening to electronic presentation of prayer, as distinct from the natural human voice, is regarded by the orthodox and conservative as an 'interruption' and raises the question of whether the individual person praying in a synagogue streamed on the Internet has fulfilled his prayer obligations. It explains why a distinction was drawn by some rabbis between those sections of prayer service requiring 'active' participation of the person and those sections in which the person is only a passive participant like hearing the recitation of the weekly Bible reading. For conservative rabbis, in particular, the question of online prayer not only raises the narrow Jewish legalistic (or *halakhic*) obstacles but also threatens the communal structure—with the synagogue—as the focus of Jewish community life. To be true, most Jews including Reformed Jews prefer the social experience and intimacy of coming together for prayer rather than praying online.

Online Rabbinic Counseling

Another phenomenon in the digital era is online rabbinic counseling. Synagogue rabbis in all the streams, including even some *haredi* rabbis, recognize the value of the Internet for rabbinic and online counseling such as questions to rabbis about the application of Jewish law. Yet, online rabbinical counseling has also generated a debate about the advantages and disadvantages of the phenomenon. Supporters of the new trend argue that non-affiliated Jews now have access to rabbis which they would not otherwise have. Online counseling offers an anonymity enabling people to raise questions they might not otherwise feel comfortable to raise with the local community rabbi acquainted with them.

Critics say online rabbinic counseling is inappropriate. Rabbis' answers sent via SMS are too short. Personal circumstances—which can be crucial in a rabbi's ruling—cannot be taken into consideration by the rabbi who is unacquainted with the questioner. Quoting the dictum, "Make yourself a Rabbi," of the mishnaic tome *Ethics of the Fathers*, former Israeli Chief Rabbi Yonah Metzger characterized the rabbi not only as being a functionary but also being a role model to emulate and identify with; one would not 'make oneself a rabbi' if one already has a virtual rabbi. Instead of accepting the decision of the rabbi, people would be inclined to 'shop around' to different online rabbis to find the reply most acceptable and comfortable to them. Lastly, the ease of online counseling discourages the Jew from studying the online sources in the *halakhic* literature.

Conclusion

Given that both prayer is a primary characteristic of Judaism and that communal worship may not be done online, the overall impact of the digital era upon Judaism is less than first impressions may suggest. Only in the United States where the Reformed has a strong presence might the reverse be true. Nevertheless, the Internet has created a revolution in accessibility to information about Judaism and Jewish-related matters. The technological information highway is affecting the Israeli religious word no less than other non-Jewish religious communities, particularly given the high priority which religious community. So, against the background of fears that the sex-related content on the Internet would awaken religious identity the effect of the Internet is more in terms of religious identity. Whether they like it or not, the Internet is embedded in the 21st century and the chances of banning it are next to nil even in tightly embedded religious enclaves—raising the challenge of how the Internet may be integrated into their lifestyle and cause no, or little damage to religious identity.

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Influences of Religious Telecast in a Multi-Religious India: An Analysis of Hindu and Muslim Television Viewers

Binod C. Agrawal

Students of religious studies have recognized "at least three functional domains—shared by most religious systems—in which to look for change" (Babb 1998:445). According to Babb, "Religious traditions must be socially reproduced and propagated, which requires that technical means exist for their transmission. Second, religious systems are embedded in social contexts by which they are shaped in fundamental ways. And, third, religious systems are often (perhaps always) implicated in the legitimization of authority." I believe that at least there are two additional domains that operate for continuous and to re-interprets new religious ideas in the context of South Asia.

The process of evolution and re-interpretation at least in the case of Hindu *Dharma* and Islam of South Asia can be observed on a day-to-day basis especially in India as part of religious modernity. In the twenty-first-century South Asia, the impact of communication revolution has been far reaching and has deepened very rapidly. Communication revolution, as believed has influenced the social structure, psychological sphere and communicative patterns of South Asian cultures. The effects of communication revolution as concluded by Agrawal (2010) are not identical to those of Euro-American cultures.

The direction of reversible and irreversible changes and the process of change in the context of South Asia are yet to be fathomed by communication scholars and social scientists. The glaring visible impacts can be seen in the day-to-day lives of daily wage workers, vegetable vendors, housewives, top industrialists and business tycoons alike who are seen busy with their mobile phones in South Asia. Babb (1998:446) had observed that "India has incontestably undergone a genuine media revolution. Few visitors to India from other countries can fail to notice the extraordinary degree to which electronically amplified sound and visual images protected by chromolithography, film and television have become part of the Indian sensory surroundings, especially in India's cities."

In 2013, it has been further compounded by digital technology information revolution which has jumped literacy, age and sex barriers. It is in this context that "the amplification effect of new media has been powerfully evident in the realm of religious culture" (Babb 1998:446).

Meanwhile Islam remains somewhat obscured and least effected due to communication revolution until very recently. While discussing communication revolution in the context of Islam, Lawrence (1998) indicated that the scholars of Islamic religious studies of South Asia focused on issues relating to Islam identity. Though according to Lawrence (1998:489) "Islamic identify and Muslim community overlap, but they are not identical. One relates to religious perceptions and pursuits, the other to civil society and political expediency."

Recent developments in radio and television broadcast especially satellite television and increased Internet penetration has influenced religious discourse. These have also helped break literacy, age and gender barriers among the Muslims of South Asia. The Hindu and Muslim media consumption of religious content and its effects remain largely not understood due to lack of empirical studies of the process and the contradictions that exist between religious realities and religious broadcast.

Media and Religion: Theoretical Postulate

In the book *Television and Religion: The Shaping of Faith, Values and Culture*, Fore (1987) indicated "television is not simply a technology but an entire system involving an economic philosophy, a political structure, and strong cultural interconnections. There is no way we can separate the media's technological possibilities from its economic-political-cultural realities" … which transcends all of its surface effects which acts as a cultivator of culture. In the same paper, Fore quoted Kuhns who believed that "the entertainment milieu has transformed the ways in which we believe and are capable of believing." In the context of South Asia, repeated observations supported the view that religious television signifies highly ritualistic replication of prayer and worship in participatory mode. For example, Hindu devotees participate in *Ramlila* (a drama performance of Hindu epic Ramayan), *Garba* (rituals prayer dance in honor of Jai Ambe Goddess), *Shivratri* (birthday celebration of Lord Shiva), *Ramnavmi* (birthday celebration of Lord Rama) as a socio-religious activities. The same can be said about Muslim performance of *Namaz* after *Vazu* (purification), recital of *Quran*, *Roza* (fasting) and *Taraweeh* (special prayer during *Ramzaan*). Religious pilgrimage by Hindu; and visit to Mecca for *Haj* by Muslim are other examples of collective and individual religious practices.

The question in the paper is raised as to what happens to the Hindu or Muslim devotees and in what state of mind they get into during the religious participation or performance and how are they treated by the rest of the non-participants.

The observations indicated that Hindu or Muslim devotees, it seems, are treated somewhat sacred who remain out of immediate social environment and social sphere. Once the religious participation is over, the individual gets back into normal social life. Anthropologists have described this intermediate social stage as a state of "liminality" (Kottak 2011:290).

Media and Religion in Multi-religious India

The cultural contour of South Asia contains a legacy of the continuity of the Indian civilization, evolution of religious ideas and high degree of visual literacy and continuous religious acceptance and external influences. Time and space in the infinite Hindi universe has been conceived, examined and explained through philosophical perspective that provides moral dictums, vision and myth of human existence, its past, present and future. Such religious explanations relate to humans and humanlike Gods and Goddesses, and almighty God and their unending and continual conflict with self proclaimed thoughts of right and wrong. Incorporation of several new religions by external persuasion or pressure has led to serious conflicts and arm struggle among different religious groups.

The century old Indian cinema has helped improve visual literacy and has added colourful extravaganza in which Hindu Gods and Goddesses manifested humanlike behaviour and character. Film critics of India believe "films have taught us [Indians] how to dream, how to love, laugh and live. They provide an escapist fantasy to an ever increasing brood of mother India" (Filmfare April 2013: 146). Built on the foundation of cinema, digital media has further added sophistication in symbolic and representational domain. Digital media has also helped in expressing characters of multitude Hindu Gods and Goddesses and their intimate relationships with humans and has added means and methods to improve visual representation and in breaking literacy and language barriers.

Satellite Religious Television

In 2013, there were several dozen non-stop dedicated "Satellite Religious Television Channels" for Hindu viewers. Similarly there are over a dozen Islamic religious channels for Muslim viewers. In addition, most of the private and public service television channels devote a part of their time on religious telecast. Religious television is viewed on a fairly regular basis as reported in a number of television studies (Agrawal 2012a, Agrawal et al. 2012b, Agrawal 2011, 2010, and Anonymous 2009). In this respect, all pervasive religious television has added several million strong Hindu and Muslim viewers having access to terrestrial, cable and direct to home television (DTH) in the multi-religious country of 1.21 billion according to Census of India 2011.

Aim

This paper aims among other things, to analyze possible influences of religious telecast on the Hindu and Muslim viewers living in the urban multi-religious cultural setting of Hindi speaking states of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand in India. More specifically the paper aims to (a) study change in the religious behavior among Hindu and Muslim viewers having common cultural and linguists tradition, (b) assess degree of religious tolerance expressed by Hindu and Muslim viewers towards each other and (c) extent these influences have been internalized by Hindu and Muslim viewers as a result of religious television viewing. The concept of liminality has been used to analyze influences of religious viewing. The paper is based on the research studies conducted.

Viewers' Profile

The profile of both Hindu and Muslim viewers as indicated in Table 1 is that of educated adults of both genders who lived in household of five and above members. Economic status of Hindu viewers seemed better compared to the Muslim viewers. Both have good knowledge of religion and are able to discern the content of the religious telecast against their strongly held religious beliefs.

Table 1: Socio-economic Characteristics of Viewers by Religion (in percent)

Religion	Hindu	Muslim
Age		
Below 35 Years	35.7	59.1
36-55 Years	53.1	29.9
Above 56 Years	11.2	11.0
Gender		
Male	61.4	68.4
Female	38.6	31.6
Education		
Illiterate	1.8	11.0
Below Graduate	34.6	57.8
Graduate+	63.6	31.2
Marital status		
Unmarried	15.8	40.5
Married	81.9	57.8
Divorce/Widow	2.2	1.7
Family size		

1-4 members	41.3	24.6
5+ members	58.7	75.4
Average family size	5.1	7.2
Monthly household income		
INR 10000 and less	15.2	66.1
INR 10001-20000	37.7	16.3
INR 20001-30000	19.9	6.6
INR 30001+	25.7	11.0
Cannot say	1.6	0.0
Total N	448	301

INR=Indian Rupee

Faith in God

The viewers were asked about their faith in God and their daily ritual performance. Only minor differences between Hindu and Muslim viewers were observed about faith in God (Hindu 97.3 percent and Muslim 100 percent) (Table 2).

Table 2: Faith in God by Religion (in percent)

Believe in Religion and God	Hindu	Muslim
Yes	97.3	100.0
No	2.7	0.0
Total	**448**	**301**

Table 3 indicated that 45.8 percent Hindu viewers performed some rituals or prayer once a day and 37.5 percent more than once day. In case of Muslim viewers 70.8 percent Muslim performed *Namaz* (prayer) daily and remaining 29.8 percent performed *Namaz* on various festival days like Ramzaan, Id-ul-Fitr and Id-ul-Zuha (Table 3).

Table 3: Offer of Prayer by Religion (in percent)

	Hindu	Muslim
Offer prayer		
Once in a day	45.8	-
More than once in a day	37.5	-
Sometime	11.8	-
Monthly	2.7	-

On special occasion	2.2	
Offer of Namaz prayer		
Daily	-	70.8
Only during Ramzaan	-	16.9
Sometimes	-	10.3
During Id-ul-Fitr/ Id-ul-Zuha	-	1.3
No response	-	0.7
Total N	448	301

Religious Tolerance

A set of three questions were asked to the Hindu and Muslim viewers relating to religious tolerance operationally defined as acceptance of other religious practices with positive feelings and appreciation in multi-religious cultural setting.

Table 4 indicated that except 13.4 percent Hindu viewers and 2.3 percent Muslim viewers largely either did not watch or somewhat watched the telecast of other religions. Similarly, 17.4 percent Hindu viewers ever visited any mosque, church or *gurudwara* (Sikh temple) and 0.7 percent Muslim viewers ever visited temple or church or *gurudwara* (Sikh temple). Participation in the religious fares and festivals was equally low (Hindu viewers 16.3 percent, Muslim viewers 2.7 percent) as indicated in Table 4.

On the whole, there seemed to be limited participation of other religions, in spite of the multi-religious cultural setting of India. It applies both to Hindu and Muslim who have been living together for centuries. It could also be because the Hindu and Muslim viewers preferred to confine within their religious domain in spite of unhindered exposure and continuous interaction with multiple religions. Observations indicated a somewhat different picture. Economic, religious and day-to-day social interaction due to human necessities has reflected a whole lot of sharing and participation in each other's religious activities.

Table 4: Religious Participation and Viewing of Programs among Hindu and Muslim

	Hindu	Muslim
Watch programs of other religion		
Very much	13.4	2.3
Somewhat	50.0	55.8
Not at all	36.6	41.9
Like to visit religious places of other religion		
Very much	17.4	0.7

Somewhat	59.8	32.6
Not at all	22.8	66.8
Celebrate other religions festivals and participate in their customs		
Very much	16.3	2.7
Somewhat	59.8	48.2
Not at all	23.9	49.2
Total	448	301

Anger, Fear, Sympathy and Worry

The Hindu and Muslim viewers showed anger when one lied (38.4 percent Hindu and 49.2 percent Muslim viewers) (Table 5). Given the nature of the Indian family and importance to familial relationships, it is not surprising that as much as 33.7 percent Hindu viewers and 42.9 percent Muslim reported getting worried because of their family followed by loss of reputation (Hindu viewers 27.7 percent and Muslim viewers 15.6 percent) (Table 5). These differences could be a result of prevailing socio-political condition in India. Further, probing would be required explaining contrasting views on the issue of separation from loved ones and reputation.

The concept of transmigration of soul or rebirth in the Hindu religion seems to have helped in inculcating and internalizing the notion of temporariness of humans fear from death. According to Hindu belief, the life cycle of birth and death continues until one attains *nirvana* (liberation of soul from mortal constituents) in which human birth provides the best opportunity of attaining *nirvana*. The same cannot be said about Islam and Christianity where after death one has to wait until the Day of Judgment. It is this reason that only 5.4 percent Hindu and 7.0 percent Muslim viewers had shown any fear from death (Table 5). While no Hindu is afraid of hell, 17.3 percent Muslim viewers are afraid of hell. The degree of 'humiliation' (28.6 percent Hindu and 19.9 percent Muslim viewers) slightly differs from each other. A similar observation can be made about 'separation from loved ones' (37.1 percent Hindu and 26.2 percent Muslim viewers) (Table 5).

Physically handicapped persons drew sympathy (Hindu 40.0 percent and Muslim 31.2 percent). Sick and helpless drew more or less equal sympathy (21.9 percent Hindu viewers and 17.9 percent Muslim viewers) from both whereas poverty did not attracted sympathy among Hindu viewers (17.6 percent) as compared to Muslim viewers (24.6 percent) (Table 5). Analysis indicated culture specificity coupled with religious beliefs that evoked fear, anger, worry and sympathy within the context of the Indian culture mediated by religious values.

Table 5: Reasons for Anger, Fear, Sympathy and Worry by Religion (in percent)

Religion	Hindu	Muslim
What fears you the most		
Death	5.4	7.0
Separation from loved ones	37.1	26.2
Failure	16.7	7.3
Unknown trouble	12.3	9.0
Humiliation	28.6	19.9
Grave	0.0	3.0
Day of Judgment/ Hereafter	0.0	10.3
Hell	0.0	17.3
What angers you the most		
Lie	38.4	49.2
Too much work	4.7	3.0
Failure	13.2	5.6
Bad behavior	21.0	14.3
Bitter words	22.8	10.3
Words against religion	0.0	17.6
What concerns you the most		
Family members	33.7	42.9
Earnings	12.1	13.0
Employment	10.3	8.6
Health	16.3	3.0
Reputation	27.7	15.6
Religious performance	0.0	16.9
Towards whom do you feel pity and sympathetic		
Sick	8.0	23.6
Poor	17.6	24.6
Handicapped	40.0	31.2
Helpless	21.9	17.9
Person in pain	12.5	2.7
Total N	448	301

Influences of Religious Telecast

A question was raised: To what extent does religious television viewing in multi-religious cultural setting has strengthened the belief in Hindu *Dharma* or Islam? The viewers were administered a battery of eight questions to gauge their views on the influences of religious telecast. Each question was asked to assess as to how religious telecast might have influenced the viewers' belief. These questions related to religion and current life, love for humanness, capacity to take important decisions, ability to think rationally, able to learn about important things and understand environment and be able to assess others perceptions and approaches. It was assumed that the composite effect created during the state of liminality while viewing religious television would lead to changes towards religious belief both among Hindu and Muslim viewers.

Each question was separately analysed and a composite influence of religious telecast was also calculated. For this purpose, each question having three options of responses, a numerical value was assigned for each kind of response in the category of 'not all' (zero), 'increased a little' or 'belief as become a stronger' (one) and 'belief as become very strong' or 'increased very much' (two). These values have been assigned for the calculation in a non linear and non-equidistance scale though reflecting a difference of opinion in three categories. Percentage of mean score for each category was separately calculated and a total mean score was also calculated. The same has been presented in Table 6. Two kinds of analyses are presented to assess the influence of religious telecast among Hindu and Muslim.

There seems to be significant differences in the belief towards religion after viewing religious telecast between Hindu (15.0 percent) and Muslim viewers (39.9 percent) (Table 6) and composite mean score of Hindu (0.7) and Muslim (1.2) (Table 6). While Hindu has been much less influenced by the religious telecast the Muslim viewers reported strong influence. Table 6 clearly indicated that in the state of liminality Muslim viewers strongly felt the influence of religious telecast as compared to Hindu viewers.

The strongest influence of television viewing can be seen in increased humanness among Muslim viewers (44.2 percent) as opposed to Hindu viewers (12.5 percent).

On the whole, it seems religious television viewing had moderate or no influence whatever at attitudinal level among Hindu viewers. Once the Hindu viewers are out of state of liminality and return back to normal life, little or negligible influence of religious television can be observed. On the other hand, degree of influence among Muslim viewers seem to be multifold compare to Hindu viewers. However, once the Muslim viewers are out of state of liminality and return back to normal life, they strongly held religious belief remained intact with or without influence of religious television. In the light of the analysis, it is argued that strongly held religious beliefs and cultural dictates would not get influenced by religious television viewing as it lacked religious and spiritual

sanctity. At the same time, the changing attitude at the societal level may continue to bring about socio-cultural change with or without religious television viewing as ascertained by Mandelbaum (1970).

Lack of influence of religious television among Hindu and Muslim viewers as indicated in Table 7 provides a perspective in understanding of cultural nature of television. It is argued that television may not be able to influence strongly held beliefs as they are not internalized by the viewers as observed in the case of cinema. Also, in the multi-religious India, in spite of living together in physical proximity, did not help increase interaction, religious tolerance and social interaction which could be explained by a whole host of structural, historical and political factors. Hence, there is a need for deeper analysis to understand the influences of religious television in the multi-religious context of India.

Table 6: Influence of Religious Telecast (in percent)

Television Influence	Hindu	Muslim
Belief towards religion		
Belief has become very strong	15.0	39.9
Belief has become little stronger	59.6	49.8
Belief has not at all increased	25.4	10.3
Belief towards life		
Easiness has increased very much	11.4	37.5
Easiness has increased a little	52.2	51.8
Easiness has not at all increased	36.4	10.6
Humanness		
Increased very much	12.5	44.2
Increased a little	53.1	49.5
Has not at all increased	34.4	6.3
Capacity to take important decisions		
Increased very much	11.6	25.2
Increased a little	37.1	56.8
Has not at all increase	51.3	17.9
Ability to think rationally and prudently		
Increased very much	10.0	24.3
Increased a little	37.3	58.5
Has not at all increase	52.7	17.3
Learning about important things		
Very easy to evaluate	10.9	21.3
Little bit easy to evaluate	35.7	63.8
Has not become easy to evaluate	53.4	15.0
Understanding of environment		
Very much	11.2	27.9
Little bit better	46.0	61.8
Has not help at all	42.8	10.3
Easier to assess other's perception and approach		
Very much	10.0	26.2
A Little	48.7	64.5
Not at all	41.3	9.3
Total N	**448**	**301**

Table 7: Composite Influence of Religious Telecast (in percent)

Composite Influence of Religious Telecast	Hindu	Muslim
Very much	11.6	30.8
A Little	46.2	57.1
Not at all	42.2	12.1
Mean score	0.7	1.2
Total N	**448**	**301**

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Hindu *Dharma* Satellite Telecast in a Multi-religious South Asia: An Analysis[1]

Binod C. Agrawal and Md. Irfan Khan[2]

Introduction

The Hindu epic *Ramayan*[3] was telecast as a serial a quarter of a century ago, on January 25, 1987, by the government-financed and controlled public service broadcasting Doordarshan. Mankekar (2002:134) analyzed and examined how "this television serial might have participated in reconfigurations of nation, culture, and community that overlapped with and reinforced Hindu nationalism." *Ramayan* became so popular that on the day of telecast almost every street in many cities of North India was deserted. *Ramayan* was watched by Hindu and non-Hindu viewers alike "because it contained important moral lessons that would guide them in their everyday lives and relationships..." (Mankekar 2002:146).

In 2012, there are over dozen separate non-stop "satellite religious telecast" for Hindu, Jain, Sikh, Muslim, and Christian viewers separately. The telecast of *Ramayan* has had political overtone in a secular country like India. Today, it has assumed much larger meaning and value of religious continuity, structural realignment, and socio-cultural change.

Today, "Hinduism is indeed a complex and rich religion. No founder's initiative, no dogma, no reform have imposed restrictions on its domain; on the contrary, the contributions of the centuries have superimposed without ever wearing out the previous layers of development...Life is looked upon as a rite; there is no absolute dividing line between scared and the profane. In fact, there is no Hindu

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[1] A modified version of the paper presented in the International Conference on "Media Religion Culture 2012," held in Eskisehir, Turkey, July 8–12, 2012.

[2] The authors acknowledge with thanks the contribution made by Ajit Pandey, Amardeep Singh, Farida Ahmed and Niharika Chandola Kala, Himgiri Zee University, Dehradhun during the entire study.

[3] One of the most popular and important Hindu epics mortalized by 16th-century poet Tulasi Das is *Ramcharit Manas*. It is a poetic narration of the Lord Ram and his life. It is based on the original epic written earlier by Balmiki around 400 BC to 200 BC (King 1970:363-264).

term corresponding to the what we call 'religion'. There are 'approaches' to the spiritual life and there is *dharma* or 'maintenance' (in the right path)..." (Renou 1962:17-18). Within such an "emic"[4] perspective of Hindu *dharma*, it would be inappropriate to designate any Hindu television telecast as religious telecast though loosely it has been referred to as religious telecast. Earlier Agrawal (2011) argued that "the closest term to religion not necessarily equivalent is *dharma*" in Hinduism. In the *Upanishad*[5] one finds statements like "There is nothing higher than *dharma*." According to Radhakrishnan (1988:341) "*Dharma* is the immanent order. It denotes the laws of nature, the chain of causation, the rule for the castes...It is absolute infallible righteousness of which our earthly justice is but a shadow."

Perpetuation of *Dharma* and Television

Many modes of communication, to overcome literacy and linguistic barrier, have evolved, perfected and utilized to ensure the perpetuation of *dharma*. It has been achieved by way of recitals of oral and written words, ritual performance, observations of fasting, feasting, and collective congregation for worship over several millennia. Oral story, recitals, dance performances and *Ramlila* (theatrical performances of epic *Ramayan)* have been major means of philosophical and moral value transmission and continuity from generation to generation. Electronic and digital media like television and cinema have further enhanced reach, access, and spread of Hindu *dharma* often in real time.

Today, television viewing in India is most popular due to access and choice of over 100 satellite television channels. A large number of exclusive *dharma* related 24-hour telecast are part of the television viewing. These telecasts are viewed on a fairly regular basis as reported in a number of television studies (Agrawal 2011, 2010 and Anonymous 2009). In this respect, television has added another medium of *dharma* communication having more than 150 million strong households of viewers in South Asian.

In this paper possible influences, if any, of religion or *dharma* telecast have been analyzed. The analysis is confined to selected *dharma* components or elements in the cultural context of India and South Asia having multi-religious population.

Aim

The present paper attempts, among other things, to study possible influences of *dharma* telecast among Hindu viewers. More specifically, the survey aims (a) to study change in the religious behavior among Hindu *dharma* viewers, (b) to

assess degree of religious tolerance expressed by Hindu viewers towards other religions, and (c) to what extent these influences have been internalized by Hindu viewers.

Study

Keeping in mind the objectives of the study, a survey was conducted in June 2012 from among randomly selected 500 DTH/Cable television households in Dehradun City. Dehradun, capital of Uttarakhand State in the Himalayan region of India, is located about 275 kilometers north of Delhi. Modern Dehradun is over a century old having been established in 1871 AD as a separate district. It has been elevated to the status of state capital in 2001 and can be characterized as multilingual and multi-religious city. Its population has a high literacy rate of over 85.24 percent according to the 2011 Census of India.

For the purpose of survey, a stratified random sampling method was followed for the selection of respondents (Hindu viewers). Accordingly, the City of Dehradun was stratified into five geographical zones. Within each zone, five localities were selected having the concentration of DTH/Cable television homes. In each locality, 20 DTH/Cable television households were randomly selected. In each household, an adult (above 18 years of age) religious television viewer of either sex was selected as respondent and was interviewed with the help of an interview schedule prepared in Hindi language.

Out of 500 respondents selected in the survey, 89.6 percent or 448 were Hindu, whereas the remaining 10.4 percent were non-Hindu consisting of Muslim (5.2 percent), Sikh (4.0 percent), and Christian and others (1.2 percent) (Table not provided). In the present analysis, only Hindu respondents have been taken into consideration.

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Hindu Viewers

The Hindu viewers had reported 97.2 percent literacy rate (Table 1) having uniquely 63.6 percent graduate and post graduate viewers. Since the households were selected from DTH/Cable homes, the viewers in the sample belonged to "middle" and "upper-middle" socio-economic strata who owned Direct to Home (DTH) or Cable TV and mobile phone. Other durables found in the viewers' household included refrigerator and two- or four-wheel automobiles. Seven out of ten or 72.5 percent of viewers lived in four to six members per household, and 81.9 percent were married, having household monthly income ranging from less than Indian Rupee 10000 to more than Indian Rupee 30000 per month. As much as 61.4 percent viewers were men whereas 38.6 percent were women (Table 1).

The profile of the Hindu viewers is that of highly educated adults of either sex who lived in material comfort in which 53.1 percent were in 36-55 years age group

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[4] "The term emic refers to those phenomena which are identified and studied within native Cultural judgements" (Harris 1968:571-575 as quoted by Agrawal ed. 1982:36).

[5] *Upanishad* or 'Approaches' "...are collection of texts developing the ritual or cosmogonic data of the Veda in a strongly speculative direction and installing on new foundations the ancient equivalence felt between the human and the divine world" (Renou 1962:86).

(Table 1). It is assumed that their knowledge of Hindu *dharma* was very high and they were capable of discerning the content of the *dharma* telecast against their strongly held religious beliefs.

Observance of *dharma*

The viewers were asked about their faith in God, daily ritual performance, and their views on strongly-held appropriateness of Hindu joint family in contemporary India.

Table 2 indicates that 38.4 percent and 46.4 percent have faith in God very much and much respectively, where as 15.2 percent of viewers have somewhat or no faith in God. Table 3 indicates that 83.3 percent of viewers perform some rituals or prayers daily or more than one time in a day. Women seem to be. more religious than men (91.9 percent women as compared to 77.8 percent men. See Table 3). Religiosity seems to grow as one gets older. Table 3 shows that prayer and ritual performance among those who are below 35 years of age was 74.4 percent, while in the age group of 35-55 years, it was 88.7 percent and among those who are above 56 years of age, it was 86.0 percent (Table 3).

Table 4 indicated that 80.4 percent of Hindu viewers follow religious customs from very much to much and another 17.6 percent follow somewhat there by reflecting almost universal following of religious customs.

On the question of appropriateness of joint family in the contemporary social setting 59.4 percent accept the appropriateness of the Hindu joint family very much whereas 25.4 percent somewhat accepted somewhat (Table 5). However, 15.2 percent of them reject or do not subscribe to any of these strongly-held beliefs and values. In other words, almost 85 percent Hindu viewers have a strong sense of *dharma* and continue to be practicing Hindus.

Religious Tolerance

A set of three questions were asked to the Hindu viewers relating to religious tolerance defined as acceptance of other religious practices with positive feelings and appreciation. Since the viewers were by and large exposed to other religious observance, fairs and festivals, it was thought that such an exposure of diverse religious beliefs and practices would help enhance religious tolerance among Hindu viewers.

Table 6 indicates that 86.6 percent of viewers do not watch any telecast of other religions. Similarly 82.2 percent have not ever visited any mosque, church or Gurudwara and 85.7 percent have not celebrated or participated in rituals of other religions (Table 6). On the whole, there seems to be limited exposure of other religions, in spite of the multi-religious fabric. It could also be because the Hindu viewers preferr to confine

within their religious domain in India and elsewhere in South Asia. The contribution of television viewing seems to be negligible in helping create religious tolerance and in breaking age old religious animosity between Hindus and non-Hindus in India and elsewhere among other religious communities. The study tends to support the view that those who watched *dharma* telecast showed little religious tolerance for other religions.

Anger, Fear, Sympathy and Worry among Hindu Viewers

The concept of transmigration of the soul or rebirth in the Hindu *dharma* helped in inculcating and internalizing the notion of temporariness of human life leading to have little fear from death. According to Hindu belief, the life cycle of birth and death continues until one attains *nirvana* (liberation of soul from mortal constituents) in which birth as human provides the best opportunity of attaining *nirvana*. It is this reason that only 5.4 percent of viewers had shown any fear from death (Table 7). 'Humiliation' (28.6 percent) and 'separation from loved ones' (37.1 percent) seemed to create the most fear among the Hindu viewers (Table 7). "A factor in social and psychical equilibrium is found in the notion of *dharma* with its rigorous justice and the 'truth' which implies (the Indians insist on the attitude of truthfulness as others insist on an 'attitude of consciousness')" (Renou 1962:55). This could be one of the important reasons why the Hindu viewers showed anger when one lied (lie angers 38.4 percent Hindu viewers) (Table 7).

Given the nature of the Hindu family and the importance to familial relationships, it is not surprising that as much as 33.7 percent of viewers reported getting worried because of their family followed by loss of respect or locally referred to as *Izzat* (27.7 percent) (Table 7). Physically handicapped persons drew sympathy (40.0 percent) and not sick or helpless (8.0 percent and 12.5 percent respectively) not even poverty merit significant sympathy (Table 7). Analysis indicated culture specificity coupled with religious beliefs that evoked fear, anger, worry, and sympathy within the context of South Asia.

Influence of Television

At the empirical level, in Hindu *dharma*, there is no fear from death, little or no place for lie, nothing more than family that worries the viewers, who show their most sympathies for handicapped persons. To what extent does *dharma* television viewing can strengthen these tenets of Hindu *dharma*? The viewers were asked a battery of eight questions to gauge their views on the influences of *dharma* television. These questions were asked to assess how *dharma* television might have influenced the viewers' attitude towards their belief, current life, love for humanity, capacity to take important decisions, ability to think rationally, ability to learn about important things, understand their environment, and the ability to assess perceptions of others.

Analysis of Table 8 indicates that not more than 10 to 15 percent of viewers feel very strong influence of television in their deeds and action. At the same time 59.6 percent express that *dharma* telecast had further strengthened their belief in *dharma*. The lowest 35.7 percent learn about important things as a result of viewing of *dharma* telecast. Further, 53.1 percent feel that love for humankind increased little as a result of *dharma* telecast viewing. But, in the case of capacity to take important decisions was not at all influenced as indicated by 51.3 percent viewers. So was the case about the ability to think rationally and prudently or 52.7 percent. So was the case about not able to learn important things with 53.3 percent. However, understanding of environment or what is referred to as "nature" in Hinduism improved a little bit after watching religious television with 46 percent. Almost the same number of viewers believed that their understanding of environment had not changed much (42.9 percent). *Dharma* viewing was believed to have helped little in assessing other's perception and approach (48.7 percent) (Table 8).

On the whole, it seems that *dharma* television viewing had moderate or no influence whatever at attitudinal level. In light of the earlier analysis, it is argued that strongly held '*dharma*' dictates would not get influenced by *dharma* television as it lacked spiritual sanctity and often contradicted the existing beliefs. At the same time, the changing attitude at the societal level may continue to change with or without television as indicated by Mandelbaum (1970).

Summing Up

The brief analysis presented so far provides unclear direction of influences of religious or *dharma* television. However, it gives a clear perspective that changes as a result of *dharma* television viewing might be minimal as television may not be able to influence strongly held beliefs. Also, in multi-religious India and South Asia, in spite of living together in physical proximity may not help increase interaction, religious tolerance, and social interaction due to a whole host of historical and political reasons. The analysis clearly supports this inference.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Viewers by Age and Sex

Background Characteristics	Age			Sex		Total
	35 years and less	36-55 years	56+ years	Male	Female	
Age						
35 years and less	100.0	0.0	0.0	36.0	35.3	35.7
36-55 years	0.0	100.0	0.0	49.8	58.4	53.1
56+ years	0.0	0.0	100.0	14.2	6.4	11.2
Sex						
Male	61.9	57.6	78.0	100.0	0.0	61.4
Female	38.1	42.4	22.0	0.0	100.0	38.6
Education						
Below Graduate including no education	33.8	38.7	34.0	34.5	39.3	36.4
Graduate and post graduate	66.3	61.3	66.0	65.5	60.7	63.6
Marital status						
Unmarried	41.9	1.7	0.0	20.0	9.2	15.8
Married	56.3	96.2	96.0	79.3	86.1	81.9
Widow-Widower-Divorce	1.9	2.1	4.0	0.7	4.6	2.2
Household size						
1-3 Members	13.8	10.9	24.0	8.7	20.8	13.4
4-6 Members	70.6	76.9	58.0	77.5	64.7	72.5
7+ Members	15.6	12.2	18.0	13.8	14.5	14.1
Household monthly income						
Rs. 10000 and less	20.0	14.7	16.0	14.2	20.8	16.7
Rs. 10001-20000	33.8	39.9	40.0	37.1	38.7	37.7
Rs. 20001-30000	20.6	18.9	22.0	22.2	16.2	19.9
Rs. 30001+	25.6	26.5	22.0	26.5	24.3	25.7
Airconditioner	15.0	20.6	20.0	21.5	13.9	18.5
Cooler	64.4	64.3	72.0	66.5	63.0	65.2
Car	42.5	42.0	58.0	47.6	38.2	44.0
Motorcycle	88.1	81.5	78.0	85.5	80.3	83.5
Family owned car and motorcycle	40.0	35.7	48.0	42.2	32.9	38.6
Refrigerator	96.3	97.9	94.0	97.1	96.5	96.9
Mobile	98.8	98.3	100.0	99.3	97.7	98.7
Television	99.4	99.6	100.0	99.3	100.0	99.6
Total	**160**	**238**	**50**	**275**	**173**	**448**

Table 2: Faith in God by Age and Sex

Faith in God	Age			Sex		Total
	35 years and less	36-55 years	56+ years	Male	Female	
Very Much faith	28.1	42.0	54.0	33.5	46.2	38.4
Much faith	51.3	45.8	34.0	50.9	39.3	46.4
Somewhat or no faith	20.6	12.2	12.0	15.6	14.5	15.2
Total	160	238	50	275	173	448

Table 3: Prayer and Ritual Performance by Age and Sex

Performance	Age			Sex		Total
	35 years and less	36-55 years	56+ years	Male	Female	
Once–more than once in a day	74.4	88.7	86.0	77.8	91.9	83.3
Occasional special occasion	25.6	11.3	14.0	22.2	8.1	16.7
Total	160	238	50	275	173	448

Table 4: Follow Religious Customs by Age and Sex

Performance	Age			Sex		Total
	35 years and less	36-55 years	56+ years	Male	Female	
Very Much–Much	79.4	81.5	78.0	78.5	83.2	80.4
To somewhat	17.5	16.8	22.0	19.3	15.0	17.6
Cannot say	3.1	1.7	0.0	2.2	1.7	2.0
Total	160	238	50	275	173	448

Table 5: Opinion on Joint Family by Age and Sex

Joint Family Appropriate	Age			Sex		Total
	35 years and less	36-55 years	56+ years	Male	Female	
Very Much–Much	53.8	60.1	74.0	58.5	60.7	59.4
To somewhat	26.9	24.8	24.0	25.8	24.9	25.4
Cannot say	19.4	15.1	2.0	15.6	14.5	15.2
Total	160	238	50	275	173	448

Table 6: Religious Tolerance by Age and Sex

Participation	Age			Sex		Total
	35 years and less	36-55 years	56+ years	Male	Female	
Watch telecast of other religions						
Very Much	3.1	2.9	2.0	2.5	3.5	2.9
Much	13.1	8.4	12.0	10.5	10.4	10.5
Somewhat –Not at all– Cannot say	83.8	88.7	86.0	86.9	86.1	86.6
Visit religious places of other religions						
Very Much	4.4	2.9	2.0	2.5	4.6	3.3
Much	20.0	10.5	12.0	13.8	14.5	14.1
Somewhat–Not at all– Cannot say	75.6	86.6	86.0	83.6	80.9	82.6
Celebrate festivals and participate in the rituals of other religions						
Very Much	5.0	6.7	8.0	5.8	6.9	6.3
Much	11.9	8.4	12.0	10.5	9.2	10.0
Somewhat–Not at all– Cannot say	83.1	84.9	80.0	83.6	83.8	83.7
Total	160	238	50	275	173	448

Table 7: Reasons for Anger, Fear, Sympathy and Worry by Age and Sex

Reasons	Age			Sex		Total
	35 years and less	36-55 years	56+ years	Male	Female	
Fears most						
Death	2.5	7.1	6.0	5.1	5.8	5.4
Separation from loved ones	38.1	39.5	22.0	34.5	41.0	37.1
Failure	18.8	16.4	12.0	19.3	12.7	16.7
Uncertainty	13.8	9.2	22.0	14.9	8.1	12.3
Humiliation	26.9	27.7	38.0	26.2	32.4	28.6
Angers most						
Lie	37.5	39.9	34.0	36.7	41.0	38.4
Too much work	3.8	5.9	2.0	4.7	4.6	4.7
Failure	14.4	13.0	10.0	16.0	8.7	13.2

Bad behavior	21.9	21.0	18.0	24.0	16.2	21.0
Bitter words	22.5	20.2	36.0	18.5	29.5	22.8
Worries most						
Family	28.1	39.1	26.0	28.4	42.2	33.7
Job	16.9	10.9	2.0	13.5	9.8	12.1
Money	8.8	10.1	16.0	12.0	7.5	10.3
Health	15.0	17.2	16.0	15.6	17.3	16.3
Respect	31.3	22.7	40.0	30.5	23.1	27.7
Feels pity and sympathetic to						
Sick	5.0	8.8	14.0	7.6	8.7	8.0
Poor	18.1	18.5	12.0	18.9	15.6	17.6
Handicapped	41.3	41.6	28.0	40.4	39.3	40.0
Helpless	23.1	19.3	30.0	20.7	23.7	21.9
Unhappy	12.5	11.8	16.0	12.4	12.7	12.5
Total	160	238	50	275	173	448

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Religion and Social Communication is a very important field of academic research especially in Asia. St. John's University in Bangkok is happy to provide a basis for such research in which other initiatives in the field which should be further developed.

Dr. Chainarong Monthienvichienchai
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Over the years, the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) at St. John's University, Bangkok, Thailand has developed more and more as an academic platform for discussion, sharing and reflection in the field. It was the proposal from the participants of the annual roundtable to make some of these studies and reflection available to a greater audience through a book series for academic use. This is now done in cooperation with the University of Santo Tomas in Manila with whom ARC has a special relation and from where also some future contributions especially from Christianity are expected.

Dr. Franz-Josef Eilers, svd
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