

Religion and Social Communication  
Book Series

**2**

Volume

**Media and Religious Communication  
in Multi-Cultural Asia:  
An Eclectic Research Agenda**

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Edited by  
**Blnod C. Agrawal**



UNIVERSITY OF SANTO TOMAS PUBLISHING HOUSE

**Media and Religious Communication in  
Multi-Cultural Asia: An Eclectic Research Agenda**

***Religion and Social Communication***

A Book Series of the  
Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication  
St. John's University, Bangkok, Thailand  
in cooperation with  
The Graduate School  
University of Santo Tomas,  
Manila, Philippines

Edited by

Franz-Josef Eilers, svd  
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Binod C. Agrawal

***Media and Religious  
Communication in  
Multi-Cultural Asia:  
An Eclectic Research Agenda***

**Volume**

- I **Changing Cultures and Religious Practices in Asia**  
*Binod C. Agrawal (Ed.)*
- II **Media and Religious Communication in Multi Cultural Asia:  
An Eclectic Research Agenda**  
*Binod C. Agrawal (Ed.)*
- III **Communication Theology and Pastoral Communication:  
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*Franz-Josef Eilers, svd, Anh Vu Ta (Eds.)*

Edited by

*Binod C. Agrawal*

## Introducing the Book Series

Published by  
the **University of Santo Tomas Publishing House**  
Beato Angelico Building  
España, Manila 1015 Philippines  
Telefax: (63-2) 731-3522 • Tel. Nos. 406-1611 Loc. 8252/8278  
E-mail: publishing@mnl.ust.edu.ph

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Cover design and book layout by Kenneth E. Rayco

Recommended entry:

Media and religious communication in multi-cultural Asia : an eclectic research agenda / edited by Binod C. Agrawal. -- Second edition -- Manila, Philippines : University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, c2015.  
xviii, 182 pp ; 23 cm. -- (Religion and social communication) ; vol. 2

ISBN 978-971-506-780-5

1. Communication -- Religious aspects. 2. Mass media -- Religious aspects. I. Agrawal, Binod C., editor

BL2015.C65 .M468 2015

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 also be 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.

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## Acknowledgment

The papers presented in this volume represent the rainbow of religious and social communication that evolved and nurtured in Asia for over several millennia. Originally, these papers were discussed in the roundtable meetings of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) that were held in Bangkok in 2011, Ahmedabad in 2012, and in Chiang Mai in 2013. In addition, few papers were especially invited to give a panorama of religion in Asia. The authors belong to various religious denominations, media and communication sectors and some belong to social sciences. This diversity of disciplinary perspectives is clearly reflected, though the focus remains on religion and digital media in contemporary Asia. In these three years, roundtable discussions covered a variety of various religions, sects and regions of Asia.

In this volume an attempt has been made to introduce the authors and their main themes without imposing any religious, theoretical, or ideological perspectives in the study of religion and media. The aim is to bring out major themes of religion and media.

The book is divided into three major sections. In the first section, the papers of Franz-Josef Eilers, Binod C. Agrawal and Sebastian Periannan are included. They discuss the theoretical and methodological issues related to various aspects of religion and media, including social media, to assess its impact.

In the second section, researches related to Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism have been presented by six authors. Whereas in the third section, five studies related to Islam in Indonesia and India, and Jainism and Sikhism in India, are presented.

Prof. Dr. Franz-Josef Eilers assisted by Anthony Roman has been very kind and supportive in the preparation of this volume. Dr. Eilers held several rounds of discussions and communication in the conceptualization of the contents and publication of the book. I am most grateful to him and to Anthony for the support for the entire project.

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In the preparation of this volume valuable assistance were provided by Leslin Bastian, Shabya Baroi, and Hiral Dave who are my colleagues at TALEEM Research Foundation. I am most grateful, and acknowledge their valuable assistance in the preparation of the volume.

*Binod C. Agrawal*

Ahmedabad, August 20, 2014

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## Introduction

*Binod C. Agrawal*

Religion, media, and communication have been the objects of study and research in the Euro-American countries for quite some time especially in relation to Christianity. With the advent of communication revolution and great strides in digital media, communication reach and access have gone beyond any conventional boundaries.

According to Franz-Josef Eilers, until now religion and social communication are not a major concern in communication studies in Asia. Modern developments not only of technologies but also the phenomenon of globalization, in general, however, require a strong and serious attempt in this direction.

The Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) at St. John's University in Bangkok stands for such a concern. The Center actually dates back to a proposal by a group of scholars at a roundtable organized by the FABC-Office of Social Communication in 1999. It started a website which is now in the process of re-construction. In 2004 it began publishing a bi-annual journal called *Religion and Social Communication*. It always looks for good academic contributions. It should become a special place to share any study, discussion, and reflection on social communication and religion in Asia. The institution also organized two follow-up roundtables on religion and social communication (2005, 2010) and continues to do so on an annual basis.

According to Binod C. Agrawal, digital technology coupled with satellite transnational transmission of religious television has multiplied manifold in less than a quarter of a century worldwide and many more fold higher in Asia and South Asia. Information Technology (IT) has reduced physical and social distances and collapsed time and space. The proliferation and convergence of information technology, of the Internet and mobile telephony, and development of digital technology have penetrated religious communications in every walk and moment of human life. The religious telecast has been juxtaposed on human scale

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of religious communication to involve possible method of analysis. For this purpose, ethnographic method has been utilized to provide a glimpse of religious experiences of three major religions namely Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity in India.

Methodological tools and techniques of media and communication research largely focused on quantitative methods though qualitative methods like focus group discussion and participatory research have been introduced. Given the nature of religious amplification and viewers' religious fervor, listening and viewing these broadcasts require a method by which the strong "faith," the way the audience relate and respond to the religious broadcast, could be studied and analyzed. Keeping these distinct audience/devotees profile, context, and other factors in view, Agrawal proposed "participant observation" and "ethnographic method" for data collection. Analytical paradigm for such analysis according to the author, requires a holistic approach for both amplification and verbal religious communication. At two distinct levels of religious communication, there is a need to design and follow research tools and techniques that can capture the effects and measure social and cultural change as a result of religious amplification.

Sebastian Periannan recommends the ontological approach of narrative inquiry, biography, symbolic interactionism, personal accounts, conversational analysis, discourse analysis, ethnoscience, life history, and participatory action research. Axiology prospective, in social science research, refers to the values (explicit or implicit) underlying all research, whether qualitative or quantitative. While positivistic quantitative research often poses as objective, neutral and dispassionate, qualitative researchers "accept the fact that [all] research is ideologically driven" (Janesick 2000, 385). These perspectives include four ways to fulfill the objectives of the study, namely theoretical lenses, theological/religious prism, critical approaches, and transformative values. According to him, the ARC has opened the wider horizon for future research, reflection, and religious understanding for harmony, dialogue, and transformation.

Scholars of Buddhism have agreed, without any reservation, that the Buddha who was founder of the religion, attained transcendental wisdom under the Bodhi tree. The Buddha himself did not announce the birth of a new religion and remained a Hindu in which he was born until his death. Buddha remained firm in negating the ritualism and sacrifices as a part of religion. According to Agrawal, it will remain an enigma as to through what process Buddhism in the existing culture of Korea got integrated several thousand kilometers away from its origin. The same holds true for many countries in Asia like Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Autonomous Region of Tibet, and China.

The communication revolution has invaded South Korea. Today, young people obsessively use new modern means of media and communication technologies such as the Internet and mobile phones with Internet access, which is an essential part of their

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daily lives. In such a situation, how essential is religion for young people? Can religious media play any important role as adviser for personal and social issues in a society where there is a growing gap between the rich and the poor? There is no definitive answer and it is difficult to discern how digital media is getting integrated into the cultural ethos of South Korean society. Also, what is the actual adaptive mechanism for media mediated religion?

Weley defines interfaith dialogue as an encounter between people who live by different faith traditions in an atmosphere of mutual trust and acceptance. The main purpose of interfaith dialogue is to bring peace. The study conducted by Ma. Stella C. Tirol attempts to: 1) describe how Filipino religious denominations responded to the question of establishing an interreligious network in terms of attitude or feeling and expectations; and 2) draw indicators that manifest a changing culture in a 'rurban' community of Philippines.

She found that more than half (54 percent) of the respondents perceived themselves as modern in which 53 percent respect religious beliefs of others and as much as 39 percent each were in favor of establishing an interreligious web network where as equal number were neutral about the creation of an interreligious web network who or had no idea yet about an interreligious web network. There were others who mentioned that an interreligious network should not be created as it would create conflict of beliefs and unnecessary debates online. The general opinion was that the establishment of an interreligious web network should be planned and executed properly since it can be used as venue for religious disclosure.

According to Kiran Thakur, Hinduism is the third largest religion in the world, next to Christianity and Islam. Websites on Hindus, Hinduism, and related topics were hosted since mid-1990s. Several attempts appear to have been made to compile directories of such websites. One such exercise was undertaken by a team of Vedic students of an institute on the foothills of Himalayas who worked for a few weeks to compile the sites hosted by institutions, organizations, and individuals. The list has 651 entries (Hindu websites around the world).

Text and audio-visual contents of the majority of websites include information about Hinduism, its sects of the creators of the sites, spiritual masters, their preaching, temples, rituals, festivals, online (procedure for the worship of deities), songs, prayers, Yoga, philanthropic activities of the organizations, and so on.

The Indian Union government in August and September 2012 took certain decisions that invited a barrage of criticism from Net users, print and electronic media, and freedom of expression activists, social media companies, and Internet service providers. It blocked certain Twitter, Facebook, Internet sites, and SMS. The government resorted to ban bulk SMS and MMS from August 17 to 30, 2012



to prevent the spread of rumors that created panic among students of northeastern states studying in cities of western and southern parts of the country. Second, unlike carefully selected 'Letters to the Editor' in newspapers and 'Feedback' posted on news channel websites, the reactions of 'Internet Hindus' cannot be thrown into the dustbin or deleted with a click of the mouse. Third, the established elite, most of them middle-aged, are beginning to feel threatened.

A blogpost entitled 'Beware, Internet Hindus are multiplying like Virus on Social Media' says, "[t]oday there are perhaps as many as 20,000 so-called 'Internet Hindus,' many tweeting as often as 300 times a day, according to a rough estimate by one of the community's most active members." This blogger's claim could not be verified. It, however, does make a point that the Internet Hindus are multiplying like virus on social media.

Arbind Sinha discusses several research studies to establish a close link between Hindu mythology and political parties and throw light as to how the political parties use mythology for political agenda setting. The use of mythology for achieving political power has been a worldwide phenomenon and has been in practice over the years for propagation of a certain kind of political agenda. The cult of mythological world is popular and the concerned political parties started popularizing it using all marketing techniques—using different media to influence the mind of the receivers. The political parties in India are conscious of the fact that religious communicators, impressing large number of followers there, have been accustomed to the use of religion and associated myth and mythological characters to strengthen their power of communication as people take their communication as power.

Political parties fielded the actors who gained popularity by personifying mythical characters on television. It may be worth to note that India, particularly rural India, did not have many cinema and in this context expansion of television has been phenomenal particularly in 1980s. This made it possible for the actors to reach the hearts of millions of television viewers. The religious texts were converted into films and television serials; some of them became massively popular. There is documented proof that this popularity led some of them to gain people's power and become powerful politicians.

Buddhism, a religion of practice, has immensely shaped much of Thailand's culture and society. Thai society owes a great deal to Buddhism for many of the blessings that it enjoys. Earnest practice of *Dhamma*, could satisfactorily solve and ameliorate the problems of Thailand. This means that in order to derive benefit from religion one needs to exert effort and put it into practice. The impact of Western influence on modern Thai society structure, form of government, and to the system of education is too obvious requiring a detailed examination according to Doojai. One may say that almost every aspect of Thai life has been touched by it—from the economic system,

commercialism and consumerism, to the arts and entertainment (where the impact is the strongest, especially among the Thai youth). Amidst these developments, Thai Buddhism is faced with new challenges.

Doojai describes in detail this project of Volunteer Graduated Monks for Hill Tribe Community Development (*Dhammacarika*) that has been implemented for more than ten years, with various interesting experiences and lessons learned and copying the methods of work of the Phra Dhammacarik project. The result of *Dhammacarika* appears to be improving and successful than the previous years.

A strong advocate for religious pluralism was John H. Hick, a philosopher of religion and theologian. Based on his work *God Has Many Names*, Srivorakul critically examines Hick's religious pluralism and compared his position with Thai religious tradition in the attempt to show that Hick and author agree with Thai religious viewpoint and religious world view. According to Srivorakul, different religious traditions have to co-exist as neighbors in a world that is increasingly becoming global. Hick believed that the fact that God is called by many names could be explained by the understanding that God's general revelation is revealed to everyone and that the world's religions sprang up as different ways of responding to the divine reality, which guided cultural and historical worldview of the different believers.

John Mansford Prior observed that contrasting cultural trends are mutating the traditionally tolerant religious culture of Indonesia, triggered by a creeping secularist tendency driven by modernity and post-modernity, particularly among those who wield power.

Indonesians rarely distinguish between secularism and secularization. The key distinction is between an "empathetic secularism" and a "suspicious secularism." Progressive Muslims are not simply discussing the issue of secularism, they are heavily engaged in mainstreaming their vision of faith in a secular society in order that Indonesian society become more democratic. The second key concept proscribed by *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI) but embraced by progressive Muslims is liberalism. Liberalism is the acknowledgement of civil rights and civil liberties which are enshrined in the rule of law such as freedom of thought, opinion, religion, and conviction. The third key concept being mainstreamed by progressive Muslims is pluralism. The simple reality of Indonesian cultural and religious pluralism has become a necessary political principle.

The communicative strategy of *Jaringan Islâm Liberal* (JIL) is open. Led by Muslim intellectuals who have prominent positions in Islamic Universities, most centrally and importantly in Jakarta and Yogyakarta, and younger activists in NGOs, they publish widely in newspapers, magazines, books and pamphlets as well as in the electronic media.

The one official negative reaction to JIL comes from the Ulama Council of Indonesia, *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI). They have countered the liberal-progressive JIL by publishing a *fatwa*. In the *fatwa* they distinguish between plurality and pluralism. “Plurality,” according to MUI, is the social reality of Indonesia and so cannot be rejected, while “pluralism” is a foreign concept that should be viewed with suspicion.

Religious belief and commitment, both in the struggle for independence during colonial times and today, are buffeted by a global tsunami of commercialized values. This movement surfaces with mono-linguistic, fundamentalist moral demands in public discourse, and with its religious sectarianism, shaking communal peace and harmony. Seemingly a closed, hard-line communication network among fellow hardliners, is capable of shifting the political and social landscape in a fragile, civil society. Secularism is increasingly seen to open the road to social justice, equality, harmony in the multi-cultural and multi-religious communities. The principle of pluralism, enshrined in Indonesia’s national motto *Bhinneka tunggal ika* (unity in diversity), is the historical root upon which secularism has been grafted.

Md. Irfan Khan made an attempt, among other things, to study possible influences of Urdu telecast among Muslim viewers who constitute 13.4 percent of a total population of about 1.02 billion in 2001, and watch fifteen Urdu channels which has expanded its base within a period of a decade. In a survey conducted in the cities of Lucknow, Varanasi, Dehradun and Srinagar. More than two-thirds of viewers were in the age group of 18-40 years and the remaining were above forty years of age. Almost 70 percent of viewers were male and 30 percent were female. Majority of the Muslim viewers belonged to the Sunni religious sect (80 percent) and the remaining 18 percent were Shia. Nearly half of the viewers (47.4 percent) watched Urdu channels for 8-15 hours in a week. Around 15.2 percent of these viewers were also watching 16-23 hours in a week. On an average these viewers watched television for around nine hours in a week or more than an hour a day. It was found that among various Urdu television channels, ETV Urdu was the most watched television channel (82.1 percent) in all cities except Varanasi. Some variation in viewing of channels was also found between Shia and Sunni Sects. Peace TV was largely viewed by Sunni (25.4 percent) as compared to Shia (9.6 percent). Overall, the most preferred Urdu program content watched was the recitation of the *Quran* (80 percent). It was followed by *Naat*—a poem praising Prophet Mohammad (50.7 percent). Almost all the viewers (99.8 percent) had faith in Islam and God and almost 94 percent followed Islamic tradition/customs “very much.” Eight out of ten viewers (79.1 percent) offered prayers daily. Around 61.3 percent of viewers did not watch any telecast of other religions.

By and large, Urdu television channels attracted a large section of Muslim viewers in India. Among the various Urdu channels ETV Urdu was universally

watched among Muslim viewers. Preference of Urdu channel was region specific and varied from one city to another. Interestingly the religious programs on the Urdu channels were mostly viewed because of strong faith in Islam and Muslims preferred to confine themselves within their own religious domain.

Political Islam/*millat*/pan-Islamic identity has been at the heart of identity debates surrounding Muslims. However, sectarian identities within Islam have also found prominence in the recent past, especially with the rise of the offensive towards the Shias by the Sunni terrorist/militia The Shia which constitute the second largest sect of Islam, examines how religious spaces like the *Shah-e-Mardan* shrine in Delhi, India, play a role in consolidating Shia ideology and identity.

*Dargah Shah-e-Mardan* is one of the oldest *Shia Imambargahs* located in the Karbala neighbourhood of Delhi. In the month of Muharram, Tazias from all over the city are brought here for burial.

The author discusses the content of *Majlis-e-Hussain*, *Majlis-e-Fatima*, *Majlis-e-Zainab*, and *Majlis-e-Sakinah*, i.e. *majlises* held and speeches made to commemorate the martyrdom of Prophet Mohammed’s grandson, Hussain, and members of his family—Fatima (mother of Hussain), Zainab (sister of Hussain), and Sakinah (daughter of Hussain)—who the Shias believe, sacrificed their lives to protect and defend the rightful path for Islam. In the *majlises*, an appeal for solidarity was made with the larger Shia fraternity highlighting the turmoil and persecution of Shias in other countries. An Iranian TV/Film series directed by Davud Mirbageri, narrating Mukhtar-al-Thaqafi’s revenge of Karbala, was telecast so that they may be able to better understand what it means to be a true Muslim and a true Shia. The persecution of Shias globally was contextualized by contrasting it with the growing influence of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi version of Islam in the world. The author observed that the nature of the *majlises* was conservative and orthodox. There is, however, little evidence of the *majlises* acting as a consolidating force for constructing a national identity for the Shia community within India. While the mainstream political narratives in the contemporary world rest on the concept of nation-state and nationalism, it is traditional spaces like the *Shah-e-Mardan* shrine which are participating in forging supranational identities based on sectarian identity.

According to Komal Shah, Jainism believes in a cyclical nature of the universe, a universe without a beginning, without an end, and without a creator. Literally *Jina* means a conqueror, that is, one who has conquered the worldly passions like desire, hatred, anger, greed, pride, etc. by one’s own strenuous efforts and has been liberated himself/ herself from the bonds of worldly existence, and the cycle of births and deaths. Jainism is founded upon the tradition of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) to all living creatures.

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After *Mahavira*, the Jain religion was propagated through oral communication and through performance art and repetition. Only in the last 500 years, with the advent of writing and printing has there been a major push to record and write the stories of Jain religion, songs and poetry. This technology made many Jain books available to its followers all over the world in early twentieth century. There are many exclusive Jain religious channels like Paras TV, Jinvani, Mangalam Jain TV, being launched to focus on issues like religion, spirituality, moral values, health, art of living, and principles of Jainism in simplest form, and ensure that people, especially the youth, easily understand the preachings and their importance.

For B.S. Bhatia, the period and place of the birth of Sikhism had a very important role in the shaping of the Sikh philosophy. The period of the birth of Sikhism coincides with the arrival, of the Mughals in India. The place of birth, that is the Punjab Province, was on the route of the Mughal invaders, who would loot the province on their way to and from India. The message of universal brotherhood along with the welfare works led to the increasing popularity and acceptance of the Sikh philosophy.

The adoption of new technology has been a very natural and integral part of the evolution of the Sikh religion. The Sikhs adopted the audio technologies at a very early stage. Live broadcasting of Kirtan on radio was undertaken as soon as it became available. The Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) and the web are widely used both at the global and local level.

The Sikh religion—while spreading the message of universal brotherhood, leading a life of high virtue, serving the society standing up for Truth and Justice—has encouraged the use of the latest ICT for the preservation and spread of its message and culture.

This volume attempts to provide a glimpse of multi religious Asia—the birth place of almost all major religions—as a valuable anthology and research treasure for future researchers and scholars in the field of media and religion.

The papers presented in the volume opens up a whole lot of new research questions and agenda for scholars and religious preachers to reflect and contemplate on the future direction of religion in the midst of digital media. The editor hopes that the readers will find some new insights and understanding of religion and media in the ancient civilizations of Asia.

## SECTION I

### *Methods*

## Religion and Communication In Asia: Towards A Research Agenda

*Franz-Josef Eilers, svd*

Religion and communication have been the objects of study and research in the Western world for quite some time especially in their relation to Christianity. In the oldest German speaking book on journalism *Zeitungs Lust und Nutz*, published in 1697, Kaspar von Stieler has already written about God as the first newscaster:

The all highest God is the first newscaster and followed by His messengers like the prophets in the Old Testament. The apostles in the New Testament are showing that He loved messages and wanted them to be spread through the whole world (Eilers 2009, p. 50).

### **Developments in the US and Europe**

With the invention of new technical means of communication beyond the press at the end of the nineteenth century, studies on the relation between these means and religion/church were published like in the case of film which began in 1895. In fact the initiators of film, the Lumiere brothers, even tried to make a film on the passion of Christ. Soon studies on the 'use' of film for faith on the impact and consequences of the new means for Christianity were done and published (Lindvall, 2007; Jonston/Barsotti, 2004; May-Bird, 1982; Skinner, 1993; Walsh, 1993; Malone, 2006, 2007, 2008). Many of them are more descriptive though some are also critical and of a serious academic nature (Silk, 1995; Mitchell, 2007; Rolfes, 2007). This trend of media critique continued with radio and television, including studies on presentation methods and possibilities.

Paul Soukup (1982, 1989) has tried to develop an overview for the literature on communication and Christianity. His 1989 presentation is organized into sections on: Issues and Approaches; Resources; Communication Theory including

Theology, Church Documents and Ethics, Media Education; History; Rhetoric including proclamation and homiletics, orality and writing; interpersonal communication including group and organizational communication, liturgy; mass communication, intercultural communication and “other media” which includes computers and new media. The advisory editor of this volume, G.E. Gorman, rightly asserts in a foreword that “in its comprehensiveness, depth and detail this analysis of literature on Christian Communication far exceeds anything attempted to date by any organization or scholar.”

Some studies present individual communication personalities, including autobiographies like bishop Fulton Sheen (1980) or the communication dimensions of their lives like in the case of Pope John Paul II (Melady, 1999; Blaney, 2009). Official documents of the Church on issues of communication comprise another field which also triggered critical reflection and study (Eilers 1997, 2002).

Some Church communicators published their own experiences, ideas, and reflections in their field, like William Fore, especially on Christian television (1997, 1990). There is a whole list of “how-to-do” books for different (mass) media programmings as well as public relations and communication handbooks for Christian communicators and organizations like parishes and religious communities (Aycock & Stuart, 2010, Vasallo, 1998). A number of studies discuss the growing role of religion in cyberspace (Dawson & Cowan, 2004; Babin & Zukowski, 2002; Campbell, 2010). The relation between religion/faith and communication (media) in general is approached in several studies as a developing field (Buddenbaum & Mitchell, 1998; Mitchell & Marriaage, 2003; Badaracco, 2005; Hoover, 2006; Geybels, 2007). Robert Fortner (2007) has developed “A Christian Theory of Communication” in a very thorough study, placing Christian theology into the overall development of communication studies. Most of the books and studies in the field originate from the United States and refer to Christianity, but there are also some studies for Jewish traditions (Cohen, 2006) and Islam (Mowlana, 2003).

*The Encyclopedia of Religion, Communication and Media* edited by Daniel A. Stout in 2006 and re-published as a paperback re-print in 2010, with 124 entries from some 100 different authors, gives an overview of the field which is still far from complete. The volume includes articles on the main religions originating from Asia and (partly) their relation to communication (Stout, 2010). Religion and communication, however, do not appear. An article about “Religious Marketplace” refers only to sociology of religion and “what people do to make their own religious and spiritual meanings” (Stout, 2006, 2010) but not in any way to a deeper theological understanding or other related fields like philosophy, anthropology or the science of religion.

## Professional Organizations and Study Centers

There are at least two professional organizations for communication with special sections on communication and religion. They are the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), and the United States-based Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC).

While IAMCR has two religion-related work groups—one on Islam and Media, and another on Media, Religion and Culture—the AEJMC has a Religion and Media Interest Group with more than 200 members.

The Islam and Media work group of IAMCR describes their concerns in the following words:

The Islam and Media work group looks at the communication phenomenon such as human interaction with a view toward contributing toward mutual understanding and peace with justice. It seeks to engage in research and organizational development efforts geared towards strengthening the global societal structures based on personal responsibility and mutual cooperation in social, political and economic relations. The goal of this working group is to contribute to the advancement of research and evaluation in the media and communication related fields from an Islamic point of view (the TAWHIDI perspective).

Among the topics addressed are the Universal Principles of Communication in Islam and the West, Islam Communication and Sustained Development, Coverage of the American War against Iraq, Islam Communication in Moslem Countries, and Islam Communication and the Spread of Terrorism.

The Media, Religion and Culture Group, meanwhile, does not relate to any special religion and describes their concerns in the following way:

This working group has a special interest in religious aspects of communication. It tries to foster international cooperation in the field, discussion and exchange of ideas, and common research projects.

This workgroup considers important topics around the interaction between religion and the media including the way religious groups are brought into political alliances, special groups and their uses of the media, the complexities of religious agencies, with regard to public opinion and in community building, to proclamation and the expression of faith, apologetic and propagandistic media use at reception. (IAMCR website)

Analyzing these two descriptions, one realizes that both groups seem to be mainly American and partly European-oriented. They also seem to be concerned mainly about media but not the broader field of social communication which goes far beyond technology. A deeper understanding of social communication also

considers traditional and interpersonal communications as well as group processes in religions.

The AEJMC Religion and Media Interest Group describes their activities in the following words:

We encourage the analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, of this interaction in three areas - (1) religion portrayed in secular media, (2) the manner in which religious institutions and organizations use the media to propagate their message, and (3) the impact of religion and/or religiosity of media consumers and its impact on their media use. (AEJMC website)

Since 2006 the Center for Media, Religion and Culture exists at the University of Colorado. This center is related to international conferences in media, religion and culture which started 1994 in Uppsala, Sweden and were supported by a European funding agency. The center describes itself as an inter-disciplinary research team and acts mainly through:

- Public conferences on media, religion and culture
- Fellowship for doctoral students
- International study commission on media, religion and culture

The website of the center features a whole list of publications originating from this initiative. There are also links to websites and people to know in the field. Directed by Stewart M. Hoov (1988, 1990, 2006), the center is part of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication of the same university. The last of the conferences was held in Toronto on August 9-13, 2010 where it was proposed to create a new and independent International Association for Media, Religion, and Culture in the coming years.

In 1977, the Jesuits started a Center for Study of Communication and Culture in London which was moved in 1993 to Saint Louis University in the United States. After St. Louis University decided to end its relation with the center in 2000, it was transformed somehow into a 'virtual' institution, but still keeps their publication *Communication Research Trends* as a "Quarterly Review of Communication Research" under the auspices of the California Province of the Jesuits. It is jointly edited by Emile McAnany, Willia Biematzki, sj, and Paul A. Soukup, sj. This journal publishes abstracts of contemporary studies mainly done in the Americas and Europe, and attempts to consolidate research outputs under certain themes, which can be used as resource material for further studies and even practical purposes. A wealth of booknotes gives a good opportunity to keep abreast with respective publications in the field.

## Asia

Against such a wealth and variety of studies and publications on religion and social communication in the West, this presentation is only a small part of the whole picture. The situation in Asia is quite different; there seem to be little specialized studies on Christian Communication on other Asian Religions.

A conference on Religious Change and the Media in 1989 in Monterey, California was the basis for the book *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia* (Babb, 1997). It was published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in 1995. Two years later, an Indian reprint followed. Like the conference itself, the book was also an offspring of the Joint Committee on South Asia of the Social Science Research Council in the United States. The book presents a collection of ten articles and studies on South Asia which are organized under the headings of: Printed Images, Audio Recordings and Visual Media.

Pradip Ninan Thomas published, more recently, a study on the role of Christian Fundamentalism in India under the title *Strong Religion, Zealous Media: Christian Fundamentalism and Communication in India*. Thomas (2008) sees here a mainly "Health and Wealth Gospel" linked with movements where "[r]eligion appears as a source of images, concepts, traditions and practices that can allow individuals and communities to deal with a world that is changing around them." The study is an exploration of new Christianity in Chennai, India and in particular the communication strategies adopted by Christian fundamentalist groups... (p. xi).

Some Buddhist and Confucian concepts have been occasionally related to Asian studies on communication theory (Dissanayake, 1988; Wang, 1985, 2011). The relation between religion and communication, however, never became major of individual studies. In fact the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC), a professional organization in Singapore since 1970 never touched religion in any of the annual or other conferences. For the first time in 2010, the panel was offered on "Religious Broadcasting Bombard Me 24/7: Search for an Analytical Paradigm." The presentation of this panel are to be published in *Religion and Social Communication*, the journal of the Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC) at St. John's University in Bangkok.

Besides these few academic studies related to religion and social communication in Asia there are, however, a growing number of publications for Church practice, training and formation. These are more in the format of text books on general Social Communication theory and practice. They are less concerned about research and only partly refer to special Asian needs and conditions (Eilers, 1992, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Kumpiluvellil, 2010; Pen, 2010; Plathotam, 2010; Daniels, 1984.)

Some documents of the Asian Church on communication, together with some analyses and experiences are collected and presented in a publication of the Office of Social Communication (OSC) of the Federation of Asian Bishop Conferences (FABC) (Eilers, 2008). They could be a basis of further studies and professional developments.

Communication in ministry and mission, as well as planning (Sunderaj, 1998) for Social Communication in Church perspective and for Asian conditions, are more recently developed with a special program of studies (Eilers, 2008, 2009a, 2009b) at the Pontifical University Santo Tomas in Manila, the oldest University in Asia (1611). Since 2001 a special MA Theology Program on Social Pastoral Communication is offered in their Graduate School which is also linked with the Theological Faculty of the same University for an ecclesiastical licentiate degree. These programs comprise of general studies in Religion/Theology and Communication in view of Asian Church realities. With many students coming from different Asian countries, the program is in a special way based on and related to Asian cultures and realities.

All in all it seems that until now, religion and social communication are not a major concern of communication studies in the region yet. Modern developments, not only of technologies but also the phenomenon of globalization, in general, however, require a strong and serious attempt in this direction. The research results in American or European studies could indicate a way of how to go about things. However, the special conditions, needs, and possibilities for Asia including individual Asian cultures—with their needs and experiences—must be considered. Therefore, a more elaborated agenda is needed involving not just technology and modern media but also considering cultural realities as well as the different histories which have formed the life of people.

Asian cultures have strong communicative structures and dimensions in their profound use of symbols, ritual celebrations, community structures and values, and in many ways of non-verbal communication. James Carey's studies on communication and culture have special value here. Many anthropological studies and ethnographic contributions say something about the communication of peoples in their societies.

### ARC

Asia is the cradle of majority of world religions. In all cultures, religion plays an important role. How is this expressed and communicated in word and deed, in rituals, but in daily life of people and their celebrations? Religious beliefs and practices 'dictate,' in many ways, behavior and customs. This has been the case over hundreds of years and is still alive in many ways today. Do modern ways and means of communication change, endanger, or promote such practices today? If yes, it will

further be important to see the communication dimensions of religion in general, but especially in the religious books like the Bible, Koran, the Upanishads etc. which are in themselves already communication instruments for proclamation as religious practices. What does this all mean to people of today in communication terms? Can religious beliefs and practices be transmitted, shared, and obligations fulfilled e.g., through the Internet? How do Western television programs portray, sustain, or threaten the different religions in Asia? What is the impact experience of several Buddhist channels in Thailand on people and their lives? Do the changes, strengthen or question religious practices? What could or should be the role of communication in different forms? What are the needs of inter-religious dialogue in countries, like Indonesia, with the biggest Moslem population in the world? There are many more points to be raised. All this should be one way or the other, part of a pro-research program.

The ARC at St. John's University in Bangkok stands for such a concern. The center actually dates back to a proposal by a group of scholars at a roundtable organized by the FABC-OSC in 1999. It started a website which is now in the process of re-construction. In 2004, it began publishing a bi-annual journal called *Religion and Social Communication*. The institution also organized two follow up roundtables on religion and social communication (2005 and 2010). The outcome of one of these roundtables is a publication with the main contributions under the title *Social Communication in Religious Traditions of Asia* (Eilers, 2006). Related to this publication is also *Interreligious Dialogue as Communication* (Eilers, 2005). It is now the concern of the ARC to develop, in a more systematic way, a comprehensive research program and hopefully, to also develop a team of concerned scholars and institutions, seeing the importance of this field which in a growing way, also touches the public and political life of Asian countries.

What does it mean for religion, religious teachings, and practices when, for example in India, suddenly 500 television channels are available including some twenty or more channels promoting or related to religion? How does the use of cellphones change the communication patterns and mentality of people, especially those in the rural areas, who have been somehow isolated for a long period of time (Roman 2005)?

How do modern means of communication influence and probably change the lifestyle, values, and worldview of young people in rural areas or those migrating to bigger cities for economic reasons? How does traditional religion express itself in worship and life forming attitudes, and how are they changed through new ways of communicating? How do different religions adjust to modern communication patterns?

Religion, the relation to a higher being and a respective worldview, is an essential part of human life and society. What are the communicative dimensions of this reality in Asian countries and cultures? How should they be seen and studied under social communication perspective?

All this is not only a matter of behavior as studied by sociologists or available technology, but it is a question of disposition of peoples and societies which are expressed, reflected, and inspired by cultural and communicative actions of religion in the life and practices of communities.

Any research on communication and religion in Asia will be, one way or the other, inter-disciplinary. Ethnology, anthropology, sociology, theology, and religion will contribute as well as special communication fields within communication like intercultural communication.

### Research Agenda

As part of an immediate agenda for religion and communication studies in Asia one might consider the following fields:

1. Study of inter-relations between religion and communication of different academic fields in the Asian contexts.

Since all studies on religion and social communication need, one way or the other, an inter-disciplinary approach they probably should start with the inter-relation between the different disciplines in Asian realities. This could refer to the following fields:

- Communication and religion in Asian cultures: relations, role, and functions
- Religious practices and the role of communication in the process
- Ways, means, results, and effects of communicative practices in religious teaching and life: group-communication, mass media, 'new media' (Internet and cyberspace)
- Local theologies (philosophies) and communication
- Culture and communication (Carey) in religious realities of Asia
- Intercultural communication and religion
- Inter-religious dialogue in Asia as communication: experiences, possibilities needs.

2. Study of the use of traditional and modern *means of communication*—by religious groups in Asia:

- Content of programs

- Presentation and design
- Style
- Frequency
- Impact

3. Study of the *recipients/audience* communication in Asia:

- Composition and style
- Age
- Expectations
- Interactivity
- Priorities in use-forming habits
- Effects
- Ethics and human dignity

4. Academic programs for universities and centers of studies in the field of religion and communication:

- Research needs and methods
- Teaching programs
- Interdisciplinary cooperation

These are only some examples and directions which can be considered according to the needs and possibilities as well as availability of respective researchers. The ARC roundtable on "Religion and Social Communication: Towards a Research Agenda" from February 8 to 11, 2010 listed some research areas in general e.g., cultural influences on religious practices, communicating content or effects analysis of religious means of communicating online and offline, and communication of and for religious ways between the clergy and laity. All of them can be included in the more systematic presentation proposed.

### Who are the ones to take up these special concerns and studies in Asia?

One would first think of *institutions* like universities, but also of specialized schools of theology, or communication centers with research concerns, like the ARC which seems to have a special place for these concerns. Christian Church documents like the Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio*, which was demanded by the Second Vatican Council, called for a "rigorous program of scientific research" (no. 184) in 1971, which seems to never have been developed. There are quite a number of Christian, but also Moslem, and Buddhist universities in Asia, which take up the concern and even cooperate in respective studies for the good of the people and communities.



*ARC.Journal*

Besides the institutions, one might also think of individual researchers who want to specialize in this field. With them, there could slowly be one or more research groups developed either on the national or Asian level, or also within a specialized field.

Regular scientific conferences, colloquia or symposia, would also contribute as has been shown in a small way, by a roundtable of interested scholars at the Assumption University in Bangkok on "Social Communication in Religious Tradition of Asia" (Eilers, 2006), whose presentations were published as a book.

Another platform for research and study should be the ARC journal *Religion and Social Communication*. It should become a special place to share any study, discussion and reflection on social communication and religion in Asia. It could become a permanent link and 'home' to all those concerned and interested in this field of study.

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# Religious Amplification in South Asia: Methodological Issues for Understanding Change

*Binod C. Agrawal*

## Introduction

While discussing modern Hinduism and Jainism, Lawrence A. Babb, a scholar of religious studies postulated that, “[t]here are at least three functional domains shared by most religious systems which look for change. First, religious traditions must be socially reproduced and propagated, which requires that technical means exist for their *transmission*. Second, religious systems are embedded in *social context* by which they are shaped in fundamental ways. And third, religious systems are often (perhaps always) implicated in the legitimization of *authority*” (Babb 1998, 445-456).

Digital technology coupled with satellite transnational transmission of religious television has multiplied manifold in less than a quarter of a century worldwide and many more fold higher in Asia and South Asia. Information Technology (IT) has reduced physical and social distances and collapsed time and space. Babb (1998, 446) has referred to the process of 24/7 electronic bombardment to listeners, viewers, mobile and Internet users as “cultural amplification.” He defined such religious bombardments as “... the process by which formally parochial or obscure symbols, images or ideas come to be shared by and even normative, for large populations” (1998, 446). “This is undoubtedly one of the most important general effects that modern communications media have had on societies and cultures everywhere” (Babb 1998, 446).

The proliferation and convergence of information technology, of the Internet and mobile telephony, and the development of digital technology have penetrated religious communications in every walk and moment of human life. Observations indicate that at least one in five mobile phone owners in India carry religious ring tones ranging from Vedic hymns, popular religious *Bhajan* (devotional chants), and

*Sloka* to name a few. The same is the case with the computer and the Internet, notwithstanding competing several hundred thousand sex and pornographic websites available along with other websites.

At another level, religious communication remained at a human scale and confined to a limited number of devotees within the social context of religious centers like temples, mosques, and churches. These religious communications are bound by time, space, and religious calendar. The authority to perform religious rituals and ceremonies is legitimized by hereditary religious leaders.

Descriptive analysis at both levels of religious communication must be separately examined in order to develop an analytical framework for the study of religious experiences, effects, and consequent impact or lack of impact in the fast changing world order. Hence, both levels of religious communications will be discussed to draw a common methodological paradigm for analysis in which the scope will be limited to India.

The study of social and cultural change in the wake of these unprecedented communication and media revolution, along with human religious communication, require an urgent multi-disciplinary perspective and research tools for the understanding of change and its implications.

### Aim

The aim of this paper is to suggest methods and techniques to be employed for the understanding and analysis of the increasing exposure of religious telecast in the Asian context. The religious telecast has been juxtaposed on the human scale of religious communication to involve possible method of analysis. For this purpose ethnographic method has been utilized to provide glimpse of religious experiences of three major religions namely Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity in India.

### Explosion of Religious Broadcasting

There has been an explosion of religious broadcasting especially of television in twenty-first century South Asia. Also, major religious groups have started their separate broadcast. One of the important features of the broadcast are live broadcasts from religious worship places like Hindu temple, Sikh *gurdwara*, Christian church, and Muslim mosque. India is fast emerging as an important media hub in religious broadcasting, having its reach and access to other South Asia and Asian countries. Observations indicate that business interest largely dominates religious broadcasts thereby jeopardizing meaningful religious broadcast and effective utilization. There is also a visible conflict between religious dogma and scientific rational thinking among the viewers. At present, there is a

fairly appreciable number of religious television viewers of both sexes in all age groups who are attracted to view religious broadcasts.

Religious broadcasting is relatively a recent phenomenon. It started with a brief religious singing and prayer in the morning telecast by the Government of India controlled-television Doordarshan. The same could be said about All India Radio (AIR). However, after the turn of the twentieth century, religious broadcast has become a round-the-clock telecast in over a dozen languages of all major religions in India. The religious broadcast has in no way hindered the religious congregation, discourse, pilgrimages, and visits to religious centers.<sup>1</sup>

### Religious Radio

Radio broadcast in India is over seventy-five years old. It was originally introduced for-profit, but soon the colonial masters started exploiting the power of radio to control and to maintain power supremacy in the vast colonial British Empire, fashioned around the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). AIR in independent India after 1947, remained government-controlled until recently. AIR took upon itself the responsibility of providing information, entertainment and education to listeners, and acted as pro-development change agent. In spite of being a secular radio, since its inception, religious broadcast remained an integral part of AIR in one form or another.

After the economic liberalization and government de-control of the airwaves, a large number of privately owned FM radio stations have sprung up in the country. Religious broadcasts is a common feature of FM community radio. Religious organizations and commercial companies are in the forefront of its use, training, production, and marketing of religious audio cassettes/CDs.

Original and pirated audio tapes/CDs of religious discourse, prayer, and songs in non-broadcast mode are available in large quantities in the market. Several music companies have made a fortune from recording and marketing religious audio tapes and CDs. Many religious groups have bought air time on the commercial radio stations for religious broadcast and even AIR often broadcasts live religious events.

Most of these broadcasts are “sender-oriented” and in the form of *prarchar* (propaganda), recitation, and singing. Sporadic communication researches have been carried out to assess the effectiveness and impact of religious amplification. In the wake of the large expansion of television, radio listening in urban areas has declined though it continues to be popular in rural and remote areas of the country.

<sup>1</sup> Largely drawn from brief note prepared for discussion during FABC-OSC Roundtable on Religion and Social Communication: Relations and Challenges, February 8-11, 2010, Saint John's University, Bangkok.

## Religious Television

Television in India is just about half a century old, having started in 1959. Initially, the government-controlled and now public service television, has been overshadowed by private national and transnational television companies after 1992. The expansion of television, both of telecast and reception, or amplification, has been phenomenal and breathtaking in a very short span of time. Religious telecast and religious video production for non-telecast have been in existence for as long as television existed in India though private television and private video production companies have given a great deal of boost to religious television.

Over a dozen exclusive private satellite television channels are devoted to religious telecast. Different shades of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, and Sikhism are being propagated twenty-four hours a day. Other entertainment and news television channels are not far behind in devoting their morning hours to religious telecast covering mythological, philosophical and spiritual discourses, songs and prayers. Live coverage of religious functions, festivals, and ceremonies has become a regular feature in the Indian television news. Most of them earn profit from this telecast.

The analysis of the urban and rural viewers of religious telecast indicates that they belong to all cross sections. Often the entire family watches such religious telecast for entertainment, religious gains, and to enrich religious knowledge. Public and private debates and discussions can be heard about these telecast.

The content analysis of religious telecast indicates that those who appear as religious preachers on television tend to give “scientific” meaning and interpretation of religious principles and practices. The effects of religious television viewing have not been measured. However, observations indicate that there are a growing number of religious programs which in more than one way, have negated and questioned rational and scientific thinking.

Religious organizations have either sold their live telecast rights to television companies or leased time slots for taped/live religious telecast. The same holds true for other South Asian countries in varying degrees. Major religious events of various religions are covered and telecast as news events. Without any doubt, television viewing both in rural and urban homes continues to be family viewing and the most popular form of leisure, actively passive pleasure, and recreation.

In the context of India, the effects of religious amplification through media has had a long history starting with the *Raja Harish Chandra* silent movie more than a century ago, or the *Jai Santoshi Ma* color movie in the third quarter of the twentieth century, or for that matter the television serial *Ramayana*: a television version of popular Ram Leela performed on stage every year in almost all cities

and towns of the North, and in other parts of India broadly based on *Tulsidas Ramcharitmanas* (See Emndl 1993). Many media studies conducted by sociologists and anthropologists including the author, found a very high degree of popularity of the TV serial *Ramayana* both in broadcast and non-broadcast mode within and outside India. Video technology helped in the amplification of *Ramayana*.

## Human Scale of Religious Communication

Four descriptive analyses based on firsthand observations from among three religions within India are presented to draw common characteristics for developing methodological framework to compare the same with religious amplification.

### Collective Recitation at Home

A day after the Christmas of 2009, on a late Saturday afternoon at Ahmedabad, a group of eminent migrant space scientists and engineers got together and initiated a non-stop recital (*Akhand*) of *Tulsidas Ramayan*, composed about 500 years ago. Today, in Hindi speaking states of India especially in the Indo-Gangetic plain, it is considered as the most sacred Hindu treasure of the Lord Ram who is considered a reincarnation of the Hindu trinity God Vishnu.

About sixty adults got together to start a *Ramayan* collective or recitation which continued until Sunday, late afternoon. In these twenty-four hours, the entire *Ramayan* was read by the devotees without break. Among the participants there were a few Brahmin (priestly caste) who helped along with people from other castes to organize this *Akhand Ramayan* (uninterrupted *Ramayan* recital). *Akhand Ramayan* ended and was followed by dinner for all hosted by the son's family.

The special occasion for the collective recitation was a Christmas holiday visit of a son from the USA, who was recently blessed with a son. This has called for such a religious celebration. Observations indicate that a migrant Hindi speaker regardless of education, economic, and social status, participate in collective recitation of *Ramayan*, which is popular.

The oral tradition of religious recitation is fairly common and strong among literate and sometime illiterate Hindus across India. The continuing oral tradition of religious communication is deeply rooted into the religious scriptures, calendars and set of beliefs (Agrawal 1980).

### Sharing of Religious Ritual Harki Pedi

One of the most revered banks of River Ganga is located in Haridwar—a religious town of Uttarakhand state in India. Recently over ten million Hindus and few Sikhs took a holy dip at Harki Pedi on the occasion of *Mahakumbh* (Great

*Kumbh*) which occurs once in twelve years. On June 5, 2010, a few weeks after the completion of *Mahakumbh*, it was estimated that over 10,000 men, women, and children belonging to all age groups from different linguistic regions of the country and abroad, gathered at Harki Pedi to witness the evening 1001 oil candle *Arti* (lighting of lamp). Security arrangements were visible all around, so were volunteers of religious organizations who helped devotees to find sitting places on the floor. Several hours before the *Arti* was scheduled to be held (at 7:20 p.m.) streams of devotees began to arrive as early as 4:00 p.m. Many Hindu devotees offered cash contributions for *Arti* which were collected by the members of voluntary religious organizations. *Arti* was held in a most peaceful atmosphere with lots of religious fervor and reverence by all present. Mineral water, small eatable and paper mate sellers did good business on the occasion.

The collective sharing of religious experience, regardless of linguistic and other social barriers, gave a unique and emotional experience of how religion, though temporarily, brings people together and help reinforce the unity and continuity of Hindu religious tradition. This *Arti* is also telecast often on several 24/7 Hindu religious television channels.

#### Around the Church

Less than a decade ago, a Christian community center was built by professionals and highly educated migrants in the newly growing suburb of the city of Ahmedabad. The community center is also used as a church by Marthomite Syrian Christians of Kerala. They claim to be connected with one of the oldest Christians in the world, dating back to first century AD, only after the Catholics of Kerala.

Over seventy migrant families visit this church for Sunday and other services including weddings and baptism of infants. A priest from Kerala lives on the church premises. He serves the community and visits families to give personal services. For example, it was observed that he had spent over an hour when one of the church member's mother passed away, and had held a private service for the family and their loved ones at their residence.

The church continues to maintain old Kerala Marthomite Christian tradition in every possible way. The services are given in the Malayalam language, and other religious etiquettes and styles of Malayalam oral tradition of religious communication are followed. Many of the Church members claim to recite several verses from the Holy Bible without opening it.

While public address system is installed in the church, it is used in a limited way. Face-to-face communication remained strong in which language plays a vital role in religious communication. By and large, these Kerala Christians believe that they are liberal and tolerant Malayalees.

#### Congregational Communication

Three highly educated Bihar migrant professionals working in different research and teaching institutions of Ahmedabad promptly leave their work at about 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm to attend Friday prayers in a mosque located about 10 kilometers away from their workplace. They all speak Hindi, know Arabic, and are proficient in reading the Holy Koran. They are well informed and have made efforts to ensure that their children learn to recite verses from the Holy Koran for which private tutors have been appointed by them.

In Gujarat, a large number of migrant Muslims are working in professional and guild based occupations—confectionery, kite making, ironsmithing, dyeing, and religious teaching as *imam* (preacher) to mention a few. Even after spending several years in Gujarat, they continue to lead a life of Bihar Muslim and somewhat remain aloof and distant from the Gujarati Muslim population. The reason for lack of interaction is the language barrier, apart from other social factors.

During the prayers in the mosque, no distinction is observed of any kind among *Namaji* (prayer offerer). Regardless of their social, economic, and educational background, *Namaji* sit on the ground of the mosque and occupy space on a first-come, first-serve basis.

In the Mosque, there is a public address system used by the *imam*. The introduction of the public address system is fairly recent and was felt necessary after the total *Namaji* increased beyond manageable size.

The social and personal interactions among all who come to Friday prayers are largely confined during the congregation period and after prayers. Limited face-to-face verbal communication, in which the religious dictums of the Holy Koran and other sacred books are discussed, apart from family, business, and other matters. In case of any doubt the *imam's* or *maulavi's* (teacher) advice is sought for clarification.

#### Common Cultural Thread

One can discuss several other religious groups living in South Asia like the Sikhs, Buddhists, Zoroastrians, Jews and Jains. But the common characteristic among all is a cultural thread that binds them in spite of religious differences. Also, even after inter state migration within India or international migration, most of the cultural and religious traits continue to survive and flourish.

#### Methodological Issues

Methodological tools and techniques of media and communication research are largely focused on quantitative methods though qualitative methods like

focus group discussions and participatory research have been introduced. Given the nature of religious amplification and viewers' religious fervor, listening and viewing these broadcasts require a method by which the strong "faith,"—the way the audience relate and respond to the religious broadcast—could be studied and analyzed. Also the preachers, priests, and communicators who appear on television belonging to a religious class, must be studied separately. Meanwhile, human religious communication must be studied using existing tools and techniques.

Keeping these distinct audience/devotees profile, context, and other factors in view, it is proposed that "participant observation" and "ethnographic method" be used for data collection. For any meaningful interaction, these methods will be helpful as used by anthropologists. It would, no doubt, be time consuming requiring deeper involvement. The experiential religious knowledge gained in the process would allow an understanding of the intensity of the religious impact. For this kind of descriptive field data collection, a detailed field diary would be required for process analysis. Analytical paradigm for such analysis would require a holistic approach for both amplification and human scale religious communication. At two distinct levels of religious communication, it is difficult to fathom the depth of amplification. Hence, there is a need to design and follow research tools and techniques that can capture the effects and measure social and cultural change as a result of religious amplification.

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## Unfolding Religious Communication System: A Methodological Approach

*Sebastian Periannan*

### **Assumption**

Much of the religious thinking, reflection, and activity of the great religions or faith are, after all, precisely concerned with the communication of dogmas, values, attitudes, ideas, messages, and information using a variety of media. These media could be local or traditional, modern or mass media, and cyber or social media. In the veritable process of communicating the religious tenets, vibrations, orientations, knowledge and faith, a communication system is being followed faithfully and fortunately. Indeed, religions themselves could be seen as powerful systems of important forms of media and message.

It is clear, then, that the area and field of interest of this methodological paper suggesting “unfolding religious communication system” is dauntingly an extensive and any single approach of material from it, would be bound to leave out a very great deal. Therefore, the author assumes that a methodological approach will do justice to the topic at hand.

It seeks to do no more than provide a methodological overview to what, for many researchers, will be a new area of interest and commitment. A concern about religious forms of communication system and media and their religious implications is the common denominator underlying the thought patterns and approach which make up this paper. This is not meant to suggest that other areas of research and methodology do not exist, or that this particular area is most important. This is only one dimension of massive areas of research methodology and should not be allowed to presume or obscure the existence or significance of others. In fact the advances in communications system which have done so much to mould the contours of modernity and religious interactions, have made a consciousness of pluralism, religious harmony and otherwise, almost impossible



to avoid. It is also interestingly envisaged that a methodological approach will always benefit the areas of future research, academia, and training and for religious practitioners.

### **Relevance and Objectives**

One of Paul Tillich's greatest contributions to theology was the insight that religion is being ultimately concerned about that which is and should be our ultimate concern. From this aspect, all religions deal with the search for that which is or should be of ultimate concern (W. Fore in Chris Arthur, p. 56).

Conferences, roundtable discussions, and meetings are designed to encourage the spiritual dimension of life. One may even deny the existence of God, but people normally do not deny the spiritual aspect and dimension of human life. Forums and avenues are created to help believers to express their faith through programs and actions in their local communities and wider society. Religious and theological schools are founded on the one side to research and investigate the root paradigms, values, and dogmas or teachings, and on the other side to teach the claim's coherence, substance and credibility to each new generation of leaders, followers and thinkers. All these religious activities have in common an essential function: Communication. As Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and others are engaged in worship, education or outreach, at the core they are engaged in active communication. As William Fore describes, "[s]ome of their communication is focused inward—to allow the faithful to speak to each other in the tradition and language of their faith. But if the religion is to survive, much of their communication must be focused outward—to interact with the culture in public testimony, education and mission (W. Fore in Chris Arthur, p 56).

Since all the religions engage in the vital purpose, form, and method of communication, the author wishes to propose a methodology to study the Religious Communication System in order to do research on various moral, spiritual and practical nuances offered by each religion.

### **Significance**

Today's communication system is dominated by political economy. The enemy is global capitalism. They take control of the economies of their countries. The world economy as subservient one to their interest, a market consciousness is constantly created in people with an attempt to wipe out the traditional values of society and life. Communication system is dependent on communication and information technology today, more than ever. People are made to think differently, all about self, satisfaction of their needs and interests with no care for others and the environment. Communication system is impacted by weapons of mass destruction, nuclear weapons of terror and the USA has terrorized

the world with them. The rich and the powerful control the planet's natural resources, which affect the communication systems. We are witnessing looting and plunder of natural resources by global corporations in several parts of the world. Communication system is also affected by global financial recession and control that has a greater impact on religious thinking and activities.

A methodological approach of communication and available means of religious communication system is therefore called for. Thus, the main objective of the study in hand concentrates on a method that will enable the reader and researcher to understand the delicate nature of religious systems, and process of religious communication. In communication terms, this means that every religious thought and act, both of organized religion and of local or indigenous faith, is socio-culturally formed. Religion comes framed and clothed in religious communication system, such as language, art, music, symbols, paintings, festivals, and history supplied by current mythology, indigenous knowledge, and refers to ongoing religious communication system.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Ontological theories, epistemological emphasis, socio-cultural realities, technological impact assessment studies, and research methodological concerns have guided the study. Since the study on unfolding the religious communication system is so complex, wide and diverse, for a clearer understanding, we need to take into consideration various theoretical inputs and insights. Ontological and phenomenological theories of a given subject and reality, stand as a base and the foundation for this methodological approach. Any scientific enquiry must bring out and result in providing solid and valid knowledge for the field of study, art, science, and society. That is why we insist on epistemological emphasis here. Since religions and religious experiences of people have very strong roots from socio-cultural studies, this paper argues that we need to include and incorporate socio-cultural realities for our methodological considerations. Whether we are aware of it or not, the day-to-day experience tells us that we cannot ignore the impact of technology, particularly information and communication technology in our life. Finally, for a scientific approach and result in any research, be it a research as method or research as purpose, the researcher must be clear about the methodology to collect the data, and to correct the faulty methods. Hence, all these abovementioned theoretical considerations are part of this paper for the purpose of furthering the knowledge of religious communication systems.

### **Unfolding the Religious Communication Systems**

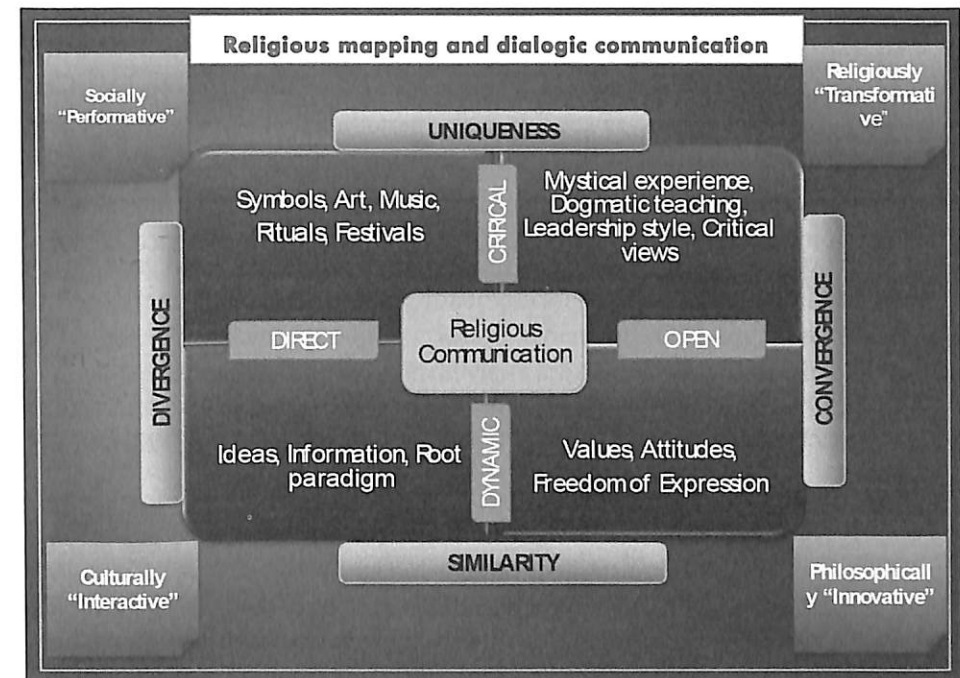
If we are to unfold the religious communication system successfully, we need to be thoroughly familiar with four broad areas of religious phenomenon

such as, (i), uniqueness, (ii) similarity, identity, and change, (iii) divergent views, and (iv) convergence. So that we can have a grasp of the root paradigms which underlie religious values and symbols.

- (i) Uniqueness of religious communication system can be studied from the aspect and ankle of mystery and intelligibility. The experience of the divine, human, and supernatural realities can be expressed only in symbolic language. In research paradigms, therefore, there will always be tension and dialectics between faith and reason, mystery and intelligibility. We can know and speak about religious communication system from the research point of view, when we explore the approaches of theological investigations, leadership styles, and moral applications on the one hand, and on the other hand, study the insights of God experiences, mystical utterances, and concrete religious beliefs and practices.
- (ii) Similarity, Identity, and Change in religious communication system involves inherent polarity, dissimilarity, broken or continuous, and doubt or bias in researching. Therefore, those ideas, events, persons and their words or world of experience cannot be ignored or altered. The similarity and identity consists mainly in the central fact of religious-event, their beliefs and practices. Change being the unchanging reality, the research has to concentrate on the interpretational and critical reflections on its methodological praxis to understand the unity and plurality from ontological, epistemological and historical values.
- (iii) When we observe from the periphery, the divergent views are more prominent than the core or convergent views. Divergence is another potential tension in researching when we look for system because of the embeddedness of orthodoxy versus heterodoxy, and core dogmas in religions. Any experience whether religious, aesthetic or poetic craves for its expression or articulation, in order that the experience may be researched or studied. Therefore, the research must take into consideration of the differing world views, unusual styles and subjects in communication media as well.
- (iv) Convergence is the longing of any communication system. That being the case, religious communication system, too, aspires for convergence. This is viewed from one versus many, universal versus particular, historical, social and contextual versus transcendental, which are the other major areas of research. This is further situated and identified when we look at the ethical orientations, ecological concerns and practices, and ultimately with committed and critical religious analysis for research. Convergence from theory and research perspectives is possible when the focus is on innovative approaches, interactive dialogues, interpretative research, and liberative models of study.

### Process of Religious Communication

A look at the religious mapping and dialogic communication (table) show us the clear path for the process of religious communication. The very process is observed and studied from the symbolic language and conceptual process. Conceptual process implies and involves the following characteristics: religious knowledge by listening, writing, reading, primacy of ideas, notional, abstraction, IQ clarity, analytical categories, relationship of words and logic, explanatory method, and temporal order. In the same manner, symbolic language delivers and declares the following structure and processes: religious knowledge by listening, participation, immersion, primacy of perception, experience, inter-action, EQ, dreams, art, music, synthetic view of religious phenomenon, sensitivity to the signs, and spiritual forces, receptivity to intuition, innovation, and evolution.



Religious communication can be viewed (table) from the four borders of similarity, identity, divergence and convergence. These four borders are directed by four inner directions such as direct, dynamic, critical and open views, opinions, and a body of knowledge. Religious communication is “socially performative” at the level of symbols, art, music, rituals and festivals. It is “culturally inter-active” when ideas, information, and root paradigms are interfaced. It is “philosophically innovative,” when values, attitudes, and freedom of expression are exchanged. Finally, religious communication becomes a realization and fulfillment as “religiously transformative,” when mystical experiences, dogmatic teachings, leadership styles, and critical views are studied and researched scientifically. And hence there is need for a search of a method.

## In Search of a Method

For *In Search of a Method*, the author will follow his own book *Social Research Methodology An Introduction* (2010), and Richard L. Starcher *Qualitative Research in Missiological Studies and Practice* (2011). Other details are provided as end notes.

As it has been noted in the objective of this paper, a researcher has to use and innovate various methods so as to get to the roots of the religious communication system for which a methodological approach is a must. And hence, religious science is our focus and goal, philosophy is our guide and tool, and social science, interdisciplinary approach is our method. Since the area is so vast, just a glimpse of the insights and nuances are outlined here, for further study and research.

We concentrate on this method:

Ontology. *What is real?*

Epistemology. *How is knowledge (religious) acquired?*

Axiology. *What is valued in research?*

This approach aims to include “narrative inquiry, biography, symbolic interactionism, personal accounts, conversational analysis, discourse analysis, ethnoscience, life history, and participatory action research” (Starcher, p. 55).

## Ontological Perspectives

According to Creswell as quoted by Starcher, “[r]eality is subjective and multiple, as seen by participants in study” (p. 56).

### (i) Relativism versus Realism

A simple understanding of relativism states that reality has no independent existence. It is always subject to someone’s perception of it. “Relativism is not a single doctrine but a family of views whose common theme is that some central aspect of experience, thought, evaluation, or even reality, is somehow relative to something else” (Starcher, p. 56). It is always subject to someone’s perception.

In a similar way, realism is that reality exists independently of anyone’s perception of it: (a). Existence: do rocks or trees really exist? (b) Is there a reality that doesn’t depend on anyone’s perception of it? “Everything is relative, anything goes,” is the general attitude.

Both the views are discussed and debated in the research world and parlance.

### (ii) Functional Relativism

It means—with respect to experience, thought, and evaluation—our understanding of these phenomena depend on their function within the ambient cultures. Thus, Starcher opines, “[i]t is not wrong; it is just different”

This “filtering” raises the question of the relationship between theology and culture.

### (iii) Theology and Culture

When we speak about God, we do not use some private language that God gives us. We use everyday language; the language that allows us to communicate the most mundane things as well as the most sublime. For this reason, theology cannot be done without culture; that is both its promise and its perils (Swoyer as cited by Starcher p. 57).

Now the question arises, how to unfold the communication system?

Based on the above understanding of the ontological perspectives from a three pronged area of interest as noted above, researchers have to engage in an ontological enquiry of the religious mapping and dialogic communication. This is what is meant when looking for a method to understand the religious communication system. There is a need to take into consideration, the implications and investigations of “religiously transformative” values, thoughts, ideas, when mystical experiences, dogmatic teachings, leadership styles, and critical views are studied and researched scientifically.

## Epistemological Perspectives

Epistemology means the study of knowledge and justified belief. It engages in capturing the reality that is properly the domain of Epistemology using qualitative/quantitative approaches such as: (i) Positivist/Empiricist Tradition, (ii) Constructivist Epistemology, (iii) Pragmatic Epistemologies, and (iv) Liberative Research.

### (i) Positivist/Empiricist Tradition

This paradigm holds that knowledge is possible only through the senses. Empiricist approach of research has been equated with quantitative research whose hallmark is measurability or quantifiability. Its strength is rigor, generalizability, and replicability. It follows the rigor of the natural sciences where researches are done through a step-by-step process called scientific process.

Ontologically, it assumes that reality exists independently of the observer. Epistemologically, knowledge is taken to be so impersonal and objective that the researcher is considered a detached actor. Deterministically, this approach proposes that wherever observation of reality has causes, prediction and control can

be achieved in that aspect of reality. Reality is unitary and it can only be understood by empirical analytic enquiry, the scientific method followed in the classical physical sciences for investigation. Empiricism is not a method of enquiry, but an assumption or justification of knowledge claim. Social scientists believe they can uncover independent, objective measurable reality with respect to human phenomena. For this reason quantitative methods are preferred.

#### (ii) Constructivist Epistemology

As Denzin and Lincoln viewed, “[c]onstructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures (as cited in Starcher, p. 58). Thus, constructivists do not study human subjects; rather they collaborate with human participants to build agreed-upon understandings of the study’s central phenomenon.

#### (iii) Pragmatist Epistemologies

The focus is on the consequences of research, on the primary importance of the question asked rather than the methods, and multiple methods of data collection inform the problem under study. Thus it is pluralistic and oriented toward “what works” and practice (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

#### (iv) Liberative Research

One of the primary aims of this form of research is to contribute to inter-religious dialogue and harmony in the society. Its theoretical rationale is based on an integral view of looking at the socio-cultural and religious reality from the angle of science. In this view, the difference between religion or faith and science will find a new meaning—significance and relevance for the modern man. It could be easily identified and applied with theological and socio-cultural anthropology, insights and techniques from Phenomenology, Ethnomethodology, Symbolic interactionism. Psychology and Sociology have to be integrated, since the very nature of this research is interdisciplinary. This could also emerge as a new sociology of theological education and liberation, along with critical constructivism, inter-textuality, inter-cultural exchanges, and illuminative religious studies (Periannan, 2010).

The understanding of religious knowledge system arises here. From the epistemological perspectives, we may use qualitative or quantitative approaches, or a mixture of the two. All enquiry is built upon an assumption or hypothesis about what is real, possess stocks of knowledge, occupy social statuses, and pursue purposes that influence their respective views and actions. What is enshrined in the religious system must be unfolded through a proper and appropriate scientific approach. In order to unfold the system, we need to uncover what is, “culturally inter-active”

meaning; ideas, information, and root paradigms of the system as interfaced, as well as, what is, “philosophically innovative,” meaning; values, attitudes, and freedom of expression as exchanged has to be studied.

### Axiological Perspectives

Axiology, in social science research, refers to the values (explicit or implicit) underlying all research, whether qualitative or quantitative. While positivistic quantitative research often poses as objective, neutral and dispassionate, qualitative researchers “accept the fact that [all] research is ideologically driven” (Janesick, 2000, p. 385) These perspectives include four ways to fulfill the objectives of the study, namely theoretical lenses, theological/religious prism, critical approaches, and transformative values.

#### (i) Theoretical Lenses

While all scientific enquiry is value laden, some qualitative researchers intentionally conduct research using a particular theoretical lens that represents a specific, often marginalized, interpretive community e.g., feminist theorist, queer theory, and critical race theory (Starcher, p. 60). Interpretative positions provide a pervasive lens or perspective on all aspects of a qualitative research project.

#### (ii) Theological/Religious Prism

Religious experience and spirituality, as the process, in which one systematically trains sensitivity, to gain regular transcendental consciousness; and ecological spirituality with nature, an inner experience of belonging to larger whole.

#### (iii) Critical Approaches

This enquiry starts with an agenda, “Those of us who openly call ourselves ‘criticalists’ definitely share a value orientation. We are all concerned about social inequities, and we direct our work toward positive social change” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 3). A critical ethnographer will study issues of power, empowerment, inequality, dominance, repression, hegemony, and victimization, AIDS crisis, media and legal system, drug, sex, violence, and cultural rebellion.

#### (iv) Transformative Values

All researchers have convictions about what is good and valuable in this world. They can always use tools whether theoretical methods or research methods, that allow them to get close to people, understand their situations and perspectives, give voice to their concerns, and work for our common good which ultimately involves the transformation of life.

The author finds four aspects of values (theoretical lenses, theology/religious prism, critical approaches, and transformative values) of particular interest because they help researchers understand the religious communication value system in doing any type of research. Relying on axiological frame, we can use the method, to study the religious communication system from the four borders of similarity, identity, divergence and convergence; as these four borders are directed by four inner directions such as direct, dynamic, critical and open views, opinions and a body of knowledge. Axiological principles are of utmost importance to observe and investigate what is “socially performative” at the level of symbols, art, music, rituals and festivals.

The Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication is opening the wider horizon for future research, reflection and religious understanding for harmony, dialogue and transformation. We can always use tools, techniques, and strategies (whether theoretical constructs or research methods) that allow us to get closer to the reality of the people, understand their perspectives, give voice to their concerns, and work for our common good, which ultimately involves the advancement of religious knowledge, truth, spirituality and wisdom for a better a world.

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**SECTION II**  
*Research in Societies*

# Communication, Culture and Buddhism in Asia: Structural Adaptation and Integration of Digital Media

*Binod C. Agrawal*

## Introduction

Radhakrishnan (1969, 353) observed that the “sixth century B.C. was remarkable for the spiritual unrest and intellectual ferment in many countries. In China we had Lao Tzu and Confucius, in Greece, Parmenides and Empedocles, in Iran, Zarathustra, in India, Mahavira and the Buddha. In that period many remarkable teachers worked upon their inheritance and developed new points of view.”

Scholars of Buddhism have agreed without any reservation that the Buddha was the founder of the religion who attended transcendental wisdom under the Bodhi tree. The Buddha himself did not announce the birth of a new religion and remained a Hindu, in which he was born, until his death. He remained closely wedded to the idea of *Vaidic* religion though he opposed the associated rituals and sacrifices of the Vaidic religion. The Buddha remained firm in negating the ritualism and sacrifices as a part of religion (Radhakrishnan, 1969). He believed in the conception of *dharma*—considered as imminent order denoting the laws of nature. “For the Buddha, *dharma* or righteousness is the driving principle of the Universe” (Radhakrishnan 1969, 341).

The quest of religious India has been for the incomparable safety, fearlessness, *abhaya*, *moksa*, *nirvana*. It is natural for humans to strive to elevate themselves above earthly things, to go out from the world of sense, to free their souls from the trammels of existence and gross materiality, to break through the outer darkness into a world of light and spirit. “The Buddha aims at a new spiritual existence attained through *jnana* or *bodhi*, absolute illumination” (Radhakrishnan 1969,

357). "The Buddha did not concede the reality of an unchangeable self for the self is something that can be built up by good thoughts and deeds, but yet he has to assume it" (Radhakrishnan 1969, 359).

"Buddhism did not start as a new and independent religion. It was an offshoot of the more ancient faith of the Hindus, perhaps a schism or a heresy. While the Buddha agreed with the faith he inherited on the fundamentals of metaphysics and ethics, he protested against certain practices which were in vogue at the time. He refused to acquiesce in the Vedic ceremonialism" (Radhakrishnan 1969, 361). Buddha's humanism crossed racial and national barriers. Yet the chaotic condition of the world affairs reflects the chaos in men's soul. History has become universal in spirit. Its subject matter is neither Europe nor Asia, neither East nor West, but humanity in all lands and ages (Radhakrishnan 1969).

The author has paraphrased the essence of Buddhism and Buddha to raise a fundamental question as to how, in spite of geophysical obstacles, lack of means of transportation, political ideological differences, religious and linguistic barriers, three major religions namely Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam spread across the globe. It should be clearly recognized that where Buddhism moved eastward from its place of origin in India all the way to Japan, Christianity moved largely westward from Jerusalem, and Islam to all directions though largely in Western Asia and Northern Africa.

At a later date, Islam moved across Asia and parts of Europe, driven by ambition and the quest for territorial and political domination with the power of the sword. Christianity reached across the world both by persuasion and brutal force.

Buddhism remains an exception. An article by the poetess Kim Yang-shik observed that "[a]ncient sources reveal interesting stories about Korea and India. During the first century A.D. a king named Kim-Suro of Kaya Kingdom married a Princess of Ayodhya, India... the religion, Buddhism has played an influential role in bringing the two countries closer. Old records suggest there had been a few exchanges in relation to propagating Buddhist religion" (e-mail message from Su-Kyung Han, Korea). However, official Korean records, museums, and other sources are silent and explicitly recognize that Buddhism arrived from India instead of China. The latter remains to be the major source of Buddhism for Korea.

Su-Kyung Han (2011) in a recent paper, maintains that Korea is home to all major religions from Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Islam. It is a major representative of world religions with various cultural values. The diversity of religions is a major part of Korean cultural tradition. Buddhism was not seen to have any conflict with indigenous religions or Korean 'nature worship,'

because Korea accepted to blend Buddhism with Korean Shamanism. With wide acceptance of Buddhist followers and with state support, Buddhism during the Goryeo period (918-1392) flowered while Confucianism played a subordinate role.

### Communication Perspective of Religious Spread

One of the major dimensions in the foregoing description is as to how Buddhism spread, accepted, and integrated diverse cultures of Asia and what were the modes of communication to reach in ancient and surviving civilizations? It raises some very serious questions about the process of religious communication, spread, and acceptance of a new religion on an already existing canvas of religious beliefs as a fresh layer of alien religious philosophy without major socio-political, cultural and ideological conflicts. It will remain an enigma as through what process Buddhism in the existing culture got integrated within the culture and society of Korea, several thousand kilometers away from its origin. The same holds true for many countries of Asia like Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Autonomous Region of Tibet, and China.

These religious dimensions are important areas of future research, though there are glimpses and historical evidences to advance the view that cultural adaptation as a continuous process of change that allows over a period of time, changes both in the original religious philosophy by absorbing local cultural traditions within the religious fold, and in the process, bring about cultural change by integrating religious doctrine for shaping day to day life and institutions that govern the social structure given society as a dynamic source of energy to be in continuous flux for change.

The communication revolution has invaded South Korea. Su-Kyung Han observed, "[t]oday, young people obsessively use new modern means of media and communication technologies such as the Internet and mobile phones with Internet access. Gaming or watching TV is possible anywhere you are, home or in the metro, in South Korea.... which is an essential part of their daily lives. The question is, however, how essential is religion for young people in their daily lives?" At the same time, religious media also attracts young people to link their interests to the spiritual world...who live in stressful environment. Can consumerist society master their problems? Can religious media give South Korean youth peace of mind in such a society? Su-Kyung Han (2011, 10) has the question: can religious media play any important role as adviser for personal and social issues in a society where there is a growing gap between the rich and the poor? There is no definitive answer offered by Su-Kyung Han in her analysis since it is difficult to discern how digital media is getting integrated into the cultural ethos of South Korean society. Also what is the actual adaptive mechanism for



media mediated religion? The author has raised three research issues for digital media propagating religion, especially of Buddhism in several countries of Asia including South Korea, Thailand, and Sri Lanka.

1. What kind of research paradigm will help discern the contribution of media in integrating religion into changing the technological world of capitalism?
2. What is the process of communication keen on propagating persuasive, non-violent Buddhist methods of spreading religion in the fast changing digital world?
3. Will technological changes reduce religious beliefs and practices into fast moving consumer products, which consumers can pickup from the media market as and when required?

These are the three issues hinted upon by Su-Kyung Han in her research study and requires a great deal of in-depth analysis and contemplation in the future.

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# **Establishing an Interreligious Web Network as Manifestation of a Changing Culture in a Filipino Rurban Community**

*Ma. Stella C. Tirol*

## **Introduction**

### **Religion and Communication**

Religion affects the way in which people live their daily life. It is a set of organized beliefs, devotions, and rituals containing a moral code to guide the conduct of human affairs (Random House Dictionary, 2014). Religion provides a set of ideas, images, symbols, stories, and theories that illustrate and explain the meaning of life and governs how one should live life (Anh, 2014). Through the means of social communication, religious beliefs and values are shared and exchanged in the community. The advent of social media has inspired the Roman Catholic Church to utilize information and communication technologies, including social media, as tools for social communication. A number of studies have already investigated the potential and use of social media in the context of religious communication. In his opening message during the 6<sup>th</sup> International Roundtable on Religion and Social Communication, Eilers (2013), described social media as the third type of social communication media. Further, he described there are now producers and consumers, which he labelled as prosumers, of social media. Today, users of social media act simultaneously as information or knowledge producers and consumers.

### **Interreligious and Interfaith Dialogue**

To some, interreligious and interfaith dialogue has the same meaning. To others, both terms can take on different meanings. According to the World Council of Churches, interreligious dialogue pertains to action between different Christian denominations. On the other hand, interfaith dialogue refers to interaction between different faith groups such as Muslim and Christian, or Hindu and Jew. Interfaith dialogue is the cooperative, constructive, and positive interaction between people

of different religious faiths and/or spiritual or humanistic beliefs at individual and institutional levels. It involves promoting understanding between different religions to increase acceptance of others.

Interreligious dialogue is often used with a similar meaning to interfaith dialogue particularly in academic circles. It encompasses the philosophical, sociological, cultural and political aspects more. Some scholars prefer to use the term religion to faith as they think that faith does not express the full plurality of culture (Trafford, 2004).

Wesley defines interfaith dialogue as an encounter between people who live by different faith traditions in an atmosphere of mutual trust and acceptance. According to the website of the World Council of Churches, dialogue was one of the ways to become informed about the faiths of others and to rediscover essential dimensions of one's own faith tradition.

Within this general framework individual theological explorations have yielded a variety of points of view. Some see dialogue primarily as a new and creative relationship within which one can learn about and respect others but also can give authentic witness to one's own faith. Others see it as an important historical moment in the development of religious traditions, in which each of the faith traditions in dialogue is challenged and transformed by the encounter with others. Still others view dialogue as a common pilgrimage towards the truth, within which each tradition shares with the others the way it has come to perceive and respond to that truth (Wesley).

Trafford (2004) states that there are many ways in which interfaith may be defined since it operates at many different levels. For instance, interfaith is a process of coming together of people committed to their respective religions and spiritual paths for the purpose of mutual understanding, appreciation and enrichment. The dialogue has a positive and deliberate connotation, a sense of offering space, openness, and respect. It can be formal or informal. It can be internal to oneself, between neighbours, among community groups, or large international gatherings.

Interfaith networks have been organized at local and international levels. These networks can be organization-based or web-based. Interfaith networks exist in America, Europe, and Asia and the Pacific. In the Philippines, Internet search has revealed the existence of three interfaith web networks.

Several studies have been done on interreligious or interfaith dialogue—wherein their meanings have been used interchangeably. Most studies focused on interfaith or interreligious organizations. With the popular use of information and communication technologies today, interfaith networks have been set up through

the Internet. However, very few studies have been conducted on interreligious or interfaith networks.

To bridge such research gap, this study explored how people in a rural community in a developing country respond to the establishment of an interreligious web network. Further, it tried to find out the implications of an interreligious web network on changing culture in the local community. It identified some manifestations of a changing culture based on people's response towards establishing an interreligious network.

### Research Problem and Objectives

This study addressed two general problems: What are the responses of Filipino respondents in a 'rural' community towards establishment of an interreligious web network? Based on the responses, what are the implications of establishing an interreligious web network towards a changing culture in the community?

The specific objectives were to: 1) describe how respondents from different religious denominations respond to establishing an interreligious network in terms of attitude or feeling and expectations; and 2) draw out indicators that manifest a changing culture among respondents in a rural community.

### Methodology

#### *Research design*

The descriptive research design was employed, in particular, survey method, in order to get a general picture of respondents' perspective about the establishment of an interreligious web network and its implications on a changing culture in a rural community in a province in the Philippines.

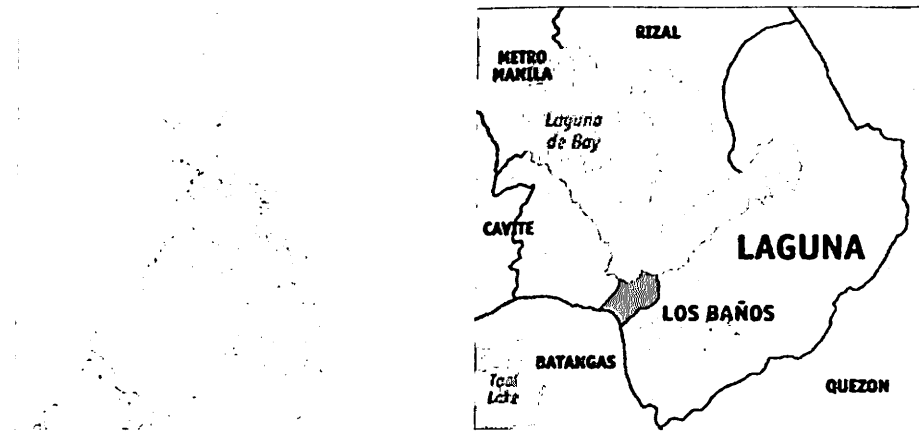
#### *Location of Study*

A survey was carried out in the municipality of Los Baños in the province of Laguna in the Southern Tagalog region of the Philippines. The site was selected due to its accessibility, researcher's familiarity with the place; and availability of respondents willing to participate in a simple survey.

The town of Los Baños used to be the seat of the Spanish Governor-General because of its cool climate, hot springs, and beautiful scenery. It has also been the site for incarceration of prisoners of war during the Japanese period. As such, Los Baños has become part of the nation's rich cultural history. It has a mix of agricultural and commercial lands, including the Mount Makiling Forest Reserve. Today, Los Baños is home to the University of the Philippines Los Baños. By law, it has been designated as a special science and nature city of the Philippines. In this connection, it has also

been declared as an agriculture, forestry, and life sciences community. The residents are mostly Tagalogs with migrants from all over the country. In terms of religion, the top five in Los Baños include the following: 1) Roman Catholics – 100,914; 2) Born Again Christians – 4,040; 3) Iglesia ni Cristo or Church of Christ – 1,785; 4) Baptists – 639; and 5) Jehovah's Witness – 496. (Socio-Economic and Physical Profile or SEPP, 2010, Los Baños)

Figure 1. Location of Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines



### Respondents and Sampling

A list of the top five religions in the Los Baños community was obtained from the Office of Planning and Development in the Mayor's Office. Based on the list, respondents would be comprised of residents from the following religious denominations: Roman Catholic, Born Again, Church of Christ, Baptist, and Jehovah's Witness.

Originally, a sample size of 10 respondents was set for each of the top five religions above. During the survey, some of the respondents failed to return their questionnaire on the deadline set. Thus, the final religious denominations of the respondents turned out as follows: Roman Catholic – 9; Born Again Christians – 9; Protestant – 5; Baptist – 3; Church of Christ (Iglesia ni Kristo) – 1, and Jehovah's Witness – 1. The total sample size for the exploratory study was 28.

### Data Collection and Analysis

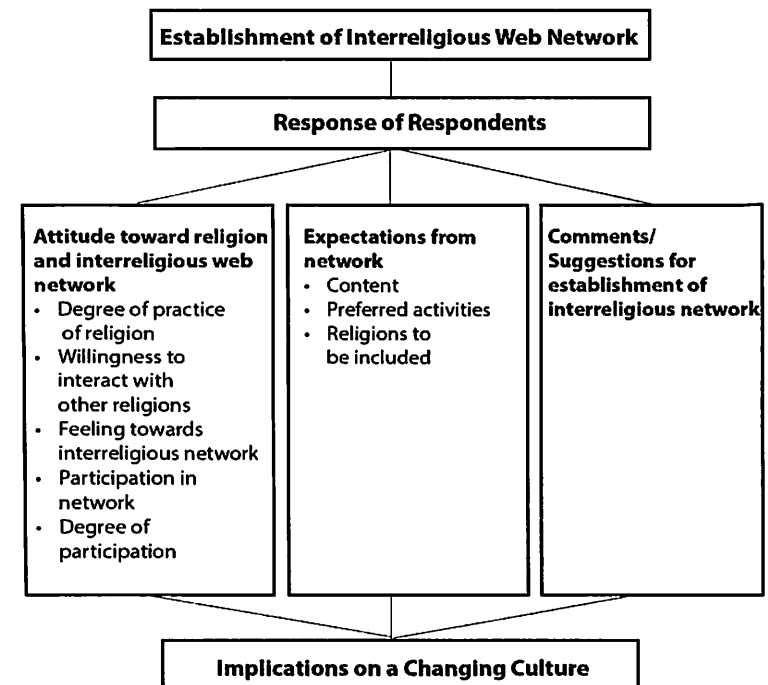
The respondents were Los Baños residents but were surveyed in their workplace which was the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) in College, Los Baños, Laguna. Three accessible places were randomly picked in the UPLB campus such as the old administration building, a college building, and the main library building. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed randomly to people who went

inside the buildings and collected immediately after the respondents have answered them. Some respondents, however, did not opt to answer the questionnaire—they took the questionnaire but did not answer and return them.

### Analytical Framework

Figure 2 shows the analytical framework used in the study. Respondents' response towards establishment of an interreligious web network was broken down into three measurable factors. These included attitude toward religion and interreligious web network, expectations from such a network, and comments or suggestions on establishing an interreligious web network. The fourth factor was the implications of such interreligious web network on a changing culture in a rural community. Implications were measured in the form of indicators that reflect the manifestations of a changing culture with the establishment of an interreligious web network in the Los Baños community.

Figure 2. Analytical framework of the study



### Results and Discussion

#### *Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics*

The respondents were mostly young to middle aged (39 years and below) and equally represented by male and female (14 each). The larger percentage

(32%) comprised of Roman Catholics and Born-Again Christians. The rest were Protestants, Baptists, members of the Church of Christ, and Jehovah's Witness. More than one third obtained a college and graduate education. Majority (72%) occupied professional, managerial, business or administrative work positions. Their estimated monthly income was P20,000 and below (47%) and P21,000-40,000 (32%). More than half (54%) were non-members of an organization. Those who were members belonged to a religious organization (25%). All of them were residents of the Los Baños rurban community in Laguna province, Philippines (Table 1).

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

CHARACTERISTIC	FREQUENCY (n=28)	PERCENTAGE
<b>Age</b>		
39 and below	15	54
40 and above	13	46
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	14	50
Female	14	50
<b>Religion</b>		
Roman Catholicism	9	32
Born-Again Christian	9	32
Protestantism	5	18
Baptist	3	10
Church of Christ	1	4
Jehovah's Witness	1	4
<b>Education</b>		
High school	6	21
College	10	36
Graduate	10	36
Vocational	2	7
<b>Occupation</b>		
Professional, managerial, business, or administrative job	20	72
Manual or hands-on job	2	7
Student	6	21
<b>Monthly Income (in pesos)</b>		
20,000 and below	13	47
21,000-40,000	9	32
Not applicable	6	21
<b>Organizational Membership</b>		

Non-member	15	54
Member	13	46
<b>Type of Organization</b>		
Religious	7	25
Professional	2	7
Civic	2	7
Student	2	7
Not applicable	15	54

### *Degree of practice of religion and reason*

More than half (54%) of the respondents perceived themselves as modern or open in their practice of religion for two reasons: (1) they could respect the religious beliefs of other people, (2) and, they tried to listen and understand others' religious beliefs as well as pick out philosophies that complement their own religion (Table 2).

Among those who were moderate in their practice of religion, about 36 percent reasoned that they valued their religion as much as they valued the teachings and practice of other religions.

Table 2. Degree of practice of religion and reason

TYPE AND REASON	FREQUENCY (n=28)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Modern or open	15	54
Moderate	10	36
Traditional or closed	3	10
<b>Reason:</b>		
<b>Modern or open</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect others' religious beliefs</li> <li>• Try to listen and understand others' religious beliefs and pick out philosophies that complement my religion</li> </ul>		
<b>Moderate</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value my religion as much as I value others' religious teachings and practices</li> </ul>		
<b>Traditional or closed</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Believe that my Church is the true Church</li> </ul>		

### *Willingness to interact with people from different religions and reason*

Overall, the respondents (53%) wanted to interact with people from different religions. They were willing (28%) and very willing (25%) to do so because they: 1) could share their insights about their religion and learn from others' religion; 2) were interested to interact with people from different religions; 3) worked with and

had friends from other religious denominations; and 4) could better understand one another (Table 3).

On the other hand, more than two thirds (43%) were neutral or undecided about interacting with people from different religions since they did not want to engage in any argument about religion or about what is right and wrong. Another reason was that their interaction would depend on similarity of beliefs or matters common to both of their religions.

Table 3. Willingness to interact with people from different religions and reasons

EXTENT OF WILLINGNESS AND REASON	FREQUENCY (n=28)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Very willing	7	25
Willing	8	28
Neutral/Can't say	12	43
Not willing	0	0
Not very willing	1	4
Reason:		
Very Willing		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with and have friends from other religious denominations</li> <li>• It's a good way to better understand one another</li> </ul>		
Willing		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can share my insights and learn from them, too, about their religion</li> <li>• Interested to interact with people from different religions</li> </ul>		
Neutral/Can't say		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not want arguments about religion and what is right or wrong</li> <li>• Interaction will depend on similarity of beliefs and matters common to us (e.g., belief in Bible and Koran)</li> </ul>		
Not very willing		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Believe in only one faith/religion</li> </ul>		

#### *Feeling towards the establishment of interreligious web network and reason*

The same percentage (39%) were in favour of establishing an interreligious web network and were neutral or undecided about their feeling about an interreligious web network (Table 4). Respondents favoured an interreligious network for the following reasons: 1) to know, understand, and gain new perspectives and to level off about other religions; 2) to open minds and gain respect about other religions; 3) to provide a venue for netizens to interact with people from different religions and discuss their respective faiths; and 4) to make use of technology in interacting with others from different religious denominations (Table 4).

The respondents who claimed to be neutral or undecided about establishing an interreligious web network mostly said that they had no idea yet about an interreligious web network. Others mentioned that an interreligious network should not create conflicting beliefs or unnecessary debates online. Other reasons indicate that respondents were worried about how open-minded people are about their own religion. Further, a moderator for interreligious web network should observe rules and meet objectives of the web-based platform. Others opine that the establishment of an interreligious web network should be planned and executed properly since it can be used as a venue for religious disclosure.

Table 4. Feeling towards establishment of interreligious web network and reasons

FEELING AND REASON	FREQUENCY (n=28)	PERCENTAGE (%)
In favour	11	39
Neutral/Can't say	11	39
Not in favour	6	22
Reason:		
In favor		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To know, understand, gain new perspectives, and level off about other religions</li> <li>• To open minds and gain respect about other religions</li> <li>• Will be a venue for various netizens to interact with people from different religions and discuss things about their respective faiths</li> <li>• Can use technology to interact with others from</li> </ul>		
Neutral/Can't say		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No idea of it yet</li> <li>• Depends on type of network – should not create conflicting beliefs and unnecessary debates online</li> <li>• Important to be cautious since people have common and different beliefs about their religion</li> <li>• Not sure how open-minded people are about religion</li> <li>• Moderator has critical role to ensure members of network observe rules and objectives of the web platform are met</li> <li>• Good idea if planned and executed properly since can be used as venue for religious disclosure</li> </ul>		
Not in favor		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to believe in only one faith/religion</li> <li>• It's not necessary</li> <li>• Our religion does not agree with it</li> <li>• Can create misunderstanding and partiality in religion</li> </ul>		

*Participation in interreligious web network*

More than half (54%) of the surveyed respondents were neutral or undecided about whether to participate or not in an interreligious web network. Their indecisiveness to participate can be traced to their lack of awareness or understanding of the value and usefulness of an interreligious web network. In addition, the respondents were unclear about the goal or purpose of an interreligious web network. Other reasons were: *might not have the time to participate in the network, depends on the representation of religious groups, and depends on whether the interreligious web network will unite people to only one God* (Table 5).

Nine (32%) of the respondents expressed their willingness to participate in an interreligious web network—in case it is going to be established in the rural community. They wanted to participate in the interreligious web network because they wanted to learn about the religion of other people and would like to open their mind to the concerns of other religions.

Only a very small percentage (14%) of the respondents will not participate in the interreligious web network since their religion did not allow it; they do not know what will be the content of the web network; and they had other priorities besides it (Table 5).

Table 5. Number of respondents who will participate in interreligious web network of Los Baños community and reasons

PARTICIPATION AND REASON	FREQUENCY (n=28)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Will participate	9	32
Neutral/Can't say	15	54
Will not participate	4	14
Reason:		
Will participate		
To learn more about religion of other people (5)		
It is convenient to know about people and their religion through the web (1)		
Will open mind to concerns of other religions (1)		
No response (2)		
Undecided/Can't say		
Not sure what value, usefulness, or good effect it will have for me (3)		
Not clear about goal and purpose of network (2)		
Might not have time (1)		
Depends on representation of various religious groups and nature of discussion (1)		
Depends on whether it will unite people to only one God (1)		
No response (7)		

Will not participate
Our religion does not agree with it (1)
Don't know what will be the content of the platform (1)
Have other priorities (1)
Joining network means one is not happy or satisfied with his/her religion (1)

*Extent of participation in interreligious web network*

When asked again about the extent of their participation in the network, regardless of their earlier response on willingness to participate, the respondents replied that they would opt for moderate (39%) to low (43%) levels of participation (Table 6). Their common reasons for moderate extent of participation were: a) busy with work or studies; b) depends on availability for discussion; c) interested in sharing the Bible, not debating about its content; and d) want to minimize getting into argument with other religions (Table 6).

The low extent of participation was attributed also to having busy work and to being cautious about the process and content of the interreligious web network. Other reasons cited were *want to limit participation in terms of reading posts and being merely a spectator* (Table 6).

The moderate to low participation in an interreligious web network dominated among the survey respondents is brought about mainly by a busy work schedule, availability of the person for discussion, and some degree of cautiousness towards engaging into a new venture.

Table 6. Perceived extent of participation in interreligious web network and reasons

DEGREE OF PARTICIPATION AND REASON	FREQUENCY (n=28)	PERCENTAGE (%)
High	3	11
Moderate	11	39
Low	12	43
No response	2	7
High participation		
More participation, more learning, more fun (2)		
No response (1)		
Moderate participation		
Busy with work, studies, and other things (3)		

Depends on my availability for discussion (3)
Just interested in sharing the Bible, not in debate (1)
Don't want to argue with other religions (1)
No response (3)
Low participation
Busy with work, academics, and organization (4)
Will see and observe first; am cautious (3)
Will limit participation to reading posts; tend to be just spectator (2)
Religion does not agree with it (1)
No response (1)

#### *Expected content in interreligious web network*

The highest number of multiple responses (13 out of 28) wanted the content of an interreligious web network to revolve on the teachings and practices of different religions. In addition, such network should also include information about the concept of interreligion as well as news and announcements on religious activities of different denominations (5 responses each) (Table 7). The same number of responses (5) indicated not having any idea at all on what the content of an interreligious web network should be.

The least mentioned topics for inclusion in the interreligious web network were opinions and views of other religions on views or issues that affect all nations as well about news about the interreligious web organization or network. Apparently, there is an interest on issues or concerns of other religions especially if one is not familiar with them.

Overall, the participants shared only a few ideas on the possible content of an interreligious web network. This finding implies the respondents' lack of understanding about the concept of an interreligious web network. They may perhaps still be confused on what it is really all about.

Table 7. Content that respondents expect in interreligious web network

TOPIC	FREQUENCY* (n=28)
Teachings and practices of different religions	13
Doctrines	
Core values	
Beliefs and practices	
Culture and traditions	
Chronicles	
God's message from the Bible	
Who God is; God's purpose to His people	
Misconceptions about religion	
Don't have any idea	5
Concept of inter religion	5
Openness to other religions	
Understanding	
Tolerance	
News and announcements on religious activities and resources/materials	5
Religious holidays, celebrations and their purpose	
Christian songs	
Books (e.g., Bible, Koran)	
Opinions and views of other religions on issues that affect nations	4
News about the organization/network	2
Vision	
Mission	
Organization	
Resources	
Not applicable	6

\*Multiple responses



### Preferred activities in interreligious web network

The respondents seemingly had few ideas on the content of an interreligious web network. However, with regards to activities in an interreligious web network, the respondents gave several answers. In order of high to low frequency occurrence, having a forum or discussion board was highly preferred among the respondents (7 responses). Ecumenical and interactive activities that cut across various faiths or religions were preferred, too. According to at least three respondents, a question and answer portion about religious beliefs and activities could be included. One response each was given for the following activities: testimonials of God's work on people's lives, chat with other Christians, sharing of outreach programs, and information about the vision, mission, and objectives of the interreligious web network (Table 8).

The variety of activities that respondents preferred to undertake in the network shows potential interest in becoming prosumers of an interreligious web network.

Table 8. Preferred activities to be included in interreligious web network

ACTIVITY	FREQUENCY* (n=28)
Forum/Discussion board	7
Development initiatives and experiences of different religious groups	
Sharing of papers	
Ecumenical activities that would cut across various faiths	5
Worship	
Prayer groups	
Bible sharing	
Interactive activities that would unite religious groups ; games	5
Question and answers about religion, beliefs, and activities	3
No idea at all	3
Testimonials on God's work in people's lives	1
Chat with other Christians	1
Outreach programs	1
Information about network	1
Vision, mission, and objectives	
Not applicable	6

\*Multiple responses

### Specific religion to be included in interreligious web network

Of the 28 respondents, 11 wanted to include as many religions as possible in the interreligious web network. Their reasons were to: *fully understand the traditions, beliefs, and culture; learn more about other doctrines; and cultivate an open mind to information about other religions* (Table 9).

Some of the religions that should be included in the web network were Buddhism, Born Again Christian, Islam, Taoism, and Hinduism. The top reasons for inclusion of these religions were interest to learn about their beliefs, traditions, and culture and to satisfy curiosity about other religions.

Table 9. Religions to be included in interreligious web network and reasons

RELIGION AND REASON FOR INCLUSION	FREQUENCY* (n=28)
All religions/As many as possible	11
Majority of Los Baños population belong to these religions (Roman Catholicism, Born-Again Christian, Church of Christ, Baptist, Jehovah's Witness)	
To fully understand their traditions, beliefs, and culture	
To know more about their doctrines	
Explanations about doctrines can open minds of people to other religions	
Have a right to be heard	
To have more networks	
Want to know their views	
Buddhism	5
Out of curiosity I want to know about it	
To know their beliefs	
To find out similarities or differences in religion	
Might be interesting to interact with Buddhists	
Born-Again Christian	4
Want Born-Again Christians to be involved if possible so these souls that are called can be harvested by God	

Islam	3
Because it is rapidly growing	
To know their beliefs	
To find out similarities or differences in religion	
Taoism	3
So people can learn about it	
To know their beliefs	
To find out similarities or differences in religion	
Hinduism	2
So people will know about it	
To know their beliefs	
To find out similarities or differences in religion	
The Church in Recovery (Local Churches)	1
Has high peak truth revelations	
Not applicable	6

\*Multiple responses

#### *Comments and suggestions on establishment of interreligious web network*

Although only five comments in all were collected from the respondents, the respondents were distributed among such responses. Based on eight responses obtained, the interreligious web network should have strong rules, regulations, and policies that should be strictly followed for smooth discussions and sharing in the network (Table 10). Specific rules were also obtained such as equal treatment for all religions, adoption of open policy to religious doctrine, avoidance of conflicts or debates, and no attacks on each religion (Table 10).

Another suggestion was to create an attractive design for the interreligious web network (7 responses) so that people will respond to and understand it. An ergonomic, dynamic design with interactive discussions would allow for intellectual discourse. Lots of photographs and visuals were recommended, too.

There was also a suggestion to explain clearly the purpose or goal of the interreligious web network to promote unity and oneness of faith among various religions (Table 10).

A network moderator was proposed for an organized discussion. The moderator must be skilled in facilitation skills and open-minded. He/she must not be biased on a particular religion.

Prior to actual establishment of the interreligious web network, the need for it should be carefully studied. The mechanisms on how to set and operate the network should be well planned. The respondents may somehow be proposing the conduct of a feasibility study for such type of web network.

Table 10. Comments and suggestions for interreligious web network to be established

COMMENT/SUGGESTION	FREQUENCY* (n=28)
Have strong rules, regulations, and policies	8
Treat various religions equally	
Adopt open policy to doctrine or God's message	
Avoid conflicts/debates	
Focus on how to inspire members' spirituality	
No attacking against each other	
Strict against flammers and spammers	
Open to reports against them	
Create attractive design for web network	7
Make the design ergonomic and responsive	
Make it easily understandable to people	
Should be dynamic and interactive (discussion boards, blogs)	
Allow for quality and intellectual discourse	
Include lots of photos and visuals	
State clearly purpose of web network	3
Promote unity among different religions	
Aim for oneness of faith	
Not a platform to offend other religions	

Select and assign a moderator	3
Must be open-minded	
Skilled in facilitation	
Study carefully how to set up and operate network	2
It is something new	
It is a sensitive issue or matter	
No comment/suggestion	3
Not applicable	6

\*Multiple responses

*Summary of Expectations about establishing an interreligious web network:  
Towards some manifestations of a changing culture*

Table 11 shows the respondents' expectations about five attributes of an interreligious web network such as content, preferred activities, religions to be included, guidelines or policies for the implementation and use of such type of web network.

Despite having a vague idea of what an interreligious web network is, the respondents were able to provide a list of topics that should be considered. The topics ranged from religious culture, tradition, doctrines to issues, concerns, and opinions about religions to religious misconceptions, news, announcements, and Christian songs. These topics imply that potential users of the interreligious web network can both produce and consume (thus prosumers) the contents of the web network. Further, it appears that the interreligious web network manifests a culture that is becoming need-based and demand driven in its need for religious information and social communication.

Meanwhile, the list of preferred activities turned out to be varied and interactive with the purpose of sharing religious information through forums, discussion boards, testimonials, games, and chatting. These activities connote a culture that is heading towards multi-media and interactivity in the use of a social network. The social media culture is changing towards the direction of one that involves multiple media combinations where prosumers can interact in various ways.

The expectation to include all kinds of religion in the web network seems to shape up a culture that is recognizing the presence or existence of other religions and that is valuing the right to be heard in the context of religion. A culture of understanding and appreciating other religions is finding its way into a rural community where the population is educated, unmarried, and gainfully employed.

Lastly, the provisions for a set of guidelines or policies for operation and maintenance of the interreligious web network also draws out certain manifestations of a changing culture in the context of religion and social communication. The culture is now one that appreciates the importance of policies in bringing order and logic to an interreligious web network. The culture is also one where space for equality, absence of bias, protection, and respect for religions is emerging. The culture reflects a fondness for storytelling and exchanging instead of merely one-way communication (Table 11).

As the results indicate, the establishment of an interreligious web network leads toward a culture that is changing in various ways. There could even be other manifestations of such a changing culture in the field of religion and social communication.

Table 11. Summary of expectations about an interreligious web network and manifestations of a changing culture in a Filipino rural community

Expected Content	Manifestations of Changing Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture and tradition</li> <li>• Doctrines, core values, beliefs, practices, and activities of different religions</li> <li>• Interfaith openness, understanding, tolerance</li> <li>• Opinions of others, their stand on issues that affect nations, views on what the Bible says</li> <li>• How other religions view life and other issues</li> <li>• Misconceptions about religion/faith</li> <li>• News and announcements of religious celebrations, feast days, festival and their purpose</li> <li>• Information about our books of faith and other resources</li> <li>• Christian songs-free download</li> <li>• Chronicles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of prosumers</li> <li>• Needs-based, demand driven content</li> </ul>

Preferred Activities	Manifestations of Changing Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion boards linked to vision, mission, and objectives of network.</li> <li>• Interactive activities like sharing of papers, development initiatives of religious groups and their experiences, outreach programs</li> <li>• Forum; question and answer regarding faith and activities</li> <li>• Testimonials on God's work in people's lives</li> <li>• Prayer groups</li> <li>• Worship exalting God</li> <li>• Ecumenical activities that would cut across various faiths</li> <li>• Bible sharing</li> <li>• Games</li> <li>• Chat with other faiths</li> <li>• Any other information as long as it is beneficial to every soul</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-media culture</li> <li>• Interactivity in use of social network</li> </ul>
Religions to be included	Manifestations of Changing Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All faith communities should be in the network; all of them have a right to be heard.</li> <li>• As many religions as possible for better understanding                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Islam</li> <li>○ Buddhism</li> <li>○ Hinudism</li> <li>○ Confucianism</li> <li>○ Taoism</li> <li>○ Zoroastrianism</li> <li>○ Judaism</li> <li>○ Church in Recovery (Local Churches)—have high peak truth revelations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition of various religions</li> <li>• Value for right to be heard (religions)</li> </ul>

Guidelines/Policies of Network	Manifestations of Changing Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have strong rules, regulations, or policies</li> <li>• Select a moderator for the network (open minded; skills in facilitation)</li> <li>• State clearly the purpose of the network</li> <li>• Aim for unity of faith, for the truth, and not for anything personal</li> <li>• Use network as venue to promote unity among different religions</li> <li>• Testimonials of God's work on people's lives</li> <li>• Allow for quality and intellectual discourse</li> <li>• Make design ergonomic and responsive</li> <li>• Make network dynamic</li> <li>• Include lots of photos/visuals</li> <li>• Put up discussion boards, papers, blogs</li> <li>• Make the network interactive</li> <li>• Make the network easily understandable to people</li> <li>• Focus on what would inspire members' spirituality</li> <li>• Treat various faiths equally</li> <li>• Guard against flammers and spammers</li> <li>• Report flammers and scammers</li> <li>• Network requires certain degree of open-mindedness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appreciation of policy guidelines in use of interreligious web network.</li> <li>• Equality, absence of bias, protection and respect for religion</li> <li>• Preference for story exchange</li> </ul>

## Conclusions

The respondents were mainly neutral or undecided about their willingness to interact with people from other religions as well as their participation in an interreligious web network. An equal number expressed that they were in favour of establishing an interreligious web network and were indecisive about their feelings towards the network. The respondents settled for moderate to low participation in the interreligious network. The reasons for their behavior and attitude were varied and wide.

A number of topics as content for the interreligious web network emerged from the data of the study. Similarly, a variety of preferred activities for the network were interactive discussion boards, forums, games, and Q&A about religion. Policy guidelines were suggested for proper operation and management of the interreligious web network that should be facilitated by a moderator.

In view of the establishment of an interreligious web network, certain indicators that manifest a changing culture in the context of religion and social communication emerged in the study. Changes in culture were manifested in terms of the role of prosumers, needs-based and demand driven content, multimedia approach, interactivity, recognition of other religions and the right of every religion to be heard, equality and respect for various religions, and policy guidelines for the interreligious web network.

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## Hinduism and the Internet in 2010-12: An Essay on Websites, Blogs, Social Media, Censorship and 'Internet Hindu'

*Kiran Thakur and Achyut Vaze*

### **Introduction:**

Hinduism is the third largest religion in the world next to Christianity and Islam. The word *Hindu* is derived from the Sanskrit word *Sindhu* (Indus) river in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent (Oxford English Dictionary). The word was first mentioned in the *Rig Veda*, believed to have been composed between 1700 and 1100 BCE (Hymn LXXV, *The Rivers*).

The word *Hindu* was borrowed into European languages from the Arabic term *al-Hind* referring to "the land of the people who live across the River Indus." In this instance, Hindu refers to all Indians. By the thirteenth century, *Hindustān* emerged as the name for the "land of *Hindus*" that, for the rest of the world, came to be known as India.

Travellers, monks, and scholars spread awareness about the philosophy, traditions, and culture of Hindus particularly during the last two centuries outside India through books, articles, and speeches. Debates over the superiority of Hinduism over other religions, especially Christianity and Islam, have continued over the period through books and other publications. The Internet offered a new, inexpensive, fast, and effective platform for dissemination of information and discussion about Hinduism since 1995, when the World Wide Web was made available to anyone with a computer and net connectivity. Web 2.0, the second generation of the World Wide Web that brought in blogs, wikis, social networking sites, and a broad range of new web applications has further reinforced the platform in cyberspace for explosion of information and engagement of debates on religious matters. The information about the topic of Hinduism over the Net

may seem to be unending, or it could be brief and to-the-point as can be seen in this passage from the Maria Carrillo High School Humanities page:

Hinduism, also known as *Sanatana Dharma*, is the religious tradition indigenous to the Indian subcontinent with about 950 million followers worldwide, making it the third largest religious system in the world. Hinduism differs from most religions in that there is no particular theological belief, or set of doctrines that unites all its adherents. The goal of the Hindu path is *moksha* (literally, 'release'), understood to be liberation from *samsara* (repeated cycle of birth and death), and this is achieved by piercing the veil of *maya* (illusion). Some widespread Hindu philosophical concepts and practices are *karma* (cycle of cause and effect), *dharma* (religious duty or obligation), reincarnation and yoga. There is no one book that is considered sacred by all Hindus, but the Vedas, Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita are revered by most Hindus.

The Hindus have been described in different ways: orthodox, fundamentalist, chauvinist, extremist, militant, die-hard, radical, leftist, right-wing, rational, secular, liberal, conservative, progressive, tolerant, believer, non-believer, atheist, agnostic and so on. Added to these descriptions is a new one: 'Internet Hindu.'

This essay briefly documents Hinduism on the Internet, Censorship of Social Media in India, and the new term 'Internet Hindu' during the first two years of this decade of the twenty-first century.

### Hinduism and the Internet

The cyberspace has a substantial presence of Hinduism for religious activity. Such presence should not be a surprise because Hinduism has, as stated above, an estimated 950 million adherents worldwide. According to the website of the Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, this is about 14 percent of the world population. The Hindu population is, thus, third largest after Christianity and Islam.

Websites on Hindus, Hinduism, and related topics are hosted since mid-1990s. Several attempts appear to have been made to compile directories of such websites. One such exercise was undertaken by a team of Vedic students of an institute on the foothills of the Himalayas who worked for a few weeks to compile the sites hosted by institutions, organization and individuals. The list has 651 entries of Hindu websites around the world.

Text and audio-visual contents of the majority of websites include information about Hinduism, sects of the creators of the sites, spiritual masters, their preaching,

temples, rituals, festivals, online *poojas* (procedure for the worship of deities), songs, prayers, yoga, philanthropic activities of the organisations, and so on.

These authors carried out a quick survey of the Hinduism-related blogs and social media sites in October 2012. Following is the summary of their findings:

- Hindu and Hinduism find mention in blogs numbering from 6,900,000 to 56,700,000 and more depending how one chooses search words.
- Search for 'Hinduism' on October 5, 2012 returned 315,000,000 (as compared to 29,800,000 for Christianity, and 104,000,000 for Islam).
- A search on 'Hinduism Twitter,' on October 5, 2012 gave us 14,700,000 results. This includes the Twitter account of Hinduism Today Magazine (@HinduismToday), an "international journal affirming the Sanatana Dharma and recording the history of a billion strong global religion in renaissance." It displays 3,217 tweets, 12 accounts being followed, and 5,847 followers.
- *The Huffington Post* has a section on Hinduism-on-Twitter that promises, "[a]s part of our ongoing series featuring some of the great religious voices on Twitter, here is a list of some of the most interesting Hindu organizations and individuals who are using the micro-blogging platform to take their message online."

YouTube offered 14,800,000 clips on Hinduism. Similarly, a Google search on 'Hinduism and Facebook' returned 16,600,000 results. These statistics are obviously not exhaustive and complete. Besides, the results for the searches will vary depending on search words. Yet, the figures are presented above to indicate how Hinduism has occupied the cyberspace.

### 'Internet Hindus'

Al Jazeera English, the Doha-headquartered news channel, was launched across India on November 17, 2011. Among its early programs was a panel discussion on 'Who are the Internet Hindus? Why do they oppose a secular India?' on July 9, 2012. The three-member panel had Sagarika Ghose, the Deputy Editor and a primetime anchor on India's leading news network CNN-IBN. She was there on the panel probably because she is credited with coining the term 'Internet Hindus.' She has been using the term through her tweets and has generated heated debate on the attitude of Hindu netizens to express themselves. The other panelist was Dr. Subramanian Swamy national president of the Janata Party (People's Party) and former central minister who has affinity towards the cause of Hinduism. Mr. Sadanand Dhume, the third panelist, is an Indian writer, journalist, and broadcaster based in New York and Delhi.

Ms. Sagarika has critics among the television news channel viewers. She was among those who derided the Internet users who prided themselves for being Hindus. The left-of-centre journalists describe them as 'loonies,' 'fanatics,' 'irrational,' and 'Hindu Taliban.' Ms. Sagarika, it appears, was so enraged by the arguments of the netizens that she would call them 'gutter snipes' (children who spend most of their time in the streets, especially in a slum area, or persons regarded as having the behavior, morals, etc., of one brought up in squalor).

Senior scribe Kanchan Gupta says, "Much of the criticism came from left-of-center journalists who believe they have unfettered monopoly over media as their inalienable birthright . . . These journalists . . . are given to contemptuously brushing aside 'Internet Hindus' as being irrelevant and describing their views as inconsequential." Gupta and the likes of him came out in defense of the Internet Hindus in their blogs and macro-blogging sites. Gupta, in particular hit back, saying these netizens are bright, well-educated, and not burdened with regional and caste biases. They are well-informed on national issues and world affairs and are rooted in Indian culture. They hold the Congress,<sup>2</sup> the Left and regional parties in contempt, as they do journalists who cravenly ingratiate themselves with the establishment.

They are cornering public opinion online. Sanjay Kaul argues that the Left-liberal intelligentsia monopolize opinion on television and newspapers, no TV anchor calls people who speak up for Hindus or Hinduism.

Prabhu says that, like most political phenomena, Internet Hinduism (IH) contains the entire spectrum, from elitists to the lumpen saffronists. While people are led to believe that the IH refers only to abusive, Right-wing netizens, no one has explicitly said so. For all purposes, it may be assumed that anyone who speaks in favour of Hinduism online is an IH.

He ridicules the belief among some critics that the Internet Hindus are all organised in a global secret conspiracy against 'secularism,' Islam, and socialism.

Kanchan Gupta quotes the findings of an ongoing, online survey in 2010 in an attempt to present a generic profile of 'Internet Hindus.'<sup>3</sup> Of those who have responded, 89 percent have identified themselves as 'Internet Hindus,' indicating they attach no shame to the term though their critics would want them to feel ashamed. Of the respondents, 4 percent are aged 20 years and below; 55 percent are aged 30 and below; 31 percent are 40 and below; and, only 10 percent are aged above 40. In brief, 90 percent of them are young Indians.

The educational profile of the respondents are as follows: 43 percent are graduates (most of them from engineering, science, and medical colleges); 46 percent are post-graduates (a large number of them have MBA degrees from the best business schools); and, 11 percent have PhDs. Of the 83 percent who are employed, 3 percent

earn up to 2 lakh of rupees a year; 18.4 percent earn up to 6 lakh of rupees a year; 34.7 percent earn up to 12 lakh of rupees a year; and, 26.5 percent earn more than 24 lakh of rupees a year (Lakh is Indian Rupees 100,000= USD 1,893.32 at the exchange rate on October 13, 2012).

Nearly 60 percent of them frequently travel abroad for work and holiday. Gupta says that some 11 percent have travelled abroad at least once.

### Censorship on Social Media

The Indian Union Government in August and September 2012 took certain decisions that invited a barrage of criticism from Net users, print and electronic media, freedom of expression activists, social media companies, and Internet service providers. The Government blocked 309 specific items including URLs, certain Twitter, Facebook, Internet sites, blogs and SMSs belonging to journalists in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Assam and in the cities of Mumbai and Pune.

The move to ban bulk SMS and MMS from August 17 to 30, 2012 to prevent the spread of rumors created panic among students of the northeastern states studying in cities of western and southern parts of the country. According to the rumors, some groups belonging to Muslim community had allegedly threatened people from the northeast to leave the cities or else they would face dire consequences. Panic-stricken college and university students in Pune, Bangalore, Chennai, and Mysore began leaving these cities en masse as the rumors were circulated through SMS and social media sites earlier that month.

The Prime Minister, Dr. Man Mohan Singh, expressed concern over the misuse of the Internet by unscrupulous elements. He said India's vulnerability to cyber crime was escalating as the economy and critical infrastructure became increasingly reliant on interdependent computer networks and the Internet. Sandeep Joshi of the daily *The Hindu* quoted the Prime Minister as saying, "Large-scale computer attacks on our critical infrastructure and economy can have potentially devastating results. The government is working on a robust cyber security structure that addresses threat management and mitigation, assurance and certification, specially building capacity and enhancing research" (use of social media to aggravate communal situation). Shalini Singh of the same newspaper reported that eventually, the government thought of involving all the stakeholders such as the Telecom Ministry, ISPs, social media companies, and the print and electronic media to combat all forms of abuse. This unprecedented move in the spirit of collaboration is an attempt at the highest levels of government to review the existing policies, procedures and even legislation involving censorship of the Internet and social media, according to a senior official of the Telecom Department. A key outcome of this dialogue was the suggestion that the government should use the Internet and social media to counter hate speech.



Gupta posed a question in his blog, 'Why do they infuriate pseudo-secularists in media?' and offered three possible explanations.<sup>4</sup> First, the Internet is beyond the control of those who control newspapers and news channels. While the print and audiovisual media have for long excluded contrary opinion and denied space to those who disagree with absurd notions of 'secularism,' or question the quality of reportage, the Internet has provided space to the 'other' voice. Real time blog posts now record the 'other side' of the day's story. Twitter affords instant micro-blogging even as primetime news is being telecast, and YouTube allows unedited amateur videos of events to be uploaded, giving the lie to edited and doctored versions shown by news channels.

Second, unlike carefully selected 'Letters to the Editor' in newspapers and 'Feedback' posted on news channel websites, the reactions of 'Internet Hindus' cannot be thrown into the dustbin or deleted with a click of the mouse. English language media journalists, long used to fawning praise from readers and viewers, are horrified that someone can actually call them 'dumb' in public space and there's nothing they can do about it.

Third, the established elite, most of them middle-aged, are beginning to feel threatened. Here's a new breed of Indians who have used merit and not 'connections' to make a mark in professional excellence, young men and women who are educated and articulate, and are willing to challenge conventional wisdom as preached by media 'stars' who have rarely, if ever, been questioned. Gupta said that the elite who dominate newspapers and news channels are seen by 'Internet Hindus' as part of India's past, not future. There are arguments and counter arguments in favour of and against Internet Hindus.

A newspaper headline to Daipayan Halder's story, for example, says: 'A fast-growing tribe of fanatics who tweet, are e-friends of the BJP, or scuppies on a self-awareness drive. They are out to own the web.' This one, as the title suggests, has an anti-Hindu bias.

Another article by Jaideep Prabhu justifies the stance of the Internet Hindus. So does the piece on *Mediacrooks* which led Sagarika Ghose on her stance on the panel discussion on Al Jazeera referred to in this essay above.

A blog post titled, 'Beware, Internet Hindus are multiplying like Virus on Social Media' indicates the vehemence of both the sides of the debate. This post says "Today there are perhaps as many as 20,000 so-called 'Internet Hindus,' many tweeting as often as 300 times a day, according to a rough estimate by one of the community's most active members." "You will find thousands with similar sounding IDs [to mine]," a Twitter user who goes by the handle @internet\_hindus said in an anonymous chat interview. "Some [others] prefer to openly do it with

their own personal IDs." This blogger's claim could not be verified. It, however, does make a point that the Internet Hindus are multiplying like virus on social media.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Veteran Indian theologian Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan states that Hinduism cannot be defined, but it has to be experienced. It is not 'just a faith', but in itself is related to the union of reason and intuition. Hinduism does not have a single or common historical founder. Hinduism, or as some say 'Hinduisms,' does not have a single system of salvation and has different goals according to each sect or denomination.

According to Supreme court of India "unlike other religions in the World, the Hindu religion does not claim any one Prophet, it does not worship any one God, it does not believe in any one philosophic concept, it does not follow any one act of religious rites or performances, in fact, it does not satisfy the traditional features of a religion or creed. It is a way of life and nothing more". <http://www.ebc-india.com/lawyer/articles/706.htm>, citing judgement in the case of *Sastri Yagnapurushdasji v. Muldas Bhudardas Vaishya*, (1966).

A definition of Hinduism is further complicated by the frequent use of the term "faith" as a synonym for "religion". Some academics and many practitioners refer to Hinduism using a native definition, as *Sanātana Dharma*, a Sanskrit phrase meaning "the eternal law", or the "eternal way."

<sup>2</sup> The Indian National Congress, currently heading the United Progressive Alliance of center-left political parties, that ruled the federal government in India when the paper was written. The Congress has dominated the political scene in the country, ruling the federal and provincial governments in most of the states for a majority period since the nation became Independent in 1947 after the end of the British colonial rule. The political situation has changed during and after the elections in 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Kanchan Gupta has not provided a sample size of the survey. However, the link to the online survey was still available on October 15, 2012 at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/BSL8HS9>. This author wrote to him for details of the sample size and asked him if the survey was still ongoing on October 11, 2012. He did not respond till writing of this essay.

<sup>4</sup> Pseudo-secularism is the state of implicit non-secular trends in the face of pledged secularism. The term is used by groups who perceive a double standard exhibited within the established secular governing policy towards culturally different groups.

## Use of Religion and Mythology for Gains

*Arbind Sinha*

### Introduction

India, the country with 5,000 years of history and civilization having multiple cultures, is characterized with the co-existence of more than one religion. India is constitutionally a secular country that houses several cultures, religions, and ethnicities, notable among them are Islam, Sikhism, Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism, and Parsee (Pattanaik, 2009). Though Hindus form a majority of the population, there is no state religion as such. The fact remains that India has been a fertile ground for nurturing multiple religions, and it also cultivated their associated myth and mythology, that have been the part of Indian culture for centuries. The majority of population in India follows Hindu religion and customs. For a foreigner, when they talk about Indian mythology, it mostly appears as Hindu mythology, but the truth remains that other, not so dominant religion and cultures are also part of the day-to-day life of people, and mythology does revolve around them (Mohanty, 2000). One of the other considerations, which has to be taken into account, is that at times mythology is considered to be limited to just religion. Thus, when we try to study religion and mythology in the cultural context of India, it becomes imperative to study the religious structure of the country and to understand the interrelation between religion, myth, and mythology.

The literature search points out that there have been different viewpoints put forth by different scholars. For Knappert (1993), mythology is part of the study of religion and one can fit each and every myth into the life and the manner in which a society lives. Pattanaik (2009) finds that mythology is related to a certain culture and not necessarily a particular religion as such. To him mythology is different from myth, as myth is a subjective truth which defines a culture while mythology are certain rituals, symbols, and stories which communicate this subjective truth. Although religion and mythology at times share a common space, mythology is not a subset of religion.

On the other front, there have also been studies that establish a close link between mythology and political parties and shed light on how they use mythology for political agenda setting, not only in India but in many other countries of the world. Using mythology as a marketing tool to show and acquire power, and ultimately financial power, is no different than mobilizing perception in their favor and also creating their own brand image and for themselves. Researchers like Mohamed and Gunter (2009) and Luo (2009) have worked on how several political parties all around the world have used mythology of some sort for agenda setting.

Several researchers have concluded that they use marketing principles for the propagation of their ideologies, and one can analyze this from several election campaigns, both in India and abroad. Wring (1997) writes that the political parties use different means and modes of communication to which they need to pay a lot of attention. White & Chernatony (2002) mentions that political parties have used these principles over the years and have been quite successful in propagating their respective ideologies.

The use of mythology for achieving political power has been a worldwide phenomenon and has been in practice over the years for propagation of a certain kind of political agenda. Murphy (1995) classifies the use of mythology in the USA elections as 'political mythology.' He questions the power of mythology and writes that in any democracy, the constitution is the most powerful and potent tool which controls the manner in which the nation operates. But, when it comes to mythology revolving around the founding fathers, the constitution kind of takes a back seat. Is mythology really so strong that it affects something as fundamental as the constitution of a nation, and thus the politicians use it as a potent tool?

The formation of the European Union (EU) is an interesting case. Some of the countries forming the EU are poles apart from each other—with different language, cultures, and beliefs. But today they are a force to reckon with sharing a common currency and economic strategies. Using mythology and mythical symbols like bull and elephants by the EU is a clear case of use of mythology in political practices. Manners (2010) concludes that one can't keep all the ideological difference in the back seat and work together. What is important is to note how long forgotten mythology is used to justify what they are doing. Consciously or subconsciously mythology has always been a very significant instrument which tells people the manner in which they should be thinking.

In the Indian context, research has been done to understand how mythology is being used by political parties to arouse the nationalistic sentiment of individuals. One of the researches speaks about how the nuclear program and the weaponry systems of India and Pakistan and the claims behind it has more to do with the

chauvinism in the region and the use of mythology for certain agenda. The use of names like "Agni" and "Prithvi" by India and "Ghauri" and "Ghazni" by Pakistan for the missiles, are claimed to be indigenous (Zook, 2000). The key is to pick the issues which is either commonly known or close to one's heart whether it is Agni, Prithvi, or Apollo (McDonald, 1969) and most of the themes denote power.

There has been much discussion about the impact of the Internet on society, social interaction, and communication (Carey, 1989; Civin, 2000). The research investigated the association between communication behavior across different media, not just interests and preferences, which may not be highly correlated with actual behavior. It was inferred by Birnie and Horvath (2002) that communication is a product of culture, and culture determines the code, structure, meaning and context of the communication that takes place. It merits mention that the traditional media such as music, particularly the folk and tribal music, dance, drama and puppetry, tableaux, and *jhanki* coexist in India with the modern communications media. These folk forms are usually taken with religious fervor and bring the poor and rich together. Obviously, religion has a very important role in the formation of identity of each society; so has been its arts and culture. India has often been marked by its rich traditional heritage of tribal/folk arts and culture. These folk art forms maintain their ethnic nature through which they make socialization possible. So, folklore has an important role in handing the social norms, and religious knowledge and wisdom, and in keeping the social structure stable.

Since one of the authors has a background in anthropology, the anthropological instinct dominated in learning the use of very selective metaphors from mythology for acquiring power—social, economic, religious, and political. We place here three sets of examples:

1. The *Behurupia* (the mimicry character in the villages and small town) imitates the mythical characters to show their art and attract people's attention. The exercise may be for monetary gain or reaffirming faith in religion.
2. Religious *yatras* (procession) or *Jhanki* (tableaux) that often use mythical characters and once again gaining people's attention for a particular religion/ideology.
3. Personification of mythological characters for political gains.

Communication happens for social, economic, religious, and political purposes. These are all done with the objective to take the people back to the glorious mythical past and to bring in more people into the fold—social gain.

*Behrupiya* (impersonation) is a traditional art form. It has its history and was considered as a popular source of entertainment for people in many parts of India and the neighbouring countries. However, from the beginning, this was practiced by most marginalized people, who made their living out of it.

*India's Communities* (Vol. 1.1: 179) mentions that according to Ibbetson (1881) the name is derived from the Sanskrit word *bahu* meaning 'many' and *rupa* meaning form, and denotes an actor, a mimic, and one who assumes many forms or characters or appearance. It often created identity confusion. Historically, the characters were copied from mythology, but with the passing of time other characters in present day social form are also taken such as a policeman, a priest, or other figures that create a commotion. It is reported that "on the wedding night . . . a sub inspector of police was loudly accusing the wedding organizers of stealing electricity. The family members and organizers were desperately attempting to sort things out. When the tension was at its height, the inspector performed a grand salute and revealed himself to be Giridhar the Behrupiya. Amidst peals of laughter from the wedding party he collected his Baksheesh of 100 rupees and left . . ."

#### Behrupia as Lord Hanuman

Behrupia in costumes of Lord Shiva Shiva

The Behrupias are local people who usually personify the mythical characters of God Rama, God Shiva, God Hanumana, Goddess Kali, and other mythological characters. In an interview with Kishan Behrupiya it is mentioned that they can steal from the present and save from the past—they can be gods and monkeys and even in present day context, could be Bollywood stars. The performers are always males. The daughters cannot and traditionally there were never women Behrupias, "*Humare bhi ijjat hoti hain. Hum gareeb hote hain lekin humarey aurat ghungat pehente hain*" (We also have a sense of dignity. Although we are poor people but our women live in veils). They also believe in status, in respect. They sing, they mimic, and they compose lyrics with the promise of a little money. The theory of power and thirst for money remained at the center. They are very popular at village fairs and provide amazing joy to the children who swarm around them.

*Jhanki* (tableaux) is a traditional form of expression of mythological, religious, historical, and political actions to impress upon the viewers who otherwise are deprived of such experience. The power of expression is used for social gain. It is described as a group of models or motionless figures representing a scene from a story, from history, or from mythology. It is done by one or more persons suitably costumed and posed. Usually, throughout the duration of the display, the people shown do not speak or move. Through these expressions it is easier to lead into extended idea for deeper understanding.

The *Gada* (club) of Lord Hanuman, and bow and arrow of Lord Ram are sold in any toy shop.

The *Jhanki* is organized on various important occasions when a large number of people gather, and the organizers get a chance to expose it to the mass. Although traditionally it was for the exposition of religious and mythological scenes, over a period of time the social development, as well as political issues, have become the theme of these

Government-organized *jhankis* project development, as well as social achievements. It has become customary to organize tableaux during the national Republic Day parade where the states as well as select organizations display their *Jhanki*.

Unlike Behrupia, which remained more or less a rural phenomenon, the *Jhanki* is an urban event. The themes of *Jhanki* have also undergone change due to the changing profile of the people interested in it. Youth culture do get particular consideration. Often, social issues get space in these tableaux. A newspaper (Indian Express) reported that "[w]hile crime against women has taken center stage everywhere, the same was visible in the tableaux of Republic Day at a government college where the district-level function was organised. The police department's tableau depicted crime against women. A helpline 0161-1091 was also displayed which is only for the complaints against women. In addition, the scene showed shattered women sitting against a dead body. The police authorities said that since they had started a woman helpline number, they thought of promoting it through their tableau. Also, the tableau of the health department highlighted the drive against female foeticide, and made people aware of their rights. The tableau of the social security department showed *Lohri* of girls, giving a message to celebrate the birth of not only boys but also of girls. A total of sixteen tableaux of various departments were shown in this function which included dairy development, fisheries and agriculture department."

The use of tableaux for spreading religious messages is not limited to one religion. The display of scenes from Hindu religious texts and personification of mythological characters have been very common. Ramlila refers to a ritual tradition of religious tableaux or short plays performed in northern India in September and October during the birthday festival of Prince Rama, the hero of the Ramayana epic and an avatar of God Vishnu. The character of Lord Ram, the religious icon of one sect of Hindus, Ayodhya—Rama's birthplace, Lord Krishna—the mythical hero of Mahabharat, Lord Shiva and demolition of a religious place has been used by all—the social, political, and the religious leaders

The political use of tableaux has also been reported. *The Times of India* (December 29, 2011) reported that "CM tableau share space with idols in *Navratri* (an important Hindu festival that continues for nine days) pandals." It writes, "[t]ake it as a PR

exercise for the next year's elections or simply an indication of his popularity, tableaux of chief minister .... have also been installed at Durga pandals in the city during the Navratri festivities this year." This phenomenon is not limited to any one political party.

Tableaux have also been used in spreading the messages of Jesus Christ. The Times of India reported that "[a] Christmas procession, Manav Mukti Divas, was taken out in the city (Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh) on Sunday." The procession, comprising of several tableaux, started from Naini and passed through various areas spreading the message of universal brotherhood. The tableaux depicted the life and birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Mythological Cult and Political Power

The cult of mythological world is popular and the concerned political parties started popularizing it using all marketing techniques and different media to influence the mind of the receivers. The political parties in India are conscious of the fact that religious communicators impress a large number of followers. There have been customary use of religion, and associated myth and mythological characters to strengthen their power of communication, as people take their communication as power. It works in a cyclic order and brightens their scope of gaining popularity—social status. On the face of it, the main players may not use it directly, but there are enough examples that their people have used mythological symbols in their mass campaign.

There are enough examples of personifying the role of mythological characters from different religious texts. With the increasing use of mythological symbols and mythological characters in Indian politics, it is not uncommon to see political figures in tableaux. We present here a few displays that project different political figures in the presentations at different occasions:

- Mr. LK Advani the BJP supremo is projected as Arjun who gets worldly advice from Lord Krishna to win the war against Duryodhan (evils).
- Mr. Narendra Modi projected as Lord Krishna, a pathfinder for Pandavas.
- The use of mythological characters does not discriminate on gender or political ideology.
- Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, chairperson of the ruling federal party depicted as the Goddess Durga aiming to clear the social evils.
- Former Chief Minister of Rajasthan projected as the Goddess Durga.
- Former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh projected as another form of goddess.

Political parties fielded the actors who gained popularity by personifying mythical characters on television. It may be worth noting that India, particularly rural India, did not have many cinema and in this context, expansion of television has been phenomenal, particularly in the 1980s. This made it possible for the actors to reach to the hearts of millions of television viewers. The religious texts were converted into films and television serials; some of them became massively popular. There is documented proof that this popularity led some of them to gain the people's trust and become powerful politicians. Political parties who believed in setting their agenda using the mythological characters to arouse people's sentiment fielded such popular characters to gain power.

Deepika Chikhalia, an Indian actress, rose to fame playing the role of Sita, the mythological superwoman in India's first super hit mythological television serial Ramayan (1987-88) based on the Ramayan epic adored by millions of Indians in India and neighbouring countries. The serial was so popular that many women rescheduled their daily chores so that they will not miss an episode. Her fame as a religious icon prompted Bharatiya Janata Party to place her as party candidate in the 1991 parliamentary election from Baroda constituency in Gujarat, her state of origin. She won the election and was Member of the Parliament from 1991 to 1996. The rural folks took her role so seriously that when Deepika reached them in their homes, the elderly women touched her feet and wanted to be blessed by Sita, wife of the Lord Ram.

Another mythological character from the same television serial, turned into a politician. Following his immense popularity in the serial where he personified 'Ravan,' the actor was also elected as a Member of Parliament from Sabarkantha constituency in Gujarat in 1991, on the Bharatiya Janata Party ticket.

The real life wrestler-turned-actor Dara Singh who played the role of Hanuman in the same serial, was nominated to the upper house of the Parliament of India (Rajya Sabha) in August 2003. He served in that position between 2003 and 2009.

Another example, from mythological epic Mahabharat, is Mr. Nitish Bharadwaj. Nitish, a veterinary surgeon and film actor from Mumbai, who starred in Marathi and Malayalam regional movies in India, is best known for his role as Lord Krishna in popular television serial, Mahabharat. Nitish was nominated to contest parliamentary election as a Bharatiya Janata Party candidate from Jamshedpur (then Bihar) in 1996. He also won the election and was member of Indian Parliament from 1996 to 1998 (the 11<sup>th</sup> parliament was dissolved in 1998).

It is important to note that Nitish represented in parliament the Bihar State (now Jharkhand), which he had never ever visited before. The only credit he had was he earned national attention by his portrayal on TV as the mythical hero of Mahabharat—the Lord Krishna. Jamshedpur is an industrial city, surrounded

by tribal villages and a supporter of Nitish Bharadwaj told that when his convoy reached the villages around Jamashedpur, the people took him as Lord Krishna coming to them. They did not want to hear that this Krishna has come only for the votes.

There are many such examples where the artists who acted as mythological character won the hearts of people and finally garbed the power of politics. Mr. NT Rama Rao and Mr. MG Ramachandaran are in the list who played the mythological roles in South Indian movies and finally made it to the chair of Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh respectively. Similar examples can be seen in the case of regional parties. These instances include but are not limited to BSP in Uttar Pradesh, which uses Ambedkar and caste, which is directly related to mythology or it be the case of Shiv Sena which uses the myth around regional leaders and public figures like Shivaji and Tilak (Vineet 2012).

### Conclusion

Through the three examples above and the analysis of pan-India cases, it appears that the use of mythology and mythological characters in India tradition has been utterly for some sort of gain—financial, social, religious, or political. As written earlier in one of the author's papers, the communication keeps the gains flowing and the gains keep communication coming in a cyclic way (Sinha 2011). Only the context and the quantum of gain changes as per the situation. Though the Indian examples are not unique and have been experienced elsewhere also in developed as well as developing countries, the present paper gives a glimpse of how the religion and mythology have been used judiciously for gains—personal or collective.

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## Communication for Capacity Building of Volunteer Graduate Monks in Thailand

*Phramaha Boonchuay Doojai*

### Introduction

The Kingdom of Thailand, formerly known as Siam, is known for its tourism industry, Buddhist temples, and long-reigning monarch. Thailand's population is relatively homogeneous, however, this is changing due to immigration. Ethnic Thais make up the majority of the population with 75 percent of all inhabitants. Thai-Chinese make up 14 percent with the remaining 11 percent made up of various other groups.

The language of the central Thai population is the educational language and administrative language. Several other small Thai groups include the Shan, Lue, and Phutai. Malay and Yawi-speaking Muslim's language of the south comprise another significant minority group (2.3%). Other groups include the Khmer; the Mon, who are substantially assimilated with the Thai; and the Vietnamese. Smaller mountain-dwelling tribes, such as the Hmong and Mein, as well as the Karen, number about 788,024. Some 300,000 Hmong, who ironically have lived in this area for more generations than the Thais themselves, are to receive citizenship by 2010.

Thailand is also home to a significant number of registered foreigners from Asia, Europe, and North America, as well as an estimated several hundred thousand illegal immigrants, some of which are natives. Increasing numbers of migrants from Burma, Laos, and Cambodia as well as nations such as Nepal, India, along with those from the West, and Japan have pushed the number of non-nationals residing in Thailand to close to 2 million in 2008, up from about 1.3 million in the year 2000. A rising awareness of minorities is slowly changing attitudes in a country where non-nationals, some having resided in what is now Thailand



longer than the Thais themselves, are barred from numerous privileges ranging from healthcare, ownership of property, or schooling in their own language.

The population is mostly rural, concentrated in the rice-growing areas of the central, northeastern, and northern regions. However, as Thailand continues to industrialize, its urban population—45.7% (in 2010, according to the National Economic and Social Development Board) of the total population, principally in the Bangkok area—is growing.

Theravada Buddhism is the official religion of Thailand and is officially the religion of about 97% of its people. However, the true figure lies closer to 85%, Muslims are some 10%, and 5% are other religions including Christianity, and Hinduism, especially among immigrants. In addition to Malay and Yawi speaking Thais and other southerners who are Muslim, the Cham of Cambodia in recent years began a large scale influx into Thailand. The government permits religious diversity, and other major religions are represented, though there is much social tension, especially in the South. Spirit worship and animism are widely practiced.

Thailand is perhaps the only country in the world where the king is constitutionally stipulated to be a Buddhist and the upholder of the Faith. For centuries, Buddhism has established itself in Thailand and has enriched the lives of the Thais in all their aspects. Indeed, without Buddhism, Thailand would not be what it is today. Owing to the tremendous influence Buddhism exerts on the lives of its people, Thailand is called by many foreigners as “The Land of Yellow Robes,” for yellow robes are the garments of Buddhist monks. In view of the increasing interest the world is taking in Buddhism and in view of the fact that Thailand is one of the countries where Buddhism still exists as a living force it will not, perhaps, be out of place to know something of the story of how this great faith reached that country.

Buddhism has also shaped much of Thailand’s culture. The early Thai architecture, literature, and sculpture all reveal Buddhist influence. It had been a Thai tradition that Buddhist males above twenty years of age must practice at least three months of monk hood after which they could retreat to their normal lives. The Buddhist monks are treated with utmost respect throughout the country. The monks drape themselves with saffron colored robes. Golden stupas and steeply sloping roofs characterize the Buddhist temples. They also serve as the hub of important social activities. Most of them are situated in the countryside.

The Muslims in Thailand are mostly Sunnis. The country allows its minority to practice the religion of their choice. The king attends important Muslim religious festivals and those in the service of the government are allowed leaves on special religious events. There are about 2,000 mosques and 200 Muslim schools in Thailand.

Christianity was introduced in Thailand during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and has played an important part in the country’s progress. It was the Christians who introduced surgery, smallpox vaccinations and also trained the doctors in Western medicine.

Confucianism is a Chinese ethical and philosophical system based on the teachings of Confucius who was a Chinese sage. This is practiced by a minority of the Thai people.

The Hindus have their own religious shrines and also operate separate schools where they teach Sanskrit to the students. The Sikhs in Thailand perform many charitable functions such as providing free school for the poor children and also aiding the aged.

Although the majority of Thailand’s population is both Buddhist and ethnically and linguistically Thai, there are regional linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic differences. The presence of many non-Thai groups also contributes to the diversity of the country. Thais generally emphasize their commonalities and the strengths that diversity contributes to their country. When differences are expressed, it is generally in subtle ways that require linguistic and cultural understanding to grasp. Thais’ emphasis on tolerance, maintaining smooth relationships, and a sense of order creates a generally welcome environment for all.

### **Buddhism and Social Problems in Thailand**

Although social problems can be linked to religion, it would be naive to attribute them directly to religion. Essentially, it is the lack of true religion in the heart of the people that is the root of all problems. Sometimes we take extraneous components of a religious institution, such as religious statues, buildings, and even traditional practices, rites and ceremonies, to represent religion and forget to really live the religious teachings. As a result, religion is rarely allowed to play its proper role in our personal and social lives. This leads to many problems, one of the most unfortunate of which is the fact that we hardly realize how much we lack true religion. The vicious circle seems to blind us and problems in society continue to multiply.

To be fair, problems like violence, fraud, corruption, and prostitution are not peculiar to any one particular society or nation. They are widespread social phenomena prevalent in all parts of the world, not excepting the most affluent or highly developed nations. Social problems may arise from a variety of causes and conditions for which religion can hardly be held responsible. For example, hunger and lack of suitable means for a decent livelihood may drive a basically harmless individual to an act of crime or violence. The long-term centralization of political and economic powers due to greed and megalomania may cause

corruption and poverty on a large scale in the country. In fact, there are many non-Buddhist countries in the world today that are plagued with social problems of all descriptions and have not known peace for a long time. Sometimes the problems are directly related to their own religious fanaticism, which is a truly unfortunate situation.

Thai society owes a great deal to Buddhism for many of the blessings that it enjoys. There is no doubt that if more people earnestly practiced the *Dhamma*, 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 little room left for violence, fraud, and corruption. Even if only one precept of the five was adhered to, it would surely contribute tremendously to society. Indeed, it is not Buddhism that is a problem to society, but not following it in the proper way.

Buddhism is a religion of practice. This means that in order to derive benefit from the religion one needs to exert oneself and put it into practice. To call oneself a Buddhist without trying seriously to follow Buddhism will not mean much in terms of practical results. Although Thailand is a Buddhist country and the majority of the population practices Buddhism, that is hardly half the story. There still remains the need to practice the *Dhamma*, and if this is done by a sufficiently large number of people, peace and prosperity will certainly result, and there will be less problems in society. Buddhism is a time-honored religious system; its teachings have stood the test of time for more than twenty-five centuries. The *Dhamma* is universally true and eternally valid. All that is needed is a sincere and earnest commitment to it.

### The Challenge of Modernization

Throughout its long history Buddhism has been exposed to various cultural forces and traditions in different lands. The religion has demonstrated its excellent resilience throughout and has survived the most trying developments in human history. The scientific and logical appeal of the Buddhist teachings have consistently won new adherents and admirers in whichever lands the religion found its home. With the rapid increase of modern communications, creating an ever-shrinking world, Buddhism, which originated in the East, finds itself locked in contact with contemporary Western culture. Interestingly, new developments are taking shape.

Unlike her neighbors, which had been colonized by Western powers at one time or another, Thailand has always maintained relatively cordial relationships with the West. When the first 'farangs' (Caucasians) called at a Thai port, they were welcomed with open arms by the locals and were treated with great hospitality

and friendship. Thai kings and royalty even donated large pieces of land and allowances to Christian missionaries and generously supported them in their activities. Christian churches, schools, and hospitals were built. Western culture and customs were introduced. As Thai people have always maintained a friendly attitude toward foreigners, Western influence continues to spread throughout the country, unchecked and unhindered, under the most favorable circumstances possible.

Of course, the West is at clear advantage in many respects. Modern technology impresses the Thais and the Western system of education has been adopted in lieu of the traditional one. People with a Western education have been regarded as a progressive class, while their counterparts were branded old fashioned and conservative. Gradually, more and more Thai intellectuals began to identify themselves with Western thought and values; unconsciously, they isolated themselves from traditional Thai society. In an effort to modernize the country in line with the 'more civilized' nations, Western prototypes of development were blindly followed—sometimes with devastating effects. Modernization came to be identified with Westernization and traditional Thai values came to be regarded, mostly by the so-called Western educated class, as incongruous and anachronistic in the modern Thai context.

The impact of Western influence on modern Thai society is too obvious to require any detailed examination. One may say that almost every aspect of Thai life has been touched by it—from the structure and form of government to the system of education, the economic system, commercialism and consumerism, to the arts and entertainments (where the impact is the strongest, especially among the Thai youth). Amidst these developments, Thai Buddhism is faced with a new challenge. From the perspective of religion, the impact of Christian missionary efforts in the country has been less than impressive. Despite the missionaries' best tactics and the enormous amount of money pumped into the country to support their activities, Christianity has won, until recently, only a marginal number of Thai converts. However, because Western culture is closely connected with Christianity and vice versa, what it lacks in philosophical value it amply makes up with cultural appeal and influence. This is all the more difficult for Thai Buddhists to deal with. Christianity spreads covertly in the garb of modernization and Western culture, and Thai Buddhists are caught unaware in the unremitting currents of these new developments.

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. Under the Westernized system of education, a large part of the Thai population has been alienated from Buddhism and traditional Thai culture. Gradually, Thai Buddhism finds itself more and more restricted in its role as a social and religious

force. The intellectual leadership long enjoyed by the Thai Sangha has become much less distinct in the present, thanks in part to the misdirected process of modernization and in part to the inability of the Sangha to cope with the new developments sweeping through the country. Thus, the role of many Sangha members nowadays is more or less confined to little more than the performance of rites and ceremonies, although there are quite a few progressive monks who struggle hard to participate more meaningfully in social welfare programs and environmental issues.

So far Thailand's modernization efforts seem to have been concentrated mostly in the cities, and it is the urban populace who have shared most of the benefits from those programs. In rural areas, monks still hold social leadership among the underprivileged, with whom they maintain a comparatively close relation and cooperation. Village monasteries fulfill people's social needs and monks still fill their traditional roles of helping the villagers in their spiritual and temporal concerns. The monkhood is still greatly respected and provides a much needed opportunity for the poor to acquire a higher level of education, something not always accessible otherwise. Monks in forest meditation centers play a key role in preserving fast diminishing Thai forest reserves and wild life. They hold great potential to contribute to society. Thus, Western influence in Thailand may be drastically different in urban and rural areas, especially where Buddhism is concerned.

Fortunately, the encounter of Thai Buddhism with the West has also produced some very positive results. Many Westerners who visited the country have found in the Buddha's teachings an answer to their spiritual quest and have made Buddhism their adopted religion. Quite a few have even taken to the robes and spent the rest of their lives in monastic training. Although these cases are mainly personal spiritual pursuits, they do have an indirect influence on the Thai religious scene as a whole. These Thai trained Western monks have also played a crucial role in the growth of Buddhism in the West in recent years. Inspired by their commitment and exemplary conduct, many Thai Buddhists have begun to reexamine their religious and cultural identity. They become more serious in Buddhist studies and practice, hitherto somewhat neglected, and have grown more appreciative of Buddhist values and culture. Ironically, it is through Westerners that some Thais begin to appreciate their own spiritual heritage. Although the scope of their influence in Thailand is still limited, this development is nonetheless worth mentioning.

To say that Western influence in Thailand represents a challenge or threat to Buddhism may be an overstatement, yet its impact must be recognized. Whether the religion will continue to prosper, or how long it will survive the onslaught, will depend on how well Buddhists respond to the calls of their conscience and responsibility. As the Buddha himself stated prior to his passing away, the progress and decline of the religion lie in the hands of Buddhists. It is they who will be responsible.

### Communication for Capacity Building of Volunteer Graduated Monks

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU), Chiang Mai Campus, Wat Suan Dok, Chiang Mai Province, which is the institution that produces graduates to serve the religion and society, realizes that rural area in northern Thailand serve as home to numbers of ethnic groups. Those ethnic groups are now facing several problems. Monks should have played an important role in improving the lives of ethnic groups according to the Buddhist missions. It also expands its mission to increasingly spread the teaching of the Buddha to various ethnic groups. The university, then, has established a project called the Volunteer Graduated Monks for Hill Tribe Community Development (Dhammacarika) with five main objectives: 1) to spread the teaching of Lord Buddha to the people in the hill areas 2) to develop spirituality in accordance with the Buddhist teachings and response to the government policy and the national plan of economical and social development 3) to provide education of language, duties of good citizens under the democratic regime as well as arts and culture 4) to suggest and create awareness on conservation of forests and watersheds according to the Queen conception and 5) to teach and signify the basic principles of health care and the danger of drugs and AIDS in the target areas in northern Thailand.

Since the year 2543 B.E., the project has not been able to achieve its goals as it should. The main cause is the project management team which includes the executive committee, project staff and volunteer graduate monks. The management team has lack of ideas, skill and technique in the process of work, together with a lack of evaluation and summary review in order to understand the work systematically and continue to develop the project more effectively.

### Communication for Capacity Building of Volunteer Graduated Monks

To support and strengthen the project of volunteer graduate monks for hill tribe development to work effectively, MCU Chiang Mai Campus and Thailand Health Promotion Fund (THPF) has been collaborating to develop a project of the Communication for Capacity Building of Volunteer Graduated Monks. It is because monks are the personal media that have the power to work to improve the health of the people in the past. It is, therefore, necessary to restore and develop the monks as a personal media, by promotion and development of ideas in the new method of community development such as community participation in the development process, development from bottom to top, the use of communication and traditional media as a tool for development. Moreover, it is also to focus on the process of working, skills and techniques to practice in development work. This is to help volunteer graduated monks to understand and be made aware of the situation of social change in order to understand the cause of health problems people are experiencing. When the volunteer graduated monks understand the cause of the problem, they will be able to develop and apply the teachings of

Buddhism to enable people to practice, to be free from suffering. There is also an opportunity to enhance and develop the network of development monks, both within the volunteer graduated monks' network and also other networks such as the Phra Dhammacarika monks' network, Buddhist monks' network, and network of monk students who studied in Buddhist universities.

The Communication for Capacity Building of Volunteer Graduated Monks project has three main objectives:

1. To develop capacity on idea, process, skills and techniques of communication in community development work for the volunteer graduated monks.
2. To stimulate and encourage bringing about activities aimed at promoting community health by the network of volunteer graduated monks.
3. To promote and develop the network of volunteer graduated monks and the development monks in northern Thailand to have the opportunity to share experiences and learn together and strengthen each other leading to an increase of efficiency in the operation of the northern development monks' network.

The project's major targets are: 7 staff members of the project of volunteer graduated monks for hill tribe community development (Dhammacarika), 6 leaders of volunteer graduated monks, and 29 volunteer graduated monks. At the same time, the second target groups are: 15 fourth year students of MCU, 30 monks under Phra Dhammacarika project and 20 monks of the nearby areas, as well as community leaders and youth leaders in the target areas, including NGOs working in ethnic community in the northern Thailand. The areas of operation in the project the volunteer graduated monks for hill tribe community development (Dhammacarika) have been selected to work (focus on ethnic groups) on are the four northern provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son and Lampang; covering the ethnic groups of Karen, Hmong, Lua, Lahu, Akha, Yao, Lisu and Tai, with a duration of 18 months which began on July 1, 2550 BE to December 31, 2551 BE.

#### Activities in the Development of Potentiality of Volunteer Graduated Monks

The project of the communication for development of volunteer graduated monks has determined the main activities for the development of the volunteer graduated monks are as follows:

1) *The Orientation*: It is to explain the program guidelines for the communication for development of volunteer graduated monks, analyze the past, present and future, roles of the monks, and temples in community development. There is also the presentation of work experiences and transferring to the next

generation (the data of community, lifestyle, language, group leaders, activities, problems and obstacles, problem solving, suggestions such as what should be done and what should not be continually done and the precaution for new members of volunteer graduated monks to apply in the program) in order to let volunteer graduated monks in respective areas (Ashram/network) to learn to participate in the study and analytical process of community problems.

2) *The workshop*: It is to build up knowledge and understanding of communication and traditional media. The volunteer graduated monks and youth leaders are able to analyze the features and utilization of traditional media in the area of work. They are to analyze elements of communication (S-M-C-R) and the utilization in their work, the activities set up, traditional media (elements, models, values, roles, resurrection, succession and development to apply to solve community problems), analysis of problems, situations, competencies of members of the community, Buddha's Dhamma and community problems solving and the development project and activities from the community database.

3) *The development of the sub-projects*: It is to enable volunteer graduated monks to develop and apply the knowledge in the areas such as analysis of problems and competencies of the community, analysis of media and communications in the community, analysis of traditional media in the past year, decision of selecting traditional media and use to solve community problems (use the past and present dimension to analyze factors, models, values, roles and functions, resurrection, succession and development to apply to solve community problems) and setting up the activity according to the database.

4) *Review and selection of the sub-projects*: It is the process of sending sub-project to the experts to review and recommend, in order to develop the project more concretely on the basis of community participation, analysis of problems and community competencies, applying the concept of communications, traditional media and Buddha-Dhamma in the activities to resolve the problems of the community.

5) *Revise of the sub-project of the volunteer graduated monks*: It is the process to let volunteer graduated monks to revise the sub-projects upon the recommendation of the experts by having a summary of recommendation and then following up the volunteer graduate monks to adjust the project in the area.

6) *Support the implementation of the program*: It is to support volunteer graduated monks and youth leaders to plan activities in detail under the slogan "drive the project on knowledge basis," using traditional media and communication as tools by having the central officers working as mentors.

7) *Promotion and development of the volunteer graduated monks' network*: It is to organize the forum to exchange experiences both within the network and with external networks on how to apply the concept of communication, traditional

media and Buddha-Dhamma in the program, on working process, problems and solutions and lessons learned from the work. The working group of the project will attend the forum in order to assist by adding more contents, skills and summarizing of key issues to enable the target groups to learn together and apply in the respective areas.

8. *Development of competencies, skills and networks of youth leaders:* It is to develop skills, the bravery, leadership, teamwork and the use of various media by observing the behavior of target groups, analysis of existing media and competencies in the community, as well as the interest of youth leaders and activities to share experiences related to working processes within the network and with other networks.

9. *Development of board of directors and staff:* It is to develop Board of Directors and staff by applying the concept of work such as communication, traditional media, community analysis, participation, cultural rights of ownership, working side by side, financing and accounting, problems at work and how to solve them.

10. *Continually following up and monitoring:* This is part of the evaluation. There are two forms of evaluation. The first one is down track in the area to inspire and share solutions in the area and strengthen in the community level. The second one is to follow up by having a forum of network to strengthen the network and to enable the network to be involved in solving problems.

11. *Evaluation:* The evaluation measures are both quantitative and qualitative assessments, such as effectiveness/results, output, outcome and working process for learning. It is to observe that it meets the objectives or not (how much), because of who and how, including how to make it sustainable. It is to see the competencies of the volunteer graduate monks on understanding the concepts used in the operation, attitudes and skills to convert ideas into action, see the competencies of youth leaders on understanding the concepts used in the operation, attitudes and skills to convert ideas into action, participation in thinking, decision making, planning and implementation. It is also to see the process of running activities such as applying the concept in other projects, participation of the community, and understanding of the community. And it is to view the activities and the results.

### **Volunteer Graduated Monks: Developed Competencies**

One aim of this project is to empower the volunteer graduated monks who work in the hill tribe community to develop their own competencies as a personal media. The project is based on the new concept of community development such as participation of the stake holders, bottom up development, the use of communications and traditional media as a tool, including process of work in order to develop skills and techniques of community development work, to

enable volunteer graduated monks aware of situation of social change, and lead to understanding the cause of existing community health problems, able to apply the Buddha-Dhamma and teach people to be able to free oneself from suffering, and having good health continually.

In addition, the operation also aims to enhance development and expansion of its work out to other development monks, both within the volunteer graduated monks' network and external groups such as the Phra Dhammacarika group, development monks group, group of students in MCU, and monks teaching in public schools in Highland, both as a learning network and collaborative/supportive network. The support will be between leaders of the network and members of the network. The support will also be on the job training for students to experience working in respective Ashram in the area.

The operation also emphasizes on shifting this ideas and lessons learned from the project to implement in other areas. Knowledge gained by volunteer graduate monks and networks built by them will lead them to help each other. This will also be an important lesson of MCU, the Buddhist institutions, to develop its way of training new generation monks.

#### *1. The competency of learning process development*

The first phase of the project focuses on developing their knowledge, the concept of volunteer work. Therefore, the project has a centralized manner. The project, then, serves as the main organizer in organizing training, while the volunteer graduated monks attend training program as trainees. The project is role is to support knowledge, concepts, skills, techniques, process of work, including understanding how to work effectively, while the volunteer graduate monks play the role in implementing the program in their respective areas as proposed in sub-project. During implementing the program in the areas, the project does its best to support the volunteer graduated monks to run the activities regularly throughout the program. Therefore, the project and the volunteer graduated monks thoroughly understand the history and activities of the project.

The evaluation found that the volunteer graduated monks have the potential to learn well, although in the beginning, they seem to be opposing. However, when they start working by their own effort, and facing the problems, they try to find ways to manage the problems by way of finding consultants, reviewing the program, assessing the results and then improving their work well in the later phase.

#### *2. Ability of running activities*

In the middle phase of the project, when the volunteer graduated monks start their activities in areas, the project then provides opportunities for them to play an important role in the project activities. And their role in running activities in the area gradually increase and becomes more concentrated. They can apply the concept,

skills, techniques and working processes to work on their own. Throughout the program, field staff visit the areas to prepare the volunteer graduated monks before implementing the program, empower and support them during the implementation of the program, including summarizing and analyzing the work, and observing the improvement of the volunteer graduated monks.

### 3. *The potentiality of building up participation*

The programs implemented in the areas by the volunteer graduated monks are assigned to have more stake holders to participate. It emphasized on building the sense of ownership of the projects and activities as well as playing a major role in the activities, while the volunteer graduated monks play the role of moderators in order to run the program to reach the final results.

The results showed that, in many communities, elders, youths and most of the members of the community participated in the program, starting from analyzing community problems, traditional media that can be used to create a healthy community, seeking ways to adjust the appropriate traditional media to build healthy community and then act by using selected traditional media to create a healthy community, and finally receiving the result out of the activities. The volunteer graduated monks play as an intermediary to coordinate the cooperation in the community.

However, to ensure sustainability of activities for health promotion, the volunteer graduated monks have to gradually reduce their roles, at the same time; support the community to involve in thinking, making decision, planning and sharing of the benefits. When the more and more community members participate, community will create awareness in strengthening community, while the volunteer graduated monks still play an important role in driving the program, because of trust on them by the community members still fully remain.

### 4. *The potentiality of corporation*

The implementation of the program in the area, need to seek more partners and networks related to the project. The volunteer graduated monks are trained to act in coordination with corporate partners such as Sangha organizations, schools, Phra Dhammacarika(s), NGOs working in the area as well as both central and local government agencies. As a result, many areas received funding for ongoing activities such as Summer Group Ordination activities, which are supported financially by many Sub-district Administration Organizations in the area.

### 5. *The potentiality of application of Buddha-Dhamma in the program*

From operating activities in the target areas through the analysis of the problems faced by the community and analysis of media that can be applied to create a healthy community, the volunteer graduated monks found that, in fact, the traditional media chosen by communities hide the principles of the teachings of the Buddha such as

Five Precepts in Kin-Wor festival of Mae Phak Lae village that leads to reduction of alcohol consumption, harmony in making "Khanom Thien" of Sala Chiangtong village creates involvement and harmony between Buddhists and Christians.

More importantly, the volunteer graduated monks apply the "Four Noble Truths" in the analysis of community problems, causes of those problems, situation in the community that has no problem, and how to solve and end the problem. This is considered having used the Buddhist principles i.e., the Four Noble Truths as a tool throughout the program.

### 6. *Ability of summary and present the results*

After the end of the implementation, the volunteer graduated monks would have developed their own capacity in the summary, evaluation and reporting project performance in documentary form. It is found that the majority of volunteer graduated monks can summarize the results in detail, prepare it in book form, and submit to the project the volunteer graduated monks for hill tribe community developed. It includes writing articles published in newspapers, journal magazine and the project booklet. More importantly, the volunteer graduated monks have the opportunity to present the work in academic forums such as Academic Conference of International Association of Buddhist Universities (IABU) at MCU, Wang Noi, Ayutthaya, Annual Conference, MCU, Chiang Mai campus, etc.

## **Kin-Wor (New Year): Example of Significant Change in Community**

Kin-Wor (New Year) means happy, joy and fun as what's new converts into the life. Life, with something new, would mean happiness to the people. In late January or early February of each year, Lahu Festival of Kin-Wor, which is the traditional New Year, is being celebrated at Ban Mae Phak Lae, Tha Kor Sub-District, Mae Sruay District, Chiang Rai Province of the ethnic Lahu. In Ban Mae Phak Lae there are two groups: Lahuni (Red Muser) and Lahuna (Black Muser) with a large number of 130 households that either belong to Christianity and traditional belief. In the year 2547 BE, volunteer graduated monk has been sent to work in the village. At the beginning, it was difficult to work because Lahu do not really have faith in Buddhism, lacks knowledge and understanding the role of the monks. After working on rehabilitation of Kin-Wor festival, the volunteer graduated monks are learning about life and culture of Lahu as well as the rehabilitation of good things in the community and conservation of those good things that are about to disappear from the community. The learning is as follows:

### 1. *Learning on Kin-Wor Festival*

Kin-Wor Festival of traditional Lahu has been held for a very long time, for a period of seven days divided into four days (New Year) for women and three days (New Year) for Men. Kin-Wor Festival is the festival to welcoming the Wor (God) which is the highly respected God of the ethnic Lahu. It is because the God helps in

protecting people and building peace. Kin-Wor Festival, in the past, is held for only ethnic Lahu, other ethnic groups outside the village are not allowed to join the festival. Another impressive thing noticed by the elders is, in the past, Kin-Wor festival had no alcohol and drugs. Tea was always served to welcome the visiting relatives at home in order to avoid controversy, distress, and physical and mental suffering amongst the community members.

Pu Jong, a local scholar, also mentions that the Lahu festival of Kin-Wor is a tradition to honor women. The first four days of the Kin-Wor festival are for women, after which the three succeeding days are for men. The reason behind this is that women work harder than men, are more patient, and sacrificial.

### *2. Kin-Wor festival and Buddhist teachings*

The year that the volunteer graduated monks participated in the Kin-Wor Festival is different from previous years. This is because before the start of the festival, volunteer graduated monks together with local scholars, community leaders and members, had organized a meeting regarding the festival, that is based on their own Buddhist values.

It was already decided that the festival would be different from the previous years, which was riddled with dispute such as debt in all families and inseparation of the community. The families did not want to spend money on beer, drink alcohol unreasonably, and lose their honor.

The Lahus agreed—by the time of the King of Thailand's 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary—to do good by observing the five precepts taught by the Buddha. In addition, this effort would benefit each family, including the whole community. The ban on alcohol, excessive drinking, and other rowdy behavior during this year's festival also spares the villagers from unwanted expense.

### *3. Five precepts and beliefs of Lahu*

Lahu is an ethnic group that is able to maintain their indigenous culture and traditions. The Lahu people, especially the elders, still visit each other at night. Tonight alcohol served is not served to welcome visitors, especially at Pu Jong's house. On the Buddhist holy days, he always abstains from eating meat and refrains from working. Also, he never consumed alcohol or drugs.

This lifestyle of ethnic Lahus actually corresponds to the Buddhist way of living. But the Lahus do not realize that what they are doing corresponds to the doctrines of Buddhism because there was no monk to teach the community. Nowadays, Ban Mae Phak Lae remains calm and peaceful due to improved relationships in the community, in the school, and in the temple. This harmony can be traced to the members' faith and culture, and the integration of Buddha-Dhamma by avoiding bad, cultivating good, and purifying the mind. The goal is the happiness, and peace of mind and body of the community members of Ban Mae Phak Lae and people around it.

## **Conclusion**

The project of Volunteer Graduated Monks for Hill Tribe Community Development (Dhammacarika) has been implemented for more than ten years, with various interesting experiences and lessons learned, starting from the selection of the areas of Phra Dhammacarika project and copying the methods of work of the Phra Dhammacarika project, then developing new concrete areas with trials from time to time. Only after the communication for development of volunteer graduated monks project has been implemented to support the process of work for a year and a half, has the volunteer graduated monks began to develop variety of competencies such as the competency of learning process development, ability of running activities, the potentiality of building up participation, potentiality of coordination, the potentiality of application of Buddha-Dhamma in the program and ability of summary and presentation of the results.

At the same time, the result that appeared at the community level is accepted to be more successful than the previous years. There are several concrete examples, such as "Kin-Wor festival" that leads to planning and working to stop or reduce alcohol consumption in the Ban Mae Phak Lae community in accordance with the teaching of the five precepts and temptation; "Chao Hua Sil festival" and the practice of not harming life, by way of vegetarianism and lives by reducing alcohol consumption in Ban Hua Sala community. "Khanom Tien festival" and building up harmony amongst community members of different faiths in Ban Sala Chiangtong; "Marriage ceremony" and promotion of relationship of community members in Ban Mae King community, in accordance with the teaching of bases of sympathy; "Yao Lui Fai festival" and the promotion of self-sacrifice in accordance with the teaching of virtues for a good household life, etc.

These are considered to be the significant findings from the learning process of the volunteer graduate monks leading to the improvement of the implementation process of the project of the Volunteer Graduated Monks for Hill Tribe Community Development (Dhammacarika).

## A Critical Exposition of John Hick's Religious Pluralism and the Thai Church Today

*Tassanee Srivorakul*

### Introduction

For John Hick, the knowledge of God or the "Transcendent Reality," can only be understood from the personal subjective standpoint. People cannot know God outside of their personal experience and so any claims of truth about God are only based on their perceptions of God and not of God as He really is in Himself. For sure, God can only be known as He is perceived, He cannot be known as He is in Himself. This idea reflects in Hick's life a Kantian influence; the idea that people can only know the phenomenon and not the *noumenon*, that is, to know a thing as it appears to us and not as it is in itself.

The author's experience of different world religions like Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam has broadened the formerly myopic and narrow view of religion in general and the Christian religion in relation to other world religions in particular. It also kindled in himself, a conviction that if people are to find lasting peace in this world and if religion is to play any meaningful role in bringing about this world peace and harmony, then it is most important that there be a radical shift in orientation, theology, social outlook within and amongst religions. The shift has to be a movement away from an exclusivist approach to religion on the one hand, and an inclusivist approach on the other. The exclusivist approach is the position that the fullness of truth resides only in my religion and all other religions must bow to my own religion and accept it as the only way to salvation and that outside my own religion, there can be no salvation. While the inclusivist approach, which from a general point of view, gives the impression of showing understanding and acceptance of other religions, but on closer scrutiny reveals an approach that holds the idea that all other religions outside of one's own have only an aspect of



the truth and that the fullness of the truth still resides in his/her own particular religion and all other religions can offer salvation insofar as the salvation offered is a way of accepting his/her own religion. Put differently, the inclusivist approach believes that all other religions are extensions of one's own religion and salvation issues from one's own religion and extends to others. These two approaches to religion have been well represented by two world religions, Christianity and Islam. Both religions continue to make what Hick refers to as *epicycles* in their attempts at reinventing the wheel and trying to accommodate other religions into their worldview.

### Critical Examination of Hick's Religious Pluralism

One response to religious diversity is to deny or minimize the doctrinal conflicts and to maintain that doctrine itself is not as important for religion as religious experience and that the great religious traditions are equally authentic responses to Ultimate Reality. This is one form of religious pluralism. Its most ardent defender has been John Hick. Utilizing Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) distinctions of noumena (things as they are in themselves) and phenomena (things as they are experienced), Hick argues that a person's experiences, religious and non-religious, depend on the interpretive frameworks and concepts through which one's mind structures and comprehends them. While some people experience and comprehend the Ultimate Reality in personal, theistic categories (as Allah or Yahweh, to mention two), others do so in impersonal, pantheistic ways (as nirguna Brahman, for example). Yet others experience and comprehend the Ultimate Reality as non-personal and non-pantheistic (as Nirvana or the Tao). We do not know which view is ultimately correct (if any of them are, and for Hick the Ultimate Reality is far beyond human conceptions) since we do not have a "God's eye" perspective by which to make such an assessment. One common illustration of the pluralist position of experiencing God is the Hindu parable of the blind men and the elephant. In this parable, God is like an elephant surrounded by several blind men. One man felt the elephant's tail and believed it to be a rope. Another felt his trunk and believed it to be a snake. Another felt his leg and believed it to be a tree. Yet another felt his side and believed it to be a wall. Each of them experience the same elephant but in very different ways from the others. In our experiences and understandings of the Ultimate Reality, we are very much like the blind men, argue such religious pluralists, for our beliefs and viewpoints are constricted by our enculturated concepts.

Hick argues for what he calls the "pluralistic hypothesis": that Ultimate Reality is ineffable and beyond our understanding but that its presence can be experienced through various spiritual practices and linguistic systems offered within the religions. The great world religions, then, constitute very different but equally valid ways of conceiving, experiencing, and responding to the Ultimate

Reality. He uses different analogies to describe his hypothesis, including an ambiguous picture of a duck-rabbit. A culture that has ducks but no familiarity with rabbits would see the ambiguous diagram as a duck. People in this culture would not even be aware of the ambiguity. So too with the culture that has rabbits but no familiarity with ducks. People in this culture would see the diagram as a rabbit. Hick's point is that the ineffable is experienced in the different traditions as Vishnu, or as Allah, or as Yahweh, or as the Tao, and so on, depending on one's individual and cultural concepts.

One objection to pluralism of this sort is that it leads to a dilemma, neither horn of which pluralists will want to affirm. On the one hand, if we do not have concepts that are in fact referring to Ultimate Reality as it is in itself, then we have landed in religious skepticism. On the other hand, if we do have concepts that describe actual properties of Ultimate Reality, then we are not epistemically blind after all, and therefore we could, theoretically at least, be in a position to make evaluations about different claims that are made about Ultimate Reality from the various religious traditions.

Another version of religious pluralism attempts to avoid some of the difficulties of the pluralistic hypothesis. For the aspectual pluralist, there is an objective Ultimate Reality which can be knowable to us. Unlike the pluralistic hypothesis, and in very non-Kantian fashion, valid descriptions of the noumenal are possible. Peter Byrne argues that each of the different major religious traditions reflects some aspect of the transcendent. Byrne uses the notion of natural kinds in order to clarify his view. Just as natural gold has an unobservable essence as well as observable properties or qualities—being yellow, lustrous, and hard—Ultimate Reality has an essence with different experienced manifestations. The Ultimate Reality manifests different aspects of itself in the different religions given their own unique conceptual schemes and practices.

One challenge to this form of pluralism is that, since each of the religions is capturing only an aspect of the transcendent, it seems that one would obtain a better understanding of its essence by creating a new syncretistic religion in order to glean a more comprehensive understanding of the Ultimate Reality. Also, since religious adherents are only glimpsing the transcendent through properties which are enculturated within the various traditions, descriptions of the Ultimate Reality cannot offer adequate knowledge claims about it. So one is left with at least a mitigated form of religious skepticism.

Another argument against Hick's religious pluralism is that he failed to take into account the idea of religious particularism. Religious Particularism resembles much exclusivism that Hick condemns. In Hick's opinion, judging from what goes on in mosques, churches, synagogues, temples and gurdwaras, the intention

and purpose of worship of these different religions, it can only be surmised that all these religions are doing exactly the very same thing, that is, offering worship and adoration to an Ultimate Reality that is referred to variously by each of these religions. They each approach this Ultimate Reality from the perspective of their history, culture, and experiences. Hick would go on to argue that Jesus of the Christian religion was just a God-conscious person who did not rise from the dead. Jesus is divine in much the same way as the Buddha and other great founders of religions. To follow this argument to its logical conclusion would be to deny the historical fact of the Christian faith and to deny that Jesus did not die to save the world; rather, the Christian faith is one of many legitimate ways of finding salvation or liberation. In taking this position, Hick eliminates the possibility of specific, historical divine revelation. The problem with this kind of argument is that while Hick posits an Ultimate Reality that is supposed to be the ground of the Christian religion, and in fact, the ground for all religions, he does not describe the way and manner of approaching this "Ultimate Reality" in concrete form. What Hick does is simply to leave us with a property-less, content-less Ultimate Reality. He does not supply the ways and means of responding and relating with this Reality. Unlike the God presented in Christianity which has a concrete face and could be approached through the person of Jesus Christ, Hick's Ultimate Reality has no concreteness to it.

An important point to note in Hick's condemnation of religious exclusivism is that, Hick as a pluralist, also falls into the problem of exclusivism. This is so because Hick believes that he has a virtue that Christian or Muslim does not have, that is, the understanding that there are many paths to reach God, or what he refers to as the Ultimate Reality. He would have the Christian and Muslim abandon their belief in their faith's deity and all the work of salvation that is attributed to it as false since they are mere metaphors or symbols. By holding to such a position, Hick also commits the exclusivist fallacy as he accuses the other religions. Hick, like other exclusivists could be accused of "ideological bias" since he insists that his own position is the correct one and that other religious positions should be abandoned in favor of his own position. While it is true that the Christian and Muslim faiths could be referred to as particular religious exclusivists, Hick could also be accused of being a generic exclusivist. Otherwise, if Hick's pluralistic hypothesis is correct, then it means that the central doctrines of the world's great religious traditions are all false. Oftentimes, pluralists like Hick use analogies that try to describe how all religions lead to the same Ultimate Reality. For instance, they would use analogies like many roads leading to the tops of mountains or blind men touching an elephant. What Hick and other pluralist failed to do was to show how they knew that each religion's road led to the top of the mountain. Does Hick or any of the pluralists have a superior vantage point?

The fact remains that, as much as Hick would accuse Christianity and Islam and other religions as being geographically and historically conditioned, he and

other pluralists must also admit that they are also culturally, geographically, and historically conditioned in the sense that if Hick had been born in Saudi Arabia he probably would not have become a pluralist! If this is so, then the question has to be asked as to how it is possible for Hick, and other pluralists claiming to have risen above their cultural conditioning, to be able to see things more clearly than everyone else. Could it be also argued, just like Hick did, that the pluralist is just another blind man touching his part of the elephant? Or has Hick taken the position of an onlooker who sees the entire elephant and considers the blind men as foolish because of their religious and exclusivist narrow-minded dogmatism. Without a sound response to these questions, Hick and other pluralists could justifiably be considered as arrogant and narrow minded in their pluralistic agenda.

His reason for considering new religions and primitive religions as inauthentic—and as such, not capable of giving salvation—is weak since some of the so-called "primitive religions" have also stood the test of time and their adherents seem to be benefitting from belonging to them. Hick posits that the test of a good religion is in the way it inspires its advocates to live moral lives. If this is the case, then how does he explain moral atheists who help their neighbors but reject the presence and reality of a transcendent God and even strongly oppose traditional religion as delusional and false? Hick did try to rationalize this away by positing an impersonal Reality which is also affirmed in many Eastern religions. But the problem with this affirmation is the question of how this can be the basis of personal virtues such as kindness and compassion? It would make more sense to affirm a personal God who directly influences its followers into concrete practice of virtue. Hick's assertion that all religions are equally capable of bringing salvation seems to beg the question since it is not an observable fact that all religions actually give salvation on an equal basis. It makes more sense to reasonably conclude that we have no idea whether all religions are or are not equally capable of granting salvation.

### Critical Evaluation of John Hick's Religious Pluralism and the Thai Church

In the present interconnected world, it is more and more likely that the daily living of people will be influenced by more than one religion. Many people live next to neighbors of another faith. Perhaps their children will marry someone from another religion. We can call the new generations as "the interreligious people." Some people prefer co-existence and mutual respect to converting the marital partner into his/her own faith. There is a great need for religious scholars to put their knowledge at the service of studying the many and various ways of faith.

In Thailand, Buddhism is a major religion. There is not much direct dialogue between Christians and Buddhists. Even though the Church in Thailand realize

the importance of proclamation as proposed by the Universal Church, most Christians still express their preference for peaceful coexistence and mutual respect.

According to Hick's ideas of interreligious dialogue, the Thai Christians would be aware of the inner worth of the person because all faiths participate in the Divine. Among different faiths, there is a growing awareness of the sublime dignity of the human person, who stands above all things and whose rights and duties are universal and inviolable. Every human person must have ready access to all that is necessary for living a genuinely human life. A genuine human life is realized in a peaceful and harmonious world.

Peace can never be attained through violent means. Now, it is time to summon the positive elements of religion to promote peace. Interreligious dialogue is what we need in the present time. Interreligious dialogue is one mechanism that can counter the violence caused by religious conflicts.

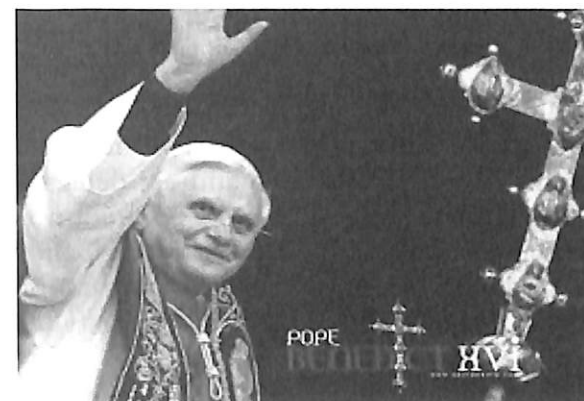
The leaders of the interreligious dialogue group are taking important roles. Each religion should have an active leader so that the aim of promoting world peace will be realized.

Another person whom the author wants to share his ideas about Interreligious dialogue is Raimundo Panikkar. He said that, "[d]ialogue is not a mere methodology, it is an essential part of the religious act par excellence, loving God above all things and one's neighbor as oneself" (Panikkar, 1984, 48). His ideas supported that human beings are on a pilgrimage to the Beyond. Religious traditions assist them in their pilgrimage. Today many religions are experiencing a revival, resulting from exaggerated nationalism. Besides, man is recognizing his finite limitation and the need for sharing experiences. Due to the globalization process, pluralistic neighborly living has become common and man begins to see the geographically isolated cultures and religions at his doorstep. A deep need is felt for understanding them, and begin to dialogue and share. We encounter the beliefs of other religions in dialogue with them, then we understand each other. In spite of the fact that we may not speak the same language, we need to understand each other more through dialogue.

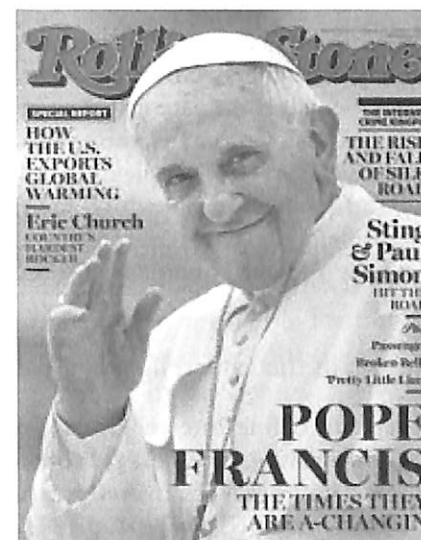
Panikkar in his book, *Interreligious Dialogue*, takes us for a dialogue journey between Buddhism and Christianity to make us understand the spirit of dialogue. Dialogue between religions is a human exchange of each other's faith to understand one another that helps us to learn from them and treat each of them like we treat ourselves. Dialogue transforms the heart of each participant searching for truth. Our present pluralistic situation necessitates a new approach to dialogue which is a religious encounter in faith, hope, love and brotherliness.

Religions like Buddhism and Christianity can walk hand in hand in dialogue supporting one another's weaknesses and augmenting one another's strengths. Thus Interreligious Dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity in Thailand is very important in achieving peace and good will, with love and respect for each other.

In our time, the Thai Church is more aware of Interreligious Dialogue. We can see from the documents that came from the Vatican and so many activities that the priests encouraged their followers to join, and also we have the good example like the Popes.



Pope Benedict XVI (2005-2013)  
(Image from Corbis Images)



Pope Francis (2013- ).  
(Image from Rollingstone)



(Image from Wikimedia Commons)

Pope John Paul II (1978-2005) in his visits to various countries around the world made it a point to meet with representatives of the various religions. While in Rome, the Holy Father is ever available to address delegates of interreligious symposia and pilgrimages. In all such encounters Pope John Paul II upholds the epochal need to promote a “civilization of love” among believers of the diverse religions. In speaking to bishops coming from Afro-Asian countries, he demanded that interreligious dialogue should be their pastoral priority (Chia 2001, 67).

The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (FABC-OEIA) is a very strong group for Asian Churches. This group talks a lot about dialogue such as; Dialogue with other religions, by saying:

Dialogue with other religions, which are significant and positive elements in the economy of God’s design of salvation, is an integral dimension of the mission of the Church, which is the sacrament of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus. In Asia today, Christians, though they are a “little flock” in many places, animated by the Spirit who is leading all things to unity, are called to play a serving and catalyzing role which facilitates interreligious collaboration. This call challenges all the Churches to common witness as they grow together towards fuller ecumenical communion. (Chia 2001, p.87)

And also gives the definition of the Interreligious Dialogue by saying:

If a statement is necessary to define interreligious dialogue, it might go something like this: “A conversation between persons of different minds, where the dialogue-partners come to learn from the other, to witness to the other, as well as to convert the other (Chia 2001, p.181).

Dialogue is not just a new tool for the proclamation of the Good News but dialogue is the very nature of man and God. God dialogues in Himself as Father,

Son and the Holy Spirit. God takes man into this Trinitarian community through dialogue of His Word made flesh in Jesus Christ. Jesus in His turn dialogues with man in building the Kingdom of God. Christians as builders of human community have to follow the same way of dialogue.

The Catholic Church in Thailand has two Archdioceses (Bangkok and Tharae-Nong Saeng) and eight dioceses (Chanthaburi, Chiangmai, Nakornratchasima, Nakornsawan, Ratchaburi, Suratthani, Ubonratchathani, and Udonrthani). Even if we have a very long history, more than 400 years, we are still a small group, not even 1%, when compared with the total population of Thailand. So only this small group of Thai Christians are aware of the proclamation especially about interreligious dialogue in Thai society.

Thanks to the Second Vatican Council, it is a new landmark in the relations of the Church with the followers of other religions. The Church has fostered a new attitude which has taken the name of “dialogue.” As God sent His son Jesus to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God, so we are sent to proclaim the same Good News to the world. Thus a Christian not only receives the Good News with faith, he/she also shares the Good News with everyone by faith, hope, love, respect, and sharing by dialogue in daily life.

### **The Author’s Journey of Interreligious Dialogue in Thailand**

I would like to share my first experience in Interreligious Dialogue with the reader. First of all, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude and sincerest thanks to the Congregation of the Infant Jesus Sisters, my generous sponsor who gave me this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity of working at Petchaboon Province, Northern Thailand. In the year 2004, I was assigned to be an assistant of my superior, Sister Wantana Kitmongkol. My responsibility was to teach Catechism to young school children—mostly of the Hmong ethnic minority. Being a Catechist one would hardly expect to have so much exciting experiences or any unusual encounters. But for me, it was a lucky opportunity for in that year (2004), the Diocese of Nakornsawan had initiated a plan to promote Interreligious Dialogue among young school children. The Pastor of the church in charge of the school where I worked had appointed me to be responsible for our school’s participation in this activity. My first experience interacting with people of different religious beliefs will remain indelibly imprinted in my heart.

Now nine-years since that experience, everything is still vivid in my mind. The most unforgettable one was the experience I enjoyed when I took our school children to go camping with children from other schools in the neighbouring area. There were about 200 young campers of different faiths—Christian, Buddhist and Muslim. Our camping activity lasted three days. My mind is still full of images of

Petchaboon, a beautiful province with a rich history and culture. I was both humbled and honoured by the gracious and generous hospitality that was extended to me and other members of the group by the hosts who accompanied us and all who greeted and welcomed us with open arms. The deep commitment of the monks, priests, and sponsors of the schools we visited amazed me.

One of the most remarkable aspects of my journey was meeting and camping with some of the children who have different religions. During that camping, we visited a temple, a mosque and a church. I was very grateful for the opportunity to spend a long time in conversation with them, and also members of the team. It was a life-enriching experience for me. I will never view that part of the world the same again.

When we visited the mosque, I found my own spiritual life rekindled as I heard the call to pray from the delicate minarets across the skies at dawn of each day. People who were so kind and generous gifted us with their lifestyle, revealed gracious hospitality and devoted service to humanity. I was changed by this experience because I believe, for the first time in my life, I saw in action what I have always been taught: devotion to God, service to humanity. My heart resonated with the call to pray from that mosque we saw and visited. As a Christian, this pilgrimage deepened my faith. It also enriched my understanding of and appreciation for Islam. I am very grateful to God for this wonderful experience.

At the Buddhist temple, I was impressed by explanations from a monk about Buddhism and Thai traditions. I understood them more deeply.

For the church, I am a Christian so it was not hard for me to concentrate during the time I attended Mass. It helped me feel proud of my own religion and I can see the beauty of harmony when we prayed together and for each other.

Each character in our group had their own ways of processing the details of this journey: photos, discussions, jokes, songs, games, running commentaries, new friends and prayers. Many of those moments are permanently imprinted in my mind and heart.

Although it was our first journey and working with total strangers, we were treated like old friends. Perhaps the most wondrous part of the entire trip was the relationships we established with the Northern people and their children. They treated us as if we were VIPs. I must note that I learned a great deal about Islam from the members of the group. I have more friends. I found the level of commitment and sacrifice among the campers an example that all Christians and others of different faiths should seek to imitate.

I was privileged to get to know people living and promoting a harmonious co-existence. Particularly in the networks of schools, the sense of commitment among

the teachers and students was palpable. This was a life-changing experience. I will remember and cherish it always.

Finally, I can say that I love Interreligious Dialogue because it helps me to understand, respect and accept others as they are. I believe that most religions in the world have the same END that is to guide their people to be good and to be close to the Ultimate and Absolute Being.

## Conclusion

According to John Hick's pluralistic hypothesis, God has many names because God's general revelation is revealed to everyone and the world's religions sprang up as different responses to the divine reality, embodying different perceptions which have been formed in different cultural and historical circumstances. All of these perceptions have their strengths and weaknesses and when they are in dialogue they can learn from one another. I totally agree with Hick on this point and indeed, when followers of the different religions can sincerely make an effort to meet each other half-way, at least in terms of having sincere discussion about how to live together and about aspects of each other's religions that are conflicting, then perhaps they might begin to see that there are more things that bind us together than set us apart.

No one religion should consider itself "the" religion, or as having a monopoly to the truth. God exists and has revealed himself to everyone and every religious tradition. It is with arguments like these that Hick rejects Karl Rahner's idea of "anonymous Christian." Karl Rahner's idea of the "anonymous Christian" is that there are members of other religions to whom Christ has been revealed and so they are saved. The common criticism of this idea is that nothing is stopping anyone from calling Christians "anonymous Buddhists" or "anonymous Muslims." Hick abandons the idea of the anonymous Christian and says that all religions can be viewed as equally salvific, if we understand Jesus being God as a metaphor. According to Hick, Jesus never taught that he was God. Others referred to Jesus as God because he lived in complete openness to God's agape love. Everyone who lives in complete openness to God's agape love, has God also incarnated in him or her. This was a very bold and courageous statement and position for Hick to take considering that he came from a fundamentalist background and was a Christian.

Furthermore, as a way of contributing to world peace and understanding, it is important that adherents of different religions, in discussing and reflecting on each other's truth-claims, also consider discussing our common humanity and the possibility that God also lives in people of conflicting truth-claims. Once we can all agree to this fact that God is with everyone and with most noble religious traditions, then, it would help us to be patient with each other and be sensitive to

each other's truth-claims without having to fight over which one was the best. It is also important to note what Hick said, that, most of the quarrels and divisions seem to exist more within particular religious traditions than amongst different religious traditions.

It is obvious from Hick's arguments that he was trying to make a distinction between a world religion and a world theology. He does not advocate the abandonment of the religion of a person's religion in favor of another or even in favor of a universal religion where everyone worships pretty much the same. What he advocates rather, is a different but universally acceptable theology that interprets religious experience within any particular religious tradition as well as in the other great religious traditions. These, for Hick would include non-theistic religions of Buddhism, Marxism and even Humanism.

On a critical note, I would like to say however, that one has to really wonder how much Hick's proposal to resolve this contradiction would be practicable and realistic except on a theoretical and academic level since most religious traditions accept their individual truth claims with a lot of convictions, emotions and passion. Hick did not seem to take into account the fact that there are different traditions and understandings even within a given religious tradition. While some in a particular religious tradition might be liberal or moderate, some others in the same tradition might be conservative and ultra-orthodox and might not be open to Hick's hypotheses and proposals.

I do not believe that Hick's hypothesis offered an adequate solution to the problem of the conflicting truth-claims of various religions and this is partly because it did not sufficiently satisfy the criteria for being free from internal contradictions and did not accurately describe religious phenomena. Hick's hypothesis seems to suggest that each religious tradition is like a blind man who only feels an aspect of an elephant and concludes that a part of the elephant is equivalent to the sum total of the whole elephant. Neither of the religious traditions is able to see the elephant for what it really is. In other words, none of the religious traditions has a total and complete grasp of the Real. The problem with Hick's analysis and hypothesis in stating that no one tradition's truth-claims is complete is that, the truth-claims were not necessarily intentionally contradictory, they are simply different. Hick also presumes that all the world's religions are speaking about the same reality. On what grounds does Hick make that assumption that the Real for one religion means the same thing for another? Most of the world's religions use particular language medium to understand and relay their truth-claims and for the most part, these religious languages, some of which are quite ancient and unique, might mean quite different specific things to specific audiences.

As a Thai Christian, I believe that the Church in Thailand needs to dialogue with other religions. This will be the better way of sharing and enriching each other. Our world now yearns for peace and justice. We can do it. Just do it!

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## SECTION III

### *Communication Networks*

## Open and Closed Communicating Networks: Sectarian and Liberal Muslim Movements in Indonesia

*John Mansford Prior, svd*

### Facing Uncertainty

Today, the ever widening and ever more complex globalizing market economy is causing a paradigm shift in cultural understanding. Thousands of villagers from the outer islands migrate to Java, Kalimantan, and Papua each year looking for work. Schooling shifts youth from the interior to the coast, from village to town, from the outer isles to the Islâmic heartlands of Java. Even small towns have more than doubled in size in the past forty years and the rate is accelerating, whereby ever more people are being dislodged from their cultural and linguistic roots. Sixty years ago in eastern Indonesia the *kyai* (Muslim teacher) and the *pendeta* (Christian pastor) were the main source of outside news as radios were few and literacy not yet universal. Today, Facebook is the most frequently used website (31 million Indonesian users in 2010), satellite disks bring CNN and other commercial value-systems into once remote villages, while 80 percent of the people have access to handphones.

Contrasting cultural trends are mutating the traditionally tolerant religious culture of the country, triggered by a creeping secularist tendency driven by modernity and post-modernity, particularly among those who wield power. While Islam and Christianity maintain a public role in each sphere of Indonesian life, secular values such as competition, social standing, and consumerism are making inroads. Neo-liberal capitalism believes that millions of selfish, price-driven decisions, when left to market forces, will create the greatest social good. In such an economy, driven by a lust for power and an insatiable greed for wealth, there is little room for authentic religious humanism, for conscience or



compassion, for dignity or equity, for solidarity or cooperation, for integrity or sustainability. Unsurprisingly, a practical agnosticism holds sway among many of the stakeholders at the center of power. As the urban elite find that they can function in a modern environment without reference to God, religion is relegated to cultural expression.

Change is not occurring at the same rate in all the islands, nor in each place within any one island. Some areas are more secularised than others. Change is proportionate to available access of any one place to the globalizing economy.

Thus the modernization process—brought to eastern Indonesia by the Christian Churches with their schools, clinics, and training centers—is highly ambivalent. Modernization has brought about an openness to the wider world, but precisely that openness is marginalizing the fragile cosmic cultures. Modernization has brought about unprecedented material wealth for some, but is creating a poverty unknown in the past; it has replaced a cyclical, relaxed, “natural” sense of time with a lineal, “historical” model which grasps at the future, where the fittest survive and the weak are marginalized. Modernization has given meaning to the individual over the group, and in doing so is fragmenting the symbolic world of the group so that the individual is becoming inarticulate: the individual is losing the language in which to express self-worth. In this situation of creeping social anomie, threatened groups tend to become authoritarian.

This process increased rapidly when the global market economy was welcomed by the local Indonesian elite in 1968. While the political and economic stakeholders enjoyed unprecedented wealth, economic “development” also brought about social disruption, mass displacement and rapid urbanisation which led to inter-communal violence once the military repression under Soeharto eased (since 1998).

### Contrasting Responses

#### *The Threatened Seek Security*

The collapse of the repressive regime of Soeharto in May 1998 led to a weakening of the national narrative and an upsurge of regional forces. Economic and political instability has accompanied Indonesia’s return to democracy.

One reaction is an exclusivist ethno-religious sub-culture arising among those threatened by rapid change. Those battered, and thus threatened, by rapid social change, the vulnerable poor and the marginalised who feel unable to build up solidarity across religious and cultural boundaries, tend to pull up the drawbridge and batten down the hatches. This is leading to a ghetto mentality, where religion is reduced to internal ritual and community identity, and when provoked can tend

towards violence. In 1999, under Soeharto’s successor, President Habibie, a local autonomy law was passed. Unintentionally, this law gave room for local, extremist elements as the national(ist) narrative became submerged in a wave of local ethnic and religious accounts. Fundamentalism reared its head in organizations such as *Jemaah Islamiyah* and *Laskar Jihad*. Radicalized after the September 9, 2001 incidents in New York and Washington, Indonesia experienced terrorist bombings in Bali (2002 and 2005), the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta was bombed in 2003 and the Australian Embassy the following year. Thus an exclusivist ethno-religious sub-culture is growing among the vulnerable, visible among both Muslims and Christians.

Over the past dozen years the country has been moving in many directions simultaneously. The three-decade conflict between Aceh and the central government was brought to a peaceful end after the tectonic earthquake and tsunami of December 26, 2004. The prohibition of DVD and films considered “sexy” has turned into a new form of censorship, while police “sweep” entertainment centers and discothèques during the Ramadhan fast. Meanwhile more than 150 local government laws have been establishing Shari’ah law in certain areas (such as in women’s dress); these have been declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court, but have yet to be abrogated. Virtually un-implementable laws of sectarian bias have been promulgated in education (2003), the arts (the Anti-Pornographic Law of 2008) and health (2009). Some 200 places of worship have been attacked over the past few years, mostly Christian. Majorities are still intolerant of minorities as for instance when Muslims in 2010 prevented the Huria Kristen Batak Protestant Church (HKBP) from celebrating their weekly liturgy in Bekasi (a satellite city of Jakarta). Incidents multiply as the police and central government are slow to intervene.

Not all sectarian moves are aimed at Christians; the *Jama’ah Ahmadiyah* movement, from which Indonesia’s founding President, Sukarno, drew key ideas, has been declared heretical (1980, 2005) and, after being attacked by members of the *Front Pembela Islâm*, is being proscribed by certain local government authorities. These can be seen as political manoeuvres where religion is being manipulated to further political and economic goals.

The central and local governments are increasingly and systemically corrupt and rife with political cartels. Of the fifty cities surveyed by corruption watch, the most corrupt was found to be Kupang, the capital of the majority Christian Province of East Nusa Tenggara.

Very briefly, the movers and shakers of these extremists communicate through the traditional networks of mosque, and *madrasah* and *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools). Handphone and cyber-communications are focused on their own

internal networks and with their sympathisers. There is very little proselytizing in the public media. They work to convert both *kyai* (traditional Muslim leaders) and influence, and on occasion intimidate local and national politicians, which is possible in a country where civil society is weak. The most visible communicative sign of this network is the long flowing white robes of wandering preachers. What makes headlines are extremist incidents, such as those outlined above. It seems that this minority press group has succeeded in casting the dominant stereotype of intolerant religion in the public sphere.

Where, then, are the forces of moderation?

#### *Security in Open Communication*

*Jaringan Islâm Liberal* (Liberal Muslim Network or JIL) came into existence as a response to exclusivist reactions to rapid change. This paper is concerned with the communicative means of this movement in contrast to that of the more fundamentalist movement to which it is responding.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century Luthfi Assyaukanie and Ulil Abshar-Abdalla (b. 1967) were instrumental in establishing *Jaringan Islâm Liberal* or The Liberal Muslim Network. Luthfi caused great controversy when he penned an article on the principles of Liberal Islâm in the largest circulation national daily broadsheet, *Kompas*, on November 2, 2002. Abdurrahman Wahid (1940-2009), former long time chair of the *Nadlatul Ulama* (NU) mass movement (1984-1999), was a forceful influence behind this move. Abdurrahman Wahid, and afterwards Ulil Abshar-Abdalla greatly influenced the traditionalist NU movement to embrace secularism. The two sides of Liberal Islâm are the intellectuals and the activists (NGOs). The latter gave birth to "Progressive Islâm" which emphasizes practical social change. When the Islâmic organisation like *Muhammadiyah* and NU were not reforming fast enough, NGOs were formed as alternative movements for the younger generation.

Reacting to these forces, *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI, the Council of Ulama of Indonesia) issued a *fatwa* in 2005 which proscribed liberalism, secularism, and pluralism, three key terms advocated by liberal-progressive Muslims. This in turn spurred on the "creative minority" of liberal Muslims to mainstream their secular ideology.

#### **Secularism**

For progressive Muslims, secularism is essentially about the State not interfering with peoples' beliefs and worship, for religious truth is individual and personal, the choice of conscience. Secularism allows freedom of religion, is fair towards each religion and religious group, and supports tolerance in interactions

between beliefs and forms of worship. Secularism does not privilege any religion; a secular society does not pressurize people in religious affairs.

Indonesians rarely distinguish between secularism and secularization. The key distinction is between an "empathetic secularism" and a "suspicious secularism." Empathetic secularism acknowledges the need to separate religious authorities from State authorities, and views beliefs (creed) and worship (cult) as belonging to the private sphere, protected by the principles of freedom and democracy. Meanwhile activities and *akhlaq* (ethical code) and social interaction (civilization) belong to the public sphere, overseen by the State in a democratic manner rooted in moral and public principles. Religious communities nurture a cultural space that insists on the priority of God.

Experience suggests that while the private sphere is rarely negotiable, we can, nevertheless, dialogue about our beliefs and worship in a rational manner. We can share our experiences and beliefs about mysticism, transcendental realities, and such honest dialogue will strengthen secularism, for we shall better understand and appreciate one another. Social tolerance is limited to the public sphere and does not impinge on the private sphere. Thus there is no hint of relativism.

Progressive Muslims are not simply discussing the issue of secularism, they are heavily engaged in mainstreaming their vision of faith in a secular society in order for Indonesian society to become more democratic. Progressive Islâm assumes that a key to progress is to implement secularism, liberalism and pluralism in the practical politics of the country. Progressive Islâm acknowledges that there are a number of secular models available and Indonesia needs to implement a secular model in tune with Islâm and with the pluralistic nation. A secularism that is dynamic and adaptable will result in a balance between religion and the State. Such a contextualised, dynamic concept of secularism is rooted in the State ideology of *pancasila*. In the *pancasila* Muslims meet both with the universal values of Islâm and also with respect for, and celebration of, diversity.

#### **Liberalism**

The second key concept proscribed by MUI but embraced by progressive Muslims is liberalism. Liberalism is the acknowledgement of civil rights and civil liberties which are enshrined in the rule of law such as freedom of thought, opinion, religion and conviction. A secular State should not divide the people into a large majority and small minorities as all enjoy the same rights and privileges. The more traditional, authoritarian form of Islâm arose from an orthodox consensus in *fikih*, *kalam*, philosophy and *tasawuf* which had been dominant in Indonesian Islâm.

Civil society was first exemplified at Madinah “*antum a’lamu bi umûri dunyâkum*” (you know better about worldly matters). *Akal*—the intellect—makes humans higher than the angels. Liberalism did not come only from Greece, but also from Persia which moreover developed mathematics and modern medicine. Progressive Muslims revere three great Islâmic scholars, the medical genius Ibn Sina (980-1037), the philosopher Ibn Rusyd (1126-1198), and al-Ghazali (1058-1111), theologian, philosopher, jurist and mystic. Most influential in the *pesantren* of Indonesia—Islâmic village schools—is the synthesis of al-Ghazali where *ijtihad* is almost identical with liberalism.

Liberalism recognizes two spheres, the sphere of *iman* (faith, belief) and the rational (intellectual) sphere. *Iman* and *akidah* are individual matters and are autonomous. Faith/belief should be left to the authority of the individual. Issues of the State and of society belong in the public sphere. Contemporary issues that liberal Islâm has been thinking through include democracy, human rights, gender justice, the parity of religions, and contact between religions. These conversations do not follow traditional patterns and are not confined to unalterable texts. Allah and his Messenger instruct believers to use their intellect: liberal Islâm gives parity to faith (*fides*) and the intellect (*ratio*).

### Pluralism

The third key concept being mainstreamed by progressive Muslims is pluralism. The simple reality of Indonesian cultural and religious pluralism has become a necessary political principle. Threats to Indonesia’s integrity need to be met by tolerance, openness and equality. Dialogue can open the way to greater mutual understanding, tolerance and civility. In a plural society and in a secular State, the State has no right to declare one religion as correct and the others as false, as has happened when the *Jama’ah Ahmadiyah* movement was banned by the government in 2010. In a secular State, all religions must be held to be true according to their followers. This ethical principle is the foundation of social justice, equality of rights and harmony between followers of different religions.

Looking at the major role religion is playing in public life, the concept of the marginalisation of religion from public life needs re-evaluation. Which aspects of religion are being privatised and which aspects need to play, and indeed are playing a role in public life? Aspects such as ritual, worship and belief belong to the private sphere. The State and public institutions have no right to interfere in this subjective sphere, namely *ḥabl-un min-a ‘l-Lâh*, “one’s personal relationship with God.”

This conviction leads to a willingness to learn from each other. Pluralism acknowledges difference and invites dialogue. Without pluralism, society will

be dominated by a hegemonic majority—by Catholic Christianity in Flores, Protestant Christianity in northern Papua, Hinduism in Bali, and Islâm in Java and in much of the rest of the country.

The liberalization of our thought is a consequence of the process of a modern, plural society which is becoming increasingly complex which in turn encourages open communication between its diverse members. History teaches that Islâm has been plural since its birth, and therefore diversity/pluralism is a grace. The civil society of Madinah in the Prophet’s time was born from within such a plural society. Without the plurality of Madinah, there would be no Madinah Charter which was formulated and agreed upon when Islâm was still a minority community. The Jewish community was the largest group, while there were also Christians and indigenous believers. The Prophet united these groups without establishing a conformist society. Within that plural society a unity was accepted (*ummat-an wâhidah*). In the social contract drawn up (the Madinah Charter), the identity of each religious group was acknowledged, while each agreed to form a common solidarity.

Similarly, when Islâm encountered other local cultures in Egypt, the Maghribi, Persia, India, Turkey, Central Asia and China, Muslim leaders did not destroy the local cultures or religions, but embraced them, created a multi-coloured “rainbow” Islâm. A pluralist stance has long been held by the Sufis, for instance al-Hallaj (866-931), Ibn al-Arabi (1165-1229) and Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273). In contemporary times pluralist views have been advanced by Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998), Seyyed Hossen Nasr (b. 1933), Hasan Askari and Abdulaziz Sachedina (b. 1942). In Indonesia Nurcholish Madjid (1939-2005), Abdurrahman Wahid (1940-2009) and Ahmad Syafi’i Maarif (b. 1935). The motivation is nothing less than tolerance and harmony between followers of diverse religions.

Progressive Muslims see Islâm today as an integral element within the global plurality of cultures, while they view Western culture, at base Judeo-Christian, as attempting to hold onto a dominating cultural, economic and political hegemony. Precisely this global hegemony from the West is causing resistance to pluralism within Islâm.

The problem is how to nurture a plural identity without turning to “identity politics” which is pregnant with potential conflict. There are at least two concepts of “identity politics” alive in Indonesia. Firstly, identity politics which wants to achieve and maintain the hegemony of the majority. And secondly, an “identity politics” launched by minorities to preserve and nurture the identity of their group over against the majority. Within a plural society, both of these concepts give birth to tension and conflict.

According to liberal Islâm, there is no need for “identity politics”, as a plural secular society acknowledges the identity of each group. Indeed, in multi-cultural politics the government is tasked to assist and protect minority groups. With pluralism, a plural society becomes creative. The heart of pluralism is *taâruf* (mutual understanding).

### The Communicative Strategy of *Jaringan Islâm Liberal* (JIL)

The communicative strategy of JIL is open. Led by Muslim intellectuals who have prominent positions in Islamic Universities most centrally and importantly in Jakarta and Yogyakarta and younger activists in NGOs, they publish widely in newspapers, magazines, books, and pamphlets as well as in the electronic media. They are also movers and shakers in the two largest Muslim mass organizations in the country, *Nadlatul Ulama* (NU) with over 40 million members, and *Muhammadiyah* with over 30 million members. They are, then consciously and systematically working openly in the public sphere, combining intellectual argument, social and political activism, galvanising support from the grassroots.

### MUI: Perceived Threats of Pluralism

The one official negative reaction to JIL comes from the Ulama Council of Indonesia, *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI). They have countered the liberal-progressive JIL by publishing a fatwa. In the fatwa they distinguish between plurality and pluralism. “Plurality”, according to MUI, is the social reality of Indonesia and so cannot be rejected, while “pluralism” is a foreign concept that should be viewed with suspicion. According to MUI and their more fundamentalist supporters, pluralism of religion flows from Christian theology. Also, behind the pluralism of religion, there hides the political and economic interests of the Western superpowers. For them, if pluralism is accepted, then *akidah* Islâm will be weakened and so will be easily persuaded by Christianization (*murtad*). They also reject pluralism in religion as they claim that pluralism is founded on “relative truth”, while for MUI truth is absolute. Here pluralism is seen as a threat to *akidah*; acknowledging pluralism will weaken faith.

This fatwa has been received as an important “point for discussion” – rather than as an edict to be obeyed! For liberal Muslims, truth, including religious truth, is a human perception of Truth which is absolute (*Allah*) but is inevitably understood only partially. Liberal Muslims see in MUI a cultural minority complex afraid to face other religious and ideological concepts and movements. The assumption behind pluralism is the acknowledgement of difference. Each religious tradition can “mutually nurture faith”. Pluralism gives rise to a dynamic that encourages each individual to perfect their beliefs by learning from another’s belief.

Secondly, pluralism is also seen by MUI as a threat to identity, for in pluralism individual identity is part of a broader whole, where there is a danger that absolute truth will give way to relative truth; truth is no longer singular but plural. Muslims believe that, in line with a verse of al-Qur’an, the religion that Allah acknowledges is Islâm. However, liberal Muslims counter with alternative interpretations. Nurcholish Madjid, for instance, understands the term Islâm in the verse “God acknowledges only Islâm as religion” as a generic term referring to all who submit to God. Madjid points to how the Prophet (s.a.w.) acknowledged the religion of the Jewish prophets as they submitted to the will of Allah. Also, liberals emphasise how we meet time and again in the Sufi mystical tradition belief in “many paths that lead to God.” Liberals also add that perhaps more than 90% of humanity who have a religion hold it “by chance”—as they were born in a particular family in a particular place; the religion we hold is part of our “born” or “inherited” identity as with the colour of our skin, our ethnic and national identities.

Thirdly, MUI is convinced that the existence of religion itself would be threatened if Muslims were to acknowledge all religions. There is concern that a certain syncretism of religions might occur which in turn would give birth to a public religion taken from all the religions of the nation state in question. As in Western Europe, a public ethic would take over the public role of religion.

Liberal-progressives respond that regarding all religions as equal is the political stance of a government in a pluralistic society, not the stance of the believer towards another’s belief. The government should have no favourites; this is not part of *akidah* but simply State policy.

Such mutual understanding can occur only if rooted on the principle of pluralism. Pluralism needs a clear epistemology and a clear ethics, as advocated by Budhy Munawar-Rachman. The alternative to Samuel Huntington’s clash of civilisations which is justified by MUI, is an open society, which ferments a dialogue of civilisations.

### Concluding Reflection

#### *Closed and Open Communicative Networks*

Religious belief and commitment, both in the struggle for independence during colonial times and today when we are buffeted by a global tsunami of commercialised values, presents itself both as a moral force for public and personal ethics, but also as a sectarian force that triggers communal violence. Thus religion has been called “bi-polar.” While religion has been playing a decisive part in “structural violence,” that is, in the legislating of discriminatory laws, religion is also a force for peace and reconciliation.

Those threatened, the extremists, those who form the sectarian face of religion, proselytise in comparatively closed communication networks which undermine civility and the very ethical basis of a plural civilisation. This movement surfaces with mono-linguistic, fundamentalist moral demands in public discourse, and with its religious sectarianism, is shaking communal peace and harmony. On the surface, this minority network seems to be becoming increasingly successful, if by successful we mean the passing of sectarian legislation by local and national parliaments. Seemingly, a closed, hard-line, communication network among fellow hardliners, is capable of shifting the political and social landscape in a fragile, civil society.

Meanwhile, JIL has joined the discourse in the public domain by translating its moral and ethical values into universal values in a common tongue. In open debate in universities, the printed and electronic media, mass movements, NGOs and in the mosque and church they are furthering mutual enrichment. Unlike the extremists, JIL is working with the non-structural power of open communication. This, in itself, is a democratic mechanism of control through achieving a renewed consensus among both majority and minority communities. Here are not simply intellectuals, but an alliance of academics and activists forming a social movement.

The clash, then, is between a closed, extremist communication network taking religious truth to be "euphoric infallibility," and an open, communicative strategy, that accepts religious truth as "inclusive-pluralistic." The choice of "closed intimidating" and "open reflective" communication reveals quite different understandings of truth and the role of religion in society.

While it seems that the closed network of the extremists is making the running today, and whereas the open network of liberal-progressives is heavily under-reported as a "non-event," it may well be the case that in the longer term, the open network from university to mass movement, from academic volumes to the printed and electronic media, from open forums to grassroots activism, is gradually creating an open, communicative pluralistic society. The closed communication network which "erupts" into the media only when it disturbs harmony, is apparently strong and "successful," while the open network appears weak and ignored. In the short-term, the extremist stereotype is not being dislodged. And yet the open network is quietly forming a social movement that might, in the longer term, presage personal and social transformation. And so, in the midst of all the ambiguity of the present moment, the liberal-progressive network is quietly shaping a reforming paradigm. *Secularism* is increasingly seen to open the road to social justice, equality, harmony in the archipelago's multi-cultural and multi-religious communities. Secularism also provides the necessary freedom to religious bodies to grow fruitfully without distorting interventions from the state. *Liberalism* is freeing the mind from

encapsulating dogma, rigid orthodoxy and fear of change. A liberal attitude is being accepted as a precondition for the practice of pluralism. The principle of *pluralism*, enshrined in Indonesia's national motto *binneka tunggal ika* (unity in diversity), is the historical root upon which secularism has been grafted. In appreciating pluralism we recognize the value of a liberalising process in our thinking and the practice of secularism in politics.

#### *A Personal Postscript*

The author writes as a foreign-born Christian living with the Christian minority in Indonesia, which, since independence (1945/1949) has lost its pre-eminence in education, health services and social outreach. This Christian minority, like the JIL, has learnt that a tolerant, pluralistic society is feasible not only without reliance upon these traditional social institutions, but is better guaranteed when religions are more clearly visible as a moral force in the public sphere without any institutional stake in power.

The author should also make it quite clear that in Indonesia, harmony is still preferred over confrontation. However, more is needed than traditional tolerance, mutual respect and a formal acceptance of others. As rapid change uproots and unsettles, so inter-faith networks need to work assiduously towards a deeper mutual understanding and acknowledgement, translating the deepest values of each tradition into a common vocabulary. Faith-inspired political and economic strategies in a secular pluralistic State will surely only succeed in a society where everyone and each religion is important and distinct, but also willingly interdependent on the others. Open communicative networks connecting the academia and popular mass movements, with no stake in power or special interests, are a long-term response to the short-term intimidation of closed, intolerant pressure groups.

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## Islam and Television : Muslim Viewers of Urdu Channels in India

Md. Irfan Khan and Binod C. Agrawal

### Introduction

Muslims in India constitute 13.4 percent of the total population of about 1.02 billion in 2001. Around 52 million Muslims in India speak the Urdu language according to the 2001 Census of India, and is one of the officially recognized languages in the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir, and the national capital of New Delhi. Since Urdu is the language of the majority of Muslims, most of the Urdu channels are not only transmitting various entertainment programs in Urdu but also the religious programs on television. Today, more than fifteen Urdu channels are available for the Indian Muslim viewers, and has expanded its base within a period of a decade. The present paper is an outcome of the study entitled "Muslim Viewers of Television Channel: A Survey" jointly conducted by TALEEM Research Foundation and Himgiri Zee University, Dehradun.

### Objectives

The present paper attempts, among other things, to study possible influences of Urdu telecast among Muslim viewers. More specifically the survey aims (a) to study the preference of Urdu channels and programs among Muslim viewers (b) to study change in the religious behaviour among Muslim viewers, (c) to assess degree of religious tolerance expressed by Muslim viewers towards other religions, and (d) to what extent these influences have been internalized by Muslim viewers.

### Study Design, Selection of Urdu Channel Viewers and Data Collection

The study was essentially a quantitative survey of selected Muslim Urdu television viewers of Urdu channels. The Northern and Western parts of the country were

purposely selected covering Muslim dominated states of Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Gujarat. Given the population size of Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow and Varanasi were selected. In Jammu and Kashmir, Srinagar was selected. In Gujarat, Ahmedabad while in Uttarakhand, Dehradun had been selected for the survey. The purposive sampling of the cities was done to have deeper insights of diverse linguistic groups of Urdu television channel viewers.

**Viewer Selection.** A stratified sampling method was used for the selection of respondents (the viewers). Accordingly, the selected city has been stratified into four geographical zones. Within each zone, a Muslim dominated locality having concentration of direct-to-home (DTH)/Cable TV homes were selected. In each selected locality 25 DTH/Cable TV households were selected using snowball technique. In the case of Srinagar a total of 50 households were selected from each of the four selected localities. In each selected household, an Urdu channel viewer above 18 years of age of either sex was selected. In this case, the selected Muslim home had no adult viewer of Urdu channel, the household was replaced by the next household having an adult Urdu viewer.

**Data Collection.** With the help of an interview schedule prepared in Hindi and Urdu especially for Srinagar, Muslim viewers were interviewed in cities of Varanasi (100), Lucknow (100), Dehradun (101), and Ahmedabad (127). In the case of Srinagar, 203 Muslim viewers were interviewed. In this way, a total of 631 Muslim viewers were interviewed in five cities in the last three weeks of September 2012 by investigators who were given intensive training before the start of field data collection.

### Socio-Economic Characteristics of Viewers

More than two-thirds of the viewers were in the age group of 18-40 years old and the remaining were above 40 years of age. Almost 70 percent of viewers were males and 30 percent were females. Majority of the Muslim viewers belonged to Sunni religious sect (80 percent) and remaining (18 percent) were Shia. Over 92 percent of the viewers were literate. A fairly large number of these viewers have graduates and post-graduates education (25 percent). Of the total viewers, 62 percent were married. The monthly household income ranged from Rs. 5000 to Rs. 25000 per month (Table 1).

Since the households were selected from DTH/Cable homes, the viewers belonged to "middle" and "upper middle" socio-economic strata who own television with DTH or Cable connection in which 94 percent own mobile phones and 76 percent own refrigerators. Nearly half of the households also own motorcycles (Table 2).

### Viewing of Television

Nearly half of the viewers (47.4 percent) watch Urdu channels for 8-15 hours a week. Around 15.2 percent of these viewers also watch 16-23 hours a week. On an

average these viewers watch television for around 9 hours a week or more than an hour a day. However, in Srinagar the duration of watching television was relatively higher as compared to other cities. Around three-fourths of these viewers like to watch both Urdu news and other programs. The other programs include movies (39 percent), TV serials (37.7 percent) and Islamic programs (28.7 percent). In the case of Srinagar, the most prominent Urdu programs watched are news (96.6 percent) and Islamic programs (89.2 percent) (Table 3).

### Viewing of Urdu Channels

Among the various Urdu television channels, ETV Urdu was the most watched television channel (82.1 percent) in all cities except Varanasi followed by Peace TV (22.5 percent) almost exclusively watched in Srinagar (69 percent), QTV (17.6 percent), Doordarshan Urdu (14.9 percent) and Zee Salaam (14.4 percent). Zee Salaam was mostly viewed in the city of Varanasi (68 percent) while in the other four cities not even ten percent reported viewing Zee Salaam with the lowest being Srinagar where surprisingly only one percent had mentioned watching Zee Salaam. It could be possibly because of non-availability of Zee Salaam signals.

In fact, in Srinagar apart from ETV (84.7 percent), others preferred Urdu channels including Peace TV (69 percent), Alami Sahara (26.6 percent) and Hadi TV (25.1 percent). In addition, there were many other Urdu channels watched in Srinagar but in small percentages. It is interesting to mention that a fairly good proportion of these viewers also watched QTV in Lucknow and Ahmedabad. In Lucknow, nearly one-fourth of the viewers also mentioned about the Alami Sahara and Noor TV that they watched (Table 3).

Some variation in viewing of channels was also found between Shia and Sunni sects. Peace TV was largely viewed by Sunni (25.4 percent) as compared to Shia (9.6 percent). Doordarshan Kashmir, Alami Sahara and Hadi TV were mostly watched by Shia in Srinagar and Lucknow (Table 4).

### Preference of Urdu Program Content

Overall, the most preferred Urdu program content watched was the recitation of the *Quran* (80 percent). It was followed by *Naat*—a poem praising the Prophet Mohammad (50.7 percent). A little over one-third of viewers also mentioned about Urdu TV serials, *ghazals*, poems and *qawwalis*.

Inter-city variation in content preference of Urdu television was observed. For instance, Urdu TV serial was more viewed in Srinagar (63.5 percent) than any other city. Similarly the recitation of the *Quran* was liked by 100 percent of the viewers in Srinagar compared to 50.5 percent in Dehradun. Interestingly, gender variation was not so prominent on the preference of Urdu content channels and

programmes (Table 3). Shia-Sunni variation indicated that recitation of the *Quran* was more preferred by Shia (93 percent) as compared to Sunni (77.1 percent) while the preference for *Naat* was relatively higher among Sunni (56.2 percent) as compared to Shia (26.1 percent) (Table 4).

### Religiosity and Faith

The viewers were asked about their faith in God and daily prayers. Table 5 indicates that almost all the viewers (99.8 percent) had faith in Islam and God and almost 94.0 percent follow Islamic tradition/customs "very much." Eight out of ten viewers (79.1 percent) offer prayer daily. Of them, at least 77.8 percent perform prayer five times a day (Table 6). Similarly 93.7 percent of Muslim viewers strictly observe fasting during *Ramazaan*, and as much as 87.2 percent read religious books (Table 7). Of those who read religious books, more than one-third read daily (37.1 percent) and another 13.6 percent read every Friday and a large number of them, though, were not regular but definitely read sometime (49.3 percent) (Table 8).

By and large, it emerges that faith in God and religious practices are very strong among Urdu viewers which perhaps lead to the strong preference for religious programs such as the recitation of the *Quran* and *Naat* among the viewers, irrespective of gender differences and geographical locations.

### Religious Tolerance

A set of three questions relating to religious tolerance were asked to the Muslim viewers - 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 Muslim viewers.

Table 9 indicates that 61.3 percent of viewers did not watch any telecast of other religions. Similarly 77.5 percent did not like to visit any temple, church, or Gurudwara and 65.1 percent had not celebrated or participated in rituals of other religions. On the whole, there seems to be limited exposure of other religions, in spite of multi-religious fabric of the country. It could also be because Muslim viewers prefer to confine within their religious domain. The contribution of television viewing seems to be negligible in helping create religious tolerance and in breaking age-old religious animosity between Muslim and non-Muslim viewers. The study tends to support the view that those who watched religious telecast showed little religious tolerance for other religions.

### Perception on Attributes of Life

According to Islam, every worldly things are mortal and life after death is immortal. Belief in God, his messenger and following of Islamic teachings decide the human fate on the Day of Judgement. Since, every thing is mortal in this world, and no one will live forever, the fear among Muslim viewers is internalized for the life after death such as fear of Hell (44.8 percent), fear of grave (24.4 percent) and the Day of Judgement (27.7 percent). Fear of death was reported by merely 22.7 percent. Except humiliation (27.4 percent), the fear of separation, failure in life and unknown troubles were not so worrisome for Muslim viewers (Table 10).

There are two most important things that angers Muslim viewers. There were 'speaking lie' (64.2 percent) or 'talking against Islam' (52.8 percent). Surprisingly, the concern of family members (53.9 percent) dominated over the concern of religious issues (35.8 percent). The other most important thing that concerned, included individual reputation (30 percent), earning (22 percent), employment (19.7 percent) and health (14.7 percent). Poor people (53.6 percent) and physically handicapped persons (52.1 percent) drew sympathy far more than helplessness and illness of a person (Table 10).

### Influence of Urdu Television

The viewers were asked a battery of questions to assess the possible influences of watching Urdu television channels in terms of their religious belief and prescribed tenets of life.

As much as 59.9 percent of Muslim viewers indicate that viewing Urdu television channels had strongly strengthened their belief towards Islam. While another 34.9 percent believed that, these channels had little impact on their belief towards Islam. On the whole, only five percent of viewers did not agree that these channels really made any impact on the religious belief. Further, 41.5 percent strongly believe that viewing of Urdu channels have made their life more simple. A large number of these viewers felt that love for humankind had increased due to viewing of several programmes telecast by Urdu channels. Further, these viewers believe that there have been some impact of Urdu channels on decision making ability, rational thinking, judging people or understanding environment better (Table 11).

### Influence of Urdu Channels on Religious Faith and Identity

Table 12 details out the influence of Urdu channels on religious faith and identity as there are television programs which talk about Islamic teachings and practices. The analysis clearly indicates that as much as 56.3 percent believe that Urdu television channels are "very much" influential while another 42.2 percent feel "somewhat" influential. In the case of Srinagar, 85.7 percent feel the influence



of religious television “very much.” This is so because a large majority of these viewers watched Islamic programmes including recitation of *Quran* and *Naat*.

Similarly more than half of the viewers believe that their knowledge of religion—Islam and faith in God have improved “very much” by watching Urdu channels. They also believe that Urdu channels have so much influence that the viewers desire to fulfil Islamic duties have increased “very much” and help the viewers feel nearer to God. The analysis further reveal that these channels have little influence on establishing their identity and achieving success in the life. However, almost half of them believe that Urdu television programs have the potential to bring about changes in the Muslim society.

### Conclusion

The study indicates that Urdu television channels, by and large, attract a large section of Muslim viewers in India. Among the various Urdu channels ETV Urdu is universally watched among Muslim viewers. Preference of Urdu channel is region specific and vary from one city to another. Interestingly religious programs on the Urdu channels are mostly viewed because of strong faith in Islam and Muslims prefer to confine themselves within their own religious domain. The religious programs of Urdu television channels have helped in internalizing religious faith and practices. However, the television exposure has little impact in breaking age-old animosity and religious intolerance towards other religion in multi-religious democratic India.

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**Table 1: Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Viewers by City and Gender**

	City					Gender		Total
	Varanasi	Lucknow	Dehradun	Ahmedabad	Srinagar	Male	Female	
<b>Age</b>								
18-25 years	50.0	7.0	40.6	40.2	31.0	31.5	38.4	33.6
26-40 years	37.0	53.0	31.7	31.5	36.9	36.5	40.0	37.6
41-55 years	7.0	24.0	16.8	22.8	18.7	19.3	15.8	18.2
Above 56 years	6.0	16.0	10.9	5.5	13.3	12.7	5.8	10.6
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	67.0	78.0	60.4	68.5	72.9	100.0	0.0	69.9
Female	33.0	22.0	39.6	31.5	27.1	0.0	100.0	30.1
<b>Religious Group</b>								
Shia	2.0	37.0	0.0	19.7	25.1	19.0	16.3	18.2
Sunni	98.0	63.0	100.0	80.3	74.9	81.0	83.7	81.8
<b>Education</b>								
Illiterate	2.0	18.0	12.9	10.2	2.5	5.9	13.2	8.1
8th Pass	10.0	23.0	31.7	22.0	17.7	21.8	17.4	20.4
9-10th standard	25.0	14.0	37.6	21.3	34.0	31.3	18.4	27.4
11th-12th Standard	13.0	6.0	9.9	15.7	15.8	13.4	11.6	12.8
Undergraduate	2.0	1.0	0.0	7.9	10.3	5.7	4.7	5.4
Graduate	32.0	10.0	5.9	14.2	14.8	11.6	23.7	15.2
Post-Graduate	16.0	28.0	2.0	8.7	2.5	9.5	10.5	9.8
Technical/ Professional Course	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.5	0.9	0.5	0.8
<b>Marital status</b>								
Unmarried	65.0	21.0	35.6	37.8	28.1	36.3	35.3	36.0
Married	34.0	76.0	63.4	58.3	70.0	63.3	58.4	61.8
Divorced	1.0	1.0	0.0	1.6	1.5	0.2	3.2	1.1
Widow/ widower	0.0	2.0	1.0	2.4	0.5	0.2	3.2	1.1
<b>Family members</b>								
1-2 members	4.0	5.0	1.0	3.1	1.5	2.7	2.6	2.7
3-4 members	17.0	31.0	15.8	33.9	25.6	24.7	26.3	25.2
5-8 members	44.0	52.0	50.5	55.9	59.1	52.8	55.3	53.6

9-12 members	26.0	7.0	23.8	4.7	10.3	13.8	12.1	13.3
13+ members	9.0	5.0	8.9	2.4	3.4	5.9	3.7	5.2
<b>Monthly HHs Income</b>								
Up to Rs. 5000	35.0	34.0	47.5	25.2	33.0	32.4	38.4	34.2
Rs. 5001-10000	23.0	29.0	29.7	34.6	32.5	28.8	34.2	30.4
Rs. 10001-15000	9.0	12.0	7.9	15.7	18.2	15.4	9.5	13.6
Rs. 15001-20000	5.0	5.0	9.9	8.7	7.4	7.5	6.8	7.3
Rs. 20001-25000	2.0	5.0	0.0	7.1	1.5	3.4	2.1	3.0
Rs. 25001+	26.0	15.0	5.0	8.7	7.4	12.5	8.9	11.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>631</b>

**Table 2: Ownership of Household Amenities by City and Gender**

Amenities	City					Gender		Total
	Varanasi	Lucknow	Dehradun	Ahmedabad	Srinagar	Male	Female	
Air conditioner	10.0	17.0	4.0	15.7	0.5	6.6	12.1	8.2
Cooler	79.0	79.0	18.8	12.6	4.9	33.6	28.9	32.2
Car	12.0	20.0	5.9	6.3	28.6	17.0	15.3	16.5
Motorcycle	65.0	61.0	29.7	61.4	28.6	49.9	37.9	46.3
Refrigerator	85.0	86.0	39.6	81.1	80.8	78.5	69.5	75.8
Mobile Phone	91.0	96.0	84.2	93.7	99.0	93.7	94.2	93.8
<b>Television</b>								
17-20 Inch	12.0	49.0	96.0	52.8	93.1	66.4	63.7	65.6
22 Inch	5.0	26.0	4.0	29.9	4.4	14.1	10.5	13.0
22+ Inch	83.0	25.0	0.0	17.3	2.5	19.5	25.8	21.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>631</b>

**Table 3: Television Viewership by City and Gender**

	City					Gender		Total
	Varanasi	Lucknow	Dehradun	Ahmedabad	Srinagar	Male	Female	
<b>No. of hours watching television in a week</b>								
0-7 hours	44.0	36.0	54.5	35.4	0.5	28.6	28.9	28.7
8-15 hours	40.0	53.0	37.6	37.0	59.6	48.5	44.7	47.4
16-23 hours	10.0	7.0	5.9	22.8	21.7	14.7	16.3	15.2
24 hours +	6.0	4.0	2.0	4.7	18.2	8.2	10.0	8.7

Programs like to watch on television								
News	67.0	83.0	46.5	74.8	96.6	83.9	62.1	77.3
Movies	49.0	18.0	27.7	44.1	46.8	40.1	36.3	39.0
Songs	33.0	5.0	26.7	38.6	15.3	20.2	29.5	23.0
Urdu programs	89.0	88.0	96.0	90.6	41.9	76.2	72.6	75.1
Serials	26.0	25.0	27.7	47.2	48.8	32.2	50.5	37.7
Other programs	6.0	49.0	6.9	0.8	0.0	12.5	4.2	10.0
Islamic Programs	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	89.2	30.6	24.2	28.7
Sports	2.0	16.0	4.0	2.4	0.0	5.2	1.1	4.0
Discovery	0.0	6.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	1.4	1.1	1.3
Urdu television channels watched								
Doordarshan Urdu	22.0	15.0	1.0	33.1	6.9	16.1	12.1	14.9
Zee Salaam	68.0	4.0	6.9	7.9	1.0	14.3	14.7	14.4
ETV Urdu	58.0	93.0	86.1	85.0	84.7	81.2	84.2	82.1
Peace TV Urdu	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	69.0	23.8	19.5	22.5
QTV	1.0	42.0	12.9	34.6	5.4	18.1	16.3	17.6
ARY	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.7	1.5	1.1	2.1	1.4
DD Kashmir Urdu	0.0	31.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	5.9	4.7	5.5
Alami Sahara	0.0	24.0	0.0	0.0	26.6	13.2	10.5	12.4
Noor TV	0.0	24.0	2.0	0.0	1.5	6.1	1.1	4.6
Madani Channel	0.0	1.0	1.0	0.0	1.5	0.9	0.5	0.8
Hadi TV	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	25.1	9.1	6.8	8.4
Paigham TV	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.4	1.8	2.6	2.1
Others	0.0	2.0	1.0	0.0	0.5	0.7	0.5	0.6
Likes to watch Urdu television program								
Recitation of the Quran	70.0	87.0	50.5	74.0	100.0	82.3	74.7	80.0
Naat (In the praise of the Prophet Mohammed)	56.0	49.0	16.8	56.7	62.1	52.4	46.8	50.7
Urdu Serials	24.0	23.0	20.8	21.3	63.5	34.2	38.4	35.5
Old movies	12.0	6.0	26.7	13.4	16.7	13.8	18.4	15.2

Ghazals/ poems/ Qawwalis	32.0	54.0	40.6	40.9	2.5	32.9	20.5	29.2
No. of hours watch Urdu TV programs in a week								
0-7 hours	68.0	59.0	74.3	72.4	10.8	51.9	45.8	50.1
8-15 hours	24.0	36.0	22.8	23.6	53.7	33.8	38.4	35.2
16-23 hours	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.9	17.7	7.5	10.0	8.2
24 hours+	3.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	17.7	6.6	5.8	6.3
Do not watch	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>630</b>

Table 4: Television Viewership by Religious Sect and Size of Television

	Religious Sect		Television Type			Total
	Shia	Sunni	17-20"	22 "	22"+	
No. of hours watching television in a week						
0-7 hours	22.6	30.0	25.4	23.2	42.2	28.7
8-15 hours	36.5	49.8	50.5	53.7	34.1	47.4
16-23 hours	26.1	12.8	14.5	19.5	14.8	15.2
24 hours +	14.8	7.4	9.7	3.7	8.9	8.7
Programs watched on television						
News	95.7	73.3	76.6	81.7	77.0	77.3
Movies	27.0	41.7	37.4	40.2	43.0	39.0
Songs	13.9	25.0	18.4	32.9	31.1	23.0
Urdu programme	66.1	77.1	70.0	81.7	86.7	75.1
Serials	37.4	37.8	40.8	35.4	29.6	37.7
Other programs	14.8	8.9	6.0	23.2	14.1	10.0
Islamic Program	44.3	25.2	41.5	8.5	1.5	28.7
Sports	4.3	3.9	1.9	13.4	4.4	4.0
Discovery	5.2	0.4	1.2	1.2	1.5	1.3
Urdu television channels watched						
Doordarshan Urdu	14.8	14.9	10.4	17.1	27.4	14.9
Zee Salaam	9.6	15.5	5.3	8.5	45.9	14.4
ETV Urdu	87.8	80.8	83.3	89.0	74.1	82.1
Others	0.9	0.6	0.7	1.2	0.0	0.6
Peace TV Urdu	9.6	25.4	31.9	8.5	2.2	22.5
QTV	13.0	18.6	14.0	37.8	16.3	17.6
ARY	0.0	1.7	0.7	6.1	0.7	1.4
DD Kashmir Urdu	24.3	1.4	3.6	12.2	7.4	5.5
Almi Sahara	34.8	7.4	15.5	8.5	5.2	12.4
Noor TV	0.9	5.4	5.1	6.1	2.2	4.6

Madani Channel	0.9	0.8	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.8
Hadi TV	43.5	0.6	12.3	1.2	0.7	8.4
Paigam TV	0.9	2.3	3.1	0.0	0.0	2.1
<b>Like to watch program on Urdu television</b>						
Recitation (of Quran)	93.0	77.1	80.2	87.8	74.8	80.0
Naat	26.1	56.2	47.6	62.2	53.3	50.7
Urdu Serials	45.2	33.3	39.4	26.8	28.9	35.5
Old movies	15.7	15.1	17.4	7.3	13.3	15.2
Gazals/poems/qawwalis	28.7	29.3	23.9	47.6	34.1	29.2
<b>No. of hours watching Urdu TV programs in a week</b>						
0-7 hours	42.6	51.7	45.2	53.7	63.0	50.1
8-15 hours	32.2	35.9	37.9	30.5	29.6	35.2
16-23 hours	13.9	7.0	8.9	13.4	3.0	8.2
24 hours+	11.3	5.2	8.0	2.4	3.7	6.3
Do not watch	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>516</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>631</b>

**Table 5: Faith and Religiosity by City and Gender**

	City					Gender		Total
	Varanasi	Lucknow	Dehradun	Ahmedabad	Srinagar	Male	Female	
<b>Belief in Islam and God</b>								
Yes	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.2	100.0	99.8	100.0	99.8
No	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.2
<b>Follow Islamic traditions/ customs</b>								
Yes, very much	95.0	87.0	95.0	94.5	96.1	93.7	94.7	94.0
Yes, somewhat	5.0	13.0	5.0	4.7	3.9	6.1	5.3	5.9
Not at all	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.2
<b>Offer prayer (Namaaz)</b>								
Yes	100.0	99.0	100.0	99.2	99.5	99.5	99.5	99.5
No	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.8	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
<b>Offer prayer (Namaaz) daily</b>								
Daily	53.0	74.0	87.1	73.2	94.1	78.0	81.6	79.1
Only during Ramazaan	29.0	12.0	9.9	16.5	0.5	13.6	6.8	11.6
Sometimes	16.0	12.0	3.0	9.4	5.4	7.9	10.0	8.6
During Id-ul-Fitr/ Id-ul-Zuha	2.0	2.0	0.0	0.8	0.0	0.5	1.6	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>631</b>

**Table 6: Frequency of Prayer by City and Gender**

	City					Gender		Total
	Varanasi	Lucknow	Dehradun	Ahmedabad	Srinagar	Male	Female	
<b>No. of times prayer offered in a day</b>								
Once a day	1.9	2.7	2.3	1.1	0.0	1.5	0.6	1.2
Two times a day	0.0	1.4	5.7	7.5	2.1	3.2	3.9	3.4
Three times a day	3.8	1.4	6.8	22.6	11.5	10.8	9.7	10.4
Four times a day	1.9	2.7	23.9	6.5	2.6	5.8	9.7	7.0
Five times a day	90.6	91.9	61.4	62.4	83.8	78.5	76.1	77.8
On some occasions	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.2
<b>Total (who offer prayers daily)</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>499</b>

**Table 7: Fast by City and Gender**

	City					Gender		Total
	Varanasi	Lucknow	Dehradun	Ahmedabad	Srinagar	Male	Female	
<b>Strictly follow fast (Roza) during Ramazaan</b>								
Yes	90.0	73.0	100.0	98.4	99.5	91.8	97.9	93.7
No	10.0	27.0	0.0	1.6	0.5	8.2	2.1	6.3
<b>Read or study religious books</b>								
Yes	89.0	81.0	86.1	82.7	92.6	87.3	86.8	87.2
No	11.0	19.0	13.9	17.3	7.4	12.7	13.2	12.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>631</b>

**Table 8: Reading of Religious Books by City and Gender**

Frequency of reading religious books	City					Gender		Total
	Varanasi	Lucknow	Dehradun	Ahmedabad	Srinagar	Male	Female	
Daily	44.9	30.9	24.1	30.5	45.7	34.3	43.6	37.1
During Juma (Friday)	15.7	27.2	28.7	10.5	1.6	13.0	15.2	13.6
Sometimes	39.3	42.0	47.1	59.0	52.7	52.7	41.2	49.3
<b>Total (Who read or study religious books)</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>385</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>550</b>

**Table 9: Religious Tolerance by City and Gender**

Watch programs of other religion	City					Gender		Total
	Varanasi	Lucknow	Dehradun	Ahmedabad	Srinagar	Male	Female	
Very much	4.0	3.0	0.0	4.7	0.0	1.8	2.6	2.1
Somewhat	58.0	66.0	43.6	42.5	4.4	38.1	33.2	36.6
Not at all	38.0	31.0	56.4	52.8	95.6	60.1	64.2	61.3
<b>Like to visit religious places of other religion</b>								
Very much	1.0	1.0	0.0	3.1	0.0	0.9	1.1	1.0
Somewhat	37.0	45.0	15.8	27.6	1.5	22.9	18.4	21.6
Not at all	62.0	54.0	84.2	69.3	98.5	76.2	80.5	77.5
<b>Celebrate other religions festivals and participate in their customs</b>								
Very much	3.0	5.0	0.0	5.5	0.0	2.0	3.2	2.4
Somewhat	55.0	64.0	25.7	46.5	0.5	35.8	24.7	32.5
Not at all	42.0	31.0	74.3	48.0	99.5	62.1	72.1	65.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>631</b>

**Table 10: Perception on Fear, Anger, Concern and Sympathy by City and Gender**

	City					Gender		Total
	Varanasi	Lucknow	Dehradun	Ahmedabad	Srinagar	Male	Female	
<b>Fears the most</b>								
Death	13.0	7.0	1.0	22.0	46.3	24.7	17.9	22.7
Separation from loved ones	38.0	12.0	35.6	5.5	7.4	11.8	29.5	17.1
Failure	13.0	4.0	12.9	0.8	2.0	5.7	5.3	5.5
Unknown trouble	18.0	12.0	33.7	11.8	3.9	9.1	24.7	13.8
Humiliation	25.0	38.0	24.8	7.1	37.4	29.5	22.6	27.4
Grave	10.0	6.0	0.0	17.3	57.1	24.0	25.3	24.4
Day of Judgment/ Hereafter	30.0	27.0	2.0	22.0	43.3	29.5	23.7	27.7
Hell	30.0	37.0	40.6	23.6	71.4	45.8	42.6	44.8
<b>Angers the most</b>								
Lie	53.0	61.0	33.7	51.2	94.6	63.3	66.3	64.2
Too much work	7.0	1.0	3.0	2.4	2.0	2.0	4.7	2.9
Failure	10.0	4.0	9.9	3.9	5.9	5.9	7.9	6.5
Bad behavior	38.0	26.0	42.6	15.7	33.0	28.3	36.3	30.7
Bitter words	19.0	27.0	37.6	7.1	13.8	19.5	18.4	19.2

Words against religion	49.0	52.0	29.7	21.3	86.2	55.8	45.8	52.8
<b>Concerns the most</b>								
Family members	52.0	37.0	39.6	26.0	87.7	51.2	60.0	53.9
Earnings	33.0	25.0	14.9	30.7	13.3	21.8	22.6	22.0
Employment	23.0	16.0	19.8	8.7	26.6	21.3	15.8	19.7
Health	5.0	18.0	2.0	3.9	31.0	15.0	14.2	14.7
Reputation	29.0	36.0	28.7	6.3	42.9	29.7	30.5	30.0
Religious performance	29.0	39.0	33.7	24.4	45.8	35.1	37.4	35.8
<b>Feeling pity and sympathetic</b>								
Ill person	26.0	30.0	14.9	9.4	45.3	27.7	27.9	27.7
Poor people	43.0	37.0	41.6	39.4	81.8	55.1	50.0	53.6
Physically handicapped person	28.0	58.0	81.2	11.0	72.4	51.9	52.6	52.1
Helpless person	44.0	26.0	11.9	39.4	52.2	37.6	37.9	37.7
People in pain	10.0	8.0	1.0	5.5	4.4	4.8	7.4	5.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>631</b>

**Table 11: Influence of Urdu Channel on Attitude by City and Gender**

	City					Gender		Total
	Varanasi	Lucknow	Dehradun	Ahmedabad	Srinagar	Male	Female	
<b>Attitude towards Islam after watching Urdu television programs</b>								
Belief has become very strong	67.0	23.0	29.7	59.1	90.1	57.8	64.7	59.9
Belief has become little stronger	31.0	49.0	69.3	39.4	9.9	35.8	32.6	34.9
Belief has not at all increased	2.0	28.0	1.0	1.6	0.0	6.3	2.6	5.2
<b>Attitude towards life after watching Urdu television programs</b>								
Easiness of life increased very much	55.0	41.0	16.8	46.5	44.3	39.7	45.8	41.5

Easiness of life increased a little	38.0	39.0	78.2	48.8	55.7	53.7	49.5	52.5
Easiness of life not at all increased	7.0	20.0	5.0	4.7	0.0	6.6	4.7	6.0
<b>After watching Urdu television programs</b>								
Humanity has increased very much	63.0	45.0	24.8	63.0	29.1	39.7	51.1	43.1
Humanity has increased a little	29.0	46.0	73.3	34.6	70.9	56.5	46.3	53.4
Humanity has not at all increased	8.0	9.0	2.0	2.4	0.0	3.9	2.6	3.5
<b>Attitude towards life after watching Urdu television programs</b>								
Capacity to take important decisions has increased very much	53.0	13.0	9.9	39.4	16.3	22.9	30.5	25.2
Capacity to take important decisions has increased a little	38.0	51.0	81.2	59.8	83.7	67.8	62.1	66.1
Capacity to take important decisions has not at all increased	9.0	36.0	8.9	0.8	0.0	9.3	7.4	8.7
<b>Attitude towards life after watching Urdu television programs</b>								
Ability to think rationally and prudently has increased verily	50.0	18.0	5.0	33.1	13.3	20.9	26.3	22.5

Ability to think rationally and prudently has increased a little	41.0	50.0	84.2	63.0	86.7	71.0	62.6	68.5
Ability to think rationally and prudently has not at all increased	9.0	32.0	10.9	3.9	0.0	8.2	11.1	9.0
<b>After watching Urdu television programs</b>								
It becomes very easy to evaluate	46.0	13.0	5.0	28.3	14.3	18.8	24.2	20.4
It becomes a little bit easy to evaluate	43.0	63.0	85.1	70.1	85.7	74.4	66.8	72.1
It does not become easy to evaluate	11.0	24.0	9.9	1.6	0.0	6.8	8.9	7.4
<b>Through Urdu television programs I realized that</b>								
It helps very much to understand the environment better	51.0	29.0	4.0	33.1	30.5	28.6	32.6	29.8
It helps a little bit to understand the environment better	43.0	60.0	82.2	63.0	69.5	66.0	61.1	64.5
It does not help at all to understand the environment better	6.0	11.0	13.9	3.9	0.0	5.4	6.3	5.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>631</b>

Table 12: Influence of Urdu Channels on Religious Faith and Identity by City and Gender

	City					Gender		Total
	Varanasi	Lucknow	Dehradun	Ahmedabad	Srinagar	Male	Female	
<b>Religious television channels influential? If yes then how much</b>								
Very much	44.0	40.0	22.8	58.3	85.7	55.8	57.4	56.3
Somewhat	53.0	60.0	76.2	40.2	12.3	43.3	39.5	42.2
Not at all	3.0	0.0	1.0	1.6	2.0	0.9	3.2	1.6
<b>Has faith/knowledge of your religion been changed by watching Urdu channels</b>								
Very much	51.0	27.0	14.9	59.1	81.3	51.2	56.3	52.8
Somewhat	45.0	64.0	84.2	39.4	16.7	45.6	40.5	44.1
Not at all	4.0	9.0	1.0	1.6	2.0	3.2	3.2	3.2
<b>Has faith in religion increased after watching Urdu channels</b>								
Very much	66.0	20.0	35.6	55.1	85.2	54.9	64.7	57.8
Somewhat	30.0	36.0	64.4	43.3	12.8	35.4	29.5	33.6
Not at all	4.0	44.0	0.0	1.6	2.0	9.8	5.8	8.6
<b>Has Urdu television channels increased your religious understanding/ feeling</b>								
Very much	52.0	19.0	14.9	38.6	59.6	37.0	48.9	40.6
Somewhat	45.0	40.0	84.2	59.1	38.4	53.5	45.8	51.2
Not at all	3.0	41.0	1.0	2.4	2.0	9.5	5.3	8.2
<b>Does Urdu television programs helps you to get identity of yourself</b>								
Very much	32.0	9.0	5.9	38.6	14.8	19.3	21.6	20.0
Somewhat	53.0	40.0	75.2	55.1	83.7	64.4	65.8	64.8
Not at all	15.0	51.0	18.8	6.3	1.5	16.3	12.6	15.2
<b>Have you found yourself nearer to God after watching Urdu Television programs</b>								
Very much	64.0	16.0	26.7	73.2	89.2	59.2	63.2	60.4
Somewhat	29.0	48.0	73.3	25.2	10.3	32.0	33.2	32.3
Not at all	7.0	36.0	0.0	1.6	0.5	8.8	3.7	7.3
<b>Has your desire to fulfil Islamic duties becomes strong by watching Urdu television programs</b>								
Very much	52.0	19.0	14.9	51.2	83.3	47.8	57.4	50.7
Somewhat	42.0	69.0	85.1	46.5	15.8	47.8	40.5	45.6
Not at all	6.0	12.0	0.0	2.4	1.0	4.3	2.1	3.6
<b>Do you agree that watching Urdu television programs has helped in achieving success in your life</b>								
Very much	37.0	14.0	11.9	22.0	16.3	17.7	24.2	19.7
Somewhat	57.0	64.0	79.2	75.6	83.3	76.0	68.9	73.9
Not at all	6.0	22.0	8.9	2.4	0.5	6.3	6.8	6.5
<b>Has Urdu television programs the capability to bring about any change in the society</b>								
Very much	48.0	61.0	37.6	38.6	46.8	46.9	44.2	46.1
Somewhat	46.0	36.0	62.4	60.6	52.7	50.8	55.3	52.1

Not at all	6.0	3.0	0.0	0.8	0.5	2.3	0.5	1.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>631</b>

## ***Shah-e-Mardan: A Space for Religious, Political, and Socio-cultural Intersections Amongst Shias of Delhi, India***

*Geetanjali Kala*

### **Introduction**

Multiple and complex identities are not new phenomena, especially with the rise of the the nation-state as a universal unit of governance/administration in modern history. With the rise in the fervor of nationalism, communities which had migrated to a particular society over centuries found themselves challenged by complex identities and allegiance issues. Nation, ethnicity, linguistics, ideology, gender, sexuality, and religion are some of the major strands of these often competing identities.

Political Islam/*millat*/pan-Islamic identity has been at the heart of identity debates surrounding Muslims. However, sectarian identities within Islam have also found prominence in the recent past, especially with the rise of the offensive towards the *Shias* by the *Sunni* terrorist/militia groups including Al-Qaeda, ISIS and several of their off-shoots all over the world. In this context, it is observed that for *Shias*, it has become important to consolidate *Shia* identity, build public opinion, express solidarity, and establish effective channels for political and socio-cultural communication. It, therefore, becomes important to examine how religious spaces like the *Shah-e-Mardan* shrine in Delhi play a role in consolidating *Shia* ideology and identity.

This paper seeks to contribute to the debates on identity and explore intersections between religious, political, and socio-cultural discourses within *Shia* Islam using the discourses at the *Shah-e-Mardan* shrine in Delhi as a case study for this purpose. The paper is an effort towards understanding how these discourses emphasise not only the *Shia* (and to a lesser extent Muslim) religious identity, but also attempt to construct a larger, supranational *Shia* political identity for



their audience (from amongst their complex existing identities—Indian, Muslim, *Shia*, and minority) through references to *Shia* (and Islamic) history, tradition, and contemporary politics using challenges confronting *Shias* across the world to evoke a sense of solidarity in the audience with the larger *Shia* fraternity. This paper also explores the use of the *Majlis* at the *Shah-e-Mardan* shrine as a channel for political communication, discussion of themes and issues pertinent to the *Shia* fraternity framed in a manner reflective of ‘*Shia* perspectives’ as opposed to that in mainstream media (commercial and state-owned)—this includes discourses on contemporary events in West Asian countries with sizeable *Shia* populations (like Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Iran) viewed in the context of *Shia* history and politics. Further, the paper studies how the *Majlis* functions as a space to discuss socio-cultural issues (like gender, feminism, and human rights), provide religious instruction, and collectively practice traditional religious (*Shia*) rituals, with the discourses drawing from *Shia* (and Islamic) history, literature and tradition for justification.

### Methodology

This ethnographic study employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) to qualitatively analyze the content of the discourse in the *Majlis* at the *Shah-e-Mardan* shrine in Delhi. CDA was selected for this study because the *Majlis* discourses are multi-dimensional, employing a variety of performance techniques like voice modulation, gestures, appeals, etc. As CDA is a multidisciplinary research tool, it helps analyze the complex language which constitutes political, social, cultural, historical, and linguistic aspects and context of a narrative (Fairclough, 1995). In the context of this study, “discourse” includes various types of semiotic (production and consumption of meanings) activities, primarily verbal and non-verbal communication, that are used to weave a particular narrative. CDA acknowledges that any discourse is “socially and historically situated mode of action” which is socially shaped, and shaping (Fairclough, 1995, p. 54). CDA can “contribute to social and cultural analysis . . . with traditional textual analysis” (Fairclough, 1995, pp. 53-54). The study uses primary data collected using data collection techniques such as field visits, non-participant observation and unstructured interviews.

### Background

The *Shia* constitute the second largest sect of Islam, historically referring to the group of people who believed that following the Prophet Muhammad’s death, leadership should have passed directly to his cousin and son-in-law, Ali, whom they also regard as the first *Imam*. The *Shia* later designated certain individuals from the family of the Prophet Muhammad as *Imams*, possessing special spiritual and political authority over the community. *Shia* Muslims make up 10 percent of the world’s Muslim population (J. Cole, 1989), being the predominant

denomination in Iran, constituting a majority in Iraq and Bahrain, and forming a large minority in Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, and Afghanistan.

*Twelver Shia* is the largest branch of *Shia* Islam, believing in the idea of a twelfth *Imam* who went into hiding after the death of the eleventh *Imam*. After the death of the eleventh *Imam* Hasan al-Askari in Abbasid Iraq in AD 873 or 874 (Cole, 1989), two major and conflicting schools emerged amongst the *Shias*—the *Akhbaris* (literalists) and the *Usulis* (rationalists). On the one hand, *Akhbaris* restricted themselves only to the Quran and the oral reports (*Akhbar*) from the times of the Prophet and *Imams*. On the other hand, the *Usulis* believed in applying independent reasoning (*Ijtihad*) in matters of religion and law. This led to the creation of the institution of formally trained jurisprudents (*Mujtahids*) whom *Usulis* regarded as the representatives of the hidden *Imam*. Safavid rulers promoted the *Usuli* School as it legitimized their rule in Persia. This was also the school which influenced *Shia* theology in India. Though most of the Muslim rulers in India were *Sunni*, there were *Shia* centers of power in southern India (Ahmadnagar, Golconda and Bijapur being the prominent ones) as well as in northern India (*Chak* rule in Kashmir, and the state of Awadh). Beginning with the Mongol invasion of Iran in the thirteenth century which led to the exit of the Seljuk *Sunni* Turks, and reaching a culmination after the victory of the Safavids, the *Usuli* school began to dominate religious-political discourse in Iran. The movement of Iranian notables to southern parts of India through the sea route connecting the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean, led to the ideas of the Twelver *Shia Usuli* school (which emphasises the importance of a clergy class separate from the common people) being propagated in India. Therefore, India’s *Shias* have historically been greatly influenced by Iran’s school of *Shiaism*.

*Dargah Shah-e-Mardan* is one of the oldest *Shia Imambargahs* located in the Karbala neighbourhood of Delhi. It is also known as Aliganj and Ali Ji on account of Hazrat Ali’s foot impression placed inside it. In the month of Muharram, *Tazias* from all over the city are brought here for burial. They are usually accompanied by large number of devotees. *Majlis* is an Arabic term meaning “a place of sitting” or “gathering.” In the *Shia* context, *Majlis* is a special gathering to mourn the Karbala tragedy, i.e., Hussain and his companions’ martyrdom. Mourning rites of Hussain and his companions—which include weeping, beating the chest and the body, recitations, prayers, singing dirges—developed about three hundred years after the Karbala tragedy (Armstrong, 2000). These mourning rites symbolize ‘undying opposition to the corruption of Muslim political life’ (Armstrong, 2000). Some of the forms used in the *Majlis* include the *Marsiya*, *Soz* and *Salaam*, which are elegiac poems written to commemorate the Karbala tragedy. The events of the Karbala tragedy are narrated by a professional narrator called *Zakir* or by the *Aalims* (the clergy). These reciters, from all over India and abroad, are invited for *majlises* during Muharram and other important days in the Islamic calendar,

especially the death and birth anniversaries of members of the Prophet's family (Rizwan, 2011). Though the *majlis* is primarily about narrating the events that took place in Karbala during the ten days of *Ashura*, more importantly it also works as an instrument to inform, build public opinion, and generate solidarity for the political *Shia* movements across the globe by recontextualising the Karbala tragedy in light of contemporary events. The *majlis* serves many purposes for the *Shia* community such as eulogizing the Prophet Muhammad's family, seeking *waseela* (mediation) from the saints, socialisation and intra-community solidarity, collective mourning, and learning religious rituals and tradition (Chelkowski, 2008).

### Description of the *Majlises* and Analysis

This paper provides a critical discourse analysis of the *Majlises* at the *Shah-e-Mardan* shrine in Delhi. It examines the content of *Majlis-e-Hussain*, *Majlis-e-Fatima*, *Majlis-e-Zainab*, and *Majlis-e-Sakinah*, i.e., *majlises* held and speeches made to commemorate the martyrdom of Prophet Mohammed's grandson Hussain and members of his family—Fatima (mother of Hussain), Zainab (sister of Hussain), and Sakinah (daughter of Hussain)—who the *Shias* believe, sacrificed their lives to protect and defend the rightful path for Islam.

### References to conflicts in the *Shia* world

In the *majlises*, an appeal for solidarity with the larger *Shia* fraternity was made through several references to countries with significant *Shia* populations—Bahrain, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, Lebanon—highlighting the turmoil and persecution of *Shias* in these countries. Interconnections were made between these contemporary political trends/conflicts and Islamic history, with repeated emphasis on the history of *Shias* as a persecuted people dating back to the martyrdom of Hussain and his seventy-two companions who were killed in 680 AD by Yazid, the Umayyid ruler of the time. Prayers (*dua*) for the *Shia* fraternity in these countries were called for with fervent sincerity. The *Shia-Sunni* conflict was framed from the contemporary perspective of *Shias* being viewed as infidels (*kaafir*) everywhere in the world and being persecuted as such (it was noted that a Saudi cleric had issued a fatwa against *Shias* designating them as *kaafirs*).

### References to Iran and Hezbollah as role models and disapproval of *Sunni* powers in West Asia

A connection with the preeminent *Shia* nation was sought to be established by putting forward Iran as a model socio-cultural and political landscape. The audience was exhorted to watch *Mukhtarnama*, an Iranian TV/film series directed by Davud Mirbageri, narrating Mukhtar-al-Thaqafi's revenge of Karbala, so that they may be able to better understand what it means to be a true Muslim and a true *Shia*. Iran was portrayed as a progressive society, and a causal correlation between progress

and the establishment of the theocratic state in 1979 was sought to be underlined. It was asserted that while the literacy rate in Iran stood at thirty-seven percent in 1979, the present literacy rate was near 100 percent. The audience was told that the position of women had demonstrably improved after 1979—more women were now educated and had better rights; this was juxtaposed with Western culture and feminist ideas that were described as decadent and having degraded the idea of a woman into a “piece of flesh” (*gosht-ka-lothra*). It was asserted that Iran was now much ahead in every sphere of knowledge (e.g. in aerospace engineering), and this was put into context by stating that this progress had been achieved despite long-standing sanctions imposed by the West on the country. The key emphasis remained on the idea that this progress had been achieved after the 1979 revolution and establishment of an Islamic republic based on *Shia* theology in Iran. Approving references were made to the Iranian government on several occasions, although somewhat contradictorily, the idea of the priestly/clergy class wielding significant influence in politics was criticised as a Christian idea—“Muslims should not hand over their religion to *maulanas*,” was the message.

The role of Hezbollah in defending *Shia* values and identity in West Asia was also praised, and an argument was made that Hezbollah was not merely a political entity but also a social organisation. The idea of Iran as a model worthy of emulation in the Islamic world was clearly expressed by declaring that amongst the Muslim countries of West Asia, it is only Iran that uses the expression “Islamic Republic” in its official name; this was contrasted with the case of Saudi Arabia, which is named after the Saud monarchy, implying that it does not regard its Islamic identity as the primary/sole one. It was asserted with some pride that in contrast to the *Sunni* states, it was only the *Shia* states that were posing a challenge to western hegemony.

### Appeal for *Shia-Sunni* harmony and pan-Islamic unity

The persecution of *Shias* globally was contextualised by contrasting it with the growing influence of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi version of Islam in the world. These developments were emphasised as being dangerous for *Shias*. Nonetheless, there were repeated calls for harmony between *Shias* and *Sunnis*, and it was asserted that even *Sunni* scholars like Ahmed el-Tayeb of Al-Azhar University have accepted that the basis of *Shias-Sunni* conflict is a question of interpretation of history, as opposed to being a question of faith.

There were also appeals for pan-Islamic unity and identity; it was argued that if there could be a G-8, there could certainly be an M-59 (group of all Muslim nations). Palestine, a symbol of pan-Islamic unity, was discussed at some length and there were prayers (*dua*) for the people of Palestine.

However, in the background of growing *Sunni* dominance and radicalism, references were also made to the growing appeal of *Shiaism*, and the example of Malaysia was cited in particular with the comment that *Shiaism* there is “spreading like wildfire.”

### **Socio-cultural themes**

At the *majlis* that was held to commemorate the death anniversary of Hazrat Fatima, there was an attempt to relate instances from her life to contemporary socio-cultural themes, and feminism and gender issues formed a large part of the discourse. Fatima was cited as a symbol/pillar of female empowerment and ideal womanhood for *Shias*, and supported by examples, it was asserted that by standing for her own rights, Fatima stood for and fought for women’s rights in Islam (*huquq-e-niswan*). References were also made to instances from the life of the Prophet, his teachings and actions that demonstrated his advocacy of women’s rights. It was argued that the themes of human rights and racial equality that came to the fore through movements in the West had in fact been already introduced within Islam 1400 years ago. Through examples, it was declared that the *Ahl-e-bait* (family of the Prophet Muhammad) first gave the idea of human rights, women’s rights, and racial equality to the world. The life of Fatima was again used as an example—a reference was made to how Fatima declared that she and her servant/slave/household help, an Ethiopian woman named Feeza, would share the household work and chores.

Drawing from *Shia* tradition, a reference was made to the Battle of Khaybar and the magnanimity shown by the Prophet Muhammad/Ali to the defeated Jews. It was also asserted that the Prophet Muhammad/Ali were the first to establish a welfare state in the world, and that not only Muslims but all citizens enjoyed rights in this state. The theme of *Shias* as persecuted people was also discussed in the context of human rights (and in contrast to the magnanimity and consideration demonstrated in this regard by the Prophet Muhammad and the *Ahl-e-bait*); drawing from *Shia* tradition, a reference was made to Zainab’s address to the people of Kufa after the murder of her brother Hussain, and on her way to the court of Yazid (the Umayyid ruler of Damascus), in which Zainab lamented the denial of basic human rights to the supporters of Hussain and his family through methods such as cutting off supply of food and water to them.

The nature of the *majlises* was conservative and orthodox. *Majlises* exclusively for women had women speakers, and no political issues were discussed with the discourse being focused on religious issues. Seating in mixed *majlises* was segregated on the basis of sex, with a *purdah* separating men and women. Religious communication forms (*Marsia*, *Soz*, *Salaam*) were interspersed with discussion of political and socio-cultural issues. There was also emphasis on the cultural aspects of the *Shia* tradition, with wailing and chest-beating being some of the ritual forms

practiced. Another ritual observed was the shouldering of a (model) coffin by groups of four women to commemorate the Karbala tragedy. This ritual observance emphasised their *Shia* identity; furthermore, sharing the burden of carrying the coffin became a means to express solidarity with one another and with the larger *Shia* fraternity.

### **Conclusion**

The medieval, walled campus of the *Shah-e-Mardan* shrine is more than a religious space for Delhi’s *Shias*. Through the *majlis*, the physical space of the shrine is transcended and a deeper connection is established with a supranational *Shia* identity, society, and politics. It is within these walls that the local individual acquires and imbibes a larger, supra-local, supra-regional, supra-national *Shia* identity through political, socio-cultural and religious communication on issues that pertain to the larger *Shia* (and Islamic) world.

There is, however, little evidence of the *majlises* acting as a consolidating force for constructing a national identity for the *Shia* community within India. While it is acknowledged that the process of socialisation and intra-community interaction at the local level does contribute to a sense of local *Shia* identity, it must also be noted that little or no attempt was made to establish a link with other large *Shia* communities in other parts of India. By thus, ignoring these intra-community linkages within India, it becomes easier to construct and establish a connection with the larger supra-national *Shia* identity, while at the same time de-emphasising other existing identities (Indian, Muslim, minority). [However, the author acknowledges the limitation that the field work was not conducted during the period of Muharram, when *Shia-Sunni* tensions are sharper, and during which time, attempts to forge a national *Shia* identity may be being made.]

Through political and socio-cultural communication, there is also a distinct attempt to use and identify with Iran as a model of *Shia* identity, politics, and society/culture. In the context of the emergence of Iran as a growing geopolitical force and the preeminent *Shia* power post-1979 Islamic revolution, with *Shia* theology as its legitimising force, Iran is increasingly looked upon not merely as an ideal *Shia* state, but also as an ideal Islamic state. The endorsement of the political actions and outlook, and socio-cultural landscape of *Shia* Iran, in contrast with that of a *Sunni* nation like Saudi Arabia needs to be viewed in this context.

It is also noted that the *majlis* provides a communication mechanism/channel that is parallel/an alternative to mainstream media, and in particular Indian media. While the dominant narrative in the mainstream media gives inadequate space (in the case of Indian media) or appears to portray the major *Shia* countries like Iran, Syria and Lebanon as a threat to modern western values and a ‘stable’

international order, the *majlis* becomes the space/channel that provides an alternative, *Shia*-centric narrative to contemporary events.

The *Shia* identity and ideology is further reinforced by using examples from *Shia* tradition and history as the primary source of reference during *majlises*. The *majlis* discourse is generally replete with vivid imagery, detailed depiction and description of scenes from the battle of Karbala, and narration of the speeches made by members of the *Ahl-e-bait*. Through these methods, the *majlis* also becomes a space for socialisation for the younger members of the community who are initiated into the *Shia* tradition and ritual.

In conclusion, the author would like to make a special mention of a recent development that is pertinent to the arguments made in this paper. In context of the Iraq conflict, demonstrations were organised by the *Shah-e-Mardan* shrine in Delhi, and about a hundred thousand people from across India registered their names to travel to Iraq, protect holy *Shia* shrines and to perform voluntary services like nursing and donating blood (Riaz, n.d.). While the mainstream political narratives in the contemporary world rest on the concept of nation-state and nationalism, it is traditional spaces like the *Shah-e-Mardan* shrine which are participating in forging supranational identities based on sectarian identity.

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## Jainism: Its Philosophical Tradition and the Re-adaptation through Media and Communication

*Komal Shah*

### The Jain in Contemporary World

The Jain population in India according to 2001 census was 4,225,053 out of the total population of India 1,028,610,328 which is approximately 0.4% of the total population<sup>1</sup> (See Table 1).

The growth of the population is estimated to be at 20% between 2001 to 2011 though official census data are not available. The Jain population outside India is small but spread all over the world. The world Jainism population stands at 4.2 million. Jain live primarily in India. Some have immigrated to other countries such as the United States and Canada. There are more Jain temples and groups in the United States than in any other country outside India.

The Jain has the highest literacy rate, 94.1% compared with the national average of 65.38%. They have the highest female literacy rate, 90.6% compared with the national average of 54.16%. It is believed that the Jain also have the highest per capita income in India.<sup>2</sup>

Religious Composition	Population *	(%)
Hindus	827,578,868	80.5
Muslims	138,188,240	13.4
Christians	24,080,016	2.3
Sikhs	19,215,730	1.9
Buddhists	7,955,207	0.8
Jains	4,225,053	0.4
Other Religions & Persuasions	6,639,626	0.6
Religion not stated	727,588	0.1
Total *	1,028,610,328	100.0

by Religion Table 2001 - CD Note : \* Excludes figures of Paomata, Mao Maram and Purul sub-districts of Senapati district of Manipur state.

## History and Essence of Jainism

Jainism is a non-theistic religion that split away from Hinduism in the Indian sub-continent at about the same time as Buddhism. This ancient religion was passed on through the high spiritual genius of one of the greatest religious teachers of all time, Mahavira.

*Mahavira* was not some imaginary being. He was a real man and we know, with reasonable certainty, that his life on earth ended just over 2500 years ago, in 527 B.C. Though many dates have been speculated over the evolution of Jainism. However, in this paper it is estimated that the religion developed 2500 years ago. Mahavira was born in 599 B.C. into a family of the *ksatriya*, or knightly, caste. His father, Siddhartha, was a prince or lord, and his mother, Trisala, also came from a noble family. His birthplace is believed to have been near the modern city of Patna, in Bihar in north-eastern India. Although generally referred to as *Mahavira* (which means 'great hero'), his original name was *Vardhamana*. Until his late twenties he doubtless led a life not very different from that of any other young man in his level of society.<sup>3</sup>

It is believed that Mahavira was a contemporary of the Buddha as described in Buddhist works, however, the Jain works never mentioned about the Buddha. Mahavira lived for seventy-two years of which the last thirty years he spent as a teacher. The Jain works give some details for the first forty-two years of Mahavir's life, but discuss little about his life as a teacher. Though Buddhist works give few details of Mahavira's life after he became a teacher. It is not well documented as to how the Jain broke into two sects, the *Digambaras* and the *Svetambaras*.

According to the account of the eighth schism, known as the great schism, which is corroborated by historical evidence, the process of the split continued from the third century B.C. upto the first century of the Christian Era. In the third century B.C. famous Jain saint Srutakevali Bhadrabahu had predicted a long and severe famine in the kingdom of Magadha (in modern Bihar) and Bhadrabahu, along with a body of 12,000 monks, migrated from Pataliputra, the capital of Magadha, to Shravanabelagola (in modern Karnataka State) in South India.<sup>4</sup>

When the ascetics of Bhadrabahu returned to Pataliputra after the end of twelve-year period of, they noticed two significant changes that had taken place during their absence, in Magadha under the leadership of Acharya Sthulabhadra. In the first place, the rule of nudity was relaxed and the ascetics were allowed to wear a piece of white cloth (known as *Ardhaphalaka*). Secondly, the sacred books were collected and edited at the council of Pataliputra specially convened for the purpose. This relaxation of rule was unacceptable to the ascetics of

Bhadrabahu, eventually, the Jain religion was split up into two distinct sects, viz., the Digambara (sky-clad or stark naked) and the Svetambara (white-clad).<sup>5</sup>

The Jain of Gujarat and the neighboring areas emerging as the *Svetambaras* sometime in the 5th century AD. By perhaps the 4th century AD Jainism had spread to South India as well.<sup>6</sup>

## British Colonialism and Jainism

British Colonial rule ushered in a period of general prosperity for the merchant class. The traditionally affluent Jain merchants benefited from this prosperity. In spite of the growing prosperity of Jains in the nineteenth century & in the beginning of the twentieth century, Jain population continued to decline in India. It could be that Jain merchants, in order to enlarge their business and kin alliance, frequently exchanged their sisters and daughters with Hindu merchants and became part and partial of caste system in India. It was also because of basic Hindu influence and the lay followers.

Many of the views, rituals, and festivals of the Hindus were appropriated by the lay Jains. With that, the boundaries between the two religions tended to become blurred. (According to the 1921 census there were only 1.18 million Jain.)<sup>7</sup>

Officially, the category '*Jain*' was used for the first time in the Census of India of 1881. The Census still remains to be the only government institution which classifies the Jain as a separate religious group. To raise the communal self-awareness amongst Jains, the British-educated Jain reformers campaigned from the mid-nineteenth century onwards the public self-identification of the Jain as '*Jain*,' particularly at the time of the Census when many Jains, for one reason or another, still identify themselves as '*Hindu*.' The incentive of gaining separate representations and other privileges that were granted by the colonial and post-colonial governments to recognized religious communities promised new avenues for the advancement of the political and economic interests of the educated Jain elites and for the preservation of the Jain religion.

In 1926, the reformer Hem Chandra Rai noted in the *Jaina Gazette* that a

dark gloom of ignorance is stunting the growth of our community to a fearful extent all around. . . . As matters stand the large majority of Jains are content with rudimentary teaching of vernacular *Pathshalas* and schools, dotted all over the country. Higher education is distinctly unpopular.<sup>8</sup> According to the mentality of the average Jain, college education is either unnecessary or positively harmful. Some of our mentors try to frighten us into the belief that the spread of [secular Western] education would lead to the decay of religion.<sup>9</sup> Rai argued instead that "[c]ollege education should not at all imply the elimination of religion from the life of the youth, as some people imagine. On the contrary, religious training would be a profitable adjunct of college careers.<sup>10</sup>

In the light of this brief historical perspective, the objective of the paper is to discuss Jainism from a historical perspective and methods of communication for transmission and spread of Jainism starting from its inception (approx 2500 years ago) to its modern re-adaptation including digital media and analyze how media and communication are being utilized for the spread of Jainism.

### Essence and Meaning of Jainism

Jainism believes in a cyclical nature of the universe, a universe without a beginning, without an end and without a creator.<sup>11</sup>

Literally *Jina* means a conqueror, that is, one who has conquered the worldly passions like desire, hatred, anger, greed, pride, etc. by one's own strenuous efforts and has been liberated himself/ herself from the bonds of worldly existence, the cycle of births and deaths. *Jina*, therefore, is a human being and not a supernatural being or an incarnation of an all mighty God. Hence the term *Jina* is applied to a person who is a spiritual victor.

Jainism is founded upon the tradition of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) to all living creatures. According to the *Karma* of an individual, the person may live in any of the four states (heaven, *kuman*, animal, or hell). The aim is to release the soul or at least elevate it to a higher home in the next reincarnation.

By means of the three jewels (right faith, knowledge, and conduct) one can reach salvation, Sin on the contrary, leads to a lower home for the soul in the next reincarnation. Achieving *Moksha* (salvation) or a liberated soul is the ultimate aim of any living being commonly referred to as the *Siddh Lok* (free from the cycle of birth and rebirth). Jainism teaches a way to spiritual purity and enlightenment through a disciplined mode of life and is founded upon the tradition of *Ahimsa*, non-violence to all living creatures.

The five ethics of Jainism are:

*Ahimsa* (non-violence),  
*Satya* (pursuit of truth),  
*Asteya* (non-stealing and honesty),  
*Aparigraha* (non-possession and non-attachment) and  
*Brahmacharya* (celibacy).

These are also called the five *Vratas* (vows) and have to be realized by mind, speech and body.

A distinction is drawn between these ethics or *Vratas* for the ascetic (saints, monks & nuns) and for the layman (*sravak*). The saints have to practice the *Vratas* rigorously. But the *sravakas* have to and can practice with lesser degree according to their worldly life.<sup>12</sup>

### Jain Philosophy

“The nine *tattvas* or principles are the single most important subjects of Jain philosophy. They deal with the theory of karma, which provides the basis for the path of liberation. Without proper knowledge of these *tattvas*, a person cannot progress spiritually.

The Nine Tattvas (Principles) are as follows:

Name	Meaning
1 <i>Jiv</i>	Soul or living being (Consciousness)
2 <i>Ajiv</i>	Non living substances
3 <i>Äsrava</i>	Influx of karma
4 <i>Bandha</i>	Bondage of karma
5 <i>Punya*</i>	Virtue
6 <i>Päp*</i>	Sin
7 <i>Samvar</i>	Stoppage of the influx of karma
8 <i>Nirjarä</i>	Partial exhaustion of the accumulated karma
9 <i>Moksha</i>	Total liberation from karma

\*Some scriptures define *Punya* (virtue) and *Päp* (sin) not as separate *tattvas*. They include them in *Äsrava* and *Bandha*. In reality *Punya* and *Papa* are the result of *Äsrava* and *Bandha*. Hence truly there exist only seven *tattvas*.

*Samyaktva* or *Samyag-Darshan* (Right Faith) is attained when one fully understands the six universal substances and nine fundamentals.<sup>13</sup>

“Jainism has contributed to the philosophy of life in its insistence that the pathway to perfection is threefold:

- *Samyak-Darshana* (right faith/right understanding)
- *Samyak-Jnana* (Right knowledge) and
- *Samyak-Charitra* (right conduct).

*Jiyo Aur Jine Do* (live and let live) is the main slogan of Jainism which was given by *Bhagwan Mahaveer* about two thousand six hundred years ago.<sup>14</sup>

“Jainism has two principal quite different branches, the *Digambara* (Sanskrit ‘Sky-clad,’ naked) and the *Svetambara* (Sanskrit ‘White robed’) Jains. The male *Digambara* ascetics wear no clothes, the *Svetambara* wear white robes. *Digambara* worship idols in temples, whereas *Svetambara* in general are not practicing idolatry and do not have temples.<sup>15</sup>

The essence of Jainism discussed and described so far can be represented and explained by one of the prominent symbols of Jainism known as *Parosparopgraho Jivanam* (Mutual assistance of all beings) as indicated in Figure 1.

### Prominent Symbol in Jainism

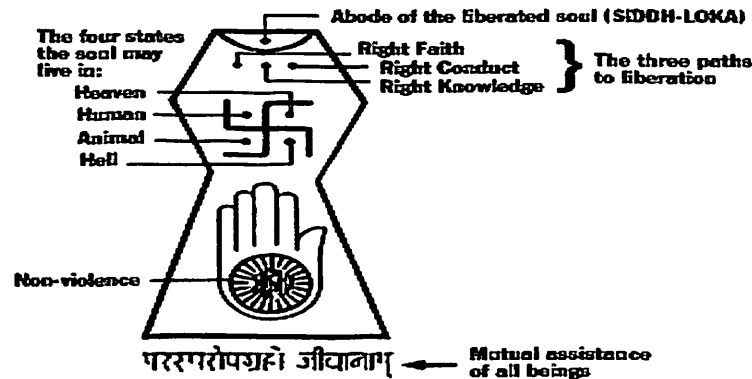


Figure 1

### Contributions of Jainism to the Indian Culture

There are three distinctive contributions of Jainism to the Indian Culture - Equality (*Sama*), Self-control (*samyamana*) and Dignity of labor (*Srama*). Equality or *Samayika* is said to be the heart of Jainism. In the *Jaina* religious scripture, *Dvadasang* or in the *14th Purva*, the place of *Samayika* is the first and foremost among the six daily duties. Without the practice of *Samayika* or equality, there is no hope for any religious or spiritual realization. When a householder accepts the *Jaina* religion, he solemnly pledges to abide by the principle of equality. The three jewels of Jainism, i.e. Right Faith, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct depend upon the principle of equality as indicated in Figure 1. The *Gita* calls it the inner poise or the evenness of mind (*Samatvam*), or equal mindedness (*Sama Cittatvam* or *Samata*) and such a man who attains this is called seer with an equal eye (*Samadarsinah* or *Sarvatra-sama-darsana*). This principle of equality must be reflected both in thought and action. In thought it is the principle of *Anekanta*, in action it is the principle of *Ahimsa*.<sup>16</sup>

### Modes of Communication in Jainism

It is often said that Jains are very enthusiastic about erecting temples, shrines or *upāsrayas* but not much interested in promoting religious philosophy. Jains are especially interested in not the modern academic study of Jainism.

Gradually this trend is changing due to the demands of the information-based economies of the future, and because of the vast improvements in the formal educational standards of the Jain in India.

In 1891, the Census of India recorded a literacy rate of only 1.4% amongst Jain women and of 53.4% amongst Jain men. In 2001, the female literacy rate has risen to 90.6% and for the Jain altogether to 94.1%. Statistically, the Jain are now the best educated community in India, apart from the Parsees.<sup>17</sup>

Amongst young Jains of the global Jain diaspora, university degrees are already the rule and perceived to be a key ingredient of a successful Jain. However, the combined impact of the increasing education and of the growing materialism amongst the Jains on traditional Jain way of life is widely felt and often lamented. Daily sermons dominated traditional Jain religious education for the spread and sustenance of the religious beliefs which were the responsibility of the mendicants. For centuries the few remaining Jain *Pandits* face an uphill struggle to adapt to the rapidly changing social and cultural environment and sometimes choose to combine monastic and academic training to keep up with the rising expectations of their followers.

### Media and Jainism

The Jain religion never spread beyond India though it was once patronized by the princes of the Deccan dynasties. Today there are only four to five million Jains left, and these are largely limited to the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka. The major reason for its limited spread is because of no use of modern means of communication for centuries together. As this religion is based on the principle of non-violence, the practice of writing was avoided due to the pain incurred to the microcosms.

After Mahavira, the Jain religion was propagated through oral communication and through performance art and repetition. Only in the last five hundred years, with the advent of writing and printing, has there been a major push to record and write the stories of Jain religion, songs, and poetry. This technology made many Jain books available to its followers all over the world in the early twentieth century.

### Spread through Print medium

One important development in recent decades has been the publication of good modern editions, often with translations into modern languages, of the sacred books of Jainism, thus making the scriptures, formerly restricted to monks, available to a wider public. The L.D. Institute of Indology in Ahmedabad is



building up an important Jain manuscript collection in original and microfilm. Jain courses and research facilities are available to further the value and importance of this religion world over. There are many modified and translated versions of religious scriptures on Jainism available in the print format, which the Jain youth can read and inculcated the Jainism philosophy in his/her modern lifestyle.

### Spread through Radio and Television medium

Jain orthodoxy of restrained movements overseas for the monks as well as the lay Jains had already taken its toll in the expansion of the Jain population a few years back. Though the doctrines of Jain philosophy have been very well documented in the print media, this religion has much more to offer than intellectual debates. Jainism as a religion is meant to guide people to lead a moral and ethical life. Thus it's both a religion of philosophy and practice. In this fast paced life of the modern world, it is unlikely to expect from a person to go through the detailed philosophy of any religion. The Jain youths too, have faced a similar experience of confusion and frustration as they would want to know more about the religion but have nowhere to turn to. Jain studies have already been introduced in various universities and courses but it does not fulfill aspirations of a lifelong course of conduct for a Jain youth. 'Satsangs' (study circles) have been there for the solution of the same since many years, but the youth was not able to relate to this Jain way of life.

Religious reforms in the Digambara sect brought about a revolution in the Jain community. They were the first to allow religious scriptures to be printed and published as well. Many monks and nuns have travelled abroad in the recent past to propagate the true essence of Jainism to the dispersed Jain population. Further, these religious gurus have even given their consent to appear on television and radio to spread the messages of Jain *Tirthankaras*.

There are many exclusive Jain religious channels like Paras TV, Jinvani, Mangalam Jain TV being launched to focus on issues like religion, spirituality, moral values, health, art of living, and principles of Jainism in simplest form and ensure that people, especially the youth, easily understand the preachings and their importance. These channels telecast 2D and 3D movies and serials based on Jain epics and historical and religious events to portray the teachings and beliefs of Jainism. The audio and visual presentations of the philosophy of Jainism have helped to reach out to a larger section of the society (Jains and non-Jains) with practical applications of the same.

Jain radio, radio podcast, Internet radio is already in existence to deliver religious discourses live as well as delayed broadcast. This has cut down on the time and energy to travel down to various religious places and has given full accessibility to the Jain community for their self enlightenment. Jinvani was the first ever 24/7 Internet radio

carrying various programs such as *Abhishek*, *Pooja*, Lecture (*Pravachan*), *Bhakti*, *Aarti*, *Samayik*, *Pratikraman*, etc. throughout the day. These programs are broadcast as per Jain religious practices followed in India. Any lay person who has had no exposure towards Jainism can even follow these preaching's with ease as they are all developed keeping the listener in view with effective communication skills, though the essence of Jainism is not disturbed in these modifications.

### Spread through New Media

Jainism made its appearance on the web around the end of 1994.<sup>18</sup>

The use of this new media was the next major transition. This came in as a boon for the Jain who are a very small minority in the world. Jains the world over have no Jain neighborhoods to support them; the Internet forms a new form of neighborhood. A few years back, Jainism was not so renowned in the world (indeed even in India), but today, anyone, in any part of the world, can access Jainism articles, texts, pictures, even music at the touch of a button. The Jains too have adopted and embraced this enthusiastically.

It is too early to assess the social impact of the new culturally thinned-out globalized versions of Jainism and of one trans-sectarian global Jain community, which are significant primarily as regulative ideas. It can be expected that traditional sectarian divisions will reemerge in the Jain diaspora as soon as a critical mass of migrants is locally present. Conversions to Jainism will probably remain exceptions. Yet the new global reverberations of Jain ideals and practices of nonviolence as a paradigm for alternative lifestyles are potentially immense.<sup>19</sup>

### Summarizing Jainism and Media

With the growth of modern communications there has been a notable development of all Jain federations of various sorts. Jain scholarship, education, and writing have been introduced at all levels, simple aids for children, learned editions of the sacred texts and university theses on Jain topics are being created world over. Jains have become more conscious of the wider public sphere. Jain sects are more concerned towards spread of knowledge of the Jain religion and to encourage adherence to its principles. Parallel to this there is a growing development of interest by scholars and others in the West and by non-Jains in India. At present we find for the very first time, Jainism been propagated to Africa, Europe and North America, where Jain communities have migrated due to economic activities.

The foregoing analysis of Jain religion in contemporary India reflects a discontinuous change from oral communication for two millennia. Jain monks and lay Jains both have adopted modern means of communication to reach both

Jain and non-Jains. Starting with print medium to the age of Internet, given the economic, political, and social power that they exert in India. Jains today have gone all out for the spirit of Jainism and keeping the lay Jains well-informed to follow the fundamentals of Jainism. It has contributed to the self-realization of Jain identity as a minority community within India and abroad without creating religious animosity and imposition of religious beliefs on others. The growing influence of media and communication hopefully will influence lay Jains to be well-informed.

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St. John's University, Bangkok, Thailand

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.

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UNIVERSITY OF SANTO TOMAS  
PUBLISHING HOUSE  
España, Manila

ISBN 978-971-506-780-5



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