

## Different Media used in Religious Communication

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**Abstract:** Religion grows out of one's personal need. Faith is communicated through various media. Religious communication is born out of communication events such as religious gatherings, individual rituals, and prayers. Religious communication has three important components such as information, transmittal of this information, and understanding this transmittal. Canonical texts, Song, Music, Dance, Drama, Architecture, Plastic Arts, Pictures, Odour, Signs, Symbols, Gesture, and Rituals are important media for communicating religious information.

**Key Words:** Freud, Dreaming, Aboriginal, Al-haram, Teyyam festival, Artistic Communication,

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud described religion as a “universal obsessional neurosis” which depicted religion as a cosmic projector of our good and bad relationship with our parents or loved ones. Religion grows out of one's personal necessity such as longings for mortality, meaningfulness, personal growth, happiness, peace, perfection, isolation, understanding, gratitude and so on. The substance of faith is communicated through various religious practices.

Religion is ‘ethics’: a store of ethical maxims and axioms (Auffarth, and Mohr, 2006, p. 1612). French sociologist Emile Durkheim states: Religion does not exist in a ‘vacuum’, but always a social ‘act’. Being a part of societal activity, religion through its various media (language, clothing, art) always acted as a vehicle of cultural information. During the initiation ceremony of Zoroastrians, the child wears a sudreh (shirt) and a sacred thread with 72 strands. The white sudreh is believed to encourage correct thought in the child.

In the absence of rational and scientific thought, religion is the main vehicle to develop knowledge and to stabilize or revolutionize human attitude and behaviour. Religions describe ideals which can radically transform people. Mahatma Gandhi was an extremely shy, fearful, self-conscious child. His transformation into one of the great political figures of our time occurred as he mediated single-mindedly on the great Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad-Gita (Fisher, and Luyster, 1990, p 13). Gandhiji was highly impressed by the second chapter of the scripture which speaks out the following:

*He lives in wisdom  
Who sees himself in all and all in him  
Whose love for the Lord of Love has consumed  
Every selfish desire and sense-craving  
Tormenting the heart.....  
He is forever free who has broken  
Out of the ego-cage of I and mine  
To be united with the Lord of Love  
This is the Supreme State. Attain thou this  
And pass from death to immortality*

Religion does not just happen. Religions are created by inspired individuals, spread by faithful devotees, and structured so as to reach specific goals and serve the felt need of adherents (Melton, and Baumann, 2002). In belief system, religion is communicated mainly through linguistic medium such as mythological stories, but sometimes it is done through emotional outbursts (ecstasy, trance), dramatic performances, rituals and artistic symbolism. The word communication itself comes from the Latin term for the distribution and participation in the elements of the Eucharist or Communion or Lord's Supper.

From the perspective of communication theory, religious communication is distinguished from general form of communication, as religion is considered to be more complex in structure. Unlike other forms of communication, in religious communication (especially non-verbal one) information is first selected and conceived, and then it is transferred in a collective form rather than to an individual person.

Religious communication is born out of pre-structured communication events such as divine services in holy places, prayer times in churches or temples, individual rituals, and religious gatherings, which demands for the mutual

interaction and physical existence of individual devotees. It has particular conformations which deal with specific themes. It interconnects with time and space through celebrations and various feasts during the festive seasons. In most western societies where Christianity has been a dominant religion, Sunday (Sabbath) acquired a special place. It is considered to be an “off day” (holiday) as a day of rest and pause from regular labour. For Jews, Sabbath begins on Friday evening at sunset-‘when the three stars are visible’; with candlelight, a blessing of the children and drinking of wine.

Religious communication is a storehouse of different themes which depend on the degree of social differentiation as well as on cultural history of the society. In spiritual traditions, these themes are designated with various names when it encounters with a transcendent reality. Themes like illumination, God-realization, awakening, self-knowledge, ecstatic communion, and kensho are few of them, which may be induced by meditation, prayer, fasting, chanting, consuming alcohol and dancing.

## 2. COMPONENTS OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION:

In the view point of religious scholarship, ‘God’ appear to be both as an addressee and a partner in religious communication, albeit in an entirely different way. In many religions, the sender-receiver (I and You) relationship between the God and his devotee stands in the foreground: He is addressed in oath and prayer. In other cases, God’s images are accompanied with his devotees in greeting, clothing and nourishment. Seder is celebrated on the first two days of the Passover, the feast commemorating the Jews’ exodus from Egypt. The meal’s constituents are centred on the Seder plate, which represent various symbolic meanings. Further ‘identifying’ forms of communication also appear, and in multiplicity: in Australian rituals summoning the ‘dream time’, the participant in worship plays the being; but mystical experiences also readily occasion the surrender of the distinguishing I-Thou relationship in favour of an identification (Stolz, 2006, p 802).The concept of ‘Dreaming’ or ‘Dreamtime’ has been reflected in the Aboriginal Cosmology. The term ‘Dreaming’ was the first attempt to understand the *Aranda* words “*altjiranga ngambakala*”, which refer to as founding drama of how the ancestors rose up to a tangible shape from beneath the earth. As the ancestors travel from place to place, they left some physical expressions of themselves in the landscapes; in form of a tree, waterhole or a rocky outcrop. Thus Aboriginals linked to the spirituality (ancestral being) through territories (land links), kinship connections (human relationships) and totems (other-species links). Different Aboriginal groups designated ‘Dreaming’ with different names such as *altjira*, *wonger*, *djugurba* and *allcheringa*. As a social phenomenon, communication consists in the synthesis of three components: a) information b) the transmittal of this information, and c) an understanding of this transmittal and its information. Each of these components is dependent on the cultural context of a society and is therefore perceived collectively (Thomas, 2006, p 433).An information is conceived when transmittal (encoder) selects a meaningful element in the communication process. First, the selection of information is based on the formation of meanings. Then the information is converted to linguistic or non-linguistic signs or codes. This system of signs (speeches or speech images) is the medium of religious communication.

Transmission of this meaningful information is the second component in the religious communication process. In this step, the transmittal (sender) plays the role of both agenda setter and gate keeper before disseminating the messages. He can either first selects the information to be transmitted or he may omit certain part according to his requirement. The transmittal may develop a relationship with the gathered information and then select a medium to transit the messages. Media can be various means of propagation, such as books, leaflets, pamphlets, radio, television and others.

The third important step in religious communication is ‘the comprehension of information’. In this step transmittal understands and perceives this meaningful information. Then he transfer this filtered information to his receivers. Transmission of messages in religious communication becomes successful only if when information is passed to the similar horizon of meaning. If on the basis of understanding, the receiver reacts in the way as sender (transmittal) wants, then the communication will be a continuous and dynamic process. A sender may reach the receiver even without the immediate presence of the latter one, only if the medium he selected is familiar and reliable to the receiver.

## 3. RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION IN OTHER COMMUNICATION FORM:

### Divine Communication

Religious communication is asymmetrical in nature. The divine communication between the ultimate and the human being are considered to be more powerful. In this form of communication, Gods must be open to humans. The concept of God or the sacred is expressed through behaviours, images, speeches and musical forms. In many religions, preaching is an eminent form of religious communication. The preacher, a human being, is not only a transmitter of divine messages, but also a medium through which the divine reality transmit itself. First, deity is understood as a person and presented in the form of image and speech. Reflection of the God through various media (like plastic arts, architecture and others) varies religion to religion. In Hinduism and Buddhism, iconography determines the vast

representation of the Ultimate. While in other religions such as Islam and Judaism, visual perceptible images of the God are not permitted.

Syntactic, semantic and pragmatic are three vital element of divine communication. First syntactically, the transmittal must connect the God with other elements of the symbolic system. Secondly, semantic representation of the Ultimate is acquired when one search about the 'proper meaning' belonging to a divinity and connect the effectiveness of a god with the human world. Egypt. And lastly, pragmatically one inquires into the communicational context in which a divine being appears. 'God- the Sacred' is not always an entity of concern. He is represented as 'higher one' when only calls him in need or become a 'personal one' when one represent him in the form of amulet.

#### **Form-bound Communication**

A complex religious communication demonstrates a high measure of 'form binding', which implies to the core area of cultic communication. Various classics text of religions encourages the process of form binding through their supernatural themes like God or transcendence that further develop with the societal position of religions. The periodical repetition of central communication events such as performing namaaz on every Friday in Islam establishes a temporal aspect of the form binding in religious communication. The Form-bound communications during Islamic Friday prayer have a greater advantage on the part of participants in contrast to other formal social conversation, as participants not only get 'ease into' the event but also indulge themselves in the intimacy of themes. In dynamic religious traditions, form binding are more flexible because they are modified and rebuilt according to demanded situations e.g. liturgical reforms, divorce rituals.

#### **Cross-cultural Communication**

In cross-cultural scenario, religions played a commanding role in communication process. Religious communication differentiated in aims and objectives. In Judaism, Jews communicate because their alderents were scattered across various areas where as the Buddhists monks had a missionary zeal of propagating their religious values. Religious communication generates deep impact on both traditional and cultural values of a society as it has a powerful effect on various ways of exchanging and developing ideas. For example, in Hinduism Brahmins class possessed a monopoly over the sacred form of knowledge. Other three bottom classes acts in corresponds to the demand of Brahmins. Religious specialists (priests) are credited of holding special knowledge, which is a common feature of every religion. But the modes in which these specialists operate vary one religion to another. Languages played an important role in facilitating or hindering communication in different religions. Use of Sanskrit helped Brahmins to have a control over the original (oral) tradition of Sruti and prohibited outsiders of the class hierarchy to come in contact with the Vedic scriptures. In contract to Hinduism, in Buddhism the teachings of Buddha were transmitted in a north-Indian vernacular language Pali. For Muslim community, Arabic became a sacred language as holy Qur'an is written in Arabic.

#### **4. MEDIA IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION:**

Religious Communication phenomena have been multimedial for thousands of years, in as much as they offer simultaneous or serial communications in a multiplicity of media of communication. For instance, they connect the acoustical linguistic transmittal of sermon or prayer, in song, with music (Thomas, 2006, p 440).

#### **Canonical Texts**

The process in which a set of symbols, texts, actions or artifacts is fixed as authoritative and normative form is known as canonization. In major religions, styles of piety and various cultic practices share straight relationship with the collection, ordering and commitment of canonical writing. Sacred books like the Bible of Christians, the Qur'an of Muslims, the Jewish Tanach, the Sikh Adi Granth and the Buddhist Tipitaka are major canonical texts. The sacralisation of the gathered material distinguishes the content of a religious canon from other classical materials or from a corpus of laws. A canon not only establishes rigid doctrines and praxis but also form a common identity for its believers. It becomes a medium of both cultivation of meaning and memory because its materialistic content is available according to the demand of space and time.

The canon is expounded not festivals, divine services and devotional sites but also in academic and legal institutions. Thus a religious canon not only holds a consecrated place among its believers but it is also regarded as a medium of cult and formation. Newly erected gate at the frontier of Mecca's haram district, 'Al-haram' is built in the form of Qur'an lectern. The term 'Al-haram' means the sanctuary and it is referred to as 'sacred inviolable place', which strictly limits to non-Islamic communities. This haram located five kilometres away from Ka'aba and stretches thirty kilometres to the southeast, enclosing Mount Arafat and other pilgrimages.

In terms of communication theory, canonical texts like the Bible and the Qur'an have twin faces. On one side they speak about past religious communication. On the other side, these canonical texts act as transmittal for the present religious communities. It also conveyed as propagation medium through which the author of the text or divinity expresses. The moral conceptions of canonical texts serve to reinforce religious traditions. A canon became a medium of production in religion as tradition is promoted through sacred testimonies or ancestral words.

## **Song and Music**

Transmission of linguistic codes through verbal means is an important factor in religious communication. Protestantism evinces, religious instrumental music and songs are vital role in this form of communication. Religious songs are part of formed communication. These songs are usually heard in community connect speech with music. Each and every participant of these songs is not only mere receiver but also considered to be an understanding recipient of messages. Information can be communicated with greater ambiguity, in comparison to speech. As music is capable of generating own unique space of experiences, which not only stimulates our intense feelings but also leads toward harmony of feelings. Songs along with music is often considered to be scaffolding for appreciating religious messages. Music has a natural affinity with differing emotions. In Abraham religions like Christianity, Judaism and Islam, the religious confessions are sung. Islam is deeply connected with music as chanting of the Qur'an can be compared to a musical score. As song and music encourages mass participation, religions have taken special interest in creation of hymns and tunes.

## **Dance**

In many religions, music is automatically connected with another medium of communication i.e. dance. The combination of dance and music makes it possible to convey intense experiences. Dance often incorporated into rituals and combined with chants, speech and instrumental music. Bodily expression in rhythmic form held an important place for the original Polynesian inhabitants of Hawaii. Hula dance is a significant ritual expression, through whose flowing movements myths and natural powers are presented, communicated and transmitted from one generation to another. It also represents adaptation of secular ideas and exploitation of non-European religions.

Hasidism is one of the notable offshoots of Judaism. It revitalized Judaism by re-introducing elements of the Jewish Kabbalah (mystical branch of worship). The Hasidim are known for their making their connection with God through ecstatic dance.

The intention to create a strong sense of ecstasy is an extremely controversial matter in religions. But Hinduism encourages private spiritual experience of the individual through dances. For the member of the Krishna Consciousness Movement expression of such intense feeling through dance is ecstasy.

## **Drama**

In sacred drama mythological stories (connected with rites and rituals) are produced theatrically before its community of believers. In many threshold rituals celebrated in ethnic religions such as initiation of a youth into adulthood or presentation of divine one often become the content of a religious play. In the Christian tradition, performing play during Christmas or Easter has become a familiar part of the festivals.

Religious dramas are very popular in rural India as they present splendid figures in highly stylized fashion. A sacred drama is so wildly adorned by illiterate rural masses that it replaced all written forms of religious communication. Gods or goddesses present their existence, histories and teachings directly to the eyes of an illiterate person. In Kerala, during Teyyam festival goddess Uccitta sings her history accompanied to beating of drums. At the final stage of this ritual, she longer speaks through community language, instead she reveal herself through wild dance and sign language. The Sanskrit drama of Kutiyáttam theatre is an important element in the annual ritual cycle of temples in Kerala. At the beginning of the ritual process, both actors (Cákyár male) and actresses (Nannyár female) are purified ritually before applying their make-up in order to elevate their position.

Two great epics of Hindus, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata formed the basis of dramatic presentation in India. On the other hand, Buddhism had a ban on monks or nuns viewing dance or drama, and this restriction prohibits development of Buddhist drama.

## **Architecture**

Theorist Umberto Eco states that architecture is a “system of rhetorical formulas”. The architecture of religious buildings is a medium of religious communication and considered to be a significant mode of conveying ideas and complex symbolism. Unlike pictorial and graphical representation, buildings do not transmit any messages but they express something beyond their physical solidity and utilitarian purpose.

According to architectural theory, building is considered as an “imago mundi” or image of the world. In concrete and plastic form, religious architectures communicate to the environment about the existence and behaviour of things. Construction of holy sites and places of worship is an important part in every religion. Religious buildings are places where gods are thought to be dwelling, where a person shows their reverence through gifts and where their images are displayed. The massive towered Hindu temples in the mould of stupas are signs of a sacred mountain on which the Gods assemble. The doomed Orthodox Church symbolises the way heaven comes to the earth.

Sacred places are tangible contributor to faith than mere words. These sites are ideal places of pilgrimage and play a major role in communication process among the devotees. Pilgrimages often included picturesque element that are easily accessible for popular human imagination. In Judaism and Islam, a sacred site is conceived as a space where community gathers for reading Holy Scriptures and for its explanation, for songs and for prayers. Places like Bodhi Gaya, Sarnath, Kapilavastu and Kusinagara are holy sites for the Buddhists.

## **Plastic Arts**

Art is the product of human creative skill. Artistic Communication is a form of symbolic behaviour in which an artist produces or arranges objects that imply and evoke emotions according to the conventions of codes. During this form of communication it is not essential for the artist (sender) and the audience (receiver) to coexist either in space or time, but it is necessary that both must share a common symbolic code.

In this modern era religions arts became a substitute for religious writings because religious arts are powerful means of communication. The sublime smile of a Buddha figure show that even a minimal gesture like a smile may convey true Enlightenment that one can attain in life. In 9<sup>th</sup> century, the Japanese monk 'Kukai' (introducer of Shingon Buddhism) showed art can play an essential role in teaching "religious truth".

Influential religions use plastic arts as a medium of transmittal in religious communication. Statues, steles are considered to be primary symbols in religions. In both Catholic and Protestantism, crucifixes and representations of Mary not only occupied a central place in Church, but also focus popular piety in daily life. In Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, statues become sacramental incarnation of divine or supernatural being. But religions like Islam, Judaism and parts of Christianity (Calvinism in older days) consider iconic representation of God as a wrong and sinful action. Such religions have alternative means of expressing their attitudes toward the Ultimate. Islamic arts and artifacts often use texts from the Qur'an to convey its messages.

## **Pictures**

Apart from plastic arts, pictorial representation is an eminent form of religious art. In Christianity, communicative nature of pictures is evinced in the name "biblia pauperum" (Bible of the Poor), where various frescos and paintings were seen as the 'Bible' of the illiterate laity. The glass windows of the churches are special visual forms of transmittal in the western churches. The presentation of child divinities like Rama, Krishna and Hanuman in colour pictures has become a common trend in India.

## **Odour**

In the religious context, fragrances such as incenses or perfumes are olfactory media of communication. Smell being an important sense organ, is very hard to ignore.

## **Signs, Symbols and Gesture**

Religion is highly complex and culturally conditioned system of interpretation, which is a storehouse of various signs and symbols. The wide variety of religious signs and symbols includes audible sounds, words, language, visual signs, haptics and kinesics (body language). Symbolism is a strong way of conveying faith and has a greater impact than the abstractions of doctrine.

Many religions use sophisticated linguistic signs other than expressive gestures. With the help of signs and symbols, entire narrative particularly myths can be presented nonverbally. In Hindu religion, not only symbolical gestures (hands and figure position) but bodily postures play a vital role in communicating religious messages. The Sanskrit term "mudra" refers to a multiplicity of meaningful hands and figure position. Each mudra has its own meaning according to the position of human body. Dharmachakra mudra (the gesture of teachings), Varada mudra (the gesture for greeting and compassion), Samadhi mudra (the gesture for meditation), Vitarka mudra (the gesture for argumentation) and Abbaya mudra (the gesture for fearlessness and renunciation) are different forms of mudras. Various gestures made by the hand in Buddha statues (e.g. Buddha teaching in analytical way or that he bids us to leave fear behind) are different mudras that portray various motif of the Buddha's life and doctrine.

## **Rituals**

Rituals are highly patterned communication, in which the transmittals are so extensively interconnected that they become repeatable. In rituals linguistic media are complemented by a variety of non-linguistic ones. In religious communication, meaningful or unusual objects (like Ganges water), behaviours and human body (nudity in Jainism) become vehicles of religious transmittal. Ritual is a form by which religious communities communicate to themselves. Divine services in churches or synagogues, mass prayer in mosques and central acts of worship are extensively ritualized acts of communication that are supported by interaction and mutual physical presence. Human presence as media of religious transmittal not only requires their faith, but also demanded their presence and acceptance of the ritualistic action. Rituals are occasional experiences that are difficult to ignore and at the same time highly intense. This ritual-practical dimension of religion is a major means of communicating faith.

The practice of rituals can be both formal and informal. The case of a Roman Catholic High Mass is highly formal ritual where as 'a meeting of the Society of Friends' is informal in nature. Various ritualistic acts are supplemented by different modes of spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation and confession.

## **5. CONCLUSION:**

Religion plays an important role as communication media. Like any other communication process, religious texts, rites and rituals disseminate message from sender to receiver. Every religion has specific objectives and goals; objective to communicate message. Religion can transform a person mentally, physically and spiritually. It demands mutual interaction and physical existence of individuals' recipients. Religion is sacred form of communication where

interaction between the Ultimate and the human devotees occurs. Different form of media such as architecture, images, and speeches, oral and musical forms are adopted to disseminate sacred and divine messages.

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