Masala McGospel: A Case Study of
CBN's Solutions Programme in India

INTRODUCTION

When arguing for the need for the church in India to be ‘Indianised’, veteran American missionary E. Stanley Jones drew a poignant analogy based on North Indian marriage custom.\(^1\) After the wedding ceremony, the women friends of the bride, surrounded by musicians, accompany her to the home of the bridegroom. They then usher the bride into the presence of the bridegroom, after which they quietly take leave. That is as far as they are allowed to go. ‘That,’ says Jones, ‘is our joyous task in India – to know Jesus, to introduce him to India and then to retire ... to trust India with Christ and trust Christ with India. We can go so far. He and India must go the rest of the way’ (1925: 160). To what extent have these words, written in the 1920s, been taken seriously by succeeding bands of missionaries and mission agencies in India?

This study looks at a relatively new form of missionary activity in India, trans-border televangelism brought about by satellite technology. There are currently four 24-hour Christian networks that feature televangelists in India. This openness is remarkable in light of growing tensions between Hindu militant groups and Christian missionaries and the deeply negative accusations levelled at the church that conversion to Christianity is part of an ‘international conspiracy’ to divide India (Dalrymple 1999: 20). Ninety-five percent of all Indian televangelism programmes are based on the genre of ‘straight preaching’, that is, they are mainly 15–20 minute sermons recorded during Church services or crusades and edited for television broadcast. Ninety per cent of these programmes originate from overseas countries notably USA, UK, Australia and New Zealand, and 75% are produced in the English language (James and Shoesmith 2006). In secular TV, unlike Christian televangelism, almost ‘all imported programmes – talk
shows, cartoons, soap operas, game shows – are ‘Indianised’, which entails dubbing and local hosting’ (Chatterjee 1998). Whilst several Western televangelists have started dubbing their programmes, only 5% of televangelism programmes are reformatted especially for the Indian audience (James and Shoesmith 2006).

Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), an American Christian media agency, has been in India for more than ten years. After years of experimentation and audience research, CBN India has developed an assortment of, what Jonathan James terms ‘localised or indigenous televangelism’ programmes. One such programme is Solutions, a half-hour magazine-type programme with interviews, real life stories and testimonies hosted by a compeer who weaves in the Gospel message. The present study aims to analyse CBN India’s Solutions in order to understand its strengths and weaknesses as seen through the eyes of Church and Hindu community leaders in India. Our particular goal is to investigate from an ethnographic perspective how culturally sensitive and localised the programme is within the Indian context.

Our approach in this study is as follows: firstly, we delineate the scope, outline the methodology and give an overview of the key terms and concepts related to the study; secondly, we provide a brief overview of televangelism in India and an historical sketch of CBN India; thirdly, we report on a content analysis of Solutions; finally, we reveal Church and Hindu leaders’ regard for the Solutions programme and evaluate the findings.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

A case study approach was used to investigate the extent to which televangelism is localised in India. CBN’s Solutions was chosen for this case study because of its success among viewers in both secular and Christian stations and its multi-linguistic appeal. Episode three of Solutions (English version) was chosen as a ‘show piece’ because, in our opinion, it represents the overall ethos of CBN’s programming philosophy.

Interview participants comprised thirty Christian pastors and thirty Hindu leaders from two cities, Mumbai and Hyderabad. Christian pastors were limited to leaders from mainline churches associated with Protestant denomination, while Hindu leaders were chosen from the main city temples, as well as from the well known Hindu organisations, such as the Arya Samaj and Ramakrishna Mission. The research methodology employed was quantitative as well as qualitative. The quantitative aspect involved the researcher watching ten
episodes of *Solutions* before doing a content analysis of the third episode, which was singled out for the case study. The qualitative part of the research involved an interview with the CBN India director as well as ethnographic interviews with the sixty Christian and Hindu leaders. The interviews were preceded by the leaders viewing episode three of *Solutions*. A set of guided questions was used in the qualitative interviews. With the exception of questions four and six (which were omitted for the Hindu leaders) the following questions served as discussion pointers for the leaders:

- How would you rate the production quality of the programme?
- What elements are culturally appropriate?
- What elements are culturally inappropriate?
- How would your church members respond to the programme?
- How would Hindus in the community respond?
- What is the best way to evangelise your community?

While the Christian leaders were interviewed as a group in both cities, the Hindu leaders were interviewed individually in their respective temples, offices and homes. The researcher had organised for both Christian and Hindu leaders to be interviewed in two groups, but due to unforeseen circumstances this did not work out. Whereas close to 90% of the Christian leaders were present at the venue for the research, only 20% of the Hindu leaders made it for their scheduled group interview. Hence fresh appointments had to be arranged for the researcher to visit the Hindu participants in their own environments. In the end this actually worked out for the better, as these respondents were more relaxed in their own familiar surroundings and, furthermore, the researcher was able to appreciate many of the issues that were raised in their context. There was an opportunity to share some of the salient results between the Christian and Hindu groups for clarification, cross-checking and discussion.

**KEY TERMS**

We have used the term ‘McGospel’ in the title of the study following George Ritzer's writings on the phenomenon of McDonaldisation — that is, the ways in which the principles of the most well-known American fast-food chain operate in a wide array of social settings such as the work place, education and health care (Ritzer 1993: 1). We have attempted to relate this phenomenon also to the church and, in particular, to American televangelism in India. Ritzer outlines five dominant themes that take place within the McDonalisation process: efficiency, calculability, pre-
dictability, increased control, and the replacement of humans by non-human technology (Ritzer 1994: 140–56). It is beyond the scope of this paper to show a one-to-one correspondence between the McDonaldisation process and televangelism, but for the purpose of this study 'McGospel' refers to the Gospel originating from the USA – with all the cultural and technological additives of America.

The term masala is a reference to the blending of Indian spices. The prolific Bollywood film industry that produces Indian movies has been referred to and known to follow a formulaic masala mix consisting of mainly melodramatic and romantic storylines linked with doses of song, dance and music. Hence 'Masala McGospel' is a reference to the blending of American Gospel with the Indian culture. McDonalds menus do vary from country to country. In India Hindus do not eat beef and Islam forbids the eating of pork, so McDonalds in India has lamb, chicken and vegetarian burgers on their menu. In Sweden McDonalds offers a Smulton-Vanilj Paj, a local version of McDonalds pie. By adapting their core culture to fit in with the local tastes, McDonalds franchises have remained successful globally (Frost 2005).

Benjamin Compaine points out that when Star TV (an Asian subsidiary of News Corp) began broadcasting satellite TV into India, with programmes like Dallas and The Bold and the Beautiful dubbed in Hindi, audience ratings were low. Compaine adds that the 'network only succeeded in India once it hired an executive with experience in Indian programming to create Indian soap operas and when an Indian production house took over news and current affairs programming' (Compaine 2002). Therefore, Compaine concludes that global firms that produce and sell only homogeneous products or content are less likely to sustain audiences (2002).

In a similar way, the American Christian media group Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) has adapted its core culture to fit in with certain aspects of Indian culture and customs in their televangelistic programme Solutions. In this way, the global and what has been termed the local are 'simultaneously apparent in interconnected ways' (Lyon 1999: 99). The term 'glocalisation' coined by Roland Robertson comes from the Japanese business technique of dochakuka, which originally was used when a company adapts a global outlook to local conditions (Robertson 1995: 20). Therefore, it can be stated that Solutions is a glocal version of CBN USA's global televangelism ministry.

We have used the terms 'indigenous' and 'localised' interchangeably to point towards a missiological understanding of communication.
focus is based on whether the universal aspects of the Christian Gospel are expressed in culturally understandable and sensitive ways. Historically missionaries have cautiously sought to draw the boundary between indigenisation and syncretism (Nicholls 1995: 19–38).

TELEVANGELISM IN INDIA

The hybrid term ‘televangelism’ was coined by Jeffrey K. Hadden and Charles E. Swann in their book Prime Time Preachers. It comes from the merging of the words ‘television’ and ‘evangelism’ and refers to the phenomenon of a new breed of Christian evangelists who use the medium of television to get their message across to the masses (1981: 4–12). Hadden and Shupe argue that televangelism’s roots are more than a century and a half old, going back to the revivalist movements of nineteenth century America (1988: 60–1). Razelle Frankl goes a step further to show that televangelism today is a direct descendent of the revival ministries of Charles Finney, Dwight Moody and Billy Sunday (1978: 23–61). Quentin Schultz explains that televangelism is based on the following features: like its ally commercial television, it is dependent on audience support, works best with strong and media-savvy personalities, and it reflects aspects of the American culture in its materialistic and consumerist value system (1989: 248).

The Indian Government’s open policy on satellite and Cable TV since the mid 1990s has created a miniature media explosion. There are currently four 24-hour Christian networks: Miraclenet, God TV – both owned by Charismatic Christians – the Catholic network EWTN, and Daystar, which was launched in early 2006 after the initial field research was completed. The religious fervour and flavour in India is further evidenced by the existence of a 24-hour Islamic TV channel, Q Channel originating from overseas, and a 24-hour Hindu TV channel, Aastha. There are five other Hindu TV channels; however, they do not currently operate on a 24-hour basis (James and Shoesmith 2006). This openness to religious television is remarkable in light of the latest census figures depicting India’s population by religion: Hindus 80.5%, Muslims 13.4%, Christians 2.3%, Sikhs 1.9%, Buddhists 0.8%, Jains 0.4% and others 0.6% (Tata Services Limited 2000). Therefore, Christians, though a minority, are dominating the religious television scene in India.

According to the Satellite and Cable TV Industry Magazine in India, there are 67 million cable TV homes and 106 million TV homes in India (SCAT India 2006). Business Line, a financial daily from the Hindu group of publications, has stated that, based on a Television Audience Measure-
ment (TAM) report, ‘religious channels had a viewership share of 0.63% of the total television pie in 2004, and it rose to 0.72% in 2005, which, when rounded off, is almost equal to the viewership from the music channels (1%)’ (ibid. 2006). The article also mentioned that ‘religious channels like Aastha (Hindu) and God TV (Christian) had an all-India viewership share of 28% in 2005’ (ibid. 2006). Given India’s population of 1.2 billion people, this may not seem significant. However, the number of cable homes is rising every year and the costs are getting more and more affordable at approximately Rp.300 (US five dollars) per month for nearly 150 channels. Therefore, community leaders are predicting more and more Indians will be able to access cable TV in the ensuing years (Field notes, 2005).

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF CBN INDIA

Christian Broadcasting Network Inc (CBN), headquartered in Virginia Beach, USA, is the televangelistic ministry started by Pat Robertson in 1970. According to the CBN website, its mission is to spread the Gospel throughout the world by means of television broadcasts and video and literature distribution. The National Counselling Center is the department of the CBN that provides prayer, scriptural guidance and literature to people who call CBN’s prayer line. The 700 Club is a live television programme that airs weekdays before a studio audience from CBN’s broadcast facilities in Virginia Beach, Virginia. From its humble beginnings in the USA, CBN now broadcasts to forty-three nations around the world as CBN International.

On November 1997 the 700 Club, a magazine-type TV programme produced by CBN, premiered in India. Today CBN has its own local office and broadcast facility in India (CBN International India) and its programmes are telecast on several Indian cable channels – Zee Music, Zee English, Zee Cinema, God TV, Jaya TV and Maa TV. CBN International India telecasts programmes in the following languages to cater for India’s multilingual population: English, Hindi, Tamil and Telegu. Initially only English programmes produced in USA like the 700 Club were aired, but in the 1980s specific and localised programmes were introduced for the Indian audience. One of the most successful locally produced English programmes is Solutions, a half-hour programme aired weekly ‘reaching one million people every month with a message of hope’ (CBN, India). It is shown on both secular and Christian stations, mostly during prime time (Periasamy 2005).

According to the promotional material on CBN’s website, Solutions is a programme that
... consists of actual testimonies of how lives have been transformed by the Lord Jesus Christ. ... The programme also includes the humanitarian activities of CBN International India touching lives through medical camps, ministries to street children and provision of drinking water. To support the vast response from viewers of Solutions our call center provides professional counselling and prayer for those who call our toll free number. With fifteen call stations, we attend to more than five thousand calls per month. Our counsellors are spirit-filled and sensitive to the physical and spiritual needs of the caller. ... Solutions is also produced in Hindi, Tamil and Telegu (CBN, India).

CBN India is registered as a business corporation in India and is contracted by CBN International to produce programmes for India. As such there are US directors on the board of CBN India, which has a staff of around 140 Indian employees. One hundred percent of the funding currently comes from the USA, although CBN India is also encouraged to raise local funds and its humanitarian arm Operation Blessing is registered as a Non-Government organisation with a local board (Periasamy 2005).

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SOLUTIONS

Solutions is a novel televangelistic programme with a magazine format. Episode number three was analysed. The entire programme was approximately 27 minutes long with the bulk of the time spent on the story of a Hindu lady named Nila, a widow who 'turned to Christ' after her husband passed away in a car crash. The story of Nila is narrated in a professional news documentary style. Soon after the story the compeer, Shekar Kalyanpuri (a pastor of a Mumbai Charismatic Church), shares the Gospel message and invites people to turn to Christ because Christ accepts the rejected of society. Nila's story is preceded by interviews of young people in large cities. They are asked: 'How does society treat widows?' The men are asked, 'Would you marry a widow?' Eight out of ten men say 'No'. This lead-up to the story is significant as it establishes the point that widows are stigmatised in Indian society.

The other major time slot is devoted to a segment of CBN's relief work in Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban. It shows CBN's India director, Kumar Periasamy, in action in Afghanistan. It basically informs the audience of the social and relief arm of CBN Operation Blessing. In a dramatic way, it zeroes in on how CBN's development work in an Afghanistan village has helped one schoolgirl who otherwise would not have had basic schooling.
### Table 1. Content analysis of Solutions – Episode 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Key statements</th>
<th>Time (in minutes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Compere at studio set</td>
<td>’Welcome to Solutions…’</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini documentary of Operation Blessings in Afghanistan and fund raising</td>
<td>Story of schoolgirl helped by CBN India</td>
<td>’Your gifts have helped a school girl in Afghanistan’</td>
<td>4½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promo of Solutions</td>
<td>A dialogue between two people</td>
<td>’Call us, our counsellors are waiting’</td>
<td>2½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compere introduces main story</td>
<td>Compere at studio set</td>
<td>’The Bible has a definition of true religion … visit widows’</td>
<td>1½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview of young people in city centres</td>
<td>Roving reporter fields questions</td>
<td>’Would you marry a widow?’</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story of Nila the widow</td>
<td>Documentary style story</td>
<td>’I was so down I prayed to Jesus’</td>
<td>7½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compere closes the story</td>
<td>Compere at studio set</td>
<td>’Jesus in the only one who could help Nila’</td>
<td>3½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing comments</td>
<td>Compere at studio set</td>
<td>’Call our Counsellors’</td>
<td>2½</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total time** 27

**HOW THE CHURCH RESPONDS TO SOLUTIONS**

Eighty five percent of the Christian leaders felt that the production quality was good, with 10% stating it was excellent. Only 5% thought that it needed improvement, specifically in the areas of photography and lighting.

Approximately 65% of the respondents felt the programme was ‘culturally appropriate’ to the Indian context, whereas 35% felt there were features in the programme that were definitely inappropriate to India. When the pastors were asked what was culturally appropriate, nearly 60% listed the following items: the compeer, Indian music, content and the style of presentation. The compeer, an Indian wearing Indian clothes, related well to the audience. Another feature of the programme that was deemed culturally appropriate was the choice of the story/testimony of the widow. Most of the pastors felt this was a culturally relevant issue in India and therefore the subject of widows in the programme would touch the hearts of the Indian community. In short, to quote one Christian leader, the programme involved ‘Indian people involved in an Indian problem handled as much as possible in an Indian way’ (Field notes CL, 2005).
Table 2. Culturally appropriate and inappropriate elements in Solutions – Christian leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appropriate</th>
<th>Inappropriate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indian compere dressed in Indian clothes</td>
<td>Style of production: programme divided into segments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story of Indian widow</td>
<td>Western dress code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Indian music</td>
<td>Western music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentle style of presentation</td>
<td>Western ways of relating and communicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compere in a luxurious studio setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incomplete Gospel presentation: ‘Jesus is my husband’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taliban (Afghanistan) mini documentary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even though only 40% felt there were features in the programme that were culturally inappropriate, the sentiments they expressed, were very strongly and convincingly worded. Firstly, the issue of dress code was addressed. Before the story of the widow was presented, reporters were fielding questions from the public about the plight of widows and posed the question: would a man marry a widow in India today? Several pastors felt some of the girls and women folk interviewed were ‘scantily dressed with short pants and short skirts’, which is offensive to Indian Christians (Field notes CL, 2005). It was also pointed out that the compere, although dressed in Indian clothes, was in luxurious surroundings and this is contrary to how pastors live in India. In other words, the pastor in the TV programme was portrayed as an American or British pastor rather than a local pastor. The Western clothes, luxurious setting and some of the trendy Western idioms and words reflect a foreign Western identity. This sentiment concurs with Moorti’s research findings on TV game shows in India:

While in the West the clothes that the men wear may signify being very casual, within the Indian context these items serve as markers of distinction. … Women appearing in many of the national programmes and especially on music-related shows are very fashionable and scantily clad. They signify a cultural and symbolic capital that is still available to only a limited slice of the population […] (Moorti 2004: 556).

The leaders felt that there are two levels of communication: on the first level, the Christian message is explained; on the second level, a message of Western cultural superiority is implied. This would cause young people and the rising middle class to aspire more and more towards Western ways of living.
Production and music was the second issue. The whole programme was 'too slick' according to one of the pastors. 'The half hour show was divided into too many segments and it was hard to follow' was another response (Field notes CL, 2005). The fast-paced cuts and quick transitions from one scenario to another can be quite confusing to many Indians who are not accustomed to the Western mode of television production. For nearly forty years American pre-schoolers have been raised on a television diet of *Sesame Street*, which trained a whole generation to learn 'through the jazzy techniques of ... quick cuts, animation, humor' (Hymowitz 1985). It is significant that the creator of *Sesame Street*, Joan Ganz Cooney, initially used the television advertisement or commercial as the model for *Sesame Street* and then went on to incorporate all of television's formats: 'Its shows are an encyclopaedia of TV forms; minute-long soap operas with soppy organ music to teach the importance of trees. ... Imitation of MTV videos, sitcoms, talk shows, TV award ceremonies – you name it ...' (Hymowitz 1985).

*Solutions* uses many of these production techniques from the USA, as they are now part of the standard production procedures; however, Indian audiences may take a while to get used to them. Hence this is a clear example of the medium not being properly formatted to the Indian mindset. One of the leaders likened this to Indian pastors who go overseas to undertake seminary training and then return to India and preach 'three point sermons', an approach which is different from the 'cyclical' approach to traditional Indian preaching (Field notes CL, 2005). According to this leader, those who communicate the faith to audiences, whether in Church or on TV, need to use culturally-sensitive techniques of communication.

One pastor lamented over the fact that, although it was an Indian story, they used 'Western music too liberally' rather than 'sticking to Indian music' (Field notes CL, 2005). Indian Culture was mentioned next. The whole atmosphere and style of the interview was quite foreign to the Indian context. 'Men and women do not sit next to each other and talk so freely,' commented one pastor. It was mentioned that even today in a majority of Indian churches the women sit in separate sections of the Church during services. Therefore, to place the Christian message 'sandwiched between these foreign cultural values seems to jar my sensibilities' the pastor continued (Field notes CL, 2005). Two other pastors agreed with this comment and added that Indian Christians and the general public are still very conservative and these subtle points need to be taken very seriously by Christian broadcasters. Another pastor commented that the way the *Solutions* programme asked young people for their opinions is also quite
foreign to the Indian culture where the parents, elders and leaders are the decision makers in the community.

The last item that was not culturally appropriate was the story of the plight of the people in Afghanistan and CBN’s relief work there. The situation in Afghanistan was too removed for people in India to respond to, especially in the area of giving their funds. If this was an Indian relief operation, it might have been more acceptable. As this is an evangelistic programme geared to non-believers, many of the pastors felt that the fund-raising aspect should be omitted as viewers may misunderstand its motives.

The pastors also felt that theologically the programme fell short in certain basic ways. For example, around 50% of the pastors pointed out that after the widow story an attempt was made to encourage people to turn to Christ. The compere ‘was too rushed’, the pastors felt and did not lead the audience to understand the implications of this significant and decisive act (Field notes CL, 2005). Furthermore, there was no ‘sinner’s prayer’ (a prayer traditionally used by Churches where the non-believer ‘asks Jesus into his/her heart’). Other pastors pointed out that a simplistic evangelistic approach was used. Yet other pastors criticised the way the widow expressed ‘Jesus is now my husband’, which ‘reduced the Lord Jesus to a product on offer to lonely widows – very similar to Charismatic televangelists who say “come to Jesus and you will be healed”’ (Field notes CL, 2005).

When asked how their church members would respond to Solutions, 60% of the pastors said that their members would respond positively. To support this view, pastors said the presentation was non-confrontational, gentle and it stimulated fresh thinking amongst Christians with regard to evangelism. The remaining 40% said that there is danger in this kind of simplistic Gospel presentation, and continual exposure to these programmes would make it difficult for Christians to discern the true Gospel and the evangelical doctrines of Christianity.

When asked how Hindus in the community would respond, 30% of the pastors said the Hindus would respond positively to this kind of presentation. This is a ‘soft sell approach’ and therefore quite positive and novel. The pastors estimated that perhaps around 20% of the Hindu community would be open to such presentations and these would be mainly from the middle to lower class economic brackets. Strong sentiments were expressed that many Hindus may still see this as part of the ‘conversion agenda’ of Christianity. ‘At least the TV programme may open their eyes,’ the pastors said, ‘but it is a long road. It is hard for Hindus to go against
the strong tide of community influence. Rarely do people come to Christ on the basis of a TV programme like this' (Field notes CL, 2005).

Pastors also added that the unfortunate association with Western ideals, technology and funding needed to produce such programmes would add to the negative response of many Hindus to Solutions.

Is this an indigenous or localised programme? Around 45% of respondents said ‘Yes’ and 55% said it was a hybrid – a fusion of Indian and Western cultures. ‘It is two parts Indian and three parts American,’ said one pastor (Field notes CL, 2005).

What is the best way to reach India with the Gospel? The leaders responded that whereas television is a good tool to reinforce the thinking and ideals of people who are already believers, it is not a good evangelistic tool for non-believers. They felt that one-on-one evangelism with pastoral care and nurture is still the best method for evangelising Hindus in India. In many respects these responses tell us a great deal about the mindset of the pastors, which is clearly conservative in its orientation, and allows for a number of inferences to be made about the nature of Christianity in contemporary India. However, in order to be clear on this issue it was necessary to elicit responses from members of the broader community.

HOW THE HINDU COMMUNITY RESPONDS TO SOLUTIONS

Seventy five percent of the Hindu community leaders felt the production quality was good, with 25% stating it was excellent (15% more than the Church leaders). Not one of the Hindu leaders felt the programme needed improvement in the technical or production aspects – unlike the Church leaders.

Twenty-five percent of the Community leaders found elements in the programme that were culturally appropriate. When asked what was culturally appropriate, about 40% of the respondents listed the story of Nila the widow, whereas only 10% listed the Indian compeer. In the Indian context, the concept of Karma (or the law of transmigration) is strong and there is an aversion for marrying a divorcee or a widow. Hence the widow story was ‘highly emotional’ and ‘attention getting’ according to one of the respondents (Field notes HL, 2005). With respect to the Indian compeer, it was noted that Christians still take leadership from ‘the Europeans’ and so it is refreshing to see an Indian compeer leading the programme ‘not in conjunction with a white man’ (Field notes HL, 2005).

Whereas the 40% of Church leaders saw elements of cultural inappropriateness in Solutions, a total of 75% of the Community leaders deemed aspects of the programme culturally inappropriate. Of these, 30% felt the
Table 3. Culturally appropriate and inappropriate elements in Solutions – Hindu leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appropriate</th>
<th>Inappropriate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Story of Indian widow (Nila)</td>
<td>Issue of widows reported unfairly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian compere</td>
<td>Presentation of Jesus as 'the only Saviour'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps one to be a 'better Hindu' in terms of improvement</td>
<td>Taliban (Afghanistan) mini documentary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Summary and weighting of responses to Solutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Church members would respond?</th>
<th>How Hindus would respond?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culturally appropriate</td>
<td>Culturally inappropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian leaders</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu leaders</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The issue of widows was not fairly handled as not all Hindu widows are treated this way in India. It was pointed out that there are Hindu agencies in India like the Ramakrishna Mission which undertake social and rehabilitation work for the marginalised in society. Three percent of the leaders felt the broadcaster was negative about widows and this negative image would not help young people in this generation. A replay of the Solutions programme showed that the leaders had misunderstood the intent of the programme (to describe the negative views about widows prevalent in India, not to prescribe such views). However, the fact that such misunderstandings could easily take place was noted as significant. The same three leaders expressed doubt over the sincerity of Nila's conversion, alluding to the fact that if the Christians had so much funding to produce such programmes, Nila might have been offered money to convert.

Two of the leaders found the Taliban story too out of place culturally for India pointing out that such fanaticism as experienced in Afghanistan is generally not seen in India and therefore should not be associated with India.8

Two other leaders took exception to the closing comments by the compere that we should accept Jesus as 'the only Saviour'. 'All gods are equally valid therefore to name Jesus as the only God doesn't go well in Hindu society,' remarked one leader (Field notes HL, 2005).

An interesting discussion took place on the aspect of how the Hindu
community would respond to Solutions. Fifty percent of the Community leaders felt that the response among Hindus would not be positive based on the issue of the exclusive claim of Jesus Christ. Four of the community leaders felt that the programme would be positively received by Hindus. Yet two out of the four felt that, even though this programme would be accepted by Hindus, it may not necessarily lead to conversion to Christianity. The programme makes you 'a better Hindu' and 'improves your situation' (Field notes HL, 2005). 'What happened to the widow can happen to me,' said one female respondent '... regardless of caste or religion, I know I am more in touch with God and his love' (Field notes HL, 2005). The Hindu leaders have obviously interpreted Christianity from a syncretistic point of view. When this finding was presented to the Christian leaders they responded that this is not surprising, since Hinduism is basically a religion that accepts other faiths. Indian business and marketing companies today are using the Indian syncretistic propensity as a positive value. This is revealed in the writings of Shivakumar who says: 'Marketers who understand and address the Indian knack of uniting conflicting values in their lives are the ones who will succeed with the changing Indian consumer ... The Indian way of managing change is to find the 'and' in every potential conflict' (Shivakumar, 2006).

Rapaille, author of The Culture Code, agrees with this view when he says 'India has a different cultural code to China. The collective unconscious of India has a way to integrate the outside world without losing its soul' (cited in Shivakumar, 2006). India's foremost psychoanalyst and social commentator, Sudhir Kakar, also supports this view when he talks about the cultural ideal of Indian society as 'a receptive absorption rather than an active alteration and opposition' (Shivakumar, 2006).

Ten percent of the Hindu community leaders answered 'cannot say' to the question of Hindu responses to the programme, whereas the remaining 10% said it may be positive for some and negative for others depending on many factors. Some of these factors are: the strength of the individuals' faith; how strong their Hindu family network is; what economic class they belong to, and the amount of Western influence they have experienced. These leaders highlighted the complex nature of Hindu society, pointing out that the cultural networks and social practices are part and parcel of life. Some of these practices were listed as oral tradition, folklore, symbols and rituals. Because the Hindu is imbedded in a culture, there are social practices and arrangements that constitute the ethos of a person. It was estimated that 20–25% of Hindus would be resistant to Christian television, including Solutions. These, according to the Hindu
leaders, are Hindus from the high caste as well as the high class. The middle to lower level Hindus would be the ones more open to Christian televangelism.

Another significant finding raised by the Hindu leaders was the level of need of a person: 'when your level of pain exceeds your level of fear (fear of community reprisals etc) you will change' (Field notes HL, 2005). When people have needs and they are not getting answers or relief from their temples or priests, in desperation they turn to other faiths. Examples were given of Hindus and Muslims who go to Porta Church (Catholic) or to Novena at Mahim (a suburb in Mumbai) for healing and miracles. When asked whether the 20–25% resistant Hindus with deep needs would turn to Christ on the basis of Christian televangelism, 30% of the community leaders indicated this might take place among a small minority depending on the level of their needs.

When Hindu leaders were asked who among the group of less resistant Hindus would be watching Christian televangelism, they indicated the middle to lower class and some Western educated Hindus. Out of these groupings it was strongly indicated that women would be more open to Solutions. 'Women are more open and honest about problems and also they are the “culture-carriers” who make plans for family celebrations, gatherings and rituals in the Indian context' (Field notes HL, 2005). This corresponds with Moorti's findings that women are the primary viewers of prime-time TV programming in India even though the producers seem to target the male audiences (Moorti 2004: 567). Interestingly enough, the 2001 census report reveals that there are more female Christians than male Christians in India – unlike the Hindu and Islamic communities where males are in the majority^{10} (Amalraj 2004).

**ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS**

Over the last fifty years many theories of mass communication have surfaced, with different models describing the process of communication. These theories can be grouped into two main categories: the message-oriented model and the audience-oriented model. The former regards the receiver as a passive member, the latter as an active individual who uses media to satisfy different longings. Our approach is to treat the receiver as an active individual who is part of an overall social environment (Mitchell 2003; Rosengren 1985; Rogers 1983).

One of the practical audience-related models is the one developed by David Barlo, who sees communication in terms of four primary elements: source, message, channel and receiver. We will adapt Barlo's model and use
it as a broad framework to analyse the findings of the Church and community leaders. ‘Source’ would refer to CBN India and in particular, to the compeer of Solutions; ‘message’ refers to both the content and the treatment of the content; ‘channel’ to the TV medium and the production techniques that are used to carry the message; and ‘receiver’ to the Indian audience (Barlo 1960).

1. Source

It appears from the findings that the positive issues raised are in the first category – the source. Both the Christian and Hindu leaders commend the Indian compeer who dresses in Indian clothes, introduces the various segments of the programme and shares the Gospel message at the end. The winsome and gentle presentation of the compeer is altogether positive.

2. Message

Seventy percent of the negative input from both Christian and Hindu leaders was centred on the message – its content as well as the underlying elements used in the treatment of the message. The widow story was 100% positive for Christian leaders but mostly negative for the Hindu leaders. This was an emotionally charged issue and was perceived by some Hindus as an unfair portrayal of Indian society. Misunderstanding of the intention of the producers was also apparent in the widow story.

Another point of contention was the treatment of Jesus Christ. The Hindus disagreed with the presentation of the ‘exclusive Christ’, whereas several Christians criticised the portrayal of the ‘syncretistic Christ’. The former criticism would pose a real challenge to CBN India which is part of the evangelical Christian tradition that believes in the sufficiency of Christ for the salvation of mankind (CBN Interview 2005). Some Hindus who were positive about the programme welcomed the message of ‘improvement’ – that praying to Christ would make one a ‘better Hindu’. Yet other Hindus saw this as part of a veiled conversion agenda. The motives of Nila the widow were questioned as some felt she may have converted to Christianity because of the new lifestyle promised her by missionaries.

Christians felt the Gospel was compromised because Jesus was presented merely as a miracle worker rather than Saviour. Hence Solutions was seen to be transforming the message of Christianity.

Whereas Hindus focussed merely on the negative aspects of the content per se, Christians tended to focus on the underlying elements of the content as well, such as music, dress code and culture. Christians expressed concern over the Western influences that have seeped into the
presentation, pointing out that these subtle things can influence one's perception of the message. The Western dress code was particularly offensive to Christians. Therefore, it appears that the message of Solutions needs to be analysed with a view to modifying both the content as well as the underlying elements of the message.

3. Channel

Ten percent of the overall negative input was directed at the channel. Both Hindus and Christians were highly impressed by the production excellence of Solutions. Hindus were generally more impressed than Christians. This being the case, it is interesting that both Christians and Hindus expressed concern that the use of high-powered technology and Western TV production methods point to an unholy alliance between the Church and the West.

Both Hindus and Christians pointed out that the production techniques and shots were geared more for those raised in the Western tradition of television. Some of the fast-paced cuts and slick editing were rather confusing at times to some Indian viewers. Therefore, Christianity mediated through technology (especially Western TV production techniques) does not seem to be fully comprehensible to certain Hindus and Christians even though India is generally known for its media-savvy outlook.

4. Receiver

We can attempt to draw a profile of an average viewer based on input from the community leaders. Among Hindus, the average viewer who is open to the message of Solutions, would be from the 25-30% of Hindus from the lower to middle class and caste brackets. The degree of openness would depend on each receiver's level of need and the existing commitment to the Hindu faith, practices and the networks associated with the religion. However, the quality of responses was called into question when it was obvious that the message of Solutions was misunderstood by certain Hindu leaders. The fact that 10-15% concluded that they can take Christian elements from the programme while still maintaining the Hindu faith is significant as it shows disparity between the intention of the producers and the interpretation of the receiver.

In the broader community it is apparent that Christians are more open to the message of Solutions than Hindus. However, the concerns from Christian leaders to modify the programme in both the content and the underlying elements, indicate a lack of complete satisfaction on the part of the Christian audience.
CONCLUSION

The global satellite revolution and the Indian Government’s open airwaves policy, together with other factors, have brought about an unprecedented increase in Christian televangelism in the last ten to twelve years in India. It is of interest to note that after several years of reliance on foreign imports and standardised programming, creative experiments have been made in the last few years resulting in the availability of localised, culture-specific televangelism programmes.

CBN India, the forerunner in the concept of localised televangelism, while still being completely funded by USA, has created Solutions – a locally hosted magazine-formatted programme with local stories, testimonies of conversion and mini documentaries.

Solutions was analysed by participants from the Protestant Church and the Hindu community, in terms of its overall effectiveness and cultural appropriateness in the Indian context. If we look at the four components of communication (source, message, channel and receiver), the message of Solutions is the component that needs most modification both in regard to content as well as in its underlying elements. While some Hindus responded positively with their own understanding of the ‘syncretistic Christ’ others reacted negatively to the ‘exclusive Christ’. Christians welcomed the localised elements of Solutions (such as the compere, content, etc) although strong criticism was levelled at the Western dress code, culture and luxurious life style implied in the programme. Theologically, Solutions with its simplistic and somewhat hurried Gospel presentation, falls short of the biblical understanding of salvation, according to Christian leaders.

The findings revealed that there are various degrees of receptivity to Solutions, ranging from resistance on the part of high caste Hindus to openness on the part of some Christians basically from the Western educated groups. The potential audience for Solutions would be mainly Christian and some Hindus from the 20-25% lower to middle caste and economic classes. Women were also thought to be more receptive to the programme. The Hindus were more conscious and vocal of culturally inappropriate elements in Solutions (75% of Hindus) compared to views on the topic from Christians (which amounted to 40%). However the Christians’ views were expressed in very strong terms.

Whilst attempts to localise and indigenise televangelism is seen positively by most of the participants, it was generally felt that the exercise has to go deeper than merely changing the face of the Western pastor. On the basis of the research, we suggest that modifications are needed in three vital
components of the communication process: the message, the channel and the receiver. Unless these modifications are made, the slick production techniques and the state of the art technology, as good as they are, could continue to create a disjunction of meaning and understanding. The title *Masala McGospel* is suggestive of the seeming disconnectedness and incoherence when the American Gospel (with all its trappings) is fused with certain elements of Indian culture. Furthermore, the uncritical use of Western technology and methodology could bring about a backlash from Hindu critics as Christianity is perceived to be linked with Western culture and the conspiracy to divide India. What is needed in Indian televangelism is serious reflection and analysis that does not downplay the realities of the religious and cultural dimensions of Indian society.

We began with Stanley Jones' analogy of the women friends of the bride quietly taking leave when they finish their task of accompanying the bride to the bridegroom's house. If *Solutions* is typical of localised televangelism in India, then we can liken this to some of the bride's friends still lingering in the house, at the risk of violating their mores. It would seem that until this situation changes, localised televangelism in India will continue to be described somewhat cynically as 'two parts Indian and three parts American'.

**Jonathan D. James** is a PhD candidate and tutor at Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia. He is a graduate of the National University of Singapore and holds two MA degrees in Media and Biblical Studies from the USA. He is currently the international director of Asia Evangelistic Fellowship and the contributing editor of the book *That Asia May Know: Perspectives on Asian Missions* (AEF, 2000).

**Brian P. Shoesmith** is an Adjunct Professor at Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia and Professor and Director of Media Studies and Journalism at University of Liberal Arts, Bangladesh. He is a founding editor of *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* (Routledge) which he edited for twenty years. He is currently writing a book on Global Media with Mark Balnaves and Stephanie Hemelryk Donald (Macmillan Palgrave, 2007).

**NOTES**

1. Jones, in his much celebrated book, *The Christ of the Indian Road* (New York: Abingdon, 1925), asserts that the real need in India is to present Christ without the cultural trappings of Western civilisation and the attempts to westernise the Indians.

2. Pastors were chosen from the following groups of Churches: Church of South India
(CSI); Baptist; Brethren; Mar Thoma Syrian and Assemblies of God (Pentecostal). There were also representatives from some independent Charismatic Churches such as Abundant Grace and New Life Churches.

3. Both these organisations, established in 1875 and 1894 respectively, are well known reform movements within Hinduism - with strong social and charitable concerns.

4. As the Hindu leaders met after the Christian leaders' meeting in Mumbai, the Hindu leaders were informed of the findings of the Christian leaders. The Christian leaders in Hyderabad were informed of the Hindu findings from the Mumbai meeting.

5. ‘Missiology’ refers to the science of Christian missions with particular reference to the cross-cultural context.

6. Alan Tippett defines syncretism as ‘the union of two opposite forces, beliefs, systems, or tenets so that the united form is a new thing, neither one nor the other’. See Charles H. Kraft and Tom N. Wisley (eds), 1979, Readings in Dynamic Indigenous. Pasadena: William Carey.

7. Since the next two sections draw material heavily from the researcher's field notes, only direct quotes from Christian and Hindu leaders will be acknowledged in the text. Owing to the sensitive nature of the research, the respondents have been assured of confidentiality and hence only the term 'field notes' with the respective designations 'CL' for Christian Leaders and 'HL' for Hindu leaders appear together with the dates.

8. The communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims in the North Indian pilgrimage centre of Ayodhya in 1984 and 1987 were noted by the leaders in their assessment of this viewpoint. For an historical sketch of the Ayodhya problem see van der Veer, 1998: 1-18.

9. See Tippett's definition of syncretism under note number 4. Some Christians have referred to this as 'Christo-Hinduism' (James and Shoesmith 2006).

10. The Christian population has the highest female to male ratio of 1,009 females per thousand males at the 2001 census, compared to 936 females per thousand males for the Muslim population, and 931 females per thousand males for the Hindu population. See John Amalraj. 2004. 'The Highlights of the 2001 Census Report: The Implications for Indian Missions' in Indian Missions, Hyderabad, India, p. 40.

REFERENCES


Robertson, R. 1995. ‘Glocalization: Time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity’, in Mike
Featherston et al. (eds), Global Modernities. London: Sage.
Copyright of Studies in World Christianity is the property of Edinburgh University Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.