

Palestinians' (Berkowitz, 2006: para 2). The content analysis of one of the programmes showed Hagee's involvement in calling 400 Christian American leaders for a 'summit on Israel' resulting in the launch of a new pro-Israeli lobbying group called *Christians United for Israel* (CUFI) (Berkowitz, 2006: para 3; *God TV*, 2006). This is a good example of the fact that global televangelists do not only preach the gospel, but also articulate strong political views. While these views are acceptable in the USA, they may be confusing, inappropriate and out of place in India according to senior Christian leaders (SCL, 2006).

Televangelism was introduced into India when satellite television made its entry into India during the 1990 Gulf war. Content analysis, employed to analyse televangelism, revealed that the majority of the programmes are from the West, in the English language and of the Charismatic persuasion. These are mainly 'global' programmes as distinguished from local and 'glocal' programmes. Global programmes have a different discourse style and many seem to accentuate a strong political message.

Therefore, global Charismatic televangelism, with programmes produced by Americans like Benny Hinn, Pat Robertson and John Hagee are finding their place on Indian television. The influences these programmes have in India on both the Christian and Hindu communities will be discussed in the forthcoming chapters.

Notes

1. Since this chapter draws on primary research, the ideas and opinions of the respondents (many of whom wish to remain anonymous) are identified in the text in the following ways: MLP—middle-level pastor/s; SCL—Senior Christian leader/s; KI—Key Informant/s; HL—Hindu leader/s and ML—Muslim leader/s.
2. The term 'uplink', used in satellite communications, refers to the establishment of a communications link from a ground station to an orbiting satellite. The term is contrasted with another term 'downlink', which is the establishment of a link from an orbiting satellite to one or more ground stations.

Chapter 5

The Economics of Orthopraxy

In 1912, the film *The Life of Christ* premiered in Bombay. Dhundiraj Govind Phalke watched this movie and was seized by an urge to produce movies that depicted Hindu mythologies. He left for England to study cinematography and upon his return, on 3 May 1913, he released the Hindu mythological film *Raja Harishchandra*, India's first full-length, indigenous, silent film. This was to be followed by many Hindu mythologicals on film produced by Phalke, which later earned him the title: The father of Indian cinematography (George, 1989).

This is yet another instance of the interesting interplay between Christianity and Hinduism. In Chapter 1, I made the assertion that Hinduism influenced the Charismatic movement. In this chapter, I explore this ongoing interplay and point the reader to the influence of Charismatic televangelism on Hindu televangelism.

While using the broad description 'Hindu televangelism', it must be pointed out that the concepts of Christian evangelism and Hindu evangelism are not identical as they represent different epistemologies. As already discussed in Chapter 1, because of the orthodox nature of Hinduism, the promotion of the Hindu faith is usually done in the context of the 'practice' of Hinduism rather than the 'theology' of the faith. Therefore, the term 'televangelism' is used in the Hindu context for comparative study purposes (alongside Christian televangelism) and it refers to the evolution of Hindu channels with TV programmes that promote the practice and lifestyle of the Hindu faith.

An interesting development in my research is the discovery of the growth of Hindu televangelism in India during the last decade.

The fact that Hindu televangelism emerged shortly after the introduction of satellite technology and Charismatic televangelism, suggests that Charismatic televangelism may have some influence on the evangelistic activities of Hinduism. This is not to suggest that televangelism is having an influence on Hinduism *per se* but that the modes of communication utilised by the Christian broadcasters are being observed and adapted by Hindu broadcasters for their own ends.

As indicated in Chapter 1, when one of Hinduism's sacred texts, the *Ramayana*, was serialised in 78 episodes on public television between 1987 and 1989, it was estimated that up to 100 million people watched the most popular episodes—bringing Indian life almost to a standstill (van der Veer, 1998: 175). *Doordarshan*, India's public TV station, has been the main carrier of Hindu programmes much to the despair of certain Christian and Muslim families who virtually felt marginalised and at times even boycotted the public station (Thomas and Mitchell, 2005: 42). On the other hand, Hindu nationalism 'received a cultural boost... and an all-India Hindu self-consciousness' was fostered when the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* appeared on state television (Haynes, 2003: 14). The serialised religious programme reveals several aspects of the politics of religion, television and nationalism. Strangely enough, the *Ramayana* on public TV was sponsored not by the pro-Hindu BJP but by the Congress-led government: 'in the hope that its flagging electoral fortunes might be revived with an infusion of [the] "Hindu vote", votes inspired by Hindu solidarity' (Rajagopal, 2001: 72).

During the two years of the *Ramayana* broadcast (1987–1989) the Ram Janma Bhumi (birthplace of the Ram movement), which planned to demolish a Muslim mosque in Ayodhya and build in its place a Ram temple increased in importance (Rajagopal, 2001: 30). The publicity grew to such an extent side by side with the televised serial that the pro-Hindu BJP party seized the political and cultural opportunity to declare, by the middle of 1989:

[T]hat the Ayodhya movement 'had reached a state and status in Indian public life when it was no more possible to ignore its effect in politics including electoral politics'. The issue was... political, with...BJP making it their number one priority that 'a temple to Lord Ram' would be built at the site of the mosque. (Rajagopal, 2001: 30)

Media critics and secularists condemned the religious broadcasts as a 'communal' text suggesting that the TV serial 'might have

participated in a reconfiguration of discourses of nation, culture and community that overlapped with and reinforces Hindu nationalism' (Mankekar, 1999: 165).

As already mentioned in Chapter 1, side by side with the political impact of this TV phenomenon, was the equally extraordinary impact on various Hindus, including those who did not understand the Hindi language, the untouchables and middle class Hindus—all of whom had their own share of spiritual responses. Many Hindus claimed to have a *darshan*, 'a glimpse of the sacred' during the viewing (van der Veer, 1998: 175). Other viewers took part in elaborate rituals and purification prayers before the start of each programme. The medium became the message when, in public places, 'the television itself was often garlanded with flowers or incense' (Mitchell, 2005: 2–3). Belief in Hinduism is grounded in practice rather than in a set body of truths. Therefore, the diversities of practice in Hinduism, when captured on television elicit different types of responses from various Hindus.

This television phenomenon illustrates, in part, why the style, content and viewing of Hindu religious television differs from Christian television. Hinduism is an orthopractic religion—it has a lifestyle orientation as opposed to a theological orientation. Belief is not always grounded on historical facts, as seen in the recent Hindu demonstrations when the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) revealed in a 400-page affidavit that there was no historical evidence to back up the existence of Lord Ram and other characters in Hinduism's ancient text the *Ramayana* (O'Connor, 2007: 16). Professor Venkatasubramanian, history professor at Delhi University, explained that 'Ram Setu has gotten into the culture and psyche. Even in the 21st century it is very difficult to come out of that belief' (O'Connor, 2007: 16). However, the Hindu nationalist BJP party accused the Congress-led government of 'assaulting' Hindu sentiments in bringing out this report (O'Connor, 2007: 16).

This lifestyle orientation explains why, among other things, Hindu folklore and practices find their way into public and commercial television programmes as they do into many other aspects of life. This also explains why theological discourse does not play such an important role in Hindu televangelism as worship and prayers, lifestyle teaching and *bhajans* (Hindu repetitious worship songs with simple melodic lines). All these components of televised Hinduism are present in other commercial channels as well as on *Doordarshan* (Indian public television). Almost all the television channels, even the secular ones,

'have at least one 60-minute, early morning time slot dedicated to *bhajans*, discourses and yoga teaching sessions' (Malik, January–March 2003: para 23). It is important to note that what is different in the last decade in Hindu televangelism is the establishment of separate Hindu TV channels that operate on a semi-commercial basis like their Christian counterparts.

In this chapter, I trace the beginnings of Hindu televangelism; give a brief overview of the main Hindu channels; analyse the construction of Hindu television and explore the influence that Charismatic televangelism has on Hindu televangelism.

The Beginnings

As discussed in Chapter 4, it was during the Gulf war in 1990, when satellite television was introduced to India. It was the reporting of the news of the war that first opened the doors of satellite television to India. CNN delivered hourly updates and insights of the US-led allied war against Iraq's Saddam Hussein.

This then led to a plethora of programmes being offered via private media companies, bringing about increasing criticisms from social and cultural groups including the Hindu magazine *Hinduism Today*:

Along with CNN, viewers rushed to embrace the new STAR TV channels like STAR Plus and MTV, England's BBC followed with its new Asian programme. Recently, a Hindi version of STAR Plus has been launched and also MTV begun by ATN...

Asia Today Network (ATN) is owned by a non-resident Indians (NRI's) headed by a Suresh Shah. It is out to exploit the market in India by competing with the Star TV by presenting Zee TV programmes sexier than the Star TV presentations. ATN uses a satellite called Asianet... (Sinha, 1993: paras 6–7)

Sinha writing in *Hinduism Today* (1993) also included a discussion of the impact of satellite TV on India pointing out that it was more of a cultural bane than a social boon:

The satellite television programmes have become so overpowering in their influence that they dominate every aspect of the life of an Indian. Whether at the dinner table, bus, train, or government office, the talk

centers around Mason's witticisms or Sinhead O'Connor's blasphemies or Ridge Forrester's lady admirers. Housewives discuss every episode of the popular soap operas, aired nightly.

It is not that there is no concern about the impact the satellite television has begun to make on India's rich cultural heritage, values and beliefs. The concern is being voiced in different quarters prominent citizens, educators and even the newspaper media. India's premier newspaper, Times of India recently carried a feature 'Sex Among Teenagers' which maintained that the overexposure of sex on MTV was responsible for powerfully inciting the new sex craze among the school kids in India. (Sinha, 1993: paras 8–9)

Aastha, Sanskar and other Hindu Channels

By the time CNN made its entry into the Indian airwaves, criticisms were mounting towards *Doordarshan*, the national broadcaster for 'aping what the foreign television offered as popular fare...for years *Doordarshan* had gradually lowered its standards...' (Sinha, 1993: para. 5).

Hence, the perception of *Doordarshan's* loss of standards and the introduction of Western satellite channels created the need for specialised Hindu religious channels to counter them. The founders of *Aastha*, India's first Hindu TV Channel, explain the aims and aspirations of this 24-hour channel:

Aastha means faith...the aim is to increase faith in our people, faith in our country, faith in our religion...we are definitely propagating... Hinduism. We have no shame in admitting...As Bill Gates had a dream of putting a computer in every house...we have a dream that every house around the globe should be watching Aastha... (Sinha, 1993)

Kirit Mehta, one of the founders of *Aastha*, suggests that the harmful influence of the West is the fault of fellow-Hindus for not doing anything positively for the faith and, therefore, *Aastha* has been created to rectify the West's harmful influences:

The negative influence of the West on our youth is partly our fault... Aastha tries to show both the East and the West from a positive point of view... We are making a great effort to produce yoga and meditation programmes for the youth. (Sinha, 1993)

Aastha gives TV coverage of the main religious festivals like *Kumbha Mela*, as well as the festivals where thousands 'reconverted' to Hinduism from Christianity. According to *Hinduism Today* (2003), the channel is proving to become a rallying point for Hinduism: '... hundreds of people told us they had come to the Kumbha Mela only after watching it on our channel. During the next Mela, we plan to provide live broadcast of the whole thing right through' (Sinha, 1993). *Aastha* TV in 2006 faced programming challenges and many 'fillers' and 'reruns' were telecast. In contrast to this, their 2008 programme schedule (see Tables 5.1a and 5.1b) reveals that the station now produces its own specials—*Aastha Special*, apportioning at least five hours per day to live telecasts of Hindu festivals (these cost between Rs 150,000–250,000 per hour) and has increased its array of new programmes.

Rajshekhkar (2003: para 5) reported on a five-day festival *pravachan* (Hindu discourse) conducted by Hindu televangelist Guru Ma in Delhi. It was revealed that the talks given by Guru Ma were recorded and edited into 20-minute segments and telecast on various Hindu channels (Rajshekhkar, 2003). The organiser and producer of this event was Kumar, a leading member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) as well as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) (Rajshekhkar, 2003). Both the RSS and VHP have been known to have links with Hindu nationalism and the *Hindutva* agenda.

Hindutva has two arms—the one associated with a violent agenda of Hinduisation and the other 'with cultural affirmation and cultural heritage—within a Hindu vision of Indian nation-building' (Hawkins, 2006). Hindu televangelism seems to fit in with this second aspect of the *Hindutva*'s cultural affirmation agenda.

Gupta (2006), writing in the *Sunday Pioneer*, says that in recent years Hindu gurus are filling the vacuum after a long period of silence when there was no united Hindu voice in India. Today television channels like *Aastha*, *Sarskar*, *Maharishi*, *Sadhna*, *Jagran* and *Om Shanti* all feature Hindu televangelists (Gupta, 2006). Gupta cites an instance, when Hindu televangelism was used to mobilise Hindus for a cause with Hindu televangelist Bapu:

The fact that Hindu televangelism has succeeded in great measure to mobilise Hindus, irrespective of their caste or their personal preference for a god or goddess was evident in ample measure when Asaram Bapu joined the BJP's *dharna* to protest against the arrest of the

Table 5.1a: *Aastha* programme schedule (indicative)

Sunday, 14 December 2008	
IST	
0:00	Shiv Krupa Avdhoot Baba Shivananad ji
0:20	Discourses Swami Hari Caitanya Puriji
0:40	Sujok Therapy Rajendra Jain Bhajans
1:00	Mata Ka Jagrata—Ramesh Oberoi
1:30	
2:00	
2:30	Lokgeet
3:00	Rajsthan Day Celebration
3:30	Sant Geet Indians Saints Devotional Songs
4:00	Mangal Maitri/Manglik Darshanam
4:20	Sai Baba Kakad Aarti—Shirdi
4:40	Shiksha Aur Adhyatma City Montessori [sic] School—Lucknow
5:00	Yog Shivir Live Telecast from Auragabad Yogrishi Swami Ramdevji
7:30	Ayurved Evam Jivan Darshan Shradhey Acharya Balkrishnaji Temples of India
8:00	
8:20	
8:40	Seva Ganga Sadhu Kailash Manav
9:00	Kal Chakra Pt. JayPrakash Sharma (Laldhagewale)
9:20	
9:40	Vipassana Puja Satyanarayan Goenkaji
10:10	Live Telecast of Shrimad Bhagwat Katha by
12:40	Puja Swami Avdeshanand Giri Maharaj from Fogla Ashram, Vrindavan
13:00	Jyotish Shikhiye Dr H. S. Rawat

Source: *Aastha* TV website http://www.aasthatv.com/Aastha_Schedule.pdf, Programme Guide section (2008).

Shankaracharya of Kanchi... Thousands of men and women who regularly watch Asaram Bapu's telepravachan joined the *dharna*... a demonstration of emerging Hindu unity... (Gupta, 2006: paras 7–8)

Sarskar TV (*Sarskar* means rich values), according to its website, is dedicated to 'Indian philosophy, religion and spiritual solidarity, culture and dissemination of the vast and timeless knowledge of our

Table 5.1b: *Aastha* programme schedule (indicative) (continued)

IST	<i>Aastha special</i>
13:30	Sai Amrut Varsha Shri Subhram Bahl Navgrah Aur Jyotishgyan Pandit K. P. Tripathi
13:50	Live Telecast of Bhagwat Katha by Puja Didi Maa Ritambhraj from Vatsalya Gram
14:00	<i>Aastha Special</i>
17:40	Shri Gagangiri Maharaj Laksh Deep Mahayagna Discourses
18:10	Swami Kriyanandji
18:30	Oshodhara
18:50	Awakening with Brahma Kumaris
19:10	Seva Gaanga
19:40	Sadhu Kailash Manav
20:00	Yog Shivir
21:00	Yogishi Swami Ramdevji Ayurved Evam Jivan Darshan
21:30	Shradhey Acharya Balkrishnaji Talks on Oneness
22:00	By Amma Bhagwan (English) Talks on Oneness
22:20	By Amma Bhagwan (Hindi) Gyan Sagar
22:30	Acharya Anil Vtaji
23:00	Awakening with Brahma Kumaris
23:20	Baba Gangaram Bhaajaus <i>Aastha Special</i>
23:40	

Source: *Aastha* TV website http://www.aasthatv.com/Aastha_Schedule.pdf, Programme Guide section (2008).

great "Sanatana Dharma" [Hinduism] to the people of the world.' The TV channel broadcasts the following types of programmes: Hindu bhajans, good healthy living (such as yoga); documentaries (of worship sites and festivals); educational (such as *Ayurveda*) and special projects (such as animated movies and religious discourses) (*Sanskar* TV, n.d.).

Zee Jagran, another Hindu channel, was launched in January 2004 with the expressed purpose of 'awakening people to realise the spiritual aspects in their life and hence enriching their lives' (*Zee Jagran* website, n.d.). The channel has regular segments featuring gurus such as Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Guru Osho, Aasaram Bapu and Prajapita Bhrmakumaris.

The Construction of Hindu Television

The following results are based on a content analysis of the two Hindu 24-hour TV Channels, *Aastha* and *Sanskar*.

1. Eight out of 10 programmes are in Hindi or one of the Indian vernacular languages.
2. Nine out of 10 programmes are based on 'life skills', for example meditation, yoga demonstrations, breathing or stress reduction.
3. Eight out of 10 programmes show the priest or teacher seated in the yoga position and keeping at all times to that space, this is in contrast to Charismatic televangelists who move all over the platform.

It is interesting to note that two out of the 10 Hindu programmes involve teachers or priests who move around the stage, like the Charismatic televangelists; and two out of 10 teach in English, both using a 'three point sermon' outline, a popular technique used by Christian preachers. Swami Sukubutananda, who is known for his 'relax your mind, transform your mind' rhetoric, communicates with passion like the American Charismatic televangelists. Sukubutananda is one of the few Hindu televangelists who speaks in English as his audience extends to Indians in the diaspora, in Switzerland, USA and England as well.

Sukubutananda's preaching is a mix of slogan-filled messages on mind, body and soul transformation: 'If you are frustrated you have created that frustration...there is divinity in you...relax your mind transform your mind' (*Aastha* TV, 4 October 2006).

Guru Yashpal Sudhanshu chants a prayer and then begins his 'feel-good' lecture on coping with stress: 'Begin each day with a pure thought...when you do breathing exercises, when you control your anger, when you laugh, you're actually prolonging your life' (*Aastha* TV, 5 October 2006).

In another programme, a Hindu priest dressed in orange robes, is seated in a yoga position and gives demonstrations on the correct way of breathing. The camera moves into a close-up of the priest's stomach and chest to show his ability to hold his breath and exhale at the appropriate time.

In a different programme, Sai Baba, a well-known guru from a Hindu sect, is shown in extreme close up shots doing meditation. There is very little discourse or preaching in this programme. The opening and closing shots of Baba's 15-minute programme build him up as a 'celebrity guru'—he walks on the middle of a red carpet flanked by devotees—women on one side and men on the other. The women hand him their handkerchiefs as he walks, he touches them and returns it to the women. On his way out, he blesses a baby and then the camera pans to his bare feet walking on the carpet. The women devotees bow down and almost kiss the ground on which Baba just walked.

Sociologist Haribabu (2006) reports that female Hindu evangelists have increased in the last five years or so in India: 'This is a significant development. The women [evangelists] pick up issues not handled by male counterparts...also the female interpretation of the texts is quite different' (Haribabu, 2006: interview).

Divya Maharaas Leela from the *Golokdham Ashram* in Delhi is one of the more popular female evangelists. Speaking primarily in Hindi, with a sprinkling of words from the English language, Leela, dressed in maroon robes speaks in an almost trance-like manner. She repeats the mantra '*Om Namah Shivai*' several times for five to six minutes. At the conclusion of her talk, her audience applauds.

Sonalia Guswari, another female teacher, demonstrates the various yoga positions. In her programme, an 'enchanted' chain with a pendant, is heavily advertised for Rs 2,990. Testimonies are shared by various people as to how they have been helped by this chain, with a greater degree of concentration and better overall health. Guswari's programme and a few others seem to be entirely devoted to the sale of religious products. They are a religious version of the 'shopping channel' and the first of their kind in Indian religious televangelism.

Books and CDs, amulets, special oils and chains with pendants, are all heavily advertised during and after each programme. There are two daily time slots (6.30 am–8 am and 5.30 pm–7.30 pm), which Hindu televangelists consider as holy times for prayer, worship and the singing of *bhajans* (Hindu worship songs). During these times an average of 20 channels would feature Hindu televangelists.

A content analysis of the two main Hindu channels in the years 2005 to 2006 revealed that 55 per cent of the programmes are dedicated to the practical aspects of Hindu living—yoga, meditation and dealing with

Table 5.2: Programme content on Hindu channels

Demonstrations and teaching on yoga, meditation, life skills	55%
<i>Bhajans</i> (songs) and prayers	35%
Teaching from sacred texts	5%
Events, festivals, news	5%

Source: Author.

stress and coping with the pressures of living in a modern, urban society (see Table 5.2). *Bhajans* (worship songs), *pojias* (prayers) and the worship and ritual elements of Hinduism take up 35 per cent. Preaching and teaching from the sacred texts only occupy 5 per cent of the total programme content. There is teaching but it is directed more towards practical Hinduism, in terms of living a life free of stress and exercising control over the forces of life. As Pavarala observes:

More and more, we are seeing the 'new age' spirituality of Hinduism (which involves life skills rather than the moral and ethical teaching of Hinduism). Ravi Shankar is the Hindu version of Christianity's Benny Hinn. Ravi's 'art of living' seminars are attracting many people to a new form of Hinduism packaged in attractive ways. (Pavarala, 2006: interview)

Sudhanshu, a well-known TV guru, said in an interview that his goal is to enhance people's aura (a halo of coloured light that surrounds each person):

That aura protects you from negative forces...when the aura weakens, other people's words and actions have a negative impact. My message is to strengthen the aura around you by meditation, introspection and worship, so you can create heaven around you. (Lancaster, 2003)

Shankar (Hindu) versus Hinn (Christian)

A comparative study between Hindu televangelist Ravi Shankar and Christian televangelist Benny Hinn revealed several interesting similarities and differences based on themes, techniques, change agent, text, political economy, products and funding (see Table 5.3).

Major themes

Success in everyday life is the theme of Shankar's Art of Living seminars and TV programmes while the healing of the body preoccupies Hinn in his televised crusades.

Techniques

Shankar uses the elementary principles of breathing, meditation and serenity. *Sudarshan Kriya* is a breathing technique invented by Shankar '...it has the power to relieve stress so people feel joyous' (Morente, 2006). For Hinn, the main techniques used for healing are prayer, laying on of hands and slaying in the spirit.

Text

Shankar vaguely alludes to Hindu texts but seems to blend the principles of the faith with success, management and psychological principles. Hinn uses the Biblical text, especially the New Testament, but keeps referring to the same portions which support his teachings on healing.

Change agent

The individual is the change agent in Shankar's teachings. By practising deep breathing, meditation and other techniques, healing, success, joy and serenity are guaranteed for the individual. For Hinn, Jesus Christ is the healer who chooses to heal people through Benny Hinn, the powerful and 'anointed' miracle worker.

Political economy, products and funding

While Charismatic televangelism (especially the global programmes) is characterised by aggressive fundraising, Hindu televangelism does not seem to solicit donations, relying solely on sales of products. Hindu culture seems averse to asking for donations which explains why Indian Christian and Hindu leaders in Chapters 6 and 7 criticised the aggressive fundraising strategies of Charismatic televangelists.

By 'political economy', I infer that both the Shankar and Hinn organisations are part of a larger global project where various media are

Table 5.3: Comparison between televangelists Shankar (Hindu) and Hinn (Christian)

Evangelists	Major themes	Technique	Text	Change agent	Political economy	Products	Funding
Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (Hindu-New Age)	Success in Life	The use of elementary principles	Hindu texts blended with success principles	The individual	Satellite TV, Website, Seminars, Books, DVDs, World-wide offices	Books, DVDs and paraphernalia	Sales and Seminar Fees
Benny Hinn (Christian-Charismatic)	Healing of Body	Slaying in the Spirit	Biblical Text	Jesus through Benny Hinn	Satellite TV, Website Crusades, Books, DVDs, World-wide offices	Books, DVDs and paraphernalia	Home Donations, Church Donations

Source: Author

interlocked wielding both political and economic influence. Both televangelists use satellite TV, books, CDs and DVDs in the market of religious consumerism and have large world-wide audiences. Shankar's Art of Living Seminars are based on fees which consist of 'differently priced packages for each city and more expensive advance courses in big cities' (Bhuskute, 2005). Hinn's world-wide and televised crusades are basically financed by TV donors, Christian businessmen and his own home church and TV ministry. Both Shankar and Hinn attract influential people from the media, business and political realms of society.

Deepak Chopra, a well-known Hindu/New Age teacher, has a huge following, both from India and overseas. Chopra, also seen on Hindu channels, is like Shankar, an advocate of mind and body healing therapies based on *Ayurveda*—the traditional system of Indian medicine.

High-profile Hindu televangelist, Ramdev who teaches and demonstrates his *pranayam* (breath control) techniques, has cashed in on television to build a huge religious enterprise. Ramdev owns an *ayurvedic* pharmacy which is:

Now part of Ramdev's burgeoning empire estimated to be worth Rs 100 crore. It includes a sprawling ashram ... and a 150-acre nursery and farm... money is churned out by the media wing which sells VCD's, books, magazines and TV rights. (Mishra, 2006: paras 4–5)

When Ramdev was recently embroiled in controversy about his *ayurvedic* preparations with the government authorities, he received massive support from political parties and leaders including the BJP, the controversial Shiv Sena, the NCP and other groups (Mishra, 2006). This is an example of the links and interconnectedness that are shaping the political economy of Hindu televangelism, not unlike Charismatic televangelism.

Charismatic TV's Influence on Hindu Televangelism

Whereas there are differences between Hindu televangelism and Christian televangelism, the similarities between the two are quite striking. A leading business paper discovered that many of these daily programmes, like their Christian counterparts, are recorded during 5 to

10-day festivals and the messages by gurus are edited into 20-minute segments and telecast on religious television (Rajshekhkar, 2003). The gurus are aware that they are being recorded for broadcast at these live preaching sessions so they start 'summing up their message every 19 minutes or so. That simplifies the editing process' (Rajshekhkar, 2003: para 24). Bapu, as well as a few other Hindu TV preachers, like the Christian Charismatic televangelists, offer Hindu products on air and there is a prayer line that viewers can call. *Businessworld* quotes a study by Samit Mehrotra who says the gurus are master communicators 'their dialectic is a mix of religion and entertainment...they make deft use of metaphors' (Rajshekhkar, 2003: para 27). Another example quoted by the paper is a study by sociologist Shiv Visvanathan who says: 'They [gurus] will not tell you to renounce everything and lead frugal lives: instead they offer "market-friendly" techniques to deal with life's stresses and problems' (Rajshekhkar, 2003: para 28).

A senior communications scholar at the University of Hyderabad sees a direct link between the upsurge of Christian televangelism and the growth of Hindu televangelism. Professor Pavarala, firstly, sees the Hindu channels as a 'social oddity' as Hinduism historically does not have a tradition of discourse like the Judeo-Christian faiths. Secondly, Pavarala describes Hindu channels as 'imitative and reactive' in that they are 'aping Christian television and reacting to the hyper-Hindu sentiment of the previous Government' (Pavarala, 2006: interview).

The two Hindu epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are making a comeback on television, this time with 'snazzy visual effects' and 'high-tech techniques such as those used in "The Lord of the Rings" films', according to a news article from Reuters (Jamkhandikar, 2008).

As pointed out earlier in the chapter, there is a link between Christian movies and the great Hindu mythologies on film. Davis (1946) argues that starting in the nineteenth century, Hinduism underwent a gradual transformation, largely through the influence of Christian missionaries. Many of the changes were in the areas of religious concepts, techniques and strategies like the introduction of public worship and united prayer in Hindu temples (Davis, 1946).

Even the name of the largest world-wide Hindu magazine *Hinduism Today* founded in 1979, bears a striking resemblance to its Christian counterpart *Christianity Today*, founded in 1955, by evangelical luminaries such as Billy Graham and Nelson Bell of the USA.

Is Hindu televangelism showing signs of being influenced by Christian Charismatic televangelism in keeping with the historical

parallels of influence in Hindu cinema, temple worship and publications? Both Hindu leaders and senior Christian leaders were asked to comment whether they felt Hindu televangelism has borrowed aspects of Charismatic televangelism. A total of 55 per cent of the Christian leaders answered that there were elements from Charismatic televangelism that Hindu televangelists have taken on board (see Table 5.4).

Some of the features of the crossover include the marketing strategies, the entertainment aspect of televangelism and the self-help and life-skill type of teaching. Congregational singing and healing miracles, as well as 24-hour prayer lines, are other examples of techniques that seem to have crossed over from Charismatic televangelism to the Hindu channels. One Christian leader said: 'Unfortunately some Charismatic televangelists have made religion into a fine art and turned evangelists into celebrities...this is the American way...the Hindus are now making Gurus famous through satellite-assisted technology' (SCL, 2006).¹

This sentiment is reflected in a news article about Hindu television:

The religious [TV] business in India is very lucrative' said an executive of a [Hindu] religious channel who asked not to be identified. So fierce is the competition for media-exposure, ... that lesser-known gurus typically pay religious channels for airtime; some have been known to record their sermons in private, then insert shots of a crowd from elsewhere and send us the tapes... (Lancaster, 2003: para. 14)

The article also mentioned that TV Guru Sudhanshu's Universal Awakening Mission operates 20 *ashrams*, a network of hospitals and

Table 5.4: Is Hindu televangelism imitating Charismatic televangelism?

	Senior Christian leaders and key informants N = 30	Hindu leaders N = 30
1. Yes ... a little	10%	25%
2. Yes ... in a big way	45%	10%
3. No	*	20%
4. No, Christians are aping Hindus!	*	5%
5. Not sure/can't say	35%	40%

Source: Author.

Note: * Not answered.

schools with offices in Chicago and Los Angeles. Its main *ashram* occupies 17 acres in Delhi. It is a:

[K]ind of religious theme park...stocked with white swans, a fire temple, a seminary for Hindu missionaries and a 60-foot high artificial mountain complete with cascading waterfall...an executive of the ashram acknowledged that for the guru's (Sudhanshu's) divinely inspired wisdom, he also had help from another source in building his spiritual empire. 'Television has created this', the executive said. (Lancaster, 2003: paras 18-19)

Shah (2006) differentiates between yesterday's spiritualists and today's Hindu televangelists:

[M]odern spiritualists are unregulated multinational corporations. The Buddha renounced his life as a prince to find meaning for himself. But the Chopras of this world use a Rolex to put together a group of lost people and tell them they are actually found. (Shah, 2006: para 14)

Thirty-five per cent of the Hindu leaders agreed that Hindu televangelism is being influenced by Charismatic televangelism. Some of the aspects of influence singled out are in the area of 'the commercialisation of the religious programmes'; 'the slick production and techniques used' and the music. Five per cent of the Hindu leaders said that the Christians are the ones who are imitating the Hindus. One of the Hindu leaders said: '...they [Christians] are copying us. The Hindu religion has spread to the West and even TV shows in the USA use our words like "dharma" and "mantra" etc...so they are following us ... not the other way round' (HL, 2006).

Businessworld's investigative article on Hindu televangelism reports:

[R]eligious television is offering them [gurus] a faster way to maximise reach and gain a following...Rakesh Gupta who started Sadhna, the third religious [Hindu] channel [says]: 'by coming on TV, the gurus can build a following. That is how they can command greater fees when they hold a discourse. The organisers will willingly pay more as they too will make more money—greater turnout, more donations'. (Rajshekhhar, 2003: para 13).

Journalist Gupta (2006), who is critical of Christian televangelists, comments: 'Yes, there will be contemptible attempts to tar Hindu

televangelists... We will hear of allegations of "crass commercialisation" of "telemarketing spiritualism", of catering to the "lowest common denominator" ... (Gupta, 2006: para. 10).

The two pillars of religious globalised television, seen in the Charismatic (Christian) and Hindu contexts are technology and the market. While technology is the new medium for the teaching and discourse of the faith, the market encourages the recoding of the message legitimising it for this world, rather than the world to come. Ravi Shankar and the Hindu TV gurus advocate a prosperity and 'feel good' message while unashamedly marketing a wide-range of spiritual products and paraphernalia.

Christian and Hindu televangelism both seem to have married their respective faiths to commercialisation. However, without the strong element of orthodoxy in Hinduism, Hindu televangelism seems even more commercialised than Christian televangelism earning it the dubious description 'Om Economics' to typify the disjunction of Hindu mediated faith in contemporary India.

This chapter revealed that the consequence of global televangelism combined with the rise of satellite television was the introduction of specialised Hindu TV channels operating in a similar fashion as the Christian channels. The Hindu televangelists on these Hindu channels preach a form of 'new age' Hindu spirituality while borrowing many production, marketing and rhetorical techniques and methods from Charismatic televangelists. It appears that Hindu television, while not being influenced by the biblical message, is influenced by the methods, marketing techniques and even the rhetoric of Christian televangelists. This, coupled with the complex interrelationships between the political economy of India, global capitalism and the nationalistic movement calls for more research in the burgeoning religious enterprise of Hindu televangelism.

Note

1. Since this chapter draws on primary research, the ideas and opinions of the respondents (many of whom wish to remain anonymous) are identified in the text in the following ways: MLP—Middle-Level Pastor/s; SCL—Senior Christian Leader/s; KI—Key Informant/s; HL—Hindu Leader/s and ML—Muslim Leader/s.

Chapter 6

Interpreting Charismatic Televangelism: Pastors and the Divided Church

This chapter examines how Charismatic and non-Charismatic pastors in urban India are impacted by global and 'glocal' Charismatic televangelism primarily through the transnational satellite networks of *God TV* and *MiracleNet*.

In the first section the results of the findings on global televangelism are examined. This is followed by the second section where the results of the findings of 'glocal' televangelism, in particular, CBN's *Solutions* programme are examined.

To study the influence of Charismatic televangelism on the Protestant Church, I felt it was important to start with the church leaders. I decided to measure the reactions to and the influences of Charismatic television on selected Protestant pastors. I was also seeking their perceptions of televangelism's influence. In India, elders and leaders are generally regarded as the decision makers and gate keepers of society. Therefore, I deliberately did not interview church members for two reasons: first, it would threaten the pastors if their communicants were interviewed; second, studying the response of the church members really constitutes a separate study which is beyond the scope and resources of this project.

This chapter draws heavily from primary research. Sixty middle-level pastors (from Charismatic and non-Charismatic persuasions) were chosen from Mumbai and Hyderabad to respond to a questionnaire on the impact of televangelism on the church. The results of their