origin (place, time, culture) but also by respective upbringing, education and especially the religious experience which forms attitudes, views, habits and practices which contribute to the “unchangeable causes” for a disposition.

The French bishops referred already on a paper in 1998 to the following dispositions and attitudes which are needed for proper competencies:

- To be aware of one’s own identity as a communicator in a Christian perspective
- To have and develop a strong ability to listen…
- The be able to
  o Analyze motivations and expectations of the other…
  o Decode properly his/her concerns…
  o To also foresee his/her reactions to answer in a proper and positive way.

Competence in Social Communication seems to be a neglected field which has to be developed. It challenges everybody, especially, however, those responsible in the Church to re-think their strategies and analyze in a more professional way what has to be done to be a better and more professional communicating Church and Community.

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Mythology and Society Continuum:
Study of an Indian television serial
Arbind Sinha

The paper is based on primary research done as part of the content analysis of a mega mythological television serial to understanding how the mythology has contributed in continuity of custom and practices and also how much the society has influenced in changing the construction of the mythology to reflect today’s reality and connect it with audience and society.

The study is based on the analysis of legends of ‘Devon Ke Dev Mahadev’, a mythological drama series that is shown on Indian television channel “Life OK” from December 18, 2011 between 8.00 pm to 8.30 pm (Indian time). The story revolves around Lord Shiva or Mahadev – the Lord of Lords as one of the three most powerful mythical characters – Brahma, Vishnu and Mahadev (often called as Mahesh). The serial is a popular serial because, Hindu culture, like many other civilizations in the world, believes more in Divine power and the God and Goddess are the one who supernatural entity. Mahadev is the obvious choice.

The paper attempts to analyse the content of the serial and to see if there is some connect between the dramatized serial with to-day’s world. The author watched the telecast on select days from March to July and observed the parts of drama story and the statements made by some of the characters to compare it with contemporary social system and practices. For further analysis, the clippings from YouTube were referred and the customs were verified with the people belonging to that culture where customs are being practiced.

The study brings out some interesting findings in terms of how the same law of governance, as shown in the serial, is still in practice in modern management, and how the present day customs observed in various Indian cultures have been incorporated in the mythical drama to make it more realistic for the audience to associate these with their own lives and practices. This helps the telecast to hook the audience up with the serial.

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Introduction

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

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

As mentioned in my earlier paper (Sinha and Singh 2012), India with more than 5000 years of history and civilization having multiple cultures, has been the fertile ground for nurturing multiple religions and associated myth and mythology. Lately, media have played its pivotal role in perpetuating the myths and mythology. The media has also been used for propagating various myths and mythologies by different presenters who might have projected a few dissimilar realities at different time and space. The question to answer is whether projection of these religions as well as social communications in more than one way does the base of memory and believes keep changing?

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

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

New images replace the old memories

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

When I was a child and used to sit with my mother for a short evening to a framed poster of Lord Shiva. I distinctly remember the face and the facial expression of Lord Shiva, as portrayed in the poster and that image is still imprinted in my mind. For writing the present paper when I started watching the tele-serial ‘Devon Ke Dev Mahadev’, I have a different image of Mahadev (another nomenclature of Lord Shiva). The face of Mr. Mohit Raina, who played the role of Mahadev in ‘Devon Ke Dev Mahadev’ serial, flashes in my memory – his face, his costumes, the way he stands, the way he sits, and the way he meditates. The new image often gets superimposed on the old image that I still carry for Lord Shiva, although except the costumes everything is new. Similarly, in 1987 a mega television serial was aired in India and across other continents. The serial was based on the Indian epic ‘Ramayan’. Even today when I think of Ram – the mythical heroic character of Ramayan, I only visualize the face of Mr. Arun Govil, who personified the mythical character of Ram.

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

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

What others say

Esther Lombardi (2003) defines a myth as “a traditional story, which may describe the origins of the world and/or of a people. A myth is an attempt to explain mysteries, supernatural events, and cultural traditions. Sometimes sacred in nature, a myth can involve gods or other creatures. And, a myth represents reality in dramatic ways”. She also says that many cultures have their own versions of common myths, which contain archetypal images and themes. Scholars explain mythology as “a traditional or legendary story, usually concerning some being or hero or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation, especially one that is concerned with deities or demigods and explains some practice, rite, or phenomenon of nature”. Mythology is made up for many tales, which hold important messages - societal ideals, morality of life, intrinsic concepts such as luck and fate, fundamental rules of society, to the people and it has survived through the ages primarily on its ability to enchant and inspire people to continue in the art. The subject attracted many scholars and there is an enormous deposit of knowledge gather on mythology and society.

Dundes (1984) wrote about the degree of flexibility that is expected in a myth. Dundes is of the view that “if myths represent the traditional values of the society, including the moral norms, one would expect them to maintain a firm shape, to show very little from one generation
to another. However the scholars like Ford and Firth have different explanation to offer. Ford (2000) holds the view that myths often evolve as a result of cultural diffusion and contact. To him, myths are constantly adapted to new cultural contexts and worldly realities. Raymond Firth (1960) also talks of ‘plasticity of myth’ and has given it a scope of change. Van Baaren (1984) talks about the flexibility of myth and says that the occurrences of changes in a myth occur as a rule to prevent loss of function or disappearance by changing it is such a way that it can be maintained. By changing it, a myth is adopted to a new situation, armed to withstand a new challenge (pp:218).

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

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

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

In the same essay, Elizabeth W. Scharffenberger (2012) has been quoted exploring the ways in which contemporary playwriting and performance can radically “unmake” myth (pp:52), However, it is also said that Kritzer (2012) argues that Caryl Churchill’s use of mythic figures and themes in ‘The Skriker’ deliberately pushes the play beyond the personal and the everyday in order to make visible “the psychological, social, and economic burden carried by young people” and address the wider issues of “social breakdown” and “natural catastrophe” (pp.122) and how Sharon Friedman (2012) contributed a fascinating survey of multiple revisions of the “dybbuk” in modern theater and the ways in which this Jewish folkloric figure has been used to engage contentious issues of gender, identity, and sexual desire (pp:140). The essay talks about the fairy tale’s potential to dramatize and contest contemporary social mores is central to Sheila Rabillard’s account of Grasses of a Thousand Colors, its appropriation of tropes and themes from “The White Cat,” and Wallace Shawn’s knowing redeployment of “the transformations which fairy tales undergo” (pp. 162) in the creation of a dislocating, dystopic fantasy of sexual predation and ecological disaster....”

To Kristin Callis, mythology is taken in the United States differently as the Greek mythology has its roots in physical perfection and many of the Americans look to mythology that depicts and celebrates physical perfection. Callis also connects it to the contemporary business world and says that “[T]he Greek mythology has its visible impact on business and products – naming the brand, and picking up the fashion – dresses, jewelry, and goddess hairstyles.” It is also said that “Mythology has benefitted the spheres of entertainment, where much inspiration is drawn from the ancient tales of mythology and where many ideas are reused in different forms of entertainment – radio programmes, films, television, and now Internet” (Age of Mythology).

The Paper

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

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

Content Study

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

Devon Ke Dev Mahadev – the TV Serial

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

The mega serial Devon Ke Dev Mahadev, depicting the life and different phases of Mahadev started its telecast from evening of December 18th 2011. The serial in Hindi language is slotted between 8.00 pm to 8.30 pm on ‘Life OK’ channel. The serial, dubbed in different regional languages of India, is telecast at different time in different language zones of India.

The Findings

Some of the incidents of the mythology, as depicted in the serial, reflects todays’ reality. The characters of the mythological drama have at times maintained themselves like any normal human being in our society. Does it reflect the psychic unity of humankind as propounded by Edward Tylor (1881)? Did the people of mythological era behaved the same way as today’s or it have been incorporated by those who wrote the scripts?

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

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

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

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

Most of the management principles applied for any corporate or government work is also the same. Another instance is when Mahadev chopped off Ganesh’s (that time known as Vinayak) head because he did not obey his order to allow him to enter into the house when his mother was taking bath (episode 285). Will we allow any outsider (Ganesh did not know that Mahadev is his mother’s husband) body in that situation even today?

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

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

Episode 432 showed that once the construction of Ravan’s castle was over, he instructed his lieutenants to kill the artisans who built the castle for him so that they cannot build another equally beautiful house for anyone else. It was only at the eleventh hour Lord Mahadev arrived at the scene and saved the artisans against the wishes of Ravan.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Conclusion**

Thus, through the analysis of the observations, as reflected in the serial – Devon Ke Dev Mahadev, the author concludes that the serial does not only reflect the practices at the mythical era, which is very much followed, believed, and practiced by many communities across the country, the producer of the serial has also put contemporary social practices that does not seem to the practice of the mythical era. New twists were given to dramatize the mythology so that it connects well
with the audience and their present practices, which in turn increases the chance of viewership of the serial. It seems like a human psychology that in the absence of a concrete evidence of the past and its datedness, we either erase the memories or create a new memory that somehow gives a mirror reflection of ourselves projected back in time in order to render it of contemporary interest. The presentations in the mythological serial under study, can be termed as “cinematic mythology”, may be for business motif or may be as Harrop and Celene mentioned – for making it more afresh.

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Religious communication through cyberspace grows steadily, and greatly changes the nature, functions and dynamics of religious beliefs and practices. Every religious tradition, classical or popular, communicates through the different features of the Internet today. The impressive varieties of websites created and maintained by religious personnel or institutions speak volumes for the reception they get from the public. People visit these websites for the purposes of getting information (knowledge) about religions as well as for practicing their devotions or piety. Among the varied types of impacts of these ‘religion-online’ and ‘online-religion’ activities, that which is relevant for building up a healthy civil society is the one made upon our understanding and organization of communities. The present study attempts to enquire into the way the virtual religious communication through the Internet impacts upon our experience of communities today. It undertakes to analyze the responses of a group of college students in Chennai to questions related to the role of religious communication in creating ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ dimensions of communities in the civil society today.

Dimensions of Bonding and Bridging

Since Robert Putnam spoke about them in the year 2000, dimensions of ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ have been explored further through empirical studies and theoretical analysis in different regions of the world. The interest in studying them goes with the general interest in contributing to...