

Understanding Theology of Television: Dynamics of Popular Culture

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ABSTRACT

Television, cinema and smart mobile phone are the part of our popular culture. The popular culture is simply culture that is widely favoured or well-liked by many people. It includes media products, consumable goods that assume iconic status as symbol of modernity, foods, and clothing style originating from particular culture, toys, and worldwide fads and so on. People use mass produced forms of popular culture to reflect and construct identities as well as display and enact values while mass media plays a significant role in shaping a society or a nation as successful and developed society or nation. It is an integral part of our lives and society; it can generate a great deal of popular interest and debate about controversial issues. The objective of the study is to investigate evolving popular culture in North India. The study also examines effect of television soap operas/programs on youth. In this regard, a survey was conducted in Lucknow district and structured questionnaire is used to collect required data. It is found that mass media influences intention of the masses to interact towards or adopt global culture and also distorts images of reality. It is important factor, which brings cultural changes and it is highly accepted source for creating popular culture among youth.

Key Words : Mass Media, Television, Popular Culture, Audience, Soap opera, Reality Shows, Lifestyle, Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Family, School, Society and Media are a prominent agent of socialization. Among these agents of socialization, media is one of the important agents, which socialize human being through facilitating culture, norms and experiences. Prot *et al.* (2015) opine that children learn a lot from television than parents. Socialisation is a process whereby we learn and internalize the values, beliefs, and norms of our culture or society in order to develop a sense of self. The process of socialization continues throughout the life, but it is very influential for children and youth (Croteau *et al.*, 2012).

Media can play a significant role in shaping a society or a nation as successful and developed society or nation. It is an integral part of our lives and society; it can generate a great deal of popular interest and debate about controversial issues. It upholds not only the social,

economic, political development conditions but also modifies the human resource development by providing the prosperous platform of information. It is a medium to disseminate information, knowledge, and education among masses pertaining to important issues (Gangopadhyay and Dutta, 2010, p.526). Newspaper, radio, television, cinema, mobile, books, magazine, computer along with internet are medium of getting information, called mass media. With the advancement of technology in the 20th century, the world is shrinking and geographical barriers are being broken because of evident flood of television programs throughout global media channels. In most contemporary societies, television is the most potent medium of popular culture and plays a prominent role in the construction of social realities. It can transfer culture from one society to another (Tabassum, 2012). Within these premises, my primary effort is to develop a better understanding of evolving Indian culture. This study also investigates the

popular culture portrayed by mass media especially television. This textual analysis investigates a set of television genres of Indian television to reach some conclusion about media, culture, and society.

Mass media interaction and culture conflict:

Now-a-days, human beings are surrounded by digital mass media. Radio, television, mobile phone gadget, newspapers, internet, movies, recorded music, and books saturate our everyday lives. Mass media especially television has become one of the most important spheres of popular culture in India. Television has supported to enhance the popular culture as this definition reveals that popular culture is a culture that carries some understanding by masses and its implications reflect upon them through the adaptation of some characteristics of that culture. For instance, U.S. Culture or American culture has acquired enough public exposure through various mass media vehicles, *i.e.*, television, cinema, Podcast, internet platform etc. in developing countries. The lifestyle, behaviour patterns, social systems, norms, ideologies of developing nations could witness the social and cultural crises due to the popularity of western culture (Kraidy, 2002). In 1991, India adopted Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalisation (LPG) and opened broadcasting spectrum for private investors, and this had laid the foundation for satellite television or global television. This increasingly global television culture has brought in new ideas, thereby challenging established cultural patterns and activities. The satellite television has revolutionized the viewing experiences of the audiences with catering strong western content (Gangopadhyay and Dutta, 2010). The poor media policies impede govern organizations to control over media content, and facilitate media organizations to broadcast distorted cultural programs (Singh, 2000). In turn, television has cultural repercussion on its viewers. Today, television channels such as HBO, MTV, TLC, STAR World, Discovery channel, Colours, Zee TV, Star TV, V Channel etc are injecting a plethora of western culture through distinct television programs such as Game of Thrones, Eat Street, Music Shows, reality shows and films etc. These television programs are depicted via unscrupulous actors. The aforesaid television channels or programs tend to foster unhealthy lifestyle and negative culture such as nightclubs, food van culture (fast food), Mall Culture, Rap music culture in India. In turn, the lifestyle of Indian citizens is also rapidly changing. Peoples of metro cities especially young

generation, they sleep a late night and wake up late morning, may experience physical disorder, obesity, depression and so on (Farhud, 2015). Therefore, the study set to investigate the impact of television in cultivating popular culture among youth. It also investigates attitudes and opinion of the youth towards culture depicted by television.

Diffusion of ideas, information, and experiences through mass media is critical for the well-being of a national culture. Gangopadhyay and Dutta (n.d.) argue that in a country like India where illiteracy and poverty are rampant; and media has adequate capability to shape and reshape cultural values of a nation or community. Culture is not a product of mass media but mass media, especially television are the part of our society and it has a power to influence or distort the culture of a society (Devdas and Ravi, 2013). It is difficult or impossible to shield young people from experiences reflecting the adult world when communication systems trespass in our homes and become so much part of our everyday lives (Srygley, 1978). Young people are influenced by televised characters and cultural events. For instance, western festivals such as Valentine's Day, Friendship Day, Mother's Day, New Year celebration, Christmas Day celebration, are growing culture in India, and some Indian festivals are also celebrated in a globalized way such as Krishna Janmashtami, Durga Ashtami, Holi, Diwali etc. Several studies indicate that the primary function of families is affected by television largely. Prot *et al.* (2015) emphasize that dual-earner families' children are being learned more from television rather than family members. Gerbner and Gross (1976) also reported that nearly half of the 12 years old child studied averaged six or more hours a day from viewing television.

Popular culture or Homogenisation of culture:

Culture is a broad concept includes religious beliefs, creeds, values, art, literature, social norms, human behavior, etiquettes and living patterns, food recipes, costumes, folk songs, dance, festivals etc. Culture is the way we view, experience, and engage with all aspects of human lives and the world. Tylor (1871) has given the first most influential definition of culture. He has defined "culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". Culture is a vital part of human society. Herskovits (1948, p.17) observes that whatever we see in the World is made

up of two things, *i.e.*, nature and culture. Nature is the god made part of the environment, while culture is the man-made part of the environment. The culture by nature is dynamic. Culture transforms according to peoples' needs, experiences, and interaction with the new technologies of certain generations. The advent of new communication technologies paves the way for the transformation of culture. The communication technologies are merging the distinct mass media, which were previously separate. The emergence of reality shows, music channels, and YouTube channel has created significant changes in youth's language, lifestyle and their communication gadget preferences. Morgan, Shanahan and Signorielli (1994) state that prolonged exposure to a set of mass media messages can influence behaviour, beliefs, values or attitudes of the viewers. Gerbner (1976) also argues that the more a person is exposed to a message provided by the media, the more likely that the person tends to believe that the message is real and replicable. It can exert an independent influence on attitudes and behaviour over a time, but that belief structures and concrete practice of daily life can also influence subsequent viewing (Gerbner *et al.*, 1980; Morgan, 1982).

The television, cinema and smart mobile phone are the part of our popular culture. Nowadays, the term "popular culture" has come into existence in place of the term "low culture". Storey (2001) argues that ideology is a crucial concept in the study of popular culture. It influences intention of the masses to interact or adopt the dominant culture and also distorts images of reality. The popular culture is simply a culture that is widely favoured or well-liked by many people. The popular culture includes media products, consumable goods that assume iconic status as a symbol of modernity, foods, clothing style originating from a particular culture, toys, worldwide fads and so on. People use mass produced forms of popular culture to reflect and construct identities as well as display and enact values. Brumett (1992) opines that popular culture refers to system and artefacts that the general populous or broad masses within a society share or about which most people have some understanding. Three characteristics help to define popular culture:

- 1) Popular culture is central and pervasive in advanced capitalist systems,
- 2) Popular culture produced by mass media industry
- 3) Popular culture serves social functions.

Hamburgers and fries, baggy jeans and noodles, junk food, video games, and pornography are all forms of popular culture (Sorrells, 2013, p.127). Popular culture is a key component in the production of social identities such as class, race culture, and age where the consumption of popular culture creates and marks social boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (Hall, 1997).

Advocacy of Indian culture on television:

In India, television was introduced for educational purpose in 1959. The Krishi Darshan was the first program broadcast with the purpose of disseminating the agricultural knowledge and information among Indian peasants. During 1970s television sets were used at large scale for educating and disseminating information among urban as well as rural masses. This led that foundation of Indian television for national and cultural development. The Asian Games held in 1982 proved to give further impetus to the rapid expansion of the national television network. News, musical programs, chat shows, game shows and soap operas were the famous genres. Initially, most of the programs were borrowed from Britain, the United States, and Germany. The British sitcoms shown during those early years of the national network were regional in their humour and accent. Examples of these were "To the Manor Born", "Some Mothers Do Love'Em and Sorry" "I Love Lucy" and "Startrek", "Telematches" and detective like The Fox, introduced Indian viewers to other kinds of foreign fare (Kumar, 1994).

The Indian television serials Hamlog, Buniyaad, Khandan not only entertained the audience but also it advocated the Indian culture, rituals, and civilization. The mythological serials like Ramayana, Mahabharat, Sri Krishna, Om Namah Shivay inculcated the religious feelings and devotion toward God. They were highly popular that people gathered in such a crowd at television set owner's home. Apart from it Bharat Ik Khoj (Discovery of India), Mirza Ghalib, Chanakya, Tipu Sultan serials illustrated history and Indian culture in an innovative manner. The Hindi serial Malgudi Days based on R.K. Narayan's short stories depicted the south Indian society and culture (Singhal and Rogers, 1989; Sharma, 2014, pp.17-18).

The implementation of LPG gave pace to development of television industry. In turn, plenty of private television channels mushroomed. They served a variety of television programs/genres such as sitcoms, suspense thriller, soap opera, quiz etc, which changed

audience's taste towards television programs. A revolution emerged during the 1990s in the television industry with the arrival of the producer Ekta Kapoor's serials. Her serials depicted the changing social life of Indian society and it also altered the presentation of women as projected as an antagonist. Another change happened 1st decade of the 21st century when serials like *Balika Vadhu*, *Na Aana Is Desh Lado*, *Jeena Isi Ka Naam Hai*, *Kumkum*, *Kyuki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* etc. reflected the cultural diversity and also presented the social evils like child marriage, illiteracy, poverty and untouchability. *Indian Idol*, *Kaun Banega Karorpati*, *Big Boss* are the imitation of American television programs.

The impact of these television serials led to the social and cultural sphere of society. The social structures are getting loose from its clutches of conservative ideologies. Extant society proliferates into class and highest influenced class. The content served by serials is the portrayal of elite society and also a portrayal of lower classes too. The audience starts to imitate their favorite characters and personify them. The serials, which depict different religion and culture, help to create a better understanding among youth and support to set a rapport or bridge with other culture.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

The analysis implies categorizing, ordering, interpreting and summarizing of the research data in order to obtain answers to the research questions. Since the research study was designed to identify culture promoted by television channels and also assess its effect on youth. The analytical framework based on systematic approach, two types of variables were considered namely independent variable (Mass media exposure) and the dependent variable (behavioral change). An attempt has been made in this chapter to synthesize and meaningfully analyze the major findings to look into the process of interaction of these variables.

Culture includes not only a single element but is a complete phenomenon of a community such as religion, civilization, dressing sense, food habits, lifestyle, literature, dialects, fetes, rituals, architects etc. The study reveals that youth are familiar with local culture and global culture. When asked reasons for homogenization of culture, Mass media, especially television stands at the second place for being the reason of homogenization of culture. The 66 per cent respondents accept that television plays an important role in the exchange of cultural features that

raise global culture while 70 per cent respondents including male and female consider Education is the key factor for cultural change. Urbanization and Globalisation also contribute broadly in cultural change with 44 and 22 per cent, respectively.

When asked, which types of program do you watch on television? The findings reveal that soap opera, sitcoms are highly rated popular programs in North India. 56 per cent respondents accept that they watch family drama serials while 48 per cent respondents spend their time to watch sitcoms and 56 per cent respondents prefer to watch musical shows on television. The sports telecast and infotainment based programs are also watched by respondents.

Now-a-days, most of the conglomerates narrowing the audience and they are making television programs in different dialects to deliver programs to serve every segment of the audience and generate high revenues. In turn, they produce television programs in regional dialects. In 2017, the reality programs and Hollywood movies were broadcast on television were *Dance India Dance*, *Super Dance Chapter 2*, *Big Boss 11*, *Dance +*, *Khatron Ke Khiladi 8*, *Nach Baliye 8*, *The Kapil Sharma Show*, *MTV SplitsVilla 10*, *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, *Rising Star India*, *Jhalak Dikhla Ja*, *Indian Idol*, *Breakfast Surprise*, *Eat around the world*, *Girls in charge*, *Tattoo girl*, *Making Mr. Right*, *Undressed Australia*, *Bride by design*, *Sweet 15*, *Food Factory*, *Naked and Afraid*, *Wild Frank in India* and several Hollywood movies. These shows portrayed the lifestyle of the upper-middle-class society and gained high popularity among Indian audiences. The content of some of these programs was abusive, aggressive and violent. Participants lived a lavish lifestyle, wore western dress and used abusive language. To know most depicted culture on national television, "Which cultures do these serials reflect?" was asked. It is found that Rajasthani culture is most popular in television channels. 66 per cent respondents reply that they have seen Rajasthani culture on television and 54 per cent say that serials broadcast on national television reflect a metro culture that is related to western culture. Apart from this, Gujarati and Punjabi cultures are also famous among North India with 46 per cent and 30 per cent along with 30 per cent Bengali and 14 per cent with Awadhi culture.

When asked, "What is your observation about the adoption of different culture depicted by television? It is found that 92 per cent respondents accept that they are influenced by those culture depicted on television. These

cultures such as food habits, dressing sense, hairstyle and body language can be seen in their behavioral practices. In a very next question asked, "What types of behavioral change do you notice in your life?" It is found that 66 per cent respondents accept that they have brought changes in their thinking. They have positive ideology towards politics, democracy, developments and modernization while 36 per cent respondents feel a change in their attires and 32 per cent respondents in their lifestyle. In addition, 20 per cent respondents consider that it helps to reduce religious dogmas and 22 per cent respondents feel that they are engaging that language use by the character on television.

DISCUSSION:

This section discusses the findings of the research study and explains causes of a phenomenon in detail by correlating findings of the previous research studies. Connecting the findings of the research study with the previous research studies helps in critically analyzing, interpreting and describing the significance of the research study. In this study, it has been attempted to explore relation television content and its effect on youth. Furthermore, this section discusses causes of cultural change.

Popular televised culture in North India:

Television is one of the main sources of entertainment and communication tool for receiving information of the world. Television not only entertains people but also educates, informs and inculcates the various changes among youth. These changes belong to social, political, economic and cultural too. The objective of the study was to understand the theology of television in relation to popular culture in North India. The study indicates that television is an important source of cultural changes and most of the Hindi television serials are highly influenced by Indian culture whereas most of the reality shows direct either foreign imported or had strong foreign influences. Most of the Indian reality shows are the adoption of western realities shows and depicted a western lifestyle. It fosters youth in various provocative, bullying and criminal activities. It also lures youth towards junk fast food, lavish lifestyle, western clothes, stylish and catchy haircut, tattoos, using the internet, cell phones, and abusive language. In resultant, western lifestyle and social structure are intruding in Indian societies as a popular culture. It might be a reason for cultural behavior change in youth. During administering the questionnaire,

one respondent observed that:

"One day, I noticed, my niece, came into the room and lay down on to the floor. She stretched her legs and hands straight and trying to creep onto the floor. It was an unfamiliar behavior to me. I asked her, what are you doing? She replied I am becoming Naagin, i.e., female cobra. She learned things and fact of life from watching television".

Jim Carrey as Ernie "Chip" Douglas in the movie "Cable Guy" 1996 argues about learning of human development through television.

"You were never there for me were you mother? You expected Mike and Carol Brady to raise me! I'm the bastard son of Claire Huxtable! I am a Lost Cunningham! I learned the facts of life from watching The Facts of Life! Oh God!"

Sultan (2005) opined that the use of mobile phones, cars, costumes and lavishly decorated homes depicted in the soap operas had a direct influence on the viewers to aspire those things. At times, Soap operas and reality shows have been accused of striving for sensation by seasoning the content with sex, violence, abuse, promiscuity, and discrimination. Feilitzen (2004) opines that reality television encourages bullying, harassment, and degradation against contestants, in those programs and audiences humiliate and evict contestants from the programs, which is unacceptable and intolerant in a democratic country.

However, television promotes Indian culture too such as Rajasthani, Gujarati, Bengali, North Indian etc. Among these, Rajasthani and western culture are dominant popular culture portrayed on television channels. It promotes and preserves Indian cultural identity. Roy (2006); Srivastava (2017) opine that television is an important source for promoting Indian cultural. During the 90s, television laid the foundation to promote Indian culture. Several television programs such as Hum Log, Maal Gudidays, Ramayan, Mahabharat, Nukkad, Tamas, Karamchand, Fauji, Buniyaad etc. were broadcast on Doordarshan. These television serials were based on freedom fighter, Indian heroes, mythological heroes, folklore and tales that were embedded in Indian tradition and culture. Indian nationalism was cultivated through the portrayal of these television serials. Mitra (1993) opined that Mahabharat and Ramayan reinforced a specifically Hindu-Hindi or a North Indian image of India, thus marginalizing other regional, linguistic, and religious groups. Mitra also believed that the variety of programs

like Mahabharat, Ramayan, Chitrahara, and Rangoli became an important aspect of Indian culture. She criticised that Mahabharat was trying to reproduce Hindi as the language of the nation; emphasizing Hindi is the language in which the greatest epics of India are read and produced.

The television program producers have their own interest, the target audience in producing television programs. They broadcast programs to gratify their audiences to generate revenue. Even though, each television channel has fragmented their audience according to the language of television programs, creed, and ideology of the audience. It is believed that the government's effort to promote communal harmony in a multi-cultural society through television broadcasting policies. Nowadays, television has become one of the most important spheres for popular culture. It plays a prominent role in the emergence of western culture in India. Gangopadhyay and Dutta (2010) assume that mass media may widen individual's knowledge, influence belief, attitudes, motivate and mobilize people towards adopting new culture either directly or indirectly by providing vivid cultural programs. Television becomes a very important tool in molding Indian society towards modernization or westernization. It brings a radical change for both literate and illiterate people due to its audio-visual capability it becomes a more effective tool for creating cultural change. Gonsolves (1998) believes that teenagers are the most favored group of all media organizations. Media influences and motivates them to follow the trends set in media programs.

The study also reveals that television serials/shows have been successful in creating positive psychological development in youth towards society and world. Youth have positive ideology towards politics, democracy, developments, diffusion of scientific ideas, innovations, and modernization. Ramafoko, Andersson and Weiner (2010) suggested that Soul City Institute and partners used television programs "Soul City" and "Soul Buddyz" to mobilize public for community development in South Africa. The series got high viewership, attached more than a million audiences on late night television show and feedback from the audience indicated that many viewers were motivated and willing to take action for the betterment of communities.

CONCLUSION:

Mass media was the highly accepted source for

creating a popular culture among youth. Highlighting the youths' choice for television, serials' genre, reality shows, music videos Bollywood and Hollywood movies were most popular among youth. The study emphasized that Balika Vadhu was highest watched television serial out of sixteen television programs. The telenovels made audience acquaint with Indian regional culture like Rajasthani, Gujarati, Bengali, Punjabi, Awadhi whereas Hollywood movies, reality shows, adventure and food shows mingled audiences with western culture. It also advocated western culture among youth in North India.

The dynamics of television enforces distinctive and dominant culture as popular culture across the world. It plays a significant role in the formation of those predispositions that were later intervened or resisted by elderly groups. Today, artificial attire, jeans, T-Shirt, decorated rooms, hall, catchy haircut, tattoos, fast food vans, outfits, shopping mall, curses in language, mobile phones, and automobiles became the popular culture of our society. The way of living and cultural patterns affected and remained updated according to trends depicted by Television.

However, education was one the most considered cause for cultural changes. It extended the horizon of thinking, imparted the capacity of rationality and logic. Industrialization increases the job opportunities, which enforce rural masses to migrate towards metropolitan cities. Although, democracy emerges as an important factor for culture changes as it provides the freedom and equality for all. All these factors correlate with each other and establish a platform for popular culture.

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