



THE CULTURAL POLITICS IN INDIAN TELEVISION SERIALS AND THE SYMBOLIC SHIFT OF REPUBLIC DAY

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Abstract

Indian television serials play an important role in molding everyday cultural awareness through repetitious narrative frameworks and symbolic representations. One of the most principal components in these serials is the relentless representation of Hindu religious rites, festivals and spiritual exercises as the central to ethical order, emotional closure and social harmony. These television serials give out both entertainment and informal learning influencing faith, principles and everyday customs within households (Hall 91). Apart from storytelling, these serials often display religious practices as key to overcoming challenges, resolving crises, maintaining family unity or peace and accomplishing ethical validity. Due to the repetitious representations of rituals, especially during critical times or difficult straits, these serials promote God-focused and faith-based perception of problem-solving which often excludes sensible, rational, scientific and structural frameworks. This paper examines two closely linked cultural trend, i.e. repeated representation of problem-central rituals in Indian television that includes deep prayer, fasting, performing difficult ritual deals, repeating mantras, showing as lamp off, keeping god's aside in water and many more. The second emerging religious practice of performing Satyanarayan Puja particularly on 26th January, India's Republic Day. Particular focus is given to this developing cultural practice on a particular day which is a secular national occasion embedded in fundamental principles, freedom and public memory. By qualitative textual analysis of popular Marathi, Hindi television serials and grounded in Mahatma Phulean and Ambedkarite thought, the paper analyses how visual motifs raise an outlook where an act of God or providence replace free will and human agency that diminish the capacity of an individual to act independently. This repetitive ritual representation influences women perception and consequently family and social paradigm. Utilizing the theories of cultural studies, representation and constitutional values, the study argues that when such ritualized thinking extends to civic observances, it symbolically replaces the legacy of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and undermines constitutional morality by strengthening the ritualistic cultural imagination. The researcher does not critique faith as conviction but questions the media's role in favoring ritual symbolism over rational analysis and civic awareness. By contextualizing popular television in larger societal-cultural and domestic frameworks, this study highlights the imperative demand for critical media literacy as well as an equitable cultural depiction in contemporary India. It concludes by stressing the necessity to recentralize rational vision of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar across media representatives, collective memory and household customs.

Keywords

Republic Day, Ritual representation, Indian Television serials, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Constitutional morality, etc.



Full Article

Introduction:

Television serials hold attention and occupy a central and powerful place in the day-to-day life of Indian viewers particularly women and within domestic spaces. In contrast to cinema or virtual platforms that require to think viewing options, television serials are watched daily often by families and act as everyday cultural practices. Gradually, these serials not just entertain but they mould understanding of faith, principles, social structure and overcoming critical situations. The most significant features of Indian television serial are the repeated prioritization of ritual forms, religious practices, festivals and acts of worship. These are presented as the fundamental indicators of cultural identity and moral uprightness.

Heavy dependence on the religious rituals as plot resolutions is the hallmark of the Indian serials. Each and every serial presents rituals like Satyanarayan Puja, Vatapournima, Karva Chauth etc. and festivals like Diwali, Ganesh Chaturthi, Navratri by explaining visual striking displays, carefully arranged, sentimentally intense and centrally narrative in spite of the main storyline. Rituals are not just background cultural elements but are placed as core elements that influence destiny, settle disputes and re-establish order. All this repetition constructs a conceptual framework where religious custom becomes hegemonic narrative framework for both middle-class and upper-class public.

This one recurring ritual structure in these serial narratives include turning points that immediately comes after an act of ritual devotion or prayer. Once a character faces any kind of illness, danger or ethical conflict, soon the visual focus moves to the other character that seems to be praying in front of a God, repeating mantras or lighting a diya. Accidents, moral crisis or hospital scenes are displayed where clinical treatments or scientific actions are regularly diminished by corresponding imagery of family members praying intensely, placing a deity in water, undertaking a fast or enacting difficult ritual tasks. Resolve and recovery are shown to be happened because of the successful completion of the ritual rather than medical expertise or human effort. Such types of visual representation indirectly but impactfully construct a power structure or a powerful logic where supernatural, divine or godly involvement is highlighted or appears to be superior to scientific action or skilled employment.

This motif turns even more significant when ritual consciousness, contemporary cultural practices observed alongside and outside television with a rising trend of ritualizing civic occasions. 26th January is celebrated as Republic Day to commemorate the enforcement of India's Constitution in 1950, to mark the transition of India into a sovereign republic country. This day is inseparable from Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of Indian Constitution and a principled advocate of equality, rationality and fraternity.

This paper argues that this ritualization of Republic Day is not the celebration itself. There are many other reasons behind it which need to be considered. When such conventional mindset steps into the national memory it effectively marginalizes Ambedkar's vision of constitutional ethics.

Research Questions:

- In what ways the religious rituals are represented repeatedly by Indian television serials during moment of crises?
- Which belief-based meanings are produced by empowering ritual more than science and establishments?
- In which manner their representations unequally affect women and family values?
- How does Satyanarayan Puja symbolically replace Dr. Ambedkar's constitutional legacy?



Methodology:

Through qualitative textual analysis, this research focuses on narrative structures, recurring ritual imagery, symbolic patterns in Indian television programs broadcast on Marathi and other regional channels. By conducting a close textual analysis, it allows for close engagement with recognition of dominant ideological interpretations ingrained in popular testimonies (Mckee, 5).

This analysis focuses on pressure-induced episodes that involve accidents, illness, moral dilemmas or danger to family unity. Specific attention is given on how rituals are constructed as potent problem-solving mechanisms whereas institutional systems such as hospitals, education or law implementation are framed to be powerless or secondary.

The theoretical framework incorporates Ambedkarite thought on constitutional ethics or morality, social justice and responsible citizenship along with Jyotirao Phule's prioritization on women's education as a impetus for social transformation (Ambedkar, 25; qtd.in Omvedt, 67). This interdisciplinary lens enables the study to link media representation with democratic consciousness, household ideology and gender.

This study demonstrates explanatory examples from broadly viewed Marathi television serials telecast on main national networks such as Star Pravah, Zee Marathi, Star Plus, Zee TV and Colors TV. Serials such as *Aai Kuthe Kay Karte*, *Tharla Tar Mag*, *Swabhiman*, *Julun Yeti Reshimgathi*, *Mazy Navryachi Bayko*, *Rang Maza Vegla*, etc. and Hindi serials such as *Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai*, *Kum Kum Bhagya*, *Anupama*, etc. were chosen on account of their long-running popularity and high TRP ratings. Those episodes that involved family conflict, medical crises, accidents or other problems were underwent a detailed review and closely analyzed to investigate the framing of ritual practices like intensive prayer, fasting, lightning a lamp, temple visits, vows, keeping God idols in water or performing a puja. These serials were determined not as rare occurrences but as an illustrative example of prevalent frameworks or ideologies that hold power in mainstream Indian television.

Literature Review:

Researchers on media studies have consistently claimed that television holds pivotal importance in shaping social reality through repetition and narrative standardization. Mass media sector in India has observed supremacy of upper-caste formations since its establishment. Theory of representation by Stuart Hall explains how media does not simply reflect reality but proactively formulates meaning through repeated narratives and images (Hall, 117). Television serials have been proven to serve as moral educators, especially within domestic realms in the Indian context. George Gerbner develops cultivation theory and explains how viewers perceptions of reality are shaped by long-term exposure of screen stories or television narratives that makes fictional or imagined patterns appear as natural or assured (Gerbner, 27). As rituals are repeatedly shown as successful intermediations, viewers begin to assimilate ritual effectiveness as good sense. Further, concept of myth by Roalnd Barthes' explains how customs, traditions, rituals and societal norms are humanize and established through repetition (Barthes, 112). Serials present rituals not just as belief system but as undisputable fact by avoiding close analysis or critical look. In terms of social dynamics, Ambedkar's criticism of tradition and his focus on rationality continue to be significant. Ambedkar asserted that unquestioning loyalty to tradition weakens democracy and social equality (Ambedkar, 45). Gail Omvedt's understanding of both Mahatma Phule and Ambedkar emphasize how intellectual domination over women play a pivotal role in maintaining social order and power structure (Omvedt, 67). This study develops on this foundation to analyze the ideological implications of ritual presentation in contemporary Indian television.

Narrative Control and Ritual Repetition in T.V. Serials:



Indian television serials constantly represent religious rituals as the key plot points and core narrative. Hindu religious festivals such as Ganesh Chaturthi, Diwali, Navratri, GudiPadwa, Vatapournima, Sankrant etc. are portrayed with detailed emphasis, strengthening ritual practice not only as cultural duty but also as moral necessity (Gerbner, 23). At the time of emergency, calamity and crisis, this ritualism gets worse. Scenes portraying the sudden extinguishing of a lamp or keeping the idols of gods in water appear during moments of immediate threat cultivating ritual as an extreme need but an acceptable act of control over fate. The narrative climaxes thus strengthens the cause-and-effect connection between ritual and success (Barthes, 109). Such depictions gain narrative control through repetition. They educate the viewers that issues are best handled or problems are best solved through devotional surrender and not through planning, strategies, rational analysis or maintaining positive attitudes. This belief system and view point discourages critical analysis, thoughtful examination and reflective action as well as normalizes dependency on divine and supernatural intervention. To specify, in recent serial Halad Rusli Kunku Hasla, moment of medical uncertainty with deep devotional act performed by family member. Similarly, in Tharla Tar Mag, narrative tension is often resolved after ritual completion. In Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai, moments of crisis regularly go along with the scenes of vrat observance or temple prayer, particularly depicting ritual as the main defense mechanism. In Gharo Ghari Matichya Chuli moments of familial crisis or narrative tension is frequently accompanied and often resolved by scenes of temple prayer, ritual devotional acts, fasting etc. Such repeating patterns and motifs display how Hindu religion and ritual is dominant narrative over institutional processes.

Marginalization of Scientific Knowledge and Institutional Authority:

Television serials often demonstrate the power of rituals greater than science in hospital scenes. Marginalization of science exhibit by often showing medical professionals helpless or unsure at the same time as family members engage in vows, prayer, lighting a lamp, keeping the idols in water, fasting or performing life threatening takes which further proves to be more powerful than science. Healing, recovery or rebirth usually follows ritual completion rather than medical treatment. This representation weakens public trust and confidence in rational or logical and reason-based systems. These repeated representations of serials that associate healing with ritual instead of medicine contribute to a culture that underestimates scientific expertise. According to Ambedkar, social progress is impossible without faith in reason and institutional justice rather than blind or irrational belief and he continuously warned against such tendencies. Media or mainstream narrative that honor ritual over science goes against undermines the vision.

Media, Women and the construction of Domestic Ideology:

Women are kept at center to perform ritual and are depicted as custodians of morals who must bear and undergo physical as well as emotional hardship and withstand difficult conditions to protect the family. Television serials maintain and strengthen the concept that women are responsible for family fortune and womanize the ritual practice. Here, Jyotirao Phule's argument that to educate women means educate the entire family is crucial because once women are ideologically framed through the medium of ritual narrative frameworks; this cultural imagery is passed on through generations. Dr. Ambedkar regarded that reason-based education for women is necessary formation that restrict women to ritual roles weaken this liberatory potential.

As women hold a central role in the ritual economy portrayed in Indian television serials. They are frequently depicted as guardians of moral discipline, faith and familial well-being. In times of crisis, female characters are regularly shown carrying out demanding rituals- temple visits, vows, and fasting, extended prayer while male characters remain largely inactive observers.



Through such representations, ritual responsibilities become gendered, strengthening the expectation that responsibility falls upon women for safeguarding the family's wellbeing (Omvedt, 67).

This pattern of representation is not merely a narrative strategy. As television serials extensively viewed within domestic spaces, women viewers repeatedly encounter these portrayals as accepted patterns of behavior. Through repetition, these narrative images become social expectations, encouraging the perception that a “good woman” is one who maintains harmony, through devotional commitment, self-sacrifice and ritual practice. In this manner, television serials gradually normalize a kind of domestic control rooted in faith rather than rational thought. Within a socio-historical framework, this phenomenon becomes more significant when analyzed through the perspectives of Jyotirao Phule and B. R. Ambedkar. Phule emphasized that educating women was the most effective medium for social change because women shape the intellectual atmosphere of the family (Omvedt, 67). Ambedkar similarly stressed the importance of women's education and rational awareness as a crucial foundation for social democracy. When women are socially positioned mainly as ritual practitioners instead of rational decision-makers, the transformative vision of both thinkers becomes limited.

Since women often function as the primary carriers of cultural values within families, the ideological effects of such representation are carried forward across generations. Children raised in households where ritual is constructed as the primary strategy of controlling uncertainty may adopt faith-based logic for difficult social situations. In this respect, the ritualized construction of women in television shows does not simply represent dominant cultural norms but actively contributes in sustaining them.

Surnames as Indicators and the Role of Caste in Television Serials:

Another underlining dimension of representation is the use of surnames in Indian television serials as symbolic markers of social hierarchy. Across various narratives, community-identified surnames and historically connected with upper caste or socially dominant groups such as Kulkarni, Deshmukh, Subhedar, Joshi, Sar Deshmukh, Killedar etc. are commonly given to the characters that are portrayed as respectable, wealthy, educated or acting in roles of authority and power within the storyline. These characters are often portrayed as business owners, community or political leaders, landlords or individuals holding institutional control.

On the other hand, surnames linked to structurally marginalized communities such as Kamble, Shinde, Bansode, Kadam, Waghmare or similar surnames regularly represented as subordinate occupations, economically weak, lower posts, constables, criminals, living in slum areas or characters situated outside centers of power. It is important to draw attention to these examples that are suggestive. However, this repeated appearance across different narratives indicates a broader representational tendency in mainstream media.

This pattern of representation operates as a type of symbolic coding. Even if caste is not directly mentioned within the narrative, viewers aware of the social meanings linked to surnames can identify these markers. Hence, structured social association is likely to be indirectly reproduced by means of reportedly unbiased narrative approaches.

From the perspective, of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, such patterns are considerable as caste operates not only through systemic structures as well as through cultural perceptions. Dr. Ambedkar consistently argued that hierarchical caste structure sustains when social inequalities become accepted in common thinking. When mainstream media repeatedly connects particular surnames with status, power or sophisticated culture. While others are represented in subordinate positions, such representations are likely maintaining traditional social hierarchies within the framework of cultural representation.



Ritualization of Republic Day and Marginalization of Ambedkar:

26th January 1950 is honored as the Republic Day and marks the adoption of the Indian Constitution. It symbolizes Ambedkar's aspiration of social democracy grounded in equality, liberty and fraternity (Ambedkar, 36). Since, it is a national occasion and observed at the national level, it represents civic rather than religious identity. Yet, the performance of Satyanarayan Puja on the Republic Day in most of the Societies reveals a transition from constitutional principles to religious observance. Significantly replaces the legacy of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. The constitutional memory is spiritual practice. Being a national occasion, it cannot be turn down to a religious festival. In Indian context celebration cannot legitimize religious particularism and must be symbolize civic unity rather than narrowing to religious exclusivism.

Republic Day is observed as coming into effect of the Indian Constitution on 26 January 1950 to constitute the establishment of democratic values. It is inseparable from the mental effort of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who conceives the constitution as a medium or mechanism of social transformation that is based on equality, liberty and fraternity.

Ambedkar foregrounded the significance of “constitutional morality”, which he described as demotion to respect democratic methods, systematic procedures and rational deliberation over blind faith to tradition. He cautioned that “constitutional morality is not an inborn tendency. It has to be civilized” (Ambedkar, TAC, 45). According to Ambedkar, democracy needed citizens to trust in law, institutional justice and reason rather than symbolic religious power.

When Republic Day is recognized mainly through religious ritual specifically performing Satyanarayan Puja, the symbolic core of the occasion implicitly constitutional reflection to religious enactment. Even though the ritual itself may symbolize gratitude or prosperity, its positioning on a constitutional commemoration may overshadow the historical consciousness of Ambedkar's rationalist and anti-caste struggle. This shift is symbolic rather than purposeful. At the same time, symbols play a crucial role in shaping public memory (Assmann, 112).

In this regard, constitutional memory must remain guided by secular-rational principles, not as a rejection of faith but as a reinforcement of democratic principles, rooted in equality within the framework of law and institutional justice. To convert Republic Day into a ritual practice without engaging with its constitutional meaning undermines the cultivation of constitutional ethics that Ambedkar regarded as crucial for the survival of democracy.

Discussion:

This finding shows that the cultural chain is connected to media representation, national memory and domestic ideology. Serials repeatedly depict that that solution for every situation crisis and institution of any incident is only religious performance or ritual- based action. This lowers down the rational and scientific thinking of people for any situation. This marginalizes science and strengthen the feminized expectations. It instills that religious rituals must be performed by women and consistently spreads a message that ritual performance is the only way for any problem. This particularism not only impacts on household and domestic ideology but also shapes the types of observance of Republic Day. When this type of thinking goes beyond domestic frameworks and undermines the foundational democratic framework it marginalizes the constitutional morality and henceforth Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. it lowers down the understanding and realization of constitution. It is the day to remember constitution and democratic values but if it is transmitted to only religious rituals then the commemoration of constitution is left behind. That is why, the warning given by Ambedkar that the democracy will not exist without constitutional ethics. This becomes more relevant in contemporary India. In short to serials affects the domestic ideology as well as social ideology. If it constitutes preferences to religious practices then the constitutional values and scientific perspective is observed as secondary.

This study does not argue that all Indian television serials or households similarly produce ritual-centric thinking. Instead, it determines a recurring descriptive pattern within dominant serial narratives and examines its possible ideological effects. The construction in some domestic settings is employed intentionally to avoid popularization. The issue centres on symbolic trends within mainstream culture not experiential regularity about every viewer or household practices.

Conclusion:

This study shows that Indian television serials strengthen religious consciousness with domestic and social spaces. By repeatedly representation of faith over rational thinking, serials undermine rationality and institutional authority (Barthes, 112, Foucault, 27). Women being the primary viewers and the one who takes forward the cultural values, spreads this ideology extensively within families and across next generation. When this religious ideology extends to Republic Day by performance of Satyanarayan Puja than it undermines and marginalize Dr. Ambedkar and his Constitutional vision. That's why, to reclaim Republic Day once again as a day of constitutional and democratic reflection, everyone should engage with Ambedkar's ideas, cultural awareness and media literacy. From this perspective, critical examination of popular media becomes a crucial analytical responsibility. Television serials are not simply sources of entertainment but serve as powerful cultural structures that shape how individual understand crisis, moral responsibility and authority.

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