

Role of Religion and Television in Sustainable Management

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Abstract

The role of religion and television in sustainable management has not been the main focus of environmentalists, corporates as well as policy planners until few years ago. However, recently importance of religion and television in sustainable development has been felt. In order to assess the role of religion and television in sustainable management, an ethnography based research was conducted which focused on Hindu rituals around trees as an example to assess if there is any kind of impact on sustainable management of trees by the influence of television. The field research revealed that there is a considerable increase in the conservation of trees due to influence of astrological shows on television indicating that television is an effective tool in conserving trees. The research found that although there was conservation of trees but it was at inappropriate places causing problems related to transportation, logistics movement and traffic jamming thereby affecting businesses of the nearby area. Therefore the work concluded that propagation of information on television regarding rituals needs to be well balanced and suggested a balanced approach for improving tree cover loss and traffic management at the same time.

Keywords: *Television, Religion, Rituals, Trees Management, Ethnography*

Introduction

Role of religion in environmental management is not a focus of mainstream environmental and business researchers. Most environmental management studies focus on issues like conserving trees through scientific planning and management techniques. Religion as a tool in trees conservation is often ignored by management practitioners. They mainly focus on scientific theories and social management strategies. However, few authors like Negi (2010, 2005), Gadgil & Rao (1994); Berkes et. al., (1995) are of a view that religious values often help to protect trees and religion can be an important method to conserve it. In order to explore the relationship

between astrological shows telecasted on television, religion and tree conservation this work focuses on studying the role of religious rituals in trees conservation propagated through astrological shows on television. The main question this research work aims to probe is: What is the impact on trees conservation when both television and religion are brought together and how it can impact sustainable management practices. For this purpose, Hindu astrology based programmes telecasted on television are analysed and their impact on people is studied through interviews. The observations made and analysis done in this study is focused on Peepal tree and rituals centered on it. As Peepal tree is the most popular tree, studying the impact on this tree acted as a model for

identifying a link between role of television and religion in trees conservation and its impact on location planning, wait time increase as well as on transportation problems.

Television and religion

Television has changed the way people used to live.

It has impacted people's perception about food, clothing, language, culture, and most importantly religion. According to a report titled “The Changing Face of TV in India” by FICCI Frames 2018 BARC (Broadcast Audience Research Council India) report the TV viewership in India has increased tremendously over the years as can be seen in the table below:

Table 1: Growth of TV penetration in India

Serial number	Year	Penetration rate in percentage	Number of viewers in million
1	2004	40	83
2	2008	46	106
3	2013	54	143
4	2017	64	183

The table 1 above suggests that overall there is a tremendous increase in TV viewership during the past 15 years. The audience have also changed from being not only spectator of events happening all over the world but have become part of those events by watching them on television. As rightly said by Kasim (“n.d.”) they have become involved spectators. This involvement is bound to have an impact on day to day religious activities of the people. Several scholars like Mankekar (1993) studied the impact of "*Ramayana*" the first religious programme on Indian Doordanshan which is till date one of the most successful television series in the history of Indian television. The huge success was an indicator that religious content, images and symbols aired on television influence the social and religious discourse of the people. Later, Babb & Wadley (1995) supported the argument by pointing out that television has transcended social and geographical boundaries in spreading religious observance throughout India. Launay (1997) stated that “Television has displaced some traditional activities with people staying at home to watch rather than participate in village life, the growth of access to electronic

television has actually enriched the religious life of the villages” (as cited in Paul & Soukup, 2002). A prominent Adman on the Business of Religion, Parameswaran (2014) stated that the phenomenal viewership garnered by religious programs telecasted on television set the agenda for a hyper-religious India. He also stated, that religious channels telecasting Yoga, Ayurveda and Astrology grew at the rate of 30% between 2011-2013 and a 20 minute slot is sold at a rate of Rs 2 lakh to 10 lakh a month there by indicating that religious and astrology based Television shows are popular among Indian viewers. His findings are also supported by a latest newsletter by BARC India (2018) which reported that 22% of TV viewing in the morning (6am – 9am) is in the miscellaneous category (This is second highest after movies) which is primarily driven by astrology based shows. This trend is constant on weekdays and weekend. The research observation also found that most of the astrology shows on Hindi news channels are being telecasted between the slots of 6am – 9am.

Synthesising from the above review and

observations, it could be said that astrology based TV programmes telecasted can play an important role in transforming religious behaviour of Indians. This information was further investigated to find out if such astrology based shows have any environmental impact due to ritual based religious & astrological shows broadcasted on Hindi news channels.

Research Methodology

The work applied qualitative research methodology of ethnography, which is defined as 'The study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally,'. (Brewer, 2000).

Ethnography is not one method of data collection but a style of research distinguished by its objectives, aimed to understand the social meanings and activities of people in a given 'field' or setting, through several methods of data collection such as in-depth semi structured interviewing, participant observation, personal documents, discourse analyses and photography. All these methods were used in the study. These methods helped us to collect information with minimum distortion in terms of perspectives and facilitated us to develop a case which is close to the real situations. Preliminary study was conducted by observing astrological shows on Hindi news channel, based on which five news channels were selected namely: Tez, News 24, India TV, Aaj Tak and Zee news. Astrology shows telecasted on these channels were analysed and it was found that most of the religious remedies suggested by astrologers in the shows revolve around trees, herbs and plants

Figure 1: Astrological shows telecasted on Television



It was also found that amongst them Peepal tree was most common and widely used term during all the shows. Therefore, for the purpose of this research Peepal tree was selected. Shows were further analysed for use of Peepal in different

rituals and remedies. The observations made from TV channels were verified through personal interviews of sixty respondents conducted in Lucknow city. Following four areas of the city were selected based on population and presence of

temples with Peepal tree: Daliganj, Chowk, Mahanagar and Aliganj. People performing the rituals were interviewed. Main basis of informant selection during rituals was through purposive sampling technique, “The purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses. It is a non-random technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of informants. Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience” (Bernard, 2002, Lewis & Sheppard, 2006).

Main reason for selecting Lucknow was familiarity with the local language and cultural beliefs. India is a vast country with many different languages and beliefs and since this work is based on the qualitative data collected about rituals through interviews, familiarity with the language and culture was very important in order to complete the research.

Results

In ancient India unconscious effort of biodiversity management was developed due to strong ritualistic, religious and traditional beliefs intensified by taboos and fear. This acted as a sustainable measure of management without any extra effort needed to promote sustainable strategies for biodiversity management. Nevertheless, over the period of time these ancient practices suffered a decline and people lost faith in

the traditional systems. Recently scholars started re-exploring the link between religious activities and environmental conservation. They also try to research on modern tools and techniques benefitting link between traditional systems and environmental conservation. In order to take this field of research further which is still in its nascent stages this work aims to understand the link between religious rituals, television and biodiversity management. As discussed earlier for this purpose, rituals centred on Peepal tree were selected. During the field work in the study area it was observed that there has been an increase in the rituals particularly related to the Peepal tree, this was deduced based on field observation and interviews with both local people and priests. In-depth interviews revealed that this is a recent phenomenon (3-5years). It was also observed that people are taking lot of pains, travelling long distances to perform rituals around this particular tree. They are against the axing down of this particular tree in fact they are protecting it in many ways such as building cages, platforms and modifying construction. Further examination of the ritual practices revealed that even though there is increase in the performance of the ritual, these are not the traditional rituals followed from generations but rather new forms of the rituals which are termed New Ritual for the purpose of this work.

This ritual was taking place under or near a Peepal tree planted either on the roadside or in a temple, which was constructed in such a way that the tree was protected by walls, platforms, cages etc.

Figure 2: Tree protection by walls, platforms and cages



In some cases the temple itself was under the tree. In most cases this was a shani (planet Saturn) or

navgrah (all nine planets) temple.

Figure 3: Shani (planet Saturn) or navgrah (all nine planets) temple



Secondly, a large number of devotees consisting of male, females, youngsters and even children were present, they were pouring oil and lighting lamp under the tree. The respondents when questioned why are they doing this ritual most of them replied “Hamari kundli mein kuch samasya thi issliye

pandit ji nein Peepal ki pooja karna bataya” meaning there is some problem with my horoscope so astrologer has advised me to worship peepal tree. Some said that “Hamne TV par suna ki Peepal ki pooja shanigrah ko shant karti hai isiliye hum yeh pooja karnelage” meaning we heard on

television that worshipping peepal trees reduces the ill effects of planet Saturn so I started worshipping the tree. These respondents also said that after viewing astrological shows on television we consulted astrologers who suggested us to worship the Peepal tree in order to get rid of the ill effects of horoscope.

Respondent also told that “is ped ko poojne se humko bahut laabh hua hai TV ke pandit ji ne batayatha ki iss pooja se hame sab tarah ke laabh hongey” meaning worshipping this tree has benefitted us. Astrologer on TV suggested that

worshipping this tree will bring all kind of benefits. All these statements hint that the respondents were influenced by the astrological shows on the television and felt that they should try the remedies told by astrologers on TV. It was also found that people want to perform this ritual because these remedies are not elaborate and take less time.

This attitude is certainly promoting the ritual which in turn is leading to conservation because the tree is required for performing the ritual. However a very important thing to note here is that this promotion is not self-driven and it is influenced by television.

Figure 4: Promotion of ritual by television



As we all know, television is the strongest and the fastest means of communication (Happer & Philo, 2013) so its role in promotion of the rituals has to be reckoned with. In this particular case, we found that the television is playing a significant role in the promotion of these rituals through advertising the tips (rituals) given by the astrologer for people to attain good health, wealth, success, love, prosperity and peace. This kind of advertisement generates a feeling in people to try and see if it may work and if it may give desired results. The

respondents when questioned whether television increased the tree worship the response was mainly positive. As stated by one of the respondent “TV se poojayein badhi hain. TV par aane wale karyakram khaaskar jyotish par adharit karyakram hame prerit karte hain poojayein karne ke liye” meaning TV has influenced and motivated us for performing these rituals” (Figure 4).

Above given examples highlight the influence of television and television induced astrologers as

one of the major reasons for the increase in the ritual activities in urban area. It was also found that respondents have started doing this ritual recently that is from last 5-6 years and some young respondents also said that they have started doing the rituals within the last few months or a year. We could also find the respondents who developed

faith in the rituals as recently as few weeks. Indicating that people have started recognizing the importance of ritual and are influenced by the television based astrological shows. This influence has led to the protection and management of tree to such an extent that the landscape and land- use pattern in the urban area has changed.

Figure 5: Figure depicting change in landscape and land use pattern



The two pictures of the same location show how over a period of time the protection of Peepal tree has changed the landscape and land use pattern.

Conclusion

In the past few decades, biodiversity management has become a highly prominent issue in the environmental discourse, both in the international and the national forum. However, the importance of religion, rituals, myths, taboos and beliefs have not taken a centre stage in the process, they were ignored while designing the biodiversity management policies. Recently scholars, scientists and researchers have started to comprehend the importance of age old self sustained traditional religions and cultures like Jainism, Buddhism,

Confucianism and Hinduism which hold philosophies and doctrines to protect and conserve biodiversity (Goswami, 2013; Venkatesh, 2016). The earth summit at Rio in 1992 and the Convention on Biological diversity (CBD) gave a thrust to this by bringing out a perspective which envisioned cultural and religion as promoting environmentally responsible behaviour and recognising their significance. This was also supported by authors like Gadgil (1994) and Negi (2010) who said that "religion and religious rituals remain one of the most imperative wellsprings of human concerns for other species".

Vivekananda once said that people of India tend to go a long way to do something if that is associated with religion. This social trait is indeed apt to be

considered a weakness in a democratic, secular, civil society; by exploiting this very trait, politicians have stoked the flames of religious fundamentalism and communal riots. However, this same trait may also be *co-opted* or enlisted for orchestrating a management movement. The strength of religious belief systems in forging environmental movements is instanced by recent social movements across the globe” (Deb, 2006).

Television played an important role in promoting religious rituals which in turn promoted biodiversity management. It has been established by literature search that the selected tree species had religious and ritualistic significances which was mainly restricted to the religious texts available only for the priests, literate section of the society and a small number of people with family traditions around these trees. However the advent of television has made this knowledge available to the masses whether literate, illiterate, rich or poor. This resulted in mass performance of the popular ritual in case of Peepal tree. This mass performance of popular rituals has led to protection of Peepal tree on the road side or in temple by building platforms as well as modifying construction. This type of management although indirect has led to visible changes in the land use and landscape pattern of the city thereby affecting logistics and traffic movement causing jamming. It was also observed that the lay persons interviewed during field investigation were unable to comprehend the environmental, medicinal and nutritional value of the trees but were able to relate to the religious and ritualistic importance. Most of them said that these trees are protected because Gods reside on this tree thereby, helping us to articulate two important points, firstly that the religious rituals, myths and taboos of a lay Hindu person contribute in the management of environmentally and medicinally important Peepal tree. Secondly, television can act as powerful resource for promoting the message of environmental management thorough religion. As

correctly pointed out by Anderson (1996) “religion is best regarded as something providing an emotionally powerful way to sell moral code”. However the task of re-inculcating traditional values or introducing alternate ones needs concentrated efforts, time and careful management of information flow so that only appropriate and correct information is transmitted. For this purpose, policy makers and religious leaders should make an effort to link religion and television in such a way that they must grow together and complement each other to achieve sustainable growth by providing some regulatory mechanisms. These mechanisms should be designed in such a way that the information broadcasted on television is well balanced and should also promote correct methods of performing rituals including where, how and when a tree should be protected for its ritualistic use, the information should also talk about the negative impacts of protecting a tree in a wrong place and how this protection will not lead to the desired benefits.

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