Age, Gender and Ethnocentrism: The Role of Media

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Abstract

Inter-religious and intercultural appreciation and acceptance is of tremendous importance in a multi-cultural society like India. Equality as a powerful driving force is necessary to the existence and development of a secular country. However, powerful forces are at play to divide the country by religion, caste, language and by class. Proving ethnocentrism is growing in the country, the authors bring out the role of media and suggests that a strategic media content along with a visionary government intervention can correct the system towards harmony and development.

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INTRODUCTION

Indian culture is rich and diverse. Every state has its own distinctive culture and identity. Compared to any other country in the world, the social identity of an individual in the country depends on caste, religion, class, clan, community, and interest group and becomes the basic unit of social action.

Ethnocentrism is a reality in this multi-stage divided society. It is very common that people think of their religion, caste, language, customs, traditions, and culture as more superior to those of others. These attitudes affect people's behavior in a society.

The term ethnocentrism was coined by William Graham Sumner, a social evolutionist and professor of Political and Social Science at Yale University. He defined it as the

viewpoint that "one's own group is the center of everything," against which all other groups are judged (newworldencyclopedia.org).

Barger (2008) considers it as the tendency of making false assumptions about other ways of life based on one's own limited experience. The problem with ethnocentrism is that it leads to misunderstanding people by falsely distorting what is meaningful and functional to them in the light of one's 'own' life experiences.

Ethnocentrism has its positive and negative impact. It creates rigid mindset and sense of false superiority. It often leads to disharmony, clashes and violence between communities of people.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies have been conducted on the effect of ethnocentrism in multicultural and multi religious societies.

Qingwen, Kenneth and Christine (2012) stated that, ethnocentrism has the potential to create stereotypes, prejudice, and negative behaviors against ethnic/minority group members. Axelrod and Hammond (2003) stated that, ethnocentric agents could form power groups and work together to achieve their aims.

Zikargae Hailemariam (2013) observed that, students who have high self-esteem that manifests greater social distance among cultural, religious, ethnic groups and less mutual understanding, tend to reject the diversity, knowledge, believes attitudes, judgments and worldviews or perspectives of other cultural, religious and ethnic groups in general.

Njoroge and Kirori (2014) observed a constant competition for control of resources and political power in Kenya, a multi-ethnic society with more than 40 ethnic groups.

OBJECTIVES

Religion and culture shape the lifestyle of people. All the rituals and traditional activities are linked with culture. Ethnocentrism is a growing social reality in a multicultural society like that exists in India. It ranges from acceptance to fundamentalism and even to animosity. The present research paper explores how people value and appreciate different cultures, practices and traditions of various religious groups. It studies the levels of ethnocentrism of various sections of the society and the role of media in shaping it.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in a city in the State of Karnataka where industrialization like other cities in the world changed the lives of the people from agrarian culture to so called modern urban culture. The researcher found Bhadravati city in Shivamogga district as an ideal study site for this study. This city changed from a traditional agrarian society into industrial society owing to the establishment of large scale steel and paper industries in order to harness rich natural resources of iron ore, rivers and forests in this belt. Due to industrialization, the city witnessed influx of people from other cultural regions migrating to this city in search of sustainable jobs.

Respondents from the four major religions and cultural groups in the study site – Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Jain – were chosen for closer observation and in-depth study.

Researcher also used a standardised ethnocentrism test developed by James Neuliep and James McCroskey (1997). The test depended on answers (as in Likert scale) given to 24 statements concerning feelings about respondent's culture and other cultures and the corresponding value. Scores greater than 80 indicated high ethnocentrism. Scores of 50 and below indicated low ethnocentrism.

The other research tools used in this study were participant observation, ethnography, interviews and survey questionnaire. The study was designed as a qualitative research, with inputs also from the ethnocentrism test.

ANALYSIS

Respondents who lived in Bhadravati city in a close geographical proximity have been exposed to various cultural and religious practices and traditions. The research found that most of the respondents were rigid about their religion and cultural beliefs.

Levels of Ethnocentrism

Table -1 shows the results of the ethnocentrism test based on religion, age and gender. Thirty respondents each from four religions were subjected to the test. They were further divided equally by gender, and age.

Table - 1 Ethnocentrism among respondents

Details	Children		Youth		Elders		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Hindu- Score							
80 >	03	02	03	03	01	02	**14**
<80	02	03	02	02	04	03	**16**

Muslim Score							
80 >	02	01	01	04	00	02	**10**
<80	03	04	04	01	05	03	**20**
Christian Score							
80 >	03	02	01	02	00	02	**10**
<80	02	03	04	03	05	03	**20**
Jain Score							
80 >	02	01	01	02	01	01	**08**
<80	03	04	04	03	04	04	**22**
Total	**20**	**20**	**20**	**20**	**20**	**20**	**120**

The test showed that the ethnocentrism among the Hindu respondents who scored above 80 was the highest (14), followed by Muslims (10) and Christian respondents (10) and 08 from Jain religion. It is alarming to note that 42 out of 120 respondents from different age groups in all the religions have high levels of ethnocentrism.

The Table-1 also shows that out of 40 children respondents 10 boys and 6 girls in all the four religions have high ethnocentrism. It shows that comparatively boys have high ethnocentrism than girls. Among the 40 youth respondents, 17 (6 men and 11 women) have high ethnocentrism level. Among the 40 elders, 10 (two men and eight women) have high ethnocentrism level. Altogether, children and youth are showing high ethnocentric traits.

Table 2 shows the range and average score earned by each respondent group. The range of score for all the respondents was 64 – 95, with an average score of 76.77.

Table 2. Range and Average score of Ethnocentrism

Religion	Children		Youth		Elders		Total	
	M	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**
Hindu	[66-84] 75.6	[75-87] 80.4	[65-85] 76.6	[71-84] 77.8	[73-91] 77.2	[73-86] 78.4	**[66-91] 76.46**	**[71-87] 78.86**
	[66-87] 78		[65-85] 77.2		[73-91] 77.8		**[65-91] 77.66**	
Muslim	[64-87] 77.2	[67-80] 74.8	[70-84] 76.2	[73-88] 81.8	[67-77] 73	[69-84] 76.6	**[64-87] 75.46**	**[67-88] 77.73**
	[64-87] 76		[70-88] 79		[67-84] 74.8		**[64-88] 76.6**	
Christian	[72-83] 78.6	[65-95] 76.8	[67-78] 75	[66-88] 79.96	[71-80] 75	[70-85] 76.4	**[71-83] 76.2**	**[65-95] 77.6**
	[65-95] 77.7		[66-88] 77.3		[70-85] 75.7		**[65-95] 76.9**	
Jain	[68-82] 74	[70-80] 74.2	[71-79] 74.6	[77-93] 83.8	[74-86] 79	[65-75] 70	**[68-86] 75.86**	**[65-93] 76**
	[68-82] 74.1		[77-93] 79.2		[65-86] 74.5		**[68-93] 75.93**	

Total	[64-87] 76.35	[65-95] 76.55	[65-85] 75.6	[66-93] 80.75	[67-91] 76.05	[65-86] 75.35	[64-91] 76.6	[65-95] 77.55
	[64-95] 76.45		[65-93] 78.17		[65-91] 75.7		[66.95] 76.77	

The range of scores among Hindu respondents is 65-91, followed by Muslims 64-88, Christians 65-95 and Jains 65-93. The average score of Hindus is 77.66, Muslims is 76.66, Christians is 76.9 and Jains is 75.93. The Table -2 also shows that the average score of ethnocentrism of Hindu children (78); Jain and Muslim youth (79.2 & 79 respectively) and Hindu elders (77.66) were strikingly high. Overall, youths comparatively have higher scores than others. The data suggests that ethnocentrism is low at childhood, maximum at youth and declines with old age.

Ethnocentrism and social interaction

Data from interviews, observation and survey reiterates that the respondents' social interaction and involvement are controlled by their ethnocentrism or cultural openness. Researcher found that people were very much ethnocentric towards their culture. This was evident in their choice of friends, house visits, participation in events held at home like marriage and birthday parties, participation in the religious festival of other religions, visiting holy places of one's own religion to visiting those of other religions. Openness to others' food habits, dress habits, and cultural practices are also controlled and limited by the levels of ethnocentrism present among the respondents.

Political ideologies embedded into religious belief systems was making people more ethnocentric. Respondents felt that the political situation in the country was creating a sense of fear among people depending on whether they belong to majority or minority religion consequently making people more community oriented and ethnocentric.

Media, communication and ethnocentrism

The role of media in cultivating, maintaining, maximizing and removing ethnocentrism was the prime concern of the research. This was gathered based on how people perceived media and cultural exchanges. Table-3 summarizes people's opinion on whether media is culturally open or skewed.

Table 3. Cultural Openness of Media

Age Group	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Can't Say	Total
Children	04	24	08	01	03	40
Youths	07	26	02	05	00	40
Elders	04	15	08	08	05	40
Total	15	65	18	14	08	120

About 65 (54.16%) respondents agreed that media is encouraging interreligious acceptance and understanding, with another 15 (12.5%) strongly agreeing. However, 18 (15%) disagreed, and 14 (11.66%) strongly disagreed. While the answers are analysed based on the age group, only a few elders were found agreeing to the statement.

Table 4 shows how people reacted to the statement, *media promotes social harmony*. Harmony between communities, cultural groups and religions is essential for any country's existence and development. Role of media in maintain harmony in the society is vital. In a country like India, which is secular, social harmony assumes significance. The question was pertaining to whether the media itself promotes harmony or they are biased with certain groups.

Table 4. Media Promotes Social Harmony

Age Group	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Can't Say	Total
Children	07	12	12	06	03	40
Youths	05	17	13	03	02	40
Elders	05	13	10	07	05	40
Total	17	42	35	16	10	120

The table-4 shows that 42 (35%) respondents agreed and 17 (14.16%) strongly agreed that media is *creating social harmony in the society*. However, at the same time 35 (29.16%) respondents disagreed that media is creating social harmony, while 16 (13.33%) respondents strongly disagreed. Instead, they stated that it is giving importance to only one cultural ideology. The general trend of the respondents across the age group does not give clean chit to media in its role of establishing peace in the society.

The answers were much clearer, when the statement, *whether media gives equal importance to all religions* was posed to the respondents.

Table 5. Media Gives Equal Importance to All Religions

Age Group	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Can't Say	Total
Children	07	04	10	12	07	40
Youths	08	12	11	06	03	40
Elders	06	07	12	08	07	40
Total	**21**	**23**	**33**	**36**	**17**	**120**

Table -5 shows that 23 (19.16%) respondents from different religious groups agreed and 21 (17.5%) strongly agreed that media gives equal importance to all the religions in news content. However, 33 (27.5%) respondents disagreed and 36 (30%) respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. Respondents also revealed that media is promoting only religion of the majority and mainstream cultural activities in all its programmes. It is giving more importance to majority culture celebrated in the society.

The researcher also looked at school syllabus to see the intercultural and inter-religious content that reach the students that might have shaped their mindset. Table 6 shows the content with religious overtones present in the school textbooks. Very clearly majority religion and traditions and practices have dominated school syllabus.

Table 6. Statistics of religion based issues in State and Central Syllabus

Standard	State Kannada Medium Syllabus				Central English Medium Syllabus			
	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Jain	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Jain
1 to 4	17	07	07	05	22	02	02	02
5 to 7	15	00	00	00	06	00	01	00
8 to 10	13	00	01	03	09	01	02	01
TOTAL	**45**	**07**	**08**	**08**	**37**	**03**	**05**	**03**

CONCLUSION

When people of diverse ethnic, religious and cultural background live together in a close proximity, their exposure to rituals, traditions, and philosophies of culture are natural. However, the social dynamics of power play in a society whereby a majority group may not only become powerful but those religious perspectives and cultural traits may weaken the other ones. When the same is reiterated as the ideal one by media and other power structures like politics and government, the minority cultures may be shocked and resort to measures to strive for existence.

The same sociological situation had resulted in a high ethnocentrism among respondents chosen for this study. Media, religions and school curricula were driving people

towards more ethnocentrism. Though the levels were high among all religions, majority religion showed greater sings of ethnocentrism. The ethnocentrism has encouraged fundamentalism in both majority and minority religions destroying communal harmony and peace in the society.

The researcher suggests conscious efforts from media and government to propound religious harmony as cultural polarization is harmful for the secular fabric of the society. Media should promote intercultural and interreligious appreciation at schools, in neighborhoods, communities, and other locations to educate people to be more tolerant of other religions and to change ethnocentric mindset of the people.

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