



Smart Leaders IAS
Smart Way to Succeed

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NATION, NATIONALISM & CITIZENSHIP



Smart Leader IAS

THE SOCIAL FACT

is a monthly bulletin for sociology current affairs which tries to give aspirants a new dimensions in their sociology preparations. The Magazine has been designed in such way that the reading experience is enriching and insightful for the readers.

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INSIDE THIS SOCIOLOGICAL BULLETIN

Connecting the dots :

Sociology is a process in making. Everyday newspapers and weekly have many important news, which have sociological angle in subtle form. This chapter helps you to connect those dots and give a clear picture of the reality.

Beyond Basics :

Going beyond basics in studies for examinations is crucial to foster a deeper understanding of the subject matter, enabling more comprehensive and critical thinking. It allows students to tackle complex questions with confidence and adapt to evolving exam formats.

Perspectives :

Beauty of Sociology, as a social science, is its capacity to offer different perspectives of a same topic. This chapter analyses a current topic with a unique social perspectives.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

- *Infosys, one of India's leading IT giants, has found itself at the center of controversy following reports of layoffs at its Mysuru campus. Amid allegations that employees were pressured to resign, the company has denied any use of force or intimidation tactics, stating that it is fully cooperating with the Karnataka Labour Department regarding the matter: **The layoffs highlight the growing "precariat", a class of workers with unstable employment and lack of job security. IT professionals, despite being in a high-skill sector, often face contract-based work, frequent layoffs, and performance-linked terminations, making them vulnerable to corporate restructuring***
- *Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin has reiterated his firm opposition to the imposition of Hindi, stating that the state is prepared for another language war if necessary. His comments come amid rising concerns over the Centre's three-language policy : **Bourdieu argues that language is a form of cultural capital, and dominant languages often carry more power in social, economic, and political spheres. The resistance to Hindi imposition in Tamil Nadu reflects an assertion of regional linguistic capital against what is perceived as an attempt to centralize and homogenize cultural identity***

- *Donald Trump's approach to foreign policy, often characterized as "America First and in his 2nd stint he supports the withdrawal of USA from WHO (health), Paris Agreement (climate), UNESCO (culture), UNHRC (human rights), and TPP (trade), prioritizing national sovereignty over multilateral cooperation: **Beck argues that globalization has created a "risk society", where global problems (climate change, pandemics, human rights crises) require transnational cooperation. Trump's retreat from institutions like WHO and the Paris Agreement reflects a rejection of global risk management, prioritizing short-term national interests over collective problem-solving.***
- *At least 18 people, including 11 women and five children, died after a huge rush of passengers caused by two delayed trains and a special Express train to Maha Kumbh led to a stampede at the New Delhi Railway station. Delays in train departures and the sale of around 1,500 general tickets contributed to the overwhelming crowd: **The incident reflects Johan Galtung's concept of structural violence, where institutional failures—poor infrastructure, lack of crowd management, and inadequate railway policies—indirectly lead to deaths. The recurring nature of such tragedies in India's public transport system highlights how systemic neglect disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, such as women and children.***
- *Opposition MPs targeted the government over the United States' deportation of 104 illegal Indian immigrants, demanding a discussion in Parliament over their "inhuman" treatment, which included shackling arms and legs while on a US military aircraft that reached Amritsar: **The shackling of deported migrants reflects Foucault's concept of biopolitics, where states exert control over bodies, regulating populations through mechanisms of discipline and surveillance. The use of military aircraft and restraints signifies how migration is securitized, treating undocumented migrants as security threats rather than displaced individuals.***

- *Cohen's concept of moral panic explains how controversial statements spark collective outrage, often fueled by media and social platforms. The viral nature of Mr. Allahbadia's comments led to heightened public sensitivity, police complaints, and reactionary censorship (episode removal), reflecting how society polices moral boundaries in digital spaces: **Cohen's concept of moral panic explains how controversial statements spark collective outrage, often fueled by media and social platforms. The viral nature of Mr. Allahbadia's comments led to heightened public sensitivity, police complaints, and reactionary censorship (episode removal), reflecting how society polices moral boundaries in digital spaces.***
- *As per the provisions of the Uttarakhand UCC, if a live-in couple fails to submit a statement of their relationship within one month of entering into the alliance to the authorities, they shall be punished on conviction with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three months: **Foucault's concept of biopolitics explains how states regulate bodies, relationships, and personal choices under the guise of governance. By mandating state surveillance over live-in relationships, the law extends state power into the private sphere, reinforcing institutionalized moral norms over individual freedoms.***
- *Men can worship at Sree Gowreeswara Temple, in Ernakulam district of Kerala, wearing shirts starting February 4. The temple authorities have decided to drop the nearly century-old practice of making men remove their upper clothes to worship at the temple: **Weber's concept of rationalization explains how traditions evolve under changing social conditions. The removal of the upper garment rule reflects an effort to align temple practices with contemporary sensibilities while retaining religious devotion. This shift is part of the broader secularization of religious customs, where rituals adapt to modern expectations of dignity and equality.***

- *Overexposure to social media, lack of exercise, not spending enough time with one's family and overwork (hours exceeding 55-60 per week) have all worsened mental well-being among Indians and ultimately put the brakes on the pace of economic growth, said the Economic Survey 2024-25: **Marx's theory of alienation explains how excessive work and digital distractions separate individuals from their personal lives and well-being. The dominance of overwork culture reflects a form of capitalist exploitation, where productivity is prioritized over mental health, leading to burnout and reduced economic efficiency.***
- *Some caste Hindu residents of Arungunam village in Tiruvannamalai district on February 11 allegedly sprayed herbicide using drones and destroyed crops raised by Scheduled Caste (SC) farmers on seven acres of panchami land. The farmers had planted black gram and sesame crops on the land: **Galtung's concept of structural violence applies here, as the denial of land rights and destruction of crops represent institutionalized discrimination rather than direct physical violence. The use of drones for crop destruction also shows how modern technology is being weaponized to maintain social hierarchies, reinforcing economic exclusion***



BEYOND BASICS

NATION, NATIONALISM AND CITIZENSHIP

“Why should we go beyond the basics?”

Understanding Nation, Nationalism, and Citizenship is crucial in analyzing the ever-evolving relationship between identity, state, and belonging. While these concepts are widely discussed, clear and structured explanations remain scarce. This version bridges that gap, offering a concise yet comprehensive overview of their global and national dimensions.

From an exam perspective, mastering these ideas helps students critically engage with issues like civic rights, migration, globalization, and state sovereignty. It equips them to analyze how nationalism shapes political dynamics, citizenship policies, and social inclusion. This version ensures an exam-focused, analytical approach, allowing students to confidently navigate these complex sociological debates.

Introduction

The concepts of nation, nationalism, state, and citizenship have been central to sociological discourse, shaping political identities, state policies, and social structures. While traditional understandings of these ideas were rooted in territorial sovereignty and cultural homogeneity, globalization has significantly altered their meanings and implications. This article explores these interlinked

concepts through classical and contemporary sociological lenses, examining their relevance in an era of transnational migration, digital connectivity, and shifting global power dynamics.

Understanding the Nation: Sociological Perspectives

A *nation* is often understood as a socio-political entity characterized by a shared cultural, linguistic, or historical identity. However, the conceptualization of a nation varies across sociological traditions:

- **Emile Durkheim** viewed the nation as a moral community that fosters solidarity among individuals, particularly through shared values and institutions. He emphasized collective consciousness as a key force uniting people within a nation.
- **Max Weber** emphasized the role of the state in defining national identity, arguing that a nation is shaped by common political aspirations rather than merely cultural homogeneity. He also linked nationalism to charismatic leadership and bureaucratic structures.
- **Benedict Anderson** introduced the idea of nations as “imagined communities,” highlighting that national identity is constructed through symbols, media, and shared historical narratives rather than physical proximity.
- **Anthony D. Smith** distinguished between ethnic and civic nationalism, where ethnic nationalism is based on shared ancestry and cultural heritage, while civic nationalism is rooted in shared political institutions and civic participation.

- **Ernest Gellner** argued that nationalism is a modern phenomenon closely tied to industrialization, where mass education and economic integration create national unity.

These sociological perspectives underline that the nation is not a fixed entity but a socially constructed and historically evolving phenomenon. The evolution of nationalism has influenced political structures, cultural narratives, and social movements worldwide.



NATIONALISM: FORMS AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Nationalism refers to an ideological framework that promotes the interests of a nation, often seeking political sovereignty or unity. Sociologists classify nationalism into various forms:

- ***Ethnic Nationalism*** (Johann Gottfried Herder, Walker Connor): This form of nationalism emphasizes shared ancestry, language, and culture as the defining elements of national belonging. It often leads to exclusionary politics and conflicts over ethnic identity. Examples include Germany in the 19th century and contemporary ethnic nationalist movements in Eastern Europe. Ethnic nationalism is often associated with movements for ethnic purity, sometimes leading to xenophobia or ethnically motivated conflicts.
- ***Civic Nationalism*** (Ernest Renan, Hans Kohn): Based on shared political values and democratic principles rather than ethnic homogeneity, this form allows for more inclusive national identities. Examples include the French Revolution's emphasis on citizenship and the United States' foundational identity based on constitutional values. Civic nationalism promotes integration and equal rights for all citizens, often forming the basis for liberal democracies.
- ***Cultural Nationalism*** (Edward Said, Stuart Hall): Highlights the role of culture, including literature, arts, and collective memory, in constructing national identity. This is particularly relevant in postcolonial societies seeking cultural reclamation, such as India's promotion of indigenous heritage post-independence. Cultural

nationalism often fosters artistic and literary movements that reinforce national identity.

- ***Economic Nationalism*** (Friedrich List, Karl Polanyi): Focuses on national economic interests and protectionist policies against foreign influence, often emerging in response to globalization. Examples include China's economic strategies and trade protectionism in the U.S. Economic nationalism can take the form of trade barriers, subsidies for domestic industries, or restrictions on foreign investment.
- ***Postcolonial Nationalism*** (Frantz Fanon, Partha Chatterjee): This form emerged in former colonies, emphasizing self-determination and resistance to imperialist domination. Many African and Asian nations adopted postcolonial nationalism to assert sovereignty and cultural pride after gaining independence. It often involves reclaiming indigenous traditions, revising colonial narratives, and fostering national consciousness.

In contemporary times, nationalism is increasingly shaped by global dynamics, such as migration, digital media, and geopolitical conflicts.

The State: A Foundational Element of National Identity

The state is a political entity with sovereignty over a defined geographical area, possessing the authority to enforce laws and maintain order. The relationship between the state and the nation has been a crucial area of sociological inquiry:

- ***Max Weber*** defined the state as an institution that holds the monopoly over the legitimate use of physical force within its territory.

- **Antonio Gramsci** introduced the concept of the “hegemonic state,” which sustains its power through ideological control rather than coercion alone.
- **Michel Foucault** examined the state’s role in disciplining and regulating populations through institutions such as schools, prisons, and surveillance mechanisms.
- **Charles Tilly** linked state formation to war-making, arguing that states historically emerged through conflict and consolidation of power.

Modern states exhibit different models of governance:

- **Nation-States:** Where state boundaries coincide with a unified national identity, such as France and Japan.
- **Multinational States:** Countries that accommodate multiple national groups, such as Canada and India.
- **Failed States:** States that struggle to maintain sovereignty, such as Somalia and Syria.

The state’s role in defining citizenship, regulating migration, and managing national identity remains a critical issue in an era of globalization.



CITIZENSHIP: EVOLUTION AND SOCIOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

Citizenship is the legal and social status that defines individuals' rights and duties within a nation-state. It has evolved through distinct historical phases:

1. **Civil Citizenship** (T.H. Marshall): Emerged in the 18th century, focusing on individual rights such as freedom of speech and legal equality.
2. **Political Citizenship**: Developed in the 19th century, granting individuals the right to participate in governance.
3. **Social Citizenship**: Expanded in the 20th century to include welfare rights, education, and healthcare as fundamental entitlements.

Sociologists further categorize citizenship based on its scope and nature:

- **Liberal Citizenship** (John Locke, Isaiah Berlin): Emphasizes individual freedoms and legal equality, often linked to capitalist democracies.
- **Republican Citizenship** (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Hannah Arendt): Focuses on civic participation and collective responsibility, as seen in participatory democracies.
- **Multicultural Citizenship** (Will Kymlicka): Recognizes cultural diversity and group rights within a nation-state, advocating for inclusive policies that protect minority identities.

- ***Cosmopolitan Citizenship*** (Ulrich Beck, Kwame Anthony Appiah): Suggests that individuals should hold transnational identities in an interconnected world, promoting global solidarity beyond national borders.
- ***Diasporic Citizenship***: Grants rights and recognition to emigrant communities, allowing them to maintain ties with their homeland.

The Development of Nationalism in India

The development of nationalism in India can be analyzed through different sociological perspectives, each shedding light on how collective identity, political consciousness, and social structures played a role in shaping the nationalist movement.

1. Functionalist Perspective: Nationalism as a Unifying Force

Functionalists see nationalism as a means of integrating society, ensuring social cohesion, and fostering solidarity among people.

- ***Colonial Rule and the Emergence of a Common Identity***: British colonial policies (such as racial discrimination and economic exploitation) created shared grievances among Indians, fostering a sense of unity.
- ***Common Institutions and Symbols***: The introduction of Western education, English as a common language, and institutions like the press played a major role in binding different sections of society.

- ***Nation as an “Imagined Community”*** (Benedict Anderson): Despite diverse castes, religions, and regions, people began to see themselves as part of a broader national identity through newspapers, literature, and mass movements.

2. Conflict Perspective: Nationalism as a Site of Struggle

From a Marxist and conflict perspective, nationalism in India was not just a unifying force but also a battleground of competing interests—class, caste, gender, and religion.

- ***Elite-led Nationalism (Gramscian View)***: The Indian nationalist movement, particularly under the Congress, was initially dominated by the middle-class intelligentsia, who articulated nationalism in a way that preserved their class interests.
- ***Peasant and Worker Movements***: The nationalist movement saw participation from peasants and workers (e.g., Tebhaga Movement, Telangana Rebellion), who framed nationalism in terms of economic justice.
- ***Caste and Nationalism***: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s critique of Indian nationalism highlighted how it was largely an upper-caste discourse, often ignoring Dalit issues. He proposed social justice as an essential component of true nationalism.

3. Postcolonial Perspective: Nationalism and Cultural Identity

Postcolonial theorists critique the Western model of nationalism and highlight how Indian nationalism developed in response to colonial discourse.

- ***Edward Said's Orientalism:*** The British justified their rule by portraying Indians as backward. Indian nationalists countered this by reviving indigenous traditions and constructing an anti-colonial identity.
- ***Gandhian Nationalism:*** Gandhi's emphasis on Swadeshi, village economy, and non-violence was a form of decolonizing the mind and rejecting the Western model of industrial nationalism.
- ***Subaltern Studies (Ranajit Guha):*** Nationalism was not just a movement of elites but also had a subaltern voice—tribals, peasants, and lower castes resisted both colonial rule and upper-caste dominance in the nationalist discourse.

4. Feminist Perspective: Gendered Nationalism

Feminist scholars argue that nationalism in India was deeply gendered, often framing women as symbolic of the nation while limiting their actual participation.

- ***Role of Women in the Freedom Movement:*** Women like Sarojini Naidu, Aruna Asaf Ali, and Kasturba Gandhi played active roles, yet their participation was often framed within traditional gender roles.
- ***“Bharat Mata” Symbolism:*** The metaphor of the nation as a mother (Bharat Mata) glorified women as symbols of purity but did not translate into gender equality in the nationalist struggle.
- ***Women's Legal and Social Rights:*** Post-independence, women's movements continued to fight for equality, showing that nationalism alone did not automatically resolve gender oppression.

5. Symbolic Interactionism: Nationalism and Everyday Life

Symbolic interactionists focus on how nationalism was constructed through symbols, rituals, and everyday practices.

- **Nationalist Rituals:** Boycotts of foreign goods, public bonfires of British clothes, and mass protests helped in building a shared national identity.
- **Songs, Slogans, and Symbols:** Vande Mataram, the tricolor flag, and Gandhi's Dandi March became powerful symbols that reinforced nationalist consciousness.
- **Personal Identities and Nationalism:** People's daily interactions, from how they dressed (Khadi movement) to the language they spoke (Hindi vs. English debates), became sites of nationalist expression.

6. Structural Perspective: Nation-Building and State Formation

After independence, nationalism transitioned into the project of nation-building, which required balancing multiple social forces.

- **Integration of Diverse Communities:** The Indian state had to bring together linguistically, culturally, and religiously diverse groups under a single national identity.
- **Secularism and Pluralism:** Unlike Western nationalism (which often linked nationhood with ethnicity), India adopted a secular and pluralistic model, accommodating religious and regional diversity.
- **Challenges of Nationalism:** Ethnic conflicts, linguistic movements (e.g., demand for linguistic states), and regional separatism (e.g., Khalistan, North-East insurgencies) tested the limits of Indian nationalism.

THREATS TO INDIAN NATIONALISM:

Indian nationalism, built on the foundation of anti-colonial struggle, faces multiple internal and external threats. These threats challenge national integration, unity, and the democratic framework of the country. A sociological analysis helps in understanding the structural, cultural, and ideological dimensions of these challenges and how India has responded to them.

Communalism

One of the most persistent threats to Indian nationalism has been communalism, where religious identities become sources of conflict rather than unity. The scars of Partition and repeated incidents of communal violence have tested the idea of a nation that embraces all faiths. While political agendas have sometimes deepened religious divides, India's constitutional commitment to secularism, social reform movements, and interfaith dialogue have worked to counteract these tensions. The idea of a composite culture—where diverse religious traditions coexist—remains a crucial force in resisting communal polarization, even as challenges persist.

Caste Divisions and Social Fragmentation

The caste system, deeply embedded in Indian society, has long been a divisive force. While legal measures have abolished untouchability and ensured representation for marginalized communities, caste identities continue to influence social and political life. Electoral politics often reinforce caste loyalties

rather than weaken them. At the same time, social mobility, urbanization, and anti-caste movements have challenged caste-based hierarchies, pushing for a more inclusive nationalism. The tension between caste-based identity and national unity remains a significant challenge, requiring continuous social reform.

Regionalism and Linguistic Identities

India's linguistic and regional diversity has sometimes created friction between local identities and national integration. Movements for separate states, demands for autonomy, and regional pride have at times been framed in opposition to national identity. The reorganization of states along linguistic lines in the 1950s was a crucial step in managing these tensions, recognizing that unity cannot come at the cost of cultural erasure. By allowing for decentralization and regional autonomy while maintaining a strong national structure, India has largely managed to balance these competing identities, though regionalist sentiments continue to surface.

Economic Inequality and Class Struggles

Sharp economic disparities between regions, classes, and rural-urban areas have challenged the idea of an inclusive nationalism. When large sections of the population feel excluded from economic growth, it weakens their sense of belonging to the nation. The Naxalite movement, rooted in economic injustice, is one example of how economic deprivation can fuel alienation. Welfare schemes, labor reforms, and economic policies aimed at bridging the gap have sought to address these concerns, though disparities remain. True national integration requires not just political unity, but economic justice that uplifts all sections of society.

Ethnic Conflicts and Autonomy Demands

Ethnic identities, particularly in the Northeast and border regions, have sometimes clashed with the idea of a unified Indian nationalism. Demands for autonomy or even secession have emerged from communities that feel politically or culturally marginalized. The Indian state has responded with a mix of negotiation, peace accords, and granting special provisions for autonomy. These measures have helped integrate ethnic identities into the national framework without entirely suppressing their distinctiveness. However, occasional ethnic tensions remind us that national unity is an ongoing process that requires constant dialogue and accommodation.

Cultural Erosion in the Age of Globalization

Globalization has introduced new challenges to Indian nationalism, particularly in the form of cultural homogenization and Western consumerism. While some see this as a threat to traditional values and indigenous identities, others argue that Indian culture has always been adaptable and resilient. The revival of local traditions, the promotion of Indian languages, and the push for indigenous industries reflect an attempt to balance global influences with a distinct national identity. Nationalism, in this sense, is not about rejecting the global but about negotiating a space where Indian culture can thrive on its own terms.

Political Polarization and Democratic Strains

A more recent challenge to Indian nationalism comes from the increasing polarization in political discourse. When ideological divisions turn into deep societal rifts, it weakens the sense of shared national identity. Democratic institutions, an independent judiciary, and active civil society play a crucial role

in ensuring that political disagreements do not turn into permanent fractures. The strength of Indian nationalism lies in its ability to accommodate debate, dissent, and ideological diversity without compromising on its foundational values.

Despite these challenges, Indian nationalism has remained resilient due to its flexible and inclusive nature. Rather than imposing a rigid definition of national identity, India has allowed multiple identities—religious, caste-based, regional, economic, and ethnic—to coexist within the larger framework of the nation. The struggles for social justice, economic equality, and democratic rights are not threats to nationalism but are part of its continuous evolution. As long as the idea of India remains open to change and self-correction, it will continue to withstand and adapt to the challenges that come its way.

Indian nationalism was not a monolithic process but a complex and evolving phenomenon influenced by class, caste, gender, and regional identities. While it played a crucial role in uniting people against colonial rule, it also reflected the internal contradictions of Indian society. A sociological lens reveals that nationalism was shaped by both dominant elites and subaltern groups, each framing it in their own way. The post-independence period further shows that nationalism continues to evolve, facing new challenges in an era of globalization and identity politics.

NATIONALISM IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

Globalization has profoundly challenged traditional notions of nationalism and citizenship by increasing cross-border interactions, migration, and supranational institutions. Some key transformations include:

1. Rise of Transnationalism and Diasporic Identities

Migration has led to the emergence of transnational communities that maintain ties with multiple nations. The diaspora nationalism seen among Indian, Chinese, and Jewish communities reflects how national identity can be sustained across borders.

2. Economic Globalization and Nationalist Backlash

While economic integration through institutions like the WTO and IMF has fostered global interdependence, it has also triggered nationalist reactions. The Brexit movement and “America First” policies highlight the tensions between economic globalization and national sovereignty.

3. Digital Nationalism and Cyber Citizenship

The digital age has facilitated new forms of nationalism. Online spaces create “digital nations” where individuals forge collective identities beyond territorial boundaries. However, cyber nationalism, as seen in state-controlled media in China and Russia, also strengthens state-centric nationalism.

Conclusion

The future of national belonging will be shaped by the interplay between local identities and global aspirations, requiring a balance between solidarity and openness in an ever-changing world.





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PERSPECTIVES

SHOWING UP

If you've spent any time on TikTok lately, you've probably come across the "showing up" trend. It's a feel-good trend where parents proudly showcase how they try to be present for their kids, whether it's for school events, games, or random day-to-day moments that mean the world to children. The message is heartwarming: being there matters, and kids notice when parents show up.

This article is written by Monica Radu under the topic Relationships. I also know that research consistently suggests that parental involvement is important. But as a working mom, I can't help but feel a little tug of anxiety every time I see those videos.

The pressure to be physically present for every milestone or school event ties into the larger societal expectation that good parents—especially mothers—are always available. This isn't a new idea, but social media has amplified it, making it harder for working moms to ignore. These pressures align with the concept of intensive mothering, which demands that mothers devote immense time, energy, and emotional labor to their children, often at the expense of their own needs or professional aspirations. Whether it's a holiday party or a preschool graduation, there's an unspoken (and sometimes spoken) expectation that we'll be there. And while these moments are important, they often come at a cost.

For me, like many other moms, that cost is work. When I get the message about my child's holiday party, the internal conflict begins. Should I carve out time to attend, risking falling behind on work and canceling class and office hours? Or do I stay focused on my job and feel guilty about not being there? This is a classic example of role strain, a term sociologists use to describe the competing demands placed on a person due to the different roles they hold in life. In this case, it's the tension between being a mother and an employee. Both are important roles, yet society often makes it feel like being a "good" mom should come first.

The pressure to "show up" is not distributed evenly. The expectation that moms should be the ones attending every event is deeply tied to gender roles. Despite the progress we have made toward gender equality, there's still a lingering assumption that mothers are the default parent. This expectation adds an extra layer of guilt for moms who have to prioritize work, something that fathers often don't experience in the same way.

Social norms and gender roles reinforce the idea that being a mother means always being available, and that's what makes this situation even more complicated for working moms. We face a unique kind of work-family conflict, the struggle to meet the high demands of both our careers and our families. When you add to this the rising costs of childcare, the reality is that many families simply cannot afford for one parent to stay home full-time, even if they wanted to. So, for working moms, the stress of "showing up" becomes another weight to carry in an already overburdened balancing act.

The idea of "showing up" is important, but I believe it's time to rethink what that means. As much as I want to be there for every field trip and class party, I have had to come to terms with the fact that it is just not possible. And that's okay. I'm still an involved parent even when I'm not physically present at every event.

Being a good parent doesn't always mean showing up for every moment; sometimes, it means showing up in different ways, ways that work for both you and your child. For working parents, this might mean finding ways to stay involved outside of traditional school hours or setting aside quality time for your kids when you are off the clock. It might mean making sure your kids know you are thinking of them, even when you are at work, by sending a note in their lunchbox or asking about their day when you get home.

We also need to broaden our societal understanding of what meaningful parental involvement looks like. Schools and daycares should recognize that not every family has the flexibility to attend midday events and instead provide opportunities for parents to engage in ways that fit their schedules. Whether it's virtual participation, after-hours events, or simply acknowledging that working parents are juggling a lot, there are ways to foster inclusivity in these spaces without creating guilt.

At the core of this issue is the need for systemic change. Employers can play a significant role in supporting working parents by offering more flexibility, whether that's through flexible work hours, remote work options, or family leave policies. Workplaces that recognize the realities of working parents create an environment where we don't have to choose between being there for our kids and succeeding in our careers.

Moving forward, we should celebrate all forms of parental involvement, whether it happens at a classroom party or around the dinner table at the end of a long workday. So the next time you see a "showing up" video, remember that it's not just about being present at every event. It is about the countless ways we show up for our kids, even when we're not there in person. And that should count too.

RAMAYAN TV SHOW AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

The broadcast of the Ramayan television series happened at a pivotal moment in India's media and cultural history. It aired from January 1987 to July 1988. This was a time when television signal reception was expanding but still limited. So for a substantial mass of the population, their very first exposure to this novel medium was the televised adaptation of the ancient Hindu epic. Combined with a gigantic viewership and the religious dimension, it caused the serial to have an outsized impact on its audiences.

Exploiting this aspect — the “geographical and over-time variation in television signal strength” — to identify “the causal effects of exposure to the Ramayan TV show, the authors of this paper pose the question: “Can exposure to religious narratives through mass media shape cultural identities and, in turn, influence political landscapes?”

There already exists a body of research that says ‘yes’. For instance, it is not a matter of debate that the Ramayan broadcast aided the rise of Hindu nationalism. It did. This study, by “examining the long-term effects of the Ramayan broadcast on cultural, social, and political outcomes,” seeks to bridge the “several interconnected strands” of this literature. Its unique methodology hinges on leveraging variations in TV signal strength across India to track how “exposure” to the Ramayan serial “affected cultural norms, communal relations, and voting behaviour in the years that followed.”

How the show affected cultural behaviour

The paper offers three key findings. First, areas with “higher Ramayan exposure (higher TV signal strength in 1987) experienced significant changes in cultural practices indicating a strengthening of religious identity.” This study tracked two cultural practices — naming of new-borns, and diet in lower-caste

households — and both revealed significant changes. “Hindu parents became more likely to give their newborn sons common Hindu names, and lower-caste households showed increased adherence to orthodox Hindu dietary practices (a substantial increase in vegetarianism).”

Secondly, areas with higher exposure to Ramayan witnessed a “short-term” increase in Hindu-Muslim communal violence through 1992.

And finally, the study found a “long-term” effect (through to 2000) on electoral outcomes, with the Hindu nationalist BJP gaining an increase in its probability of winning assembly elections in areas that had higher Ramayan exposure.

In this context, one question automatically comes up: how do we know if the effects attributed to Ramayan exposure are not also an outcome of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, which was gaining steam around the same time? The authors isolate the ‘Ramayan effect’ using a control variable “measuring proximity to the travelling mobilisation rallies known as the Ram Rath Yatra (held in 1990)”. By doing so, they found that the “estimated effects of exposure to Ramayan starting in 1987 do not appear to be confounded by exposure to the Ram Rath Yatra, the key event in advancing the Ram Janmabhoomi movement.”

Consolidating a singular identity

Pointing out that prior to Ramayan’s introduction, there had never been a TV show in India with a religious theme, the paper notes that the Ramayan series “represented a step-function in religious TV content”. To document this quantitatively, the authors “collected data on all 176 television serials broadcast on Indian public networks since 1980”. There were zero religious shows prior to 1987. This was another factor that amplified Ramayan’s unique impact, given that its viewership, too, was “unprecedented in India”, with an estimated 80 million people tuning in to watch each episode.

At its peak, over 100 million viewers were watching Ramayan simultaneously at a time when there were only 30 million television sets in India. This is explained by the phenomenon of “community viewing” wherein people gathered in “large groups around a single television set, often in public spaces or at homes of neighbours who owned TVs”. As a result, “for the first time, all Hindus across the country saw and at the same time listened to the same thing”. The serial “introduced a congregational imperative into Hinduism” and “provided a unifying narrative that transcended local differences”.

In a way, the mass dissemination of a standardised story of Ram, an avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu, couldn't have come at a better time for the advocates of Hindutva, as it helped prime a diverse Hindu population brought up on regional and linguistic variations of the epic, for the unitary ideology of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. Interestingly, as the paper underscores, the political impact of the series was likely unintended by the government. “At the time of the broadcast, the national government was led by the Congress party and not the BJP” and the “primary motivation for airing Ramayan was to increase advertising revenue for the state-owned television network.” In fact, the show's creator Ramanand Sagar had to contend with much scepticism from officials and lobby extensively to get the show approved for broadcast.

Based on their findings, which revealed a strengthening of Hindu religious identity as indicated by shifts to popular Hindu names for new-borns, switching to vegetarianism, and changes in long-term political preferences, the authors contend that “the content of mass media can have far-reaching consequences beyond mere entertainment, potentially shaping the cultural and political landscape of a nation for years to come.”

This empirical study is an important intervention at a time when the Indian media landscape, especially news television, is marked by the perverse phenomenon of polarising communal rhetoric beamed out to millions on a daily basis. It also opens up avenues for future inquiry.

For instance, given the rising trend of majoritarian propaganda films coming from Bollywood, how does a certain “narrative structure, character portrayal, and symbolic imagery activate particular social identities?” And how does the mode of consumption — viewing such content as a “communal experience” in a cinema hall or multiplex versus individually — affect its impact on beliefs and group identity? Such investigations could illuminate the mechanisms through which sustained media exposure to particular kinds of cultural and religious content shapes personal identity and political alignments.

As the paper concludes, “The story of the Ramayan broadcast serves as a powerful reminder of the responsibility that comes with the power to shape narratives and, by extension, the cultural and political future of a nation.

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