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Television in India: Ideas, Institutions and Practices

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NON-WESTERN TELEVISION: COEVAL TEMPORALITIES OF NATION AND TELEVISION

The story usually told of television is of a technology from the West, exported to other regions. This story has both presumed and produced universalist narratives of the modular character of social development enabled by the spread of technology and capitalism. The best-known recent example of an account along these lines was about the growth of print markets, in Benedict Anderson's (2006) argument about the creation of reading publics. Anderson argued that 'print capitalism' stabilized linguistic identities and made possible claims of cultural uniqueness and political sovereignty across territorial boundaries. But the implication of mass media as an inexorable force has also produced critiques centered around Americanization and mediated consumerism as aspects of cultural imperialism, and have expressed resistance to it (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972; Mattelart

and Siegelau, 1979–83; Gitlin, 1980; Miller, 1998).

Even if they disagree about mass media or the uses it is put to, advocates of both perspectives point to a historically new set of media effects arising with television. If print induced the sense of anonymous camaraderie in shared linguistic markets, television conveyed the senses of intimacy and simultaneity, and generated quotidian participation on a new scale. Unlike the textual focus in cinema studies, therefore, scholars of television have pointed to the medium's everyday flows within and alongside daily life as constituting its distinctness (Williams, 2003). If print came to be identified with the formation of modern publics, television pointed to the possibility of an even deeper identification, although critical scholarship argued that mass manipulation became more likely than mass emancipation (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972).

What is noticeable in scholarly writing is therefore a media teleology that often

associates shifts internal to the technological forms of mass media with broader sociopolitical conjunctures. For example, electronic media is correlated with the rise of bureaucratized soft power and institutions for the management of cultural aspiration and political ideology. Hence media histories often get collapsed into received historical accounts of Europe and North America. Such arguments have their *locus classicus* where electronic media arrived subsequent to the development of infrastructures that were a long time in the making. For example, scholars of France and Britain have described the process of making peasants into Frenchmen or proletarians into Britons that was already more than a century or two old before the arrival of modern mass media (Weber, 1976; Colley, 1994). The standardization of spoken language, the institution of a common educational system, the building of communications infrastructure across localities and regions, and campaigns in and against foreign nations, went alongside the development of print capitalism and the formation of a national culture, but comprised distinct processes in themselves. The national identity that resulted from such processes took on a life of its own, as something that appeared to be more than the sum of its parts, and prior to them.

We can recall Raymond Williams' argument that television fulfilled the need for a unified information uptake for society: the technology was developed only when such a need came to be expressed, though the means for realizing it had already existed for some time. Electronic media came to be established after a substantial degree of social integration had occurred in these nations. In other words, Williams understood the entry of television as subsequent to the formation of the modern public in Western society.

The analytical frame critics tend to use for assessing television arises from historical contexts where techno-social developments are pegged to broader ideological shifts associated with capitalist modernity, and with the rise of the modern nation-state. However, in the global South, cinema, radio and television

have developed simultaneously and alongside the process of nation building. Rather than an incremental development of media technology, it is their simultaneity, and the heterogeneous modes of address that result, that require analysis. An important explanation for this phenomenon lies in the fact that substantial populations in such regions could not read or write, making mass media an essential element of nation building for the majority.¹ Indeed it is the case today that though Euro-American experiences dominate accounts of television, it is in the global South that television has had maximum exposure.²

Thus most non-Western countries witnessed television's growth when nation building had only recently begun, and the gap between elite and mass culture was still wide.

New, i.e., developing nations, by contrast, usually had a thin crust of official nationalism on top, and multilingual, multi-ethnic cultures underneath, that were seldom ready to embrace each other. Infrastructure was usually limited where it existed, and the political consensus required to make the nation's parts cohere was precarious, and had to be backed by more explicit and frequent threats of violence than in most Western nations. The euphoria of winning national independence from colonial powers could not compensate for underdeveloped institutions and for the challenges of securing a nationalist project in an increasingly globalized world.

States in non-Western countries planned to use television to assist in the creation of modern publics where they did not exist before: developmentalism, rather than the sudden apprehension of a global village, or of a society of the spectacle, defines the first phase of the institutionalization of television. Television was assumed to be a technology for making mass education cheaper, and since market forces would turn the medium into a means of entertaining the well to do, granting them entry would mean abdicating the state's responsibility. In this understanding, technologies had to be used in the order of their development; print-based education had come first, and so television should impart print-based

literacy skills where audiences lacked them, experts assumed (Agrawal, 1977).

Broadcasting emerged as a utility in Euro-American contexts with relatively well-developed civil societies, but for developing nations it usually required technological assistance from abroad and a state strong enough not only to engage in meaningful program production but also to mediate mass media reception in socially constructive ways. Techno-mediation was supposed to help develop new nations, but in fact it would remake them in unpredictable ways, just as the *ancien régime* was taken by surprise by the effects of print. Perhaps anticipating such an outcome, developing nations retained state control over broadcasting in most cases. National programming found it difficult to stray very far from the bounds of official nationalism, and therefore had limited reach.

Worldwide shifts in the 1980s, associated with neoliberalism and media-market monopoly in the West, has also impacted the non-West, but differently: here, a profusion of media expressions, and the opening up of state-controlled media has been the norm, from Al Jazeera, to Beijing-opera-influenced action thrillers in East Asia, and Indian soap operas. This moment offers us a way of rethinking media history and its teleologies, but in ways that are both more global and more critical.

The way television grew in most countries contradicted the modernist teleology of communications media. This teleology assumed a linear succession of technologies that enable a transition from mythic to realist modes of perception, the latter being exemplified by state reason. The market was assumed to be a vanishing mediator in this process, necessary but subservient to enlightenment-style thought and its designated inheritor, the bureaucracy. However, with the spread of television in the global South, information uptake did not occur as policymakers expected, either on the part of the broadcaster or the audience, until the state ceded control and the market, which was usually transnational, took over. Since the state was

believed to be the indispensable means of brokering modernization, such an event was unforeseen. It raised questions about many assumptions underwriting investment in the technology by developing nation-states.

What could be noticed, for example, was the co-existence of multiple mediatic forms; rather than older media always becoming the content of new media as McLuhan had predicted, the power of older media forms could be evident in newer media such as television. For example, the advent of Hindu tele-epics that rendered Indian television into a nationwide phenomenon, adopted a mode of presentation that combined the aesthetics of calendar art, early cinema and mythological films, together with the shot-reverse shot editing style of the soap opera. The varying epistemic status of 'new media' in this context was more characteristic of market pluralism than of the more prescriptive character of state reason, which television had been envisaged as promoting.

In the West, liberal democratic norms usually provided the critical lens to view the transformation of mass media into purveyors of 'infotainment', as a perversion of the norms of enlightened civil society. A fuller expression of these developments occurred in non-Western societies, which can be summarized as market-led modernization. The most striking characteristic of market-led modernization is its extensive reliance on electronic communication, and the creation of an increasing sense of simultaneity with events in the rest of the world, without necessarily being accompanied by many of the institutional features and resources associated with modernization. Television is inseparable from the very different public sphere formations which arise in such contexts that in effect implode the temporal lag between advanced and backward regions of the world. Western television has already been parochialized in this context, since it assumes no need to acknowledge or comprehend the non-Western majority, whereas direct or indirect consciousness of the West has grown more acute precisely due to television. It is in the

non-Western world that we can more clearly obtain a sense of the global character of television, therefore.³

TELEVISION IN INDIA: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Contemporary Indian television in India presents a case of market-centric cultural regulation arising in largely state-free space, after decades of state regulation effective mainly in expanding communications hardware. It thus provides an exemplary site for understanding the centrality of media to emerging forms of (Asian) globalization. On the one hand, there is an extraordinary explosion of public communication with the expansion of television alongside growing print markets in national and regional languages. On the other hand, this more liberal regime of communication is accompanied not by the abandonment of punitive colonial-era censorship but by its transformation into unofficial but strong forms of cultural regulation, often backed by the threat of violence from non-state organizations, sometimes with tacit official support (Mazzarella and Kaur, 2009). For example, caste-based, regional and religio-political groups and parties increasingly dictate what can be seen and said publicly, using criteria of cultural authenticity rather than impartial norms of the public good as such. Market-led modernization appears fully to accommodate this development, even if the corporate character of media entails an overwhelming focus on the elite segment of the market. A number of paradoxes result, some of which I list below:

1. First, while culture is being upheld as deep-rooted and unchanging, it is reshaped by various forces, and especially by the fastest growing segment of the economy, *viz.*, the media industry.
2. Second, democratization grows not around or despite but through particularistic identities, as indicated in the salience of regional and caste parties of late.
3. Third, the expansion of modern infrastructure, of which media industries are one component,

is accompanied by the exclusion of growing numbers of the poor as the state diminishes its welfare functions. Interestingly, as people are pushed outside what passes for a state safety net, new mechanisms of surveillance and control arise, whether from government efforts to establish an identity database of the entire population, or due to the organization of an increasing segment of people's attention in terms of audience viewing time.

4. This leads to a fourth, and possibly an overarching paradox. With the media growing in reach and visibility, it is an increasingly important stakeholder in culture and politics; but it is unregulated and its influence is poorly understood.

Though studies of television tend to provide nation-specific examples, or assemble data organized according to national media systems, its growth and development are embedded in global forces. In India, international agencies are prominent at the very inception. In the Cold War era, developmental concerns on the part of the West (initially, via grants from Philips and from UNESCO, and later in the stationing of NASA's ATS-6 satellite over India for a year) led to the introduction and promotion of television. State television eventually came to be established, and achieved a degree of success in attracting audiences, but the period of meaningful state influence over television has been all too brief. Nationwide broadcasting began only in 1982, more than two decades after the introduction of television in 1959, in order to televise the Ninth Asian Games to an audience that was more foreign than domestic.

By 1991, a mere nine years later, and two years after the Cold War ended, satellite channels from abroad made their entry. When the Gulf War began in January 1991, some hotels installed private dish antennas to receive CNN news reports. Apart from interest in the conflict itself, a large number of Indian nationals were stranded in Kuwait, at the time occupied by Iraqi forces. This led to more demand for news than domestic sources could supply. Although some private companies had begun producing weekly tapes of video news, these were obviously restricted in their reach.⁴

The breakdown of the Cold War dispensation was thus the beginning of the end for the state's monopoly. International events acquired an urgency that could not necessarily be accommodated by the cautious proceduralism of state television news.

This was soon followed by the privatization of television and its enormous expansion, fuelled by foreign investment. Foreign satellite channels had already been operating for four years when a Supreme Court judgment in 1995 declared that broadcasting could not be a state monopoly, tacitly legitimizing existing and new private initiatives. Less than a third of the population had access to television in their homes at this time, but this ratio doubled in a decade (Rajagopal, 2009, appendix). By then, the earlier developmental agenda was abandoned in favor of a turn to cultural authenticity, and ultimately, programming favoring a Hindu majority.

Scholars writing on television have until relatively recently focused on the dominance of the state, but for most of the period of state control, audiences formed quite a small percentage of the population.⁵ It is with the relaxation of state regulations that broadcasting grew most rapidly and today television is tantamount to a utility for the middle classes. One Indian state government has even declared that free color television sets should be available to all, and is close to achieving this goal.⁶ Meanwhile, commercial firms control 95% of the existing channels at the time of writing, and dominate the urban television landscape.⁷ Although precise figures are not available, there is extensive foreign presence in television after years of proudly asserting state sovereignty: 100% foreign ownership is allowed for 'entertainment' channels, and up to 26% for news channels.⁸ Government reports, however, celebrate the growth of the media industry, without acknowledging that its decades-old policy of using broadcasting to promote 'education, information and entertainment' for the nation has unobtrusively been replaced by one of revenue maximization via private content providers. A full, nationwide analysis is not possible at this

time, since the finances of most television channels are opaque; for instance it is not clear how 700 or 800 channels survive when hardly one or two appear to make a profit.⁹ In many states, TV channels are financed by the leading political parties, or they represent a 'convergence' of industry, political families and media houses. The growth of media has thus provided state power new channels for its exercise, while often hiding in plain sight. The days of state monopoly over the airwaves seem quaint and ineffective by comparison with the 24/7 emotional churning of the channels today, where the same message can be reinforced across dozens of media outlets simultaneously.

This more recent, and more international phase, is characterized by largely unregulated programming, including partisan use of news media by private parties in the guise of objectivity, and a plethora of soap operas, game shows and reality TV. Competitive individualism is inculcated and rewarded on game shows and on reality TV, and characterizes most of the protagonists in these programs. News channels take up issue-based campaigns for justice and periodically champion popular mobilization, but within strict limits. The Anna Hazare campaign against political corruption, for example, dominated national news in 2011 until the major news media decided the story was over. The media dependence of the movement, which had seemed irresistible until then, thereafter became evident (Rajagopal, 2011).

The academic literature acknowledges the interpretive challenge posed by the quiet withdrawal of the state as an overt presence and the sudden appearance of an ostensibly state-free televisual space in the context of market-led globalization, and notes the importance of national and regional identity. Identity provides categories that help organize the plethora of content both for broadcasters and for viewers, although such categories are not necessarily the same as they used to be.

Previously, national and regional identities were commonsense referents within a closed

domestic economy, which the government regulated under an import substitution industrialization regime. Audiences today experience programs from the US or UK recast in domestic formats, as well as shows that acknowledge traditional and conservative Indian values albeit in upscale, consumerist settings (Kumar, 2006). With the opening of the economy and the exponential growth in its technological mediation, both regional and national identity appear, ironically, as the aim and outcome of global capital and the talent it employs. Culture had hitherto been assumed to be pre-existing, infusing all aspects of society, and unchanging, in a conceptual scheme that itself arose from the colonial encounter, according to which the West had modernity and the rest had tradition. In this binary model, 'tradition' signaled culture, while modernity was an open category standing for universal reason.¹⁰ Now culture in the shape of regional and national identity became dynamic and politicized, and a battleground for competing interests, in addition to comprising a sector that increasingly appeared to be driving the rest of the economy (Joshi, 1989).¹¹

In the rest of this essay I briefly discuss three historical phases that can be used to analytically distinguish topical and theoretical emphases in the literature on Indian television: development communication; an intensified focus on national identity and the nation-state; and finally, globalization, which is more extensively explored here. In the first phase, the state was the prime mover, spearheading the growth of television. In the second, when commercial sponsorship of programming commenced, the state adopted the role of regulator of the activity it had initiated, becoming the ringmaster of programming, deciding what shows would be sanctioned, and thus what cultural fare millions of Indians consumed every day. In the third phase, the state shifted from the role of ringmaster to being a participant and an enabler, seeking to share in the profits like any other business, and facilitating further opportunities for revenue. Its regulatory

role continues, but mainly to assist in the growth of the industry. State television channels continue to be operated at considerable expense, but little discussion of their content can be noticed either in the urban media or in scholarly literature. Certainly the effect of a cultural policy could be felt in the first and especially in the second phase, but by the third phase, the state ceded cultural policy, which had always been neglected in any case, to the market (Swati Chaturvedi, interview with Ambika Soni, July 26, 2009). This involved a 'change of mind-set', to use a phrase favored by senior government officials, treating private business as a means of growing the economy, and acknowledging limits on the state's knowledge and capacity. Due to the unrestricted entry of market forces, however, state monopoly over television was exchanged for a scenario where corporate monopoly looks set to take over instead. As I have noted above, the social effects of such media liberalization are emergent, and require further empirical study.

ESTABLISHING THE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR MASS MEDIA: SITE TO DOORDARSHAN

When electronic media became available, the experts of the time deemed them to be important in educating the masses, communicating appropriate information to enhance national development. Developmentalism was thus the broad rubric under which communications media developed, and it was viewed as capable of achieving consensus without visible coercion (Lerner, 1959). But people's needs were too local and varied, and mass communication not sufficiently context-sensitive or attuned to audience responses for much success in these efforts.

In India, for example, the state television system, Doordarshan, provided the sole option for a growing number of Indians between 1959 and 1991, and was responsible for developing programming formats

that remain influential today (Awasthy, 1965; Masani, 1976; Chatterji, 1991; Jeffery, 2006). The audience for this system is now so much smaller and poorer that few if any of the numerous recent reports on television take much note of it, and virtually all of the profuse news coverage focuses on the private channels alone. However Doordarshan indexed the first phase of India's televisual modernity, which can be extended from the inception of the medium until the time a significant corpus of television programming actually began to emerge in the mid-1980s.

The bulk of the literature during this period addressed the hypothetical potential of television, and was oriented towards development communication, although critiques of this perspective were also made. A significant section of the literature centers on the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) conducted in 1975–76, analyzing the results of studies carried out with educational programming in rural areas, with the help of a satellite whose services were loaned by NASA to the Indian government, specifically via the Space Applications Centre in Ahmedabad, for a year.

In the case of SITE, the bulk of the funding went to hardware installation, and relatively little was spent on software testing and implementation. Like much of the development communication literature, studies of SITE are loquacious on objectives and laconic on outcomes. However, it is clear that broadcasting programs were envisaged without some means for clarifying and reinforcing desired audience responses, making it unlikely that the planners' intentions would bear fruit. One former broadcasting official observed, 'Much time is spent in putting up transmitters, building and equipping studios ... but no thought is given to the programs which are to be broadcast from these centers. The entire machinery is upside down' (Awasthy, 1965, p. 28).

Such an operational model, whether upside down or not, suggested an unreflective reliance on a conveyor belt model of pedagogy that assumed messages stayed relatively unchanged from sender to receiver. However,

as Umberto Eco (1965) has pointed out, aberrant interpretation is the rule, not the exception, in mass communication. Ultimately, villagers were reported to prefer the feature films that were aired to the educational programs, which they found unsuited to their needs. Revealingly, one study reported that villagers referred to television as *tamasha*, a Hindustani word for spectacle or drama, or as *sanima* (cinema) (Agrawal and Rai, 1980, pp. 83–4). Small wonder that the Minister of Information and Broadcasting, when asked about the predominance of movies on Doordarshan, protested that if the government stopped screening films no one would watch television.¹² The task of socializing the population into TV viewership was, therefore, the self-appointed task of the state, and this was understood to be a modernizing activity *in itself*, regardless of what people viewed. One SITE study noted, '[M]ass media exposure is a great force in making man modern', citing Daniel Lerner (Agrawal and Rai, 1980, p. 296). The extension of media infrastructure was understood as the state's mission, alongside creating railroads and canals, setting up heavy industries and designing new townships, laying the basis for modern attitudes that would undergird the state's nation-building. The outcomes of the SITE experiment on viewers were unclear at best, but the expansion of television enlarged the state's reach, and expressed the sense, if not of what James Scott has called 'seeing like a state', then of looking like one (Scott, 1998; Pierce, 2006, pp. 48, 887–914).

Although the expansion of communications was part of a plan to enlarge state infrastructure, it was not foreseen that political authority would itself fundamentally transform in the process, from state to non-state agents and sites, and from bureaucratic planning to corporate strategy. This occurred with the government opening the door to commercial programming, initially within state television and later, outside it. Although developmentalism had always presumed that state communication achieved the best results, the commitment to a rigid model of

control and the inability to manage the heterogeneity of its audience, together with the success of market actors in securing and organizing people's attention would lead to a sea change that is as yet only very partially understood.

IMAGINING AN AUDIENCE FOR TELEVISION

The second phase of India's televisual history spans the growth of commercial television under the aegis of state television, which occurred roughly between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s. A wider array of perspectives can be found in this phase, ranging from developmentalism to critiques of the forms of nationalism represented on Doordarshan. A tacit assumption in this period concerned an instrumental relationship to television: if only television was properly used, national development might be advanced, and the cultural and political abuses of the technology eliminated. A distinctive shift in this period concerned Doordarshan's experiment with entertainment genres, although developmental programming aimed for example at farmers, women and children dominated, together with a limited amount of news coverage.

This much-discussed experiment in what were described as 'pro-development' soap operas combined entertainment and education to both attract audiences and improve them. It was inaugurated by an energetic bureaucrat, S.S. Gill, Secretary to the Information and Broadcasting (I&B) Ministry during the critical phase of television's expansion in the early 1980s. The prospect of making profits while fulfilling development objectives was enticing; some proponents deemed it a 'win-win' proposition (Singhal et al., 1993). The prototype was *Hum Log* (We People), written by a well-known Hindi novelist and journalist, Manohar Shyam Joshi, which ran for 17 months. Developmental themes were found to depress audience size however, and sponsors withdrew until such messages faded

out. It was as a family melodrama that the serial eventually succeeded.¹³

As the government's emphasis shifted from building infrastructure to developing programming ideas and content, demands for economic growth increasingly came into conflict with assertions of cultural continuity, creating a dilemma for those making the serials. The problem lay in seeking overt messages of change, although the strategy of national development had in fact been to rely on an assertion of cultural continuity, while assuming tacitly that cultural change would follow from economic growth. It was the makers of commercial entertainment who mastered deniability as a tactic, providing narratives that overtly endorsed traditional cultural codes while subtly inserting new ones of individual aspiration and achievement.

It was the unexpectedly successful serialization of the Hindu epics on television, beginning in 1987 that brought home the political dividends of claiming that the culture was in fact unchanging, despite all the evidence of social change.¹⁴ Bureaucrats had been skeptical that the Ramayan and Mahabharat would win substantial audiences, and that these epics could successfully fit with their developmentalist mission. They could not have been more wrong. To the bureaucrats' surprise, the telecasts brought urban India to a standstill and decisively distinguished the new medium from the morally more ambiguous cinema, giving it respectability. The values upheld in these epics, of devotion and sacrifice, were widely seen as belonging to the past, and as unavailable in present-day society (Rajagopal, 2001). The collective desire to commemorate the absence of such Indian values confirmed the existence of a winning programming formula. The winds of change were blowing, but television could provide a shelter or a buffer rather than a mirror to the storm, with nostalgia for an upper caste Hindu past rendered as historical commonsense.

Doordarshan eventually succeeded (viewership grew from 1.2% to 18.2% of the population between 1981 and 1991), but at the

cost of displacing its earlier mission of development and embracing instead something closer to a market-friendly Hindu orthodoxy (Rajagopal, 2009, p. 326). An Indian personality took shape for television not so much by advocacy as by denial of change, and tactful acknowledgment of a new dispensation that was assumed to be a *fait accompli*.¹⁵

TELEVISION UNDER LIBERALIZATION: BETWEEN DEREGULATION AND LOCALIZATION

Until the early 1980s at least, it was assumed that television was an unaffordable luxury for a poor country (Pal, 1983). As late as 1978, the B.G. Verghese Committee Report estimated that by 2000 there would be between 12 and 18 million TV sets in the country. That figure was reached in just over a decade, and by 2000 there were over 70 million television sets. In fact by 1996 bureaucratic perspectives on television had changed – the Nitish Sengupta Report declared it to be a ‘misconception ... that television is a luxury’ and recommended acknowledging ‘the immense potential of television as an instrument of rapid socioeconomic transformation’ (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1996, paragraph 2.16). Within two more decades television had become a utility, for example in the state of Tamil Nadu where more than 16 million free color TV sets were distributed in a few years at a cost of nearly \$900m.¹⁶

By 2010, TV had the highest penetration among all mass media in India at 56%, while 90% of those surveyed in a media industry study reported that it was their preferred entertainment.¹⁷ Meanwhile, market reforms led to the increase of TV channels from a handful to 450 or more in less than 20 years. A 2009 study reported that there were 110 million TV households in India, out of which 70 million homes subscribed to cable and satellite, while Doordarshan alone served the remaining 40 million homes.¹⁸

The speed of developments, if nothing else, has ensured that the lacunae in the scholarship on Indian television are numerous. Ownership data on the industry are scarce, due to mostly private control, scanty regulations, and a state record-keeping system that prefers secrecy to disclosure.¹⁹ Television channels, whether public or private, have not always welcomed outside observers, and no public archives are available of television programming; hence studies have concentrated on content analysis more than on televisual sound and image. Given the enormous volume of output, studies thus far are understandably limited in scope.²⁰ In what follows I offer some preliminary notes in understanding the nature of the changes affecting television, and the effects that these changes in turn had on emerging cultural trends.

Now when economic reforms were carried out, the task of the private sector was to advance the growth of the economy. What was the task of the media industry once it was granted freedom by the state, besides growing and making money? What was to be communicated, and what outcomes were desired, when state regulations were limited at best, and focused on containing overt violence and obscenity? As it turned out, the government wanted very little more than revenue growth; issues of political censorship could be informally managed and usually required little overt coercion. Meanwhile, after decades of warning against corrosive Western values, foreign investment flooded into the Indian media industry. The result, however, was in some respects the opposite of what had been feared: *Indian language programming expressing conservative values and upholding traditional roles became among the most widely watched programs*. As it turned out, cultural identity was not only the basis for expanding the media market, but also in a way, its outcome. Corporations sought to brand goods so as to encourage old and new consumers to imagine intimacy with these goods. Cultural identity defined in regional, religious or national terms served this purpose. Identities necessarily changed in the

process, into something more public and stereotyped, but reflexive and individuated as well; that is, they became harder externally and more plastic internally. While a measure of turbulence resulted from these new expressions of identity, the political order itself revealed itself to be surprisingly resilient.

This resilience was in part due to the fact that despite ostentatious ideological differences, the major political parties, except for the Communist Parties, have been in agreement on the necessity of economic reforms and market liberalization. With the media industry loudly championing economic reforms, debates over the relevant policies have been confined to the opinion pages of daily newspapers rather than spilling out onto the streets. Television as itself a site where economic reforms are being carried out is a subject that has largely been ignored, both by economists and by other scholars. This is surely something that requires analysis across the board and through attention to the various aspects of the televisual apparatus (including satellite uplink agencies, broadcasters, content providers, televisual content, cable operators, advertising and market research companies, and audiences). Instead, economists have at best focused on the media's rate of growth while bracketing the media industry itself. Meanwhile other scholars have discussed the media industry while assuming reforms as a backdrop.

Since the media consume an increasing share of the working day, and since media companies are stakeholders in the process, issues of media production and reception are relevant to discussions about both the changing structure of the media industry and on the manner in which media legitimize the new context of neoliberalism. Existing commentary tends to be dominated by industry analysts, for whom economic growth is an end in itself and state intervention is mainly perceptible as either pro- or anti-business, however. Official commentary itself tends to adhere to such an instrumental perspective, and expresses reluctance to intervene amidst rapid market growth regardless of the fears of monopoly.²¹

What would it mean to think about the growing relevance of television under liberalization? In what follows, I offer a brief discussion of state deregulation and its outcomes, which can be summarized as follows: (1) Liberalization of India's economy has produced a far more deterritorialized form of media control due to extensive investments coming in from abroad. (2) Paradoxically, this is accompanied by an intensive localization of television programming, with an explosion of Indian-language news and soap operas whose message of overt patriarchal dominance and covert individual aspiration, amidst the proliferation of game shows and other imported formats, was indisputably a homegrown product.

State Deregulation and Deterritorialization: The Changing Structure of Televisual Control

Litigation is often cited as the proximate cause for relaxing state control over the airwaves. In 1995, India's Supreme Court ruled, in response to a petition arguing that the airwaves were public property and not the property of the state.²² But corporations and entrepreneurs had already been serving Indian audiences for some years, beginning with the Gulf War in January 1991, when some hotels installed private dish antennas to receive CNN news reports. Apart from interest in the conflict itself, a large number of Indian nationals were stranded in Kuwait, at the time occupied by Iraqi forces. This led to more demand for news than domestic sources could supply. Although some private companies had begun producing weekly tapes of video news, these were obviously restricted in their reach.²³

A few months later, Star TV began to broadcast *The Bold and the Beautiful* in the region. Television channels could tape-record their shows and courier them abroad, as well as uplinking from Russia, the Philippines, Hong Kong or Singapore, as in fact broadcasters like JAIN, Sun TV and Asianet,

Zee TV, Sony, ATN and BITV had been doing since 1990, depriving the government of a substantial amount in revenues (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1996, article 7.6).

Bypassing terrestrial authority highlighted at least three factors:

1. It showed that new technological developments were altering the ground on which many aspects of state control were based. Technologies such as video, dish antennas and the internet required intensive policing on the one hand, and sophisticated expertise on the other, if the government monopoly over what people watched was to be retained. The reluctance of the state to commit scarce resources for such measures was compounded by the lack of political will to do so.²⁴
2. Audiences were increasingly knowledgeable enough to locate and use these technologies, which meant that the artificial information scarcity the government sought to preserve would be harder to maintain.
3. New media technologies and their ability to create audience demand entailed not only the *de facto* end of the monopoly in broadcasting, but also a loss of legitimacy for the government, which was propounding laws that were unenforceable and out of date, while also depriving it of much revenue. Broadcasting monopoly was leading not to persuasion, but to popular skepticism about government propaganda. The result of excluding private initiatives was therefore counter-productive (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1996, articles 2.36, 7.6). The urban middle classes wanted news and entertainment, and businesses were able to cater to them. The government could stand in their way, at considerable expense to itself, or it could yield to the pressure, and reap the benefits.

Pressures to liberalize access to television were enabled by the fact that the potential for revenue dominated government policy objectives. Frequently, the means of determining and implementing these objectives was short-sighted, and oriented towards preserving state control rather than allowing non-state parties to gain influence in the name of development. But as liberalization gained momentum, revenue enhancement by itself became an overarching policy objective

(Ahluwalia, 2002). Practices that yielded high revenue growth therefore implicitly justified themselves. Ministerial pronouncements on television, for example, dwelt on the growth of the sector without acknowledging that it came at the expense of state broadcast media, whose pioneering efforts in establishing television were aimed above all at promoting not-for-profit education, whereas entertainment was overwhelmingly the objective of commercial media.

Meanwhile, cable operators all over the country had for years been operating satellite dish antennas to receive signals, which they then transmitted through informal cable connections to residential neighborhoods, in a completely unregulated process. The Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act of 1995 belatedly sought to register these operators and obtain their consent to a code of conduct to guard against concerns about mores, taste and security. But the code is a voluntary one, and although government monitors a limited number of channels, there is no systematic oversight of television programming in India.²⁵ Thus the Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Ambika Soni, when asked why her ministry was not exercising its authority in this regard, replied, 'Self-regulation is the proper way for educated people' (Chaturvedi, 2009). Invariably, discussions about the lack of government regulation were diverted to appreciating the media industry's rapid expansion, implying that such a lack resulted in increasing growth and was thereby justified (Newstrack India, 2010).²⁶

By 2006, a UNESCO study would observe that India had one of the *least restrictive* policies regarding the entry of foreign media companies, and that available government records tended to obscure the extent of foreign presence in the sector. This was the result of a gradual devolution of government regulation. Though government-appointed observers were invariably critical of commercial entertainment in broadcasting, and urged the reinforcement of public service components in the field, they seemed aware that their recommendations could be unpersuasive.

For example, the Sengupta Report, after a ringing denunciation of 'alien entertainment', suggested the establishment of one public service channel each in TV and radio, aware that to expect government broadcasting as a whole to embrace the public service ethos, even while commercial broadcasting was expanding rapidly, would be unrealistic (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1996, articles 5.2 and 5.4). Ironically, liberalization, rather than being viewed as an acknowledgment of regulation's limits, was increasingly viewed as a default option. For example, on the subject of foreign investment in the news media, one information and broadcasting secretary told reporters, 'We have all along said that we will be happy to take any step to facilitate the growth of the industry but the industry hasn't demanded it'.²⁷ The erstwhile roles of the state and the media were flipped.

Region and Deregulation

Given the plethora of channels, no comprehensive map of televisual dynamics is possible. However, a brief discussion of television in one region can help in a symptomatic reading of the emerging media field. One of the largest television companies in the country is the Sun TV group owned by Sumangali Cablevision, which dominates the television market in Tamil Nadu, and has channels in all four southern states. The other leading television company in Tamil Nadu is Jaya TV, named for its founder J. Jayalalitha, leader of the one of the two major Dravidian political parties in the state, the AIADMK. Competition in television is an extension of political party competition, and viewers understand that television is partisan; hence it is necessary to move between channels to get alternative views on important issues. Due to its size and influence, Sumangali Cablevision is the more significant of the two by far, however. The company was founded as an arm of the erstwhile ruling party in Tamil Nadu, the DMK, and its owners are

close relatives of the leader of the DMK. The DMK itself was founded on a lower caste, anti-brahmin platform in 1949, and came to power in 1967 with a campaign based on linguistic identity through its extensive grass-roots cadre, and its astute use of mass media in its campaigns; the AIADMK was a break-away faction.²⁸

Sun TV's own success was the result of a deft reading of the caste landscape of Tamil Nadu. Although Tamil Brahmins probably formed 2% or 3% of the population, and lacked political power, Brahmin norms remained influential in the domestic sphere, and thus presented a gateway that programmers had to cross to reach mass viewership. Accordingly, for the first several years of its existence, Sun TV's programming was entirely given over to Brahmin producers, such as K. Balachander, Y.G. Parthasarathy, Y.G. Mahendra, 'Crazy' Mohan, Mowli, and S.V. Sekar, who produced Brahmin-dominated serials. Other networks followed suit. In the words of one observer, a TV viewer until the late 1990s could have been forgiven for thinking that only Brahmins lived in Tamil Nadu (Bala Kailasam, Creative Head, SRM Group Television, 2011). Once audiences appeared to be hooked, Brahmin producers and stories were phased out. Serials switched focus instead to non-Brahmin characters and settings, and proceeded to garner much larger audiences. In following such a route to winning viewers, Sun TV showed the subtlety of a party that had won political power from the Brahmins, but knew that they remained culturally hegemonic. In other words, winning audiences required broadcasters to read both viewer preferences and contextually defined social preferences, and finding a way to negotiate between the two.

Since the starting point for mass media in India, as in most other countries, was a situation of minority cultural dominance, there tended to be a wide disparity between these sets of preferences. In south, representations of the caste elite were deliberately used as a Trojan horse to lower the threshold of acceptance with mass audiences. Such a clear

strategy was premised on the more than half-century-old political polarization of lower caste identities, an event that was, however, not accompanied by a social revolution that significantly improved lower caste status in general.

In north India where the political ascendancy of lower castes was still contested, lower caste identity was not available as a vehicle for viewers. Here, mass programming strategy took its cues from events that were themselves enmeshed in television, with art imitating art imitating life. The success of the Hindu mythological serials in the late 1980s and early 1990s made the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) aware of the mobilizational potential of Hindu symbols and mythological themes. Until then, the conventional wisdom had been that Hindus could not be unified politically on a religious platform, due to their divisions across caste and sect. The BJP reaped the electoral dividends of using such themes and eventually came to power at the Center in 1998, an event that had been unthinkable barely a decade earlier. The successive triumphs of the tele-epics and of Hindu cultural nationalism set the stage for televisual formulas in which overtly upper caste Hindu orthodoxy became the backdrop, medium and boundary for dramas.

In both north and south India however, acquisitive individualism was a subversive element galvanizing the social context, with the familiarity of the melodramatic form softening the nature and extent of the shift being attempted.

ASPIRATIONS, IDENTITIES, AND CHANGING SOCIAL RELATIONS

The reversal was most striking in the case of films. It was an historical irony that the long-disparaged film industry provided the cultural resources to incubate programming for an Indian audience. The Indian film industry, probably the most prolific in the world, was granted industry status in 1998, nearly a

century after its inception. By and large, filmmakers had to win market share without the subsidies other industries obtained.²⁹ But as a result, they found themselves free to address their audience without rehearsing the dogmas of official nationalism. The narratives they provided rendered the law of the state as, typically, external to the customary laws of the community when dealing with all conflict including crime. The police invariably arrived after the trouble was over and the culprit confessed, to provide symbolic closure to a method of conflict resolution regulated by the community itself (Prasad, 1999). This formula emerged outside the matrix of developmental institutions, but, with liberalization, came to infuse television as well. This was a noteworthy departure from an earlier period when it was necessary to sharply distinguish films from other mass media. Similarly, film producers for many years treated television as merely a convenient vehicle for films, but industrial consolidation created an increasing continuity of both form and content across media platforms. With new regulations allowing 100% foreign ownership in entertainment media including the film industry, Bollywood became a convenient resource for expanding the media market, leading to a general Bollywoodization of mass media: pictures of films and of film stars and sounds from film song tracks became fairly ubiquitous in radio, television and print as well as mobile phones.³⁰

Bollywood filmmakers produced not only the Hindu mythological epics for Doordarshan. The templates they created were used also for the so-called pro-development soap operas. Serials like *Hum Log* appealed to audiences that had been exposed to social realist cinema from filmmakers like Guru Dutt and Bimal Roy, and later Basu Chatterjee, Gulzar and Hrishikesh Mukerjee. In such films, the rhythms of ordinary life were treated as adequate for cinema, with melodrama confined to the domestic sphere rather than extending to more sensational topics. The mythological epics helped extend this framework of television

entertainment, and, in situating it within the bounds of Hindu conservatism, sanctioned the investment as morally appropriate. It was from here that soap operas began anew in the liberalization period.

Prominently, these were serials revolving around mother-in-law and daughter-in-law tensions within joint family households, popularly known as *saas-bahu* serials, and initiated in the show *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* (Because the Mother-in-Law Was Once a Daughter-in-Law) produced by Balaji Telefilms, which set the trend. The family setting was invariably extremely wealthy, but domestic rivalries, livened by sensational crimes such as kidnapping, rape and murder, created fraught scenarios for the family members. In effect, the greater explicitness and intensity of lower-class domestic conflict was transposed to upper-class communities, thereby providing something for everyone.

Exaggerated audio-visual effects provided interpretive cues, for example different characters would be signaled by distinct audio tracks. A respected elder could come before the camera to the sound of devotional music, and the arrival of a fashionable young man could be signaled by reggae or hip-hop tracks. Abnormal events would be replayed to signal distress or surprise, for example a slap of rebuke administered by a husband or a parent; swish pans would be used to render scenes blurry or make them spin, to suggest the loss of balance and perspective induced by shock. These and other elements of melodramatic form could provide aesthetic props creating a sense of continuity in narratives that were themselves changing.

Thus although soap operas centered on the family, the family was no longer portrayed in quite the same way. For example, portraying romantic love, which was at the center of most film stories, involved a delicate negotiation between reassuring elders of their importance and allowing fulfillment to young lovers, and much of the drama turned on how these competing tensions were resolved. Frequently, filmmakers exercised creativity in endorsing traditional authority while allowing romance

to be required. What shifted was the way in which the individual's relationships with the community were resolved; earlier they were, with rare exceptions, harmonious. In television currently, there is a premium placed on individualism, and seldom a respite to antagonism. One viewer posted a remark about Tamil soap operas that could be applied to Indian soaps more generally:

[Do you want to know] how to drive your sister-in-law out of the house? How to plan for looting property from your father-in-law? How to take revenge on those who spoiled your family? How to deal with the illegal affairs of your wife/husband? One point solution for all your queries, watch Mega Serials on TV. (Srinivasan, 2006)

Remarkably, however, *saas-bahu* soaps tend to be filled with pious references to scripture and tradition. Scenes of prayer and worship are frequent, as are claims of upholding custom and observing ritual prescriptions. The fact that viewers choose to watch shows with overtly feudal and patriarchal values while market reforms are dissolving many existing certitudes is often seen as proof of deep-rooted traditionalism. A more nuanced diagnosis is obviously necessary. Resurgent traditionalism alone could not explain the multiple currents present together in society (Shailaja Kejriwal, personal interview in 2004). Increasingly stereotyped invocations of tradition are accompanied by subtle changes in social relations, especially of caste, gender, and other forms of embedded inequality. Women portrayed in soap operas, for example, are increasingly assertive, even if in the name of custom; when sacrificial behavior is depicted, it appears increasingly unmoored from the support systems of the community, and more personalized. Such individualized attitudes are clearly compatible with a media system premised on promoting the consumption of goods.

We can ask what kind of media regulation might be possible in such a context. Heavy-handed *dirigisme* is not favored any longer, and the subtlety required to address social change is assumed to reside in the industry

itself. Meanwhile, the reliable old standby of 'national identity' has been so thoroughly reworked that some of the more popular presentations of Indian cultural themes often emerge from foreign-owned channels, embracing cosmopolitanism while abundantly signaling rootedness. What is interesting, however, is that if the earlier state regime was criticized for being narrow in scope, uniform in content and conformist in spirit, similar tendencies are visible even with hundreds of private channels.

Although the promotion of markets is supposed to guarantee competition, uncertainty about how to address an emerging market of television viewers has led to conservative programming choices and zealous imitation of market leaders. As a result, the formula of paying lip service to convention and tradition while covertly espousing aggressive individualism has become the norm. One example will suffice to convey the point. For the moment on Indian television, even such well-established Western genres as law and order shows or hospital-based dramas, where individualism is subordinated to the demands of cooperation and professional discipline, are glaring in their absence. This moment may pass soon. Even so, there are lessons to be drawn here. The collective thrust of the media corporations appears to be to delegitimize traditional structures of loyalty and trust, understanding them as backward, cumbersome to the individual, and above all hostile to their own goal of championing consumer choice and enlarging the market. Religious and familial orthodoxy and the rule of elders are assumed as conditions against which overt challenge is inadmissible. No doubt these messages are meant to speak across ideological divides. What is interesting is that neither side comes off well: if the established order is cruel, its adversaries are cunning or dishonest.

Overwhelmingly, the events that these soap operas portray correspond to events in the private domain, but the public sphere offers a privileged space for their enactment and resolution. Since the progress of social

reforms stalled after national independence, citizens had to cope with traditional social structures that could not easily mediate ongoing processes of modernization; hence such an outcome is not surprising. The collective urgency attending private concerns seeking expression far outweighs the felt need of public sphere issues as such. What we have therefore is a disappearing public, one that is swallowed up by an expanding private sphere.

Thus, televisual exposure has provided a sanctified space for social and moral experimentation, for example in the guise of reality shows. Popular reality shows such as *Bigg Boss (sic)*, which is said to have 114 million viewers in India and 100 million more abroad, make individuals on the show and off it confront cultural difference in highly contrived settings.³¹ They stage what would normally be private or intimate forms of behavior, on the part of ordinary persons, in public. This leads to a certain homogenization of conduct on the one hand, and an intense awareness of the power of publicity on the other. In this way television is socializing audiences through shock and public spectacle.

Here is a specific method of education. If the reality shows are brazenly sensationalist (*Bigg Boss* has featured a woman who was formerly a bandit, a seven-foot-tall professional wrestler, a cross-dresser, and so on) they succeed because they satisfy not only curiosity about the bizarre, but give individuality to it, and so underline the drama of detaching oneself from the community and standing out as an individual, albeit in stereotyped ways. Such modes of performance allow expression of tendencies not sanctioned in daily life. They allow vicarious participation for audiences who can learn to assess the potential of their own behavior as a spectacle to be managed in an identifiable manner.

Orthodoxy appears fascinated, not threatened, by such portrayals, and at present cannot conceive that such programming might seriously undermine it. This is surely an error. Indian business is already being nudged by foreign corporate capital to adopt a more socially liberal attitude on questions

of caste, class and gender. An example would be the Oscar-winning *Slumdog Millionaire* (dir. Danny Boyle, 2008), released by Rupert Murdoch's Fox Productions, where the sub-human treatment of a poor Muslim boy in Mumbai is clinically portrayed, while sentimentality is reserved for his love story.

INDIAN TELEVISION TODAY

No categorical position can be adopted, therefore, on the effects of inflow of foreign capital on Indian television, but the manner and scale of its deployment, as well as the paradoxical social reactions to it – from renewed commitments to social orthodoxy, to the embrace of individuated models of pleasure and consumption – deserves notice. According to one reckoning, between 40% and 60% of the investment in Indian media and entertainment industry comes from foreign investors.³² At the time of writing, there exists a limit of 26% foreign direct investment (FDI) in news channels, and 76% in 'non-news' channels, but various factors compromise this *cordon sanitaire* around 'news'. For example, up to 100% FDI is possible in advertising, market research and public relations, and together these industries dominate strategy and content choices across the media. The 'readership' surveys done by market research agencies together with television ratings influence the decisions of advertising agencies as well as the news and entertainment media. Taken together with the importance of media planning and public relations, the customary role of media professionals is defined less by journalistic norms and more by market concerns. In 2007, advertising expenditure amounted to 120 billion rupees, at least three-quarters of which go to TV, radio and print media. The five leading advertising agencies, mostly controlled by foreign conglomerates that in some cases own all the equity in these firms, account for well over half of advertising business in the country (Vasanti, 2008a).

It is interesting and perhaps symptomatic that in such a context, no precise accounting exists of the extent of foreign investment in Indian media. For example, the UNESCO report cited earlier noted that the Indian government did not record foreign private equity or venture capital investments as foreign direct investment (FDI), nor did it include the retained earnings from foreign subsidiaries under such a heading. This led to underestimating foreign investment, the report noted. For example, in 2002 Rupert Murdoch's News Corp invested about \$200 million in its Indian cable television operations (Star TV), but although the amount equaled all the rest of FDI that year, it was not included in the Indian FDI statistics (UNESCO, 2006).

It is clear that in the government's view, regulation and controls over foreign investment, although performed in the national interest, had for years acted as a drag on economic growth, and gave power to bureaucrats who neither understood the technicalities of what they were regulating nor were effective in their interventions. It is the wholesale character of the shift that is striking, from a state-centered approach to one that is led by the market's intuitions and desires. Public service television should have its place, state officials agree. But it seems that for the present, that place is mainly by the side of rural and poor viewers, who watch Doordarshan if they cannot get something better.³³

The Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Bill 2011, which makes full digitization of cable television across the country mandatory, has led to a wave of media mergers. Corporate houses envision that greater economies of scale for business promoters will lead to greater profits, and far more viewing options for those who can afford them. Affordability for the wider public is the subject that remains a big question. One immediate result will be that consumers can no longer negotiate rates and viewing options with their local cable operators (LCOs). Currently, broadcasters claim they receive only about a quarter of the fees that viewers pay for their programs, because

LCOs under-report subscribers and gain disproportionate revenues (Rajagopal, 2012).

A comparison with the US context is instructive. In the case of US media, the emergence of media monopoly led to diminishing content from local and from foreign sources in favor of more generic, syndicated national features (Bagdikian, 1983). Meanwhile the growing political conservatism of the media, if it was perceived at all by the public, appeared as a status quo orientation, with little hint of political scandal. In India by contrast, both local and foreign content increase, with Western program formats often receiving a markedly indigenous coloring. And the growth of media corporations in India occurs through a corrupt state-industry nexus that is readily perceived through the numerous television channels owned and operated by members of political parties, or is otherwise made public through leaks, sting operations and other increasingly familiar genres of scandal.

Even where domestic ownership exists, since many major media are privately held, information is not available regarding the nature of their control. We do know, however, that in at least ten states, major television channels belong to political families; the real numbers may be higher (Vasanti, 2009). A further hint of concentration is suggested by the fact that in 2008 11 cable distribution companies provided nearly all of the 400 television channels then present in the country (Vasanti, 2008b). The largest companies in the electronic media segment are Star India, New Delhi Television (NDTV), Sony, Essel group, India Today, Sun Network and Television Eighteen. Recently, the Walt Disney group has emerged as leader of the children's entertainment segment. Since there are no particular rules and laws to limit cross-media ownership, almost all major newspaper groups have entered the electronic media market. The fast-paced growth of the media business has forced these groups to issue public equity or invite FDI to survive in the market. Consequently, privately owned media are being reshaping in a corporatized

structure, in a departure from the traditional family-owned business model that deserves investigation.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In lieu of a conclusion, let me end this survey of Indian television with some suggestions for further research.

1. The growth of television has been accompanied by the growth of cross-media ownership, and by the movement of content across platforms such as film, radio, print, television and cellular telephones. Earlier assumptions that took for granted a degree of medium insularity are untenable in such a context. Furthermore, where political independence bestowed citizenship rights before social reforms took root,³⁴ cultural norms are multivalent and contextually defined, and need to be distinguished not simply in terms of what people believe, but in terms of what is assumed to be permissible and what is not. What is screened on television is part of a chain of events in the domestic sphere, the political public sphere, and the mass media more generally. Exclusive attention to television is liable to be misleading in such contexts. These factors demand a decentering of television, and an attention to the medium as part of a broader canvas. We can recall here a remark by Oskar Negt (1978) 'A critical theory of the media cannot have the media as its center'.
2. While it is a commonplace that sensationalism has proliferated with the growth of television, the multivalent character of cultural norms entail a reversal of the public-private opposition in some crucial ways that clarify the forms of prevailing sensationalism. Processes of self-fashioning and subject formation that occurred in an era when print was dominant, are necessarily far more public today, especially where for the majority of the population, literacy is less than a generation old. We may decry the drowning of properly public issues by sensorially rendered private matters, but the imperative to represent and in some measure adjudicate questions of identity formation that neither the domestic sphere nor the political public sphere can cope with, can hardly be overstated. The dynamics of this distinct space where the public can disappear into

the private sphere, require to be studied with a more expansive historical imagination than is sometimes brought to bear on it.

3. If private concerns take over public space, what happens to norms for communicating properly public issues? The norms of news reportage are not those of the received journalistic canon, in this context. Objectivity and neutrality appear to matter less than emotional resonance and ethical appropriateness, and partisan attitudes are more prevalent; viewers moving between channels may have to negotiate a plurality of opinions that may be mutually irreconcilable (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Unlike the Habermasian model, whose parliamentary decorum and rule-governed rational criticism relegates the violence of politics outside the public sphere, *violence is internal to the public sphere* in such contexts. How it is managed in televisual news reportage is a topic that deserves study.
4. Although communication requires language, communication theories tend to be parsimonious in their assumptions about language, and presume at best monolingual conditions. Few societies today fulfill this condition. What are the dynamics of multilingualism in historical contexts where the dominance of a colonial language gives way to indigenous vernaculars as the latter gain in significance with the growth of markets and media? What kind of cross-pollination occurs between linguistic domains, as English words and syntax are borrowed in indigenous languages, and metaphor, vocabulary and cultural styles from native languages infuse the former language of command?³⁵

NOTES

- 1 They were not the only relevant mediators, to be sure; there were also canals, roads and railways, as well as institutions of the state, etc.
- 2 For example, the combined population of North America and Europe constituted an estimated 1.38 billion in 2010, for example, when the transcontinental countries of Russia and Turkey are included, or about 23% of the world's population. Meanwhile the number of television sets in the world is approximately 1.4 billion, of which 285 million are in North America. No estimates are at hand for the number of TV sets for all of Europe, but if we tentatively assume 250 million sets across the 842 million population of Europe (UN figures for 2005), more than

900million television sets exist outside Europe and North America, or 64% of all television sets. (Department of Social and Economic Affairs, UNPD. [Graph illustration of population by continent and world's ten most populated countries.] *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:World_Population_by_Continent_and_10_Most_Populated_Countries.png).

- 3 In this essay, I move between arguments about the media in general and about television more specifically; my arguments do not apply exclusively to television except where I indicate that they do.
- 4 Started between 1988 and 1991, *Hindustan Times'* Eyewitness, *India Today's* Newstrack, the Observer Group's Observer News Channel (ONC), and Independent Television's India View were the most prominent. Their combined circulation was probably in the tens of thousands (Tanna, n.d.).
- 5 The potential audience in 1982 was under 2% of the population, for example, and in 1991, when foreign channels made their entrance, less than a fifth of the population had television in their homes (Rajagopal, 2009).
- 6 In the state of Tamil Nadu more than 16.2 million free color TV sets have been distributed in four years for nearly \$900 m. A million more are promised (see Times News Network, 2011).
- 7 Of the more than 450 television channels estimated to be operating according to a 2009 report, the state television network, Doordarshan, controls 31. (See PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2009.)
- 8 About 40% of foreign direct investment in India originates from companies based in Mauritius. Singapore, the US and the UK, respectively, follow with single digit figures in comparison (Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion, Government of India, 2010).
- 9 See Sucheta Dalal (2011), cited in Sandeep Bhushan (2013).
- 10 For a useful discussion of this conceptual scheme and its implications in the Cold War era, see Pletsch (1981).
- 11 The Entertainment and Media industry ('E&M') grew at a cumulative rate of 16.6% between 2004 and 2008 (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2009, 16). The Gross Domestic Product in India, by comparison, has grown at a rate between 7% and 9% during those years. One media professional has remarked, '[Earlier] the market was driving media, by the late '80s media started driving the market' (G. Krishnan, cited in Kohli-Khandekar, 2003, 28).
- 12 H.K.L. Bhagat quoted in *The Indian Express*, 22 June 1983.
- 13 The prototype of the pro-development soap opera was derived from Peru, with a serial called *Simple*

- mente Maria* (Simply Mary), showing how a working-class girl, with hard work and discipline, could overcome her status as a poor single mother and achieve social mobility. It initially aired on Panamericana Televisión Channel 5 and achieved high ratings in the United States, Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, as well as other countries (see Singhal et al., 1994; see also Rajagopal, 2001, 79).
- 14 This period was marked more broadly by the beginning of liberalization together with the rise of increasingly powerful political competition to the ruling Congress party in the form of politicized religious and caste identities. Television became a key place for observing both the anxieties and the possibilities of this conjuncture. See in this context Mankekar (1999) and Rajagopal (2001).
 - 15 This is a reference to the title of the widely cited P.C. Joshi Committee Report on Doordarshan. See Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India (1985).
 - 16 See footnote 6 above.
 - 17 These are the results of a survey by Deloitte India of 2,000 Indians living in cities, and between the ages of 14 and 75, published in a report titled *The State of the Media Democracy*, released in 2010, cited in Kohli-Khandekar (2010b).
 - 18 Figures from *Indian media and entertainment outlook* (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2009). The figure given in Wikipedia for the number of television channels at the time of writing, Jan 2011, is 550.
 - 19 The Right to Information Act, passed in 2005, allows a targeted disclosure of information, and has thus opened a crack in the wall of state secrecy. Information can now be selectively sought and obtained, but only as part of a campaign where many bureaucrats understand the public to be beneficiaries rather than masters; in this sense colonial-era state culture is slow to change as yet.
 - 20 Noteworthy amongst recent studies is Munshi (2010).
 - 21 A characteristic note is struck in the Nitish Sen-gupta Committee Report of 1996: 'Thus, there is no point being ostrich-like by refusing to grant such permission and not facing the real issue which is that it may be a better option to grant permission and having satellite channels under some discipline rather than letting them operate as free uncontrolled agents. On the other hand, despite the proliferation of the satellite channels, and the government controlled electronic media losing their earlier monopoly, paradoxically, the need for autonomy for electronic media remains stronger. They have to compete successfully with new challengers who have entered into the arena and at the same time successfully reflect the true non-political facets of our nation and its rich and variegated cultural heritage' (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1996, Article 1.8).
 - 22 The case involved the attempt by the Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) to ensure that a six-nation cricket match it was hosting would be telecast by Doordarshan on mutually agreeable terms. Doordarshan's refusal to parlay led to CAB obtaining an agreement with Trans World International (TWI) to generate the broadcasts. TWI is the 'event arm' of New York City based IMG (formerly International Management Group), a global media and sports business. However the agreement required Doordarshan cooperation in hosting the signals, which was not forthcoming. When the case came to court, the lawyers for the I&B Ministry contended, among other things, that the CAB was a trade organization, whereas Doordarshan was empowered to serve the public interest. The Supreme Court eventually ruled that trade organizations too could serve the public interest, and that no monopoly over the airwaves could be allowed to the government (*The Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting vs. Cricket Association of Bengal & Anr.* dated Feb. 9, 1995. 1995 AIR 1236; SCC (2) 161).
 - 23 Started between 1988 and 1991, *Hindustan Times'* Eyewitness, *India Today's* Newstrack, the Observer Group's Observer News Channel (ONC), and Independent Television's India View were the most prominent. Their combined circulation was probably in the tens of thousands (Tanna, n.d.).
 - 24 Thus police may be unwilling to 'raid' a cable operator who is merely 'showing' a film without the necessary permission. However, if there is the prospect of media publicity, police initiative immediately becomes more likely. See the discussion with an erstwhile cable entrepreneur, Purushottam Samraj of Showtime Advertisement (Pvt) Ltd., who claims to have introduced cable to Delhi. See Media Researchers @ Sarai (2005). See below for further discussion.
 - 25 The Secretary to the I&B Ministry disclosed in 2010 that 100 channels were being monitored on a round-the-clock basis, with a plan to extend surveillance to more channels. (Interview with Asha Swarup, Secretary, I&B Ministry, quoted in Sruthijith, 2008).
 - 26 At the time of writing, about 30,000 cable operators are estimated to cater to 83 million cable homes between them. There are also several multi-system operators who receive satellite signals and convey them to cable operators, obtaining a carriage fee from TV channels of ten or twenty million rupees a year to carry their content. However, they form a relatively small section of the market as a whole. Local-level

- cable operators retain the bulk of subscription revenue, therefore, and it is estimated that only 10–15 per cent of it reaches the cable companies (Kohli-Khandekar, 2003).
- 27 The remark was in response to a specific question about print media (Sruthijith, 2008).
 - 28 The DMK, or Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Dravidian Progressive Party) led by C.N. Annadurai ('Anna') was itself a breakaway from the Dravida Kazhagam (Dravidian Party). The latter was founded by E.V. Ramasami Naicker, originally as the Justice Party, in 1916, and came to power in Madras in the first General Elections in 1920. The AIADMK (All India Anna DMK) was formed by a leading Tamil cine star, M.G. Ramachandra ('MGR'), whose erstwhile friend and colleague Jayalalitha now heads the party.
 - 29 The difference is one of degree; no field was free of state influence. The Films Division and the National Film Development Corporation provided a limited amount of funding for select films, enabling the so-called 'parallel cinema' to emerge; in addition, documentaries were funded by these organizations. Censorship provided another avenue of influence: with politics and overt romance being forbidden, filmmakers had to find creative means of circumventing these obstacles. See Viridi (2003).
 - 30 However, with the growth of the middle classes and development of overseas audiences, Bollywood itself became more upmarket, while regional film industries such as the Bhojpuri film industry addressed more of the urban working class audiences in Northern India. See e.g., Tripathy & Verma (n.d.). My thanks to Ratnakar Tripathy for sharing this paper with me.
 - 31 The show results from a collaboration between Network 18 in India and Viacom, the media corporation; its host is the actor Salman Khan (Timmons, 2011).
 - 32 Government figures indicate that \$2.1 bn in foreign investment went to 'information and broadcasting' between 2000 and 2010, while in the same period, the service sector attracted \$26.2 bn. These represented 1.7% and 21% respectively of total FDI for those years. The figures for the service sector include but do not isolate advertising, marketing and public relations, which are all dominated by foreign firms (Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion, Government of India, 2010).
 - 33 About one-third of the 119 million television households did not have cable television in 2009, according to a recent report (PriceWaterhouse Coopers, 2009). I have not been able to obtain precise figures for Doordarshan audiences for recent years; my account is drawn from interviews with industry personnel.

- 34 I am thinking here of the stagist process of growth envisaged, e.g., by sociologists such as T.H. Marshall (see Marshall, 1950).
- 35 Typically, even the most highly rated top Hindi news channels are only able to charge about a third of the rate for advertisements that English language news channels get, reproducing a difference that has long operated in print media. While the ratios may vary, the story is true for news television as well. This rate differential does not apply to entertainment TV (Kohli-Khandekar, 2010a).

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