Profesions of faith: Hindu nationalism, television and the avatars of capital.
Dasgupta, S.M.

Citation for published version (APA):
Cultural Fabulations, Native Constructions and Global Television

Look at the case of Japan. Their knowledge and science is world-famous. But our own achievements are much more advanced. We must learn to develop these while at the same time never losing our Indian culture (Bharatiya sanskriti).

It is because we want to be modern that our desire to be independent and creative is transposed on to our past.

The discourse and practice of cultural nationalism as articulated in relation to the ongoing globalization of mass media, and television in particular is the focus of this chapter. The particular philosophical background, such as Integral Humanism, which legitimates such a discourse has already been broached above. For present purposes, the re-articulation of this expansive philosophical discourse at the specific site of cultural production will be the point of entry into an examination of how “culture” is embedded in the discursive and political practices of the Hindu Right and the negotiations of global TV networks to the former. In the process of this examination the articulation (or connectedness) of culture to discourses of history, tradition, economic change and contemporary realpolitik will be traced and emphasized.

Describing society according to his Integral Humanist philosophy, Deendayal Upadhyaya argued that “Chiti” is the soul of the nation. He develops this notion by distinguishing it from human “personality” understood as the “cumulative effect of all actions, thoughts and impressions.” Chiti on the other hand is “unaffected by this history. Similarly national culture is continually modified and enlarged by all historic reasons and circumstances... but these are not added onto Chiti, Chiti is fundamental and is central to the nation from its very beginning. Chiti determines the direction in which the nation is to advance culturally. Whatever is in accordance with Chiti is included in culture.”

This complex passage places the vicissitudes of national culture on the terrain of historical change, yet ascribes the core of such a culture to an unchanging, essentialised soul which remains untouched. This seeming contradiction provides a conceptually versatile, indeed flexible ideology of legitimation for whole-heartedly engaging in the most contemporary practices of modernity while still being able to claim a core “Indianness”, which is for example, very much in evidence when one notices that the affluent middle-class in large métropoles see no contradiction between their highly westernized, technology-mediated lifestyle on the one hand, and their unabashed turn to the Hindu Right and espousal of national pride. They most certainly are not all readers and followers of Integral Humanism, yet the slow dissemination of such a worldview and map of daily life is most evidently visible in particular assertions of national pride by the Hindu Right government. Witness the following: “The BJP believes in a

1 DDII Metro, Editor’s choice: interview with Swami. Feb 6, 1999 (translated from Hindi).
3 Deendayal Upadhyaya, Integral Humanism, p. 41. Emphasis in original.
new social and economic order which is non-exploitative, cooperative and harmonious, and which provides full play to individual initiative and dignity. The multifarious urges and aspirations — spiritual, intellectual, economic and social — of the citizens have to be reconciled and harmonised. This approach follows from our national heritage and from the concepts of Gandhiji’s Ram Rajya and Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya’s Integral Humanism. The holistic, total and comprehensive philosophy must suffuse all of us in national effort toward all-round economic development.” The focus on individualism is seen as a response to the stultifying consequences of the traditional socialist state while at the same time linking this individualism to an organic notion of Bharatiya culture.

Upadhyaya argues that through the organic virility of the Virat Purusha as metaphor of the nation “whatever is against Chiti is discarded as perversion, undesirable and is to be avoided. It is on the foundation of this Chiti (soul) that a nation arises and becomes strong and virile.” This notion of the unchanging soul of the nation as the touchstone for determining the moral legitimacy of cultural change seeps into discourses one would consider as far off from culture as nuclear technology and their devastating deployment. Yet, in the aftermath of the May 1998 Pokhran nuclear explosion soon after the ascension of a BJP-led coalition to power, a masculinist rhetoric of national pride erupted throughout the country. High-technology did not necessarily conflict with moral values, or as Upadhyaya argued, keeping in touch with latest historical developments does not necessarily mean going against Chiti. Rather, Chiti remains the touchstone for deciding the moral legitimacy of such developments. Chandan Mitra, a distinguished historian, one-time Marxist and Oxford Ph.D argued “The bomb is the global currency of self-esteem... And what two hundred years of colonialism did to us was that it robbed us of our self-esteem. We have been told systematically that we are really not fit to rule ourselves... Even if you don’t have guns, [Mahatma Gandhi] said, you still have moral force. Now fifty years down the line we know that moral force isn’t enough to survive in this world... When you look at India today and ask how best you can instil a sense of national pride... the bomb seems to be as good an answer as any.”

The seemingly counter-factual collapsing of eternal moral principles, condensed into the Soul of the Nation, Chiti, onto the most sophisticated high-tech deployments of military power is one instance of a larger discourse that, rightly I think, sees no contradiction in deploying the most upto-date technological developments within a moral, cultural framework “rooted” in an ethos which derives its legitimacy from a particular “Hindu” reading of what national culture means. This very discourse is deployed to great effect in the particular instance of global media, cultural nationalism and Hindutva. Parenthetically, it is worth noting that this not a particularly Indian trend but is found in the resurgence of Confucianism in market-oriented China, and the recent turn to the Dalai Lama as a source of “spiritual guidance” for the captains of Indian industry.

“What is being modern? We Hindus were modern for centuries before those British and Muslims came.” While such an argument would be dismissed by those who still cling to an outdated notion of modernity and tradition, it makes two crucial points:

5 Deendayal Upadhyaya, Integral Humanism, p. 42.
7 See Dalai Lama preaches ethics to India’s corporate captains, TOI, 10 Jan, 1999, pp.12.
8 BJP Party Worker, interview, New Delhi, February 23, 1999 (Translated from Hindi).
firstly, it implicitly calls into question not just the received dichotomy of modernity and tradition, but further, the ascription of both to that of West and East respectively; secondly, it articulates a powerful contemporary discourse which sees the fruits of modernity as available for legitimation on grounds which are happily coincident with "Hindu culture". What matters is not so much where technology, for example, is developed (to assume its sole Western provenance would itself be historically inaccurate) but to what end it is used. In the context of the very recent demand for Indian computer professionals in the U.S, Germany and now the Netherlands, the seeming paradox of high-technology and static culture is explained away thus: "The computer scientists in the Industrialised Countries (sic) have discovered that Sanskrit is the most scientific language of the world and have unanimously decided to adopt it as the computer language. A scientist has described Panini as the perfect software. In the process of acquiring adequate knowledge of Sanskrit the scientist (sic) have discovered that the Hindu civilisation has achieved remarkable achievements in most branches of modern science and technology." Views such as these instantiate the ongoing negotiation between a national social imaginary couched in religious terms, and a transnational global dynamic that mediates dialectically between the universal and the particular: "if there is any universal or universally acceptable definition of modernity, it is this: that by teaching us to employ the methods of reason, universal modernity enables us to identify the forms of our own particular modernity." Partha Chatterjee's observation points to precisely this dimension where the resources of scientific thinking, reason and technology, whether in the sphere of media, resource management or economic development are overlaid by a particularist discourse (in this case the Indian nation subsumed within a religious vocabulary) that simultaneously disapovs a dependence on the west while employing its very terms of discourse.

At the risk of belabouring my point, it is worth emphasizing that it is the use of technology rather than its mere adoption on which hinges the legitimacy of Hindutva rhetoric. Thus cultural values can co-exist and indeed deepen according to this logic not inspite but because of the intensified use of technology. When the Swadeshi Jagran Manch argues that "[A]fter the air attack (satellite TV) comes the ground attack (Press)... Intellectuals and leaders in the country have not yet been able to find out ways and means for protecting the social and cultural values from the onslaughts of foreign TV networks when they are faced with the danger of imminent intrusion of the foreign print media", it is self-reliance and autonomy that are at stake while the alien cultural values are simply the necessary by-product of technology being in the wrong hands. As it goes on to argue "[A]n important contributory factor for India's breathtakingly long spell of prosperity [!] is that the development of human beings in every respect has been the primary aim of state policies. According to the Bharatiya approach to life, progress of man means simultaneous development of body, mind, intellect and soul of man." While I have already in the previous chapters rejected such a reading of Indian post-Independence economic history, what the above argument accomplishes is link change, development and economic/technological progress to a "Bharatiya" way of life whose organicist, primordial character we have already encountered in the philosophy of Integral Humanism.

11 Daya Krishna, Swadeshi View of Globalization, p. 24
12 Ibid, p. 47.
CHAPTER 5
DIGITAL HINDUISM AND THE SACRED MARKETPLACE:
MEDIA, TECHNOLOGY AND PROGRAMMING

Speaking at the Centre for Media Studies in 1997, Monroe Price, professor of communications at Yeshiva University, New York echoed the turn to the West: "Let Indians employ the sword for getting through to the world rather than the shield for protecting itself from the world."\(^{13}\) This discourse of virile, proactive engagement with the West, rather than the old socialist fear of capitulation to Western power can be evidenced in many engagements of the Indian state under BJP tutelage to global media and technology. In the specific case of satellite-technology, computer developments and the like then, the discourse of Hindutva sits quite comfortably alongside these prime harbingers of modernity. The particular contours of specific discourses of Hindu nationalism however, necessarily shift depending on the political, economic and social circumstances of their articulation. Thus, "We must ensure that foreign television does not use their culture against us, and there, the government will not stop one bit in protecting our Indian culture."\(^{14}\) The assumption of the state as guarantor of the moral and cultural well-being of the nation, itself understood in the organicist metaphor of Upadhyaya's *Virat Purusha* is articulated in response to a perceived foreign *cultural* threat rather than the encroachment of modernity itself into "Bharatiya culture." What such a statement implies is not a rejection of technological development but its deployment toward a moral goal consistent with the nation's soul (Chiti). Asked whether he rejected the use of satellite technology, the Director of the Information/Media Cell of the BJP headquarters in New Delhi poetically replied that "we cannot turn back the clock, but how the time changes should be determined by us."\(^{15}\)

A surface interpretation of such a nationalist defensive argument collapses when one looks at the government's own policies, as well as the shifts in global TV programming strategy. Most prominently, foreign ownership is not simplistically understood as the "cause" of the perversion of Chiti, but is in fact encouraged to participate in the expanding globalised media landscape. The reason for this at one level is the greater availability of transmission time with the proliferation of TV networks and enhanced capacity for satellite transmission through multiple transcoders. More importantly, the turn to foreign sources for funding is linked to a recognition on their part that unless programming is not "Indianised" the networks will fail, as in the early experience of STAR TV and MTV. This diversification of funding sources beyond India, as well as the fine-tuning of TV software for the local market will be approached later in the chapter. At this point though, placing the minister's remarks alongside the BJP government's own policies illustrate the complexity of the situation as well as the evolving relationship between culture understood as the "soul of the nation" and modernity.

In August 1998, the BJP government expressed its willingness to approve 100 per cent foreign-equity for companies producing software for the Indian market. "Analysts feel that the upswing in the software business in the country's television's(sic) industry is directly proportional to the enhanced reach of the channels as well as the Indianisation of foreign channels." Within the context of both the above developments, it is argued that "that liberalisation of foreign ownership makes sense, as this will enable Indian software companies to make programmes consistent with

\(^{14}\) BJP Information secretary, interview, New Delhi, February 24, 1999 (Part translation from Hindi).

\(^{15}\) Ibid.
the country's mores. In any case software from foreign companies continues to pour into the country.”

The increased participation of major foreign players in the production of TV software (programming) thus increases rather than threatens the survival of the “country’s mores.” Further, this strengthening of the country's national character is centrally located within the enhanced capabilities of broadcasting systems' technological muscle, and the taken-for-grantedness of economic liberalisation, the free-market and transnational cooperation.

It is in the current heated debate around Direct-To-Home (DTH) transfer that the lineaments of the flexible logic of Hindu nationalism, or what I term “Digital Hinduism” comes to the fore in the clearest fashion. DTH technology enables the reception of satellite transmission directly from the satellite broadcasting TV network, thus effectively cutting out the cable operator, whose dish at present is the hub through which satellite feed is cabled into subscribers' homes. DTH is also the technological platform for the provision of other services such as email, internet, visophony, telephone and cyber commerce. The implications of this technology in terms of cost, coverage and market appeal can be gauged from the following statistics: Cable TV Homes: 18 million, Cable operators: 45000, Average subscription Rs 100; By 2000, 68 million Cable TV homes; Major operators include SITI Cable (owned by Zee TV: 600,000 Homes, BiTV: 165000, Hindujas: 400,000; Ad Spend in 1995: US $ 1 Billion, TV Ad Spend: US $ 250 million, Cable Ad spend: US $ 37 Million; By 2020: estimated Ad Spend: US $ 20 Billion, US $ 5 Billion, and US $ 1 Billion respectively; Programming in 1995-500 hours per week, by 2020 6000 hours. The debate around DTH is thus linked to a huge increase in the number of hours of programming through a phenomenal expansion in channel availability, an exponential jump in advertising revenue and an appreciable expansion in terms of cable TV homes.

According to the vociferous attacks on foreign broadcasting from the Hindu Right, such a development would further distance government control of programming (itself limited to the Cable Network Regulation Act which merely requires cable operators to register with the Post office and makes no programming demands, although some are at present being demanded such as a minimum number of DD channels). However, it is in fact the BJP Information and Broadcasting Minister Pramod Mahajan who shows the most support for DTH. “The air is open to all, the sky is the limit” is his opening salvo in the heated debate around DTH. But this expansiveness toward technological change is argued forcefully thus: “DTH actually means viewing the channels with a 12 inches(sic) antenna instead of a 12 feet(sic) antenna. We cannot oppose technology. We must learn to use them(sic) to our best advantage. And whoever comes first is bound to have the early bird advantages.”

By couching the discussion around DTH in purely technological terms (six feet to six inch receivers), Mahajan neatly sidesteps the discourse of his own party in its vociferous attacks on foreign networks, the “air attacks” on the nation's Chiti. The realpolitik sentiment of “first come first serve” hides the fact that in terms of either financial resources or programming material, the state broadcaster DD would be unable to compete effectively with global networks such as NewsCorp. who have already taken up the cudgels against the Indian government for its restrictive law on maximum foreign equity.

16 Debashish Chaudhuri, “TV cos. to be allowed 100 per cent foreign equity”, Screen, August 21, 1998, pp.1.
17 Emerging satellite and cable technology and the implications for the Indian market, CMS monograph, Centre for Media Studies, monograph, 1998.
18 I am not in a hurry but I cannot wait for Eternity: interview with Pramod Mahajan” The Organiser, Feb 21, 1999, pp.11.
participation of 20 per cent in broadcasting. NewsCorp, CNN and other networks have been lobbying the U.S. State Department on this issue for some time. What is at stake are millions of dollars in advertising revenue, and the pond is big enough for major Indian satellite networks to dip into.

Mahajan’s “open skies” policy, besides its convenient framing in terms of keeping up with technology, is paralleled by the RSS public organ, The Organiser, framing a feature article discussion of the DTH issue in the sanskritised tones of Hindutva: “An no bhadrah kritavo yantu vishwatah (Let noble thoughts come to us from all sides) – Rg Veda.” The scriptural, Hindu legitimation of DTH with which the cover story opens replays a similar logic to that we have encountered above. It underlines that the invocation of cultural autonomy is imbricated deeply within a logic of globalised integration at the level of both technology and content as in the government approval of 100 per cent foreign equity participation in TV software production.

Further, the multiple uses of high-technology provide for other services such as telephone, internet and cyber commerce which are most crucial for a deepening of the effectiveness of business interests in the country. For all their attacks on “the evils of capitalism”, Swaraj through Swadeshi need not imply in actual practice the sequestering off of the country from either the technological benefits, cultural caché or economic benefits of an expanding global cultural economy. Further, however overblown the claims of openness to the skies for deepening Indian culture, DTH penetration is estimated to reach at the most 1 million homes compared to 20 million through present cable subscriptions, with DD still having the maximum non-cable reach in terms of coverage. Thus, the adoption of cable would be limited to only those households with the disposable income that could afford a 500 per cent hike in subscription fees from the prevailing monthly cable charges of Rs. 100. Nevertheless, such a shrinking of the market, in terms of higher DTH costs cannot be expected to put off advertisers. To recall the figures in relation to advertising, at present cable TV ad spend in 1995 was US $ 37 million, and is estimated to reach US $ 1 billion by 2020. Since DTH would provide a premier class of audience composition in terms of income, it would provide an even more effective platform for reaching specific market-niches, as the experience of the Premier League broadcasts for subscribers to satellite broadcasting of soccer in the U.K. has shown.

In the case of DTH then, both the exorbitant costs and the commercial use of this technology militate against its widespread availability in general terms and consequent capacity for deepening “Bharatiya culture” universally, assuming that the flood of channels via DTH would be interested in promoting such a thing in the first place. Cultural discourse here functions as a crucial legitimation for a set of wholly other interests, primarily commercial revenue generation, side-stepping the clout of cable operators and providing crucial hard/software capabilities for greater integration into the electronic super-highway of the global business networks. Further, given that at present cable operators are the only gateway to satellite broadcasting, global networks like ZEE TV have moved into the field, and Zee’s Siti Cable is the largest provider of cable feeds to subscribers in the country as a whole.

The native subject of nationalism is here constructed and strengthened in its moral, cultural superiority through the deployment of precisely those signifiers of modernity which have been traditionally understood to belong elsewhere. More importantly, in

19 Anup Kumar Mishra, “How far is Too far,” The Organiser, ibid., pp. 9.
the context of Hindutva and its philosophical underpinnings, the belief in development, holistic thinking and its execution through high-technology, the free-market and institutions such as the World Bank, World Trade Organisation and related organisations is seen as a recognition on the part of the west of what was already embodied in “Hindu philosophy” — “Bharatiya view of life wants man to limit his needs to the essentials and is against the cult of consumerism promoted by capitalism. The fast depleting natural resources and the awful spectre of pollution has compelled the west to seek a reduction in the consumption of natural resources and the human consumption requirements. The latest formula of the West for reconciling the three Es i.e. Economy, Employment and Ecology means that the West has veered round to the basic premises of Bharatiya view of life.”

Even those high-profile public figures who have captured the headlines in the West for their critique of the high-tech obsession with development find place within the expansive pantheon of Hindutva. The BJP Today, for example, regularly has columns, often without citing their sources, by international figures whose words when placed in the context of the publication give the impression that recent global developments dovetail smoothly with its agenda. In an excerpt from a speech, published in its December 16-31, 1998 issue, the magazine approvingly quotes Prince Charles’ well-known antipathy to genetically modified technology in agriculture. While the government increasingly barters the livelihoods of thousands of small farmers to Monsanto and other GM producers, it approvingly quotes from Charles’ speech, “Seeds of Disaster”. Ladybirds, greenflies and the pristine English landscape in his speech find their counterpart in the Indian agricultural scene.

In the context of economic liberalisation, the globalization of technology and television, the discourse of Hindu nationalism occupies a complex, yet deeply embedded place. Firstly, it calls into question the traditional bifurcation between Western Modernity and Indian Tradition, by claiming to have both already been modern before the West came to it (as the swami whose quote began this chapter opines) and being modern differently than the West (spiritually, organically rather than materialistically or conflictually). Secondly, the philosophical invocations of a specifically Indian form of humanism, with its inbuilt flexibility, an almost quasi-Hegelian co-existence of the universal (Chiti, soul of the Nation) and particular (Culture) provides for a historically-nuanced touchstone for legitimating continual engagements with western technology and the cultural after-effects of globalization, thus bypassing socialist critiques of engagement with the West as a form of capitulation to capitalist interests. Thirdly, the actual policies of the state with regard to either foreign participation or high-technology in the television sector do not evidence a clear-cut, uni-directional logic which follows the defensive invocations of cultural invasion from the skies; rather, it instantiates a continual mediation of particular economic, political and cultural imperatives in order to determine the material forms of engagement with its putative Other, the West. Within this negotiation, culture functions as a crucial discourse that can mark off a certain singularity, an “Indian way” inspired by Upadhyaya and Gandhi, while escaping the logic of withdrawal and state-planned sequestration of India from global changes that marked the earlier mixed economy model and the state control of television. As the interviewer on the Editor’s Choice programme on DD’s Bombay Metro Channel asked the swami vehemently, “isn’t it a shame that in our classrooms, we are taught about the British and colonialism but not about our great epics like the

21 Swadeshi, pp. 50.
Ramayana and Mahabharata which should make us really proud!" That a state channel, that purports to speak for the plurality of the nation underwrites such programming which collapses a scriptural sanskritised version of Hinduism onto the history of all Indians, and does it in its satellite-mediated high-tech platform speaks volumes about this complex, evolving landscape where Bharatiya Sanskriti, technology, modernity and revisionist history coincide.

**PROGRAMMING FOR THE "MASSES": FROM DOODHWALLAS TO VENGABOYS**

*Ab Main Vengaboy*
*Thoda sa Attitude, Thoda Sa Cool-Cool*
*Tu Geet Punjab Kyu Bore karta Hai*
*Thoda rap kar Harjeet singh*
*Oh Harjeetay let's stop this fighting yaar*
*Jo Bhi Gana Ga Jaisa bhi Ga*
*Masti Aana Hi Chaiye Bus*

(Now I am a Vengaboy
A little attitude, a little "cool"
Why bore us with your Punjabi songs
Oh Harjeet let's stop fighting, mate
Sing whichever song in whatever way
The main thing is to have fun)

The economic liberalisation of India, particularly in the period following the 1991 New Economic Policy of Finance Minister Manmohan Singh was coincident with the opening up of the television landscape to foreign and non-resident Indian broadcasting networks. As shown in the previous chapter this development was followed by the resurgence of a frontier discourse of East and West in culturalist terms, where a particular notion of Indian culture was articulated within the flexible semantic and ideological contours of what was termed Hindutva, Bharatiya culture (as opposed to Indian culture) and Chiti (Soul of the Nation). In this section, I look at broad structural shifts in programming on television, by both Indian, non-Resident Indian and non-Indian broadcasters within this globalised landscape.

It's past midnight as I ascend the glass elevator to the trendy nightspot "10 Downing Street" in Pune's exclusive Boat Club area. The pumping beat of techno music seeps through the heavy doors which are held open by a liveried doorman. The relatively empty dance-floor suddenly comes alive as the DJ spins Baba Sehgal's "Ab Main Vengaboy". This mega-star whose songs have an almost revolving air-time on MTV India, Channel [V] and other channels provide one example of a kind of hybrid articulation of where representing one's identity is located not in a primal scene of Indian tradition or a wholehearted taking-over of Western pop. The point rather is fun. One can play the Dhol (Indian drum) but Rap can also add some extra spice. Further, identity is understood here in the easy consumption and sporting of various identities. "Kabi I look like Jackie Chan, Kabi Like Amitabh Bachchan (Sometimes I look like Jackie Chan, Sometimes like Amitabh Bachchan) I am coming in Autorickshaw. My

---

22 Editor's Choice, op cit.

23 Baba Sehgal song in his album of the same name. Translation from part Hindi/Punjabi.
favourite comic Laurel and Hardy. Very Infectious, I have a Lexus.” The smooth shuffling between expensive cars and autorickshaws, rap and Punjabi songs provides an accurate articulation of the present complex notions of belonging, the habitus through which a certain form of urban middle-class youth culture roots itself in the idiolect of Indian everyday life as well as the aspirations and assumptions of certain western lifestyles under contemporary globalization.

This “lonely boy from Bhatinda”, sporting a crew-cut, fur coat, stars-and-stripes boxing pants and heavy Indian silver jewellery emblematizes a particular form of hybrid identity. It is an identity that circulates especially widely on satellite TV networks in a slew of different strategies, from Indian film music programming, fashion shows, talk shows, soap operas and the like. The mode of address is very street-cred Hindi slang, the kind of “lingo” western observers mistakenly characterised as post-modern in their reading of Salman Rushdie, yet sprinkled with generous doses of English, this amalgam commonly called “Hinglish” in marketese. Not the anglicized, colonial English which young people in private schools still learn, but the vernacularized version. The attention to the “local” which is both recognizable in its contours and recoded in its subcultural meanings marks a wider marketing strategy of TV networks after their earlier abortive attempts at making a dent in the Indian market.

Early entrants onto the Indian mediascape such as STAR TV which entered the market in 1995 soon found themselves losing out to Zee TV, owned by a group of non-resident Indians based in Hong Kong who tailored programming very much by tapping into the historical sedimentations of Indian genres and modes of address such as Hindi film-based music, “homey” talk shows and the like. As shown in the previous chapters, STAR soon took over Zee TV with a 49 per cent equity control, and tailored its programming with a specific Indian audience in mind. Later entrants such as CNN and BBC followed suit, with BBC World starting its own national feeds, BBC India, and CNN addressing primarily Indian audiences as well as focussing more on a pan-Asian following, while the most powerful channel, Zee TV started Zee India TV, after taking over El TV. Each of these channels however, did not simply imitate each other, but developed on their already existing image. Thus, the primarily high-culture image of the BBC and its appeal to a small section of the educated middle-class elite with programmes which interview famous Indian personalities, particularly in the diaspora such as Nobel laureate and economist Amartya Sen and feminist postcolonial academic/activist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. CNN tailors news programmes toward an Indian audience as well.

However, it is music channels such as Channel [V] and MTV India which provide the most successful example of the localisation of programming, yet, as I have already indicated earlier, what constitutes the local cannot be thought within our traditional understanding of DD-style Indian high-culture, or some kind of “folk culture” like “Apna Utsav” (Our Festival), a state-sponsored series of festivals featuring “our” Indian culture. A recent MTV commercial emblematizes this complex relationship in condensed fashion to great effect. Its handheld-camera aesthetic follows two middle-aged, kurta-clad men who stuff paan, stamped with the MTV logo into their mouth, the next shot, a close-up of the MTV logo in white against a white wall, which then is splattered with jets of paan juice, presumably from the men. As the juice drips down, the voice-over states “MTV India.” The resonance of such an address, sedimented in the mundane experience of chewing paan, the blood-red stained walls of buildings combined with the simultaneously appreciative and denigratory gesture of flashing
the MTV logo and covering it in spit condenses in a few seconds the attitude of most viewers to the channel. As a form of media consumption that sets its audience above those below them on the social scale ("the voice of Young India" as one commentary put it), it also marks the stain of Indianness that must colour any foreign entrant into the symbolic media landscape of the country. SONY TV's hit show Boogie Woogie (a kind of Indian version of the US show Star Search) similarly features aspiring dancers where performances from the Maharshtrian Lawani to Michael Jackson-style break dancing follow one another, to the cheers of an ecstatic audience. In such programmes the coincidence of different modes of popular cultural style illustrates the disutility of thinking culture in terms of high/low, official/ folk or western/eastern distinctions. This double-structured condensation of imitation and distanciation is visible in most big cities, in advertisements, architecture, fashion, consumption patterns and the like.

The suffusion of such imagery in material culture is sedimented with the non-isomorphic trajectories of globalization, and television provides one site for locating its precise workings. The case of MTV and Channel [V] is particularly instructive in this regard. When MTV entered India officially in 1995, it relied on the familiar strategy of recycling videos it already had rights to, but the viewership did not take off, primarily because the audiences were unfamiliar with the artists, and besides, the music industry had not taken off in a big way in promoting them. The situation has changed dramatically with greater availability of music from the west, primarily through tie-ups such as MTV-HMV. However, the appeal to Indian music, both traditional music from the Indian film industry spanning the decades from the 50s to the present, as well modern video-formatted hybrid styles remains enduring. Part of the appeal must be understood by the fact, that the history of Indian, particularly Hindi cinema, was from the start deeply influenced by certain forms of film-making developed elsewhere. Such a recognition would preclude the conclusion that the present hybrid scene is a combination of traditional, specifically "Indian" tradition with global, western modern forms of entertainment. The spectacular sci-fi renditions of Méliès' "Man on the Moon", the grand scale of D.W. Griffith's "Birth of a Nation" set the stage for the representation of themes, particularly religious mythologicals such as "Raja Harishchandra." Crucially, this history of early Indian cinema was itself articulated to a particular form of cultural nationalism, in the context of British colonialism, for whose authorities the adoption of the Greek prosceneum stage, and the lavish costumes were seen primarily as borrowed spectacle rather than the recoding of certain forms of Western aesthetics in the service of nationalist sentiments through a recourse to the past. The present televisual hybrid articulations of Indian identity partake in similar fashion of a particular re-reading of the past, such as Hindi film music, but stage them in a thoroughly modern, MTV-style format.

For example, Channel [V]'s music show, Cabaret, features clips of famous cabaret songs from films of the days gone-by. But seeing German-born Helen, a symbol of spectacular stardom in her time in the 1970s cavorting in daringly-cut dresses as she seduces a reluctant hero acquires a strange and familiar tone in the present. What is striking is the ways in which Raspberry Dolly, the show's host, clad in off-shoulder crimson gown and boa seems like a technicolour version of the black-and-white film strip of Helen. Both feature a certain transcendence of the limiting boundaries of past and present, tradition and modernity. The show's popularity can be gauged by the continual popularity of music from that period, often re-done with techno, house and hip-hop overtones. Audiences for such shows, while primarily aimed at youth in big cities
is also readable by the older generation, who are familiar with such films and yet keep in touch with what the "modern" generation is upto. While it might be too instrumental to conclude that such shows fulfill the particular "needs" of the present generation's anxieties within a period of flux (indeed, one could argue that this flux is precisely what the present generation enthusiastically embraces), marketing research and viewer ratings make evident that such multi-accented programming is the only way to dent the audience market. In commercial terms, further, since most networks have vast libraries of old Indian films, it is a cheap way to avoid expensive new programming while dressing up the oldies in the street-cred, urban style of middle-class youth.

The temptation to see such shows as contradictions collapse at both a textual and affective, receptual level. Conceptually, tradition and modernity as temporal and spatial markers of difference fail to hold to the extent that the formulation of Indian film and TV production from its very inception crossed geographical borders and aesthetic styles. A past that never was cannot now be conjured up, even by the most intrepid forms of postmodern cultural criticism if they must provide any analytic value in comprehending the contemporary scene of mass-mediated cultural production. Given the already contaminated character of "Indian tradition" the present analyses of "hybridity" cannot point simply to the present globalised mediascape as the cause and context of TV's syncretic style. On the other hand, obviously things are not just a repetition, but a repetition with a difference. The forms of borrowing and their frequency in terms of address, aesthetics and content are quite clearly markers of a particular period of globalization that can be traced roughly to the early 1990s. Further, the effects of such cultural globalization in terms of the reactive discourse of cultural nationalism are much more prominent than in the past when even the most syncretic styles, whether Satyajit Ray's indebtedness to Italian neo-Realism or Ritwik Ghatak's Brechtian experiments in theatre and film were hardly amenable for a Hindu nationalist project. Televisually, as elaborated on earlier, the state-planned approach was marked by a particular highly ambivalent stance toward secularism while still commissioning Hindu epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata (with unforeseen and devastating consequences). However, the absence of a concentration on foreign programming did not provide an alibi for a Hindu cultural nationalist response, which itself could only be articulated within a political and social culture that developed after the disillusionment with the Indira Gandhi era and outside the strict field of television.

After MTV's costly failure at breaking into the Indian market, when it reappeared outside the STAR TV network, it had done detailed research, particularly with regard to the particular high-spending, youth market in urban areas. Tailoring its programming with a greater Indian accent, and downsizing its "firang" component, MTV launched a spectacular restart on the Indian scene. The reorientation of MTV towards its Indian audience must also be situated in relation to its far-more successful competitor Channel [V]. A subsidiary of Murdoch's STAR TV, the Hong Kong-based channel received a major boost when STAR entered into a joint venture with Britain's Thorn EMI, Germany's Bertelsmann Group, Time Warner of the U.S and Japan's Sony Entertainment in 1995. These major multinational corporations have together created a music channel that has captured the local Indian market by tailoring its programming to the urban cosmopolitan consumer, combining substantial local programming with traditional international music favourites. Channel [V]'s general manager remarks "Through our strong partnership and diverse resources, we will now be even better
equipped to respond to the tastes of our culturally diverse audiences. Ultimately, the greatest beneficiaries of this new partnership are music fans themselves."24 Almost 50 per cent of its programming is in Hindi.

What is crucial to recognize is not just that programmes were Indianising but they were also diversifying their content, in terms of age-group, language, form of programming and style of address. In August 1998, MTV's on-air music mix stood at 70-30 in favour of Indian music. However, this was distributed in a fairly non-segmented manner, with Hindi music videos interspersed with foreign artists. Further, research showed that audiences were not language-specific but more oriented to the form of the music itself. Thus music programming used a scattered set of genres from film-music, music videos of Indian artists, foreign artists and the like.

Further, they changed the appeal of their VJs, orienting more toward a form of hybrid personality that emphasized the street-cred image of these hosts who swapped languages frequently within a show. This approach was further diversified by encouraging greater audience participation, not simply through letter-writing and emails, but by taking shows on the road such as the Pepsi-MTV Dance Connection which toured 15 cities and small towns focussing on the "hip-set." The MTV and Brand Equity Youth Marketing Forum in 1998 in Bombay provided the platform for MTV to "humanise" itself as a channel with a social purpose while delivering the trendy set in person to advertisers and marketeers. In February 1999, the channel announced for the second year running it would host the forum. As Arun Arora, CEO, The Economic Times put it, "This is an opportunity for the industry to share with each other our collective understanding of the largest consumer segment in the world."25 The popularity of the channel stems precisely from this convergence of its middle-class urban youth audience and its extensive capacity, through programming and organising campaigns within civil society to deliver them to consumer good corporations. Sunil Lulla, MTV General Manager paraphrases its strategy as that of "Indianise, Humanise and Humourise."26 It has obviously proved a highly successful strategy since in the space of one year it expanded its reach from 2 to 35 million households, and its TRPs have shot way past that of its prime rival Channel[V]. Channel [V], the music video subsidiary of Zee TV is proving a formidable competitor, which had already set the tone for programming by its focus on Indian film music and a vernacular mode of address.

The failure of STAR TV in establishing a pan-Asian identity for example, resulted in a strategic overhaul of its programming priorities with much greater focus on regional specificity. The STAR Plus channel was converted into a "Hinglish" channel (where the language medium would be a hybrid of Hindi and English). The network's general manager in India, Andrew Carnegie explains: "If we can make the channel relevant to Indians, Star Plus can occupy a slot similar to the one enjoyed by Times of India in Bombay."27 While "Hinglish" as the "language of Indians" is a questionable assertion, what such reorientation of programming enables is the efficient expansion of local(urban) viewership for advertisers, and an attention to "cultural specificity" that refutes arguments of cultural homogenization by foreign media, or the destruction of "Indian culture." Besides the turn to vernacularisation, offering enormous amounts of money or commodities in prize form as a strategy for guaranteeing viewership is exemplified best by the recent spectacular success of STAR Plus' Kaun Banega

23 "Brand Equity, MTV will host youth marketing meet", TOI, February 26, 1999, p.1.
26 "MTV ENJOY!", Screen, August 21,1998, p. 20
Cultural Fabulations, Native Constructions and Global Television

Crorepati? (Who Will Become a Millionaire?) Launched at prime time on July 3, 2000, following a blitzkrieg of publicity in newspapers, hoardings and television, the show attracted a huge audience of 40 per cent of the country's 33.6 million cable and satellite households, easily capturing the number one spot in the ratings game. Modelled on the British show Who Wants to be a Millionaire?, it is hosted by legendary film star Amitabh Bachchan and offers a whopping 10 million Indian rupees. The star appeal of the show and the massive amounts of money offered to the audience enable a relatively economical way for pulling in record viewing figures and a consequent astronomical hike in advertising charges for the sponsors. The fact that the show was a gamble by the channel in its struggle to outdo rivals Zee TV and SONY TV is glossed over by Sameer Nair, head of programming for Star's Indian subsidiary, News Television India Ltd, who insisted: "It's not a greed-based game, it is a game of skill. The whole family can watch without anyone getting embarrassed by sex, violence or wrong value systems. The competitors have to work hard because of the pressure." 

Doordarshan: The State, Media and the Market

The state channel DD and its regional and local subsidiaries had to necessarily shift their programming strategies keeping the competition in mind. While I have gone into this shift in some detail, and approached its history in a preceding chapter, I shall focus briefly on the current popularity of mythologicals and trace their complex articulation to questions of "culture" and the market. Om Nama Shivay, Jai Hanuman and Shri Krishna are highly popular programmes, the first of these being shown on DD1 and consistently topping the ratings list. The decision of the then Director-General of DD, S. S. Gill to cut down on this genre came in for sharp criticism. Ramanand Sagar attacked "pseudo-intellectuals" and "so-called rationalists" after DD decided to restrict mythologicals, while I.K. Gujral, the Prime Minister condemned mythologicals for promoting superstition. In the midst of this heated debate, the DD D-G, defended his position thus: "I am not against mythologicals. Our mythological literature is so vast that one can continue with a serial for 600 years. Most of these producers have developed a tendency to stretch out a storyline endlessly." His remarks are particularly telling, since the enormous time-span over which these epic stories are televised have a great deal to do with commercial considerations. Given the complexity of the plot lines, the appeal producers have made to "Indian traditional modes of presentation" and the often collapsing of different stories where one epic is part of another, enables a dragging out of the time of transmission over months and years, and yields enormous revenues, without putting pressure on the software provider to think up new material and hire more script writers. Further, given their popularity, there is no shortage of advertisers for the programme.

With regard to advertising, some interesting observations come to light when one considers the mythological as at least partly, a religious text, and the market considerations of private television. In order to woo viewers and ensure faithful audience niches for programmes like soap operas and TV serials, many producers have resorted to announcing contests where viewers are invited to answer questions, and when right, are able to win prices including kilos of gold, expensive vacations and automo-

---


29 "Sagar defends mythologicals", Screen, October 10, 1997, p. 38

biles. While this example illustrates the growing imbrication of consumer marketing with TV programming, in the case of mythologicals the situations is slightly more complex. When Dheeraj Kumar, producer of the top mythological Om Namah Shivay got in on the act, irate devotees reacted angrily to the commercialisation of the program. Kumar hastily withdrew the contest and replaced it with a request to viewers to write a 10 line “moral” for each episode telecast, and the rewards were Prasadam, Shiv Jyotirlingas, Angavastaram, Rudraksha and a “mega prize” of a Jyotirlinga yatra with “gold moments of Lord Shiva.”

The increasingly circuitous yet necessarily imbricated relationship between the secular religion of liberalisation (consumption) and the profane divinity of TV ratings (watching mythologicals) is eloquently evident here. While the producer can neatly sidestep accusations of crass commercialism of divine texts, he can tap into this self-same religiosity for ensuring greater audience viewership and hiking up the ratings. This is not your direct form of advertising, which for example, was deployed by B. R. Chopra when he took his TV mythological, Mahabharata, to small villages, and a major toothpaste manufacturer hired a shed for viewing and marketing its products. To dwell a bit longer on the embeddedness of mythologicals in the present consumerist globalised mediascape, some criticism of religious mythologicals has been a part of this genre for some time, as Gill’s response above demonstrates. However, in a review article that framed television as the new religion of the masses, one commentator came up with some surprising criticisms. “What are we feeding our kids on?” he asks. “Lord Shiva has an unmistakable Small Pox Vaccination mark on his arm. The Omnipotent also needs the protection from Small Pox. Vishnu has tobacco-stained teeth. At least he doesn’t smoke. Hanuman speaks with a distinctly Punjabi accent.”

Criticising the shoddiness of portrayals of divine figures on TV, he demands, “Television is the new fireside that the family gathers around, and the stories need to be retold in a visual idiom and expression that connects to the generation growing up on bytes.” In a manner that is reminiscent of earlier invocations of the happy marriage between high-technology and mass-mediated divine inspiration, what is being demanded is the use of better computer technology that can show the natural divineness of mythological characters from Indian epics. This transferential dynamic between technology and Indian culture, East and West is figured tellingly thus: “Our mythology is precious. It is perhaps the richest in the world. Just imagine what a Spielberg or Lucas could have done with this mythology if it belonged to them?”

A glance at the imbrication of mythologicals in the network of economic and technological developments of television illustrates the complex linking of questions of the sacred with the profane. This division is nicely collapsed in the age of global television thus: “Religion was entertainment of the past. The rituals, the colour, the spectacle, the music, the dance, the community participation, the shared experience of the myth, the magic and the beliefs was as much entertainment as it was an expression of faith. Today, entertainment is taking that role. And hence it seems that entertainment is going to be the religion of the future. And why not...both entertainment and enlightenment are a vacation for the mind.”

Some of the debates around national culture that do not come up with as much vehemence with regard to mythologicals however, themselves raise a further set of
questions regarding the conceptualisation of culture across the high/low distinction. S.S. Gill's response to the present situation where sex and violence has degraded Indian popular culture through television, is a predictable one. Asked what alternative forms of programming he had in mind, he replies "We need famous plays, good literature [that] depict the society and customs and traditions of various regions of India. I don't want clones of Santa Barbara, Baywatch and Dynasty on DD." This familiar Gandhian rhetoric of "unity in diversity" with its folklorish invocations, and rejection of outright mimicry of western programmes are ineffective on many counts. The reliance on advertising revenue make the production of "high culture" programming economically unviable, while as has been already seen, most private programming has learnt the hard way and adapted efficiently towards producing software for the local market that speaks a certain hybrid form of language and content which is tailored to specific niche-audiences.

One notable exception in terms of its rejection of a highly street-cred modern, hip look at culture is the DD hit series, Surabhi. When it began broadcasting in 1991, it tapped into the exploding viewing options of satellite TV by focusing on the bizarre and rare aspects of folk culture, while maintaining a studied distance from the popular street culture of Hinglish, Reebok shoes and khadi kurtas. In a review of the show's popularity titled "Culture Sells", the advertising magazine A&M, foregrounds the spectacular success of Surabhi through its relationship to sponsors. In its later avatar as Tana Bana, Procter and Gamble came aboard as sponsor, and the current sponsor, Amul India, fits in nicely with the image of the show as "a clean, wholesome programme which is just what Amul stands for," as Shashi Sinha, account manager for Amul argues. The program is now known as Amul Surabhi, and as Siddhartha Kak, producer and charismatic host who started as a DD news reader opines "At the end of the day, an Indian needs to identify with what is Indian, to feel assured that Indian values still exist." This reading of Indian values in high culture terms seems contradictory to what I have argued above about the hybrid nature of popular TV programming, but on closer inspection illustrates a point made earlier – that in addition to securing huge ratings, identifying niche audience markets is the name of the game. As the article continues, "But Kak wants to leverage the show's equity and establish contact with the top-end consumer interested in Indian culture, whether in India or abroad." What the example illustrates is the possibility of high culture programming also surviving within the present market-oriented mediascape given that greater penetration into high-income households remains the baseline, rather than cultural elevation, DD-style. Further, advertisers are not hard to come by, given such fine-tuning of programming towards target audiences with disposable incomes.

With regard to feature films Gill stresses the need for "something original, something socially relevant. Most of the films...do not serve any social purpose. There is too much violence and vulgarity...substitute them with quality films. I want to improve the viewer's tastes...I know quality tele-films may not generate as much revenue as an Amitabh Bachchan-starrer does, but since Doordarshan is a public service organisation, serving the public is more important for it than generating income. You have to pay a price for all good things in life." This mode of thinking, reminiscent of the Reithian approach to society and followed by DD before satellite networks showed up,

36 "DD has deprived", op cit., p. 37.
38 Ibid.
39 "DD has deprived", op cit., p. 38.
fails to acknowledge the realpolitik of commercial broadcasting.

Writing about the discourse of “the people” in different social fields, Bourdieu remarks that “the stances adopted towards the 'people' or the 'popular' depend in their form and content on specific interests linked first and foremost to belonging to a cultural field of production and, secondly, to the position occupied within the field.”

The above analysis illustrates how a theory of articulation, placed in a relationship between cultural production, economic liberalisation and media expansion deploys a range of sometimes contradictory discourses of the “people” as the ground for thinking and producing “Indian culture.” His understanding of the “cultural field” as possessing the most relative autonomy in relation to other fields, in its invocation of “the people” requires some historical fine-tuning given the situation under analysis, since liberalisation has paradoxically made “the people” much more the addressees of financially-solvent, market-driven media corporations.

As one commentator put it, “The success and glory of our culture is mainly because of its dynamic equilibrium.” This seemingly oxymoronic “dynamic equilibrium” mirrors Upadhaya’s Soul/Culture distinction, and in the present scenario links it closely to the profitability of programming as crucial for understanding who “the people” are and what “their culture” is, from Kak’s high culture to the hip Bhangra-pop videos on Channel V. As he goes on, “Bottomlines, not philanthropy dictate the policy of today's TV industry” and its this bottomline, located at the level of advertising that I will turn to now.

ADVERTISING: FROM “CULTURAL ARROGANCE” TO “CULTURAL RESPECT”

Just in case Hero, Coca Cola, Levers, Titan, Bajaj, Maruti, P&G (Procter and Gamble) and Colgate Palmolive were wondering.

Smart marketing people everywhere know that there's one sure way of reaching their target audience.

It's on Home TV, the family entertainment channel that speaks to an affluent Hindi speaking audience in 7 million homes all over the country.*

Culture is only a vehicle. It can never substitute an idea.**

Yehi hai right Choice, Baby!
(This is the right choice, Baby!)*

The Janus-faced modality of Bharatiya Culture as elaborated by Upadhyaya and evidenced in the approach to media technology and foreign programming, with its openness to the skies and simultaneous defensive assertion of autonomy is one of the hallmarks of much advertising, in particular on satellite TV. In a thought-provoking piece on the sea-change in the media landscape in India, and particularly on modes of adver-

---

40 Pierre Bourdieu, “The uses of 'the people”’, Essays Toward a Reflexive Sociology, p. 150.
41 Sandip Belagaje, “Prasar Bharati: Boon or Bane?”, Screen, April 10, 1998, p. 42
42 Ibid. pp. 42.
45 Pepsi TV ad, chart topper for A&M-IMRB AdScan rating poll.
Swapan Seth, executive director, Equus describes the bygone era of planned socialism as one where India was a “a nation devoid of self-confidence, a nation about to build and create its own fortunes.” Such a discourse of the fall of the nation and its resurgence in the era of liberalisation bears a striking resemblance to the contours of the familiar rhetoric of the Hindu nation brought to its knees under colonialism and “western socialism” after Independence. In the field of media and advertising however, it is the increasing possibilities of consumption, and the wider range of choices that strikes Seth most. “So the consumer had little independence in terms of choosing brands”, he argues, yet around the 70s something changes. “We were aghast when Coca-Cola was banned, Ram-like, from our land.”

The metaphorical transference of consumer availability to Ram’s banishment into exile is both provocative and instantiates the power of metaphor as a passage, a transfer and consequently a generative matrix for linking seemingly disparate themes and meanings. Clearly within such an understanding, neither the product Coca-Cola nor the mythic character, Ram, retain their originary character. Functioning rather like fetishes, Coca-Cola becomes a symbol of choice, that is counter-factually linked to Indian Independence while the actual circumstances of its banning in the 1970s were precisely those of preserving our Independence! As for Ram, the skyrocketing TRPs for mythologicals provide the ideal platform for a massive commercialisation of religion, both as a medium for delivering consumers to advertisers but also in the marketing of objects as rewards for religious devotion and faithful viewing, as the example above about Om Nama Shivay made clear. A visual representation of this collapsing of the discourses of “local flavour”, Independence through choice and consumption is instantiated in a popular TV ad for Candico on Channel [V]. The camera shakily follows at close range the swivelling head of an enormous Indian water buffalo as it masticates in the confines of a dark shed, to the strumming of a Ry Cooder-esque blues guitar. Suddenly, as the animal’s face stares straight into your eyes, a huge pink balloon blows out of its mouth and pops explosively. The punchline on the screen with a voice-over reads “Your Right to Chew!”

If one were tempted to read Seth’s comments as an apology for a wholehearted turning to Western consumerism, besides his metaphor of Ram’s banishment, his reading of the failures of advertising reproduce the familiar theme we have encountered above: the resilience of the nation’s Chiti, or Soul in “choosing” the path most consistent culturally with its ethos. “By the 90s, the winds of change had swept across the consumer continuum...But the Indian did not get hypnotised by these events. Having finally got independence as far as choice was concerned, the consumer made pragmatic decisions and evaluated both Indian and global brands with an objectivity that no one expected. So, the customer did not stand weak-kneed in front of Pepsi. She evaluated and uncorked a Thums Up.” Rather than stand at the altar of the all-conquering Western God, our, now interestingly-gendered consumer asserts her independence through choosing an Indian product. This is a crucial point to make. The terms of the discourse of both Independence and Openness are not couched in terms of Western materialism and Eastern Spiritualism. Rather, like Ram, our Independence through consumption occupies a space within the discourse of consumerism. Further, it reproduces a similar logic where technology like DTH is wholeheartedly embraced along Seth’s argument for “pragmatic decisions.”

47 Ibid. p. 81.
too generalised in its claims, witness the following. In “Market freedom: Tryst with Destiny Again”, a special _A&M_ feature in its August 15, 1997 annual review, the lead writers open the article thus: “Ironic. That’s just the word. India awoke to ‘light and freedom’ having struck the world dumb with what was perhaps the planet’s biggest ever victory of persuasion over might. Then she chose to let people choose their leaders, even religions. And then somehow ended up with an economic system so warped that the allocation of the nation’s resources are determined by the mighty, not people’s persuasions on what they want to consume.”

Ironically, while globalization has triggered increasingly frenzied and complex intellectual responses from intellectuals, particularly social theorists and media studies experts, they have tended to focus on the most spectacular and one could argue, epiphenomenal after-effects of globalization. Just as the term does not indicate a substantive conceptual understanding, but a vague gesture towards planetary movement, media theorists have equally tended to look at the proliferation of images without tracing not so much a “deeper” deterministic analysis but the more visually attractive and intellectually fashionable descriptions of Pico Iyer’s video nights in Kathmandu, Homi Bhabha’s celebratory exilic pontifications and Lyotard’s postmodern consumer. What is at issue then is not the lack of validity of the above representations, but their articulation to developments that are linked yet distinctive, such as economic expansion of the free-market, movements of people for a variety of reasons, tremendous developments in technology and the like.

In the specific case of India one can easily quantify and describe the dizzying array of images, their mish-mash of styles, their hybridized languages, and stop there. The conditions of possibility for the proliferation of broadcasting channels, forms and content of programming however, are not surprisingly, advertisers. Given the coincidence of economic liberalization and global media expansion into India, the role of advertising cannot be overstated. Thus, the proliferation of channels would not be possible unless advertisers were willing to foot the bill, and advertisers could hardly profit unless there were indeed a multitude of products that needed marketing. This proliferation of products following the opening up of the country’s borders was crucial for both advertising and consequently the expansion in TV programming and outlets. It might be said that looking at advertisers is only one part of the picture and that is indeed true. Marketing of products is based on a certain complex articulation with a variety of structures of feeling. The latter however cannot either be dis-articulated and sealed off in the realm of “ideas” or “values”. This would repeat the error of theorists of media audiences and their resistant viewers without articulating such concerns to the global dynamic of the evolving mediascape in the country. Addressing this relationship would involve getting into a chicken-and-egg guessing game, which I have already attended to in the introduction. The concept of articulation would allow one to locate the specificity of the role of advertising rather than subsuming analysis of the current cultural landscape to it. These prefatory remarks are necessary in order to both specify the importance of advertising as one of the conditions of possibility for global television, rather than to explain away the entire field of analysis to market indoctrination.

The clearest manifestation of the clout of advertisers can be gauged from the amounts spent in supporting programmes. As stated in the previous chapter, this is not limited to private, or global networks, but included state television itself, which

---

48 Ibid. p. 86.
in some ways is the most significant player in the field in terms of coverage. Yet, as will be shown below, it is not so much coverage but specific niche-markets that are crucial for advertisers. Thus, rather than assuming greater viewers means greater importance, one needs to locate the kind of audience appeal within the particular attractions they hold for advertisers. This appeal, as will be seen later is primarily defined in terms of disposable income. As Raveena Tandon Kohli, Programming president of SONY TV (the most spectacular entrant in the field and second only to chart-topper Zee TV) explained “our focus is on the urban middle-class and we have an extensive team of programmers whose work is based on the market research bureaus’ analyses of target income groups.”

To give one example of the prime concerns that new channel providers have when entering the Indian market: When Sony Pictures Entertainment Company launched AXN (Action TV) Asia, as a 24-hour channel devoted only to action and adventure, an analysis of the development clarified “AXN's strength lies in its being a platform for advertisers to target their messages to a niche-group-action enthusiasts in the 25 to 45 age group. The channel's secondary audience is all men in the 18-45 age group. While programming on the channel is primarily from abroad, the advertising focusses specifically on the Indian market.”

In terms of mode of address, advertisers have learnt the hard way that the same ad campaigns cannot be exported all over the globe. At first, most multinationals stumbled by reproducing ads from other countries in India. This brand of “cultural arrogance” earned MNCs the term “Misreading National Culture” by advertising guru, Alque Padamsee. Soon however, their strategies reflected the growing awareness that unless campaigns were finetuned to the complex, segmented audience market they would fail. Further, the advances in broadcasting technology which had enabled TV networks to direct specific programming to specific audiences were crucial for such fine-tuning toward market niches. As Padamsee argues “Coke is under the impression that they invented the world, and Coca colonization is very easy... All you have to do is to roll out the Coke machine and everyone buys it. Not true.” Only after U.S. ad agency Wieden and Kennedy told Coca Cola India that its “cricket stupid!”, that the agency learnt it had to vernacularise its product marketing. Wills, ITC Ltd's leading cigarette brand made waves in its highly successful TV campaign titled “Just right for India, just right for Wills” featuring the agony and aggression of a fast-paced cricket match, while the Indian team becomes the Wills Indian cricket team. The case of India is particularly instructive since most of the major advertising agencies are subsidiaries of international corporations such as Ogilvy and Mather (O&M, India), Grey Communications (Trikaya Grey), Thomson Advertising (Hindustan Thomson Advertising), etc. The organisational and ownership patterns are a clear institutional example of the recognition on the part of global organisations for the need to diversify in terms of personnel and content.

When Fiat Uno entered India it had to tune its advertising keeping in mind particular inventories of images that would resonate with the local market. As executive creative director, Chaitra Leo Burnett which handled the account explains “We could have taken an obvious approach like, say, trying to fit several Sumo wrestlers into the car [to emphasize its sturdiness] but consumers cannot relate to this idea.” Pintoo Guha, the producer explains “it wanted to capture the middle-class in the real sense—

49 Interview, January 24, 1999, Bombay.
CHAPTER 5

The ad features a group of school children struggling to watch a cricket match through a crowd when a member of the audience places one of them on the car roof for a better view. The amount of research and money spent on localizing global media campaigns is evidence that simple clichés of Indian life are not mechanically reproduced but require months of research, scripting, auditions and the like.

Advertising strategies are also fine-tuned for particular audiences, and it should come as no surprise that if one scans the range of modes of address and subject matter, it becomes very hard indeed to fix on a particular image of “Indian culture.” The Gilbey Solitaire whisky ad (Trikaya Grey) is one example, where the spirit of change, as it were, is couched in inter-generational terms, mediated through the ubiquity of technology. Cruising the web for a date on his son’s computer, the father of a young man (called “Dude”) is chatting with “Devil Woman”. Scanning the bookshelves in his son’s room, he takes on his son’s persona, claiming to read Sylvia Plath and Stephen King, working hard and “party[ing] harder”, and when asked what he drinks, he scribbles in “Solitaire” after hastily deleting “Royal Challenge” which he had started typing in. The markers of a particular modern lifestyle, aeons away from the no-alcohol, pen-and-paper, Amar Chitra Katha and Hardy Boys culture of pre-liberalisation India flash on the TV screen, during STAR TV’s prime time, from computer screens, “modern” novels, western “lingo” (Dude and Devil Woman). The range of advertising strategies on TV take on such purely “modern” themes, yet they also tap on earlier, almost clichéd images of Indian life combining them to create hybridised forms of address. In the context of such an ad, it is interesting to note one ad agency director commenting “By and large, there seems to be no marked trend towards Indian-ness in recent advertising.” Such a statement is both true yet not quite. The trends in advertising could not be understood as either purely western or Indian, but precisely for this reason rather than despite it, one could understand the localisation on the local national market as the product of a transnational imaginary that is not easily identifiable with particular fixed images. In other words, the very fluidity of the forms of advertising are related to the fluid, and complex character of how everyday life and future aspirations intersect for those specific audiences that such ad campaigns target. Such fluidity however does not necessarily manifest itself everywhere.

Multinationals like Coke, Pepsi and Nescafé for example have been acutely sensitive to the specificities of their target markets, although how they envision this “specificity” has more to do with the invention of tradition than any sustained attempt at conceptualising the differentiation of audiences. Thus, “if Coke stands for a backyard with falling autumn leaves or mother’s homebaked apple pie...then the Indian ad would interpret it thus – small boys playing in the by-lanes of India, with ghazals playing in the background. This is the theme of the Coke ad being viewed on Indian TV.” Similarly, McCann Erickson India’s CEO argues “After years of forwardness, the American is discovering religion and wants to rediscover Krishnamoorthy; while the Indian teenager may feel that he has 2000 years of religion behind him and that’s enough. He may want burgers but he loves batata vada, he wears jeans but dons the Kurta top too.” While such pronouncements about “Indian teenagers”, ghazals and “2000 years of religion” are as risible in their envisioning of “Indian Culture” as “apple

53 Ibid.
55 Lintas India’s creative director quoted in “Who is to blame for lack of ad creativity? TOI , March 17, 1996, p.13.
56 Ibid.
pie” and “autumn leaves” are for “American Culture”, they exemplify the kind of fine-tuning foreign advertisers engage in, in designing specific campaigns.

As we have seen, strategies for marketing products on TV run the range from clichéd invocations of “Indian Tradition” married to aspirations of the good life understood in western terms, to quite modern, risqué campaigns such as Solitaire whisky. I have argued that in the case of the latter, the seeming modernity of these campaigns must also be seen as “Indian”, as part of a particular ethos that obtains within particular class fractions. The sophisticated Raymond Man, advertising Raymond suit fabrics for example, came in for criticism for creating Indian versions of Western stereotypes, yet in terms of the up-market consumer it was aimed at, it worked very well: “There seems to be an audience for it and appreciation for the brand among well-off women seems to be rising...it’s a matter of strategy, and targeting the super-mobile consumer (who is closer to being the global citizen than anyone else) might well bear ripe fruit when offspring of mixed marriages grow in number, foreign travel rises and globalization begins.” This quote condenses in telescopic fashion the relationship between class mobility, consumption, a transnational symbolic imaginary and the broader processes of globalization. It further highlights that the “reality” ads must connect with are fragmented along many lines and no a priori and universal strategy can succeed in the present “post-Independence” consumer revolution. In tellingly oxymoronic fashion, Pandey calls such strategies “a realistic fantasy, appealing to the inner need to break free.”

The particular forms of advertising run the whole gamut in terms of modes of address, language, style and editing. The ads on satellite TV networks are a particularly useful site to look at how their intended audience is conceptualised and addressed. All television channels have a wide-range and very intensive in-house campaigning strategy which follows a predominantly jump-cut, graphically-complex MTV style editing format. Further, the language is generally Hinglish except for the staider channels like BBC India. All the networks further, have intensive promotion of their sister channels within the network bouquet on offer – thus Zee India TV often advertises Channel [V].

In the area of news-programming, the battle for greater TRPs is manifested in strategies that take in the concerns of the viewer as well as that of the market. When Zee India TV, the news and current affairs channel starting losing ground to Sony TV, a major overhaul of its news programmes was set in motion in order to make them “more market- and -viewer friendly.” It would be a mistake to ascribe the hybridisation of advertising only to entertainment channels, and concerns for market-share and advertising income are a common baseline for calculating the efficiency of the reach of new channels as well. As will be seen in the next chapter, a period of proliferation of news sources has become a source of much political and commercial concern in terms of control and profitability.

In the above discussion, what is revealed in all its complexity is the energetic engagement with modernity in terms of a high-tech, satellite TV mediascape that radically reformulates questions of culture outside the tradition/modernity debate and discloses in dialectical fashion a particular marriage of the universal and the particular, not as two opposed categories or movements, but rather as the very inter-penetration of the one into the other, which fuels further movement in terms of cultural dis-

57 “Reality Gaps”, op cit., p. 42.
58 Ibid.
courses, media programming, state-capital configurations and the like. It emphasises that to take specific discourses out of their embedded location in power relations and assume for example, that Hindu nationalists are against “foreign cultural invasions” is to be blind to how in practice, whether through government legislation or shifts in programming, the local and the global do coincide with each other and in the process deconstruct the distinction between the two.

Further, the signifiers of modernity, if understood as a clean break with the past, must be recast in their concrete embeddedness, in areas such as programming, audiences and state participation in a globalising economy, to appreciate the plurivalent values that such markers of the “modern” illustrate. It is this precise divided and fuzzy logic of modernity, as articulated in response to globalization, media and democracy that the next chapter turns to.