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Geoffrey W. Reeves

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Geoffrey W. Reeves

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Centre for Asian Communication, Media Studies and

Cultural Studies

Edith Cowan University

Perth

Western Australia

Introduction

India represents an example of immense complexity and diversity in cultural production and communications. Broadcasting, film, newspaper, magazine, and musical production have been characterised by regional and linguistic diversity, with non-Hindi and non-English media in the private sphere especially showing signs of remarkable growth over the last decade or more (Jeffrey 1993). While the basic role of the state and state regulatory framework was established under British colonial rule, it has undergone substantial modification in the post-colonial period. In concert with many countries in the 'third world', private rather than state cultural and media production has become increasingly dominant to the extent that it challenges - strong central interventionist powers notwithstanding, both state production and regulatory frameworks.

With the development of national broadcasting - television especially, through Doordarshan, and its increasing commercialisation as a result in particular of the success of 'soapies' such as <u>Hum Log</u>, and the <u>Mahabharata</u> and the <u>Ramayan</u>, the concerted questioning of the relationship between the state and Doordarshan gathered momentum. Pressures for the privatisation of electronic media have grown, while many within the mass media industries have expressed concern over the amount of control the state is able to exercise over production and editorial content. The long standing concern with, and struggle for media autonomy based on the BBC public service broadcasting model, has more recently and increasingly been linked with pressures for the privatisation of Doordarshan and an overall deregulation of the electronic media.

Indian television, which was introduced as a limited service in 1959 as part of a UNESCO project, developed very slowly (Awasthy 1978: 208). It was given a low priority by the Indian government as it did not fit in well with national industrial and economic strategies and social objectives. The Indian electronics industry was in its incipient stage of development, there was an absence of broadband telecommunications links, and there was the concern on the part of AIR that its 'own corps of trained personnel should produce indigenous programming ' (Awasthy 1978: 207; Bhatia et al 1984: 36). However by the early 1970s the situation had changed considerably as a result of the expansion of local production of television transmission and reception equipment, the setting-up of a television training institute, and the proposed introduction of nation-wide broadband microwave

linkages. After protracted debate, by 1972 the Indian government was committed to the expansion of television services based on the co-existence of a substantial earthbound network and a satellite system -INSAT (Singhal & Rogers 1989: 64-66).

The expansion of television services occurred against a backdrop of debate about whether it was to be used for information, educational, or entertainment purposes, and whether it would drain scarce resources away from sound broadcasting which, despite its crucial role in communicating development programmes, still did not have a complete national coverage (Awasthy 1978: 208; Singhal & Rogers 1989: 71-74).

In the late 1960s, when Indira Gandhi was in charge of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, expansion of television broadcasting was given much more serious consideration by the Government (Bhatia et al 1984: 37). Thought was given to finding a way of creating an industrial infrastructure, possibly with foreign collaboration, able to engage in the indigenous manufacture of television broadcasting equipment. In 1971 collaborative arrangements were worked out between state-owned Bharat Electronics Limited and Fernseh (FRG) and NEC (Japan) for local production of studio and transmission equipment.

Colour Transmission and the Doodarshan National Network

The creation of a national television network in India is linked to the expansion of domestic electronics industries and the easing of restrictions on the importation of components and equipment, to the continued growth of consumer goods industries and national advertisers anxious to exploit large, essentially petty-bourgeois markets, and to the greater centralisation of state power.

The Congress government's drive for the development of a national television network essentially coincided with the introduction of colour transmission. Central to the implementation of both was the televising of three international events in New Delhi in 1982-83. The most important of these events was the hosting and televising of the ASIAD Games in November-December 1982. The other two events of great importance were the hosting of the Seventh Conference of the Non-Aligned Nations Movement and the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. Quite clearly the hosting of these events was seen by the Indian government as providing a

showcase for India's technological and organisational ability, as well as a means for gaining greater prestige in the international community (Pendakur 1991: 242). Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister's son, was made chairman of the ASIAD Committee, with complete organisational responsibility for the event. While the successful hosting and televising of ASIAD, and the other two events, was important for international purposes, domestic considerations were not unimportant. Success would boost Congress's image, and enhance that of Rajiv Gandhi who was being groomed as Indira Gandhi's successor. Given the importance of television coverage to such domestic as well as international image-building, it was essential for 'the pomp and festivity of the games' to be seen by as many urban Indians as possible.

The introduction of colour transmission provoked a great deal of debate. Strong advocates of its immediate introduction argued somewhat spuriously that it would have been impossible to provide international coverage of ASIAD without it; that is, colour transmission had to be provided for foreign broadcast organisations (Pendakur 1991: 243). Besides, black and white television was obsolete - as the introduction of colour television in countries such as Nigeria, Sri Lanka, and China clearly attested - and was not as convincing as colour in educational programmes.

There can be little doubt that the introduction was linked to the rapidly growing importance of television as an entertainment and advertising medium for a large and expanding petty-bourgeoisie in particular which was increasingly attuned to the rhythm of expanded, repetitive consumption. Critics of the introduction of colour transmission argued that it was given much greater priority than a 'much needed national adult education program and a community health workers' program (which) were being scuttled' (Pendakur 1991: 243).

The introduction of television on a national scale was linked to the launching of Insat 1 (Pendakur 1991: 243). The initial daily transmission from New Delhi was to be for one and a half hours, with the principal programme categories being information, entertainment, and education. Clearly, as Pendakur (1991: 243) suggests, 'the intention was to create a wider audience for the pageantry and fanfare of ASIAD and other events in Delhi'.

The development of an extensive national television network required very high levels of investment in infrastructural development. Predictably, after the initial introduction of television in Delhi, new transmitters were built in major

metropolitan centres such as Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Lucknow, Amritsar, Jalandhar, and Srinagar.[i] As a result, between 1973 and 1983 there was an eightfold increase in the number of television transmitters throughout India (Pendakur 1991: 244). The significant increase in signal reach enabled a much greater percentage of the population to gain access to television.

The substantial growth of television infrastructure was made possible largely through the sizeable funding allocations to broadcasting through successive development plans. Under the Fourth Plan there was a significant leap in expenditure on broadcasting. The allocation to broadcasting under the Fifth Plan (1974-1979) established the supremacy of television when the government more than doubled its allocation. The Sixth Plan further increased the amount to be spent on the expansion of television (Pendakur 1991: 245).

The dramatic growth in the provision of a television infrastructure was matched by the rapid and sustained increase in the number of television receivers in the country (Tables 1 and 2). This was most pronounced between 1983 and 1985 when several factors combined to dramatically increase the number of receivers. Uppermost among them were government measures, including the liberalisation of import restrictions, relaxation of customs regulations, reduction of duties on imports, and a 'special provision allowing relations of citizens living abroad to send television sets home'(Pendakur 1991: 245). During this period an estimated million television sets were imported.

TABLE 1

Growth in the Number of Television Sets and Audiences, 1971-1985

Year	TV Sets	Audience (million)
1971	0.004	0.5
1973	0.16	1.7
1975	0.45	5.1
1977	0.67	8.5
1979	1.1	12.4
1981	1.7	16.4
1983	2.8	30.3
1985	6.8	60.00
1988	27.00	216.0 (estimated)

Source: Pendakur, 1991, p. 246.

TABLE 2

Production of Television Sets in India (Sets in Lakhs)
1980-1990

Year	Black and Big Size	White Portable	Colour	Total
1980	3.70	-	-	3.70
1981	4.35	-	-	4.35
1982	5.70	-	0.70	6.40
1983	6.60		0.50	7.10
1984	8.25	1.75	2.80	12.80
1985	13.60	4.50	6.85	24.85
1986	13.30	8.20	9.00	30.50
1987	14.00	17.00	12.00	43.00
1988	16.00	28.00	13.00	57.00
1989	41	*	11.50	52.50
1990	38.00	*	10.50	48.50

*   Included in big size.

Source: Sivasankar & Venkateswarulu, 1993, p.70.

The remarkable growth in the number of television receivers was also the product of a more general easing, if not abandonment, of national policies concerned with the 'fostering of indigenous research and development and production of television technology' (Pendakur 1991: 245). Relaxation of licensing regulation governing the manufacture of television sets allowed domestic manufacturers to import substantial numbers of television kits for assembly in India and to take advantage of using relatively low local labour costs.

Although there was an enormous increase in the number of television receivers, and a much greater reach of the expanding national network, access to television was still severely restricted to the majority of the population by the basic cost factor. The generally low level of wages for Indian workers has meant that for many - and certainly unskilled factory workers and agricultural labourers, both black and white, and colour sets, are well beyond their reach. In 1981, according to Pendakur (1991: 246) a city typist would have to have set aside all of his/her annual earnings to purchase a relatively basic black and white television set. A colour television set would have required the annual earnings of a school teacher or skilled factory worker.

The successive substantial allocations to broadcasting in general, and television in particular, under national development plans has meant that the increasingly extensive television infrastructure, as well as that for telecommunications, has been largely funded through domestic savings based on the earnings of the Indian rural and urban labouring classes. Of course, they are precisely the classes which have least access to privatised television reception, and who are dependent to some extent on limited access through community sets.

Television: The National Programme

The introduction of the national programme on Indian television met with more regional opposition than support. It was essentially justified by the Indian government and broadcasting controllers in terms of its role in the promotion of national unity and promotion of understanding between different regions. Luthra (1986: 430) notes that

> The fare (of the National Programme) was to consist of
> news in Hindi and English, and programmes reflecting
> the music, dance and other aspects of life, literature and
> culture of all regions.

Certainly the introduction of the national programme could be seen as part of the attempt by the Indira Gandhi administration to establish a stronger national presence in the regions at a time when their position was under considerable pressure.

The regional objections to national programming, which were predictably strongest in Tamil Nadu, included, first, the claim that it represented the imposition of Hindi on non-Hindi states, second, the shift of the focus of production to Delhi to the detriment of production in other parts of the country, and third, the replacement of local prime time programming by the compulsory relay from Delhi. After opposition the relay of Hindi news by the Madras TV Centre was dropped from November 11 1982 (Luthra 1986: 430). It was only after discussions in Delhi in July 1983 between Publicity Officials of all the states, and Ministers of Publicity and Information, that a revised national programme was agreed upon. The most significant revision, effective from September 15 1983, was the shift of the National

programme to the 9.00 to 10.30 p.m. time slot, thus leaving the prime time spot to local programming.

Commercialisation of Doordarshan

The commercialisation of Doordarshan basically began in 1976 when television services were separated from AIR and commercial spots were introduced. Advertising sponsorship followed in 1980. The pace of commercialisation has been encouraged, first, by the sharp increase in the number of television viewers since the mid-'70s, and second, since the mid '80s, by the success of locally produced soap operas - initially **Hum Log**, subsequently the **Ramayan** and the **Mahabharata**. As a result of commercialisation and the success of soap operas, there has been a sharp increase in annual revenues from advertising spots (a leap from US $0.6 million in 1976 to $130 million in 1988), increases in advertising rates, and increases in Doordarshan's operating costs (Singhal & Rogers 1989: 79).[ii] (See Table 3)

Undoubtedly the drive for the increased rate of commercialisation - indeed privatisation - of Doordarshan has come from some forces within the central government anxious to reduce its funding commitment (while enjoying the rapid increase in revenue from advertising and maintaining tight control over the organisation for political purposes), from transnational corporations, their Indian subsidiaries, and local companies interested in expanding their markets, and from programme producers. For Bombay film producers adversely affected by the expansion of television audiences and intense competition in the industry, there are definite advantages in producing programmes for Doordarshan: 'there is relatively less financial risk in producing television serials, as eager commercial sponsors are plentiful, and problems with box office sales, film distribution, and piracy do not exist' (Singhal & Rogers 1989: 83).

TABLE 3
Doordarshan's Gross Revenues from Advertising, 1975-1988
(in millions of dollars)

Year	Gross Revenues
1975	-
1976	0.65
1977	1.73
1978	4.14
1979	5.13
1980	6.73
1981	9.39
1982	13.25
1983	16.50
1984	26.19
1985	51.92
1987	90.66
1988	107.33

Source:Pendakur, 1991, p.258.

Corporate Power and the Commercialisation of Television

The greatest drive for the rapid commercialisation of Indian television has undoubtedly come from the expanding corporate and industrial sectors of the economy. Despite uneven growth rates, throughout the late 1970s and 1980s capitalist industrialisation accelerated. By 1979 India had become the world's tenth largest producer of industrial commodities, and was ranked third behind the United States and Japan in its number of engineeers and scientists. The acceleration of capitalist industrialisation was manifested in higher national productivity, a substantial increase in the volume and value of commodities produced, and in the substantial growth of the number of licensed industrial enterprises. The accelerated industrialisation was also expressed in a much greater concentration of capital (while capital investment increased significantly, further concentration in the case of big business occurred), the growth of exports associated with transnationals in India, and in the development of an export orientation on the part of a number of major private and public sector companies.

Capitalist industrialisation, and the rapid expansion of a highly differentiated consumer goods market on a national scale, has witnessed a corresponding growth in the financial services (this growth is reflected in the number of newspaper and

magazine advertisements for banks, insurance companies, and other financial institutions) and in advertising and market research industries. Increases in production and demand necessitated a much greater emphasis on the creation, identification, and management of demand through market research, advertising, and 'appropriate' media programming. A concomitant of this has been the growth over the last decade of often large-scale demographic and psycho-graphic studies of the Indian middle class (Pendakur 1991: 251). Not unexpectedly the Indian state has played a major part in this development with the commissioning of studies by the health, tourism, and finance ministries. While such specifically commissioned studies are obviously concerned with issues of policy formulation and implementation, they also represent part of the process whereby the state's informational role expands and the careful management of information and opinion takes effect. Pendakur (1991: 251-52) goes so far as to suggest there is a fusion in the expanded television and advertising industries of the need of the 'new regime (that is, the Rajiv Gandhi regime) to create and manage consensus and legitimate itself in a society that has been ripping at the edges for the last 40 years' and the need of the industrial capitalist to generate and expand a consumer culture. Ultimately, as Pendakur (1991: 252) notes, both the modern 'democratic' state and the owners and controllers of industry rely on the same technologies of opinion formation and market research to 'produce audiences/voters/consumers'. Certainly the Rajiv Gandhi regime, which was closely identified with the acceleration of this development, increasingly resorted to such technologies, including the use of television and video campaigning, to boost and shore-up its position.

The development of the modern nation-state can be read, Murdock (1993: 527) suggests, at least in part as a 'history of attempts to manage mass participation in the political process'. Constantly present has been a tension between 'two opposed rhetorical figures': on the one hand, the ideal citizen who is rational, 'open to sequential argument', and able to make considered personal choices and to soberly register political preferences; on the other hand, there is the figure of the crowd, which is essentially irrational, emotional, 'seduced by dramatic images, acting in concert, bargaining by riot and demonstration'. Since official discourse in democratic polities has been predicated on the advancement of the responsibilities of citizenship, it has generally denigrated the seduction of the crowd. The growth of consumerism, however, has posed a double-pronged problem for this discourse. First, consumerism has emphasised that consumption may provide personal

solutions for public difficulties. Second, consumerism tends to negate the appeals to the public good that underpin the rhetoric of citizenship.

In India, as elsewhere, the tensions have been manifested in the history of public broadcasting as it has struggled to accommodate itself to the controlling imperatives of the state and the requirements of mass democracy (where the ruling party has attempted to control the construction and flow of political images and restrict access to oppositional parties) in a popular field which is dominated by the increasingly powerful forces of commercialised entertainment. Apart from trying to retain control over the public broadcasting apparatus, while making constant concessions and adjustments to the growth in power of private commercialised mass media and cultural industries, the ruling party and state managers have increasingly resorted to broadcasting and advertising as a means of shaping and controlling image and opinion formation and distribution. When Indian politics, certainly at the central level, were dominated by Congress the tensions were easier to contain. However, with the decline of Congress domination, Congress fragmentation, and the emergence of new parties or alliances of parties (Janata, Janata Dal) the tensions have become much more difficult to contain. The decline, and substantial popular 'loss of faith' in the dominant forms of representation, has been marked by the challenge to them of nationalistic, anti-secularist, sectarian, and fundamentalist forces. The response of a Congress party under electoral and ideological siege, was, beginning with Mrs Gandhi, to attempt to accommodate and mobilise these forces to its advantage, while trying to ensure that they did not become uncontrollable and a powerful means of mobilisation for oppositional parties.

At the same time as the growing fragmentation and contradictions of the political field presented major problems for public broadcasting, increasingly powerful pressures have been directed at it by the rapidly expanding private sphere of communications and cultural production. The accelerated privatisation of cultural production, together with the proliferation of new communications distribution channels (satellite and cable television networks, VCRs), have fundamentally altered the relationship of public broadcasting to the development of consumer culture and capitalist forms of cultural production. Increasingly public broadcasting has become involved in a sharpening competition for 'core productive resources', creative labour, and intellectual property rights. The competition for audience time and allegiance has correspondingly greatly intensified.

The growth and importance of the Indian advertising industry is borne out by basic statistical data. This industry, whose growth has been predicated on a combination of national and international capital, has also been marked by considerable indigenisation. Although transnational agencies and their affiliates still clearly dominate Indian advertising billings, they have been joined, if not challenged, by the proliferation of Indian agencies.[iii] The growth of indigenous capital in advertising is partly attributable to government restrictions on foreign ownership of Indian businesses. The 1974 Foreign Exchange Review Act required all businesses to have a majority Indian ownership. In addition, the Indian government, which has been a major advertiser, especially in the print media, has exclusively supported indigenous agencies.

The growth of Indian agencies, above all, has been associated with the consistent expansion of the consumer goods sector throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. The 'liberalization' of state policies with regard to international capital has clearly provided opportunities for the more vigorous growth of transnational agencies, although it is also clear that the different regional concentrations of development contribute substantially to the emergence, and continued growth of, Indian agencies. The most prominent of these indigenous agencies has been the Ahmedabad-based Mudra Communications Ltd which has been tied to the Reliance Corporation. In the period from 1982 (Rs 21 million) to 1992 (Rs 8832 million) Mudra Communications increased their gross billings by something like forty two fold.

It is certainly clear that total billings, and the billings in the most important markets (principally the major cities such as Bombay and Delhi), have been dominated by the transnational agencies, with Mudra Communications occupying third place (Table 4).

TABLE 4

Top 10 Indian Advertising Agencies by Gross Income 1991-1992

Rank	Name	Gross Income	Capitalised Billings	Growth over Last Year(%)
1	Hindustan Thompson Associates Ltd	2465.27	16443.35	20.6
2	Lintas India Ltd	2205.64	14711.62	39.8
3	Mudra Communications Ltd	1324.00	8832.00	7.6
4	Ogilvy & Mather	1146.09	7644.43	9.7
5	Ulka Advertising	964.00	6430.00	29.9
6	Clarion Advertising Services Ltd	705.00	4700.00	51.6
7	R.K.Swamy/BBDO Advertising Pvt Ltd	617.00	4115.00	16.2
8	Rediffusion Advertising Pvt Ltd	540.00	3600.00	20.8
9	Trikaya Grey Advertising Pvt Ltd	529.16	3529.50	50.2
10	Everest Advertising Pvt Ltd	491.00	3275.00	9.9

Source: <u>Advertising and Marketing</u>, December 1992, p. 50.

Throughout the 1970s there was a general increase in expenditure by advertisers across the different media (Table 5). The growth was highest in the case of cinema advertising at a time before the impact of television and video on audiences and advertising revenue was sharply felt. Cinema's share of advertising revenue decreased consistently throughout the 1980s, although the sharp reduction in total advertising revenue did not occur until after 1985. From the mid-1980s television advertising revenue increased dramatically while at the same time showing a steady growth in overall share of advertising revenue.[iv] (Table 5)

The consuming public for expanding goods and services, and thus for advertisements, was composed initially of wealthier and propertied strata - essentially the new petty bourgeoisie, and certainly not the poor and the landless. Increasingly this consuming public embraces higher income sections of the working class. Television has the important advantage over most other media of being able to effectively reach this clientele at relatively low cost, and especially through

entertainment-oriented programming. The development of the Doordarshan national programme, and more recently satellite television, has been crucial to the construction of national advertising and national consumer goods and services markets.

Television, and advertising, clearly play an important role in the redefinition and reconstruction of the 'nation' and 'national culture'. Both emphasise the predominance of the commodity form in society and culture, that is, they stress the way in which the basic social relations of an Indian 'national' society are essentially constituted by the commodity form. India is progressively redefined as a nation of consumers. The citizen is redefined as a consumer. Aspects of Indian history, culture, tradition, and social relations are reworked in such a way that they become central to both the production and consumption of commodities, and a major way of legitimating symbolically particular forms of consumption. The internationalisation of advertising, and especially the use of powerful international symbolic associations, is part of the process by which Indian national culture and society is redefined. It is important to recognise, of course, that the particular constructions of India which are developed through popular entertainment, and through advertising, are not necessarily shared by state policy makers, nor by the representatives of such powerful forces in Indian civil society as Hindu fundamentalism.

The basic linkage of entertainment and advertising has been central to the drive for more television entertainment programming. This has posed a major dilemma for policy makers who are committed to the educational role of television while ever mindful of the revenue advantages to be gained from exploiting popular entertainment programming. The most substantial, and economically the most important, segments of the television public have no need for, or any interest in, educational and social responsibility-type programming, and feel resentful when it interferes with their viewing practices.

TABLE 5
Expenditure by Advertisers by Media 1975-1987

Year	Press	TV	Radio	Others*	Cinema	Total
1975	550 (67.8)	-	70 (8.6)	120 (14.8)	71 (8.8)	811 (100)
1976	600 (69.8)	10 (1.2)	70 (8.1)	110 (12.8)	70 (8.1)	860 (100)
1977	655 (70.1)	25 (2.7)	70 (7.5)	109 (11.7	75 (8.0)	934 (100)
1978	690 (70.1)	40 (4.1)	75 (7.6)	110 (11.2)	70 (7.1)	985 (100)
1979	1180 (77.4)	61 (4.0)	85 (5.6)	121 (7.9)	78 (5.1)	1525 (100)
1980	1460 (74.5)	90 (4.6)	120 (6.1)	160 (8.2)	130 (6.6)	1960 (100)
1981	1910 (76.7)	110 (4.4)	150 (6.0)	180 (7.2)	140 (5.6)	2490 (100)
1982	2330 (77.9)	160 (5.4)	150 (5.0)	200 (6.7)	150 (5.0)	2990 (100)
1983	2980 (79.5)	200 (5.3)	180 (4.8)	220 (5.9)	170 (4.5)	3750 (100)
1984	3210 (77.4)	280 (6.9)	190 (4.7)	250 (6.2)	190 (4.9)	4030 (100)
1985	3330 (74.3)	500 (11.2)	200 (4.5)	270 (6.0)	180 (4.0)	4480 (100)
1986	4500 (71.7)	1000 (15.9)	250 (4.0)	400 (6.4)	120 (1.9)	6270 (100)
1987	5400 (71.0)	1360 (17.9)	280 (3.7)	450 (5.9)	120 (1.6)	7610 (100)

*   Principally billboard and transport advertising
Source: Ramakrishna Rao, 1993, pp.15-17.

Hindu Mythology and Popular Fictions

Whereas soap operas had long been the most popular genre of television programming in Latin American countries, in India they did not appear on national television until 1984. The first of such serials, <u>Hum Log</u> was a pro-development soap opera influenced by the Mexican model. After a lack of initial popular enthusiasm for the first episodes, and political criticism, a number of changes were made which increased its popular appeal.

> The family planning theme was diluted and themes
> such as the status of women, family harmony, and
> national integration became central to it (Singhal &
> Rogers 1989: 95).

<u>Hum Log's</u> plot revolved around the joys and sorrows of a lower-middle class joint family, with a sub-story addressing political corruption and underworld activities. Masud (1985) notes that this setting had the advantage of securing a vast audience, while 'domestic or domesticated space is the perfect home for scenes of intimacy and confrontation'.

<u>Hum Log</u> was followed by series such as <u>Buniyaad</u> (Foundation) and <u>Khandaan</u>. Shown in 1986-87, <u>Buniyaad</u> was a historical soap opera which dealt with India's partition primarily through the examination of the life and times of a four generation family. The saga focused on the tumultuous events following the partition with Pakistan. Some characters in common with the earlier <u>Hum Log</u> were clearly important in maintaining audience involvement and continuity. <u>Khandaan</u> is

> the rich man's <u>Hum Log</u> but is meant, like the latter, for
> the lower middle classes (as <u>Dynasty</u>, its original, is in
> America). However <u>Hum Log</u>, despite its gaucherie, has
> a certain innocence.   <u>Khandaan</u> is all knowingness,
> contrivance and calculation (Masud 1985).

Not unexpectedly many Indian popular 'fictions' are taken up with stories from Hindu mythology: from the **puranas**, and the two great epics, the <u>Ramayan</u> and the <u>Mahabharata</u>. This applies to feature film to a limited extent (Barnouw & Krishnaswamy 1980; Ramachandran 1985), to popular literature - especially comic

books (especially true of Indonesia as well), and increasingly to television series where the <u>Ramayan</u> and the <u>Mahabharata</u> have enjoyed astonishing popular success.

Ramanand Sagar's <u>Ramayan</u> was shown by Doordarshan in 1987-88. Based on the religious epic, it attracted vast audiences (60 million on Sunday mornings) and substantial advertising revenue. The televised production of the epic, which celebrates Lord Rama's victory over the Demon King Ravana, stressed human values such as morality, obedience, discipline, and loyalty. While for many critics the series was a poor representation of the epic, for others it had the virtue of stressing values which would enable people to cope in a climate of often rapid economic and social change and moral uncertainty (Singhal & Rogers 1989: 70). The **chaupaiyans** (verses) of the epic 'were put to melodious music, each conveying a moral theme'.

The popular success of <u>Ramayan</u> led to the production of another Indian epic serial, <u>Mahabharata</u>, which began broadcasting in late 1988. The strength and popularity of the series is seen by some commentators as residing in its 'contemporaneous flavour', its realism in the sense that it deals with conflicts immediately familiar to its audience - including the 'most common cause of family disputes - property', and above all, in the way in which 'every episode seems like a leaf taken out of the routine happenings in any ordinary Indian family'.

Apart from the <u>Ramayan</u> and the <u>Mahabharata</u>, since the introduction of television soap operas, there has been a great diversity of setting and themes. Vijaya Mehta's <u>Lifeline</u> (<u>Jeevan Rekha</u>) provided a realistic portrayal of life in a hospital. Col. Kapoor's <u>Fauji</u> was a semi-factual, semi-fictional account of life in the army. Ketan Mehta's <u>Mr. Yogi</u> provided an initially irreverent take-off of the middle class and modern manners. <u>Doctor Sahib</u> dealt with a general practitioner with a heart of gold, while <u>Murjim Haazir</u> recreated turn-of-the century Bengali ambience.

Doordarshan's programming of serials has been regarded by its critics as always being with an eye to its political masters. One critic observed in 1989 that

> Perpetually scared of incurring the wrath of the
> political bosses, the DD mandarins played safe by
> blocking out all that could be interpreted as
> critical of the government, at the same time trying
> to please the authorities by airing programmes

that gave a boost to government objectives and policies (D'Silva 1989).

Boond Boond was dropped after it poked fun at village panchayats and its protagonist had some slight resemblance to the then opposition leader - later prime minister - V.P. Singh. The Indian answer to Britain's Yes Minister, Kakkaji Kahin was constantly butchered from the beginning. Storyline and dialogue were so extensively altered that 'ultimately, the Bhojpari-speaking political fixer named Kakkaji lost his identity and a promising satire was turned into a dull farce' (D'Silva 1989).

Masud (1985), writing at the beginning of the wave of Indian television soapies, considered sponsored television in India to be 'triumph of the middle class' - certainly of middle class culture. Threatened by labour disorder, urban lawlessness and over-crowding, this class has had a 'panic stricken admiration of 'order' and 'rationality', a fascination for the consumer culture exemplified in television advertisements which provide a type of structured order which ultimately contributes to their subordination, and the 'celebration of celebrity' in which politicians such as Rajiv Gandhi, and stars drawn from the film world, provide release for their fears and aspirations. The middle classes have provided the publicists and writers - the literati in general - who have produced the 'celebrity culture' and the hegemony for the ruling classes of the industrialists, ex-landlords, top politicians and senior state bureaucrats.

Hindu Fundamentalism and the Televised Epics: Ramayan and Mahabharata

The claim has constantly been made that the growth of Hindu fundamentalism has been fed, whether calculatingly or not, by the immense popularity achieved by the television series versions of first, the Ramayan, and second, the Mahabharata. S.T. Gill, the former Information and Broadcasting Secretary who initiated the serialised television adapatations of the epics, argued that the epics symbolised essential aspects of the 'Indian psyche' and provided a unifying symbol for the diverse groups within Indian society (Rajagopal 1993: 108).

After the success of Ramayan and the Mahabharata mythical-historical output became a high-rating standard fare on Doordarshan (Rajagopal 1993: 109). This

stood in sharp contrast to Indian feature film production which, while obviously exploiting myths central to Indian culture, had largely avoided the mythological epics. Faced with precarious financial returns from production (fewer than 15 per cent of films recouped their initial production costs) the Bombay film industry had not touched 'mythologicals' for many years (Rajagopal 1993: 108). As Das Gupta (1991: 165-66) suggests, the traditional mythological film has never formed the 'favourite medium of the middle classes' and beat a retreat before the combined pressures of demands for freedom from foreign rule and freedom from the shackles of tradition. The overtly mythological film quietly retreated in the face of the post-independence preoccupation with modernisation, industrialisation, and the dissemination of a scientific and 'secular' outlook. Popular film responded to the significant shift by mythologising the present, by 'creating new models of divine power invested in humans destined to protect traditional virtues'.

In the case of television the constraints on innovative production and the exploration of new and different material, combined with intense competition among television writers, meant that few took chances: the emphasis was on the production of unobjectionable or the 'least objectionable programming' (Rajagopal 1993: 108). Given such constraints, state initiated innovation represented the only way of 'breaking the mould'.

The adaptation of the mythological form for television, although heavily indebted to Indian mythological film and Western representations, was nevertheless a significant innovation, albeit one to be seen very much in the context of acute and mounting problems facing the central state apparatus and the ruling Congress Party. Rajgopal (1993: 109) notes that the use in series such as Ramayan and the Mahabharata of 'themes found in diverse folk traditions as well as in literature, with religious or historical characters' offered the possibility of a bridge between 'oral and classical traditions and between different regions'. That such programming coincided with, and indeed, may have been part of, attempts to mobilise votes along relgious lines, made it at least 'potentially inflammatory'.

Some analysts (Sen Gupta 1991:2558) view the development of the television epics as part of the hegemonic project of a state under increasing fissiparous pressures whose legitimacy is questioned, if not challenged. Sen Gupta notes that

> The intervention of the state to create a cultural
> discourse wherein fascism may find much of its
> symbolic and effective power can be most clearly
> seen in its hegemonic control over the electronic
> media, particularly television. Despite the current
> enthusiasm over 'autonomy' dissent finds no
> place on television, it is perhaps naive under
> present circumstances to expect that to happen.
>   (Sen Gupta 1991: 2558)

According to Sen Gupta, the controllers of state television, Doordarshan, basically colluded in the violent distortion of the 'original' texts of the Ramayan and the Mahabharata. They were prepared to set aside any evidence of a series such as the Ramayan contributing to an environment of Hindu fundamentalist politics out of sheer commercial considerations; after all, each episode of the Ramayan was earning Rs40 lakhs from advertisers.

Indeed, Chatterji (1991: 209-211) questions whether the decision by the Indian government and Doordarshan to show the Ramayan and the Mahabharata was in breach of both the Constitution and the broadcasting codes of AIR and Doordarshan. The Supreme Court, in responding to a writ petition objecting to certain episodes of the Ramayan dealing with the banishment of Sita, appeared to adjudge the series a religious broadcast (Chatterji 1991: 213-14). The televised Ramayan and the Mahabharata certainly exposed the fine line between religion and culture in a country where culture is so bound up with Hinduism - and Islam for that matter (Smith 1963: Ch.3). State or government encouragement of culture 'may amount to the propagation of Hindu culture and Hindu religion' (Chatterji 1991: 211).

In the aftermath of the destruction of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya the Indian Union Government and Doordarshan rejected Krishna, another expensively produced mythological series by Ramanand Sagar who was responsible for the Ramayan. Initially the decision to reject Krishna appeared a trifle odd given the problems Doordarshan was suffering from a major dearth of popular serials, and damaging competition from the satellite television channels. The rationale for the Doordarshan decision to reject the series was provided by the Union minister Krishna Kant Sahay who claimed that the series could have been used by the BJP to 'arouse communal passions' (Shifa Maitra 1993: 31). According to Maitra's report, the minister 'felt that earlier, too, the BJP had used the serial Ramayan to increase its own power and hence the ruling party was very wary of putting Krishna on the national network'.

In the aftermath of the **Ram Janambhoomi** issue and widespread violence, a series dealing with Krishna would at least have had the potential to contribute to renewed frenzy - especially when the the construction of Hindu temples at Kashi and Mathura is on the BJP's and Hindu Parishad's agenda. Despite central government and Doordarshan rejection, <u>Krishna</u> has found illegal transmission outlets through local cable operators as well as through a number of international networks. Maitra notes that

> Another gimmick adopted to popularise the serial
> is the introduction of Krishna vans which tour the
> Hindi belts of India showing the serial to the
> masses free of cost. At the **Kumbli mela** at
> Hardwar and Ujjain, the masses are said to have
> "loved" the serial.
> (Maitra 1993: 31)

The television serialisation of the <u>Ramayan</u> and the <u>Mahabharata</u> brought to the fore the whole issue of the struggle for both the control over the means of cultural production and control over content (Rudolph 1992). The mega-serials, according to Rudolph (1992: 1494), first sought to interpret the epics in ways which were relevant to contemporary Indian society. Other commentators have suggested this, pointing to the way in which the serials, and certainly parts of the <u>Mahabharata,</u> could be construed as criticising state and ruling party abuse of power and calling them to moral account in terms of precepts which are central to the epic tradition. Initially, some observers even suggested that Draupadi was used in the <u>Mahabharata</u> to 'articulate feminist sentiment' (Rudolph 1992: 1494). Second, the televised epics have contributed to the increased standardisation of the epics, with the great diversity of local and regional versions at risk of giving way to a national one. Third, Rudolph notes, the televised epics have contributed to the creation of a 'national Hindu identity', that is, to a 'form of group consciousness that has not hitherto existed'.

The serialised television productions of the epics, through their shallowness of treatment of characters, absence of psychological introspection, praying on simple sentiment, and striving for some contemporary relevance, do not represent such a dramatic departure from the adaptations of language and interpretation made by touring and local companies for village and town performances. The epics have never represented final text 'museum pieces' but rather texts readily adaptable to

changing circumstances (Lutgendorf 1990: Lutgendorf 1991). This is the substance of Janaky's criticism of Sen Gupta, which, while accepting the centrality of his claim that the televised epics have been an important part of the growth of Hindu fundamentalist consciousness, nevertheless hinges on the status of the Mahabharata in particular as a text. Janaky (1992) notes that the Mahabharata is a text which has undergone a great many contradictory and dissenting constructions throughout its life. There is as such no original text which is unambiguous in meaning and which can be used to measure the distortion, manipulation, and falsehoods produced in the television versions. Janaky (1992), like Lutgendorf (1990:1991), suggests that analysis of the two epics should proceed, not on the basis of some original or authentic text which has a fixed and unambiguous meaning, but rather on the recognition of two texts which have been constructed, whether intentionally or not, in ways which contribute to popular forms of Hindu fundamentalist consciousness. However there is, as Rudolph (1992: 1494) observes, a significant difference between previous, often localised adaptations of texts such as the Ramayan and the Mahabharata to changing circumstances, and their adaptation, through television production and distribution, to the 'arena of public culture where values, metaphors and preoccupations can be standardised for national public consumption'.

Amrita Chhachi (1989: 570) uses as an example of the highly selective, careful contemporary construction of a Hinduism that requires no 'textual or historical verification' the way in which Sita is depicted in Sagar's televised Ramayan. Sagar, when interviewed about his series, quite frankly admitted that in the period when the Ramayan was set, women did not cover their torsos. However, in order for him to convey the image of Sita as the 'pure, chaste and ideal wife' it was necessary for her to wear a blouse - nudity would have 'violated the moral message of the serial. Das Gupta (1991: 167) observes as an 'ironical fact' that the form of the mythological film in Indian cinema is 'directly derived from the West' and has little if anything to do with Indian art. The visual culture of the Ramayan, like that of all the Indian film mythologicals, is directly indebted to the forms developed by the much villified Ravi Varma in his late nineteenth century, heavily academic treatment of Indian gods and goddesses.[v] Das Gupta (1991: 169) accuses Sagar of exploiting a cheap sexuality - 'Sagar is trying to extract all the commercial juice he can out of a sexy situation' - in which there is a contradiction between the spoken language and the non-verbal. Indeed, the non-verbal is characteristically marginalised in popular cinema and television. Das Gupta illustrates this point by referring to the following.

> In the scene where Kaikeyi obtains her boons, she
> has slinky hair falling over her shoulders, her face
> made up, with heavy eyeshadow. Kaikeyi's body
> language, the way she stands, the way she pouts
> her lips, her coquettish arrogance before Rama, all
> indicate a vulgar sexual hold on an aging
> monarch which the words strenuously deny.
> (Das Gupta 1991: 169)

Much of the consternation about the contribution of the <u>Ramayan</u> and the <u>Mahabharata</u> to Hindu fundamentalism has focused on issues of sexual politics and the representation of women. For Sen Gupta the television epics provided material for a 'popular culture of Hindu fascism'. The epics were

> faithful to the gender bias of sources of their
> ideological inspiration. This gender bias
> manifested itself in two ways - one, a complete
> brushing away of aspects of female or male
> sexuality wherever it proves to be uncomfortable
> with a masculinist, heterosexual and puritanical
> world view. Secondly, the complete and total
> subversion of of any dissenting voice within the
> female characters, be it Gandhari's lament or
> Sita's anger or even the agony of someone as
> rebellious as Draupadi.
> (Sen Gupta 1991: 2559)

Central to Indian feminist concerns has been the challenge to patriarchal forms of authority and control which are emphasised in Hindu fundamentalist thought. This challenge has involved, first, exposing and agitating against the more obvious and extreme manifestations of women's subordination and oppression -dowry murders, police rape, **sati**, and the abortion of female foetuses after amniocentesis (Chhachhi 1989: 573). This has been done very much in terms of the argument developed by the early twentieth century social reform movement in condemnation of social ills and injustice - and thus as a way of mobilising wider public support. Second, the challenge, as Chhachhi (1989: 573) notes, has taken the less publicised form of establishing the connection between the more extreme manifestations of women's oppression, such as dowry murders, and the structural violence which is fundamental to the existing patriarchal family system.

Patriarchal structures of authority have been under threat, not just simply from the women's movement and women's agitation, but more fundamentally from the demands of the capitalist labour market. The contradictions thrown up by this have led to attempts, including violent ones, to 'reassert control and reimpose systems of domination' (Chhachhi 1989: 573). Hindu communalism and fundamentalism, with its strong emphasis on masculine identity, military prowess, and forms of disciplined, para-military style organisation, is central to this. Chhachhi (1989: 575) notes that 'almost always' the call for a return to culture and tradition, which is at the crux of fundamentalist rhetoric, is addressed to women. Women are 'neither acknowledged or allowed to be producers of theology, although they are the main practitioners of religion and hence the reproducers of culture and tradition'.

Sen Gupta (1991: 2559) argues that in the Ramayan and the Mahabharata the assertion of female identity and sexuality is either completely ignored or seen as 'dangerous' and 'castrating'. Where there is the possibility of bisexuality in particular characters, or a real ambiguity regarding their sexual identity, it is again either seen as a curse or completely ignored.

According to Sen Gupta (1991) the essentially rambling and encyclopedic nature of the Mahabharata in particular, and the Ramayan to a lesser extent ('far more cohesive in terms of structure and plot'), promoted multiple and contradictory 'readings' of the texts. The very nature of the Mahabharata was such that it allowed spaces for both elitist and subaltern voices, for 'voices of rebellious, angry women and voices of powerful patriarchs'. Although over time 'the elitist voice came to predominate' the subaltern voices could not be stifled: 'theirs was a subdued but persistent chorus that renewed itself with each reinterpretation' (Sen Gupta 1991: 2558). However, according to Sen Gupta, the televised interpretation of the epics was such that the contradictory strain which was so much a part of the epic tradition was negated. This construction, which may be seen as part of the very selective construction of tradition in accordance with the requirements of a 'fascist' culture, was part of the hegemonic control exercised over the electronic media.

The televised epics, Sen Gupta contends, contributed to the new cult of male gods (the establishment of a holy trinity of Ram, Krishna, and Shiva)[vi] and to the much greater marginalisation of the mother goddess which was 'very much the stuff out of which popular Hinduism was constructed from the late 60s onwards' (Sen Gupta 1991: 2559). The **mata** cult, like other popular forms of Hindu expression, was

generally associated with the pre-Aryan, non-Brahminical 'little tradition' of Hinduism. According to Sen Gupta (1991: 2559) 'a new Hindu identity that deliberately highlighted its "Brahminical"/"Aryan" accents could not afford to allow undue prominence to the mother goddess'.

Doordarshan - The Issue of Autonomy

In the late 1980s the commercialisation of Doordarshan and AIR had reached the stage where proposals for greater autonomy were being advanced and a bill introduced in the Lok Sabha. Many critics were somewhat sceptical of the meaning of the proposed autonomy. Under the Rajiv Gandhi administration the electronic media were used for party propaganda purposes (Singh 1990); the distinction between party and government at times was a blurred one. Shortly before the end of his administration a number of news programmes tested the limits of new found freedom. In the **Prasar Bharat** bill a two-tier structure for Doordarshan was introduced which consisted of a board of governors and a watchdog broadcasting council. Financial control remains vested in government which retains the right to issue directives to make or prevent any broadcast 'in the interests of security of the state or preservation of public order' or 'on any matter of public importance'. The government resisted pressures to go further along the privatisation route by invoking familiar arguments about problems of development, unity and national order, as well as the dangerous promotion of a consumer ethos which cannot be sustained by current production levels and uneven distribution. According to Singh (1990), however, the major obstacle to greater autonomy for the electronic media, and privatisation, is that 'whatever the party in power, control of the electronic media is too valuable a weapon to give away'.

The BBC model of autonomy has exerted considerable influence over Indian policy-makers for several decades. As early as 1948 Nehru upheld it as the model for Indian broadcasting, although he argued that at the time, given the peculiarities of Indian conditions, there could be no more than a 'semi-autononmy'. Broadcasting became a department of state. The influence of the BBC model was clearly evident in the recommendations of the Chanda Committee (1966) and the Verghese Working Group (1978).

The BBC model of autonomy has involved, first, freedom from governmental control, and second, an autonomy from control by parliament (Chatterji 1991: 203-

204). The first, despite ultimate control by government, has involved a means of financial independence and the maintenance of objectivity in the presentation of news, current affairs, and other programmes. The media, in other words, should not be biased in favour of the government. The second has involved a means of budgetary independence.

During the 1989 general elections to the Lok Sabha all parties included in their manifestos a promise to grant autonomy to the electronic media (Chatterji 1991: 203). The Janata Dal manifesto promised that within a year of election to office it would establish autonomous corporations for radio and television under a parliamentary charter.   The newly autonomous organisations would be supervised by an independent board of governors. The BJP also pledged itself to the autonomy of radio and television, while simultaneously raising the possibility of having separate channels for the states (Rudolph 1992: 1491-92). However Congress I's relatively weak commitment to media autonomy was largely couched in terms of the 'functional autonomy' Doordarshan was supposed to enjoy under the Rajiv Gandhi administration. The Congress-I's manifesto's commitment to 'functional autonomy' was essentially a renewal of the 'pledge that AIR and DD would be free to be objective and fair even while remaining under the financial, personnel and, ultimately, political, tutelage of the information and broadcasting ministry' (Rudolph 1992:1493). When set against the backdrop of 'Rajivdarshan' and constant intervention in the electronic media, the pledge lacked some credibility.

The National Front Government of V. P. Singh introduced a new **Prasar Bharat** (Indian Broadcasting Bill) soon after being sworn in on December 2, 1989. The bill was to be debated and passed in May 1990 after parliament reconvened in March for its budget session. At its first reading, however, 'numerous basic changes were introduced, thus robbing the act of being a charter of freedom for AIR and Doordarshan (Chatterji 1991: 203).

The Challenge of Satellite Television

Strong pressures for greater media autonomy and privatisation long preceded the rapid introduction of private satellite television. However, it was the speed at which satellite television was introduced, its immediate success with the most lucrative segments of the advertising market, and its rapid encroachment upon areas of highly successful Doordarshan programming, which intensified the crisis within Doordarshan and exposed national communications policy as in a state of disarray. Clearly the central Indian government, through the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and Doordarshan, could effectively contain pressures for privatisation and autonomy while the central preoccupation was with terrestrially-based electronic media. The introduction of satellite television, through STAR TV (with its many channels) presented a challenge which could not simply be dealt with through the usual bureaucratic form of control and political intervention.

The initial entry of STAR TV in the satellite television market provided them with an advantage, not just simply in terms of programming and the ability to tap the most influential audience and advertising segments, but in the basic channels of communication. STAR TV seized a substantial advantage over Doordarshan by effectively tying-up the distribution system.

> Today, most of the dish antennae in the country are so installed as to receive only programmes beamed by STAR TV. And the five parallel STAR signals coming from Asiasat plus the two to three inter-film channels provided by local cable-TV operators - through whose networks satellite television programmes are largely disseminated - take up almost the entire capacity of the existing distribution system.
>
> (Chaudhury 1993: 12)

Doordarshan, relying on terrestrial transmission, was disadvantaged by its viewers having to disconnect the cable-TV line to switch to Doordarshan. The use of Insat for the transmission of the Metro Channel represented the first serious step on the part of the Indian government to fight the competition from STAR TV and the other satellite television operators.

At the time STAR TV first began its transmission to India there was apparently little Doordarshan management concern about the threat it posed to existing electronic media interests.[vii] The sheer size of Doordarshan with its large staff (many actually only employed on a contractual basis), 'sprawling countryside networks', diversity of governmental contacts that could be translated into advertising revenue, and massive popular success of series such as the Mahabharata and Tipu Sultan, seemed to render it immune from the type of challenge represented by STAR-TV. The popularity of STAR-TV programmes such as The Bold and the Beautiful, Santa Barbara, and Real Value, attracted the sponsorship of the Godrej Group. Doordarshan and government officials, however, felt that the language factor would provide an effective barrier against a major increase in market share. The launching of the Hindi channel, ZEE TV, quickly removed this barrier so that the Indian government and Doordarshan were presented with a major problem. Zee TV very quickly attracted major advertisers: 'starting with a mere 23 advertisers in December 1992, Zee TV had attracted 85 advertisers by the end of March this year' (Chaudhary 1993: 11).

Indian government responses to the introduction of private satellite television and private cable television systems, and the pressure for a more thoroughgoing privatisation of Doordarshan have assumed a predictable form. The rhetoric of response has been dominated by the concern to protect national integrity and security from anti-national propaganda (the Pakistan factor is important here), and to promote advertising which promotes the consumer ethos and 'elitism'. For example, the Inter-Departmental Committee which was set up by the government in June 1989 to consider the policy implications, and the adequacy of existing laws relating to the growth of cable television networks and the dish antennae system, couched its concern very much in these terms.[viii] The committee, however, while expressing concern about the impact of foreign programming, suggested that the only effective long-term way of counteracting such influence was through the development of better and more competitive Doordarshan programming.[ix] This partly reflects the sheer difficulty of effectively controlling and licensing household cable television networks and satellite dishes.[x]

Faced with the mounting competition from the satellite television channels, declining audiences (of major importance given the impact on advertising revenue), and increasingly shrill criticism, especially from private television and film interests, the Doordarshan management and the Indian government responded by first,

announcing the up-linking of the four metro channels to the Insat 1A and 2A satellites (from April 1 1993), and second, by the phased opening of three more channels that would cater for the diverse interests and 'needs' of the country. In addition to the national network and the metro channel, the other channels proposed were one each for Entertainment and Cultural Activities, Sports, Current Affairs, News, and Financial Matters. Undoubtedly the linking of the metro channels to the satellite system, and the opening of new channels with specific market interests, will give a considerable spur to local television production, which, prior to the introduction of private satellite television, has been 'hamstrung' by the 'paucity of of enough cost-effective channels of telecast' (Sinha 1993: 23).

The announced changes met with a mixed reaction from Indian film and television interests which had been closely identified with the drive for the privatisation of Doordarshan. Although the new channels are to cater substantially to private television production companies, this is to be achieved without any real relinquishment of control by Doordarshan.

> The TV industry has, of course, not received the Minister's decision very happily. If anything, they are incensed because instead of going ahead with their oft-repeated promise of privatisation, the I & B Ministry has rather cunningly tried to retain its hold over the electronic media. Despite their assertion that commercial time would be sold to private agencies, the ministry's decision reflects the reluctance of the power-hungry brokers at letting this important lever of power and **moolah** go out of their hand
>
> (Sinha 1993: 23).

Doordarshan management's decision to sell time slots on the proposed new metro channels on a first-come-first-served basis quickly descended to the level of farce. After putting price tags on the different slots, depending on the channel and the time, Doordarshan set no other conditions. At least ten days before the applications were to be received long queues of applicants (or at least their stand-ins) had begun to form outside Doordarshan's Metro Channel offices at Tolstoy Marg in New Delhi. Some of those queueing represented major television production interests (Pronnoy Roy's NDTV, for example) while others were completely unknown quantities. Faced with growing chaos some applicants petitioned the Delhi High Court to have the

queueing declared illegal. Attempting to address the chaos after an initial delay, Doordarshan's selection criteria underwent an abrupt change from the first-come-first-served principle to selection on the basis of computer 'random number generation' (Suroor 1993: 9).

Pronnoy Roy's NDTV, which was orginally first in line, went to the High Court after the abandonment of the first selection procedure. The Delhi-based North India Film Association challenged both selection principles. On July 15 the Delhi High Court stayed the Doordarshan selection scheme.[xi] In a later, detailed judgement the Delhi High Court set aside both the 'first come first served' and 'random number generation' schemes. While accepting six petitions challenging the validity of the first principle of selection, the court dismissed the petition by Home Communication Network, which had been initially successful, for its retention.[xii] Interestingly the Delhi High Court in its judgement upheld the contention of the government counsel that any choice based on past performance had the tendency to create monopolies and to inhibit new entrants. This went against the submissions of major, proven television and film production companies, as well as against the position of the Air Time Committee which had been set up by the Prime Minister's Office and not by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The Air Time Committee, chaired by P.S. Deodhar, had opposed the selling to early arrivals of the time slots and was concerned that the professional background of the applicant was at the least the starting point in the selection process: 'applicants should have proven track records in producing television/radio programmes, feature films, video film, video magazines, documentaries etc'. The Information and Broadcasting Ministry's decision to ignore the recommendations of the Air Time Committee was undoubtedly partly bound up with resentment at having their powers usurped by the Prime Minister's Office, as well as with special arrangements which had been worked out with new applicants.

Indian television reveals a good many of the major contradictions of state, economy, and society. Many within the Congress - I governments' of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi could see immense advantages in using television in particular to mobilise mass political support through popular programming and the careful construction of powerful images at a time of growing political fragmentation and Congress - I electoral weakness. The Ramayan and the Mahabharata were produced and shown at at time when issues of Hindu identity and communal consciousness were increasingly important as mobilising forces, and could be seen as part of the

response of significant sections of the Hindu upper castes to the apparent threat to their position by middle and lower castes who rejected their status in the Hindu **varna** order and in modern Indian society (Balachandran, 1993). While initially working for Congress, the mobilisation of such forces, including the immensely popular televised epics, ultimately, and at least in the short term, served the interests of the aggressively Hindu BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and Hindu fundamentalist organisations such as the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) and the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad). At the same time the increased 'liberalisation' of the Indian economy, with its substantial easing of restrictions on trade and investment, and basic shifts in communications policies, exposed major contradicitions in the state, many of whose managers wanted the benefits of sustained economic growth and the rapid expansion of consumerism without relinquishing often direct forms of political and bureaucratic control over programming and the construction and dissemination of news.

End Notes

[i]   The transmitters were built in India, partly by private companies, and partly by state-owned enterprises.

[ii] Singhal & Rogers (1989: 75-80) note that the successful commercialisation of Doordarshan has provoked often intense debate about television's role in Indian society, including its role in the promotion of consumerism, competition between consumer goods manufacturers, and in exacerbating inequalities.

[iii] Each year the A & M (Advertising and Marketing) magazine provides a detailed report on the performance of India's top advertising agencies. These reports provide a good guide to the extent of the development of local agencies and their principal markets.

[iv] Advertising revenue for the print media, assisted greatly by the continued expansion of the vernacular language press, continued to show steady increase throughout the 1980s. However its share in relative terms showed a steady, if slight, decrease.

[v]   Tapati Guha-Thakurta, in her The Making of a New `Indian' Art: Artists, aesthetics and nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850-1920 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) provides a most critical account of Ravi Varma's work.

[vi] This is expressed very directly in the immediate Hindutva programme of the `liberation' of temples at Ayodhya Mathura, and Benares (Varanasi).

[vii] Towards the end of 1991, STAR TV, then a little-known Hong Kong company, acquired a satellite transponder and began beaming a `heady mixture' of shows to the Indian sub-continent.

[viii] This is an expression of a deeper paradox. Both Doordarshan and AIR, through increasing reliance on revenue generated through popular programming and advertising, have contributed directly to the dominance of the commodity form in Indian society and to the development of a consumer culture. This has included the expansion of the market for electronic goods (television sets, VCRs, radios, as well as software). The reservation, if not opposition on these grounds, sits rather uneasily with, first, the trade and investment liberalisation policies of the late 1980s, and second, with the extent of the development of the consumer goods industries and the massive growth of consumerism.

[ix] `Panel against ban on cable television networks', The Hindu (International Edition), 2 March 1993, p. 7.

^x   The widespread introduction of cable television networks posed some difficulty for the Inter-Departmental Committee. During the early 1990s the household penetration of cable television increased consistently in New Delhi, Bombay - where it was introduced much earlier, Madras, and more slowly in Calcutta. One 1991 estimate put the number of people hooked into the cable television networks at 50 lakhs (5 million) (`Carry on Cable', <u>The Times of India</u>, 31 October 1991).

The rapid expansion of cable television networks has been at times vigorously opposed by film producers and production personnel, by film distributors and exhibitors, and by video shop proprietors. This occurred in Madras in February 1991 when a range of protests and legal actions were engaged in by different sections of the Tamil Nadu film industry.   Film industry representatives argued that the industry was a major employer, generated very substantial revenue for both the central and state governments through entertainment tax, and was thus deserving of greater state support and protection.   The use of videos through private household cable television networks breached copyright, evaded entertainment tax, and took income away from the film industry through either the use of foreign film material or locally produced-and possibly pirated, videos which could service a great many households (`Film industry protests against cable TV', <u>The Hindu</u> (International Edition), Vol.17, No.9, 2 March 1991).

^{xi}   `Court stays DD scheme on time slots', <u>The Hindu</u> (International Edition), 24 July 1993, p. 13.

^{xii}   `Doordarshan's time slot schemes set aside', <u>The Hindu</u> (International Edition), 2 October 1993, p.4.

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