



Critical Studies in Media Communication

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcsm20>

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Published online: 04 Jun 2010.

To cite this article: Usha Zacharias (2003) The Smile of Mona Lisa: Postcolonial Desires, Nationalist Families, and the Birth of Consumer Television in India, Critical Studies in Media Communication, 20:4, 388-406, DOI: [10.1080/0739318032000142034](https://doi.org/10.1080/0739318032000142034)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0739318032000142034>

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The Smile of Mona Lisa: Postcolonial Desires, Nationalist Families, and the Birth of Consumer Television in India

Usha Zacharias

□ – *This paper examines how the inception of consumer television in India during the late 1980s facilitated both market liberalization and a conservative politics of class, gender, and religio-cultural community. As reflected in the discourses and images in the English press, consumer television made room for novel figures of desire, changing forms of cultural citizenship, and new spaces of governance. Advertised through images of postcolonial whiteness that glamorized capital and technology, television also brought with it anxieties regarding westernization, consumption, and gender reform. These conflicting discourses produced the nationalist TV family as part of a new gender politics and as a new form of cultural governance that sought to forge tighter links between market, state, and conservative notions of community.*

Perhaps a single image can capture the cultural politics of the moment that this essay seeks to describe. The image is Crown TV's March 30, 1988 advertisement in *The Times of India* that featured Leonardo da Vinci's much-consumed masterpiece, Mona Lisa, on the television screen. The text proclaimed commodity exclusivity and consumer superiority ("because some

TVs are not meant for everyone") and encouraged consumption as a mode of reinforcing and transcending social hierarchy ("classics are ... appreciated by only those who have been gifted with the luxury of good taste"). Recast on the television screen, Mona Lisa's contemporary smile appears to exude the ambivalence of excessive desire, the elusiveness of constantly upgradable technology, and the evanescent endpoint of progress.

Yet, semiotically, that is not all: inscribed on the televised Mona Lisa's almost bare shoulders is another sign, the volume markings that may be imprinted by a remote, controlling viewer. Over her forehead and hair, we see the channel number, again manipulated by the unseen owner of the television set. In the context of a post-

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colonial logic of representation, these imprints of power have sedimented histories that refer to India's colonial past, the neocolonial present of the advertisement, and its globalizing future. Without the television screen's frame, da Vinci's masterpiece forms part of the British colonizing discourse of the cultural and creative superiority of western civilization that legitimated its administrative regimes over the "less civilized." Subject to the implicit gaze of the invisible brown viewer, the painting that universalizes Eurocentric classical measures of artistic perfection is now recast into a postcolonial narrative of the Indian television viewer's competence in cultural consumption. The imprint of the channel and the volume serve to dislocate the power relations that are naturalized in the colonized-colonizer relations of looking, in which Mona Lisa, as the symbol of western artistic achievement, would look down upon the brown audience. Instead, the Eurocentric gaze is challenged by both the omniscience of the technology-capital nexus, and by the postcolonial consumer who has the "luxury of good taste" drawn from colonial breeding and the economic power to purchase the set that is "not designed for just anybody."

It is now possible to delineate the racial politics of the image: why is an Indian television set advertising itself with the image of a white woman? It would appear that the subtext of the advertisement is the promise of whitening, of racial transformation through the consumption of television. Wearing Mona Lisa's mask, a new colonizing force has now emerged, a class that is in the permanent process of racial passage from brown to white, and which may be unwilling, or even helpless, to reverse the material destiny

of this upwardly mobile trajectory of signification. Using the seductive form of a white woman, the advertisement also allays the anxieties that the image of the white male colonizer may evoke.

What is curiously prophetic about the advertisement is its subtle articulation of colonial cultural discourse and postcolonial national assertion with the racial, class, and gender ideologies of economic liberalization that accompanied the birth of consumer television in India in the late 1980s. In this sense, nothing in the image is as historically significant as the invisible television viewer whose social desire, metaphorically embodied in the figure of Mona Lisa, encompassed the fascination for capital-technology, the ideologies of cultural nationalism wrapped in whiteness, and the assertion of postcolonial citizenship through consumption. This discursively constructed viewer of early consumer television represented an important turning point in cultural citizenship in India's postcolonial history. In the late 1980s Doordarshan, the state-owned monopoly television network, was still extremely small by the standards of Indian television today. Broadcasting programs 11 hours a day through its single major channel, Doordarshan featured a varied mix of imports primarily from the U.S., Britain, and the then U.S.S.R., although the most consistently popular programs were the Sunday evening Hindi movie, song sequences from Hindi films, and narrative series in Hindi. In 1987 and 1988, neither economic liberalization to facilitate India's integration into the world capitalist system nor conservative cultural nationalism appeared as hegemonic social trends. Yet, in a short span of time India had reached an agreement on deregulating the economy with the

International Monetary Fund (July 1991) literally admitting the failure of state-led planned development, and the Hindu nationalist parties had successfully implemented a violent anti-Muslim campaign (December 1992), that marked the failure of “unity-in-diversity” nationalism. Looking back from the 21st century, the late 1980s appear to have set up the historical chessboard for the two significant developments that structure India’s political present: neoconservative cultural nationalism espoused by Hindu identity groups, and the liberalization of the economy—spelling the end of the imagination of the nationalist state as the means of more equitable redistribution of social resources.

Theories/Methods/Texts

Framed within this historical horizon, this paper explores some of the persuasive figures of desire, the new forms of cultural citizenship, and the tentative spaces of governance opened up through late 1980s television culture that arguably facilitated both market liberalization and neoconservative cultural nationalism. The term “neoconservative” is used here to suggest both the rightwing predecessors of conservative (Hindu) nationalism during the colonial period, and to indicate the revival of conservative consolidation of imagined communities (imperial, economic, national, religious). To trace these emergent cultural trends during 1987–88, this paper draws its sources from the mainstream English press in India, which caters to a small but politically and culturally influential minority largely consisting of middle and upper classes in urban and metropolitan areas. This period marked the popular telecast of the

Hindu mythological series, the *Ramayana*, the commercial expansion of state-owned television, and what feminists have noted as the shift in gender politics to favor a new alliance between the state and competing religio-cultural patriarchies, Hindu and Muslim (Sangari, 1995).

The emergence of consumer television in a postcolonial society invites an approach that can describe the replay/inversion of colonial ideologies among national elites, the assertion of cultural nationalism, the discursive management of class and gender conflict, as well as new spaces of governance intersecting the state, capital, and religio-cultural communities that television produced (for a timeline of Indian television history, see Singhal & Rogers, 2001). Feminist work on the cultural politics of colonialism has shown how discourses of interracial desire between colonizer and colonized are intertwined with shifting lines of power and control of classes, races, and genders (McClintock, 1995; Paxton, 1999; Ray, 2000; Sharpe, 1993; Spivak, 1988). The interpretive possibilities of this framework are used here to address the cultural politics of what Alexander and Mohanty (1996) term the “recolonizing activity of capital and state” and the reconstitution of communities (racial, religious, cultural, economic) that structures contemporary citizenship. Theoretically, this paper argues that the gendered spaces of desire, agency, and citizenship that television generates are intimately interwoven with the logics of institutions such as the family, the market, the state, and capital, as well as those of imagined communities, whether they are imperial, religio-cultural, or national.

Studies in whiteness as a majority identity categorize it in terms of its

universality and invisibility (Nakayama, 1995), racial particularity (Wiegman, 1999) or in terms of its material privileges and citizenship rights (Lipsitz, 1998). In contrast, the postcolonial whiteness described here opens up and expands the space of socially articulated desire through flexible racial coding, liberating it from more frugal nationalist ideologies and metaphorically profiling new markets. Drawing on feminist scholarship that theorizes the family as an ideological construct, Mankekar (1999, p. 101) states that the “viewing family” was created “as a metonym for the nation, as unit of reception, and as unit of consumption.” This paper argues that the nationalist TV family also emerged as a new, tentative site for social governance that fostered conservative links between the state and the religio-cultural community.

The arguments here are based on a variety of television-related texts (advertisements, government statements, media critic columns, editorials, features, interviews, and news) that appeared in the three leading national English dailies, *Indian Express*, *Hindustan Times*, and *The Times of India*, as well as two prominent English language magazines, *India Today* and *Illustrated Weekly of India* during 1987 and 1988. The English language audience, as Rajagopal (2001, p. 159) points out, are a “well-networked national elite,” who perceive themselves as “agents of modernization” even as they represent the “leading segment of the market in terms of production and consumption decisions.”

The main themes of these 300-odd mainstream writings and reports, which form the larger archive of the paper, included the state-planned commercial expansion of television as medium, industry, and infrastructure;

the effect of television on issues of nation, community, and religion; women’s images on television and women-oriented narrative series; the need for increased state regulation of television content; and critiques of the political bias of the medium. My explicit search in this archive of print media texts on television was for the cultural logics of consumption of television, especially those which facilitated the two important political transformations in postcolonial India: the liberalization of the economy and the emergence of conservative community politics. In reviewing the discourse around television, I sought semiotic and rhetorical clusters that thematized the expansion of capital/market through symbolism of social desire, and asserted the viewer’s cultural nationalism. The state’s thrust in developing television technology, and in expanding the reach of television through technological initiatives, formed a significant focus of news reports on television during the period (“AIR, TV network,” 1988; “Direct Madras TV,” 1987; “Doordarshan outlay,” 1987; “Govt. firm on raising TV,” 1988; “Hyderabad TV,” 1987; “Jaipur TV,” 1987; “Madras TV’s,” 1988; “TV to reach,” 1988). In conjunction with the state-led expansion of television technology was the sales boom in television as a commodity (50 percent increase in 1987) leading to brand diversity and competition (“Boom in sales,” 1988). This emerging alliance of technology, market, and capital led me to focus on selected advertisements for major TV set manufacturing brands that narrativized this discursive conjuncture.

The cultural logics of the transition to consumer television were particularly evident in the ads that celebrated a contradictory combination of de-

sires, blending multiple ideologies of colonialism and capitalism to assert the power of the Indian viewer. The flexible use of east/west, colonial/national difference in their service of the market, in combination with the discourse of a new national pride in market, capital, and consumption that took on hues of whiteness appeared to be symbolic of the economic transformations that were taking place. The whitened bodies so common in Indian advertising and on globalized television at the turn of this century seemed to have their noticeable predecessors in the examples found in 1987 and 1988. Heralding a new gender politics, women's racially coded bodies metaphorically profiled markets that reflected both sophisticated tastes and affirmed ideologies of domestic consumption.

Looking back from the present, television's contradictory role in the late 1980s was to open the middle class home to the apparent anarchy of market-based social desires and increased cultural regulation. Seeking to draw out this contradiction in terms of discursive conflict, I focused on news reports reflecting the tensions, real and imagined, between the market and culture, between consumer urges and class relations, between modernization of the family/community and the regulation of gender. Despite the discourses counterposing cultural nationalism against westernization, or describing the vulnerability of child consumers, what was notable was the continuing economic fact of the consumer boom (Katrak, 1987). Through which cultural logics did viewers continue to consume television-oriented commodity culture even as they sought to protect themselves from the colonizing onslaught from capital, state, and market? This question led

me to link together diverse press statements that rhetorically constructed the family as the victim of television's consumer culture through the figures of women and children, and the family as the site of resistance to cultural change through the alliance between the state and patriarchal communities. The discourse of the embattled yet consuming family and its reconstituted gender politics formed part of the contradictory, even disparate, ideological justifications for the forging of conservative, regulatory links between the state, family, and community that were vital to both economic liberalization and to the Hinduization of the nation. Foucault's position that power can be studied through its antagonistic strategies rather than from its internal rationality (1982), as well as his analysis of sexual regulation through the site of the family (1978), provided the methodological impetus here.

In what follows, the first two sections of analyses use the publicity images that advertised major TV set brands during 1987 and 1988 to describe how new modes of social desire, metaphorically represented in the nationalist viewer/producer (who can competently decode the vocabularies of colonialism and capitalism), and the packaging of technology in whitened images, lay out a culturally attractive logic for the promises of capital-technology and market expansion. The last two sections describe how the critical responses to television-led expansion of consumption are discursively treated as a problem of ungovernable social desire and of possible westernization of the middle class consuming family whose subjects are primarily women and children. Through the symbolic terrain of shifting gender politics, the consuming family is projected as the primary victim of market

expansion and consumerist desires. It is represented, therefore, as the genuine site of resistance to cultural westernization, thus setting the stage for new, conservative ties of governance between the state and the religio-national community. These arguments expand on the recent work on Indian television by Rajagopal (2001) regarding the medium's creation of a space for both consumption and Hindu nationalism, and by Mankekar (1999) on the reconstitution of gender, family, and community in television's nationalist culture.

The Techno-Capital Nexus and the Myth of Male Creation

In this section, I focus on selected television advertisements featured in the English press which symbolically paved the way for market liberalization by asserting the power of capital-technology and by evoking the growing self-assertion of Asian masculinity against western models. While the majority of ads played on the post-colonial viewer's desire for western techno-modernity, noteworthy in the context of emerging markets were the narratives of transnational masculine collaboration, and myths of male generative power that promised to provide the postcolonial, implicitly male viewer with new, indefinitely open domains for self-assertion as a market player.

Magical Arrival of TV

The increased visibility of television marketing was related to the almost overnight expansion of the television industry within India after the state licensed huge production capacities and liberalized the import of ready-to-

assemble TV hardware kits (Pendakur, 1989). Major manufacturers such as Bush, Onida, and Videocon almost doubled production during 1985–1987 in the intense market competition to meet expanding middle class demands for quality color TV sets. (“Battling for buyers,” 1987). The opening up of market spaces was accompanied by subtextual narratives of a new colonial discovery, this time featuring Japan. For example, the arrival of Sony's color television brand on the consumer market was accompanied by imagery reminiscent of colonial voyages of European explorers to the Orient. The ad campaign, an example of which can be seen in the February 20, 1987 *Indian Express*, featured a huge ship on the screen with wind sails filled out by the sea breeze. The ad evoked the remote, unnamed elsewhere from which the technological object arrives on the shores of the nation.

In another campaign, television starred in a script which wove together magic, seduction, and conquest by the stranger from the foreign spaces of tele-technology. In *The Times of India's* March 30, 1987 ad, Robotex TV described itself as flying in from the “unexplored vistas of tele-technology” and arriving into the home of the nation “like a stranger.” This romantic stranger, the copy promised, would “enamour you with its magnetic looks” and “conquer teleworld” with an “armory of sophisticated features.” In both the campaigns, the narrative of the civilizing colonizer was subtly rewritten in terms of sophistication, taste, and the desirability of technology.

At a historical period when ad texts in print media hardly laid out layered narratives, many television ad campaigns were notably non-anthropomorphic, allowing a new semiotic

language of capital-technology, unfamiliar to the nation-under-development, to grow and gain legitimacy. Part of the mystique of the working of capital and the fetishizing of the techno-commodity-object, television sets sprung up in ads independent of human labor, agency, or national/local context. Ads in which TV sets dominated the visual space with their magnified presence seemed proudly to announce the arrival of TV from an origin of technology-capital. The advertisement for Orion TV, appearing in the *Indian Express* on July 18, 1987, typified this trend, with the space simply filled up by a huge television set, and the copy with a list of technological features. The logic of such images was the self-evident power of technology and capital as the model of social success that the transnational advance of western capitalism had set for the world. Luxuriating in the participation in such power was the elite postcolonial subject whose cultural citizenship in the independent nation was shifting in accordance with the expanding markets and ability to consume western techno-modernity.

Images of Male Generation

The gender politics of this empowered postcolonial subject are strikingly visible in two instances described below in which both the corporate world and the state used narratives of masculine generative power to represent their successful deployment of technology and capital. Beltek's popular ad campaign, as seen in the *Illustrated Weekly of India* of January 10, 1988, glorified the transnational alliance of masculinities. The television set featured in the ad depicted one of the crowning artistic achievements of the

Italian High Renaissance, Michelangelo Buonarroti's Sistine Chapel fresco, *The Creation of Man*. The copy read, "Painted by Michelangelo. Sharp focus by Beltek." In the original fresco that has become so familiar an icon in visual culture, the whirlwind-like Creator leans down from the sky, fingers outstretched, to give life to Man. Receiving the benediction of life force, with his own fingers reaching out toward the Creator, Man lies in repose on a barren hillside, as if about to uncoil into life. The television screen in the ad cut the original so that only the outstretched hands and fingers of Man and the Creator were in sharp focus. Using this familiar cut, the power of television technology eliminated both man and god, and replaced the classical myth of masculine self-generation with a commercial one.

As with Mona Lisa, we see that the imperial/colonial encounter is re-enacted through the reproduction of the painting with the inversion of the colonizer/colonized relationship, where the colonizer's artist would envy the creation of the colonized. Challenging the well-known achievements of Renaissance art, its capacities of close observation and precise representation (Mitter, 1994), the copy stated, "Thanks to Beltek you have a piece of art even Michelangelo would envy." The triumphant tone appeared to suggest that the east would mirror the west and capture its exact copy through apt technological means so as to assert its own masculine, generative power. If the colonized spectator, as Shohat and Stam (1996) contend, alters the very process of identification through a situated reading, the above example shows that alternative readings may challenge one form of domination (colonialism) while reinforcing

another (capitalism). Reversing, inverting, or challenging colonial patterns of desire can be a way of securing spectator identification that is perfectly consonant with consumer capitalism.

Another narrative of masculine generative power and collaboration marked a significant, if futuristic, moment in the re-imagination of Asia that once again demonstrates how television expansion was related to the developmental state's growing alliance to transnational markets, capital, and technology. This new Asia, that Ching (2000, p. 257) notes, is not the exotic, orientalist Asia imagined from the western colonizing perspective or an anti-imperialist Asia seen from the perspective of colonized nations. Instead, what is prefigured in the ad is Asia as the subject and agent of economic globalization, and as transnational producers and consumers of capitalism's future. As seen in the *Indian Express*, February 20, 1987, this ad marked an important event in India's television history: the inauguration of the first state-owned firm, set up with Japanese multinational collaboration, to produce color picture tubes. Uptron, which was to collaborate with the Japanese multinational Toshiba in this project, published congratulatory messages from the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, President Giani Zail Singh, as well as officials of Toshiba and Mitsubishi, symbolizing the proud alliance of national and corporate power.

The letters repeatedly emphasized the start of a new technological era with the masculine assertion of the "erection of a milestone" in India's development. Mitsubishi senior official T. Yamada stated, "The most significant point of this project lies in the fact that this is a joint business venture between India and Japan

It is our duty and our great pleasure to breed a 'baby' just conceived here today." The Uptron plant, engendered from transnational masculine collaboration, was fondly admired by both the paternalistic figures of the Indian nation-state and of multinational corporations. The growth of the technological baby was identified with the development of television as a symbol of the technological progress of the nation.

In effect, we see that the expansion of the television market is partly made desirable through colonial imagery and narrative patterns that promise the Indian middle class viewer the pleasure and power of inhabiting and possessing new spaces of technology and capital. While some ads flattered the knowledgeable postcolonial viewer's literacy in western culture, imagery, and technology, others played on a discourse of national generative power, pride, and resistance to the shadows of the colonial past through new forms of consumption. Critical to the appeal of these images was the articulation of postcolonial cultural citizenship in terms that successfully mediated the colonial classical legacy, as well as the imperialist nexus of capital and technology. The gender politics of these images can be seen more clearly in the use of women's bodies in television's publicity culture that I describe in the next section.

Postcolonial Whiteness: Promising Class and Race Mobility

The transition from the post-independence state that represented egalitarian, "good" nationalist aspirations, to the market nation, was accompanied by images that suggested

racial and cultural transformation from brown to white/western (as noted with Mona Lisa, and other invocations of colonial signs). Images of whiteness, whitened bodies, and hybrid foreign bodies formed an inseparable part of television and television advertising which global consumer culture was to build on later in the 1990s. These dynamic signifiers, which did not point to whiteness as a fixed racial identity, can be characterized as examples of what I have termed post-colonial whiteness. Rather than stabilizing racial identity, the flexible bodies that exemplified postcolonial whiteness opened up new spaces of desire and commodification, forming a culturally seductive logic for market liberalization.

The temporalities of the promises of race-like transformations were visible in the use of women's bodies in television advertising. The evolutionary logic of race set up a cultural gender clock in television-related texts and images that differentiated between white/westernized women, women-on-the-way-to-whiteness, hybrid, foreign-looking women, the modernized traditional woman, and so on. The signifying interplay of these fluctuating, ambiguous images suggested the infinite possibilities of transformation and mobility to the socially ascending postcolonial viewer. Symbolically, these images also formed intertextual links with existing social hierarchies of caste and community in India, where propertied castes and more privileged communities could aspire for social mobility through consumption.

Hybrid Colonial Travelers

Among the nomadic publicity figures, the white-like woman and the

traditional Indian woman occupied significantly different roles with relation to television as a commodity and as a medium that were based on their temporal position on modernity's evolution scale. A popular magazine advertisement for Blue Diamond television, seen in the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, November 23, 1987, featured a blue-eyed woman with light eyebrows and hair so bright that it could be blonde. The copy read, "Discover the breathtaking colours of Blue Diamond technology," thus commodifying whiteness itself in its seductive guise as territory to be discovered. With her cool, haughty, challenging look the woman embodied both the arrogance of technology now cast in a narrative of racial superiority, and its end product, the cold, brilliant blue television screen. The labor of technology is itself performed, as a Binatone CD ad states in the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, November 29, 1987, "by dedicated men who have been constantly at work behind the scenes to bring about breakthrough after breakthrough in television technology." The concealed labor of white men, who were completely absent in visual representations, strangely acquires the face of the white woman in whom the imperial gaze finds a temporary home. The white woman not only appeared as co-extensive with the television set, but also in other covert narratives of racial superiority that sold television's accessories. For instance, Magnascope's December 17, 1987 ad in the *Illustrated Weekly of India* for a television screen featured a white woman tennis player in a simultaneously inviting and challenging pose—a feminine body language that the conjunction of technology and capital constantly employs even today in computer ads.

A memorable advertising icon of the late eighties perhaps best captures the sense of expansion of the spaces of desire and the growing search for markets in uncharted territories. This was a textile advertisement—significant enough since the growing genre of sponsored series were backed by textile companies such as Bombay Dyeing, Mafatlal, and the newly-emerging Reliance Industries. The advertisement featured a solitary foreign-looking woman, loosely draped in a sari (the traditional women's clothing familiar to all viewers) as if the garment was strange and exotic to her, wandering around in equally exoticised village settings. Television critic Bhushan (1987b) commented satirically: "It is amazing how a new myth, that of the white woman, is being sold on Door-darshan these days. So here is invitation to Indian women to ... distance themselves from Indian reality—the world of bullock carts and village wells; to become fascinating to Indian men."

This stranger, who in a series of ads traveled through village India unraveling the seven yard traditional sari in unexpected ways, re-enacts a narrative of exploration and discovery. As McClintock (1995) points out, the imperial conqueror is usually embodied as the male who possessively surveys the virgin territory of the yet unconquered land. While this image is remarkable in terms of appropriating national space as foreign space, it is also significant that there is no imperial masculine eye here that divides and possesses. Instead, we see the recirculation of desire through the almost innocuous, languid figure of the idle rich upper class woman who orientalizes the rural space. Given the ambiguous caption, "You fascinate me," the image suggests the unstable

fluctuations of desire between the rural and the urban, the foreign and the familiar, signifying the ambivalent, restless, nomadic mobility of emerging commodity culture's search for new markets through the traveler.

Subjects of Helpless Desire

In contrast to the masculine viewer, whose nationalist pride and ability to regenerate capital-technology were affirmed in television ads, there were very few advertisements of television sets that featured Indian women, traditional or modern, in ways that associated them with capital-technology. The exception to this gendered absence were professional, westernized women, as in Hitachi/Weston's ad for Cetron TV in the *Indian Express*, May 1, 1987, featuring a short-haired (cultural code for westernized and modern) Indian woman, with the copy reading, "Cetron doesn't just bring you the news. It makes news." Clearly, television itself was the star of the script which listed features such as computerised digital display and automatic channel search at a time when the nation had only one main broadcast channel, and a second channel that was still taking shape. Unlike her western counterpart, who provocatively symbolizes the challenge of technology, or the more glamorous native counterparts who appeared as the content of the medium, the more traditional upper caste woman appeared as the enraptured consumer of television content. Keltron's television ad in the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, May 24, 1987, featured the close-up of a young woman with long, loose, hair, and traditional features. Her tearful eyes and clenched fists expressed the anguish and ecstasy of the viewing subject. The

copy, "Keltron TV. It simply absorbs you," reflected the young woman's immersion in the viewing content as well as her emotional abandon and vulnerability before the medium. Similarly, Onida's popular campaign as seen in the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, March 6, 1988, inscribed an imaginably female spectator into a western consumer myth. The visual featured a television set with a cracked screen and a shadowy monster, closely resembling pictures of the devil, with long horns, long fingernails, long ears, and protruding eyes. "Neighbour's envy. Owner's pride," read the copy which described the seemingly feminine neighbor's reaction "when admiration takes on the colour of envy and hands tighten around objects that can be hurled." The stereotypically feminine emotion of envy here is translated into the western myth of the devilish, almost forbidden, seduction of technology, even as the accentuated eyes and ears of the beast suggest the consumer's sensual extensions. The ad imagines a feminine presence overcome by passions: envious, demonic, and destructive in her guise of the consuming subject.

Represented as advertisers, content, and consumers of television in the symbolic world created around the medium, women's racially coded bodies (which resonate with caste, class, and community power relations) opened up ambivalent and conflicting spaces of desire. These new modalities of desire formed part of the symbolic logic for the economic transformations to which television was vital. The significance of postcolonial whiteness was not its symbolic investment in more static, older, colonial racial codes, but its resonance with oncoming transnational economic transformations of market liberalization.

Postcolonial whiteness opened up new, flexible, almost postnationalist spaces of desire, discovery, and conquest for the shape-shifting, consuming citizen, even as it set up conditions for race-like notions of community and class exclusivity. This threatening new space in which consumption, modernization/westernization, and social transformation were yoked together appeared to call for new modes of governance and resistance.

The Nationalist Family as TV Citizen

While advertisements portrayed images of and desires for transformation, writers and critics in the mainstream English press expressed social concerns over the ways in which the family and the relations of gender, class, and sexuality it represented would be reorganized through television-led transformations. Statements in the English press about the family, gender, and class, detailed below, appeared as the "reality checks" for consumer television and cultural westernization, with the family functioning silently as a metaphor for the social order of the nation as well as gender and class hierarchy. As I discuss below, the consuming family appeared as the victim of the market that television represented through the discursive figures of its two most vulnerable members: the innocent child consumer who metaphorically represented helpless desire, and the woman, invariably inseparable from the family, as the undisciplined subject of new television culture (which I analyze in the next section). Through these susceptible figures, the consuming family appeared, somewhat farcically, as the vanguard of national culture under threat of westernization

(as ironic as this idea might seem after centuries of British colonialism).

In the late 1980s, class formed a subject of debate as consumer television's role in promoting social elitism was critiqued by intellectuals, media commentators, and activists, even as it was admitted by the government (Bhushan, 1987a; Devadas, 1988; Mallik, 1987b; "Media to focus," 1988; Narula, 1988; "TV approach elitist," 1988). These criticisms, however, conflated issues of cultural westernization and class conflict, framing the discussion on elitism from the perspective of the consuming middle and upper class family, who implicitly appeared as the national citizen-subjects of television. Television advertisements, some commentators observed, had created a social elite who were "removed from their roots and moorings" even as they acquired "more and more decision-making power" in the nation ("Impact of TV," 1987). Parliament members across the board said Doordarshan's elitist advertising policy spread consumerism and profited multinationals ("MPs want TV," 1987; "TV ad policy," 1987). The slippage between consumer television as an agent of cultural westernization, and consumer television as a source of sharpened class differences resulted in the translation of class issues as cultural issues. The consumer goods advertised on television, it was stated, were luxuries "in our context" and likely to create "unrealistic desires" since not all viewers had disposable incomes. Left party members argued that the serials had no social purpose and simply propagated a "five-star culture." The consumer advertisements which reached "weaker sections" and "rural areas" could cause social strife since they did not present a "realistic view of life," politicians stated in a

parliamentary debate ("MPs want TV," 1987). The "overt and covert efforts to swing the nation toward rank consumerism, the creation of superfluous wants, the raising of unattainable social expectations and consequent frustrations," intellectuals warned, could lead to social tension and unrest (Chowla, 1987). Dissolving issues of class conflict into desire, cultural invasion, and consumer vulnerability, these statements also appeared to place emphasis on the dangers of conspicuous consumption rather than on class differences themselves. Rhetorically, this ensured that class relations were framed primarily from the perspective of the consuming national family, excluding non-consuming communities such as "weaker sections" and "rural areas" which were once television's principal audience ("TV approach elitist," 1988).

Questions of consumption also dissolved into issues of cultural and national integrity where India might lose its newfound national identity through the susceptible members of its national family, the child and the woman. Television, a writer pointed out, would lead India to follow the "destiny of the west," where the medium had played a key role in propagating consumer culture (Chowla, 1987). A national media feedback report, cited in Chowla (1987), criticized sponsored programs for propagating "false values" and "life-styles inconsistent with the national psyche and destination." The advertisements, according to responses recorded in this report from a nationwide audience, did not conform to the values of the majority of the viewers, particularly the manner in which "female figures" and children were "employed in persuasive messages."

Indeed, the elite and middle class

child, the sociological counterpart to the many that frequented television commercials, appeared in print reports as the unruly consuming subject. Rhetorically, the figure of the elite and middle class child suggested the helplessness of the family, especially the mother, in controlling processes of consumption. A study by a national institute stated that commercials presented unwholesome images to child viewers: "pop drinking, chocolate eating, ribboned children whose hurt is relieved by band aid; tea and coffee sipping adults who sit down to sumptuous meals; ... and jogging, surf-riding teenagers whose pleasures are enhanced by fragrant soaps, shampoos, and cosmetics" ("TV policy," 1987). A humorous columnist parodied the child who substituted brand names for nouns to designate simple objects such as a glass of juice or a bar of soap in a school test, much to the embarrassment of its series-addicted mother (Bansal, 1987). More serious issues were raised about the erosion of the reading habit (Nadkarni, 1988), about the sponsorship of children's programs by toy, chocolate, and soft drink manufacturers (Bhushan, 1987a), and about the possibility that children would imitate television violence (Chopra, 1988).

Positioning the child as the victim of television and the market also silently naturalized the consuming family as the subject of television. In that sense, the elite child consumer played a significant role in normalizing class relations vis-à-vis television, and drawing attention away from the rural child whose pedagogical needs had legitimated the state's investment in television (Pendakur, 1989). The exclusion of the rural child as television's consumer is illustrated in a photograph of more than a dozen village children

huddled on the floor before a TV set that sat on a teachers' table, in front of the blackboard. The accompanying news report cited the many failures of educational television: "nobody wants to take on educating the rural outback in an age of commercialism. The private sector is interested in sponsoring programmes, but for urban children with enough filial clout to buy the sponsor's toys and other wares" (Devadas, 1988, p. 134).

The discourse of unreal desires, family disruption through children's desires, and class disruption through visibility of social desires, all appeared to call for new modes of resistance and governance. The middle and upper class family was projected as the vulnerable subject of a discourse of ungovernable desires (so that the child consumer seemed almost metaphoric) and television was seen to have an "overpowering influence" in "infantilising the people, literate and illiterate alike" (Upreti, 1988). As I point out in the next section, the forms of resistance and the forms of governance adopted toward such desires were not necessarily sharply distinct.

Gender and Governance of the TV Family

The translatability of issues of culture and consumption, and their politically conservative reworking through the alliance of the state and patriarchal community were particularly evident in television's rearticulation of gender politics. Television's gender discourses articulated state, market, and family together in ways that affirmed both market capitalism and a new, conservative consolidation of imagined communities (religio-cultural, national,

economic). Given the boom in brands and products during the period, the family was now home to a wide variety of new products including noodles, toys, chocolates, soft drinks, packaged foods, household gadgets, readymade textiles, new soaps and detergents (Bhushan, 1987a; Katrak, 1987). The ideologies of consumption that threatened the social formations the family sustained, such as caste, community, and class, were now rearticulated through a new gender politics symbolized in the figure of Lalithaji.

Lalithaji, an advertising icon who emerged battle-scarred from the detergent wars of late 1980s television culture, is arguably the counterpoint to Mona Lisa (for more on the detergent wars, see Rajagopal, 1999). Lalithaji symbolized the combination of the traditional, upper caste Hindu housewife and the wise woman consumer (for a different analysis, see Mankekar, 1999). An experienced, middle-aged shopper, she appeared in impeccably starched saris, hair in a bun, sindoor on her forehead suggesting her Hindu identity, and wisely choosing a particular detergent over the many others. The “ji” suffixed to her name signified the respect that the shopkeeper gave her, enhancing the weight of her opinion as well as her hierarchical status over the middle caste petty traders. Her pristine clothing suggested her composure during the daily battle of running a home and family in the new wilderness of the metropolis where one must encounter and outwit lower caste middlemen peddlers. Cool and judgmental in demeanour, she represented the woman, marked in clearly recognizable ways as a Hindu, who could hold her own in the new postcolonial struggle, choose the right detergent, make the wise decision that would out-think the rest of the consumers, the

market, and the modernizing social forces that sought to redefine the conditions of her traditional Hindu being. As the disciplined yet empowered consumer who successfully walked the line between tradition and market capitalism, Lalithaji seemed to symbolize the gender reforms that were so essential for television’s consumer culture to take root.

Simultaneously, the conservative Hindu woman consumer was empowered with a new ideological arsenal through the telecast of the Hindu mythological series, *Ramayan* and *Mahabharata*. Categorized by several writers as an assertion of national and religious tradition, the *Ramayan*, according to one writer, “proves beyond a doubt that a majority of Indians, despite the continuing onslaught of Western liberal values, still cherish to live psychically in a world which has become a part of the past” (Upreti, 1988). The mythological series generated neotraditional spaces which allowed conservative narratives of gender to be recouped within a discourse of cultural nationalism (Zacharias, 2001). The telecast of these mythologies was socially consolidated by the emergence of the rightist Hindutva identity movement (Rajagopal, 2001). Even as the state championed gender reforms, its media culture invented new spaces for the production of Hindu tradition as national tradition and of a new, reformed Hindu womanhood as national womanhood. Gendered ideologies of domesticity, fidelity, family and community loyalty as well as caste hierarchy, were reaffirmed in novel yet archaic languages of proper conduct and morality.

Through figures such as Sita and Draupadi, mythological aspects of womanhood, docile or powerful, were

revived at a critical time to assert Hindu identity and the relations of power entwining family, kin, and community. The success of the mythological series was not necessarily in reproducing the mythological texts themselves but, as with the Lalithaji example, in their easy translatability into the gender politics of consumer television which invented an all-new traditional family, affirmed women's agency as home-makers and consumers, and reinscribed their embeddedness within patriarchal community boundaries.

The discursive translatability of this politics of community (and the religious patriarchies it sustains) can be seen in the protests and debates in response to Doordarshan's screening of foreign films late at night. A host of organizations, prominent among them the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party and its women's wing, Mahila Morcha, led protest marches in New Delhi against the films, charging that they offended the moral and cultural values of the nation. "Stop cheap films," became the slogan of the groups which saw in them the power to "lead astray Indian youth" and cause degeneration of morals ("Adult films," 1987; "More protest TV," 1987). Members of parliament led by the Bharatiya Janata Party criticized the import and screening of films with sexually explicit content, including international classics such as Werner Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun* ("Govt. flayed," 1987; "Late night movies," 1987). An elected representative in parliament pointed out that it was "awkward" to view films with adult content in the presence of "women members of the family," ("TV programmes," 1988). Women and children formed the subjects of forbidden sexuality in this debate. In

an article provocatively entitled, "No sex please, we're Indian," journalist Karlekar (1987) commented, "Sex was unknown in India till 11:30pm on Tuesday, April 7, 1987. Husbands and wives lived like brothers and sisters. All conceptions were immaculate . . . All this vanished . . . when Doordarshan started telecasting adult late night films."

In the debate that ensued, a letter from a viewer perhaps summed up the new television ideology that was taking shape by distinguishing a home from a theater: "... we are Indian, and we, all the members of the family together, do not intend to witness sexually explicit scenes. The morcha [protest] was against taking explicit sex, and that too in late hours, into the Indian home" (John, 1987). Curiously, the more private space of the television home became a site of national culture, and therefore of nation-state governance, in opposition to the public space of the theater, demonstrating the links between patriarchal control of sexuality, the television family, the imagined communities of the nation, religion, and the state. Responding to concerns voiced by parliament members, the Information and Broadcasting Ministry issued an assurance that the government would not "telecast anything offensive to Indian culture and traditions" and would institute "family viewing" as a selection criteria for programs ("TV programmes," 1988). The screening limits on foreign films allow us to see how the discourse against cultural westernization can easily transform into one that appears to call for cultural surveillance of national values by the state. When the management of desires evoked by television appeared as a critical issue debated in the press, calls for governance of such desires were issued mutually by both the

family and the state. A new, sexually disciplined nationalist family was projected in the debate, which would consume television's commodities even as it governed desires that might threaten the relations that the family naturalized. The state promised to safeguard the traditional and emerging power bases of the religio-cultural family represented by the Hindu parties and to elevate it as the representative family for the nation. Enshrining the family, disciplined through conservative gender norms, as the national subject of television and as the site of resistance to non-Indian values worked to generate a new space for cultural regulation.

In Conclusion: Space of the Aftermath

This paper explored the images and discourses of cultural transformation at an important period in India's television history when the medium morphed from its developmental, pedagogical avatar into a profitable, fast-growing, commercial outlet. Cultural citizenship, mediated through television, took an important turn such that a neoconservative politics of community could emerge alongside its strange bedfellow, economic liberalization. An image called up by an optimistic reviewer perhaps reflects an emerging new mode of social governance that is inseparable from viewer desire. Despite commercialization and a flood of sponsored TV sitcoms, including a remake of *Dynasty*, she wrote that middle class social comedies still presented a "very real world" far removed from the glittering Bombay film industry. "Now even the slum-dwellers, the driver and his family, with a little black and white TV set in the servants' quarter of affluent mansions started identifying with the TV

characters spouting socialism in that other popular serial, *Nukkad'* (Malik, 1987a). This image spatially segregates different classes without conflict, reduces classes to families, and transforms class relations to viewing modalities even as it democratizes the right to "spout socialism" within an upper class image of harmonious governance. Self-governing consuming families (the ones with little sets and the others) are reconciled on the level playing fields of narrative desire.

Even as this image naturalized the divisions between television families, the hues of whiteness explored in this paper show how national elite groups desire and produce favorable racial coding and subtle racial ideologies in ways that suggest their affiliations to postnational, profitable, global agendas. Without reducing whiteness to a universal discourse or to a culturally relative ideology, we can still see how racial codes are intertwined with the rearticulation and reproduction of power relations between national classes and communities. Postcolonial whiteness—the hue that tentatively emerges after anticolonial nationalist ideology has run out of steam, and a new, transnational culture is taking shape—is significant not as the material presence of whitening bodies, but for the play space of the multi-lingual markets, so essential to economic liberalization, that it allows the nationalist viewer/reader to travel through.

This essay also addressed the conservative nationalist reaction to the seemingly open space of social desires and cultural westernization that television heralded. The world of markets and media, as Rajagopal (1999) has argued, is the discursive context for the production and reproduction of communities, and for the creation of communities of consumption that in

creasingly determine the scope of citizenship. The gender politics of the production of the community in the discursive context of the market takes on a contradictory form, where linkages between the patriarchal community, the market, and the state create the ground for conservative alliances. If the citizen-subject of earlier television was the rural farmer, the village child in need of education, and socially marginal communities, the citizen-subject of the late 1980s was the family, identifiable as the middle and upper class consumers of television and the commodities it advertised. The discursively produced postcolonial family functioned as a legitimizing force for both market liberalization and for neoconservative political tendencies expressed through the state and religious community. The restructuring of relationships between the state, class, community, and family was negotiated through a new gender politics that television played a vital part in espousing. In this emerging conservative turn, the family, symbolized by its women and children, was projected as the site and measure of national tradition, and therefore of national resistance to foreign incursions, as part of a new system of cultural governance that crystallized during the next decade.

The short career of national television before it merges into global culture also shows how academic categories such as colonial, postcolonial, national, neocolonial, and global are indistinct. They often overlap materially, symbolically, and discursively, even as they appear to be temporally

simultaneous. This is especially so for contemporary studies of media in which film, television, and the Internet all constitute part of the communication archive. Given the differences in archives and sites of enunciation, media scholars play a complex game with time and epistemes. In this sense, what can be described is, in Foucault's terms, a "space of dispersion" of discourses rather than (dis)unities such as the national, colonial, imperial, or global (1971, p. 10). This space can only be created by revisiting the "rhetorical separation of cultures," as Said (1994, p. 38) terms it, and rereading them to reveal their "intertwined and overlapping histories" (p. 18). We have to begin by interweaving the multiple, discrepant experiences of colonialism, imperialism, nationalism, globalization, and militarism that constitute the space of dispersion of media discourses. This epistemic space is now irrevocably one of the aftermath: "cultural politics after cultural studies" (Edwards and Martin, 2002, p. 4), gender and sexuality after transnational feminist theory, race theory after hybridity, Marxism after the micro-left, the right after its militarization, postcolonial studies after globalization, globalization theories after 9/11, and the subjects that breathe after the subject died. In this space of the aftermath, new modes of governance, citizenship, desire and agency require even more reflexive, flag-free inquiry than this essay attempts from its own invisible but safe middle class location in between the "affluent mansions" and the "servants' quarters" of the new world.

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Received March 20, 2002

Final revision received January 1, 2003

Accepted May 10, 2003