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ADAPTATIONS FOR DOORDARSHAN DURING THE LATE 1980s: A HISTORICAL REVIEW

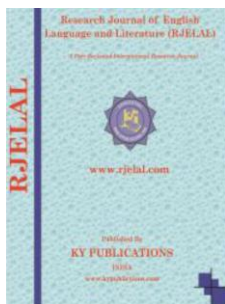
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ABSTRACT

Since the advent of Doordarshan, the only national television broadcasting channel in India, the late 1980s period witnessed seismic shifts in the reception of shows that appeared on TV such as *Buniyaad* (1986), *Malgudi Days* (1986) *Nukkad* (1986), *Katha Sagar* (1986), *Feluda* (1986), *Tamas* (1987), *Shrikant* (1987), *Ramayana* (1987), *Mahabharata* (1988) *Bharat Ek Khoj* (1988), *Wagle ki Duniya* (1988), *Mr. Yogi* (1988) *Vikram Betal* (1988) and others. They were the literary adaptations in those days that were immensely popular and well received. These were not just adaptations of literary pieces but, in subtle ways, were quintessential metanarratives of 'nation' constructed by the then class in power. The paper attempts to analyze the connections of the literary works with the context in which they were selected for Doordarshan adaptations to create a hegemonic and ideological image of nation. These adaptations motivated by ideology, constructed a perpetual image of nation as majoritarian middle class - upper caste. The paper attempts to answer how the texts adapted for Doordarshan became tools for propagating ideology of the ruling class. So theoretically, using Patrick Cattrysse's ideas of 'selection policy' and 'adaptation policy,' their functions and relations (1992), the paper will analyze the politics of literary adaptations for Doordarshan during 1980s.

Keywords: Adaptation, Doordarshan, Hegemony, Nation and Ideology.

Rise of Doordarshan

Ever since the advent of visual media, literary works were adapted not only for two-hour movies but also for TV. To understand adaptations, according to Linda Hutcheon, 'we need to examine the forces that have changed culture'(2006) hence it becomes pertinent to consider the seismic shifts happened in India for the mediums of mass communication particularly television. So tripping back to the history of television in India, it was Doordarshan, a free satellite national channel. It was

a major milestone for emergence of TV viewership culture in India. Before Doordarshan, television in India began on 15 September 1959 on experimental basis under All India Radio. During those times there were only two one-hour educational programs a week generally meant for school children and farmers. It was a time, when not all in the country could afford to have TV sets in their homes. With the recommendations made by the Asok Chanda Committee in 1966 to expand the reach of broadcasting, gradually by 1970s, several

community television sets were installed in rural and urban areas and also in schools for wider dissemination of information. This move of the government proved to be one of the important landmarks in the history of Indian television. However, it was in the year 1976 when Doordarshan, under Prasar Bharati, a government public service broadcaster, came into existence as a separate department independent of All India Radio. In the year 1978 Varghese Committee had made recommendations to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for the organizational restructuring of broadcasting in India. The then Indian government used ATS-6 American Satellite for broadcasting but from the year 1982, Doordarshan started providing coverage through the national satellite INSAT 1A and then for the first time the transmission was in colour. It also started providing content from other countries. Slowly, apart from educational shows about agriculture, news, health and family planning; entertainment, in the forms of dance, music, drama and folk arts, was also included in the telecasts.

Emergence of TV series during the 1980s

In 1983 government sanctioned a huge expansion of setting up the transmission throughout the country. Consequently from the year 1984 came an era of TV series on Doordarshan such as *Humlog* (1984-85), *Ye Jo Hai Zindagi* (1984), *Rajani* (1985), *Karamchand* (1985), *Buniyaad* (1986), *Malgudi Days* (1986) *Nukkad* (1986). *Katha Sagar* (1986), *Feluda* (1986), *Tamas*(1987), *Shrikant* (1987), *Ramayana* (1987), *Mahabharata* (1988) *Bharat Ek Khoj* (1988), *Wagle ki Duniya* (1988), *Mr. Yogi* (1988) *Vikram Betal* (1988) and others. All the Doordarshan TV series, most of them were literary adaptations. During the period 1984-90, adaptations on Doordarshan addressed some or the other aspects that reflected an inclination towards the life of urban middle class society in India. *Humlog* dealt with issues of a middle class Indian family. *Ye Jo Hai Zindagi* was about the humorous lives of common people. *Rajani* was about a woman's fight against injustice in the morally corrupt society. *Karamchand* was the first detective fiction on Doordarshan, highlighted the ways for people to be vigilant. *Buniyaad* addressed the trauma and aftermath of

partition in India. *Nukkad* talked about the lives of people who gather at a road end. *Malgudi Days* was a literary adaptation of the text by R.K. Narayan, dealt with the idea of typical Indian life with all its glory and shame. *Katha Sagar* was a series adapted from the short stories by Rabindranath Tagore, Anton Chekov, Leo Tolstoy and others. *Feluda* adapted from Satyajit Ray's collection of detective short stories set in Bengal. *Tamas*, an adaptation of Bhisham Sahni's novel, interweaved the lives of young innocent people caught during and after the partition of India. *Shrikant* adapted from Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya's novel *Shrikanto*, was about a man's journey from Calcutta to Burma. *Ramayana* based on the Sanskrit epic poem *Ramacharitmanas* by Poet Tulsidas told the story of Rama, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. *Mahabharata* was an adaptation of *Mahabharata*, a Sanskrit epic by Ved Vyasa. *Bharat Ek Khoj* was also an adaptation of Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India*, which talked about the history of India and its independence. *Wagle Ki Duniya* based on R.K Laxman's cartoons, addressed the issues faced by a common man his struggles with advancements in the world. *Mr. Yogi*, based on Gujarati novel *Kimball Ravenswood*, was about a US settled Indian who came back to India searching for a perfect bride on astrological basis, which resulted into tragic-comic situations. *Vikram Betal*, an adaptation of *Betal Pachisi* by Somadeva, dealt with questions of morality and justice.

By the late 1980s, the broadcasts had a greater-wider reach across the nation and the response to it was incredible. Doordarshan, the national public television network of India had become a mass phenomenon in all parts of India. They were the adapted literary works which were dominating the Indian television during that time. These TV series of that time were the pioneers in building a TV viewership culture in India unequalled to any other time in India. All activities in the country slowed down during their transmissions. The shows went directly to lives of Indians and to their collective thought and imagination. Moreover, as Doordarshan had the monopoly on Indian TV broadcasts, the TV shows helped not only to educate masses but it also brought the Indian

traditions, culture and history in the forefront in such a way that could enrich minds and make people think. Most of the TV series were literary adaptations. So it becomes prudent to analyze the phase in history to answer the questions of why and how literary pieces transform into works of TV, a different medium that has significant impact in the history of India for creating a viewership culture. So a study of the transformational processes at the core of these adaptation practices can help us comprehend better, the relations between adaptations and the post-colonial history.

Policies Governing Doordarshan

Selection and Adaptation Policy and Media Policy

In inquisition of the literary adaptations that appeared on Doordarshan during 1980s, one comprehends that Doordarshan through these adaptations portrayed a typical pattern of the society in India or the hegemonic idea of 'nation' thought by the then ruling party, Indian National Congress. This pattern represents the Indian social milieu as urban middle class, upper caste Hindu who knows Hindi. Somehow it reflected society which has not forgotten its traditions and heritage but has also accepted the modernity and the advancements in the world. Also the 'metanarrative' of 'nation' as the balance between traditions and modernity and the problematization of urban-rural dichotomy for India's identity can be clearly observed. Considering this, the intriguing questions that arise are: If Doordarshan was a public-state owned channel devoted to socio-economic development of the nation why could not it avoid such patterns that were deviating from its set public welfare objectives? Why only these texts were selected for TV adaptations? What could have been the functions of these adaptations? Were there any 'selection' and 'adaptation' policies? To answer these questions, the theoretical approach chosen here is of Patrick Catrysse.

Catrysse in his essay "Film (Adaptation) as Translation; Some Methodological Proposals" (1992) proposes a systemic model for analyzing adaptations. He concludes that there are policies such as 'selection' and 'adaptation' for reproduction of literary text. He contends that adaptations have

functions within the socio-cultural and cinematic context and these functions have relations with the 'selection' and 'adaptation' policies.

Selection Policy: The 'selection' policy depends mainly on the creative artists who would wish to recreate the work literature with respect to the 'media policy' governing the public television. This might include the importance given to books or literary prestige of authors depending on the quantity or quality of their literary work. So the selection is done more so for the cultural emancipation of existing works which were appealing socially, morally and creatively to the makers involved in the reproduction. Apparently, Doordarshan under Prasar Bharati during the early 1980s invited creative directors and producers for making TV series but the late 1980s literary works selected for adaptations mainly were to publicize and glorify the native authors. Except the stories by Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov for *Katha Sagar*, no literary piece written by a foreign author was adapted. The selection policy here could have been the publicity and promotion of native literature and ultimately glorifying their authors. This move can be thought to be as a part of the entire decolonization process. The shows had not been broadcasted without any political consent. These authors of the adapted literature such as Jawaharlal Nehru, R.K. Laxman, R.K. Narayan, Bhisham Sahni, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya and Madhu Rye had ideologies more close to that of Gandhi, indirectly the Congress party. Ironically, the Hindu texts like *Ramayana* or *Bhagwad Geeta* or even *Vikram Betal* which had no relation with the media policy, still were broadcasted. It can be claimed that Doordarshan even though, having its media policy set by the government did not achieve its objectivity.

Adaptation Policy: The 'adaptation' policy seems to serve as constraint for the process of adaptation. This may take conceptualization for modification, addition, substitution, permutations, structuring the narrative and other aspects such as acting, staging, costume, lighting, photography, pictorial representations, music etc. This process may consider the models and conventions of filmmaking for the popular medium of TV. Entire poetics of TV goes into account as the medium changes totally. It

has to consider the limitations of TV as compared to the art of filmmaking.

Language of the target audience also becomes a key issue in translating the literary works for TV as the adaptations have to reach the audience in a language they understand. Polemically, Hindi was always regarded as a language which was known to all and this probably was also considered by the Indian National Congress. All the adaptations including *Malgudi Days*, *Ramayana*, *Vikram Betal*, *Mahabharata*, *Mr. Yogi*, *Shrikant*, *Katha Sagar* and others were adapted in Hindi and not in the language of its source. No wonder with the passage of time and the realization of the language barrier of target audiences, Doordarshan has channels in almost every language which is in official languages' list of India. Moreover, now it also has channels in the dialects of different regions of India.

Selected characters from different adaptations had significant roles unlike their original texts. These characters were adapted in ways that they became the representatives of the visual narratives. For example R. K Narayan is never thought to be as a children's writer but *Malgudi Days* (1986) on TV is every so often thought as children's programme because the stories selected and adapted were mostly children centric. Swami and Leela from *Malgudi Days* are characters who gained popularity.

Music for all the series and illustrations were introduced. The adaptation policies would have been made with regard to the thought that the target culture was already into watching films because film as a popular medium was already established and well received. By 1980s, film was a forty years old medium for Indian audience and by then it had flourished according to the taste of target audiences.

The 'selection' and 'adaptation' policy work in tandem at the level of creative artists or the makers for TV per se but it cannot disregard the 'media policy.' If in case it surpasses the media policy it will have to face consequences depending on the type variance from the media policy of the government. However there were no set norms for TV series but Doordarshan had the patronage and

the censorship of the shows that appeared on it. It had the authority to select or reject the proposals made by the creative artists. The 'selection' and 'adaptation' of any literary work has to meet the ideological requirements of the channel or the media policy per se. So it can be claimed that 'media policy', which is ideologically shaped by the party in power, of a country has a larger influence on the both the 'selection' and 'adaptation' policies. These policies have their own importance but cannot do away with the media policy of the governing state because the created product for TV goes for scrutiny to the public service agency and depending on the product's political and ideological viability, it is either broadcasted or referred back or even rejected.

Media Policy: Even though Cattrysse does not make any mention of the 'media policy' in his article but in the Indian context of public television 'media policy' plays a vital role in the broadcasts on TV. To understand the significance of shows on public TV 'media policy' made by the government cannot be neglected. As Doordarshan was working under Prasar Bharati, a government agency under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting they had their own set ideas about the broadcasts, which they claimed they cannot compromise with. A report in the year 1980 stated that: "in a hyper conservative society like India, which has rigid social and religious norms of behaviour, where the political consciousness has still not matured and where harsh economic conditions inhibit individual growth, there are bound to be serious limitations on the freedom of expression." (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1980: 74) A report of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (1995) stated that the objectives set for the medium of Doordarshan were: (1) To act as a catalyst for social change, (2) To promote national integration, (3) To stimulate scientific temper in the mind of the people, (4) To disseminate the message of family planning as a means of population control and family welfare, (5) To provide essential information and knowledge in order to stimulate greater agricultural production, (6) To promote and help preserve environment and ecological balance, (7) To highlight the need for social and welfare measures including welfare of

women, children and less privileged, (8) To promote interest of games and sports, and (9) To create value of appraisal of art and cultural heritage. The objectives for the broadcasts on Doordarshan can be considered as their media policy. Unfortunately, when we refer to the literary adapted shows during 1980s we understand that it has failed to implement any of these objectives. Ironically, it portrayed contrasting images on TV from the objectives set for broadcasts on television. It could only bring out shows which were more near to the psyche of the middle class- upper caste Hindu Indians neglecting the heterogeneity of India.

Functions of Adaptations: Cattrysse believes that if texts are selected and adapted within policy constraints, they ought to have 'functions' within the socio-cultural context for which they are recreated. Significant insights can be drawn only if one renders adaptation not merely as an adaptation of literary work but studies it with relation to its functions within its context. Doordarshan was the only channel in India which had monopoly during that period. Moreover it was a public service broadcaster mediated by government agencies. So they, probably, would have broadcasted or commissioned shows that had political or ideological functions. So the selection and adaptation policies vis-à-vis its functions can be dealt by exploring the political context of Doordarshan. There can be mainly two aspects with regard these policies, (i) the ideology of government that has control over television medium as the broadcasts dealt with some content and (ii) The function of the television medium for political purposes. The 1970s and 1980s were thought to be periods of identity crises. The government had a clear focus on establishing India's identity. The government in power, Indian National Congress had ideals of socialism, secularism and populism guided by Nehru and Gandhi. It is obvious that they would not miss any chance to propagate its ideology but also as it is a public entity it has to ensure the rights and duties according to the constitution. It is answerable to the parliament. So the media policy considers the constitutional rights and freedoms but also through the broadcasts does not comply with it. However, the important ideological and political function would have been to

establish India's identity quintessentially hegemonic. For example the shows such as *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Vikram Betal* adapted from the Hindu Texts *Ramacharitmanas*, *Bhagwad Geeta* and *Betal Pachisi* respectively, represented the traditions and heritage of India whereas shows such as *Mr. Yogi*, *Wagle Ki Duniya*, and *Malgudi Days* addressed the dichotomy of tradition and modernity. Moreover the shows like *Shrikant*, *Bharat Ek Khoj* and *Tamas* dealt with the ideas of nation and its independence. These texts were not screenplays but were literary texts adapted to serve as ideological, political and cultural purposes.

In the initial period of TV people thought TV to be a medium closer to facts because it had already broadcasted educational programmes in public interest. As a consequent, the viewers imagined about India, the country they lived in, as portrayed on TV. This imagination led to a social cultural acceptance of the identity and influenced the people to adapt in such ways. This 'hegemonic' idea of 'nation' was skillfully brought on the channel of Doordarshan for the people who were seeking for their own identity and it was instrumental to great degree as it had the power to control or manipulate interests. It could reflect the idea of nation as thought by the government in power. In subtle ways Doordarshan and its telecasts become 'ideological state apparatuses' as defined by Louis Althusser (2004).

Conclusion

The study of historical and political context of late 1980s vis-à-vis literary adaptations, suggests that the policies for 'selection' and 'adaptation' involved conception of urban middle class sentiment and Indian culture vis-à-vis modernization processes. Needless to say that political events and historical periods demanded an acceptance of the motives based on ideology of the class in power. It is quite evident that adaptations had to consider all the policy constraints presided by the people involved in its production. Most of these literary adaptations considered the idea of 'nation' as thought by the people in power. It represented the post-colonial decolonizing ideology of the government that attempted to uproot colonial

façade and bring Indian cultural legacy. It can be claimed that it could not cater to the idea of decolonizing the 'Indian mind' and establishing the glory of Indian culture, language, values, myths, literature and writers as it could only portray fewer sections of such varied heterogeneous population of India. It was trying to generate 'ideas' and 'knowledge' as 'hegemonic nation' (Gramsci, 1971) could only be reflected through the homogeneous social patterns and this was probably done to create a strong and the only Indian identity on the plane of television that was reaching almost every corner of India. Indirectly it was trying to influence the audience to think and believe India to be a nation which is being portrayed on TV which was purely ideological and mediated through government agencies. Doordarshan in Noam Chomsky's words was 'manufacturing consent' (2016) about the ideas of 'nation.'

Against the stated objectives Indian television could hardly achieve goals. Instead of being a catalyst for social change it ushered as medium of majoritarian knowledge and practices. The primary objective of Doordarshan channel was to create a national stage for Indian population and its development but the shows could hardly prove its objectivity. The media policy of Doordarshan claimed to achieve goals by portraying common identity ultimately leading to unitary nationalism on the imaginary plane of Television which was limited only to a few parts of the society. The issue of language always remained as they thought Hindi is understood by vast majority of people from the target audience. Moreover, the government would have been aware that these adapted shows were also very significant as they reached to a large section of Indian population who could not read. They had the power to influence the target society and encourage the national literature but it only broadcasted shows which were viable ideologically. It helped in the preservation of native literature but only a few writers who were 'Gandhians' or ideologically inclined towards the party in power were publicized or glorified through the medium of Doordarshan. Also, it played a role in bringing the Indian audience in front of TV sets creating some

kind of unity through shared emotions within the very limited groups of society.

Adaptations, in the light of such policies can be significant sources to witness the ideological reconstructions of literary pieces. The significance of this lies in its new polysystemic perspectives which are derivative of the factors affecting/effecting the process of mediation during an adaptation. Interpretations based on this can give significant insights unlike the discussions on loss, gain and equivalence for the essence of literature. It is an interesting alternative perspective which allows us to think and analyze the adaptations with regards to different constraints governing them. The analysis of the texts adapted for a different medium vis-à-vis socio-historical context can reflect a certain ideology and poetics in a given society in a specific period of history ultimately provides with insights of the relations between adaptations and history. These mediated spaces of culture and everyday life on TV are highly problematic as they force us into a debate of binary category systems, such as 'virtual' versus 'real', 'rural' versus 'urban' and 'entertainment' versus 'education', portrayed as culturally homo/hetero-geneous identities on ideologically determined terrain of media.

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